

Challenging Prospective Teachers' Understandings of History

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United States reform initiatives in teacher education call for teachers to develop subject matter knowledge that is broader, deeper, and more connected than is currently the case (Holmes Group, 1986). Policymakers, eager to ensure that prospective teachers learn as much subject matter knowledge as possible, have, in a number of states, either restricted the number of teacher education courses that prospective teachers may take or by-passed university-based teacher education altogether. Restrictions on the number of teacher education courses expresses the policymakers' belief that to increase the subject matter knowledge of prospective teachers, they should spend more time in arts and science courses. After all, arts and science courses, rather than teacher education courses, have been the traditional source of subject matter knowledge.

The assumption that prospective teachers will learn more of the subject matter knowledge they will need for teaching by taking more arts and science courses is, however, largely unexamined. Although researchers have studied, from a variety of angles, the effects of university education on students (for a comprehensive review, see (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), the teaching and learning of specific subject matter particularly history at university remains largely unexamined. We actually know little about the effects of arts and science courses on how students think about the subject matter what they believe the subject matter to be, how new knowledge in the field is generated and evaluated, what the major controversies in the field are and why, and so on. Certainly, like teachers at other levels, university faculty collect and analyze, usually informally, data on their students' learning. But much of what these faculty have learned remains tacit and uncommunicated (for examples to the contrary, see Booth, 1988, and Smith, 1990).

In this paper, I examine a required undergraduate history course and the thinking of students in the course as a way to begin addressing the gap in our collective understanding of teaching and learning in arts and science courses. In describing the course, I identify the purposes the organization and structure of the course appear to serve, as well as the views of history that permeate these purposes. I then discuss the kinds of understandings students seemed to develop during and after the course and speculate on the role that the experience of the course may have had on these understandings. Finally, I compare these kinds of understandings with the recommendations of reformers.

Description of the Study

The undergraduate historiography course as the object of study: In selecting a course to study, we were primarily concerned to identify one that seemed likely to bring students face to face with critical epistemological questions in the field such as what is historical knowledge and how is it produced and validated. Such

understandings underlie many of the curricular and pedagogical decisions history teachers make. We were interested both in how prospective teachers thought about such questions as well as in how history instructors treated them. We were also interested in how students thought about such epistemological questions under promising circumstances a "best case." Consequently, we wanted to choose an instructor who had a reputation as a successful pedagogue. Finally, we wanted a required course that is, one considered critical for all students that is typically taken early in students' sequence of courses. This latter stipulation was important because we wanted to be able to follow the students for at least a year to see how their thinking developed subsequently. This was posited on our belief that the ideas whose development we were interested in tracking were difficult and required some time to comprehend.

A section of the required undergraduate historiography course offered by the History Department at Michigan State University taught by Professor Peter Vinten-Johansen met all of these criteria. After a brief career as a high school government teacher and a stint in the Navy, Vinten-Johansen did graduate work in history at Yale. He has taught at Michigan State University for 15 years. (For an autobiographical account of Vinten-Johansen's development as a teacher, see [Picture] Vinten-Johansen, in press [Picture].)

Vinten-Johansen taught the section of the course taken by students in the Honors College at Michigan State University. Consequently, some of the students were likely to be highly motivated and had achieved considerable success in their past experiences with history both in high school and in college. Others in the course were not Honors College students. According to Vinten-Johansen, in all essential respects the course was similar in organization, procedures, and pedagogy to other, non-honors courses he teaches. The presence of the Honors College students, for our purposes, enhanced its qualifications as a "best case" test of the idea that arts and science courses could enable students including prospective teachers to develop deep and connected understandings of the subject matter.

Of the twenty students who started the seminar, 16 completed it. Of the 14 students for whom we have baseline data, eight were third-year students, two second-year, and four first-year. The students had taken an average of two history courses prior to the historiography seminar; three of the third-year students had taken as many as four courses. Although they had taken no previous college-level history courses, two of the first-year students had taken Advanced Placement American history courses in high school. The courses students had previously taken were, by and large, survey courses taught in large lecture formats with weekly discussion sections taught by graduate students. The most common survey course taken was the two-term sequence in American History. All but three of the students were history majors. Eight of the original 14 planned to teach high school history after graduation.

Description of the data on teaching. We documented the opportunities that students in the course had to learn, the instructor's rationale for the purposes and opportunities he orchestrated as well as students' understandings of critical ideas over time. To document opportunities to learn, I attended and took notes on all but 2 of 19 meetings of the seminar. I also made tape recordings of the class (subsequently transcribed), interviewed the instructor formally twice, tape recorded the instructor's conferences with the students, and collected course documents and copies of the instructor's comments on students' written work.

I conducted two formal interviews with the instructor as well as several informal conversations about the course and specific students. The first structured interview focused on the instructor's rationale for the course the sequence of activities, the texts, the assignments, and so on. The second interview focused on his assessment of how much progress students made toward the goals he had set for them. In this interview, we returned to some of the themes of the earlier interview such as the purpose of various activities and texts.

In taking fieldnotes, I focused on the classroom discourse that is, the issues that were discussed and how these were related to prior and subsequent issues or questions, the roles of various participants in the discussion, the kinds of questions asked and explanations offered, and other ways in which history was represented.

Description of the data on student learning. Students' written work constitutes another source of data, both on the teaching of the course and on student understanding. When possible, I collected the papers the students wrote for the course. These papers included Professor Vinten-Johansen's marginal and summary comments. Consequently, the papers represent evidence of student understanding, opportunities the instructor created for students to learn, goals and purposes of the instructor, and the instructor's ideas about history and about knowing and doing history.

We conducted at least two and in some cases three structured interviews with each of the 11 students who remained in the sample over the first year of the study. The interviews consist of three sections: The first section focuses on students' past experience with learning social studies and history both inside and outside of school. In the second section, we asked students about specific historical events and issues: The causes and consequences of the Civil War as well as specific events and people associated with these issues; the meaning of Reconstruction; highlights and results of the civil rights movement as well as, again, events and people from the movement; and the Tonkin Bay Resolution in relation to the War in Vietnam. We chose these topics because they are commonly found in most high school history courses and textbooks and they are topics on which historians have offered a variety of interpretations. We sought to find out not only what students knew, factually and contextually, about these events, but also how they thought historians construct accounts of these events

and what historians might find problematic in conducting historical inquiries. We also presented students with conflicting interpretations of a historical period Reconstruction and asked them which account they preferred and why and how historians could produce such a range of interpretations for the same set of events.

The third section focuses on the same historical events and issues that appeared in the second, but the questions focus on how the students would teach these topics to eighth and eleventh graders. We also asked them to critique sections from two textbooks on the Civil War and the civil rights movement. We chose these particular textbooks to represent both dull and more engaging texts as defined by a recent review of history textbooks [Picture](Sewall, 1987)[Picture].

Data analysis : I analyzed the data on teaching especially the interviews with the instructor and the transcriptions of the course meetings for evidence on several dimensions of the instructor's knowledge and purpose. One dimension was the instructor's ideas about what history is and what it means to know history. A second dimension was the instructor's goals and purposes for the historiography course. Closely related is a third dimension: The way that the instructor represented history through the organization, sequencing, and discourse of the seminar, as well as through the texts, assignments, and activities. Finally, I analyzed the data for evidence of the instructor's assumptions about what his students believe about history and learning and knowing history.

I entered the data from the student interviews into a database that allowed me to sort them along several dimensions and to compare their responses to each of the items at the beginning of the course and then one year later. For this analysis, I examined students' responses on three dimensions of knowledge: the nature of history, the "doing" of history, and the teaching and learning of history. Beginning with the full transcripts of the interviews, I reduced the data on each dimension for each student to a summary with illustrative quotations and then to a summary. I then looked for patterns across the individual summaries.

Problems with the study: Obviously, case studies of this type do not produce generalizable findings. The study was designed to serve several other purposes. First, I explore the relationship between a practicing historian's views of the nature of history and historical inquiry and the opportunities he orchestrates to enable undergraduates, some of whom are prospective teachers, to develop understandings about history and historical method closer to those of historians. Concomitantly, I also examine how students make sense out of an experience of learning history that contrasts with those they have previously encountered and what, if any, changes seem to occur in their knowledge and thinking about history over time.

Although I cannot draw conclusions about undergraduate history teaching and learning on the basis of these data, this is not my purpose. Rather, I describe and analyze the relationships among the instructor's views of history, the experiences

he orchestrates for his students, and the evolving historical understandings of prospective teachers and other undergraduates. Currently, few detailed descriptions or analyses of these phenomena and their relationships is available to historians or teacher educators. Yet, just such investigations are needed if we are to begin to understand the relationship between various approaches to teaching and the kinds of understandings students develop when involved with these approaches. I hope this paper spurs interest in, discussion of, and more investigation of these issues.

Description of the Historiography Seminar

The case. The centerpiece of the historiography seminar is a puzzle: What is an apparently obscure seventeenth century dispute over a seat in Parliament between two Englishmen one named Goodwin and the other Fortesque about and why should anyone care? Although Professor Vinten-Johansen described the course as consisting of three "chunks" and the Goodwin-Fortesque controversy as the second "chunk," the other two "chunks" are, in fact, intended to aid students in their investigations into the case. During the first three weeks, students analyze Garrett Mattingly's (1959) classic account of the English defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and then compare Mattingly's account with Fernandez-Armesto's (1988) revisionist analysis of the event. In the third chunk, students read G. R. Elton's *England Under the Tudors* (1974) and Joyce Youngs's *The Sixteenth Century* (1984) and led seminar discussions on portions of these texts.

The history workshop portion of the seminar commenced with the distribution of "the packet" a collection of primary documents relating to the Goodwin-Fortesque dispute during the eighth class meeting, or one-third of the way through the course. Consisting of some 46 single-spaced typed pages, the packet contains various documents that bear on the case: court accounts of events in the case; reports of the dispute in Parliament from the journal of the House of Commons and private diaries kept by Members; various state papers; correspondence between James I, the recently installed and first Stuart monarch, and the House of Commons; letters written by Members; and correspondence among diplomats. (In our first interview, Professor Vinten-Johansen quickly acknowledged that the idea for the packet and the packet itself are products of Professor Jack Hexter, with whom Vinten-Johansen studied as a graduate student at Yale in the 1970s.)

The students' first task was to order the documents chronologically and by source. Simple, but for the fact that, as the students discovered, England was, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, on a different calendar (Julian) from the Catholic states of the continent (Gregorian). Immediately, then, students encountered a problem in accomplishing what appears to be the most straightforward task historians undertake: Establishing the temporal order of events.

Subsequently, Professor Vinten-Johansen divided the class of 20 students into two types of groups. The first type consisted of 4 or 5 students apparently randomly assigned to each group. The second type was topic-specific. During the ninth class meeting, Vinten-Johansen worked with the class to identify topics on which they would need additional information if they were to make sense of the documents and, ultimately, the case itself. The topics for research identified included: biographical information on the principals in the case; organization of the government and the elections process; legal terminology; and the social structure of England at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

In their topic-groups, students were responsible for collaboratively deciding what information they needed to sort out the case, finding the information in books that Vinten-Johansen had put on reserve in the library or other sources they found for themselves, and finding information about their topic that classmates in their primary group requested. The information students gathered as part of their topic-specific group they reported back to their classmates in their primary group. In these groups, students pooled their information and understandings in an effort to make sense of the controversy.

Out of these collaborative efforts emerged the research papers that each student wrote. The first draft of these papers was due after the thirteenth class meeting, some four weeks after the packet had been introduced. After receiving Vinten-Johansen's comments and meeting individually with him to discuss their drafts, students turned in a second draft in lieu of a conventional final examination.

The Armada: Before receiving the packet on the Goodwin-Fortesque case, students read two accounts of the battle between the English fleet and the Spanish Armada in 1588. Vinten-Johansen, from the beginning, focused classroom discussions of Mattingly on the purpose for which he wrote *The Armada*. During the second class meeting, students reacted to Mattingly's characterization, in his preface to the 1959 edition, of the battle in the English Channel as part of an "ideological war." Several students objected that he seemed to ignore other possible reasons for the conflict, such as economics and burgeoning nationalism. Responding to these suggestions, Vinten-Johansen channeled the discussion, mid-way through the class, to the context in which Mattingly wrote:

Mattingly is writing in a time [The Armada was originally conceived in 1940]
in
which this ideological struggle is going on and so, therefore, in his mind even
though economics may be an issue, even though nationalism may be an issue
in
his mind, this ideological . . . conflict going on in the 1940s is causing him to
go
back and look at an earlier period of time . . . Do you think that is wrong? He
is
in a way imposing something from the present onto past. Why? What does that

mean? What does that say about history?

After a student responds that "you can never have completely unbiased history," Vinten-Johansen agrees that as human beings "come from different backgrounds and experiences" they will write biased history. The remainder of the class and much of the subsequent discussion about The Armada focused on Mattingly's thesis.

Discussions of Fernandez-Armesto's account of the Armada similarly focused on identifying his thesis and the evidence on which he based this argument. From the beginning, however, students used Mattingly's account as the standard against which to judge Fernandez-Armesto's thesis. Discussions explored differences in the types of evidence on which the two historians base their arguments, particularly Fernandez-Armesto's detailed account of the ordnance each side had at their disposal.

Toward the end of the third class on Fernandez-Armesto the seventh class meeting debate on his argument reached its peak. Several students had contended that a critical element of Fernandez-Armesto's argument is his contention that the English and Spanish were more evenly matched than they had previously been portrayed and that characterizing the battle as the English "David" defeating the Spanish "Goliath" misrepresented what actually occurred.

Kathy: I don't think [Fernandez-Armesto] says they were equal. I think he says Spain won.

Vinten-Johansen: OK, do you, do you -

Gary: I think he says it right here on page 236 when he says "the deficiencies of Spanish

strategy above all, as I have suggested, the failure to provide a northern port of refuge

bears some responsibility for the Armada's failure. The English made a contribution of

sorts to their own salvation, the weather did much of the rest, but the Armada would still

have been reckoned a remarkably successful venture but for the work of the Irish siren."

. . . I think that's such a stupid thing to say How can he claim success just success

that they made it out of there? I mean, that wouldn't have made it a successful voyage.

David: I'll take a shot. I think that he was arguing that they could claim success because

[Fernandez-]Armesto mentions early in the book that, really, possibly, the main purpose behind the Armada might have been just to end English provocation and not so much, you know, the success and the total invasion. So I think that in those terms, that argument stands up a lot more strongly.

Gary: Well, I know he says that maybe they didn't plan to invade and maybe they just went to scare the English into doing something. But, I mean, how can you consider all the time that they spent as being successful and nothing really happened to the English?

Kara: I would argue against that because I think what I got from what he's saying . . . that the Spanish were successful because they were able to keep most of their ships together and the English weren't really able to sink them or really harm them in any way. Most of their problems came from the weather and not having enough food and the English didn't accomplish their goal of destroying the Armada.

Gary: But how's that successful when the Spanish were on the offensive?

Dick: But it's not thinking like winning or losing the Spanish were defeated, or the English didn't succeed because they couldn't destroy the Armada and the Spanish succeeded because the English weren't able to. It's not like win or lose.

Gary: I think that's a cop out to say that

Vinten-Johansen: Jump in, Sean.

Sean: That's what I was thinking too. . . . I mean, why call it the Armada? Why not call it like a "little sailing fleet?" Just for the heck of it, they went out and sailed . . . If that's all they wanted to do, why do they go to all the trouble. . . ? If it's all just going to be some type of feint to quell England's provocation into Spanish territory or anything like that,

they didn't have to go to such extremes to do that, probably. And all they did was go up there and sail around and then get a couple of ships lost and . . . I don't see it as a Spanish victory.

Vinten-Johansen: You do not?

Curt: . . . this assumption's ridiculous because . . . I read at the beginning how [Fernandez-Armesto] said the only reason for the Armada was possibly to get bargaining power over the English. Well they certainly didn't. I mean, the English think that they won. So, I mean, it's not like the English were beaten up and said, "Well, at least we got them out of here." I mean, the English didn't get touched at all and got them out of there. So, I mean, Spain really has no bargaining power. If they came back, I mean, maybe the weather would change but England seemed [stronger]. . . [Fernandez-Armesto] is not looking at it . . . from the English point of view. But to me, the English seemed that they know that they won and they're not going to bargain.

Diane: I have to admit that I agree that the Spanish lost it, but I don't think by that much because . . . the Spanish only lost like four or five ships. . . . After the battle, I mean, the weather took out most of the ships. And I think maybe [Fernandez-Armesto] is suggesting that Philip was just testing his power against the English and they got up there and they got in a fight and they came out a lot better than maybe Philip thought that they would come out and then that way it was a victory and then that way maybe if the ships would have been able to get down back through the channel and back to Spain and they could have improved it, gone back up, challenged the English again and won.

Curt: What I don't understand is if he's arguing that Spain was the victor in this battle, why didn't they have the guts to come back down the channel to go home?

Vinten-Johansen: They couldn't, it was not a matter of guts, the wind was

Kathy: Why didn't Spain turn around and attack, attack the English? Why didn't, if they

were the victors, you know, why didn't they, why didn't they do something to

England? They had to sail all the way back to Spain and then say, "Ha-ha, we

won"

This exchange illustrates the kinds of conversations that took place around the Mattingly and Fernandez-Armesto texts. Nine of the 18 students present took part in this particular exchange. Professor Vinten-Johansen's role was minimal indeed, when he tried to interject information into the discussion, Kathy interrupted him to make her point. This exchange could also be examined for evidence of student understanding: Students evidenced a capacity not only to identify the thesis of a historical account but also the capacity to critique the evidential and logical basis for the thesis. Lest the reader conclude that this type of conversation is possible because this was a Honors section, I would add that 5 of the 9 students involved in this exchange were not in the Honors program.

Context for the packet: The third "chunk" of the course consists of two other texts: G. R. Elton's *England Under the Tudors* and Joyce Youngs's *Sixteenth Century England*. Whereas discussions of Mattingly and Fernandez-Armesto had focused on the arguments they make and the evidential bases of their arguments, these two texts were treated as sources of information that would help students interpret the Goodwin-Fortesque case. Vinten-Johansen assigned each student a chapter from one of the books on which to make a presentation to the seminar and led a discussion. The presenters was responsible for answering questions that classmates might have about the topic.

Papers: Students wrote three short papers and a longer research paper on the Goodwin-Fortesque case. The short papers included an analytical review of Mattingly's *The Armada*, a analytical review comparing Mattingly's account with that of Fernandez-Armesto, and a revision of the later. These written assignments were distinguished by two features: Vinten-Johansen treated all papers as drafts and review of the papers was an occasion for him to meet with individual students and discuss their progress. For instance, Vinten-Johansen required students to turn in a first draft of their research papers after the thirteenth class meeting and a second draft at the time set aside for the final examination.

The short papers, like the classroom discussions, required the students to attend to historical arguments and the bases for these. For instance, in the first paper, students had to identify Mattingly's thesis in *The Armada* and the logical and evidential foundation for his thesis. The comparative essay required students to compare the theses and the substantiations of the two authors. Vinten-Johansen

wrote extensive comments both in the margins and on separate sheets of paper. The example below is typical of the comments Vinten-Johansen wrote on a first draft comparative essay, submitted after the ninth class meeting:

Opening paragraph is one of you most clearly written to date, Dick. Need to flesh it out more, however from your personal orientation to each of the author's major thesis and your final integration. Also need more analysis (where I write "because...") especially concerning which (or both) of the arguments you consider persuasive.

Substantiation needs reorganization. The first paragraph has far too many topics.

Reduce the number of paragraphs, then discuss M[attingly]'s view vs. F[ernandez]-A[rresto]'s view and explain why you consider F[ernandez]-A[rresto]'s more reasonable. You point out different perspectives and simply choose the one you like. Rough transition to Mattingly. In the next long paragraph; your organizational logic is unclear. We'll need to think of ways to help you set this up in the revision.

Throughout, you need clearer explanation of the standards you employ for determining "better," etc. There's a difference between a particular perspective on the Armada and a clearer, more persuasive explanation. The key to that comes in your thesis the analytical part especially.

The five-page paper on which this comment appears contained an additional 15 comments or questions.

Conferences: Another critical experience in the course was the required conferences that Vinten-Johansen held with individual students about their papers. Although these conferences focused on the student's written work, they usually involved the themes that recurred in the classroom discussions. Students signed up for appointments on a schedule Vinten-Johansen brought to class. As Vinten-Johansen afforded 15 minutes for each conference, the discussions tended to be sharply focused. Limiting conferences to a quarter of an hour each made this a manageable component of the course for Vinten-Johansen who had considerable administrative responsibilities in addition to teaching and research.

Below is an excerpt from the conference that he had after he returned Dick's paper with the comment recorded above:

Vinten-Johansen: So you're stacking the deck against Mattingly.

Dick: I guess so. I didn't think, I thought Fernandez[-Armesto] was better, that's why I guess.

Vinten-Johansen: Yea, okay, but, "better?" What's "better?"

Dick: A more persuasive. . . .

Vinten-Johansen: Why?

Dick: 'Cause of the way he, umm, examined the Armada itself.

Vinten-Johansen: Because you liked it more?

Dick: Not really. When I read it I didn't like it as much. I kind of felt like he was ripping off the English. But then I thought at the end he did a better job.

Vinten-Johansen: Okay, now what we need to do is get that word "better" out of there and

come up with something where we can really compare the writing. In other words, we've got to compare the two theses. Then, unless there is a larger problem with the way in which Mattingly sets up the notion of the conflict.

Dick: The narrative?

Vinten-Johansen: No. . . you say here, "In his book, Mattingly does not examine the Armada

with its real goal in mind." You're telling the reader that Mattingly's got it screwed up. Instead of focusing on the "real goal" which you've set up here, to essentially invade England, . . . you're saying that Mattingly's gone off on a tangent. He's all concerned about . . . the Armada's role within the larger crusade. . . . There's absolutely no doubt in your mind that that's the case?

Dick: Well, when you put it that way I'm not sure, but the way he set up France and the

Netherlands, and what was happening in Spain, what was happening in England, I think that's, and then he just fit the Armada in to it.

Vinten-Johansen: Okay. What do you have, do you have any standard by which you can judge which one is the real goal, which one is closest to coming up with the real goal? . . . Other than yourself and how you feel about it?

Dick: Yea, I think, the documents that Fernandez-Armesto used.

Vinten-Johansen: What about the documents that Mattingly used?

Dick: I think they both said, kind of said the same thing.

Vinten-Johansen: Okay, what, how did you decide what was the real goal? . . . You're convinced that the real goal, the actual mission, the real goal was to make this crossing, to assist in the crossing. What, tell me precisely, what evidence caused you to arrive at that conclusion?

Dick: I can't remember that exact thing from the book, but the way he said, to meet Parma.

Vinten-Johansen: Okay, but whose goal was that? Is this something that Mattingly or Fernandez-Armesto invented?

Dick: Phillip's goal.

Vinten-Johansen: Okay, so what . . . is imbedded in here, but not clear yet, is that you're going to evaluate the two authors in terms of, at least initially, how well each one reconstructs Phillip's goal back then, in 1587-88. And then how the rest of this story that they tell whether or not it seems to carry out Phillip's goal or whether they wander off. What you're suggesting is, Phillip II's true goal, actual, real goal, whatever you want to word it, was what?

The exchange exhibits a pattern typical of the conferences we recorded: Vinten-Johansen relentless in questioning students about the claims they make in their papers and how they substantiate their claims.

These five elements the packet and the attendant research and discussions in small groups, the books about the Armada and the accompanying discussions of the authors' theses and substantiation, student presentations from the Youings and Elton texts, the short papers and the longer research paper, and the conferences on the papers constitute the opportunities that Vinten-Johansen has created for students to learn. But why these elements? Where do these come from? In particular, what seems to be the relationship between Vinten-Johansen's understanding of his subject including his ideas about the nature of the history, how one comes to know history, and how new knowledge and understandings are generated and the purposes and opportunities to learn they create?

Rationale for the Workshop Approach to History

Vinten-Johansen's pedagogy and purpose is grounded in his understandings of what history is and what it means to know and do history. In the data I identified six ideas that appear central to his view of history: (1) The record of the past lends itself to multiple interpretations; (2) a given event can only be understood in the context in which it occurred; (3) part of the historian's task is to link a given event to its context in a way that produces an interpretation of the event; (4) a critical aspect of writing history consists in placing oneself in someone else's shoes and seeing the world as he or she saw it; (5) historical accounts and interpretations should be judged on their own terms according to how well the historian substantiates his/her thesis; and (6) history is written for the present generation and, hence, the past needs to be periodically re-interpreted.

These ideas are not merely idiosyncratic beliefs; they coincide with the views expressed by other historians and philosophers of history, particularly those who have been categorized under the label "idealist." (Walsh, 1967). Idealist historians have been defined as such to distinguish them from "positivists" who believe, in Tosh's (1984) words, "the essence of historical explanations lies in the correct application of generalizations derived from other disciplines supposedly based on scientific method such as economics, sociology and psychology" (p. 110). Idealist historians, on the other hand, distinguish human events, which have an "inside" that is, at the core of human events are human motives, beliefs, feelings, and so forth which must be apprehended if the events are to be understood from natural events that are amenable to the inductive methods of science (for further discussion, see Collingwood, 1946; Croce, 1921; Walsh, 1967).

Moreover, as Novick's (1988) recent treatment reveals, the historical profession in the United States has moved away from earlier, unsophisticated notions about objectivity. That the conceptual framework of the historian, built up through his or her experiences in particular cultures during a particular period, shapes not

merely interpretation but what he or she chooses as the object of study has become a commonplace.

I draw attention to the similarities between Vinten-Johansen's views and those of historians in the idealist tradition to place him in the debate in the field over the nature of history and historical inquiry. I do not mean to suggest either that Vinten-Johansen sees himself as an idealist nor that his views consistently line up with those identified with idealist historians. Below, I examine the ideas that I believe lie at the core of both Vinten-Johansen's views of history and his pedagogy. Table 1 presents a summary of the experiences in the course and the understandings they seemed designed to encourage. Although I have relied primarily on interview data in developing these ideas, I have also drawn on other sources such as transcripts of classes and student conferences as well.

Table 1. [insert here--could we make this an appendix?]

The record of the past lends itself to multiple interpretations. Underlying Vinten-Johansen's commitment to the workshop approach that he uses in his historiography seminar is his view that there is no single account of the past. Rather, the past can be ordered and interpreted in a number of ways. This is evident in the following justification Vinten-Johansen offered during our interview for the essay students write comparing the two accounts of the Armada that they read:

History is a series of interpretations and viewpoints that are based in evidence but various readings of the very same evidence issues of selectivity, the background of the historian would eventuate in different outcomes. . . . [The students] needed to see that history is not simply a series of chronological recapitulations. That it involves a process of understanding not just what happened but how and why it happened as it did. And I wanted them to see that Mattingly had looked at this, had not just come up with a view of the Armada based upon . . . his own interests or proclivities, but that the range of evidence that he looked at eventuated in a certain interpretational point of view and one that I hoped that some of them would take issue with. And to kind of pique that a bit, I made sure that Fernandez-Armesto had some different points of view so that they could see that, you know, intelligent and reasonable people could disagree without turning into fisticuffs. So [the paper served] two purposes; one, to see that all history is a

process of interpretation, and two, that if they're going to do history themselves,

they've got to develop interpretations. Not just simply recount what happened. It's

not just a what's the word I want it's not just a chronology but chronicle.

What Vinten-Johansen says here echoes others who have attempted to define the study of history.

For example, Walsh (1967) defines history as a "significant" narrative of the past:

That is, a

narrative in which the historian has labored to uncover the "intrinsic" relationship among events

in order to produce a coherent whole from the events he or she studies:

[The historian's] way of doing that, I suggest, is to look for certain dominant concepts or leading ideas by which to illuminate his facts, to trace connections between those ideas themselves, and then to show how the detailed facts become

intelligible in the light of them by constructing a 'significant' narrative of the events of the period in question. (Walsh, 1967, p. 61)

In researching the Goodwin-Fortesque case, students soon find that several interpretations are possible for the evidence they uncover. In particular, they must decide whether this is a case of Parliamentary privilege or of Royal prerogative. That is, had Parliament, as some Members claimed, been granted certain privileges by the Tudors Elizabeth I, in particular that empowered it to decide matters related to its internal governance such as the validity of elections and who has the right to sit in Parliament? Or, as James I claimed, did the monarch have the prerogative, by divine right, to over-ride any decision Parliament might reach? The facts do not, to the students' dismay, speak for themselves. In their research papers, they must argue for an interpretation and substantiate their argument. The notion that history is interpretation is no longer an abstraction; interpret the students must.

A given event can only be understood within the context in which it occurred. In describing historical inquiry, Walsh (1967) places at the heart of the enterprise delineating the "intrinsic" relationship between one event and others. Vinten-Johansen gives expression to this by the way he situates the Goodwin-Fortesque case within the overall organization of the course and within history:

Students are forced, first, into a sense for a broader context, that even if they . . .

. . . look at a particular event such as the Armada they have to recognize that the Armada cannot be viewed in isolation. . . . So the first goal of doing history is to

have a sufficient sense for background, setting, the broader contextual

developments. To be able to know more or less where a particular event might be situated.

In fact, all the readings in the course had as a primary purpose providing students with a context for the case. The accounts of the Armada set the stage for the transition from the Tudors to Stuarts and England's emergence as a Protestant power capable of counter-balancing Catholic power on the continent; the Elton and Youings texts offered details of the political, diplomatic, and social milieu in which the case occurred. The use of the topic-specific groups to gather information was precisely to delineate and fill out the context of the controversy.

The historian's task is to link a given event to its context in a way that produces an explanation for the event. This is most clearly expressed in Vinten-Johansen's purpose for the research paper that students wrote on the basis of their investigations and discussions of the Goodwin-Fortesque controversy. In our first interview, Vinten-Johansen explained:

Students need to recognize that particular events are confusing to the participants

at the time. The clarity that we often impose historically is an artifact. . . . They need to go back and, in a sense, become absorbed in the uncertainty, in contingency, the lack of perspective in an event itself. Once they have . . . that confusion, then the goal is to essentially recognize that the role of the historian is to impose clarity on the past for a particular purpose. The purpose is: first, clarity for the individual investigating the event to try to understand what he or she thinks occurred. The second is clarity in terms of communication to others. Why would this event in which one has invested one's time and energy and understanding be of significance to other people?

Vinten-Johansen's idea that historians "impose clarity on the past for a particular purpose" comports well with Walsh's (1967) observation that the historian's task is to construct a "significant" narrative of events and Burston's (1976) assertion that historians seek to "elucidate the individual event" (p. 32). Carr (1964) asserts that "[t]he facts of history cannot be purely objective, since they become facts of history only in virtue of the significance attached to them by the historian" (p. 120). These views of "facts" and the historian's relation to them differs markedly from the views of those in the positivist tradition who hold that the historian's beliefs and values are largely irrelevant (see, for instance, Benson, 1972).

Just as the texts in the course particularly Elton and Youings and the topic-specific groups were the vehicles for filling out the context of the case, the primary groups were the forum in which information on the context and insights students had gathered in their research were pooled to make sense out of the information gleaned from the documents in the packet. Again, the process of inquiry and collaborative "sense-making," more than either the primary

documents or the secondary sources, constituted the principal opportunity for students to develop understandings of the nature of historical knowledge and inquiry.

Writing history involves placing oneself in someone else's shoes and seeing the world as he or she saw it. In discussing this component of his view of history, Vinten-Johansen described during our first interview how he has used *To Kill A Mockingbird* in another course he taught:

There's one point in [the novel] when [the little girl] stops and says, "You know, suddenly I can step inside the shoes, and I can walk around in them for a few minutes, and I could understand that Boo was not that different from me where it counted," or something like that. . . . I use that, and [I urge my students] to "use your feelings and your intuitions not as the basis for your judgment, but as the vehicle for getting yourself out of your present, and at least making a pass [at getting] into these very strange waters of the past."

In describing his use of literature, especially novels, in his history courses, Vinten-Johansen explains why he tries to create opportunities for students to experience, imaginatively, someone else's reality:

What is the context that would help explain why they did that? There's usually an explanation for what human beings do. Even a serial killer you can figure out. There's a lot of detective work, I suggest to [my students], even though I don't like the whole notion of history as detective [work]. . . . There is that sense of what a good detective has to do in order to try to understand, to solve a problem, a murder or what have you, that a historian also can make use of, and that tends to work. But because of the difficulties that students have with [putting themselves in someone else's place] . . . you'll see how chock full [my courses] are of literature. . . . And that's largely because I have found literature is one of the most effective ways of getting students into a different world view.

Such imaginative projection into the hearts and minds of others in the past is, for a number of philosophers and historians, a critical requirement for understanding and doing history. In particular, idealist historians such as Croce (1921) and Collingwood (1956) argue that historical truths are not generalizations of the sort that the physical scientists seek but rather individual, applying to a particular event rather than to a category of events. Understanding individual events is possible because these experiences are a consequence of human thought and

doings which are accessible to the historian. According to Walsh (1967), the historian can "re-think or re-live" the thoughts and experiences of individuals in the past: "This process of imaginative re-living . . . is central to historical thinking, and explains why that study can give us the individual knowledge which other sciences fail to provide" (p. 44). Elton (1967), in distinguishing between amateur and professional historians, observes that "[t]he purpose and ambition of professional history is to understand a given problem from the inside" (p. 18).

Vinten-Johansen views the experience of imaginative re-thinking and re-living as a critical antidote to the presentism common not merely among his students but characteristic of the way many in society think of the past. The issue arose in the first seminar discussion of *The Armada* when a female student objected to an analogy Mattingly uses to compare the way Elizabeth I managed the people of England to the way a woman manages her lover. The student accused Mattingly of sexism. After soliciting other students' views of this observation, Vinten-Johansen discussed the charge:

If you are going to stand back and try to be objective, it is a sexist description, by our current standards. But then, as a practicing historian, you have to stop and say, "Wait a minute. What kind of society was this?" In so far as that society was sexist by our standards, then it is possible that Mattingly has captured sexism in the society. If Mattingly had written this book thirty or forty years later than he did, it is very possible that he would have figured out a way to let us know whether he approved or disapproved of that sexism, but writing in the 1950s actually he started writing in the 1940s was essentially a decade before the full popular explosion, so to speak, of the notion of sexism.

Notice that in this class, the second of the term, Vinten-Johansen is already including students in the category of "practicing historians," explaining to these novice historians the culture and the conventions of the enterprise of doing history. Vinten-Johansen, in class, frequently asks questions intended to alert students to their use of contemporary beliefs, knowledge, moral standards, and attitudes to judge the actions of individuals in the past. In discussing students' first drafts of their research papers, he frequently questions students about their judgments of Members of Parliament or James I, asking what purpose is served by characterizing James as one student did as "stupid" because he insisted on the divine right of kings.

Historical accounts should be judged on their own terms according to how well the historian substantiates his or her thesis. This component of Vinten-Johansen's view of history is central to the total experience of the course. Many of his comments on students' papers like the quotation from his comments on Dick's paper above focus on this issue. This parallels Vinten-Johansen's insistence that

historical events be understood, as much as possible, from the "inside," although he acknowledges, as Berlin (1954) argues, that our capacity to do so is restricted by the degree to which our understandings are framed by the moment in which we live.

The emphasis on judging historians in the terms of the purposes and methods that they set for themselves appears to be Vinten-Johansen's way to help students think about the importance of internal consistency and overall coherence to the persuasiveness of the argument they will make in their research paper. His comments on students' papers and to students in individual conferences and class focus on the viability of the arguments they are attempting to make rather than on whether the interpretation is right or wrong.

In the following student conference, Vinten-Johansen addresses his comments to Kathy's criticisms of Mattingly in the comparative essay:

Kathy: I guess I'm judging Mattingly by . . .

Vinten-Johansen: By Fernandez-Armesto's criteria? Is that fair?

R: I guess not.

Vinten-Johansen: Would you want somebody to decide whether you have had a successful undergraduate career on the basis of your buddy's standards of what makes success, your parents' standards to success, or your own standards of success?

Kathy: My own.

Vinten-Johansen: All right. Then you've got to extend the same courtesy to Mattingly. What was he trying to do in his book? Does he do that well? What was Fernandez-Armesto trying to do? Does he do that well?

History is written for the present generation and, hence, the past needs to be periodically re-interpreted. A critical aspect of Vinten-Johansen's view of historical knowledge is that our understanding of the past changes as circumstances in the present change. This is evident when he discusses the use of both Mattingly's and Fernandez-Armesto's accounts of the Armada. Published some 38 years apart, they offer contrasting interpretations of the event:

It becomes a . . . perfect instance in which one can show the need for constant historical revision. That we are writing for a present generation and that present

generation is never the same. So that even if no new material is unearthed on a subject like the Armada, let's say, one can go back and with different eyes, different assumptions, with different goals in mind can make a very valuable contribution in trying to [understand the events].

The experience of the workshop itself is designed to convey the idea that "different eyes" may produce different interpretations. As Postan (1970) argues, "[t]he facts of history, even those which in historical parlance figure as 'hard and fast,' are no more than relevances: facets of past phenomena which happen to relate to the preoccupations of historical inquirers at the time of their inquiries" (p. 51).

Discussion

Vinten-Johansen's understanding of historical knowledge and the enterprise of doing history can be viewed as part of the larger discourse about knowing in history and historical inquiry. Like other historians and philosophers, he views history as primarily interpreting the past, of weaving together past events in a way that creates an explanation both for individual events and for the resulting whole fabric. For Vinten-Johansen, the essence of historical inquiry is uncovering the relationship of a specific event to the wider context in which it is embedded and, thereby, coming to understand the event in its context from the inside. This is, however, only half the historian's task. Historians must also communicate their understandings to others. To do so, they must create a text driven by their understanding of the events and substantiated by the evidence of the events themselves and from the context cultural, social, political, economic, diplomatic, intellectual in which the events occurred. By coming to understand the context and recreating this for the reader, the historian can produce a text that may induce the reader to re-enter, with him or her, the particular moment in the past and see the events from within. This describes Mattingly's *The Armada*, a text that Vinten-Johansen holds in high esteem.

Vinten-Johansen's understanding of history as a field of human inquiry represents but half of the knowledge that makes him an unusual pedagogue. He has also thought a great deal about what experiences are likely to help students develop the understandings of history and the doing of history for which he aims. He appreciates that merely reading history and about history is unlikely to enable students to develop such understandings of history and historical inquiry. This appreciation may be traced to Vinten-Johansen's own experiences as a student of history. As a graduate student in history at Yale, Vinten-Johansen studied with Professor Jack Hexter who pioneered work in the use of history workshops. That experience appears to have been seminal not only in Vinten-Johansen's notions about history and historical inquiry but also in his ideas about how students come to develop an appreciation for these views of history.

The historiography course as described above is the point at which Vinten-Johansen's views of history and historical inquiry intersect with his ideas about learning history and his knowledge of his students. He has modified the idea of the history workshop he experienced as a graduate student to fit the level of intellectual development he believes typical of his undergraduates. Rather than leaving students on their own, as he had been left as a graduate student, to decide what information they would need to make sense of the case and where they might find that information, Vinten-Johansen helps students identify the contextual factors on which they require more information and places on reserve in the library secondary texts he knows contain this information. His selection of texts for the course serve double duty: They exemplify different types of histories specifically, narrative, analytical, social, and political and they provide contextual information for the case they are researching. Paper assignments are carefully articulated with the rest of the course. Early papers are designed to help students recognize and, then, construct a thesis and understand how historians go about substantiating a thesis. The seminar itself is also an exercise in identifying, constructing, and substantiating theses about past events. All of these experiences have in common the direct involvement of students: Students in the course rarely have the opportunity to be passive, even if they might prefer to remain so.

Students' Thinking about History

Ideas about doing history

As the above account reveals, most of the historiography seminar focused on students' understandings of writing narrative history how historians gather, assess, and make sense of evidence; how they decide the relative weight to give different bodies of evidence; how they develop and test historical theses; what problems are inherent in constructing historical accounts and explanations and how historians deal with these. Such understandings are vital if students are to develop a critical attitude towards the historical accounts they encounter. Understanding the extent to which historical accounts are products of the particular historical circumstances in which their creators live and are dependent on the available evidence is the essence of appreciating the constructed, interpretative, and tentative nature of our knowledge of the past.

Such an appreciation prepares prospective teachers to help their students develop perspectives on historical accounts. For instance, such an appreciation prepares teachers to help their students understand why certain groups have been under-represented both in accounts of the past and in constructing the accounts of the past on which non-specialists depend. Understanding the constructed nature of historical accounts is critical if teachers are to help students appreciate why all accounts, including those of the present day, are subject to constant revision. Finally, such an appreciation, to some extent, de-mystifies the writing of history and may, perhaps, prompt teachers to see themselves and their pupils as capable of constructing their own accounts, however modest, of past events and people.

At the beginning of the historiography course, the students in our sample, while they held somewhat disparate views on doing history and the nature of historical accounts, seemed to share several conceptions. The first of these is that, in writing history, first-hand accounts of events are more reliable than more distal accounts. In describing how they would write an historical account, they rarely mentioned the use of secondary sources. Several students also recognized that eye-witness accounts, while highly reliable, often conflict. In such cases, the historians' task is to balance the accounts, rather like an accountant or a mathematician:

You'd have to take everything from the South and the North like a grain of salt and then put it all together some way and see if like someone in the South said there is a hundred soldiers in this troop and then the other one said there was like ninety-eight. That's pretty close. So it must be true. Kind of like math. (Steve, IV#1)

During the interview, we gave students a copy of the text of President Johnson's speech to a joint session of Congress that eventuated in the Tonkin Bay Resolution that provided a legislative justification for the military build-up in Vietnam in the mid-1960s. We asked them how they might go about writing an account of this speech for a student history journal. Nearly all the students mentioned the importance of learning more about the context in order to understand the speech and the resulting resolution. To discover more about the context and the resolution itself, nearly all said they would consult secondary sources in contrast to their observations that historians seek out eye-witness accounts.

Most seemed to have a point of view on the issue of Vietnam and assumed that they would write an article to support that point of view. The purpose of consulting secondary sources would be to gather information to substantiate a position they had already taken, not to help them interpret the speech. None mentioned that the actual processes of researching and writing would be means to get clearer about what they thought about the issue. This assumption that historians bring predetermined positions to the writing of historical accounts is consistent with the reflexive view, expressed throughout the interviews, that all historical accounts are, by definition, biased. Bias can be traced to the personal circumstances race and region of birth, for instance of the historian.

We presented the students with brief summaries of four conflicting interpretations of Reconstruction drawn from Foner's (1988) recent reassessment. Most were unaware of any account of Reconstruction other than the one we christened the "Gone-with-the-Wind" view: Northern Reconstructionists the dread carpetbaggers manipulated ignorant and largely passive former slaves to their own self-aggrandizing ends. When asked which of the four versions they found most credible, not surprisingly almost all of the students chose the one with which they

were most familiar the "Gone-with-the-Wind" version despite the fact that historians, for several decades, have attacked and discredited this interpretation [Picture](DuBois, 1935; Foner, 1988; Woodward, 1986)[Picture]. Interestingly, one student who had read Foner's account for a survey course in American history, mentioned that Foner's differences with David Donald [Picture](1965)[Picture], another historian of the Reconstruction era, arose from the fact that Donald was a Southerner and Foner a Northerner.

Virtually all of the students, asked to explain the differences among the various accounts of Reconstruction, ascribed these to the historians' personal biases: Whether they were from the North or the South, whether they were black or white, and whether or not they were prejudiced toward blacks. As one student told us, "If Jimmy Joe Bob from the South is writing about the Civil War, I'm sure he'd be biased to reasons why the South had the right idea and the North didn't" (Jeff, IV#1). Another observed that a Southerner could not have constructed the interpretation that characterized Reconstruction policies as essentially conservative because they didn't entail land redistribution.

Two students who also subscribed to the general notion that historical accounts are by nature biased, talked less about the role of personal biases and more about how the preoccupations and concerns of a given time shapes historians' perspectives. Responding to a revisionist account of Reconstruction that focused on the role of African Americans in shaping not only the agenda and policies of Reconstruction but also Southern society and institutions in the immediate post-war period [Picture](Foner, 1988)[Picture], Curt said:

I think it was written more in the time of the civil rights movement than after because I don't think that anybody would've looked at things that way before. I assume that this was written by a black, just because I don't think that anybody before that looked to say that the blacks were the center of everything. It just seems like something that you wouldn't think about until there was a big black movement again. (Curt, IV#1)

After learning when the various interpretations of Reconstruction that we gave her to read had been constructed and by whom, Mary mentions both the role of personal bias and of the historical moment in the historian writes:

It makes a big difference if you know where they're coming from. If you know if they're black or white, if you know when they're writing, because you can think of what their culture is like at that time. You know what might be affecting their views. (Mary, IV#1)

Views of history

For another analytical category that we termed "views of history," we drew on several different questions in the interview as well as from students' comments in the seminar. In the interviews that we did at the beginning of the seminar, two-thirds of the students in the sample believed that historians' accounts are, to greater or lesser degrees, instruments of their personal biases such things as their gender, race, regional origins, political commitments and nationality. A few students do mention that historians need to be conscious of their own biases and that such awareness could help them counterbalance their biases. By and large, however, the students assumed that biases are irresistible forces against which historians are impotent. As one student commented,

With something like the civil rights movement, our way of looking at things is not too different than it was in the 50s, 60s, and 70s because it wasn't that long ago.

So we would only see it from our bias. We wouldn't see it from an outside point

of view Because you get emotional about something, you have strong emotions either one way or the other. It's going to blind you a little bit to the ways things really are. You may get all the facts right but it will color it a little in your mind and if you're writing about it or talking about it, it will color it in the minds of other people. . . . Like the examples I read about the four versions of Reconstruction. We had the Northerner writing that the Radical

Reconstructionists were great guys because he was really caught up in that cause

and he really believed in it, so he downplayed what really happened and built the

Radical Reconstruction position for the Negro and doing all these wonderful things out of the goodness of their hearts. (Karen, IV#1)

Historians write accounts of the past in order to push their own political agendas. Such a belief

in the dominating power of personal bias produces a fashionable cynicism, a relativism in which all accounts are equally biased. According to this view, no account is entirely wrong nor are any entirely right.

Skepticism toward historical accounts is precisely the stance most history instructors would like their students to take. Certainly, Professor Vinten-Johansen tried to help his students develop such stances. Yet, a cynicism that ignores the standards and criteria that historians have developed for judging the relative merits of various accounts is as reflexive and unthinking as a gullibility that accepts all accounts as equally true. Having arrived at such a cynical position, students can easily mistake their stance for critical analysis and reasoned judgment.

This skeptical stance is, however, fertile ground for teachers bent on encouraging a critical view of history in their students. As Vinten-Johansen observed, "[h]istory is a series of interpretations and viewpoints that are based in evidence but various readings of the very same evidence issues of selectivity, the background of the historian would eventuate in different outcomes . . ." a point of view shared by numerous practicing historians and philosophers of history (see, for example, Carr, 1954; Collingwood, 1946; Croce, 1921; Geyl, 1955; Handlin, 1979; Walsh, 1967). From at least three of the students, the data we collected seemed to show an evolution of thought beyond the reflexive cynicism described above. In the first interview, Mary, one of the three, responded to our question of why historians' interpretations of Reconstruction differ as follows:

I think a lot has to do with like the time they live in and their background. Like the one by W. E. B. Dubois. . . . He was black and you can sort of tell that he's trying to make the blacks, make it sound like they were actively involved in the

Civil War and actively involved in getting themselves free. (Mary IV#1)

A year later, the focus of her remarks shifted away from the ineluctable effects of personal bias and toward the indeterminate nature of past events. In the following, responding to a question about whether facts or concepts should be the focus of history instruction, Mary references her experience in Vinten-Johansen's seminar:

When I had Peter's class, we read two different books on the Spanish Armada. One book I hated because I thought he contradicted himself the whole time and

I didn't agree with what he was trying to say. But if he had made a case for it, if

he'd supported himself better, I would have said, "Oh, OK, this works." But then

the other book had different ideas and he supported himself well. And I don't necessarily subscribe to one or the other, but I'm like, "OK, I can see this" and "OK, I can see this." You've got to figure out what's going on from the two different ideas. But if you don't support yourself, people just aren't going to believe you. That's why I don't like textbooks because they'll say, "This happened,

this happened, this happened and this is why," and that's not necessarily why. .

. You know a lot of that's up in the air. I mean you can make speculations and you know you may be right and a lot of people may think that this is why, they may think the same reasons. But you don't know, you weren't there. . . . (Mary IV#2)

As we conducted these follow-up interviews during the Persian Gulf War, Mary used this conflict to illustrate her point in the context of a question about the war in Vietnam:

I don't think that history is all cut and dry . . . I mean, you can say, "Yes, this happened on this date, this happened on this date . . ." but you can't talk about motives. I don't know what I think motives for Vietnam are. Twenty years from now, me or somebody else is going to think different motives. . . . That's the kind of stuff that you can't tie down. . . . Some historian will write [about the Persian Gulf War] and say this is what happened and this is why, but then another historian's going to come out and say this is what happened and this is why and neither of those two people are going to agree. It's going to be totally different accounts. (Mary IV#2)

In this response, we can discern a focus on human motivation that is, reconstructing what lay behind the actions of people in the past as well as an appreciation for the fundamentally interpretative nature of all historical accounts. Evidence of similar concerns for human motivation and appreciation of the interpretative nature of historical accounts appears in the follow-up interviews of seven of the nine students for whom we have data on this dimension of historical understanding.

In the initial interviews, three of the students expressed another view of history: History as cyclical. Again, this view was largely reflexive, a reflection perhaps of popularized versions of Santayana's dictum that "Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it." Karen is typical of those who held this view. Asked how she would respond to a hypothetical high schooler who wondered why bother studying history, she said:

I'd tell him, "So you don't go out and make the same mistake yourself one day and get us involved in another war." Because, like I said last time, I believe history is cyclical. Events will happen, not exactly the same over and over again, it's kind of impossible to get all the same things but same general type of things will go on again and again because history really isn't paid too much attention to by anyone. And so they'll come up to a situation . . . that had happened in the past once or several times, same basic type of situation and choices and they'll go right ahead and make the same choice that was made before when it may have had disastrous consequences. You need to have the knowledge so you can possibly avoid repeating the same mistakes and having the same problems. . . . All history is basically war, peace, war, peace, preparing for the next war. (Karen IV#1)

In the third meeting of the seminar, when Karen suggested that history was cyclical, Professor Vinten-Johansen, aware of the appeal of this view for the popular mind, spoke directly to the difference between historical parallels and the view that "history repeats itself." In the follow-up interviews we conducted a year after the seminar, Karen returned to her view that history is cyclical but she devotes equal attention to her belief that

. . . . history can be interpreted in different ways. In a lot of cases, it's kind of hard to conclude that this interpretation is absolutely wrong, one hundred percent and this interpretation is the only right one. A lot of it is personal opinion, not fact. (Karen IV#2)

In the follow-up interviews with the other two students who had offered the view that history is cyclical in nature, both appeared less certain than about their earlier beliefs. Bill, for instance, who was perhaps most insistent about the cyclical nature of history, devotes, in his second interview, greater attention to the interpretative nature of history than to its cyclical nature.

One explanation for these apparent changes is that students learned from Vinten-Johansen's critique of this view that it is unpopular among historians. This isn't, however, what students communicate in the interviews. Rather, at least two of the three students who initially expressed this view seem to have moved beyond it, developing conceptions of history more textured and variegated than simplistic dicta on the nature of history.

Finally, one student, particularly interested in archaeology, initially viewed history as the orderly presentation of information about past political events and the people involved. Asked in her first interview about the historiography seminar, she opined,

In this 201 class, we don't have a textbook so when we read the Armada books, they were mainly just the author's interpretation of the work. They were facts in a way but they were kind of tainted by their preference and I like textbooks, how they come across as straightforward and just give me the facts. . . . They don't have opinions or personal feelings in them. (Nancy IV#1)

A year later, Nancy's beliefs that the facts of history are unsullied by opinions, personal feelings, or perceptions and that textbooks are neutral compendia of facts have not changed. In response to a question about what high school students should learn about the Civil War, she replied,

The facts. I'd have to get my facts straight before I could teach them. I'd have to look at text books and make sure I was telling them the right idea. I'd just want to make sure that they knew the facts. I wouldn't want to put my opinions or perceptions over the facts. I would just want to tell them the strict facts about it.

(Nancy,IV#2)

Perhaps most surprising about Nancy's view is that it wasn't more widely shared by others in the class.

In sum, most of the students in the sample believed, at the outset of the seminar, that the personal circumstances of historians their gender, race, region cause them to skew historical accounts. In this view, historical accounts are the means that historians use to pursue their interests and the interest of others in their group. A year later, a subtle shift seems to have taken place in the views of about half the students: They appear to have developed a greater appreciation for the degree to which the present moment and the preoccupations of the present moment shape how all of us, historian and non-specialist alike, see the past. In their frequent references to the historiography seminar, moreover, we seem to be able to discern the effects of the course, particularly their work on the Goodwin-Fortesque case and the comparison of Mattingly's and Fernandez-Armesto's treatments of the Armada. The idea that history is cyclical, a repetition of the same events in different times and places, figures less centrally in the year-later interviews of those students who argued for this view at the outset of the seminar. And the one student who held that history was "just the facts, ma'am," seemed, a year later, to continue to hold this view.

View of Teaching and Learning History

Perhaps most striking about students' views of history and the doing of history is their relative sophistication. Most view history as interpretation of the records of the past shaped largely by the concerns and preoccupations of the present. When we look at these same students' view of teaching and learning history, however, we are struck by the extent to which they are prisoners of their own experiences. And, compared to the effect that the historiography seminar had on the views of several of them, the effect on students' beliefs about teaching and learning history was minimal.

When asked how they would help high school students learn the knowledge of the Civil War that they believed important, most of the students said they would lecture. This reflects their own experience in secondary and university history classrooms. Few had experienced any approach to teaching history other than lecturing. Two of the students did mention that they might have students do projects, one touted the value of discussions, one suggested the use of primary

sources, and one reported he'd tell "good stories." The latter is an approach that several students believed distinguished good history teaching.

Asked the same question about teaching the civil rights movement, several resorted to the lecture as the primary approach. Most, however, mentioned the use of documentary films. Three students also mentioned the use of primary sources or contemporary accounts. Four touted the value of discussions. Several students also suggested that they would have pupils read "real books" that is, works of history that are not textbooks.

Although most of the students considered the historiography seminar the best history course they had taken, only one student mentioned the workshop approach in their discussion of methods they might adopt. When we asked them about using such an approach with high school students, several expressed their doubt that high school students have either the motivation or the ability to carry out work of this type. This is perhaps consistent with their belief that Professor Vinten-Johansen 's seminar required them to work more than any other history class they had taken. Describing his experience in the course, one student, who liked the course in spite of receiving a failing grade, said, "Peter puts us through hell."

Most considered learning history as unproblematic, as simply a reflex of learning [Picture](Cohen, 1988)[Picture]. Consequently, to learn history, learners need only be told what happened and why this despite the strong criticism most heaped on the history classes, nearly all of which were lecture courses, they had taken in high school and at university. Jeff is a notable exception. Somewhat baffled by the seminar at the outset, Jeff came to rethink not merely the nature of history but also what it means to know and learn history. Responding to a question about how he might help eighth graders learn about the Civil War, he said:

I'd want to teach them how to learn because you can't tell someone history because then it defeats the purpose. If you learn it yourself and put your own interpretation on it, you can be guided The who, how, what, where, when, why are very important questions even Ph.D.s and doctors are still asked that
when they write articles. "What do you think about this?" Or " How about this?
You didn't consider this." And that's not telling someone they're wrong. It's just
saying maybe you can consider this, too. . . . How to learn is important, knowing
how to go to the library and look up what's interesting to you. (Jeff, IV#2)

Mark's view of learning also differs from most students in the sample:

If you just go in and just teach out of a text book and just have them learn things,

they're going to get bored and they're not going to know why they're doing it. You

have to give them a reason why they're learning and you have to give them some

kind of information that they can use out of school School can't just be a place where you go and then that's the only place you use your knowledge.

You

should get some kind of knowledge that you can use elsewhere and I think that's

what you have to try and do in teaching history.

Unlike the other students in the study, Mark took teacher education courses between the first and second interviews. He attributes his outlook on learning to a specific teacher education course:

Before the class ["Learning and School Subjects"] I had last term I used to think

more in terms of what I was going to do as a teacher instead of what they were going to do as students, and kind of a two-way thing I have to look at how I'm going to help them learn instead of just tell them I'm going to teach. (Mark, IV#2)

In sum, despite their belief that they had learned more in the historiography seminar than in any other history course, most students' views of teaching and learning changed little between the beginning of the seminar and one year later. Most believe learning is a reflex of teaching; most say they would lecture to students despite the fact that their own experiences of lectures are overwhelmingly negative. Several students also thought film documentaries and primary sources were appropriate for teaching about the civil rights movement. Two students offered different views of learning, one perhaps due to his own struggle to understand and the other because a course focused his attention on learners' experiences of learning.

Discussion

What are the effects of experiences such as the historiography seminar described here on students' understanding of history and the teaching and learning of history? Answering this question is fraught with all the problems that attend attempts to trace any individual's understanding or knowledge, or back to a particular source. In the first instance, we don't know the relationship between a person's understanding and a particular experience. That they developed new understandings, beliefs, insights, knowledge, behaviors after a given experience in no way establishes that the experience is responsible for the change. Changes

might well be due to other experiences not investigated. In addition to attending other classes, students, during the year we followed them, also talked with family and friends and others, read a range of texts, viewed television and movies, listened to the radio, and so on. The evolution of their understanding may well owe as much or more to these experiences than to the 19 meetings of the historiography seminar.

The difficulty of tracing understandings back to particular experiences is further compounded by the dimensions of knowledge in which we were interested. As the discussion above reveals, our understandings of the nature of historical inquiry and knowledge are bound up with broader understandings such as how we determine the truth about anything. Appreciating the role that context historical moment, material circumstances, class and race, relation to political authority, cultural milieu plays in shaping how individuals make sense of experience is fundamental, not merely to understanding the argument that is history but to understanding why groups and individuals come into conflict. Developing such an appreciation can just as well and probably far more often occur in the course of daily life than in formal academic settings.

Not only are understandings difficult to trace to their sources, but they are difficult to grasp. Much in our culture, in fact, legislates against understandings of the type Professor Vinten-Johansen has designed his seminar to cultivate. We are led to believe, particularly as young people, that in virtually all matters, true and false exist unambiguously. Stories are either true or false. Either former African-American slaves were the ignorant dupes of carpetbaggers or they weren't. A belief that stories are either true or false is less taxing on us and especially on those of us charged with teaching history than the alternative: that we often cannot determine precisely what happened in the past and even if we could we can't be sure what meaning to impute to what seems to have happened. Were African-American ex-slaves the dupes historians of the Burgess-Dunning school made them out to be? Or were they the active but tragically frustrated architects, in cooperation with Radical Republicans, of a design for genuine political and economic freedom undone by the machinations of Southern Redeemers and by wider economic misfortune [Picture](Foner, 1988)[Picture]? For a long time, the former was regarded as truth, celebrated in such popular icons as D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. Today, historians may regard the Foner's version as nearer the truth. Grasping that what we widely regard today as truth may soon be regarded as myth, as a version of reality that, like the Burgess-Dunning version of Reconstruction, serves the interests of a particular group, is no small intellectual feat. Consequently, expecting students to develop such an appreciation for the constructed nature of reality, for truth, in a semester or even in a year is probably unrealistic. I could mount similar arguments for the other understandings Professor Vinten-Johansen hoped his students would develop.

That we did find some evidence that a majority of the students appreciated this aspect of historical knowledge and, moreover, that their understanding seemed to become more textured, more nuanced over time was as encouraging as unexpected. Unexpected because, however intensive, the seminar is but one thin strand in the skein of students' total experience. Moreover, university classes are rarely compelling experiences.

Most of the students in the historiography seminar seemed, in fact, to find the experience compelling. Aspects of the experience that render the workshop a compelling experience seemed to include: attempting to make sense of events not already treated by historians; sorting through and making sense of evidence and the context collaboratively with one's peers where progress in understanding is genuinely dependent on others; and developing an original thesis and mustering support for it under the close critical attention of a teacher who expresses his concern for student growth through the seriousness with which he treats their efforts.

Although most students did appear to find the experience compelling, their developing understanding of the nature of historical knowledge and inquiry seems largely disconnected from their beliefs about teaching and learning. I was surprised that a learning experience that was as powerful as apparently the seminar was for most students should have provoked so little reflection on learning and teaching. This should raise questions about the assumption, common among some policymakers, that greater subject matter exposure constitutes better preparation for teaching. Even engaging and compelling experiences with a subject matter such as the historiography seminar is unlikely to provoke students to reconsider their beliefs about teaching and learning the subject matter. Of the two students who did reconsider their beliefs, one traced his reconsideration not to the seminar itself but a later teacher education course.

Conclusion

I undertook this study to find out more about how students respond to an experience designed to challenge their understandings of historical knowledge. In particular, I was interested in the influence of such an experience on students' understanding of the nature of historical knowledge and inquiry and the teaching and learning of history. I reasoned that what prospective teachers regard as historical knowledge is critical to a variety of decisions they make as teachers from the materials they use in teaching to the kind of discourse they encourage in their classroom. I further reasoned that an experience of learning history that students felt to be compelling might also influence their views of teaching and learning the subject.

I found that the course did, indeed, challenge their views of historical knowledge and did so in compelling ways. I also found evidence that several of the students in the seminar reconsidered their initial beliefs about the nature of historical

knowledge and inquiry. How much of this reconsideration was motivated by the seminar experience, I cannot determine. Yet, the data suggest that the experience did play a significant role.

Most of the students began the seminar with the view that historical accounts were shaped largely by the personal biases of historians and that historical accounts were the instruments of their authors' self-interest a profoundly cynical view. A year later, several of these students had evolved views in which historical accounts, inevitably, bore the imprint of the times in which they were written. These students still believe that readers must consider personal biases in judging competing accounts, but more pertinent might be historical context in which the historian constructs his or her account.

Yet most of the students' views of teaching and learning history remained unchanged. Teaching is seen as largely a matter of making learners aware of past events and the rationale for these events. Learning would follow. Students who had reconsidered their ideas about history knowledge were not moved to reexamine their beliefs about teaching and learning. This suggests that merely addressing prospective teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subject matter may not be sufficient. If prospective teachers are to rethink teaching and learning their subject, their unexamined beliefs may need to be challenged as Professor Vinten-Johansen's seminar challenged his students' beliefs about historical knowledge. Forcing prospective teachers to take more arts and science courses in their subject matter seems unlikely to produce such a challenge.

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Notes