
Review Essay

The Amateur in the Operating Room:
History and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

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CONSIDER TWO LECTURERS. The first had access to state-of-the-art knowledge. This historian could draw upon complex interpretations of human behavior, sophisticated models of the manner in which different social groups form visions of reality, and well-defined methodologies for analyzing evidence. The lecture was part of a great collective enterprise in which the efforts of generations of scholars had been systematically combined to produce a greater understanding of the past. The second lecturer operated almost entirely in isolation. Except for chance encounters with folk beliefs about the subject, this historian had few resources to work with and, of necessity, had to base the presentation on knowledge that would have been unremarkable fifty years earlier. In comparison with the first lecture, the second was marked by a relatively simplistic understanding of human interactions, little sensitivity to the manner in which different groups experience the world, and a cursory and very impressionistic consideration of the evidence.

There are few historians who would not prefer to be in the situation of the first lecturer. Yet these were two aspects of the same lecture, and this strange juxtaposition of such dissimilar forms of knowledge occurs daily in history classrooms at virtually every college and university in the United States. Behind every act of teaching there are two different forms of knowledge: knowledge of the subject matter, and knowledge of how it may be taught and learned. Just as every act of researching the past depends on an understanding of the historical period, the secondary literature on the subject, and relevant methodologies, so every act of teaching history rests upon knowledge of the challenges posed by a particular subject matter, access to collective notions about how students learn, and an understanding of specific strategies to make teaching more effective. But the manner in which these two forms of knowledge are generated could not be more different, for the transition from amateur to expert that occurred long ago in the realm of research has not yet been completed in that of teaching.

The goal of this article is to examine efforts to bridge the chasm between these

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two aspects of historical practice. It will seek to define what a scholarship of teaching and learning history might look like, and it will review the efforts of scholars to introduce into the realm of teaching history some of the rigor that marks our activities in the realm of research. Finally, it will consider arguments for and against this line of inquiry and suggest directions for future research in this area.

Ironically, the contrasts in the expectations of rigor in these two realms of historical knowledge have been made more disturbing by the growing sophistication of historical research. Our visions of historical actors have become much more complicated without this new complexity being reflected broadly in our knowledge about teaching and learning. Historians whose study of the past involves complex notions of the construction of self and other and of the relationship between knowledge and power often revert to a crude and naïve empiricism when they enter the realm of teaching, and this mismatch makes the inconsistencies between our knowledge about history and our knowledge about teaching history much more problematic than they were in earlier generations.

The asymmetry in our knowledge reflects the very different ways in which the practices of research and teaching have evolved within our profession. Historians have systematically worked together for more than a century to give researchers the tools that they need to do their jobs. Before they are asked to generate new knowledge about the past or even to share what has been learned with students, historians are provided with careful training, access to the writings of others in the field, and careful evaluation and feedback by peers. In the process, evidence is systematically collected, assumptions are carefully examined, and competing interpretations are weighed against one another. And the entire enterprise is infused with a commitment to rigor and collective responsibility.

Historians facing the challenges of *teaching* history are generally quite bereft of any of these advantages. Most of us care passionately about teaching and believe that it is vitally important that students be exposed to the kinds of reasoning and the knowledge of the past that members of our profession have developed. But until very recently it was believed that no formal training was necessary before historians began thinking about teaching and learning, no examination of the efforts of other scholars, no collective effort to ground knowledge as firmly as possible. Historians who devoted years to systematically collecting and evaluating evidence about the topics of their research were expected to base their teaching strategies on random impressions or oral folklore about what works in the classroom. Assumptions about learning were rarely examined, and traditional approaches to teaching were passed informally from generation to generation with little systematic evaluation of their effectiveness. Outside of this haphazardly shared folk wisdom, historians generally formed notions about teaching in isolation, and instructors were often totally ignorant of the pedagogical discoveries of colleagues teaching in the next classroom. In short, one might apply to most of our knowledge about teaching history Alan Booth's observation that our system for assessing student learning "is based on precedent rather than systematic reflection about the learning needs of history students."¹

¹ Alan Booth, "Changing Assessment to Improve Learning," in Alan Booth and Paul Hyland, eds., *History in Higher Education: New Directions in Teaching and Learning* (Oxford, 1996), p. 261.

The contrast between these two forms of knowledge raises major questions about the way that we prepare historians to respond to the challenges that they will face in the classroom. Is it fair to either the teacher or the student to deny to the realm of teaching the rigor and professionalism that we expect in the researcher? As Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori and Patricia Donahue have suggested, should we “apply to talking and writing about teaching the same standards of professional accountability that govern more traditional scholarship in the field . . . [and reconfigure] teaching from an amateur to an expert activity?”²

This kind of question has been gaining increasing currency since 1990, when Ernest Boyer popularized the term “scholarship of teaching” in *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*.³ Major foundations, including the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the Pew Charitable Trust, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, as well as the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the Council of Graduate Schools, and a number of professional organizations, have launched initiatives designed to help faculty members in all disciplines develop rigorous scholarship about teaching and learning in their disciplines. More than 200 campuses have participated in AAHE-sponsored programs in the scholarship of teaching and learning, well over 100 faculty fellows from a wide range of disciplines have launched research projects in this area as part of the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and disciplinary societies, including the American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians, have strongly endorsed this effort. And, finally, graduate students on many campuses are now beginning their professional careers with a knowledge of the scholarly literature on teaching and learning because of the spread of Preparing Future Faculty programs.⁴

Two on-line journals have appeared in this new field, as have a number of programmatic essays that examine the directions the field might take in academia as a whole and in particular disciplines. Of interest are Mary Taylor Huber and Sherwyn P. Morreale’s *Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Exploring Common Ground*, which includes an excellent article by historians Lendol Calder, William Cutler, and T. Mills Kelly, and Alan Booth’s

² Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori and Patricia Donahue, “English Studies in the Scholarship of Teaching,” in Mary Taylor Huber and Sherwyn P. Morreale, eds., *Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Exploring Common Ground* (Washington, D.C., 2002), p. 83.

³ Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (New Jersey, 1990).

⁴ For more information about the development of Preparing Future Faculty programs, see <http://www.preparing-faculty.org/>. Among the factors that have been suggested as contributing to the rapid development of this new field include the entry of new groups of non-elite students into higher education, the influence of powerful groups such as the National Science Foundation and the accrediting bodies in fields such as engineering and accounting, and the impact of new teaching technologies. For more information on the development of these trends, see see Marvin Lazerson, Ursula Wagener, and Nichole Sumanis, “Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 1980–2000,” *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 32: 3 (2000): 12–19; Maryellen Weimer, “The Disciplinary Journals on Pedagogy,” *Change* 25: 6 (1993): 44–51. By the mid-1990s “and learning” had been added to the term “scholarship of teaching” in response to the shift of focus from what instructors do to what students learn. This emphasis on the “learning paradigm” was popularized by Robert B. Barr and John Tagg in “From Teaching to Learning: A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education,” *Change* 27: 6 (1995): 13–25.

forthcoming essay, "Rethinking the Scholarly: Developing the Scholarship of Teaching in History."⁵

Behind these efforts is a belief in the possibility and potentiality of a scholarship of teaching and learning that has many of the essential qualities of the forms of research with which we have long been familiar. Lee Shulman, the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, has argued that this new form of knowledge must be "*public, susceptible to critical review and evaluation, and accessible for exchange and use by other members of one's scholarly community.*"⁶ The precise definition of the scholarship of teaching and learning has been contested, but a consensus has formed within growing circles in academia that there is scholarly research to be done on teaching and learning, that the systematic creation of rigorous knowledge about teaching and learning is a crucial prerequisite to responding to major challenges facing academia, that this knowledge must be shared publicly and should build cumulatively over time, and that the explorations of this area should be conducted by academics from all disciplines, not just those with appointments in schools of education. Advocates of this new form of enquiry would agree with Salvatori and Donahue's argument that "We need a culture of teaching as intellectual work—work that can be theorized, work whose parameters and conditions of possibility can be analyzed and evaluated in accordance with formally articulated standards, work that can be interpreted within a framework of disciplinary knowledge and modes of inquiry."⁷

In these discussions a distinction is often made between the scholarship of teaching and learning, in which faculty make their own original contributions to the field, and scholarly teaching, in which professors make use of this literature to increase learning.⁸ While there would presumably be a limited number of academics who make original contributions to the scholarship of teaching and learning, a much larger number of professors would become scholarly teachers who as a matter of course stay abreast of the major issues being discussed in this scholarship. These

⁵ Lendol Calder, William W. Cutler III, and T. Mills Kelly, "History Lessons: Historians and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning" in Huber and Morreale, eds., *Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* (2002): 45–67; Alan Booth, "Rethinking the Scholarly: Developing the Scholarship of Teaching in History," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 3: 3 (2004): 247–66. Other important programmatic essays on the scholarship of teaching and learning include Lee S. Shulman, "Teaching as Community Property: Putting an End to Pedagogical Solitude," *Change* 25: 6 (1993): 6–7; Pat Hutchings and Lee Shulman "The Scholarship of Teaching: New Elaborations, New Developments," *Change* 31: 5 (1999); Barbara Cambridge, "The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Questions and Answers from the Field," *AAHE Bulletin* 52: 4 (1999): 7–10; Randy Bass, "The Scholarship of Teaching: What's the Problem?" *Inventio: Creative Thinking about Teaching and Learning* 1: 1 (1999), available at <http://www.doiit.gmu.edu/Archives/feb98/randybass.htm>; Lee Shulman, "From Minsk To Pinsk: Why A Scholarship Of Teaching And Learning?" *The Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 1: 1 (2000), <http://www.iusb.edu/~josottl/contents.v2.htm>; Pat Hutchings, *Opening Lines: Approaches to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* (Menlo Park, Calif., 2000); "Roundtable on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Political Science," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35: 2 (2002): 223–28; Pat Hutchings, ed., *Ethics of Inquiry: Issues in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* (Menlo Park, Calif., 2002).

⁶ Lee Shulman, "Course Anatomy: The Dissection and Analysis of Knowledge Through Teaching," in Pat Hutchings, ed., *The Course Portfolio: How Faculty Can Examine Their Teaching to Advance Practice and Improve Student Learning* (Washington, D.C., 1988), p. 5. The emphasis is Shulman's.

⁷ Salvatori and Donahue, "English Studies in the Scholarship of Teaching," p. 84.

⁸ See Shulman, "Teaching and Community Property," pp. 6–7; Hutchings and Shulman, "The Scholarship of Teaching: New Elaborations, New Developments," pp. 10–15; Salvatori and Donahue, "English Studies in the Scholarship of Teaching," pp. 80–81.

different roles are obviously two aspects of the same project, since the scholarship of teaching and learning would lose its *raison d'être* if the result of its labors had no impact on classroom practices, and scholarly teaching presumes a steady stream of new pedagogical research.

At the core of this entire project is the realization that all academic learning is discipline specific and that generic strategies for improving teaching are of limited effectiveness.⁹ In this view, a discipline such as history represents a unique epistemological and methodological community, whose rules and procedures must be fully understood and made explicit before we can generate rigorous knowledge about teaching and learning in our field. It is increasingly believed that advances in teaching calculus or accounting, for example, are useful to a history instructor only after they have been reconsidered in terms of the conditions of knowledge in that discipline. Therefore, advocates of a scholarship of teaching and learning argue that it is time to develop a new vision of higher education in which some of the expert practitioners in each field actively contribute to the generation and dissemination of pedagogical knowledge.

Let us postpone until later in this essay a discussion of the advisability of accepting this challenge, and first consider what resources might be available to assist historians, should they decide to make their own contribution to the creation of a rigorous and extensive scholarship of teaching and learning history. In the first place, there is a treasure trove of examples of pedagogical experience in the back issues of journals, such as *The History Teacher*, *Teaching History*, *Perspectives*, and *The Magazine of History*, and in collections such as *Experiments in History Teaching*, *History Anew: Innovations in the Teaching of History Today*, *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History*, *History in Higher Education*, and *The Practice of University History Teaching*.¹⁰ Many of these articles already provide valuable examples of how the scholarship of teaching and learning can illuminate teaching. Other works represent a kind of way station on the path to a fully realized scholarship of teaching and learning history, somewhat analogous to Thomas Kuhn's preparadigmatic sciences. Such articles often capture the best practices of very effective history instructors, and presentations of this sort will remain a very important part of our collective effort to improve the teaching of history. But this type of study lacks the mark of fully developed scholarship because it stands alone without building on the research of others, provides little demonstration of effectiveness of the methods being used beyond the author's impression that they did or must work, or lacks a clear theoretical framework within which teaching strategies can be situated. Such

⁹ See, for example, Lee S. Shulman, "Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching," *Educational Researcher* 15: 2 (1986): 4-14; John Seely Brown, Allan Collins, and Paul Duguid, "Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning," *Educational Researcher*, 18: 1 (1989): 32-41; Sheila Tobias, "Disciplinary Cultures and General Education: What Can We Learn from Our Learners?" *Teaching Excellence* 4: 6 (1992-1993): 1-3; Janet Donald, *Learning to Think: Disciplinary Perspectives* (San Francisco, 2002).

¹⁰ Stephen Botein, Warfren Leon, Michael Novak, Roy Rosenzweig, and G. B. Warren, eds., *Experiments in History Teaching* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978); Robert Blackey, ed., *History Anew: Innovations in the Teaching of History Today* (Long Beach, Calif., 1993); Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg, eds., *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives* (New York, 2000); Booth and Hyland, eds., *History in Higher Education*; Alan Booth and Paul Hyland, eds., *The Practice of University History Teaching* (Manchester, England, 2000).

studies can, however, be invaluable as a starting point for scholarly investigations, since they raise so many potentially rich questions about the specific nature of learning and teaching history. It is easy to imagine synthetic publications that would survey writings on particular topics, link them to other works on common theoretical problems, assess the validity of their claims, and make this literature more readily accessible to those engaged in scholarly teaching.

Contemporary educational research also offers a great deal to historians wishing to enter into the systematic exploration of learning history, and many of the educational researchers most involved in this work in recent years have made the task easier by couching much of it in a language familiar to professional historians. Two broad questions stand out in this body of work that would be of great importance to the further development of a scholarship of teaching and learning history. First, what do students bring to the history classroom that may have a major impact on their learning? What visions of the world, models for human interaction, or assumptions about the nature of history itself have already been inscribed on the "blank slate" that we so often imagine exists at the beginning of a semester? And second, precisely what must students do to succeed in history courses? What mental operations and procedures must they master in order to think historically?

The first notion—that we need to understand better what ways of thinking students bring into the classroom—represents the rejection of an older vision of education that saw students as empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. In this model, the classroom was viewed as more or less isolated from the broader world, and a failure to learn was considered to be the result of the student's stupidity or lack of commitment. It is now clear that learning can be interrupted by the kinds of powerful nonacademic visions of the past that have been explored by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen in *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*.¹¹

If we are to develop better strategies for introducing students to a deeper understanding of the past, we will need clearer ideas of what students are bringing into college history classes, and educational researchers have already begun this effort. Samuel Wineburg and Peter Seixas have explored the manner in which "school history" is often overwhelmed by creations of popular culture, such as *Forrest Gump* and even *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*.¹² Other scholars have considered the ways that primary and secondary schools give an ideological spin to visions of the past that can create problems on the college level. Linda Levstik, for example, asked elementary and middle-school students, teachers, and teacher candidates to arrange a series of captioned pictures in a timeline of American history. The teachers' explanations of these choices offer a snapshot of the

¹¹ Roy Rosenzweig, "How Americans Use and Think about the Past: Implications from a National Survey for the Teaching of History" in Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg, eds., *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History*, pp. 262–83; Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): pp. 109–13, 168–69, 175–76, 179–80.

¹² Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, Pa., 2001), pp. 232–55; Sam Wineburg, Susan Mosborg, and Dan Porat, "What Can *Forrest Gump* Tell Us about Students' Historical Understanding?" *Social Education* 65: 1 (2001): 55–58; Peter Seixas, "Preservice Teachers Assess Students' Prior Historical Understanding," *Social Studies* 85: 2 (1994): 91–95.

reproduction of a triumphalist narrative that officially celebrates diversity but ends the process of inclusion with the civil rights movement in the 1950s and consistently presents events from the perspective of politically dominant groups. Aspects of American history that did not fit on this patriotic tableau simply did not exist for the present or future teachers.¹³ Studies such as these can give us an understanding of the narratives that students bring to college from popular culture or from their earlier history courses and can greatly assist us in designing courses that effectively introduce students to more sophisticated ways of conceptualizing the past. These studies could, for example, lead to the creation of model questionnaires that survey students' understanding of history that would give faculty a clearer idea of potential obstacles to learning at the beginning of introductory courses.

In another study that could be very useful to those teaching college history, Margaret McKeown and Isabel Beck have created a sophisticated and very nuanced understanding of fifth and sixth graders' knowledge and ignorance of the American Revolution by asking students a carefully structured series of questions and then systematically processing the transcripts of the interviews. Not satisfied with simple designations of correct or incorrect answers, they sought to define categories of partial knowledge. Some students responded to certain questions by providing a "government stew" in which they demonstrated some knowledge of different aspects of government but were unable to use this knowledge effectively. Other questions elicited "associations to a broad concept" in which students related particular issues to ill-defined terms such as "freedom." The category of "narrow associations" was used to represent answers that provided details, such as the names of particular colonies, without any larger understanding. The result was a series of "semantic maps" for each student in which the presence or absence of particular links between basic ideas could be charted.

The richness of McKeown and Beck's study cannot be captured in a short summary, but their conclusions suggest parallel studies on the college level would be very valuable. They found, for example, that standard elementary texts focus a great deal of space on knowledge that was not completely foreign to the students but fail even to touch on crucial areas in which ignorance was common. In their most telling criticism they noted that, while an understanding of the American Revolution absolutely required an understanding of England's role vis-à-vis the colonies and of the notion of political representation itself, these ideas were present neither in the texts nor in the students' prior understanding of the subject. And, while as a group sixth-grade students who had already taken American history did better in answering most of the questions than the fifth graders who had not, there were areas in which the ability of the students to respond actually declined. McKeown and Beck's data strongly suggest that the addition of more isolated facts without a clear explanatory structure caused more students to move to areas such as "document stew" where they were unable to construct a coherent position from

¹³ Levstik also noted students' subtle deviations from this vision of American history and the efforts of the present and future teachers to assure that the narrative was imposed. Linda S. Levstik, "Articulating the Silences: Teachers' and Adolescents' Conceptions of Historical Significance," in Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg, eds., *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History*, pp. 284-305. See also Linda S. Levstik and C. Pappas, "New Directions for Studying Historical Understanding," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 20: 4 (1992): 369-85.

what they had been taught.¹⁴ The construction of parallel maps of the typical patterns of ignorance and knowledge of college students entering different types of institutions could give us a general picture of what needs to be taught in various types of courses, and the development of model pretests could give us a better understanding of patterns in a specific class.

Since the 1980s, educational researchers have also been concerned with a deeper level of preexisting cognitive organization that can interfere with student learning. For example, it is now widely recognized that, long before they enter a high school or college physics course, students have of necessity already created rough "Aristotelian" approximations of the physical world that can prevent them from mastering the physics of Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein. In many cases, they are able to fill in the correct blanks on science tests, but these earlier ways of understanding often reassert their primacy as soon as the students leave the classroom.

In *The Unschooled Mind*, Howard Gardner posited that "Just as people's theories of matter, or of life, bias them toward interpreting physical phenomena in certain ways, so too their theories of mind, of person, or of self play a major role in the ways in which they interpret texts about human nature." And he suggested a few areas where such early patterns of social learning might create obstacles to assimilating historians' views of the past, such as the expectation that history is organized according to narrative patterns that make a certain kind of moral sense, that events have a single cause, and that general stereotypes can be applied to entire classes of people.¹⁵

There have been some efforts to develop this kind of analysis of students' naïve historical reasoning. Judith Torney-Purta studied the attempts of American high school students to explain a historical phenomenon and found that many of the students conceptualized history entirely in terms of individual agency. In an analysis of a discussion in a Swedish high school, O. Haldén found a similar pattern and documented the persistence of this way of reasoning about the past in the face of the teacher's efforts to help students see the importance of institutional factors. The latter study was particularly disturbing, since Haldén's analysis of the transcript of a discussion session demonstrated that the students learned what words to repeat to give the teacher the illusion that they had mastered a more complex interpretation of the past, despite the fact that no learning had really taken place.¹⁶

Such research has, however, only begun the task of creating a systematic understanding of students' ways of thinking about the past and the manner in which

¹⁴ Margaret G. McKeown and Isabel L. Beck, "The Assessment and Characterization of Young Learners' Knowledge of a Topic in History," *American Educational Research Journal* 27: 4 (1990): 688-726. See also Gaea Leinhardt, Catherine Stainton, Salim M. Virjit, and Elizabeth Odoroff, "Learning to Reason in History," in Mario Carretero and James F. Voss, eds., *Cognitive and Instructional Processes in History and the Social Sciences* (Hillsdale, N.J., 1994): pp. 131-58.

¹⁵ Howard Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach* (New York, 1995); pp. 172-75.

¹⁶ Judith Torney-Purta, "Dimensions of Adolescents' Reasoning about Political and Historical Issues: Ontological Switches, Developmental Processes, and Situated Learning," in Carretero and Voss, eds., *Cognitive and Instructional Processes in History and the Social Sciences*, pp. 103-22; O. Haldén, "Paradox of Understanding History," in Gaea Leinhardt, Isabel L. Beck, and Catherine Stainton, eds., *Teaching and Learning in History* (Hillsdale, N.J.: 1994), pp. 27-46.

these processes can interact with the forms of historical thinking expected in college classrooms. We need to generate studies comparing the strategies different groups of students have developed for explaining social phenomena, the amount of change in these processes produced by typical college history courses, and the relative effectiveness of different approaches to teaching at broadening and systematizing notions of the past.¹⁷ It would also be useful to design model pre- and post-tests that would allow faculty to examine changes in their students' models of social and historical interactions across a semester.

The study of students' prior conceptions of the past leads immediately to its converse: the exploration of the forms of thinking that students will have to adopt if they are to be successful in college history classes. As we have seen, at the core of the entire project of a scholarship of teaching and learning is the belief that disciplinary thinking is crucial to learning. Therefore a central goal of this work is to define as clearly as possible the kinds of thinking that students typically have to do in each academic field and to devise strategies for introducing students to these mental operations as effectively as possible. This is particularly important in educational systems in which students regularly move from one discipline to another several times in the course of a day. The very success students experience in one class may become a barrier to learning in the next, since they will understandably attempt to transfer successful strategies even when this is quite inappropriate.

If we are to help students make a successful transition into the realm of history, we must have a very firm and conscious understanding of what makes our discipline special and what kinds of mental operations and procedures students must master to succeed in it. At first glance, this may seem like a simple process, since we have been operating as historians for most of our professional lives. But, as future history professors, the most basic steps in thinking like a historian were probably so obvious to us as undergraduates that we were scarcely aware of learning them, and in any case that learning is probably buried so deeply under our later training that we are no longer fully conscious of how we do what we do. For this reason, developing strategies for helping students learn to do history must be preceded by a systematic effort at making explicit what they need to be able to do to reach this goal. As Robert B. Bain has written, "The problem for history teachers begins with trying to understand what defines meaning-making in history."¹⁸

The problematic nature of history's unique methods of "meaning-making" is nowhere more obvious than in the area of reading. In a series of fascinating articles, now included in *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, Wineburg has demonstrated that the moment a professional historian picks up a page, he or she begins taking a sophisticated series of steps that are almost completely unknown to the novice learner. When presented with a document, virtually every history

¹⁷ Gardner suggests that this process could be accelerated by immersing students in the central problems of historical research, relating the events of the past more closely to their own experience, and providing students with frequent occasions to view the same phenomena from multiple perspectives. But this barely begins to address the challenges posed by preexisting notions of history. See Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind*, pp. 236–38.

¹⁸ Robert B. Bain, "Into the Breach: Using Research and Theory to Shape History Instruction" in Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg, eds., *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History*, p. 332.

professor that he observed—but less than a third of the students—began by looking at the bottom of the page in search of information about the author and the nature of the source that would help situate the text within some larger context. But this was only the most obvious of the steps that the experts went through, as they treated texts as complex “rhetorical acts” whose basic nature had to be reconstructed. The historians zigzagged from one text to another in order to make explicit the motivations of the authors, to relate the text to its historical context, to explore the connotations of the words used to describe events, and even to construct a “mock reader” who fell into the rhetorical traps set by the “mock author” who was posited as creator of the text. As Wineburg noted, for the historians:

... texts are not lifeless strings of facts, but the keys to unlocking the character of human beings, people with likes and dislikes, biases and foibles, airs and convictions. Words have texture and shape, and it is their almost tactile quality that lets readers sculpt images of the writers who use them. These images are then interrogated, mocked, congratulated, or dismissed, depending on the context of the reading and the disposition of the reader. In such readings, authors, as well as texts, are decoded.¹⁹

Wineburg’s analysis of the micro-steps through which this kind of knowledge is realized is essential reading for anyone interested in helping students learn history or even for one seeking to gain a better understanding of the epistemology of our discipline. And the complexity of these mental operations is all the more striking when they are compared with the assumption, common to almost all of the students in his studies, that the text is a passive receptacle bearing information directly from the author to the reader. It is important to note that the difference between the two forms of reading does not reside in the store of facts that historians have accumulated about the topic. Most of the historians in Wineburg’s study were not specialists in the period being considered, and some did no better than some of the advanced placement high school students on factual tests about the era. But, when the students began to read, they were not playing the same “game” as the historians. As Wineburg suggests, the historians read the texts like prosecuting attorneys, whereas the students acted “like jurors, patiently listening to testimony and questioning themselves about what they heard, but unable to question witnesses directly or subject them to cross-examination.”²⁰

Wineburg’s studies of novice and expert reading strategies also offer new insights into the perennial problem of “presentism” in student encounters with material from the past. He follows the reasoning of “Derek,” a very bright high school student who was able to read a passage about the American Revolution with great insight, but then abandoned what he had just learned when it came into conflict with conceptions of human nature derived from his own society and generalized to all humanity. When Wineburg presented students with a set of documents in which Abraham Lincoln discussed race and slavery, they either

¹⁹ Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, p. 74; see also pp. 17–22, 63–112; “Probing the Depths of Students’ Historical Knowledge,” *Perspectives* 30: 3 (1992): 20–24; “The Cognitive Representation of Historical Texts,” in Leinhardt, Beck, and Stainton, eds., *Teaching and Learning in History*, pp. 85–135. See also Samuel S. Wineburg and Janice Fournier, “Contextualized Thinking in History,” in Carretero and Voss, eds., *Cognitive and Instructional Processes in History and the Social Sciences*, pp. 285–308.

²⁰ Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, p. 77.

dismissed Lincoln by associating him with the atemporal category of “racist” or projected the categories of their own era back into the nineteenth century by treating him as a cynical “spin doctor.” However, where the students found certainty, the historians in Wineburg’s studies found confusion. For them words like “natural rights” and “physical differences” were not simple signs that could be interpreted in terms of their meanings today but rather question marks that kept leading back to the central question: “What could Lincoln’s words mean in that world?” In a fascinating phrase, Wineburg describes one of the historians as “an expert at cultivating puzzlement,” and he makes it clear that it is just such efforts to undercut our own natural reading of the text that allow us to escape some of the limitations of our own period and that distinguish our reading processes from those of novice learners in the field of history.²¹

Wineburg is not the only researcher offering important insights into the kinds of mental operations implicitly expected of students in history courses, operations that often become visible through detailed analyses of the kinds of mistakes students make when trying to perform tasks that are second nature to the professional historian. One team of researchers presented undergraduates and history professors with a series of primary and secondary texts on the acquisition of the land to build the Panama Canal and then compared the ways in which the two groups identified author bias, grappled with inconsistencies among the texts, recognized material that was missing from the texts, and resolved conflicting views. In another study McKeown and Beck have sought to reconstruct the efforts of primary and middle-school students to make sense of the sections of their textbooks.²²

Denis Shemilt has presented a fascinating picture of the difficulty a group of British secondary students had in generating coherent historical narratives. Many students in his study produced lists rather than narratives, as in the case of a student whose understanding of the history of medicine was reduced to a “timeline comprised of a *list* of notable physicians, inventions, and discoveries that had no more narrative logic than the alphabet. Hippocrates comes before Galen as ‘G’ precedes ‘H.’” Shemilt compared this student’s experience to a child viewing the disjointed scenes of a “trailer” without any understanding of what a film is. Other students were able to construct a basic narrative structure, but the elements in their story were bound together by a sense of absolute inevitability that ruled out all real understanding of causation. And others saw history as a series of “headline actions and events” followed by periods in which nothing happens. An image of what historians themselves do in creating narratives emerges from Shemilt’s analysis like a photograph from its negative, and this heightened awareness of the mental operations we expect can help us to help students master them. Thus, Shemilt found that by rewriting sample secondary texts in ways that emphasized the kinds of

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17–22.

²² Charles A. Perfetti, M. Anne Britt, Jean-François Rouet, Mara C. Georgi, and Robert A. Mason, “How Students Use Texts to Learn and Reason about Historical Uncertainty,” Carretero and Voss, eds., *Cognitive and Instructional Processes in History and the Social Sciences*, pp. 257–83; M. Anne Britt, Jean François Rouet, Mara C. Georgi, and Charles A. Perfetti, “Learning from History Texts: From Causal Analysis to Argument Models,” in Leinhardt, Beck, and Stainton, eds., *Teaching and Learning in History*, pp. 47–84; Margaret G. McKeown and Isabel L. Beck, “Making Sense of Accounts of History: Why They Don’t and How They Might,” in Leinhardt, Beck, and Stainton, eds., *Teaching and Learning in History*, pp. 1–26.

narrative continuities expected in history, students were much more able to internalize the rules for telling historical "stories."²³

Similar concerns motivated studies by Gaea Leinhardt and Kathleen McCarthy Young, who have identified three basic organizational patterns in student history papers: the list (a series of unconnected items), the specified list (a set of items organized around an abstract rhetorical theme), and the causal list (an integrated essay in which inherent patterns of causation provide the basic order for the paper). Using this model and the types of "connectors" commonly used to link items in each of these schemas, Leinhardt followed the progress of "Paul," an intelligent high school student, as he slowly mastered these forms of presenting history.²⁴ Leinhardt's analysis is too rich to capture in a brief summary, but, like parallel studies by McCarthy Young, Stuart Greene and Dai Hounsell,²⁵ she presents us, once again, with the realization that some of the most important aspects of doing history are rarely if ever taught. As Leinhardt has pointed out, success at writing a paper assumes not only generic writing skills and an understanding of the material but also an understanding of "what is worth talking about, and exactly how that talking will proceed" in a history class.²⁶

Studies such as these point to a fundamental challenge facing those of us entrusted with teaching college history: students are entering our courses without an understanding of the kinds of reasoning required to think historically. Wineburg has argued the very nature of the primary and secondary school curriculum makes it difficult for students to adapt to the discipline-specific forms of reasoning that they will encounter in college history courses. For years before they arrive at college, they are presented with generic tests of reading comprehension and with textbooks in which "the historical text becomes the 'school text,' and soon bears a greater resemblance to other school texts—in biology, language arts, and other subjects—than to its rightful disciplinary referent." Once the footnotes and the structure of evidence and argument have been stripped away, the "epistemological distinctions" that lie at the heart of disciplines disappear, and "we too often end up teaching a single tongue."²⁷ This process creates young people who begin higher education without any notion that they need to tailor their reading strategies to the nature of the disciplines that they are studying.

A major revolution in the secondary school curriculum to eliminate the problems with primary and secondary education identified by scholars like Wineburg would, of course, be highly desirable. But while we are waiting for that unlikely event, the studies cited above strongly suggest that it would be advisable to find

²³ Denis Shemilt, "The Caliph's Coin: The Currency of Narrative Frameworks in History Teaching," in Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg, eds., *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History*, pp. 83–101.

²⁴ Kathleen McCarthy Young and Gaea Leinhardt, "Writing from Primary Documents: A Way of Knowing in History," *Written Communication* 15: 1 (1998): 25–86; Gaea Leinhardt, "Lessons on Teaching and Learning in History from Paul's Pen," in Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg, eds., *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History*, pp. 223–45.

²⁵ Stuart Greene, "Students as Authors in the Study of History," in Leinhardt, Beck, and Stainton, eds., *Teaching and Learning in History*, pp. 137–70; Dai Hounsell, "Reappraising and Recasting the History Essay," in Booth and Hyland, eds., *The Practice of University History Teaching*, pp. 181–93.

²⁶ Gaea Leinhardt, "A Time to Be Mindful," in Leinhardt, Beck, and Stainton, eds., *Teaching and Learning in History* (Hillsdale, N.J., 1994), pp. 209–54.

²⁷ Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, p. 77–79.

more effective ways to help students make the transition into the forms of thinking and of rhetoric that they will need in college history courses. If students bring dysfunctional strategies to reading and other core course activities, it is quite unlikely that they will really encounter the "big ideas" that we feel are so important in the course material. This is of relatively little import if we only expect to examine our students on their retention of facts. But, as soon as learning to analyze, evaluate, compare, or situate particular texts within their historical context becomes an essential requirement for success in our courses, teaching becomes more problematic. The work of researchers such as Wineburg and Leinhardt can help us to find the tools that we need to achieve our goals.

The applicability of such educational research to college history courses was made clear in a recent article by Calder, who adopted the "think aloud" protocol employed in Wineburg's research to measure the extent to which his students were mastering "the habits of historical thinking" in his American history survey.²⁸ Such studies provide a model for the application of existing scholarship to specific teaching situations at the same time that they extend our knowledge of student learning.

However, it is unlikely that the existing education research will in itself allow us to overcome the obstacles that hinder student learning in our classes. In the first place, most of the existing scholarship focuses on learning at the primary and secondary levels. New studies will be necessary to determine the applicability of this work within the context of higher education and in many cases to reconceptualize these models of student learning. It will also be important to reconsider the impact of different institutional and cultural contexts on the processes of learning described in such studies. Unlike British advocates of a scholarship of teaching and learning, who have been made quite sensitive to the political and institutional aspects of teaching and learning by their collective experience of Thatcher and post-Thatcher educational policies, Americans who are seeking to develop this new field often seek universally applicable principles of education. This is a natural impulse in a new area of inquiry, but, if the scholarship of teaching and learning is to produce studies that are really useful in the history classroom, it will be necessary more systematically to consider and assess their applicability in different national contexts, in different types of institutions within the same nation, and with different types of students.

The development of a scholarship of teaching and learning history, involving as it does an intricate understanding of the ways in which historians, students, and institutions interact, will be difficult to achieve without the active participation of members of our discipline. In the past this involvement has been largely absent. As Wineburg has noted, historians have expected their students to perform complex analytical processes, such as recognizing the biases in a text, but "as a guild historians have been uncharacteristically tight-lipped about how they do so."²⁹

²⁸ Lendol Calder, "Looking for Learning in the History Survey," *Perspectives* (March 2002): 43–45. See also David Pace, "Decoding the Reading of History: An Example of the Process," and Valerie Grim, David Pace, and Leah Shopkow, "Decoding History: Learning to Use Evidence," in David Pace and Joan Middendorf, eds., *Decoding the Disciplines: Helping Students Learn Disciplinary Ways of Thinking*, in *New Directions in Teaching and Learning* No. 98 (Fall 2004).

²⁹ Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, p. 63. It might be argued that the

Researchers like Wineburg have gone to some length to grasp the major issues in contemporary historiography, but this effort would be greatly facilitated if professional historians were to accept some of the responsibility for defining the kinds of thinking students need to master for success in history classes.

Moreover, it is difficult to see how such research can have a very big impact in the classroom, if historians are not involved in the process of generating it. Great and forbidding walls continue to divide North American university professors both from what happens in the secondary schools and from the efforts of educational researchers to facilitate learning. Even a cursory reading of the best examples of this literature can convince the reader that it is time to begin to breach the divide, but it is unlikely that new and rigorous ideas about teaching and learning will ever be widely applied in college history classes if academic historians are not involved in the creation of such knowledge. As Huber and Morreale have noted, "scholars of teaching and learning must address field specific issues if they are going to be heard in their own disciplines, and they must speak in a language that their colleagues understand."³⁰ It is historians who are most fluent in this language, and we will need to play a role in shaping this scholarship if it is to be read and used by large numbers of our colleagues.

It remains to be seen whether historians are really qualified to play such a role. Developing knowledge about our students and their learning might take us into areas that seem distant from our professional training. If it is necessary to abandon completely our approaches to scholarship and to begin from scratch to master a new discipline, few historians are apt to contribute to this effort.

On closer consideration, this problem is less serious than might be imagined. In recent years, many educational researchers themselves have moved away from the double blind tests and quantitative analyses that marked classic social science methodologies. There has been a realization that most aspects of real-life classroom situations are too complex and amorphous to be studied only through comparison groups and statistical inferences, and respected leaders in educational research, such as K. Patricia Cross, have questioned whether "further refinement of research methods, new statistical controls, more rigorous standards will lead to greater knowledge."³¹ At the same time, the cognitive revolution in psychology has encouraged researchers to think about teaching and learning in a much broader context and to focus on "the cognitive architecture behind a given response—the

extensive literature on the philosophy of history provides the kind of explanation of our discipline that can serve as a foundation for explorations of the cognitive demands of history, and many educational researchers working on history topics refer to this work. But such studies generally focus on epistemological questions that are far removed from the practical steps that must be understood, if we are to model historical reasoning.

³⁰ Mary Taylor Huber and Sherwyn P. Morreale, "Situating the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: A Cross-Disciplinary Conversation," in Huber and Morreale, eds., *Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, pp. 2; See also Calder, Cutler, and Kelly, "History Lessons," pp. 57, 61, and Lee S. Shulman, "Foreword," pp. vi-vii, both in *Disciplinary Styles*.

³¹ K. Patricia Cross, "What Do We Know About Learning and How Do We Know It?" presented to the American Association for Higher Education Conference on Higher Education, Atlanta, Georgia, March 24, 1998.

thought patterns, beliefs, misconceptions, and frameworks that students bring to instruction and that influence (and often determine) what they take from it."³²

As a result, qualitative approaches, often similar to those employed by most historians, are being given ever-increasing respect in the social sciences and schools of education.³³ Unlike researchers in fields such as physics or chemistry, historians do not have to retool intellectually before they can undertake a systematic examination of teaching and learning in their own discipline. As Calder, Cutler, and Kelly have put it, "Historians are accustomed to the kinds of 'fuzzy logic' needed if scholars are to understand a world as complex as a college classroom."³⁴ Moreover, there are works, such as *Classroom Research: Implementing the Scholarship of Teaching* by Cross and Mimi Harris Steadman, that can greatly assist historians in the process of bridging the narrowing gap between the two kinds of re-search.³⁵

The emphasis on the disciplinary nature of learning has also begun to bring pedagogical research and history closer together. As educational researchers have become increasingly convinced that learning is discipline specific, many of them have studied the literature on the philosophy of history, interviewed professional historians, and become familiar with contemporary historiography. As a result, the concepts and the language of educational researchers working on history today are much more familiar to most historians than was the case in previous generations.

THERE ARE NUMEROUS AREAS in which it is easy to imagine that important benefits would be derived by a systematic investigation of issues of teaching and learning history in which professional historians played a major role. In addition to students' prior conceptions of history and the kinds of mental operations required of college history students, we could explore such potentially important issues as the impact of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, region, and learning styles or the implementation of new technologies or teaching methods on learning history. And we could use our skills as researchers to create a better understanding of the historical roots of the issues facing college teachers today.

It remains unclear, however, whether a commitment to the creation of a scholarship of teaching and learning history is appropriate to our discipline at this point in time. The development of such scholarship would presumably minimize the discrepancy between the rigor of our research and the disorganized manner in which knowledge about teaching and learning has been generated and shared in the past, and, if this effort were successful, it would give historians new tools in their efforts to share history with undergraduates. But such a redefinition of historical

³² Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg, eds., "Introduction," in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History*, pp. 3-4.

³³ This convergence has been noted by researchers in education, such as Peter Lee and Rosalyn Ashby of the University of London Institute of Education, who have written that their own effort to reconstruct the ways of thinking of students in the lower grades "is similar to historians' reconstruction of the ideas of people in the past." Peter Lee and Rosalyn Ashby, "Progression in Historical Understanding among Students Ages 7-14," in Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg, eds., *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History*, p. 203.

³⁴ Calder, Cutler, and Kelly, "History Lessons," p. 61.

³⁵ K. Patricia Cross and Mimi Harris Steadman, *Classroom Research: Implementing the Scholarship of Teaching* (San Francisco, 1996).

scholarship might have unintended negative consequences for our profession, and the potential costs of such research should be weighed carefully before we launch this kind of initiative.

The first concern of many historians would undoubtedly be the possibility that the spread of the scholarship of teaching and learning within our discipline would have a major negative impact on existing forms of research. This is, however, probably not a real source for concern, since the great majority of historians would continue to do the kind of work that they are doing at present, and the scholarship of teaching and learning history would no more spell the end to current forms of research than did the appearance of quantitative studies, women's history, or cultural history. New infrastructures for research would have to be created, including the institution of annual conferences, professional organizations, prizes, and networks of peer evaluation parallel to those already existing in other areas of historical scholarship, and contributions to this literature would have to be recognized as a legitimate form of scholarship in tenure, promotion, and salary decisions. But there is no inherent reason why this activity should have a major negative impact on more traditional historical research.

The scholarship of teaching and learning does differ from earlier additions to the research pantheon in that it cannot be considered a success unless a significant portion of those teaching college history become "scholarly teachers" who use the findings of this research to increase student learning in their own classes. This is no small challenge, for, as Paul Hyland has noted, "Historians are not generally renowned for the enthusiasm with which they read and digest the findings of educational research, much of which clearly challenges the assumed effectiveness and universal value of traditional practices such as lecturing and essay-writing."³⁶

There are many ways that this assimilation of new ideas about teaching might be supported. The Preparing Future Faculty programs that have begun to appear in graduate history programs could make this much easier by producing a new generation of history faculty who are familiar with the literature of teaching history as well as that of traditional historiography. In the United Kingdom, new faculty are commonly expected to take courses that include the scholarship of teaching, and one research university has made the production of some form of the scholarship of teaching a requirement for all new faculty.³⁷ Access to the literature on teaching and learning history could be facilitated through the production of review articles that describe and evaluate what is already available and translate works of those in other disciplines into a conceptual language more meaningful to historians—a task that has been begun quite effectively by Wineburg, Suzanne M. Wilson, and Booth.³⁸ This is particularly important in terms of the literature on learning history

³⁶ Paul Hyland, "Measuring and Improving the Quality of Teaching," in Booth and Hyland, eds., *History in Higher Education*, p.129.

³⁷ 2.7 percent of the 595 history graduate students responding to a 1999 survey indicated that they had some access to pedagogical training. Chris M. Goode, "The Career Goals of History Doctoral Students: Data from the Survey on Doctoral Education and Career Preparation," *Perspectives* 39: 7 (October 2001): p. 23; Alan Booth, *Teaching History at University: Enhancing Learning and Understanding* (London, 2003), p. 151. For more information about the development of the PFF programs see <http://www.preparing-faculty.org> (Follow links to history). See also Terry Lee Seip, "We Shall Gladly Teach": *Preparing History Graduate Students for the Classroom* (Washington, D.C., 1999).

³⁸ Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, pp. 28–60; Suzanne M. Wilson, "Review

at the primary and secondary level, which needs to be carefully filtered to determine what is of greatest relevance to those teaching at the university level. It would also be useful to go back through past writings by historians about their own teaching to collect and systematize "best practices." And it is possible to imagine summer seminars, modeled on the National Endowment for the Humanities research seminars, in which historians could explore the relevant literature on teaching and learning.

But all of these efforts to make work in this field more easily available to professional historians cannot negate the fact that it would take time and energy to engage with the literature on teaching history and to implement ideas inspired by this literature in the classroom. At present, a good deal of time is undoubtedly wasted by faculty, particularly in the early years of their careers, who laboriously reinvent pedagogical "wheels" whose design might have been easily derived from an encounter with the scholarship of teaching and learning. But, even when this increase in efficiency is factored in, it is likely that many historians will find that scholarly teaching takes time—time that must, in most cases, be subtracted from other professional activities. If there is no institutional recognition of this labor, the impact of the scholarship of teaching and learning will be restricted.

Fortunately the scholarly nature of the endeavor makes its integration into the reward system of our profession easier. In the past, teaching has generally been seen as a charismatic activity that was innately difficult to evaluate, whereas research could be easily judged by a system of refereed publications and peer review. But it is important to remember that the complex system that currently gives us a greater sense of certainty in the evaluation of research was itself the result of decades of cultural labor. The very nature of scholarly teaching makes it much easier to imagine a similar process through which the quality of work in this area might be made more subject to systematic review and evaluation. A new genre, the "course portfolio," is currently being created that will allow faculty members who have developed courses informed by scholarly literature to submit their work to external reviewers just as they do traditional historical research. A pilot project is currently underway that will explore the creation of networks to evaluate this research, and historians such as Cutler and Kelly have produced models for the creation of such portfolios in our field.³⁹

However, the rationalization and emphasis on assessment that are implicit in the course portfolio and more broadly in the scholarship of teaching and learning, quite legitimately, raise concerns about the desirability of introducing these elements into areas of our professional life where they have not been very much in evidence. The very notion of professionalization and rationalization of teaching raises red flags for some, such as Jan Parker, who has written that "To British ears, of course, 'amateur'

of History Teaching," in Virginia Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (New York, 2001): pp. 527–65; Booth, *Teaching History at University*, pp. 167–71.

³⁹ William W. Cutler III, "Writing a Course Portfolio for an Introductory Survey Course in American History," in Hutchings, ed., *The Course Portfolio*, pp. 19–24; T. Mills Kelly, "Toward Transparency in Teaching: Publishing a Course Portfolio," *Perspectives* 39: 8 (2001); Joyce Appleby, "Reviving the Teacher-Scholar Ideal," *Perspectives* 35: 4 (1997): 3–4. See <http://www.unl.edu/peerrev/> for more information on project to create networks for the external review of course portfolios.

has a rather fine ring—lover of subject—and ‘expert’ sounds a little clinical. I want an expert to fix my washing machine but I am not sure I actually want to be taught, or to have my children taught, by experts.”⁴⁰ But the opposition of expertise and human interaction that underlies this reaction does not seem to be fully justified. It is unlikely Parker’s children would be better served by an amateur pediatrician or that the formal training a physician receives in itself eliminates the possibility of more personal interactions. To return to the realm of education, it could be argued that a more thorough understanding of the kinds of problems students face in history classrooms and a superior set of strategies with which to help would be more likely to increase, rather than eliminate, the possibility of a meaningful encounter.

More serious objections to the systematization of knowledge about teaching history are implicit in an essay historian Michael S. Sherry published in the *Journal of American History* in 1994. Although written before the idea of a scholarship of teaching and learning had been fully formulated, his essay implicitly suggests reasons that we might be wary of calls to make teaching “*public*, susceptible to *critical review and evaluation*, and accessible for *exchange and use* by other members of one’s scholarly community,” to quote Shulman’s maxim once again. Sherry has suggested that the professionalization of teaching could threaten academic freedom and independence. “How and what we teach,” he writes, “are largely our choices . . . In teaching we can be ourselves—be more creative, insofar as creativity is nourished by freedom from external scrutiny and by looser conversational methods.”⁴¹ Moreover, it is not impossible to imagine misguided administrators or state legislatures seeking to apply a single educational model to college courses.

These political concerns are serious, and, if the scholarship of teaching and learning is to be made an important part of the work of historians, it will be necessary to guard against these possibilities at every stage of the process. But it can also be argued that historians will be in a better position vis-à-vis external forces if at least some members of our profession have more clearly formulated their own goals and methods and have generated their own evidence of the effectiveness of their strategies for increasing student learning. Moreover, if the process of publically sharing ideas automatically leads to thought control, historical research should have long ago collapsed into a narrow orthodoxy. In fact, in the realm of research there is good reason to believe that the rationalization of approaches to traditional historical research and the institutionalization of means of evaluating that work have contributed to, rather than destroyed, the intellectual independence of researchers, and the same result might reasonably be expected in the generation of knowledge about teaching.

Similarly, it is unlikely that the creation of this new knowledge would destroy our sense of independence, creativity, and personal ownership of teaching. There is no doubt that freedom is a crucial element in creativity, but so are a knowledge of the basics of a craft and productive interactions with a community of other

⁴⁰ Jan Parker, “Disciplines: Carnegie, Cornell and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,” *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 2, 3 (2003): p. 142.

⁴¹ Michael S. Sherry, “We Value Teaching despite—and because of—Its Low Status,” *The Journal of American History* 81: 2 (1994): 1051–54. See also Grant Reeher’s comments in “Roundtable on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Political Science,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35: 2 (2002): 225–26

practioners, and nothing in our professional experience is more apt to crush spontaneity and a sense of personal worth than facing problems in the classroom with no effective strategy for coping with them. Scholarly teachers commonly report a sense of great exhilaration when they can bring to their teaching the same intellectual excitement that they have experienced in their research. As Booth has written, for those who chose to enter into this kind of work, it "can lend rigour to teaching, refresh approaches to the subject, generate a sense of well-founded confidence in current practices, and provide a solid foundation for developing as a teacher and meeting future challenges."⁴²

This brings us back to the contrast with which this essay began: that between the amateurism that we accept in our knowledge about teaching and the professionalism we demand in other aspects of our work. The notion that teaching is a purely practical activity, based largely on charisma, is dying throughout academia. While there is no doubt that personal gifts often play an important role in successful teaching, this does not negate the fact that systematic knowledge about teaching can be of great assistance. Some historians have a natural gift for research, but we do not leap to the assertion that systematic training, rigorous criteria for judgments, and shared results are irrelevant to that enterprise. Moreover, those with the greatest natural affinity for teaching eventually reach a ceiling that they cannot break through without greater knowledge about the processes of learning, and those with the fewest natural gifts are all the more in need of well-grounded best practices to guide their efforts. As Pat Hutchings recently argued in a roundtable at the meetings of the American Political Science Association, without a scholarship of teaching and learning "Teaching as a profession has no way to improve itself."⁴³

The very existence of a growing body of scholarship on teaching and learning is making it increasingly difficult to deny that many aspects of our practice as college history teachers can be grounded in such knowledge. It now seems quite possible that we can replace an understanding of teaching based on folk traditions and unfounded personal impressions with one rooted in a rigorous and collective examination of what fosters student learning. Under such circumstances, it would seem to be a violation of the most basic ethical commitments of our profession to accept as normal what Salvatori and Donahue have called "willed ignorance and the arrogance of not-knowing."⁴⁴ Pride in ignorance should be no more honored in teaching than it is in others aspect of our professional life.

There are many peripheral reasons for historians to make a commitment to the development and application of a scholarship of teaching and learning history. This project could prove highly useful in the effort to justify the mission of history and other academic disciplines to outside stakeholders. The development of a shared language about teaching and learning may help assure that we can respond to demands for external accountability without betraying the essential missions of higher education. And the systematic exploration of the kinds of reasoning required

⁴² Booth, "Changing Assessment to Improve Learning," p. 261.

⁴³ "Roundtable on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Political Science," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35: 2 (2002): 223–28.

⁴⁴ Salvatori and Donahue, "English Studies in the Scholarship of Teaching," p. 83.

of history students might even provide insights into our actual practice that would have an impact on research itself.

But at the core of the call for fostering the scholarship of teaching and learning in our discipline is one central question: how much collective responsibility should we accept for increasing student learning of history? If, as Shulman has written, teaching is an act that carries with it "inexorable responsibilities,"⁴⁵ then we must consider the obligations we have as the group that has been given both the task of producing new knowledge about the past and that of introducing students at the college level to this knowledge.

A crucial aspect of this is our obligation to ourselves. There is evidence that most historians strongly value the opportunity to teach and believe that it is vitally important for students to have a meaningful encounter with history.⁴⁶ This is one of the great reasons for joining our profession in the first place. We recognize that history can potentially teach students to evaluate claims critically, to see complex questions from more than one perspective, to understand how different groups can view the same situation in different ways, to recognize the long-term consequences of actions, and to master dozens of other subtle mental operations that are absolutely necessary for their success as individuals and for the very survival of our society.

There is, however, a growing perception that guiding students toward a meaningful encounter with history is becoming more difficult as a shared sense of historicity and of a general temporal framework are gradually being eroded in the broader society.⁴⁷ Moreover, the very nature of the history we teach today places greater demands on the instructor than was the case in earlier generations. Not only is current historiography more conceptually demanding, but, as Alan Brinkley, among others, has noted, historians have moved beyond confirming "many of the comfortable myths with which some (perhaps most) Americans viewed their history."⁴⁸

This transformation of both the audience and the nature of history has made teaching in an academic setting more difficult, and yet we continue to send historians into the classroom without the intellectual tools needed to accomplish this task. The link between the moral mission of history and the development of new ways to understand teaching and learning is vitally important to educational researchers such as Wineburg, who has argued quite forcefully that history is a privileged route to overcoming the cultural narcissism that prevents students from understanding people with very different experiences, values, and perspectives.⁴⁹ But the existing patterns of socialization in our profession have made it more difficult for historians themselves to make this connection. Faced with a sense of frustration and disempowerment in the classroom, we frequently fall into "student

⁴⁵ Lee S. Shulman, "Foreword," in Hutchings, ed., *Ethics of Inquiry*, p.v.

⁴⁶ David Thelen, "The Practice of American History," *The Journal of American History* 81: 3 (1994): 945-46; Booth, *Teaching History at University*, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁷ See, for example, David Lowenthal, "Dilemmas and Delights of Learning History," in Stearns, Sexias, and Wineburg, eds., *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History*, pp. 63-82.

⁴⁸ Alan Brinkley, "Historians and their Public," *Journal of American History* 81: 3 (1994): 1027-30.

⁴⁹ Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, pp. 23-24.

bashing” and disparagement of teaching—responses that are apt only to make the situation worse.

The creation and dissemination of better tools for responding to the challenges of teaching history today could allow us to apply the intellectual skills that we have honed so carefully to the solution of the very real problems that we face in the classroom and that the nation as a whole faces on a larger scale. If we fail to respond to this challenge, we may condemn ourselves and our profession to impotence and irrelevance. The issue of social responsibility is particularly acute if we remember that the question is not whether we should completely abandon research for the sake of teaching, but whether we are willing to redirect a small portion of the energy we devote to our present intellectual quests toward the solution of problems that have great import for our society.

Of equal or even greater importance is the responsibility that we have for the students who take our classes. The classroom is generally inhabited by young people at one of the most vulnerable points in their lives, or by returning students who are struggling to redirect their lives. The success or failure of students in our courses really matters. In such an environment we must ask why it is acceptable for historians to pursue their vocation in total ignorance of what is known about the field, when we would utterly condemn such conduct by other professionals. Why is the classroom a place for the uncritical perpetuation of folk traditions when the operating room is not?

Mel Levine writes of “the sad tales of students who have come to equate education with humiliation.”⁵⁰ Many of our students arrive in college having experienced twelve years of humiliation in place of an education. Often race or class or ethnicity or gender have been piled on top of negative family dynamics and woefully inadequate school systems to convince our students that they are of little value and that they are condemned to marginality in any intellectual undertaking. If they arrive in a history class that has been conceptualized on the basis of folklore, grounded in notions of learning and social interaction that we would laugh at if they appeared in a research article, and taught without any awareness of the uniqueness of historical reasoning—if, in short, they are taught by an amateur—all of the messages they have received about their personal worthlessness may be reinforced. Once again they will be told that they are inferior to those who have been privileged and pre-educated. If, by contrast, they arrive in a class that is rooted in a shared project of using our collective intelligence to create rigorous knowledge about teaching and learning, at least some may have the opportunity to succeed where they had previously known only failure and to experience that empowering moment in which the limitations and humiliations of a lifetime begin to melt slowly into air.

⁵⁰ Mel Levine, *A Mind at a Time* (New York, 2002), p. 14.

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