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Teaching and Learning in History: Effective and Reform-Based Practices for Students with Learning Disabilities

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This article provides a review of effective and reform-based approaches to instruction that focus on teaching and learning of history for students with LD. Historical thinking goals, such as learning to think like a historian, to develop contextualized understandings, and to apply domain-specific approaches when reading and writing with primary source documents are now the norm in secondary history classrooms. Promising approaches that are designed to meet these goals, as well as interventions involving historical discussion and those that allow students to engage in inquiry are shared, as well as recommendations for further research and practice in history instruction.

Introduction

What is history? How do historians make sense of the past? I recently asked these questions to eighth grade students identified with learning disabilities (LD), and to those with other high incidence disabilities, before they began to work on a multimedia project, and heard many ideas. Two of the more interesting responses came from Derek, who said history is "what our country was built on and important things that happened before us" and Shelly, who said that history is "a story about people who lived before us and is passed through many generations." Together, these students seemed to understand that history is a representation of ideas about events and people who lived before us, and that it is somehow conveyed to people who live in the present. Notably, both Derek and Shelly deepened their views about history after participating in a project, shared later in this article, that allowed them to learn from each other and to hear different interpretations about topics such as manifest destiny, the lives of free African Americans in the North, and the rise of the cotton gin in the South.

After participating in the project, Shelly said, "[History is] things like way back and historians trying to put puzzle pieces together, like a mystery, from many, many years ago about how people lived." Her new interpretation provides reference to the recognition that history is constructed from sources, and that one of its' purposes is to understand the lives of people based on incomplete and fragmented evidence. Students must use insights such as these to contextualize the vast sea of differences in issues, perspectives, and motivations held by individuals who lived a long time ago in comparison to those who live today (VanSledright, 2001). When interviewed after working on his multimedia project, Derek noted that history is, "the study of our past, what happened before our time [to] understand how we got to where we are," indicating a glimpse of another, broader purpose of history, which is the linkage between what has happened in the world before now and current events. These

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comments are representative of responses from students with and without LD who participated in an inquiry form of history instruction, and offer support for the belief that the development of sophisticated historical thinking is possible for students with and without disabilities in middle school.

Traditional Forms of History Instruction

Most secondary students with LD receive social studies instruction in the general education classroom. Unfortunately, textbooks drive socials studies instruction more than any other school subject (Bean, Zigmond, & Hartman, 1994; Twyman and Tindal, 2006) and, when in use, teachers present them as authoritative sources of information (Bain, 2006) rather than nuanced interpretations of past events – and even when they don't, students interpret them as such (Paxton, 1999; Wineburg, 1991). Additional problems associated are that social studies texts cover too much content, lack coherence, focus on examples rather than concepts, and are just plain boring (Beck, McKeown, & Gromoll, 1989; Carnine, Miller, Bean, & Zigmond, 1994; Jitendra, Nolet, Gomez, & Xin, 1999; O'Brien, 2000). In addition, studies indicate that students with LD often receive little instruction beyond basic literacy in history and social studies classrooms (O'Brien, 2000; Gersten, Baker, Smith-Johnson, Dimino, & Peterson, 2006).

Special education researchers have responded to this learning environment by developing approaches to instruction that focus on basic skills such as learning vocabulary (e.g., Marshak, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2011), as well as in teaching cognitive strategies for reading, and writing from content area textbooks (e.g., Bulgren, Deshler, & Lenz, 2007; Englert, Okolo, & Mariage, 2009), so students with LD can meet traditional academic content demands in general education settings. As a result, special education researchers have validated a number of approaches to instruction that involve the application of general learning and literacy strategies to learning in the social studies (see also Boon, Burke, Fore, & Spencer, 2006 and Harniss, Caros, & Gersten, 2007). This focus on skills and strategies has been valuable for students with LD (c.f., Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998), and has contributed to enhanced learning outcomes. In fact, a strong argument can be made that instructional approaches studied by special education researchers can improve the learning of *all* children in diverse classrooms (Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000). Therefore, continued work on the application of general learning strategies in content areas is certainly justified.

However, special education researchers and teachers must do more than provide general reading and vocabulary strategies for social studies learning if students with LD are to have full access to academic expectations that are found in today's general education curriculum in secondary settings. This is especially important as historical thinking goals have been emphasized in general education classrooms for some time (e.g., Bain, 2006; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Seixas, 2007; Wineburg, 1991). In addition, an emphasis on disciplinary thinking has become embedded within efforts to develop students' reading and writing skills as a key pathway towards developing adolescent literacy (cf. Moje, 2008). Disciplinary interventions are also relevant for meeting students' future needs, because it seems likely that as students learn to reason about people in the past, they will develop more sophisticated ways of reasoning about the myriad issues and viewpoints that require critical thinking today (Sha-

nahan, 2008). Thus, the purpose of this article is to highlight model approaches to history instruction for students with LD. These may serve as examples of promising forms of teaching that promote students with and without LD to develop domain-specific ways of knowing, reasoning, and problem solving that are particular to the discipline of history.

Reform Approaches to History Instruction

Thus, the work of special education researchers who have developed innovative forms of history instruction for students with LD are now reviewed after first establishing relevant historical thinking goals, such as learning to think like a historian, to develop contextualized understandings, and to apply domain-specific approaches when reading and writing with primary source documents. A series of interventions that have been found helpful for students with LD are then reviewed including approaches that focus on: (a) historical reading and writing in the discipline of history, (b) historical discussion and debates, (c) multimedia design projects, and a web-based virtual learning environment, called a (d) virtual history museum, that allow students opportunities to engage in historical inquiry.

Reframing Goals For Instruction

National organizations in both the United States and Canada (National Center for the Study of History in the Schools, 1996; Seixas, 2007) have called for increased attention to viewing history as a discipline with standards related to the development of historical reasoning and from multiple perspectives. In this call, a central tenet is to evaluate historical evidence and to understand historical accounts as interpretations influenced by the purposes of historians (Lee & Ashby, 2000). Peter Seixas (2009) developed Canadian benchmarks of historical thinking that provide a framework for educational reform. This framework (see Table 1 for broader explanation) centers on six concepts, or "ideas that provide an understanding of history as a discipline…and shape the way we go about doing history" (p.28).

In fact, for the past 20 years, social studies educators in America and Europe have focused on helping students think critically in ways that approximate the thinking of professional historians,[1] who continue to construct new ideas about the past and have helped us come to more nuanced understandings about prior events. One of the most influential history educators in the United States is Sam Wineburg, who has observed both historians and novices (including high school students and adults who are preparing to become teachers) and made powerful inferences about cognitive processes underlying epistemological thinking in this domain. Wineburg (2001) describes how historians attempt to decipher a "subtext, a text of hidden and latent meanings" where excerpts from historical documents are viewed in different ways, "the text as a rhetorical artifact and the text as a human artifact" (p. 65).

1 Consider Gary B. Nash, author of "*The unknown American revolution: The unruly birth of democracy and struggle to create America*," (2005) who crafted a storied account of the contributions of African Americans, Native Americans, women, and both rich and poor white men to the birth of the United States.

Table 1. ***Seixas' (2009) Framework for curricular goals in historical thinking.***

	Main focus	**Explanation**
1)	*Establish historical significance*	People and events are significant when they impact large numbers of people over time; this evaluation requires placing the topic into a broad context or narrative.
2)	*Use primary source evidence*	Traces left behind from the past are examined, even interrogated, so we may construct an account or argument about it was like back then, what happened, and why.
3)	*Identify continuity and change*	One must look beyond individual events, to ask whether and for whom change results in progress, and to consider both change and continuity across different historical periods.
4)	*Analyze cause and consequence*	Ideas and decisions of individuals and groups may have unforeseen or unintended consequences; while based on precipitating actions and events, the result may be changes in long term economic, social, and political conditions.
5)	*Take historical perspectives*	People in the past experienced their world in entirely different ways than we do now; their whole way of thinking and perhaps feeling remain a challenge for us to imagine.
6)	*Understand ethical dimensions of history*	Although concepts like racism, sexism, and homophobia are products of very recent times, we expect to learn something from the past that helps us in facing the ethical issues of today – therefore, we must learn to make ethical judgments.

Wineburg's seminal study (1991) identified three heuristics that historians use when approaching texts that have subsequently been affirmed by others (e.g., Bain, 2005; Monte-Sano, 2010). He found that historians interrogated historical documents by looking at authors and their biases --"sourcing," situating documents in the time and place of their creation --"contextualization," and comparing documents --"corroboration," to find points of agreement and contradiction. In defining expert approaches to historical texts, Wineburg identified discipline-specific ways of reading and thinking. For these historians, primary documents were regarded as excerpts of social interactions that had to be reconstructed in order to render the documents

comprehensible. In order to derive meaning from a text, the climate of opinion, language use, social mores, and events of the time had to be considered. Such contextualization is crucial to analyzing the documentary record and constructing an interpretation of past events.

Historical Reading and Writing in the Discipline of History

Research on the kinds of reading and writing activities that foster historical thinking in students indicates that the kinds of texts with which students work can influence their reasoning processes (Paxton, 2002; Stahl, Hynd, Britton, & Bosquet, 1996). Students are more likely to think analytically and interact with texts if they read primary documents (Rouet, Britt, Mason, & Perfetti, 1996). Further, writing argumentative essays from multiple historical texts has been shown to help students progress from listing information to synthesizing texts into an argument (Young & Leinhardt, 1998), and develop deep understanding of content (Wiley & Voss, 1999). Finally, instruction that emphasizes historical thinking and argument can help students' writing improve (Monte-Sano, 2008; 2011).

Students with LD and other students who are struggling academically can also benefit from disciplinary approaches to reading and writing. De La Paz (2005) applied Wineburg's (1991) work in her development of a historical reading and writing intervention with students with and without LD. In this study, the self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) model of instruction was applied to both a historical reasoning (reading) and writing strategy in an integrated social studies and language arts unit. Although description of the SRSD approach is beyond the scope of this article (see Graham & Harris, 2005 for a recent review), this model incorporates a process by which students gradually take ownership of learning by (a) moving from explicit teacher modeling to collaborative (group) practice, to independent execution of specific academic and self-regulation strategies, and (b) fading procedural scaffolds such as the use of graphics or other prompts that contain strategy steps as students gain mastery.

In De La Paz's (2005) study, eighth-grade students with and without LD applied a historical reasoning strategy as they read primary source documents and then they applied a planning strategy to compose argumentative essays. The results indicated that, in comparison to students without disabilities in a control group who did not receive either form of instruction, students who demonstrated mastery of the target strategies during instruction wrote historically more accurate and more persuasive essays regardless of their initial learning profile. Students without LD demonstrated higher gains than those with disabilities; however, the students most in need of the most instruction improved to the same level that their most advanced peers held before instruction.

A subsequent study with eleventh-grade students who were poor or average writers (De La Paz & Felton, 2010) replicated the utility of the historical reasoning and argumentative writing strategies. Teachers modeled use of the historical reading strategy by demonstrating how to annotate the sources, making the sourcing, corroboration, and contextualization strategies explicitly. Teachers then modeled the planning strategy by transforming content that students discussed during a class debate into a plan that emphasized disciplinary thinking, and by requiring a careful

examination of evidence from primary sources that could support a response to a given historical controversy.

Outcomes in De La Paz and Felton's (2010) study demonstrated that students who received the experimental form of instruction learned how to consider several aspects of the sources they were given to read and to corroborate and contextualize aspects across sources with events of the time period in which they were situated. They also learned how to use evidence as a means for substantiating their claims in their written arguments (83% of students in the intervention group used quotes or documents to support their claims), or use quotes to further an argument (compared to just over 50% of students in the comparison group). Finally, students who received instruction wrote essays with more advanced development of claims and rebuttals after the instruction, after controlling for the length of their essays.

Historical Discussions and Debates

Classroom discussion is another viable means for promoting disciplinary thinking (Johnson & Johnson, 1988), in part because students work together to understand each other's interpretations (Kamil et al., 2008). In addition to exposure to multiple interpretations, classroom discussions can enhance text comprehension because, in contrast to typical question-answer recitation during lecture, sustained interactions allow students to explore topics in greater depth. Fortunately, several forms of historical discussions have been used successfully with students with LD, across several studies.

Classroom discussions. Russell Gersten and his collegues (2006) conducted a recent study on the benefits of classroom instruction with middle school students with and without LD. This study, which focused on the Civil Rights Movement from 1954 to 1965, used carefully selected excerpts from the documentary, *Eyes on the Prize*, by DeVinney (1991) to ground students' understanding of the historical era. Students read a variety of sources over the five weeks of instruction, including excerpts from their textbook and secondary sources from the time (e.g., *Time* and *Life* magazine articles on Rosa Parks, the integration of Central High School, and voter immigration training). One of the defining instructional features in this study involved the ways the teacher helped students understand content during daily discussions of each video segment.

The teacher strategically inserted clarifying statements and questions that had been planned prior to the start of the instructional unit as students watched the video. These prompts allowed the teacher to explain and elaborate on the material from the video, which was initially foreign to the teenagers in the study. The questions also afforded students an opportunity to react to the content and begin to make inferences about events such as the trial of Emmett Till, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and lunch counter sit-ins in the 1960s. Students engaged in "think-pair-share" discussions to compare how they would feel if they were in the situation depicted in the video or text and wrote responses on their own. Additional supports included use of compare-contrast activities with text and oral reading within student dyads to facilitate decoding and text comprehension.

The effectiveness of this approach was demonstrated using a variety of outcomes in comparison to a comparable group of students who had previously been

matched and randomly assigned to receive the same curriculum that differed only in terms of the interactive approach. After instruction ended, students' comprehension and knowledge of content were determined using written exams and structured verbal interviews, which allowed students an opportunity to elaborate on central aspects of the time period. Findings from this study were strong – students with and without LD who experienced this approach demonstrated advanced performance on all measures except a vocabulary-matching task that included definitions of terms and important figures. Thus, the combination of teacher-facilitated and peer-peer discussion made a real difference in students' learning of the historical content.

Okolo, Ferretti, and MacArthur (2007) examined the nature of whole-class discussions and teachers' instruction during discussions about historical topics with fifth and sixth graders. The historical topics included an investigation into the *ways of life* of two immigrant groups (Chinese and European Jews) and an exploration of westward expansion in the late 19th and early 20th century in the United States. Four lessons were videotaped and analyzed to determine the nature of discussion sequences, rates of participation, and instructional challenges encountered by the teachers and students. Information about student outcomes came from multiple-choice tests, interviews, presentations and debates, and surveys about student dispositions for learning.

Analysis of discussion sequences (i.e., a connected set of initiation-response-comment statements) indicated that the teacher talked most of the time during all four lessons; however, students also participated at a high rate, with discussion sequences occurring once or more per minute for three of four lessons. In all four lessons, initiations were made by teachers and were structured as questions, invitations to share a comment, or, less frequently, as opportunities to share opinions via a show of hands. About half of the time these invitations were directed a specific students in an attempt to engage in the discussion. Furthermore, a single student issued most responses, although about 10% of the responses were issued by a group of students answering or commenting simultaneously.

Okolo et al. (2007) reported that nearly two-thirds or more of the class participated in discussion in each lesson and that students' responses were generally one or two sentences in length. However, because choral responses were not accounted for, these findings may be an underestimate of their engagement. Presentism, or the tendency to interpret the past in light of current experiences, was a major challenge to students' understanding of historical content and classroom discussions. Interviews indicated that the participating teacher valued the use of classroom instruction and believed that limitations in students' abilities to communicate opinions and debate specific beliefs could be improved through increased exposure to whole-class and small-group oral discussions.

Debates. MacArthur, Ferretti, and Okolo (2002) employed another form of classroom discourse, debates on controversial issues, to facilitate students' historical thinking and content area learning outcomes. The study included one sixth-grade inclusive classroom participating in an eight-week unit on immigration around 1900. As a culminating activity for the unit, students participated in debates on whether immigration should have been permitted during the period studied. Historical understanding was assessed quantitatively with a multiple-choice test and an individual

interview. Substantial improvements were found for all students on a content test, an interview involving historical thinking measures, and a self-efficacy measure. On the posttest interview, students with disabilities performed at an even higher level equal to their peers without disabilities.

The researchers hoped the debates would afford an opportunity for students to demonstrate historical understanding of the period, in particular, the multiple perspectives of immigrants and people opposed to immigration. In fact, students demonstrated historical understanding of multiple perspectives. Unfortunately, their debates also revealed how they often failed to use relevant knowledge that they demonstrated in interviews. A second limitation was that students' arguments were more characteristic of everyday discussions than historical reasoning, as students seldom used specific evidence from the unit to support their claims. Conversely, findings from the study also indicated that the debates supported high levels of student discussion without teacher participation. The debates did not restrict opportunities for participation by students with disabilities, indicating, in all, that they are viable ways to support students' learning about multiple perspectives on controversial issues, but also that students may need more explicit instruction on historical reasoning to promote evidentiary arguments.

Inquiry Instruction

This section provides summaries on the benefits of instruction that provides students with opportunities to create multimedia projects, and on the advantages in using a web-based virtual learning environment that provides primary and secondary source collections for students to engage in meaningful historical inquiry.

Multimedia design projects. In project-based inquiry, students work collaboratively to investigate authentic, interesting problems, then share and discuss their work with their peers. A consistent focus for research in this area has been the examination of teaching practices that promote student reasoning with historical projects that aim to increase both their factual knowledge and historical thinking skills, rather than limit their explorations to the type of thinking and information that is found in textbooks (e.g., Friedman & Heafner, 2007; Lehrer, Erickson, & Connel, 1994; Saye & Brush, 2002; Tally & Goldenberg, 2005). Participation in these projects gives students an opportunity to develop the abilities needed to participate in reasoned discussion of civic issues, a core purpose of the social studies.

Ferretti, Okolo, and MacArthur (Ferretti & Okolo, 1996; Okolo & Ferretti, 1997; Ferretti, et al, 2001) explored project-based inquiry in a series of studies that allowed students with LD a chance to create multimedia presentations and share the results of their inquiries with others. In each case, the researchers selected controversial topics to foster students' understanding of multiple perspectives. Students conducted research on their topics in small groups and engaged in collaborative discussions that focused on using evidence to support their position, then used various software programs to create group projects and present reports to their peers. The multimedia presentations allowed students to present information in a variety of ways and circumvent some difficulties with text.

The focus of these early studies (Ferretti & Okolo, 1996; Okolo & Ferretti, 1997) was to provide students with LD opportunities to investigate historical topics

and to determine the extent that significant learning occurred in terms of students' knowledge of historical events, and associated causes and consequences. Ferretti et al, (2001) subsequently evaluated the effects of a multimedia project designed to help students with and without LD to learn historical content and develop more sophisticated historical thinking. Two instructional units were developed on the migration of peoples, on westward expansion from 1840-1860 and the migration of farmers, miners, and Mormons to California, Oregon, and Utah, and on immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Design elements involved the following. First, the instructional units were organized around a conceptual framework that explained migration in terms of conflicts between migrants and prior residents, and long-term outcomes. This framework was used as a strategy to help students understand the groups studied and to generalize to contemporary examples of migration, such as immigration from Central America. Second, after a period of general learning of background information, students worked in groups to investigate one migrant group and then presented their findings to the whole class. Third, students were provided with a collection of primary and secondary sources, which served to present background information about the historical period and as information sources for group projects. Fourth, students used a compare/contrast strategy as a vehicle to compare the ways of life of peoples who came into conflict. Finally, collaborative discourse with peers and the teacher was seen as critical to learning, and teachers worked with groups and the class as a whole to guide their discourse in constructive ways.

Results from Ferretti et al.'s (2001) study permitted in-depth evaluation of student understanding using measures of historical knowledge and reasoning, and attitudes towards learning. Results from an interview with questions on evidence, bias, and reasons for differing historical accounts, revealed that students with and without disabilities made significant gains in historical knowledge and historical reasoning, although students without disabilities made larger gains. Both groups of students increased their self-efficacy for learning social studies.

A more recent study involving multimedia provides additional evidence on the benefits in using inquiry projects for teaching history to students with and without LD (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2010). This study explored relative benefits for students who completed a technology-assisted project-based learning experience; moreover, learning outcomes were compared with students who did not participate in technology-enhanced social studies instruction. Students in both conditions learned about westward expansion in a unit on "the divergent paths of the American people from 1800 to the mid-1800s and the challenges they faced," in the Northeast, the South, and the West (California State Board of Education, 1998).

Students who created multimedia projects engaged in inquiry that centered on one geographic region, which allowed us to determine the extent to which they learned not, only about their assigned region, but also the two other regions. We developed a digital set of primary and secondary sources that supported the state content standards and selected *mPower* software (Multimedia Design Corporation, 2005) for students to use during the project because it appeared ideal for the creation of multimedia presentations and it allowed individuals who viewed the projects to determine how they wanted to access content (i.e., in nonlinear ways). Instruction

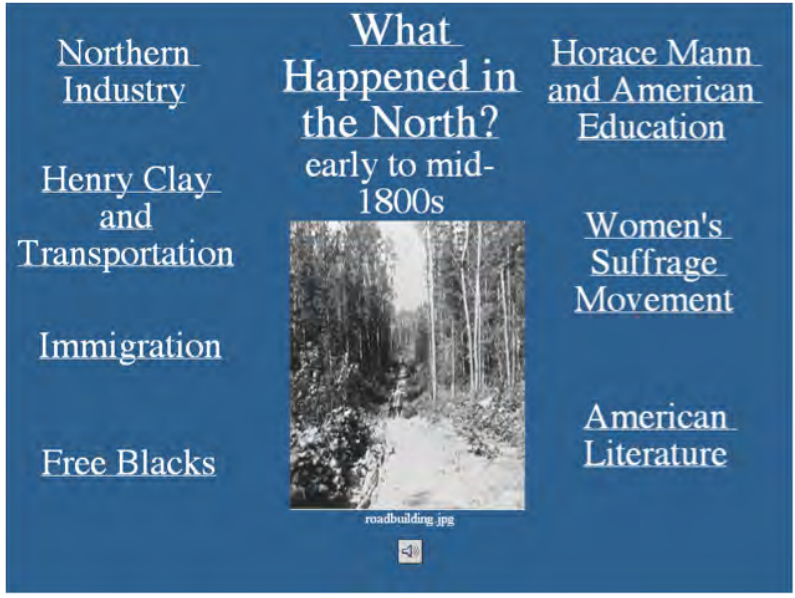
included lessons on reading and interpreting primary and secondary sources, as well as how to use the software for their projects. At the end of the unit, each student presented his or her contributions from the group project to the class (Figure 1 shows a screenshot from a sample project).

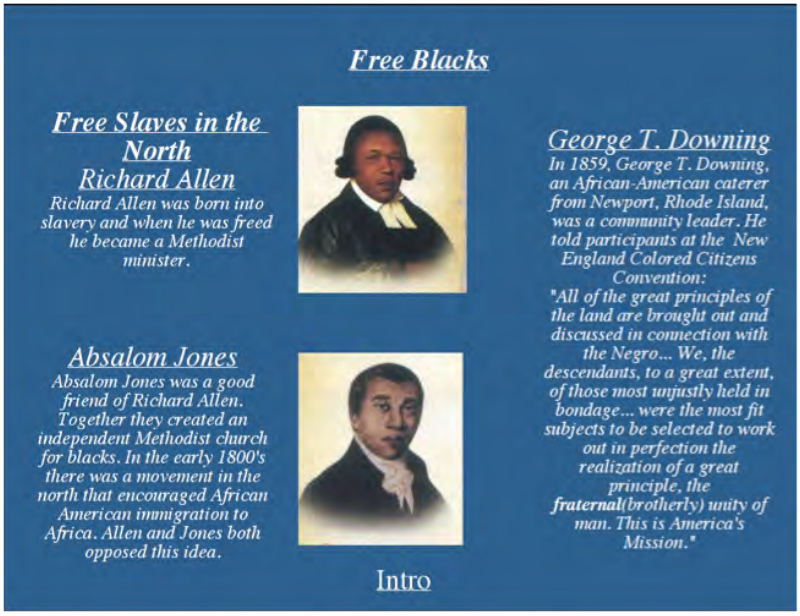
We used several dependent measures to evaluate the benefits of the project-based learning. A few are emphasized here to indicate the degree of students' content learning, using (a) a researcher-developed measure (a 50 item, multiple-choice test before and after the multimedia unit), (b) a state-administered social studies test that was administered 2 months after instruction ended, and (c) a description of the students' multimedia projects to determine the degree to which students' work showed evidence of historical thinking.

The results of statistical analyses revealed that, whereas before instruction, students in the intervention and comparison conditions did not differ with respect to their initial levels of content knowledge. After instruction students who completed multimedia projects, and who learned about content from each other, learned more than students in a comparison group who received instruction on the same standards using instruction that centered on whole class activities. Additional statistical analyses revealed benefits for learning content on the state-administered test (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2010).

Finally, we wished to explore the extent to which students who participated in the multimedia unit demonstrated historical thinking. We found that student teams were willing to go beyond the textbook in creating their projects. Our analyses revealed that 40% of their content came from textbooks, 40% came from primary sources, and 20% came from secondary sources. Analyses of each scene in the multimedia projects were then completed to determine the degree to which students engaged in sourcing, contextualization, and interpretation of primary and secondary sources. The results indicated that 29% of students with and without LD used a quote to support a claim, that 7% of the students with LD and 14% of the students without LD also provided a citation for a claim, and that 14 and 21% of the students with and without LD provided evidence that they understood the author's perspective, which indicates that 40% of the students with LD and 54% of the students without disabilities demonstrated important elements of historical thinking (Lévesque, 2009; Monte-Sano, 2008).

Figure 1. **Screenshot of the main screen and a sample of linked content related to Westward Expansion in the northern U.S. in the early to mid 1800s.**





Virtual history museum (VHM). Michigan State University researchers (notably Cindy Okolo and Carol Sue Englert) developed and validated the use of a web-based learning environment called the VHM, which was designed for teachers to create virtual museums for students to learn about history and how to think like historians (Okolo, Englert, Bouck, Heutsche, 2007; Bouck, Okolo, Englert, & Heutsche, (2008). The relevance of this type of learning may seem more obvious when considering that historical institutions such as the Smithsonian's *National Museum of American History* allow students to engage in virtual explorations of historically significant artifacts (such as the Greensboro Woolworth *lunch counter* that sparked a series of Civil Rights sit-ins during 1960's; www.objectofhistory.org), and that museums like the Phillips Collection provide exploration of primary sources (such as Jacob Lawrence's *Migration Series*, a multi-panel illustration of the 1910-1930 mass exodus of African Americans from the south to the northeast and Midwest; www.phillipscollection.org/migration_series/for_educators/tips_tools/index.cfm). Furthermore, Sam Wineburg and other history educators have developed websites such as Historical Thinking Matters, in collaboration with George Mason and Stanford universities (http://historicalthinkingmatters.org) that are designed to guide teachers and students' exploration of controversial events, as well as to create instructional frameworks for teaching students contextualized approaches for historical problems (see Reisman & Wineburg, 2008 for a discussion of underlying pedagogical concepts).

However, the VHM is the first project (register at http://vhm.msu.edu) to be specifically designed to meet the learning needs of students with LD. The site allows teachers to structure how students investigate nuanced historical questions, such as whether John Brown was a hero or villain, through *exhibits* or organized sets of primary and secondary source *artifacts* and a variety of learning *activities*. In this virtual environment, a museum metaphor is used as *curators* (teachers) create artifact collections (with photos, other images, music, maps, and excerpts from speeches, letters, and the like) and to choose learning activities that enable *members* (students) to investigate and understand the exhibit. Teachers and students have choices in designing and using this tool in their exploration of historical topics. For example, teachers are able to provide different degrees of scaffolding for the writing process (by providing sentence starters in an outline format or by omitting this support), and students can choose to take notes and use a text-to-speech function to have documents read to them.

Bouck, et al., (2008) provide a qualitative evaluation of the VHM. In this study, learning outcomes of students with LD and other high incidence disabilities were examined after receiving instruction in co-taught eighth grade American history classes. Students explored two VHM units that met district content standards. Classroom observations and student interviews helped the researchers understand how students used the VHM and its overarching purposes. Moreover, students' written responses to a compare-contrast activity, written predictions, and position essays provided evidence that students were able to use historically accurate information, and that they developed more nuanced understandings of multiple perspectives after they engaged in corroboration. The success of the VHM demonstrates the utility of virtual explorations as another viable means for students to participate in substantive historical inquiry.

Educational research from the past 20 years (e.g., Bain, 2006; De La Paz, 2005; Lee, 2005; Monte-Sano, 2008; Seixas, 1999; VanSledright, 2002; Wineburg, 2001) and policy initiatives such as the Common Core State Standards promote a disciplinary approach to the study of history and emphasize literacies that are central to history. In practice, this means that teaching history as a set of dates and names to memorize is no longer acceptable. Instead, teachers and researchers are finding more and more ways to incorporate investigation into historical questions, reading and analysis of primary and secondary sources, and synthesizing and conveying ideas in writing. Because reading, writing, and critical thinking have become more prominent in expectations for K-12 history instruction, a focus on disciplinary literacy in history is timely. Moreover, one only has to listen to current events to be reminded that civic responsibility also mandates an appreciation for the perspectives of traditionally underrepresented or marginalized persons and groups in society.

Fortunately, teachers now have a considerable array of instructional approaches that help students consider problems of historical interpretation, develop analytical tools, critique sources, and learn to construct historical interpretations. In general, such history instruction is seen as central to increasing student achievement and enhancing the experience of learning history by promoting deeper understanding and engagement in historical thinking (Caron, 2005; Ferster, Hammond, & Bull, 2006; Stearns, Seixas, & Wineburg, 2000). These interventions are viable ways to provide students with LD opportunities to practice advanced historical reasoning skills to have access to meaningful learning opportunities in history classrooms.

Researchers in special education should be encouraged to continue their efforts to develop instruction that enables students with LD to meet the same academic challenges as students without LD in contemporary history and social studies classrooms. As of yet, this goal has been difficult to realize (Buckley, 2005; van Hover & Yeager, 2003). This article suggests that special education teachers and researchers consider historical thinking goals as they develop novel approaches to instruction, and outlines promising practices that enable students with LD to participate in authentic historical discussion, and develop more sophisticated understandings about relationships between people, events, and issues that took place in the past.

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