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ABSTRACT

Research on restructuring domain-specific knowledge suggests that inferences made by a learner are based more on what and how concepts are structured and organized in particular domains than on the age of the learner. In this view, it is possible for children to operate more expertly in a particular area than could be explained by global stage or the "expanding environment" theories. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how domains are structured and organized in classrooms, and the ways in which children respond to those structures. This paper discusses the nature of history instruction in a nontraditional first grade classroom and is based primarily on classroom observation. The class operates from what the teacher identifies as a "whole language" perspective in which cross-disciplinary thematic units are the focus of instruction. The teacher teaches from what is labeled a "perspective of care." Historical content is specifically structured to emphasize personal response, ways of "finding out," and the development of ethical/moral sensibilities. Among the conclusions drawn are that history, can be shaped to particular forms and structures in the classroom based on the teacher's conception of history, and that even very young children can begin to develop the interest and understanding that lead to mature historical thinking. A list of references is included. (DB)

"I PREFER SUCCESS:"

Subject Specificity in a First Grade Setting

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Running Head: Subject Specificity

"I Prefer Success:" Subject Specificity in a First Grade Setting

Research on domain-specific cognition and knowledge restructuring (Carey, 1985; Keil, 1984, Gelman & Baillargeon, 1983) suggests that the conceptual domain with which a learner is involved influences the learner's choice of procedures and routines used in constructing meaning in that domain. These studies suggest three interrelated aspects of development: First, that children's thinking and learning processes are similar to those of adults; second, that young children can learn things in particular domains much earlier in development than was previously thought; and third, that learning in these domains takes a longer time in development than has been previously argued. In this domain-specific knowledge restructuring view, inferences made by a learner are based more on what and how concepts are structured and organized in particular domains than they are on the age of the learner. Children come to understand these domains at least in part because they develop schema or frames of reference through meaningful engagement with specific content (Carey, 1985, 388; Vosniadou & Brewer; Gelman & Baillargeon, 1983). In this view, then, it is possible for children

to operate more expertly in a particular area than could be explained by global stage theories. It also means that educators may have considerably more influence over development than a global stage theory would assume. It is crucial, then, to understand the ways in which domains are structured and organized in classrooms, and the ways in which children respond to those structures.

Historical Information in the Classroom

In regard to history, we know something about the possible sources of children's historical information, and the kinds of history to which children report having been exposed in school (NAEP, 1986). There is also a growing body of studies of classroom practice (McNeil, 1988; Stodolsky, 1988; Levstik, 1986, 1988). There is evidence, for instance, that much of the history children seem to know appears not to be particularly dependent on any formal instruction (NAEP, 1986). In the NAEP history assessment students were most familiar with holidays and associated traditions, and the kinds of national symbols that are part of the general culture. It is quite likely that students could come in contact with this type of history through such everyday contacts as public and family celebrations of holidays as well as through flags displayed on public and private buildings,

eagles on flagpoles, post offices, and so forth.

Of course, present curricular patterns in the elementary school reinforce learning these national symbols and traditions. In the primary grades (K-3), for instance, history is commonly associated with celebrations such as Thanksgiving and Presidents' Day. Students in the NAEP report confirm their school exposure to historical topics related to the national symbols and traditions already mentioned, as well as to other topics in history, though they did less well with these on the assessment.

NAEP also surveyed students to get a general sense of patterns of instruction in history classes. The results should be read with a fair degree of caution, given the possibilities of students' mislabeling methodologies, or not accurately reporting or recalling proportions of time spent in different activities. There is also a wide range of teaching behavior that could fall under any methodological label (cf Wilson & Wineberg, 1988). With these reservations in mind, then, students report that the predominant modes of history instruction in their classrooms have been lecture and testing-- the patterns reported by Goodlad (19), McNeil (198) and others.

Special Status of History and Social Studies in the Elementary Classroom

A number of critics have argued that current curricula often

underestimate students' ability to understand historical content and concepts related to historical time, especially at the elementary level (Thornton & Vukelich, 1988; Downey & Levstik, 1988; Laville & Rosenzweig, 1975). Perhaps the lack of a more in-depth engagement with history at the elementary level should not be surprising, given the special constraints to which any social studies instruction at this level is subject. Relative to reading and math, social studies has very little time in the school day, is often relegated to short periods of time in the afternoons, and sometimes is not part of state-wide standardized tests (NCSS,1989; Atwood, 1986). This not only restricts the number of topics and depth of coverage, it also reduces instructional practices to those that can most easily be confined to short periods of instruction. As a result, elementary children often have had little opportunity to come in contact with more history than is required by the holidays and traditions curriculum. The lack of classroom time devoted to history in the elementary curriculum also makes researching the ways in which historical thinking, learning and teaching occur more difficult.

A Setting for Teaching and Learning History

In this paper I will be discussing the nature of history instruction in a

nontraditional first grade classroom. The class operates from what the teacher identifies as a "whole language" perspective in which cross-disciplinary thematic units are the focus of instruction. This kind of environment provides rich observational data. In this classroom, social studies and science are the content about which children read, write, talk and construct, thus providing access to both the children's and the teacher's ideas about specific domains. In addition, the teacher operates from what Carol Gilligan (1988) labels a "perspective of care." Historical content is specifically structured to emphasize personal response, ways of "finding out" and the development of ethical/moral sensibilities.

Finally, Ruby Yessin's approach to teaching gets "results" even by traditional standards. Her elementary school is one of three in its metropolitan district declared a Chapter 1 school, having met state requirements for programing aimed at helping "at-risk" children. Yet, over the last two years, Ruby's students have tested in the 90th percentile on the first grade CTBS tests in science and social studies. This is a classroom in which meaning construction is choreographed by a teacher with a strong interest in particular kinds of content, including history. She explains teaching as "a way of wanting to learn, a discovery of the joy of learning

and exploring." It is "a series of relationships, not something you do to someone else. I would be teaching the same way if I were working with twelfth graders--building responsibility. No one is born responsible. That is what teaching and learning can do."

History from a Perspective of Care.

Ruby sees herself as mediating between children and a world that often treats them harshly. She explains:

> We need to do something about these children now. They are our most precious possession, and we are throwing them away. I think I can make a difference. I don't know if I could have done this for thirty years, but it was the right time for me, and I can see myself here for a long time.
>
> ....
>
> I want them to see themselves as successful. I try to fill in the void that may occur before they ever come to school. First grade is the most important schooling a child gets. Drop-outs start here. Success and failure starts here--I prefer success. We can change children, and if we can do that we can change society

In a school where very few parents come to PTA, or parent meetings,

Ruby knows many of the adults in her students' immediate families, and parents drop in to visit, get advice on GED plans, or stop to talk as they deliver children in the morning. Many adults move in and out of this room, and the students have access to them all. It is a crowded classroom, packed with books, children's work, artifacts, pictures and various living systems. Bees that fly in the only window are carefully "rescued" by the teacher who then sets them free "because we do not harm living things."

Structuring History for Teacher Purposes.

While there are a number of occasions in which children introduce a topic that becomes part of a thematic study, it is in teacher-selected themes that the domain-specific patterns of instruction are most clear. Some overall patterns cross domain boundaries, but Ruby structures the way in which history--and most social studies content--is presented to the children in patterns that are unique to this part of her curriculum. A topic in history generally begins with a piece of literature--most often non-fiction. Columbus' journey to the new world, for instance, began when Ruby shared parts of a book describing the voyage. The teacher introduced a globe, where the children found points of departure and arrival, and traced sailing routes across the Atlantic. They looked at pictures of what

different points on the route looked like, and spent a great deal of time pouring over globes.

The next day, Ruby pulled out a beautifully illustrated pop-up book of sailing ships, explaining that she had been told that first graders couldn't handle such a delicate and intricate book, "but then I thought about this first grade, and I knew that you could be very gentle, and I knew you would really want to see the kind of ship that brought Columbus on his voyage." With this, she slowly opened the book, and as the children leaned forward to see better, an early sailing vessel rose from the pages of the book. For almost twenty minutes, she and the children carefully examined the sailing ships, discussing what it would have been like to make a long voyage in each of them. Finally, a ship such as Columbus sailed appeared, complete with string riggings, portholes through which the children could see the cargo hold, and sailors doing their work.

Next, children engaged in a variety of extension activities carefully linked with reading and writing. These included becoming shipbuilders; first reading careful directions, then building ships, and finally writing descriptions of the shipbuilding. Team work was stressed, and the need to be able to depend on the people on your team. Children were congratulated

for showing cooperation, sharing, or thinking about something someone else in the group might need.

Thus, history was supported by a scaffolding of cooperation and caring. All ways of knowing in this classroom involve explicit attention to care, and are embedded in a management system that emphasizes a litany of "virtues:" sharing, cooperation, consideration, participation and a good attitude. An excerpt from the fieldnotes on the shipbuilding experience demonstrates the way in which management undergirds history instruction:

> 2/10. Ruby has passed out writing paper and shipbuilding directions, and talked about the care with which a shipbuilder must work, to keep explorers as safe as possible. Some of the children, including Joey, draw ships at the top of their papers, despite instructions for building a three dimensional model. When one of the boys begins to complain that Joey is not following directions, Ruby responds:
>
> T1: That is just what shipbuilders do! They make diagrams of their ships so they will know just how to build them. That is an important part of making a good ship, and Joey will be a

careful shipbuilder, won't he?

Joey, of course, is both pleased that he is a "careful shipbuilder" and aware that he is expected to use his "diagram" to help him construct a three-dimensional ship. Ruby has maintained the momentum of constructing ships to take explorers to the New World, preserved the child's dignity, and added new information to the concept of "shipbuilder."

The immersion of children in a pattern of care facilitates linking the content of history to personal response. As part of a thematic unit on inventions, for instance, children studied George Washington Carver. The teacher introduced Carver, and the children worked communally to develop a list of "Questions about Inventors." Ruby asked children: "How can we find answers to our questions?" When encyclopedias were suggested, a child was dispatched to find the appropriate volume, and Ruby read an excerpt from the entry on Carver. She then led a discussion to see if the excerpt had answered any of the questions already listed. So far, the children had not seen a picture of Carver. Next, Ruby introduced an illustrated biography of Carver:

1-29 T: Let's read the title: A Weed Is a Flower. I think I am

going to show the illustrations this time, because they are so beautiful. [As she reads, T edits some of the text, stopping often for commentary and discussion]

. . . .

T: George Washington Carver had no hope for the future. Look like there's no hope. Now look hopeful. Good! In this class we are hopeful about the future, just as George Washington Carver becomes hopeful for his future. [Reads section on his having influenced the entire world--refers to globe] One man invented something used across the whole world. [Shows picture]

Darryl: I didn't know he was black!

T: This is his story

Darryl: He wrote it?

T: Some of you will have biographies written about you, because you will also do important things.

. . . .

T: Some people in this room remind me of George Washington Carver. They are inquisitive people, who always ask lots of questions, and are interested in all sorts of things!

Mark: Darryl!

T: You thought of Darryl! I thought of all of you. We came up with all sorts of questions I couldn't answer (refers back to questions they had written earlier about things they wanted to know about Carver]

....

T: [Describes all the work Carver did in order to earn money for his schooling--cooking, cleaning, sewing, etc.] Could we do any of the things that George Washington Carver did?

Ch: Yes! [Children forward suggestions]

T: We could certainly bake bread. We've done that before!

C: And we can make clothes, and chop wood [class adds to the list of things they could do to earn money for school]

T: [Rds on] George always tried to do things . . .

C: Right!

T: Yes, he worked hard to do good things, just like we do in this class. And he saved for college until he was thirty years old, because he knew you were never too old to get a good education. Listen to the things he could do. He was a piano player, a singer, a

painter . . . George was so smart, so he decided to be . . . ?

C: Rich.

T: There are three people in this room with the same job.

C: Teacher?

T: Yes, he became a teacher. . . .

In a similar sequence, the children discuss Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The student teacher shares an article about Dr. King that includes his "I Have a Dream" speech; Ruby invites the children to close their eyes and "dream, too." They all share their dreams, and Ruby says:

> T: When you closed your eyes and you had a dream, Dr. King also closed his eyes, but he dreamed not so much for himself, but for other people. He saw things that weren't right, and he didn't say he had a good life, and he couldn't help. . . . He decided that his dream was for other people, and he thought of ways to make things better. Lots of people heard, and lots of people listened. Some people didn't listen. Even today, some people don't listen. Hold up one finger. One person can make a difference. So you, as one person, can

make a difference in a lot of people's lives. Do you think he made a difference?

C: Yes

At this point everyone in the room stands in a circle, joins hands and sings "We Shall Overcome."

The children spent time over the next several days making mobiles expressing their dreams for their community, their country and the world. They ended their study of Dr. King with a pledge that they could take home and sign if they wished. It read as follows:

I promise to work harder at finding peaceful solutions to problems at home and at school.

I also promise to not judge other people unfairly and to help in making Dr. King's dream a reality.

Out of this study, Darryl and Christina create a poem about helping the homeless to find shelter, and Michael writes "When I am a millionaire, I will give all my money to the poor people." Joey uses Dr. King's formula to write "the longest story in the whole class:"

I have a dream to help people and clean up the rode.

I have a dream to be a nice friend.

I have a dream to help people and build nice things for the poor people.

I have a dream to help poor people and get some thing to do for them.

These experiences, while interesting in themselves, do not end when the study concludes. Rather, they become part of a body of reference available to the teacher and the children throughout the year. Historical lessons become touchstones that reappear in other contexts. Dr. King becomes a reference point in order to make sense of the concept of civil rights, and again, in a discussion of conflict resolution:

> T: "We can still disagree, but we can live in peace and harmony. We can promise to work toward peaceful solutions, we would talk together. Dr. King worked for brotherhood...."

When constructing an imaginary island world, this interchange occurred:

> 10-17 T: Make an island [shows fist]. Now, show water all

around. Pretend that you have a secret island. Close your eyes. . . . Matthew, what did you hear?

Matthew: water

T: Oh, I love water sounds!

Ashun: A captain talking on a ship. Talking about treasure.

Christina: water and birds, and boats and I saw a treasure.

T: Could you hear Columbus' ship?

C: I heard him talking

Peggy: I am exploring

T: Exploring! Peggy, tell us about that word. What does exploring mean?

Christina: It was like when Columbus and all them crossed the Atlantic ocean exp . . . [can't quite reconstruct the word].

Mark: I heard Columbus on the Santa Maria, and saw him talk to the natives [there are some other comments here, mostly about treasure]

Eben: I was Columbus, and I saw the night sky, and the moon, and I saw the stars come together and make things.

Anita: I saw Columbus come to America

Ashun: I saw the shoes he had to wear.

In using this perspective, Ruby intends to make history meaningful for the children: "If you don't make it personal, and make the connections to their lives, what's the point? They'll never remember it." And so she structures history in terms of relationships--Dr. Carver or Dr. King caring enough to sacrifice in order to make a difference, explorers from Columbus to modern astronauts seeking to "find out" about the world, a local separatist community (Shakers) trying to build a good society. Over the course of the year, the world is represented through history as a place with problems to be solved, heroes and heroines to be emulated, and individuals who can make a difference. Darryl's poem of relationship with and responsibility for the homeless hangs on the blackboard, next to his portrait of Dr. King, while Ruby continues to point out the ways in which individuals help and are helped by the group, and makes explicit the

similarities between historical behavior and the behavior of these first graders. Historical content becomes a vehicle for inspiring a sense of efficacy in children who have more experience with being acted upon, rather than acting. In her study of adolescent moral development in relation to history, Bardige (1988) notes that the personal response that may inspire action is sometimes lost when history instruction emphasizes more abstract and "objective" stances (Bardige, 1988). In Bardige's view, separating the personal from historical response can lead to a feeling of impotence:

> If we are to meet the challenge of educating in ways that help our children . . . become more human, then we must attend to and build on the "finely human" aspects of their thinking. As we help them to see and understand the realities, complexities, and laws of the world, we must also help them to hang on to their moral sensitivities and impulses (p. 109)

Of course, Ruby's students are first graders, not the adolescents of Bardige's study, but Ruby's purpose is the same. She wants to help children

to develop mature historical understanding, without losing sight of the power of the individual--indeed, the responsibility of the individual--to care about the concrete repercussions of historical and current events. As a result, historical content is basic to many of the themes in the class. The teacher draws on content from the domain of history, personalizes it, uses it for cross-disciplinary analogies, and holds it up as an object lesson in how to act positively in the world.

Moralizing History

Ruby did not simply espouse a generalized "care perspective," or demonstrate it only in informal interactions with students. Instead, content was selected and organized to focus on the "moral sensibilities" implicit in historical events. Historical understanding involved not so much the ability to see different sides or interpretations of a historical event, as the development of empathy, usually with a historical figure. This is particularly interesting in light of Bardige's research on historical thinking in the development of what she called "multiple lens morality"--the ability to see different sides--could lead not just to greater ability to take account of a different point of view, but to a tendency to "rationalize inaction, evade decisions or shrewdly manipulate others into complacency in the face

of evil" (Bardige, 1988, p. 108). Bardige notes that the potential cost of loss of a personal, or "face-value," response to history can be the sense of efficacy that might lead to action against injustice.

Let's Find Out

A second aspect of history instruction in this class was the emphasis on learning to answer questions independently. "Let's find out" was a familiar phrase generally linked with "what do we already know?" A common pattern in the classroom was to create a "word web" on the blackboard early in a thematic unit. After a field trip to a "Dinosaurs Alive!" exhibit, the children used the web below to discuss what they already knew about dinosaurs, to clear up some misconceptions (one child was reluctant to enter the exhibit because "dinosaurs stinked!"--a misunderstanding of "extinct"), and as a beginning point in discussing what new information they had acquired. The teacher began the discussion by calling children's attention to the web already constructed on the board:

2-9 T: What did we already know? [Children respond by reading off the items on the web]

die from extinction plant eater, meat eater

\ /

DINOSAURS — energy

hide eggs — | \triceratops

Four legged

Two legged

dinosaurs

moved mechanically

100 tons

100 teeth

T: And when they died of extinction, what changed?

At this point, there is considerable discussion of environmental changes that might have led to the death of the dinosaurs:

Anita: The weather changed, and all the flowers died,

and the plants got frozen.

T: And do we know this for a fact?

Mark: No.

T: No, we think that's a very good . . .

Anita: Idea.

Mark: I think what happened is that the small dinosaurs died, maybe got eaten by rats and all, and they didn't grow up, and then the parents died and there was nobody left.

Eben: They couldn't adapt.

T: What a wonderful word! Let me write that on the board.

Brandon: They were hungry.

T: Yes, It doesn't feel good to be hungry [tells about an Asian refugee who was so hungry because of war in her country]

Brandon: And your belly's empty.

T: If the dinosaurs could have helped each other, but they couldn't grow their own food.

In this excerpt, the teacher juggles several elements. First, she establishes a beginning point: What we already know. Second, she solicits new information that the children have gathered as a result of a reference source--the exhibit. Third, she asks for and honors their interpretation of that information--what changed in the environment. Fourth, she suggests that this is speculation--"good ideas," but not known "facts." Fifth, she emphasizes specific terminology and concepts important to the discussion. Sixth, she clarifies the term "extinction" without pointing out the child's misunderstanding of the term. Finally, she goes for human connections--hunger, and helping each other.

In addition, Ruby reinforces these more abstract discussions with a variety of concrete extensions. In order to understand fossil remains of prehistoric periods, the class observes real fossils collected on a walk, they make plaster "fossils" during which they talk about "imprints" and they build a model of the layers of the earth, and put their fossils in the model. With the teacher next door, the class also makes "Magic Finger Jello," a solution that allows them to read a recipe, measure ingredients, estimate the number of dinosaurs a batch of jello will produce, label the dinosaurs, and, finally, eat them.

Each step in this process requires "researchers:"

T: We need to know more about the earth. How do you think we can learn more about the earth? If we wanted to cook , we'd go to....?

C: a restaurant

T:[Laughs] What else might we use?

C: cookbook

T: And if we wanted to learn about the earth, we'd use

C: An earthbook. [Several children pull out informational books, and Allie finds one entitled Earth.]

T: I guess Allie will be our researcher.

C: Hi, researcher! [two other children are selected to help Allie go to the back table and look through books for "good information that will help us learn about the earth"].

At library on the same day, several of the children search for books to bring back, and are congratulated on their finds: "That's a wonderful book for us to use this afternoon!" They are encouraged to make use of other people in their environment, and guests are brought in for them to work with. Work

periods generally start with these admonitions: "What do we need to know?" "What is our question?" and "How can we find out?"

Ruby encourages the development of classroom experts--students who have "found out" information or have expertise that can be used by other students (cf Levstik, 1986). Questions are not only answered by the teacher: "You came up with a lot of questions I couldn't answer." Often, when a question is raised, it is referred to the student expert, or opened up for full class discussion. When Michael wants to know what a "custom" is, Ruby asks if anyone in the class can help him. The teacher may also request that a student become an expert on a particular topic that will be needed by the class. For instance, Michael is encouraged to read a book on geology in order to help the first grade construct a model of the different layers of the earth.

To further support this diffusion of expertise, Ruby arranged with the arts magnet school for a "partner class." These older students come and read with the first graders on a regular basis, but they also provide assistance in other ways. One day, a girl and boy came to class to share information on a topic related to Thanksgiving. They presented their information, and then stayed to help children with a follow-up activity. In another instance, several sixth graders developed a mural to be shared with the first graders. In each case,

the message was transmitted that learners of all ages can have areas of expertise, that questions are important, and that there are a variety of ways to find answers. This pattern also means that children regularly contribute to the knowledge base in the class. "I don't expect it will all stay. These are pieces that can be recalled. The child will remember some of it and think 'I want to know more.' They will be interested."

Building Interest

At the beginning of a new unit, the teacher invites children to come to the front of the room. They are about to travel far across the globe:

> Ruby puts on a Hap Palmer record, and the children sing "We all live in a neighborhood," and stops at different points in the song, so that children can identify their home address, the name of their city, state, country, continent, and world.
>
> Michael: We on the planet earth.
>
> T: We will be going on a journey, and in order to get there we will weave a magic carpet. We're getting ready to go to another continent.
>
> Darryl: We talked about Europe. There was people who wanted

freedom and talked funny on the radio.

T: This time we're going to pretend visit a country on another continent. If we went to China, what would we need?

C: passport

C: permission

T: Michael, find China on the globe.

Mark: We have to go over the cific ocean.

T: Pacific Ocean to get to the continent of . . . listen, I'm going to trick you.

C: Atlantic.

C: Europe!

T: We're going to travel to the continent of Asia, and we're going to visit China. This afternoon we are going to do a word web for China, and we'll learn about some Chinese customs. What do we already know?

At this point, the children share what they already know about China. Michael says he has been to China, but he doesn't remember it because he was not born yet. Another child says she thinks a favorite story, Tikki, Tikki,

Tembo is from China. As the unit progresses, they will add language and counting in Chinese, a New Year's celebration complete with dragon, newspaper articles about Asia, and so on. The first graders are quite pleased with the information they gain, and anticipate the next voyage on their "magic carpet." They continue to bring in books relevant to historical topics. Eric keeps an encyclopedia on his desk, just to look up new information because "I need to know about this."

Of course, this use of "lets find out," works in part because there is something to do with the information once it is "found out." Michael will use his knowledge to help his peers construct a model of the earth that shows surface changes as well as layers of sedimentation and rock. Eric will bring the encyclopedia to group and share his findings while Mark brings carvings from Kenya to supplement a visit by a guest from Ethiopia. Christina wants to use the researcher's jewelry as "a artifact." And, perhaps most significantly, quiet Angela who hardly ever says a word, will ask: "Isn't school fun?"

What Aspects of History Are Represented?

An interesting contrast between history as it is represented in this first grade and in a sixth grade classroom that was the subject of a previous study

(Levstik, 1986) has to do with the way in which the best and worst of human potential are presented. In the first grade, one of the explicit purposes of history instruction is to provide children with role models of courageous people, people who have solved problems, or done their part to make a better world. In fact, Ruby's emphasis on the positive is something she feels very strongly about, for young children in general, but especially for children whose lives outside of school often put them in contact with the worst of human nature. When reading the biography of Carver, for instance, she left out the description of the Night Riders kidnapping and killing Carver's mother. In the sixth grade curriculum, on the other hand, the border areas of human experience, both good and ill, were explored, and appeared to meet a deep-seated need on the part of the students. The sixth graders reported being moved, inspired, and sometimes angered by what they read, and they frequently added that they had learned something they labeled "the truth." In their discussion, they compared themselves to characters from historical fiction and biographies, and wondered about the choices they might have made under similar circumstances. As one child said, "I never knew how hard people had it." Bardige (1988) and Levstik(1989) noted similar reactions in other pre-adolescent and adolescent students.

In the first grade, the children sometimes bring up historical problems--racism, usually. Their teacher may discuss these things briefly, but they are deemphasized in this classroom:

T: In this room we don't treat each other like that.

. . . .

Eben: It doesn't matter what color your Mom and Dad are as long as you love each other.

T: You are all special because there is nobody else in the world quite like you, but we all have something in common, too. We are all . . . ?

Ch: Human beings!

The children sometimes raise other questions about these problems. Darryl, for instance, wanted to know if King's assassin had been caught. In an ensuing discussion he said he hoped the murderer would be killed. When it was suggested that that would violate Dr. King's plea for peace, he thought for awhile, and then said, "Well, I don't know about that."

What Is the Historical Discourse?: Structuring Historical Representations

The excerpts above demonstrate some of the discussion and debate

revolving around history in this classroom. A large part of the structure of history is the discourse within which it is embedded. As has already been mentioned, the most common forms of historical discourse reported in U.S. classrooms are lecture and expository text. While there is great variation in the degree of discussion involved in lectures, and in the style of individual lecture discourses, this pattern tends to have the teacher doing most of the talking and thinking about a domain. In contrast, students in this first grade engaged in extensive cross-peer, and student to teacher discussion and debate. In addition, the participation of adults other than the teacher in the classroom provided opportunities for students to talk about history with several adults, usually over a good book. With other children I have studied, the "good book" would most likely have been historical fiction, biography or autobiography (cf Levstik, 1986,1989). With these children, the predominant content-related literature was non-fiction of all types.

Literary frames for historical discourse.

While Ruby exposes her students to a wide variety of fictional texts, she emphasizes non-fiction in relation to content areas, and spends time with children talking about the genre clues in a piece of literature that will let them know what they can expect of a book. In addition, the majority of

their writing is non-fiction--usually about what they are studying in science and social studies. Sometimes they write recipes or directions for activities that are then sent to another class to be used in their work. During a study of the Shakers, the children "became" Shakers, and each day wrote about their work: "We are weavers" or "We are broom-makers," with an explanation of what they had done, and how it related to the Shakers.

Non-fictional texts were mediated in this classroom in ways very similar to the kinds of mediation described in whole language classes relative to fictional texts (Routman, 1989,). Children do not get dittoes with paragraphs of information. Rather, the teacher or a child brings a book to group, and the book is shared. Generally, if the book is brought by a child, the child stands next to Ruby. Leaning into the curve of the teacher's arm, and warmed by her encouragement, the child talks about what has been found. Such shared texts form the basis of the second hour of the morning when illustrations are discussed, facts checked, and questions asked. Another child may be called upon to check with the librarian for further information, or to locate one of the reference books in the classroom. Children keep reference books at their desks, and are allowed to read them during "free time." Ruby explains that one of the nicest things to have happen is to find a

child so engrossed in one of these books that s/he is distracted from the on-going class. Thus, an incident that in another class might be a punishable offense--not paying attention--is considered in this context a sign of intellectual growth. Ruby will tell the child that she knows the book is wonderful, and hopes it can be shared very soon, and then asks the child to put it away for the time being. The message is clear that the child is legitimately torn between two valued activities, and that the teacher respects both the child's interest in continuing to read, and his or her need to attend to the ongoing class activity. As a result, children check out informational books during their library time, read as much as they can, and allow the teacher, their partners, or other adults to help them understand the rest. Ruby talks about the children's "hunger to know" and their appreciation for whatever experiences she "puts in their way."

In many ways, then, Ruby structures the way in which reading, literature and language arts are integrated into the history curriculum. Her extensive use of informational literature, is, she says "done for a purpose." It is part of the "web of meaning" that she and the children are building to support learning, not just in this class, but in the children's future engagement with content. Ruby purposely makes "Finding Out" so highly valued that there is

plenty of incentive for making use of non-fiction, and for classroom language to be content centered.

This is a particularly interesting finding in view of the current emphasis on narrative approaches to history. One of the concerns raised by reliance on narratives--especially fictional narratives--is the finding that while historical narratives may inspire children to greater interest in history, and to be more critical of more traditional sources of information, including the textbook, it does not appear that children are spontaneously critical of the world created through the narrative. Without teacher intervention, the young reader takes the narrative world as "the truth," and uses that as the standard against which other information about that historical event, era or personage is judged (Levstik, 1989, 1988). Perhaps particular mediations of non-fictional texts could help foster a more balanced response to historical interpretations. There is also an increasing body of fine informational literature for children to use--well written with lively text, careful illustrations, and beautiful formatting. Such books may eventually change the way in which teachers use and children respond to informational texts, and change the way we think about the primacy of narrative in children's ways of thinking.

Conclusions

Rather than arguing that history per se forces particular kinds of teaching, Ruby's example demonstrates that the teacher's conception of history leads to particular forms and structures in the classroom. These structures have to do with whether history is seen as having utility beyond being an academic exercise--whether concepts from history are drawn on to explicate other content areas, concepts or ideas, for instance--and whether the discourse of the classroom provides opportunities for the development and use of historical vocabulary, mediation of historical understanding, and a variety of ways of interpreting and reinterpreting historical content. Ruby's class also provides further evidence that given the appropriate context, even very young children can begin developing the interest and understanding that may lead to mature historical thinking.

Finally, one of the things of which a study such as this reminds us, is the power of a charismatic teacher with a sense of mission. When asked whether she has a job, Ruby replies "No. Teaching is much too important to be just a job. What you do is so important! People remember the

experiences they had in school because it makes a difference in their lives."

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1. Transcriptions of field notes use T to indicate the teacher is speaking, C to indicate a child other than one of the focus children, Ch for choral responses, and pseudonyms for each of the focus children