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A Paradigmatic Speculation on Doing History with a Future in Mind

Una especulación paradigmática sobre hacer historia con el futuro en mente

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ABSTRACT

Reading history education through curriculum theory, I explore competing paradigmatic logics undergirding history programs and teachers' pedagogical choices. Compared to a 'standardized management' and 'constructivist best practices' paradigm, I draw from my scholarly journey to argue that a 'curriculum wisdom' orientation best honors democratic complexities, the nature of doing history, and a hope for public education as an ethical exploration towards a more preferable social future, however defined. In making this case, I explore futures thinking in the form of scenarios in which teachers and students use historical knowledge as warrants for distinguishing between the possible, probable, and preferable futures of those local-global issues deemed of personal-social import. As a conclusion, I ask, in what ways might we envision the potential of something more educative then merely transmitting a nation-state's single story of origins and change over time or appeals to shifty notions of objective history from one presumed to know to one presumed to be lacking?.

Keywords: history education, curriculum studies, curriculum theory, futures thinking, paradigms.

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RESUMEN

Al leer la educación histórica a través de la teoría del currículo, exploro las lógicas paradigmáticas en competencia que sustentan los programas de historia y las elecciones pedagógicas de los docentes. En comparación con un paradigma de 'gestión estandarizada' y 'mejores prácticas constructivistas', me baso en mi experiencia académica para argumentar que una orientación de 'sabiduría curricular' honra mejor las complejidades democráticas, la naturaleza de hacer historia, y una esperanza para la educación pública como una exploración ética hacia el futuro social más preferible, como quiera que se defina. Al presentar este caso, exploro el pensamiento de futuros en forma de escenarios en los que los profesores y estudiantes utilizan el conocimiento histórico como garantías para distinguir entre los futuros posibles, probables y preferibles de aquellas cuestiones locales-globales consideradas de importancia personal-social. Como conclusión, pregunto, ¿de qué manera podemos imaginar el potencial de algo más educativo que simplemente transmitir la historia única de los orígenes de un estado-nación y cambiar a lo largo del tiempo o apelar a nociones cambiantes de historia objetiva de una que se supone que sabe a una que se supone que falta?.

Palabras clave: educación histórica, estudios curriculares, teoría curricular, pensamiento futuro, paradigmas.

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Introduction

However common, I still consider odd that the majority of university teachers have no general education or curriculum studies background. This is not to suggest they are, therefore, poor instructors. Rather, I ask here what might instructors at any grade level learn about history education when examined as a curricular issue related to the 'what and whys' of our instruction as a potential contribution to preferable social well-being? In my response to this question, I hope to further discussions about ways in which the curriculum field might inform our history programs and pedagogical choices.

The epistemological question 'what is most worth knowing?' continues to shape the ways mainstream North American educators think curriculum across the subject areas. Today, another question seems ascendent, how might we have students arrive at a disciplinary-based reasoned judgement about a problem or event as found in the material sciences or in the historical past? In this formulation, advocates of historical or scientific thinking offer a refined epistemological set of approaches to a subject area's conundrums. As in the past, however, advocate's responses to these questions largely draw on non-educational source material:

> What complicates the issue even more is that the field of educational research in Sweden is also under attack from within. Other disciplines enter into education through subject didactics, yet often without doing their homework, without bothering to trace theories of education through their intellectual history and without relating themselves to what actually has been done and currently is being done in the field of education.[1]

Likewise, in Canada, several Canadian Ministries of Education have adopted a disciplinary based historical thinking program absent of curriculum theory or educational philosophy with funding support for the development of history resources for classrooms (https://thinking-historically.ca/about-us/). In the interests of brevity, I refer to those who advocate for and design such programs as "disciplinarians."[2]

Briefly, disciplinarians premise their proposals on the need for students to work with second order historical concepts (e.g., cause and consequence) so as to learn "how to question historical accounts and understand the evidentiary base upon which they rest."[3] Historical second-order concepts provide "a rational way, on the basis of evidence and argument, to discuss the differing accounts that jostle with or contradict each other."[4]

The North American development of historical thinking over the last four decades reflects its roots (along with education more generally) in cognitive psychology emphasizing individual cognitive processes as the target of educational efforts. Left out in this approach are thinking's more affective, collective, and desiring dimensions. While I recognize the significant contributions of a disciplinary school of thought, I attend in this piece to thinking history education through curriculum study and theory, concerned with questions about the formation of subjects and those subjectivities we teachers presume to teach. The animating question of freedom as a "becoming subject" distinguishes this approach from that of a disciplinary understanding of subjects:[5]

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[1] Gert Biesta y Carl Anders Säfström, «A Manifesto for Education», *Policy Futures in Education* 9, nº 5 (2011): 542, https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2011.9.5.540.

[2] Kent den Heyer, «History Education as a Disciplinary Ethic of Truths», in *New Possibilities for the past: Shaping history education in Canada*, ed. by Penney Clark (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 154–172. I recognize that my use of 'disciplinarian' is not without plausible contention as a descriptor of a commonality I read in the perspectives of many scholars I associate under this heading given the impossibility for any word to totally capture all the nuances of any particular body of work so associated.

[3] Peter Sexias, «Schweigen! Die Kinder! Or, Does Postmodern History Have a Place in the Schools», in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History*, ed. by Peter Stearns, Peter Seixas, & Sam Wineburg, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 24

[4] Peter Seixas, «The Purposes of Teaching Canadian History», *Canadian Social Studies* 36, nº 2 (2002): n.p. https://canadian-social-studies-journal.educ.ualberta.ca/content/articles-2000-2010, accessed February 15, 2023. See also, https://thinking-historically.ca/about-us/

[5] Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* Trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001). Kent den Heyer, «An Analysis of Aims and the Educational Event», *Canadian Journal of Education* 38, nº 1 (2015): 1-22.

> We propose that to speak for education in an educational manner means to express an interest in freedom and, more specifically, an interest in the freedom of the other: the freedom of the child, the freedom of the pupil, the freedom of the student. Freedom is not license. It is neither about 'anything goes' nor about individual preference and choice. Freedom is relational and therefore inherently difficult. This is why educational freedom is not about the absence of authority but about authority that carries an orientation towards freedom with it.[6]

Thus, I draw from a different source code than disciplinarians to speak about what history education potential offers the inherent capacities of teachers and students to create new conditions for freedom, however attenuated, and for re-cognizing and working creatively for their preferable collective becoming.[7]

Before doing so I share a brief background of my academic journey in the interests of objective disclosure, what feminist scientist Sandra Harding named 'strong objectivity.'[8] Harding argues that any research becomes more objective when research authors (or teachers) include what commitments animate their work (in addition to sponsorships of the work and so on). Related to teaching history, educators likewise greatly impoverish students as historical thinkers when they do not share what shapes their pedagogical choices as a hoped-for contribution to one and not another possible future.

What we choose to research tells something about what we feel we might lack. Growing up in rural Nova Scotia, Canada, I was taught the Canadian Anglophone "grand narrative" history. This is a story in which "women, Aboriginal people, and immigrants are secondary characters in young people's story of Quebec" and other provinces too, as research shows.[9] This story in Canada moves from East to West along with the so-named "settlers" and railways through the transformative actions of the nation-state's founding leaders of European descent. Still today, the frame of this grand narrative shapes university undergraduate historical study of Canada most commonly organized into pre and post Canadian confederation courses (the British parliament's British North American Act of Confederation, 1867).

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[6] Biesta & Säfström, «A Manifesto for Education», 540.

[7] My proposals originally concerned secondary education (ages 14-19) but extend both back to earlier grades and forward to university history teaching and learning. Proposals for improvement I believe can be done at all grade levels with the pedagogical attunement of specific teachers in specific learning contexts.

[8] Sandra Harding, «Strong Objectivity: A Response to the New Objectivity Question», *Synthese* 104, nº 3 (1995): 331–349, doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01064504

[9] Jocelyn Letourneau, «Remembering our Past: An Examination of the Historical memory of Young Quebecois», in *To the Past: History Education, Public Memory, and Citizenship in Canada*, ed. by Ruth Sandwell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 74. See also Kent den Heyer and Laurence Abbott, «Reverberating Echoes: Challenging Teacher Candidates to Tell and Learn from Entwined Narrations of Canadian history», *Curriculum Inquiry* 41, nº 5 (2011): 610-635, doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-873X.2011.00567.x.

While we students absorbed this celebratory storyline of the confederation's agential leaders, many Nova Scotians were more concerned with the present and "The Man" whose decisions made far away affected a region with a precarious economic life. The lesson I learned is that history happens to ordinary people, not something that they make. After two degrees and several teaching assignments, in the mid-1990s I earned a Masters of Arts at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. There I had the great fortune to learn from Dr. Roger I. Simon.

For Simon, the historical subject was not the past per say but a set of present and future possibilities that might be revealed through an encounter with the limitations of our institutionally shaped historical frames of reception. What might we become if invited to write as acts of agency in the marginalia of those grand narrative scripts through which we've learned to act appropriately in places of remembrance (e.g., manifested in heritage monumentalizing in schools, museums, public memorials)?

From Professor Simon I learned that identifications and commonplace templates of storytelling contain within their very expression fragment, fracture, and palimpsest. Simon expanded for me what education potentially offers – less a question of learning history to be a responsible or good or productive citizen and more about becoming a (better) human being through engagements with the past as a "difficult gift."[10] Ivan Illich captures this concern for the counsel that history can provide in this quest:

> People [need] to understand how immensely distant the mental world is in which the 12th century authors moved. I then try to keep [students] there for a while, becoming aware how much they are strangers, how little they can use their own concepts, their own modern German or English or French words *and* prepare them to re-enter the modern world *with a crucial question about it. And at that moment of re-entry, to become aware, for a moment, what a different universe they enter when they enter their own certainties, the world in which they feel at home*.[11]

For Illich, doing history requires a question of import for the present or a concern raised through our encounter as historical subjects with a strange past from which we seek counsel.

After three more years of high school social studies teaching, I started a PhD at the University of British Columbia, supervised by Dr. Peter Seixas. At that time, Seixas drew from the work of the British scholars of historical thinking, particularly Lee and Shemilt.[12] These researchers used

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[10] Roger I. Simon, *The Touch of the Past: Remembrance, Learning, and Ethics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
[11] Ivan Illich, «*Part Moon, Part Traveling Salesman: Conversations with Ivan Illich*», Transcript from *Ideas*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, November 21 and 28, and December 5 and 12–19, (1989): 15, emphasis added.
[12] Peter Lee, «History teaching and the philosophy of history», *History and* Theory 22, nº 4 (1983): 19–49, doi: https://doi.org/10.2307/2505214. Dennis Shemilt, *History 13–16 evaluation study* (Edinburgh: Holmes McDougall, 1980).

second-order concepts to study students' historical thinking and advocated for their use to improve British history education. Sharing similarities with British educators, Seixas's second-order concepts at that time included significance, epistemology and evidence, continuity and change, progress and decline, empathy and moral judgement, and historical agency (he later dropped historical agency later from subsequent lists).[13]

A point of departure for me from Seixas' et al disciplinarian interpretation of what it is to do history was my graduate student involvement with North American curriculum theory conferences. Like the teachings of Dr. Simon, for scholars working in this area subjectivity was the central object of education variously understood through feminist, Marxist, critical race theory, queer theory and other analytical lenses with insights to improve public-school subjects. In my case, I learned thereby to identify my commitments to teaching and research as a psychoanalytically informed antiracist approach to challenge Canada's Anglophone White supremacist "grand narrative" with other ways to story the nation-state, efforts which continue still today.[14] In doing so, I began to see serious shortcomings in the disciplinarian definition of the problem and proposed solutions for historical understanding. These commitments have shaped my practice for the last 20 years working in social studies teacher education and research.

As I learned through these conferences, research communities arrange themselves through a shared recognition of the defining problems to be addressed and accepted methods of doing so. Any "problem" is but a powerful story around which researchers and teachers identify, stories about a discipline's enterprise entangled and conveyed within larger stories of the nation, its development over time, its purposes, its values and, in some cases, its alleged destiny. A necessary question concerns whether, today, our inherited stories about the nation, citizenship, and the purported purposes of history education serve us well or for ill.

Paradigms

Thomas Kuhn's used a notion of paradigms to help understand the nature of scientific change over time.[15] In Kuhn's history, disciplines tend to crystallize around an organizing problem, agreed upon methods to address the problem, and a means of measuring success in doing so. Within the milieu of curriculum work, Henderson and Kesson and Henderson and Gornik build from Kuhn and argue that "when professionals advance a paradigm, they are making two interrelated moves. They are framing and justifying the organizing problem of their field, and

[13] Lee's list in his 1983 publication, for example, consisted of evidence, cause, change, time, and empathy.

[14] den Heyer and Abbott, «Reverberating Echoes», 610-635; Timothy Stanley, «Whose Public? Whose Memory? Racisms, Grand Narratives and Canadian History», in *To the Past: History Education, Public Memory, and Citizenship in Canada*, ed. by Ruth Sandwell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 32-49.

[15] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The structure of scientific revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

they are stating how this problem should be studied, and they hope, resolved."[16] In their reading, three curriculum paradigms presently compete for dominance today in North American education: 'standardized management', 'constructivist best practices', and 'curriculum wisdom.' Because they are likely unfamiliar to readers of this journal, let me very briefly convey what problems define these paradigms. I require a caveat before doing so.

We must recognize a paradigmatic reading of our professional work as a heuristic aid to help clarify thinking. Humans on the other hand are messy and do not so easily fit into one or another all the time. Indeed, in my own educational journey described above I moved from one to another paradigm over time. Nonetheless, a reigning logic found in North America's history education curriculum and practice helps us to identify that under which we may be most subjected (Figure 1).

Figure 1. 3 Paradigms for education[17]

Educational Paradigm	Organizing Problem	Problem Solving Cycle
Standardized Management	Student performances on standardized tests	Activities allgned to high stakes standardized tests
Constructivist Best Practice	Student performances of subject matter understanding	Activities that facilitate students subject matter meaning making
Curriculum Wisdom	Student performances of subject matter understanding embedded in democratic self and social understanding	Activities that facilitate students subject matter meaning making in a context of active democratic learning

The organizing problem of the "standardized management paradigm" is how best to improve student performance on standardized evaluations. Operating in this paradigm, proponents seek to improve students' ability to receive and reproduce knowledge created by favoured practitioners in each discipline. Those committed in public schools to a standardized management paradigm utilize methods such as textbook end-of-chapter questions, information comprehension exams, and test preparation for example believed to improve student performance on standardized tests. International testing programs such as PISA and TIMMs that purport to measure student progress across nations and cities also exemplify this paradigmatic approach to solving 'the' problem.[18]

[16] James G. Henderson and Rosemary Gornik, *Transformative Curriculum Leadership* (New York: Prentice Hall, 2007), 10; James G. Henderson and Kathleen R. Kesson, *Curriculum Wisdom: Educational Decisions in Democratic Societies* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall, 2004).

[17] Henderson and Kesson, *Curriculum Wisdom….*

[18] Sam Sellar, Greg Thompson, David Rutkowski, *The Global Education Race: Taking the Measure of PISA and International Testing* (Edmonton: Brush Education Inc., 2017).

In this paradigm, information is interpreted to be the knowledge students require to be successful on exams. Critical thinking for practitioners operating out of this paradigm only occurs if and when students have acquired sufficient historical knowledge with which to critically think. We hear those operating out of this paradigm almost every year when lamenting surveys suggesting a poor state of student knowledge of traditional facts.

The Anglo-countries throughout the 1990s witnessed public arguments between advocates for a single best set of historical references supporting an origin and progressive improvement over time of state and society (usually with the most prominent media perches) with those educators who call for a more nuanced and complex story of struggle (e.g., *People's History of the US*), and, from another angle, with those calling for a second order historical thinking approach to history teaching and learning (e.g., see Seixas and Lee's lists above).[19]

Perhaps seeking a means to work around the competing claims of which 'best narrative' students should be taught, "constructivist best practices" educators focus learning activities to address the problem of subject matter understanding as disciplinary performances. Readers may be familiar with those operating out of this paradigm in the work of Gardner promoting "disciplinary knowing" and the critical thinking challenges for students to improve their disciplinary habits of mind as relates, for example, to the study of history.[20]

Using both quantitative and qualitative informed methodologies of measurement, practitioners measure student success to the degree they use subject content and ways of thinking (e.g., weighing evidence like a historian) commensurate with the disciplines. Distinct from the previous paradigm, constructivists call for weaving critical thinking throughout the information or knowledge acquisition process.

As Ken Osborne notes, this trend towards constructivist best practices finds its historical antecedent Fred Morrow Fling's advocacy for disciplinary-based historical instruction in US public schools during the decades before and after the turn of the 20th century.[21] As Osborne details, Fling anticipated the academic vocationalism which has returned to us today in an advocacy to organize history education according to disciplinary "second order concepts" or "procedures."

As a US historian trained in Germany in the late 1880s into the methodology of "scientific history," Fling energetically advocated for the use of what he called the "source method" in

[19] Important to note that advocates for a traditionally celebratory story of the nation-state and those who challenge such with a different set of facts and stories can fit (perhaps with mutual unease) together into a standardized management paradigm, it is at heart a concern with students knowing 'the right' stuff.

[20] Howard Gardner, *The Disciplined Mind: What All Students Should Understand* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999); Michael Denos and Roland Case, *Teaching About Historical Thinking* (Vancouver: Critical Thinking Consortium, 2006); Peter Seixas and Tom Morton, *The Big 6 Historical Thinking Concepts* (Toronto: Nelsen, 2012).

[21] Ken Osborne, «Fred Morrow Fling and the Source-Method of Teaching History», *Theory and Research in Social Education* 31, nº 4 (2003): 466-501.

public schools. Fling's source method was concerned "not to provide information, but to examine the nature of historical proof and argument." [22] Both his program and its justifications "anticipated both the new social studies of the 1960s [in Anglo-North America] with its interest in the structure of the disciplines […] and more recent developments in history education [in which] the nature of historical evidence and interpretation [are] fundamental elements of any worthwhile history curriculum."[23] In contemporary terms, the "fundamental elements" are referred to as historical "second-order concepts" or "procedures" or "problems."

Fling and recent advocates share a vision of what history potentially offers its students. For Fling, "the most valuable result of historical study" is student scepticism.[24] In its more recent formulation, students working with historical concepts will learn "how to question historical accounts and understand the evidentiary base upon which they rest." Historical second-order concepts provide "a rational way, on the basis of evidence and argument, to discuss the differing accounts that jostle with or contradict each other."[25] In each case, advocates claim their approach better prepares students to deliberate about competing public claims in the present. This might be the case.

The claim that such a history education improves present and future deliberations, however, asks, and requires, that educators continue to ignore the emotive and imaginative relationships to present issues that students may not have to a series of conundrums located in the past. I discuss this further below. The logic of this appeal also fails to place a sufficiently robust interpretation of ethics and social action at the center of study. Rather, educators are asked to work for a hoped-for *deferred benefit* ('we promise we think it will happen') to democratic life in lieu of actually engaging what students' imaginative capacities might now offer in relation to pressing issues of personal-social import. Central to my critique here is that without articulating a desired future-present in mind, there is neither "the" past nor justification for including one history lesson over another. Further, any history lesson's objectivity lies in the degree the teacher or author shares their investments in the event, process, and or story they write or about which they teach:

> Objectivity in history – if we are still to use the conventional term – cannot be an objectivity of fact, but only of relation, of the relation between fact and interpretation, between past, present, and future …[so as] to liberate and organize human energies in the present with an end view in mind.[26]

[22] Ibidem, 466-67.
[23] Idem.
[24] Ibidem, 472.
[25] Seixas, «The Purposes of Teaching Canadian History», n.p.
[26] Edward. H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), 120-121.

In contrast to the previous two, the paradigm of "curriculum wisdom" considers the problem of how best to support students' acquisition of content (including information, knowledge, and ways of knowing) so as to enhance their capacities within democratic societies; what Henderson and Gornik refer to as "3 s understanding." 3 's' understanding consists of selves/**s**tudents using **s**ubject matter to interpret their diverse and multiple relationships to their **s**ocial. Educators "ask their students not only to demonstrate a deep understanding of the subject matter but also to exhibit democratic self and social understanding."[27] Utilizing multiple methodologies, those operating within this paradigm encourage diverse types of student performances of 3s understandings that illustrate the acquisition of historical knowledge as a warrant for claims about the present-future. As detailed further below, I introduce one addition to their formulation of a curriculum wisdom paradigm, that of a futures thinking dimension necessary to historical work (Fuigure 2).

Figure 2. How might teaching Feudalism look from different paradigms?

- S.M: Students memorize a chart depicting feudal hierarchy; answer questions about the economy of Feudalism and other social facts of the times.
- C.B.P: Using diaries, letters, paintings and textbook, students depict life in Feudal Europe by writing letters to a person of interest; answer a quiz on Feudal hierarchy; a one page argument about various responsibilities that each social group owed another.
- C.W: "What characteristics, if any, of Feudal life do you see today?" & "In what ways are you implicated in your findings?". "Based on your study, what preferable possibilities for future Canadian societies must be kept in mind?" Students cover all information as describe in previous paradigms and address question for summative evaluation.

In a standardized management paradigm, schools and universities are likely to be places where teachers convey answers to deep questions students are never asked. In working out of a constructivist best practices paradigm, students might indeed be skilled in applying their "disciplinary minds" to a problem located in the past. Unless that problem is explicitly related to questions that implicate those present, such mindedness likely does little to enhance students'

[27] Henderson and Gornik, «Transformative curriculum», 16.

capacity for ethical social action in the face of multiple challenges impacting our collective-individual lives for which historical study might provide counsel.

For many operating out the first two paradigms, a call for history education to enhance such capacities might be condemned as either diminishing their claims to an objective history itself or perhaps indoctrinating students into becoming activists. However, those working out of a wisdom paradigm counter that if not put to use towards improved (however defined) collective becoming, history and its lessons likely not only bore but become "inert."[28] More fundamentally, to inquire into ethical social action spaces may be a precondition for learning itself. This is especially so if we think of both justice and learning as an ethical journey rather than achievement or acquisition of a pre-determined thing (be it information or skill).[29] Finally, without strong objectivity as discussed above and without a preferable future in mind teachers betray of what doing history consists, explored further below.

I premise my curriculum wisdom approach on students' inherent inventive capacities to contribute to social life through an exploration of possible, probable, and preferable futures in regards to those present situations deemed inadequate: that is to put ethics and social action at the center of the curriculum. This offers quite a distinct departure from a disciplinarian promotion of an education premised on "deficit reasoning" – that the young do not know enough or reason incorrectly and therefore deserve to be the objects of our disciplinary treatments (a rather self-serving formulation of the problem; after all, when does anyone know or reason well enough?). We need a more affirmative and humanizing premise for our work with young people.

Finally, standardized management and disciplinary approaches elide questions about the role of power in an economy of historical distribution in which some interpretations of the past encountered in and outside schools are common and others marginalized.[30] Thus, while dedicated to elevating students' "reasoned judgments," these judgments are to take place within an unexamined social and political context of influence as to what is considered a valid historical problem worth wide public distribution. I explore the ways these distinctions play out in differing interpretations of 'historical perspective' (as a second order concept) and the place of futures thinking in historical education.

Historical perspective

Disciplinarians use historical perspective as a condition possessed by those in the past and call for teachers to work with students to appreciate the circumstances shaping past intentions and perceived choices. As a historical, political, and ethical concern, however, a historical perspective

[28] Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: New American Library, 1929).
[29] Kent den Heyer and Dianne Conrad, «Using Alain Badiou's Ethic of Truths to Support an 'Eventful' Social Justice Teacher Education Program», *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 27, nº 11 (2011): 7-19.
[30] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

is also a present framing that confers significance on some events, people, and processes whereas less attention is given to others[31] Students of the constructivist best practice disciplinarian school may become apt to appreciate something about past contexts and perspectives that shaped perceived choices. They will however likely be less informed about the sources of their own historical perspectives and that of their teachers and of the present political state that shapes what is taught and learned as school history and what may be learned from studying the ethical implications of such delimitations. Thus, those operating from a standardized management orientation and disciplinarians call for a history education with its promised benefits to citizenship that is itself ahistorical, most profoundly in a silence on their own conditions of possibility (e.g., liberalism, colonialism) and the political commitments under which their proposals proceed.[32]

Without a discernable present frame or perspective guiding why we emphasize some people and contexts, educators greatly impoverish students as historical thinkers under the totem of ("objectively weak") procedural ethical reasoning. I suspect such an objectively weak stance in schools leads many North Americans to still conflate history with 'the past' and, thereby, why, when histories with critically grounded theory enter public debate, we hear cries of "revisionism" as if re-visioning were not the very basis of the discipline itself. A strength of a curriculum wisdom paradigm lies in a recognition that without articulating a desired future-present in mind, there is neither "the" past nor justification for including one history lesson over another.

Beverley Southgate provides an example of the historical and political contexts shape historical work extending notions of historical perspectives to the present might highlight.[33] Southgate studies the uneasy relationship of historians to their contemporary social-political situations. These relations have produced historical scholarship ranging from nationalistic histories in time of war (as she studies, European historical scholarship in the First World War) to calls for "affected disengagement" from partisan concerns in the name of pursuing the historical Truth about the past: "So 'Omnia veritas' wrote Geoffrey Elton 'truth is everything' […historians] must never again submit to 'lay' external pressures, or deviate from the central disciplinary tenet that 'the past must be studied for its own sake'."[34] As Southgate details, Elton's lament expressed the despair of many in a generation that witnessed European pretensions to scientific or single set of disciplinary conventions for history wash away in a tide of atavistic scholarship in support of the superiority of one's national tribe and its political status quo.

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[31] Stanley, «Whose Public? Whose Memory? Racisms, Grand Narratives and Canadian History», 32-49; Carol Schick and Verna St. Denis, «Troubling National Discourses in Anti-Racist Curricular Planning», *Canadian Journal of Education* 28, nº 3 (2005): 295-317.

[32] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Press, 1993); John Willinsky, *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire's End* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

[33] Beverly Southgate, «'A Pair of White gloves': Historians and Ethics», *Rethinking History* 10, nº 1 (2006): 49-61.

[34] Ibidem, 52.

Of course, it may be objected that Southgate documents a failure of particular people at a particular time, not the general ideal of what should be achieved by following the procedures of "scientific" or "disciplinary" history more faithfully. What Elton witnessed, however, was neither the first nor the last time that such a thin interpretation of disciplinary thinking failed to transfer into the shadowy emotive, psychodynamic, and political relationships of historians to present issues. We should not be surprised, but should question why we continue with this faith in the democratic benefits of such a narrow "best practices" interpretation of what it is to do history. Training into a "scientific" or "procedural" interpretation of history simply omits several crucial subjects: people's subjective relationships to their doing of history and their relationship to the contextual social and political influences involved both in what, at differing times, is considered *valid* historical investigation, *relevant* topics, and *worth* conveying in textbooks.

The political-disciplinary shifts detailed by Southgate from scientific to nationalist and then again to objective history exemplify a social politics of historical investigation. Of course, these issues have been taken up by historians themselves.[35] For reasons insufficiently explained, however, these concerns do not appear for those who work out of a standardized or best practices paradigm.

'Imagin[ing] the past and remember[ing] the future'[36]

We find a justification for an inclusion of a futures dimension in historical thinking within the research profession itself. The US historian, William Cronon examines the books of two US historians published in the same year, 1979.[37] These historians "dealt with virtually the same subject" and "had researched many of the same documents, and agreed on most of their facts, and yet their conclusions could hardly have been more different."[38] To illustrate, Cronan takes quotations from the author's two books to support his argument that every historical narrative constitutes a value laden creation:

> In the final analysis, the story of the dust bowl was the story of people, people with ability and talent, people with resourcefulness, fortitude, and courage… They were builders of tomorrow… Because [of] those determined people… the nation today enjoys a better standard of living.[39]

[35] See for example, «Theses on theory and History» *Verso*, accessed 20 November 2023, https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3893-theses-on-theory-and-history.
[36] Lewis. B. Namier, *Conflicts: Studies in Contemporary History* (London: Macmillian & Co Ltd, 1942), 70.
[37] William Cronon, «A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative», *Journal of American History* 78, nº 4 (1992): 1347–1376. https://doi.org/10.2307/2079346.
[38] Ibidem, 1347.
[39] Bonnifield, cited in Cronan, «A Place for Stories», 1348.

> The Dust Bowl was the darkest moment in the twentieth-century life of the southern plains … The Dust Bowl was the inevitable outcome of a culture that deliberately, self-consciously, set itself the task of dominating and exploiting the land for all it was worth.[40]

How do two well-regarded historians dealing with the same archival sources and agreed-on facts come to such different conclusions? The facts neither speak for themselves nor themselves contain the lessons these historians draw. Rather, each historian threads the facts together in narratives woven out of their present concerns that animate why they initially bothered to go to the archive:

> In both cases the shape of the landscape conformed to the human narratives that were set within it and so became the terrain on which their different politics contested each other."[41]

These historical claims emerge as much from present concerns as they do from the past itself or the evidence by which we interpret it; not just a present concern, but also a more or less explicit future toward which these historians might have hoped their work contributes:

> Only the future can provide the key to the interpretation of the past; and it is only in this sense that we can speak of an ultimate objectivity in history. It is at once the justification and the explanation of history that the past throws light on the future, and the future throws light on the past.[42]

The lesson I draw here concerns the role that the future plays in learning quests – our hoped-for contributions to a preferred future for which we seek the past as counsel rather than a future that just occurs.

Remembering futures: Scenarios

Let me offer an example of the ways taking the future seriously can enhance historical thinking about our shared social world as called for with 3s understandings. Rather than directed to the past, David Staley convincingly argues that teachers develop students' critical/historical reasoning by directing such towards their articulation of future "scenarios."[43]

As Staley explores, scenarios differ from predictions: "Where a prediction is a definitive statement about what will be, scenarios are heuristic narratives that explore alternative plausibilities of what might be."[44] Scenarios extend critical thought about an important question

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[40] Worster, cited in Cronan, «A Place for Stories», 1348.
[41] Cronan, «A Place for Stories», 1362
[42] Carr, «What is History», 121
[43] David J. Staley, «A History of the Future», *History and Theory, Theme Issue* 41, (2002): 72-89; David Staley, *History and Future: Using Historical Thinking to Imagine the Future* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007).
[44] Staley, «A History of the Future», 78.

into the future and constitute one among many potential responses to placing ethics and social action at the heart of history education.

Having students think about future scenarios calls upon their historical reasoning both in terms of subject content and in terms of what is commonly referred to as historical thinking skills as articulated by the (US) National Standards for History: "to raise questions and to marshal solid evidence in support of their answers;" to "create historical narratives and arguments of their own;" and to "examine the interpretive nature of history." Working in Alberta, Canada, the high school front matter of the provincial program of social studies grounds the subject in "learning opportunities for students to develop skills … and the capacity to inquire, make reasoned and informed judgments, and arrive at decisions for the public good."[45] On the same page, the program calls for "students to become engaged and involved in their communities by listening to and collaborating and working with others to design the future" and "creating new ways to solve problems." On the following page, the program hopes to have "students [strive] to understand and explain the world in the present and to determine what kind of world they want in the future."

Like any disciplined work, scenarios begin with clearly articulated questions. Here teacher and students design questions that emerge out of pressing issues of concern. I refer to such questions as "throughlines."[46] I distinguish throughlines from "essential questions." Wiggins and McTighe define an "essential question" as "a question that lies at the heart of a subject or a curriculum …and promotes inquiry and uncoverage of a subject."[47] Rather than questions at the heart of a subject area, throughlines are provocative questions that forefront the necessity of ethical responses which require multi-disciplinary perspectives or frames of analysis. These might range from the more local to the more general: from "to what extent, if at all, will bullying continue in our school?" to "Given what we can determine about the historical record of relations, what ought to be the future of the Arctic and the Inuit people in regards to land claims, hunting rights, and sovereignty?"

After identifying their throughline questions, teachers and students scan the environment looking for what is called "driving forces" that are "key factors that will determine (or 'drive') the outcome of the scenario. Here "evidence" is identified in much the same way that historians work with artifacts from the past to explain events: "Like evidence from the past, evidence for the future is not intrinsically evident. It is made evidence by the historian's mind acting upon

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[45] Alberta Education, *Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12. Program of study* (Edmonton, Alta: Alberta Education, 2005).

[46] Kent den Heyer, «Implicated and Called Upon: Challenging an Educated Position of Self, Others, Knowledge and Knowing as Things to Acquire», *Critical Literacy: Theories and Practices* 3, nº 1 (2009): 26-36. http://www.criticalliteracyjournal.org/.

[47] Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005), 342.

it."[48] Resources for such scanning include all aspects of news and media that may suggest a driving force necessary to take into account shaping possible futures. Here a selected past might become meaningful both as an indicator of past driving forces and conditions in which they operated. Of course, the capriciousness of human agency and chance along with non-human interventions must also be considered in futures design.

Once a question has been identified, the present environment scanned for driving forces along with informative and state-required historical content introduced by the teacher, students then write the story of each scenario. (Staley, in his review of the literature on scenario writing, suggests a minimum of three – possible, probable, and preferable - to emphasize the future's malleability). Each scenario has a plot that articulates a different but equally plausible logic playing out in the future: "The narrative of each scenario does not describe a linear procession of events ('this will happen on this date, then this will happen'). Rather, the scenario is a description of the context within which those events may occur."[49] As a performance of 3s understanding, scenarios describe a context as if one were already there in a future looking around at a present already formed.

Concluding thoughts

In what ways might we envision the potential of something more educative then merely transmitting a nation-state's single story of origins and change over time or appeals to shifty notions of objective history from one presumed to know to one presumed to be lacking? Using a paradigmatic heuristic, I identify three differing and competing logics to justify education as a contribution to social good. The influence of Roger Simon, Ivan Illich, and curriculum theory lead me to advocate for curriculum wisdom with its explicit concern for enhancing students' subjective abilities to see historical study as a guide to address today's individual-collective questions-of-import with a preferable future in mind.

Historical work with ethics at its core positions knowledge/ways of knowing from or about the past as a warrant for claims centrally concerned with questions of justice grounded in particular situations created by complex societal challenges. In this organization, teachers ask students to consider the ways in which they are personally and differently "implicated" in such questions.[50] History serves students when it helps them make sense of possible and preferable relationships to these questions as manifested in their present desires, sense of self and other, and hopes for the future.

I premise my thoughts here on a hope that our collective discussions might take up the possibility of a more affirmative educational aim than the teaching of procedures or problems

[48] Staley, «A History of the Future», 84.
[49] Ibidem, 80.
[50] den Heyer, «Implicated and Called upon», 26-36.

without historical context and absent of the opportunity for students to investigate the messiness of social power as it manifests both in their daily lives and in the histories and futures they are. In the absence of this type of historical engagement, we should not be surprised, despite appeals to the contrary, that students encounter dangerously few competing historical claims worth their time either in or outside schools.

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