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## Historical empathy and pedagogical reasoning

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### ABSTRACT

The process of engaging in historical empathy holds the potential for significant curricular and dispositional benefits for students in history classrooms. In order to realize these benefits, classroom teachers must be able to integrate historical empathy into their existing planning and teaching; a process that would benefit from empirical examination. This single subject case study examined the pedagogical reasoning process of an experienced classroom teacher who integrated historical empathy into an existing instructional unit designed to foster student knowledge of social control as an enduring historical understanding. The findings of this study suggest that experienced teachers may only be able to partially anticipate the unique pedagogical needs integrating historical empathy requires, and that a holistic examination of pedagogical reasoning during all phases of planning and teaching may be most suitable for the task.

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### Introduction

Historical empathy is the process of students' cognitive and affective engagement with historical figures to better understand and contextualize their lived experiences, decisions, or actions. Historical empathy involves understanding how people from the past thought, felt, made decisions, acted, and faced consequences within a specific historical and social context (Endacott & Brooks, 2013). Research on historical empathy demonstrates its potential for assisting teachers in actively engaging their students with history (Endacott, 2010; Kohlmeier, 2006) and achieving curricular goals related to acquiring historical content knowledge (Brooks, 2008; Davis, 2001; Doppin, 2000; Endacott & Brooks, 2013; Grant, 2001; Jensen, 2008; Kohlmeier, 2006; Yeager, Foster, Maley, Anderson, & Morris, 1998). Scholars have suggested repeated engagement in historical empathy can promote complex ideas and decision-making (Doppin, 2000; Endacott, 2010; Foster, 1999), moral judgment (Barton & Levstik, 2004), and a dispositional appreciation for the complexity of situations faced by people in the past (Endacott & Brooks, 2013).

Substantial attention has been given to the beneficial curricular and dispositional student outcomes that result when students engage in historical empathy (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Brooks, 2011; Dulberg, 2002; Endacott, 2010; Foster, 1999; Foster & Yeager, 1998; Kohlmeier, 2006; Lee & Ashby, 2001; Riley, 1998; Stern, 1998; VanSledright, 2001), but a significant need remains for empirical research that bridges theory and practice by examining the pedagogical reasoning of teachers who seek those benefits and outcomes. The few existing studies of teachers' use of historical empathy have examined the choices teachers make to shape their curricular goals (Cunningham, 2007), as well as the strategies used to encourage

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empathy's affective component (Brooks, 2011). The purpose of this study was to build upon these works through intensive examination of the pedagogical reasoning of a social studies teacher as she incorporated historical empathy into an existing instructional unit for the first time in order to develop enduring historical understandings. The research question that guided this inquiry was: How does one experienced social studies teacher reason pedagogically as she incorporates historical empathy in an existing instructional unit to promote enduring understanding?

## Review of the literature

### *Pedagogical reasoning in history education*

Purposeful examination of teachers' pedagogical reasoning can be traced back to Lee Shulman's (Shulman, 1987) transformative work that described the content, character and sources of pedagogical knowledge that constitute the "normative basis for the professionalization of teaching" (p. 4). Shulman divided teacher knowledge into the seven categories of content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds. Each of these categories represented a different domain of understanding teachers used to make reasoned pedagogical decisions. Some of the categories were educator specific, while others related specifically to knowledge of subject matter. Shulman used these categories of knowledge to create a model of pedagogical reasoning and action that outlined teachers' reasoning process. The model included six phases: (1) comprehension of subject matter and purposes; (2) transformation through preparation, representation, selection of strategies and adaptation to student needs; (3) instruction; (4) evaluation; (5) reflection on performance; and (6) new comprehensions of purposes, subject matter, students and self. Combining Shulman's categories of knowledge with the model for pedagogical reasoning helped differentiate the reasoning of the educator from the reasoning of a subject matter expert in another field (e.g. history or mathematics).

While Shulman's model helped professionalize the educator's knowledge and reasoning, it also privileged the transmission of content as the primary purpose for pedagogical reasoning (Cunningham, 2007; Meredith, 1995). His model mentions other pedagogical aspects such as purpose, instruction, evaluation and reflection, but content was firmly entrenched at the beginning and end of the process. This model, and the primacy of content, influenced much of the pedagogical reasoning research that followed. In history education, researchers focused on preservice teachers' historical thinking (Seixas, 1998), differences between historians and history teachers (Wineburg, 1991a), teachers' historical problem solving (Wineburg, 1991b), the relationship between epistemology and history teaching (Wilson & Wineburg, 1988), and the role of pedagogical knowledge in practice (Lee, 2002; Wilson & Wineburg, 1993; Yeager, 2005).

Constructivist history educators also seek purposes beyond the acquisition of content, including but not limited to, interpretation of the past (Grant, 2001), contextualized thinking, and the development of participatory citizens (Barton & Levstik, 2004). There are aspects of Shulman's pedagogical reasoning model that might be explored to see how teachers accomplish these purposes in the classroom, one of which is "knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds" (Shulman, 1987, p. 8). Those who are interested in promoting history education's constructivist purposes in addition to content knowledge may be equally interested in research that examines teacher's reasoning towards these broader goals. This paper focuses on historical empathy as one mode of historical inquiry that helps teachers reach those goals.

### *Pedagogical reasoning and historical empathy*

The literature on pedagogical reasoning and historical empathy is limited but educative. In one of two known studies, Cunningham (2007) discovered that teachers used "knowledge packages" (p. 618) consisting of student factors, structural factors and teacher factors when they reasoned pedagogically about engaging their students in historical empathy. Student factors were significant to teachers' reasoning and included: (1) their linguistic, imaginative, and dispositional capacities for engaging in the difficult task of empathizing with historical figures; (2) their preconceptions or misconceptions about historical facts or chronology that would have to be accounted for; (3) their reactions to different historical topics, willingness to work hard, emotional investment in understanding, and the likelihood they would produce empathetic responses; and (4) general student factors such as classroom behavior and attitudes towards learning in general. Structural factors were less specific to historical empathy and included typical teacher concerns such as curricular time, availability of resources, curricular limitations, equipment problems, and school-wide homework restrictions.

Teacher factors also influenced pedagogical reasoning and the teachers in Cunningham's study noted that reflecting on their experiences was the primary source of their development. In a contrast to other models of pedagogical reasoning, Cunningham discovered that, "Much of the shape of the empathy curriculum was formed not prior to class time, as a focus on content knowledge suggests, but in the moment-to-moment interactions during lessons" (p. 613). However, content knowledge certainly remained a factor in pedagogical reasoning, as teachers used it to identify historical figures, promote understanding of historical context, and challenge anachronisms or inaccuracies. Teachers' "goals and roles" (p. 616) affected their use of content knowledge as teachers specifically drew upon content that helped develop students' knowledge of historical context and perspectives. For Cunningham's teachers, who were trying to accomplish historical empathy's

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