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Contributions of educative document-based curricular materials to quality of historical instruction

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H I G H L I G H T S

- We propose a theoretical framework for historical quality of instruction.
- We explore one teacher's enactment of a history curriculum with educative features.
- We observe instances of the teacher supporting disciplinary historical reading.
- We observe instances of unprompted sophisticated historical thinking and questioning.
- Yet, teacher's limited subject matter knowledge constrained instructional quality.

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This case study explores whether and to what extent a history curriculum with educative features can contribute to the quality of historical instruction. Analyses focus on one teacher's implementation of three lessons from a document-based history curriculum with educative features explicitly designed to support teacher enactment. We found that the teacher's limited subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge constrained the quality of historical instruction. At the same time, we observed instances of the teacher supporting historical reading, and of unprompted student participation in historical thinking and questioning. Our findings suggest promising directions for the design of educative document-based history lessons.

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The success of any curriculum intervention rests on the quality of its enactment by teachers. Social studies researcher Stephen Thornton claimed that teachers should be understood as “curricular gatekeepers” whose beliefs about the purpose of social studies and decisions about pedagogy shape classroom instruction entirely (Thornton, 1991, 2005). Thornton argued that “attempts to circumvent teachers through ‘teacherproof’ curriculum and prescriptive models of instruction are doomed to failure,” and that instructional reform requires “raising the consciousness of teachers about their gatekeeping” (1989, p. 9). Remillard (2005), in a review of research on mathematics curriculum, made the case for a more complex interaction between teacher and curriculum: teachers interact in a “participatory relationship” with a curriculum’s

representations of concepts, tasks, and materials. In Remillard’s model the curriculum itself plays a role in the enactment. Indeed, to the extent that curricular materials can contribute to teachers’ learning and understanding of subject matter and pedagogy, they can be said to be *educative materials* (Ball & Cohen, 1996; Davis & Krajcik, 2005).

This case study explores whether and to what extent a history curriculum with educative features can contribute to the quality of historical instruction. In contrast with research in math (e.g., Land, Tyminski, & Drake, 2015; Remillard, 1999, 2000) and science (e.g., Beyer & Davis, 2009; Schneider & Krajcik, 2002), there has been no work on teacher enactment of educative curriculum in social studies either in the United States or elsewhere. Despite a growing global call for history teachers to engage students in interpretive, disciplinary work about the past (e.g., New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2010; see Seixas & Morton, 2013, for Canada’s Historical Thinking Project), international research on teaching history has

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focused on student learning and assessment, teacher beliefs about inquiry instruction, and the affordances or limitations of national curriculum guides (e.g., Bertram, 2012; Ledman, 2015; Voet & De Wever, 2016). The absence of research on teacher enactment of curricular materials mirrors, in part, the absence of curricular materials designed to support disciplinary historical thinking. In Great Britain, the History 13–16 Project of the 1970s was arguably the most ambitious effort in curricular reform, but research to emerge from the project focused on students' developmental trajectories in historical thinking rather than the curricular features that might support teachers' instruction (see P. Lee & Ashby, 2000; Shemilt, 1983). In the United States, the curricular materials produced during the New Social Studies projects of the 1960s and 1970s avoided educative features for fear that they be interpreted as condescending to teachers (Brown, 1996). When subsequent evaluations of the New Social Studies found little evidence of the initiative in classrooms, researchers concluded that the materials ran counter to teachers' beliefs and priorities (Shaver, Davis, & Helburn, 1978). The alternative explanation—that social studies curricular materials might be designed to support teacher enactment—has yet to be explored. This case study takes the first step toward addressing the theoretical and empirical gap in the literature on educative curriculum for teaching history.

The possibility that curriculum might be designed to support ambitious instruction is particularly compelling in the context of American middle school (ages 11–13) history classrooms. Researchers have long noted the persistence of out-of-field teaching, especially in middle school (see Ingersoll & Gruber, 1996). The National Center for Educational Statistics, a federal organization for collecting and analyzing education data in the United States, found that over 67% of middle school history teachers did not have a major in the subject and over 50% had neither a major nor certification in the area (Baldi, Warren-Griffen, & Tadler, 2015). Research in mathematics instruction has found that educative materials can partially compensate for low mathematical knowledge of teaching (Charalambous, Hill, & Mitchell, 2012), a construct comprising both subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). In this study, we explore whether the same could be said for history. In particular, the study asks:

- How does one teacher enact educative history curricular materials in his middle school classroom?
- How, if at all, can educative curriculum contribute to and support instructional quality in history classrooms?
- What are the affordances and limitations of educative materials designed to support document-based historical inquiry? How might these materials be augmented to further support teacher learning?

Through this limited investigation, we also hope to make a broader theoretical contribution by exploring whether a conceptual framework that has been used to analyze the enacted curriculum in other subject areas can capture the relationship between teachers and educative curricular materials in history classrooms.

1. Enacted and educative curriculum

Curricular theorists have distinguished between the formal, the intended, and the “enacted” curriculum (Gehrke, Knapp, & Sirotnik, 1992). Whereas the *formal* and *intended* curricula refer to published materials and teachers' goals, respectively, the *enacted* curriculum focuses on what actually occurs in the classroom. When the enacted curriculum departs from the formal or intended curriculum, especially in the context of innovative approaches that challenge pedagogical business as usual, it can be for any number of reasons.

Remillard (2005) proposed a framework for the “participatory relationship” between teachers and curricula to help clarify the complex set of variables that shape enacted curriculum. The framework focuses on how teacher characteristics—such as pedagogical content knowledge, subject matter knowledge, background and beliefs, capacity for reflection, and perceptions of students and curriculum—interact with a curriculum's representations of concepts, tasks, and materials. Additionally, Remillard noted how contextual factors influence the enacted curriculum. Such factors include, for example, the social and cultural forces in schools that reinforce traditional forms of instruction (Cuban, 1982, 1986) and students' particular instructional needs.

In a series of case studies, Charalambous and Hill (2012) adapted Remillard's (2005) model to explore the extent to which teacher knowledge and curricular materials contribute to the mathematical quality of instruction in a given lesson. The authors narrowed their focus to those elements in Remillard's model most central to their investigation. For example, they compared teachers with varying degrees of mathematical knowledge of teaching, a complex construct that contains both subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (see Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2008), and different curricular resources that were more or less explicit in their representation of tasks and concepts. Lastly, they examined the enacted curriculum through criteria that they established for mathematical quality of instruction. These criteria included (a) richness of the mathematics; (b) working with students and the mathematics; (c) errors and imprecision; (d) student participating in meaning making and reasoning; and (e) development of a coherent lesson trajectory (p. 452). In one of the case studies (Charalambous et al., 2012), found that “curriculum materials, when sufficiently supportive, can compensate, at least partly, for limitations in teachers' mathematical knowledge of teaching and help teachers with even low levels of such knowledge provide adequate instruction” (p. 512). The possibility that educative materials might be designed to help teachers with low historical subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge provide adequate instruction in history holds great promise, especially in a field where instruction has been largely characterized by rote memorization (Cuban, 1993; J. Lee & Weiss, 2007; Saye & SSIRC, 2013).

Davis and Krajcik (2005) identified five elements of educative curricular materials that might support successful enactment, and thus help teachers address the particular demands of their classroom contexts (Ball & Cohen, 1996; Davis & Krajcik, 2005). These include features that (a) help teachers develop subject matter knowledge; (b) illustrate the “pedagogical judgments” of the curriculum designers; (c) support teachers in anticipating and interpreting what students might think or do in response to different instructional materials and activities; (d) provide directions to teachers in how to adapt curriculum materials for their particular students; and (e) help teachers make connections between lessons and units over the course of a school year. Such “guidelines,” Davis and Krajcik argued, provide a framework for developing educative materials; however, it is important to note that individual units and lessons need not include each element to be considered educative. In fact, exactly how to balance and embed these elements in curriculum materials for different types of teachers remains a focus of ongoing research (e.g., Beyer & Davis, 2009; Remillard, 2005).

This study features a series of lessons from the *Reading Like a Historian* (RLH) curriculum, a document-based inquiry approach to history education written by both authors and comprising stand-alone lesson plans that address discrete topics in U.S. or world history (see <https://sheg.stanford.edu/rh>). In a quasi-experimental intervention in five high schools, the curriculum was found to have effects on student history learning and reading comprehension

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