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# Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History

*National and International Perspectives*

EDITED BY

*Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas,  
and Sam Wineburg*



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## Lessons on Teaching and Learning in History from Paul's Pen

*Gaea Leinhardt*

18. There are signs in some sixth-grade and eighth-grade responses of a belief in the right or the duty to give an opinion in history, which transcends any obligation to validity or truth. This seems to be partly a consequence of the belief that nothing can ultimately be known for certain about a past that is no longer open to direct inspection. See R. Ashby and P. J. Lee, "Information, Opinion and Beyond," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego (1998), for examples, and Appendix 11.2 of this essay for "opinion" categories.) Some students seem to operate with a notion of "relativism" (at least in history "topics") very similar to the one that Rorty claims is not in fact held by anyone: "'Relativism' is the view that every belief on a certain topic, or perhaps about *any* topic, is as good as every other. No one holds this view. Except for the occasional cooperative freshman, one cannot find anybody who says that two incompatible opinions on an important topic are equally good." (R. Rorty, "Pragmatism, Relativism and Irrationalism," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 53 [1980], pp. 719–738, quoted in R. J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* [Oxford, 1983], p. 201.)

If teaching stresses distinctions between "fact" and "opinion" without making distinctions within the latter, or if it makes no attempt to differentiate provisionality from skepticism, it is likely to push adolescent views about differences in historical accounts into a potentially vicious relativism, or at least a shoulder-shrugging helplessness. Since some students have already moved beyond such positions, it would be unfortunate if teaching, in trying to offer helpful simplifications, appeared to justify them.

19. P. J. Lee, "Historical Knowledge and the National Curriculum," in R. Aldrich, ed., *History in the National Curriculum* (London, 1991), pp. 39–65, esp. pp. 58–62; D. Shemilt, this volume.

It is an auspicious time to have a discussion of how we might proceed in the systematic study of the teaching and learning of history. It is auspicious because we have both a solid corpus of research that spans a variety of instructional settings and geographical locations and a generous array of questions to ask and tools with which to answer them. It is auspicious also because we have a vital new set of challenges and occasions for study. We can concern ourselves with the content of history instruction. We can concern ourselves with the historical stance to be taken by texts, teachers, and students. We can concern ourselves with the kind of historical knowledge we expect from our teachers and desire for our students. We can also begin to concern ourselves with the potential for learning that exists in the media and in places such as museums and historical sites. In this essay I use an example from my own work to explore the ways in which we can look at one line of questions that might be fruitfully asked, one set of tools that might be effectively employed, and one location that might be usefully explored in studying history teaching and learning.

My own research asks these questions: What is the nature of highly effective educational practice in history, and what is the nature of the history learning that results from such practices?<sup>1</sup> These questions belong to a family of questions about effective educational practices. I focus on these questions because as an educator I am interested in the specifics of what particular subject matters can contribute to the life and learning of students. I am also interested in the general ways in which specific subjects can contribute to the overall growth and development of a literate

populace. Thus, one core question behind the research program is the following: What are the essential opportunities that teaching and learning in history provide? Opportunity here implies both the “chance to” and what is essential. What are the critical or most important things that the learning or teaching of history affords—or what essential thing do we lose when students do not study history?

To get a feeling for what I am thinking about, consider the following: Imagine a student who is in the tenth grade or maybe a student in the second year of college (generally they are age 15 or 19). This student is a C-minus student. He is taking the last formal history course of his life. This student might grow up to be a heartbeat away from the presidency or might someday sit in judgment on the presidency. Or, imagine instead a young woman in her third year of college who is an education major. Filled with idealism and caring, she, too, finds herself to be a less-than-stellar student, but she will likely teach for forty years and potentially influence over a thousand students. What should these students remember and understand, twenty-five years later, from this last history class? What powerful and unique opportunity does the content and disposition of history provide the teacher and the learner?

Further, consider that while our hypothetical students have taken their last history class, they have not been exposed to their last bit of history. No, they will go on to hear Rush Limbaugh declare that history is just the facts, see Tom Hanks convey the entire Vietnam era in *Forrest Gump*, and witness various incarnations of John Wayne present World War II, or maybe it will be Steven Spielberg’s version that captures their attention. They will be awash in history, they will live in it, but they will have no more history from the academy.

This question of educational opportunity leads to issues of content, processes, and ownership. What might be taught and learned—and who decides—and how might that instruction best be accomplished? Instructionally, what are the richest mixes of educational processes, such as physical experiences (field trips, films), textual analysis and integration (reading and writing from historical sources), and performance (debates, theater) in which students should engage? What sorts of content emphasis seem to be of greatest, or at least of great, value: a clear, singular, historical chronicle; an understanding of multiple perspectives; an understanding of source and its import; a process of reasoning; or a corpus of integrated and annotated knowledge? And how should we decide?

As work by Peter Seixas, Sam Wineburg, Jim Wertsch, and Terrie Epstein—and my hypothetical students—have all shown, students learn history outside of school.<sup>2</sup> They learn history from their parents. They learn history from television. They learn history from movies. They learn history in museums. The voice of the academy is not privileged in the development of historical memory or in the historical constructions of students, their parents, or even teachers. If, in reality, the academy is not privileged in the memories of individuals, then who actually owns the historical agenda? And if there is not a single owner, what again is most essential for us to offer and try to ensure is learned (both mastered and appreciated) by students in the classroom specifically?

Learners and teachers come to their classes with a sense of history. What is their sense of history, what are their historical understandings, and how do they develop them? As Levstik and, more recently, Gregg have shown, both teachers and learners have a priori understandings and content knowledge about and of history.<sup>3</sup> Some of that understanding may be quite sophisticated and subtle; some other understandings might be quite simplistic and deeply flawed. Substantial research in fields such as physics has shown us that we cannot hope to provide a meaningful educational experience for teachers or students unless we have some sense of these other understandings.

What information does answering these sorts of questions provide? In general, the answers help us to gain a clearer picture of students as learners and of teachers as both practitioners and historical consumers; they also give us a better feel for the relationships among the academic sense of history, the popular-cultural sense of history, and the local and personal sense of history. In my work on classrooms, I have examined common, very good practice. This research provides a baseline for what constitutes good history teaching and learning. I can describe what a solid, thoughtful history teacher can and does accomplish with minimal intervention or support. I can show, I think, how teachers with quite different perspectives on teaching history can accomplish enormous amounts in terms of student learning. I can also describe what highly committed and thoughtful students can gain with little intervention or support beyond being lucky enough to have an excellent teacher. That information helps us to set goals that most can aim for, and it suggests the ways in which more carefully designed interventions can be built.

### A Case Study of History Teaching and Learning

Let me turn to the specifics of the program of research that I have engaged in over the past decade. The program has examined in detail the instructional practices and learning consequences of several talented teachers.<sup>4</sup> One teacher in particular, Sterling (pseudonym), has been the focus of much of my work on exemplary practices and their outcomes. Sterling was among the several teachers selected for study; she was chosen on the basis of the excellent scores achieved by her students on the Advance Placement exam, as well as of recommendations from parents across the city in which she taught and from fellow teachers and supervisors. Sterling was a content-based teacher. By that I mean she was passionate about her subject, had been formally educated in it, and was a voracious reader of it. She was also a child of Western Pennsylvania, steeped in the traditions of labor unions and labor conflicts, aware as well of the extreme wealth and power of the industrial barons whose names are on our parks, avenues, and museums.

Briefly, our database for Sterling spans two years and two courses (A.P. U.S. history and A.P. modern European history).<sup>5</sup> The data include audio- or videotape records of an entire first semester and portions of the second semester of a U.S. history course (slightly over 100 lessons) plus sixteen audiotaped lessons in European history, as well as the complete written productions of six students in U.S. history (including their notebooks) and a series of interviews with the teacher. This corpus of data has allowed us to ask a variety of questions about the fundamental models of history that this teacher holds, the ways in which history is explained by teachers and students over time, and the way in which historical reasoning develops over time.<sup>6</sup>

My current project involves tracing one student, Paul (pseudonym), and analyzing the way in which he gradually learned both to write with greater command of historical ideas and to speak in more historically sophisticated ways while retaining a rather narrow view of the discipline of history. Paul was observed during the course of one semester of A.P. U.S. history. Tape recordings of every day of class were annotated with identifications of every time Paul spoke. We collected copies of every piece of written material that he turned in to his teacher, as well as copies of all the pages in his notebook. The observations also included audiotapes or detailed notes from weekly discussions we held with his teacher, Sterling, and the collection of similar student data (except for annotating all their

talk) from other members in the class. We transcribed all the data and now can analyze every phrase that Paul uttered in class for the entire semester as well as every sentence that he wrote.

In another essay, I have described what we have learned about the development of understanding and thinking on the part of other students.<sup>7</sup> Paul, however, needs his own investigation; he is unique. Paul was an unusually articulate student who expressed a strong desire to “master” history; he was personally both ambitious and willing to put an enormous amount of effort into learning history. He wanted to be able to “talk the talk” and “walk the walk”—to both *appear* knowledgeable and *be* knowledgeable. I did not initially intend to study Paul. Paul was a white, middle-class, male student; he was politically conservative, socially amiable, and totally goal driven. He had no particular demographic characteristic to recommend him as a subject for study. But Paul had so many intriguing aspects to his learning and his goals that he demanded to be studied. For example, although he was technically ineligible for the A.P. history class, Paul talked his way in.<sup>8</sup> His glossy, pompous, and often amusingly misapplied manner of speaking seemed jarring at first, but the frequency of his speech drew our attention to him. Over the course of the semester he learned to refine his speech and to focus it on increasingly complex historical issues. Paul never reached a tolerance for historical ambiguity, but he did apply a lawyerly take on evidence and the support of arguments. He had an automatic, procedurally driven way of writing, but he struggled with it and forged it into a more reasonable and clearly serviceable style.

I will not go through the entire story of Paul, but I will use him as a way of showing how certain analytic tools might contribute to deepening our understanding of the complexity and subtlety of learning or perhaps contribute to our appreciating what it is a student has to come to grips with in order to learn. Here, I focus on those tools that when used over substantial lengths of time—months, for example—can help us to see the development of a student’s ability to engage in historical analysis. The two powerful data resources for seeing this happen over time are acts of semiformal speaking in class and acts of semiformal writing in and out of class.

Why “semi”? or why “formal”? Formal acts of writing and speaking are ones in which there is considerable amount of prior thought and rehearsal—or revision—before they are publicly shared. For example, a speech or debate presentation, a term paper, or a final project are what I

would call formal in the school context. Informal speech is purely conversational and completely unrehearsed. Informal speaking can careen from the specific and subject-focused to the highly personal and non-discipline based; informal writing is free or stream-of-consciousness writing; it does not try to mimic a particular academic style, nor is it edited for clarity or accuracy.

In our work we have seen considerable growth in the “semi” range of speaking, in which students respond to the teacher’s or their own questions in class in a thoughtful and elaborated way.<sup>9</sup> It is in these semiformal discussions that students display their accountability to the discipline in terms of content and form, to the general level of the discussion to date, and to the purposes of discussion at hand. It is under these circumstances that students muster evidence and refer to sources as well as to the arguments and explanations already given within that community. Likewise, in writing, when students are given substantial time—an hour or two—to produce essays in answer to specific questions, they begin to develop a more sophisticated form of presentation and more well composed content. The advantage of the semiformal situation for researchers is that it is a naturally occurring event of some frequency; it is a situation that reveals what students are learning; and, in most high school and college-level classes, it occurs at least three to five times a term for each student.

Thus, the use of core questions about highly effective instructional practice has led us to examine the results of those practices and their impact on one student’s development. In examining Paul, I focus on both the way that he learned to write and the way in which he developed his competence in speaking about historical ideas and “facts.” I am taking as a given that the course itself was a legitimate one, in the sense of being a reasonable set of materials to share with young high school students, and I am taking as a given that it was reasonable for Paul to make intense efforts to learn the material and the ideas. That the course could have been dramatically improved is also true, but if we focus on that, we will never get to what Paul did accomplish.

### *Analyzing the Writing: Paul's Pen*

Because of space constraints, I focus here on how Paul developed in his historical writing, reserving the analysis of his talk for another venue.

One advantage of analyzing students’ textual productions is that it is easier than analyzing their spoken productions. Writing is also more straightforward to explain. We can closely examine the demands of the task itself, including the question posed; we can consider the understandings of rhetorical forms that are used; and we can consider how evidence is mustered in support of an idea. The ambiguities that flood almost any act of speech are less prevalent in written text, and thus the complexity of analyzing text is greatly reduced. But, there is an additional reason for examining the development of a student’s textual competence. As an educator, I study history learning for two reasons: first, because it is enormously important for people to know and feel the content and questions of history and, second, because in the process of learning history and the tools of history, students have the opportunity to learn specific kinds of thinking and reasoning, one of which is a form of writing.

Paul was asked to write four essays during the first semester. Three of these essays made use of retired items from the A.P. exam, specifically the Document Based Question (DBQ). The DBQ follows a standard format: A general question is posed to the student and is accompanied by eight to eleven “documents.” These supporting documents do not include textbook summaries; they are only partially overlapping in content; and they provide a mosaic of the time and issue of focus rather than a cleanly specified set of pro and con arguments. The set of materials often includes one or two speeches on the topic from notable historical figures; one or two diagrammatic presentations, such as an editorial cartoon, a chart, or a map; and newspaper accounts or interviews. These are oblique moments rather than continuous texts portrayed in various forms. The design of the DBQ requires that the student transform his or her knowledge by manipulating the different sources, using background understanding, and peeling through the multiple layers present in the documents (the authors, the dates, the stance, the critical points within them).

The DBQ asks students to write a short essay in which they respond to the question by using the evidence in the documents and any relevant general knowledge that they have about the time or events. There are various dimensions along which the students might be seen to make progress. One dimension is the historical sense of the piece, including its accuracy and general rhetorical and temporal organization. In addition to the overall historical sense, my colleague and student Kathleen Young and I examined two other dimensions that helped us to see how the student was developing skill in handling the demands of the task.<sup>10</sup>

One dimension we called the Organizational Pattern, and the other we called Document Use. It is in the organizational pattern and the document uses that we can see the development and growth of students' competence in historical writing as opposed to the development of more general reasoning.

Organizational pattern refers to the specific construction of the essay. In examining some thirty essays, we identified three commonly used organizational patterns—*list*, *specified list*, and *causal list*—that reflect the way the essay demonstrated its content coherence. A list is simply that—an arbitrary series of facts or units that are somewhat elaborated upon. The list could be organized in a number of different ways without changing the meaning of the essay. A list pattern is indicative of a rich, perhaps overwhelming collection of information that drives the essay. A specified list provides advanced organizers that may be specified by number (e.g., “There are three major factors”) or, in a more sophisticated manner, by category (e.g., “There are economic, political, and social factors”). Having a specified list in an essay suggests a rhetorical sensibility, and it provides a structural frame within which the student can work. A specified-list pattern suggests the student is in control of the “story” and is accessing information for it. A causal list, as its name suggests, uses the inherent causal relationships among the elements to structure the essay. In a causal list arrangement, the essay could not be rearranged arbitrarily because the linkages among elements are directional and sequential. This pattern suggests that the student has a fairly strong sense of the counterplay of forces that occurred.

In addition to the overall type of organization employed for an essay, our analysis of organizational pattern included the types of connectors that were used between idea units within an essay. These connectors were often reflective of the type of underlying organization employed by the student in the essay. We identified the following types of connectors: list, exemplar, equivalence, place-holder, causal, and qualifier. These connections are highly local and link two or more ideas within the essay. Interestingly, students, in both their speech and their writing, take some time to develop a repertoire of connecting statements. It is the employment of various patterns of connections—different ones suitable for different idea relationships—that turns out to be worth monitoring. One might well ask why? After all, students in an A.P. class surely know the words, “and,” “for example,” “similarly,” “first,” “because,” and “however.” They do indeed, but they are less certain of the

underlying relationships between specific concepts—of how they wish to express those relationships.

Beyond issues of organizational pattern, however, the DBQ places greater demands on the student writer than does a direct essay question. These increased demands stem from the availability of, and the charge to make use of, the multiple nonoverlapping documents. The use of documents is complex not only because of the inherent interpretation and meaning of the documents themselves but also because of the specific issues of referencing. Should documents be identified by title (the cartoon, the speech, the chart) or by code (A, B, C)? Should they be grouped by position on an issue or by some content value? Should they themselves be analyzed and should parts be brought in to support an argument? Our analysis of students' document use identified the ways in which students made use of the documents in their essay, by either mentioning them, restating them, or integrating and interpreting them. We analyze this aspect of the essays because using documents is both the task of and the reasoning tool for the DBQ.

Using these analytic tools for examining writing, we can get a sense of Paul's development as a writer by comparing his first DBQ essay of the semester, written in October, to a later one, written in January. For the analysis of each essay, I present the DBQ question, describe briefly the supporting documents provided, describe the overall historical stance Paul adopted, present a schematic diagram of the entire essay response, describe specific organizational and document-use features, and then examine in some depth the concluding paragraph.

#### Question 1

From 1781 to 1789 the Articles of Confederation provided the United States with an effective government. Using the documents and your knowledge of the period evaluate this statement.

This DBQ question included eight documents: a letter from the Rhode Island Assembly to Congress (1782); a chart with three columns (one with a list of years from 1770 to 1792, another with the corresponding market value of exports to Great Britain, and a third with the estimated U.S. population in thousands) but with no identifying sources; a letter from Joseph Jones to George Washington (1783); John Jay's instructions to the U.S. minister to Great Britain (1785); a map of western lands ceded by the states 1781–1802; a segment of John Jay's speech to Congress on

negotiations with Spain (August 1786); a letter from John Jay to George Washington (June 1786); and Rawlin Lowndes' speech to the South Carolina House of Representatives as it debated the adoption of the federal constitution (January 1788).

Paul took on the DBQ question as if it could have a factually correct answer and stated in his first sentence, "The statement that the Confederation provided the United States with an effective form of government during the Critical Period in American history is false." He undoubtedly took such a strong stance because he heard Sterling emphasize the importance of making a point and backing it up rather than being wishy-washy about the question. In his essay his most repeated point was that no one respected the United States in its early years. Paul identified the areas of agreed-upon weaknesses in the Confederation: foreign relations and domestic policy. He elaborated with evidence the lack of functionality in conducting foreign affairs but continuously used the personalized stance that the United States was unable to gain the respect of foreign nations and "The Articles were a laughing stock to the British and spanish [*sic*]." Paul, however, was a student only three weeks into the term and he had done an acceptable job of presenting the canonical historical issues. In terms of answering the DBQ for an A.P. exam, he had a way to go.

In reading Paul's essay, one gets the sense that he searched for a single unifying idea around which he could group the document bits. The unifying idea was that the United States (personified) was not respected while it employed the Articles of Confederation—almost as if Uncle Sam needed to switch from driving a Buick to driving a BMW to gain the respect of friends and colleagues. For Paul, answering the question "Was the government effective?" and uniting the essay were two separate tasks. He wrote an essay about respect and about why and how it could be seen that Uncle Sam did not receive any.

Paul began this course with a fairly good mastery of the generic five-paragraph essay (theme) form. In this form, the first paragraph presents the main argument and the structure that will be followed, the next three (or eight) paragraphs elaborate each of the core ideas identified, and the final paragraph recapitulates. Figure 12.1 shows a diagram of the structure of Paul's ten-paragraph, 766-word essay. In this diagram, the small black nodes represent idea units or multiword phrases that express a central concept, and line links show the connections between ideas as stated in the essay. Ideas that are adjacent in the essay but have an unstated relationship are also shown as connected. However, when ideas are separated

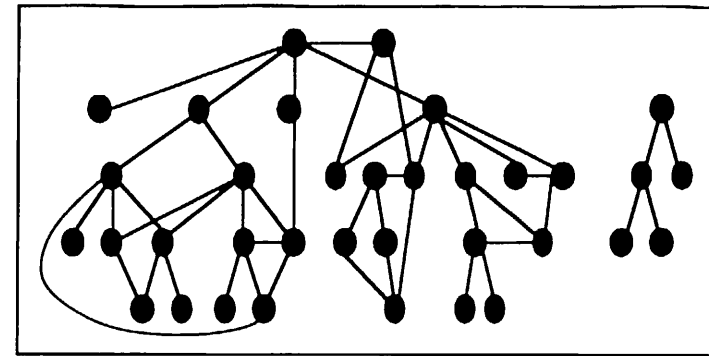


Figure 12.1. Node-link diagram of DBQ essay 1—Articles of Confederation

by other ideas and there is no specific statement that links them, the nodes are shown as unconnected. The concluding paragraph is shown as a separate cluster of nodes to the far right. The diagram can be "read" from top to bottom, with more or less smaller details appearing lower in the system than major ideas. In Paul's essay, two sets of ideas were developed: the ideas surrounding foreign policy (shown by the cluster of nodes to the center right of the diagram), and ideas surrounding domestic policy (shown by the cluster of nodes to the left). As one can see just from the diagram, however, ideas literally crisscross each other. Nodes high up in the diagram are connected strangely to rather minute points lower down in the system.

The overall pattern of the essay was a specified-list pattern as determined by Paul's presentation of the main ideas in the form of a collection of concepts with a descriptive connecting structure. For example, he used constructor links ("first," "second") as organizers. The beginning of the second paragraph reads, "First of all, under the Articles of Confederation the United States received very little respect from foreign nations and was unable to effectively negotiate foreign policy." Two paragraphs later, the opening sentence reads, "Secondly, the Spanish also refused to respect the American states while they were bound by this loose Confederation." (Note the reversal of the causal structure that is implied in this essay; Paul seems to be suggesting that the Spanish knew that the U.S. government was going to get stronger and that it was when the governmental structure was loose that they did not respect it—an odd form of presentism.)

The essay made use of time-based, place-based, and some causal-list organization. As was the case with many students, Paul, once inside a structure, showed some evidence of difficulty in climbing out of it. An example of this difficulty can be seen in the essay's fourth paragraph:

Secondly, the Spanish also refused to respect the American states while they were bound by this loose Confederation. During this period in American history, Spain closed off the mouth of the mississippi [*sic*] to the Americans and refused to budge or compromise on this matter. John Jay's speech to Congress on the negotiations with Spain's Don Diego de Gardoqui shows that the Spanish refused to allow the United States to navigate the mississippi [*sic*]. It also illustrates Spain's lack of respect for American negotiators because this Treaty was never signed. As Gardoqui alluded to in Jay's speech, the states were too divided on issues in the west to sign the treaty. As a result, the vote needed was never acquired to ratify the treaty. The Articles were a laughing stock to the British and spanish [*sic*].

In this rather lengthy paragraph, Paul made a short excursion into the issue of domestic affairs—the inability to obtain ratification—as a means of supporting his interpretation of the international problems. He then used this mentioning of domestic issues in the following paragraph (“this leads to another ineffective aspect of the Articles . . .”) to bring up domestic policy, rather than realizing that there were two core ideas—foreign and domestic—and that he needed organizational language to bring him back up to the top of the organizational structure.

The specific connection language used by Paul throughout the essay helps to illustrate the way the essay itself was structured. Paul used causal links (“although,” “however,” “thus,” “as a result,” “because,” “in order to”); he used some constructor links (“first of all,” “secondly,” “during,” “next,” and “finally”); and he used exemplar connections (“for example,” “as G alluded to,” “as illustrated”). Although there is a lack of an overall logical argument in this essay, the presence of these kinds of connections does not in and of itself mean that Paul could not have made a causal argument with them; rather, his connection language is consistent with the general sense that he is using a less than powerful essay structure to make his point. When Paul did use causal connections, they were not placed between assertions and evidence. Evidence was used to exemplify, not to explain. The essay is apparently being driven by the essay form with which Paul is most familiar rather than by the content of the ideas. In this essay Paul did not make use of tradi-

tional historical specified-list categories—such as social, economic, and political factors—as organizing devices.

The DBQ requires that students construct a coherent account, respond to the question posed, and use the documents provided. Students need not use all of the documents, but they are expected to find ways to make use of most. Paul's essay shows signs that he was moderately well along in his ability to incorporate documents. He specifically mentioned four of the documents by identifying a feature within them and then listed three other documents in a set. On the sheet with the essay question, he placed a check mark next to each “used” document. He was unable to “see” or perhaps to “use” the information in the chart (a document that helped to show a pattern of steady growth in population and productivity before the revolution and a less steady pattern afterward). Paul did not integrate or transform the documents; rather, he used them in conjunction with his initial organizing structure to support or flesh out the concept. Yet, he was more sophisticated than other students who simply listed the documents by letter or number (“the third document and fourth document prove X”).

In examining the written productions of students, there are several locations that prove revealing. One location is the first paragraph, which is important because it is hard for a student to escape the inherent structure or lack of it that is set up there. The middle paragraphs are revealing because it is there that students are most likely to produce statements backed up by evidence. The final paragraph is particularly telling because it is there that the student can clean up the less-than-perfect structure and enhance the initial argument; yet, it is most commonly written under time pressure. The final paragraph of Paul's first essay follows:

As a result of inability to effectively negotiate foreign policy, maintain and establish domestic policy, and enforce decisions, the central government under the Articles of Confederation did not provide America with an effective government between 1781 and 1789. The documents and events of the period illustrate this point.

What can we see here? Paul had at least part of the canonical list of weaknesses of the Articles. He had a causal connection, “as a result of,” and he had a time-based summary. He left out any discussion of what the Articles provided for and he treated them as an unanalyzed unit. He was less than articulate about the documents themselves and how to use them in this last paragraph. Essentially, he wrote as though the documents were



well known speakers who proved his point. He did not unpack them or integrate their content into his content. He knew the “answer” to the essay question without the documents, and so he wrote that answer and summarized it in his last paragraph, but he never appropriated the contents of the documents for use within the confines of the essay. In his first attempt for the year, Paul made substantial use of a variant of the five-paragraph essay with a structure built around foreign and domestic policy. Three months later Paul had considerably greater mastery of the essay form.

In January Paul wrote his last DBQ essay of the term in response to the following question:

*Question 3*

Documents A–H reveal some of the problems that many farmers in the late nineteenth century (1880–1900) saw as threats to their way of life. Using the documents and your knowledge of the period, (a) explain the reasons for agrarian discontent and (b) evaluate the validity of the farmers' complaints.

The DBQ contained eight documents: the platform from the People's (Populist) party (1892); William McKinley's acceptance speech (August 1896); a three-column chart of dates, population, and money in circulation (1865–1895); a political cartoon titled “The Eastern Master and His Western Slaves,” from the late 1880s or early 1890s; a section of an article from “Causes of Agricultural Unrest” by J. Laurence Laughlin, taken from the *Atlantic Monthly* (1892); *A Call to Action*, by James B. Weaver (1892); testimony before the U.S. Senate by George W. Parker of the Cairo Short Line Railroad (1885); and a section from Frank Norris' *The Octopus* (1901).

In his nine-paragraph, 1,346-word essay, Paul started by restating the question and locating it in time both by date and setting: “Between 1880 and 1910, the average American farmer faced several problems as the nation and its government moved towards an industrial trend heading into the twentieth century.” Within the confines of the first paragraph Paul laid out a highly usable and effective structure for the rest of the essay. He identified three reasons for farmers' discontent, elaborating upon each one. He ended the paragraph with the evaluation that some of the reasons were not valid and then proceeded. Each subsequent paragraph explicated a grievance, using the documentary evidence, and then analyzed its validity, also using the documents. Paul tended to express a view sym-

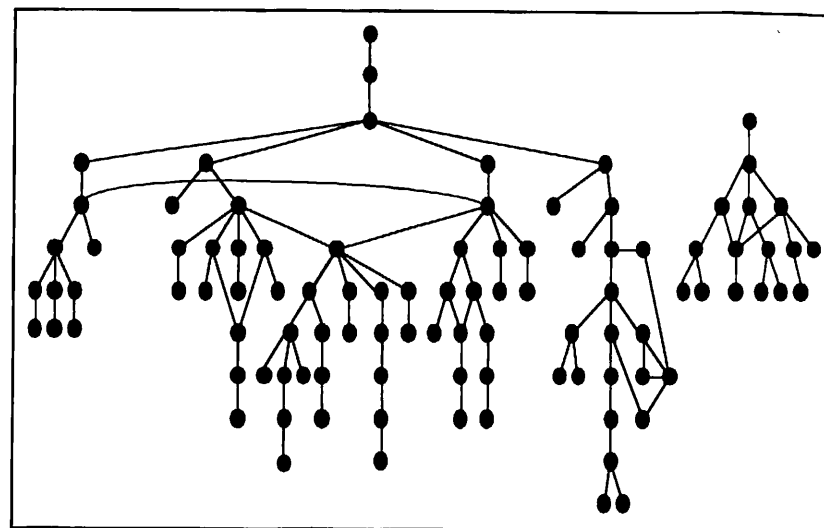


Figure 12.2. Node-link diagram of DBQ essay 3—Farmers' Discontent.

pathetic toward the farmers' condition and disagreeing with the farmers' explanations.

In this last DBQ essay, Paul showed that he had managed to integrate the skeleton of the five-paragraph essay form with the substantive content of the history. In contrast to the first essay, Paul here combined his knowledge of the form of the essay together with the information provided in the documents and his own knowledge about the topic. What was in an awkward collision before is now mutually supportive. For example, when Paul argued against the validity of the farmers' free silver position, he wrote, “If one looks at the population and money in circulation . . . it is easy to see that inflating the economy. . . .” When Paul argued that the railroads discriminated against the farmers but did not conspire to do so, he cut a particularly fine-grained distinction. Absent from his account, however, is any sourcing of who the documents' authors were and why their particular voice as historical actors was important.

Figure 12.2 shows the node-and-link diagram of this third DBQ essay. The structure appears more detailed (more nodes) and more evenly balanced in terms of depth than does the first. The diagram helps us to “see” how Paul made a series of central points and then elaborated on them, generally returning to the higher structure when it was rhetorically appropriate.

The organizational pattern of the essay remained a specified list rather than a causal list, although Paul included many causal statements inside the essay itself. Consider the first two sentences of the first paragraph: "Between 1880 and 1900 [note date anchoring], the average American farmer faced several [note unspecified organizer] problems as the nation and its government moved towards an industrial trend heading into the twentieth century [note accurate placement of the temporal setting—industrial trend—but awkwardness of phrasing]. Correspondingly, [note weak connect when causal connect is available], these problems led [causal link] the farmers to harbor many grievances against the American government and American industry." The main sections of Paul's essay used a numerated, specified-list organizational system ("the first reason," "the second reason," "in conclusion"), but within the sections Paul incorporated causal language.

In examining still another part of the organizational features of Paul's last DBQ essay of the semester—the specific use of connections—we can see that there was a great deal of growth since the first essay in October. Paul used more and a greater variety of causal links inside the essay ("i.e.," "this is evident from," "because," "however," "reason can be seen," "it stemmed," "instead of stemming," "as a result," "would result," "while," "in spite of," "due to the fact," "due in part," "although," "causing," "only reason," "due to"). There are also constructor links and exemplar links inside the essay. The point here is not to suggest that Paul should have been drilled on the use of various types of linking phrases but rather to see exactly how Paul struggled to merge his prior knowledge of a particular writing system with his current knowledge of the specific historical issues and with the task of writing a coherent and carefully specified essay.

A final area of growth in Paul's writing is reflected in the way he learned to incorporate documentary evidence in his citational system. In his first essay, Paul, apparently running out of time, was forced to say things like "illustrated in documents C, G, and H." In his last essay, we have two kinds of evidence of his increased document use. First, on the DBQ examination sheet itself, Paul wrote comments next to each of the documents—"farmers and currency," "conspiracy," "money," "shows invalid problem." In many cases, more than one point was summarized on a document. Why is that so important? One of the difficulties that students face is not only mentioning the documents but making use of them—chewing them up, so to speak, and transforming them. If each document is used only once, then it is likely that the use is more list-like than trans-

formative. By making multiple notations, Paul was laying the groundwork for using documents to serve his arguments rather than simply to annotate a list. Second, Paul used the documents themselves multiple times and used multiple documents to support a single point. His own coding for that was to place stars on the areas inside the document that made points he would use and to make a sweeping check mark when the document had been used.

The specific attachment language—that is, the language that was used to insert the document—was still awkward ("In fact, an editorial cartoon in . . ."). At other points in his essay Paul showed greater facility—for example, when he wrote, "This is evident from the testimony of George W. Parker, vice president of Cairo Short Line Railroad . . . in which he said that discriminating rates were used." Here, Paul not only made use of a reasonable lead-in but also identified both the speaker and his role. Such sourcing, as Wineburg has shown, is rare.<sup>11</sup> From the node-link diagram of Paul's third DBQ essay (see far right portion of Figure 12.2) and from the text itself, we can see that this essay's closing paragraph showed considerable improvement over the one in his first essay. Here, he has carefully recapitulated both the core question and his response.

In conclusion, the farmers' discontent between 1880 and 1900 stemmed from four factors. First, farmers believed that the railroads and industry were conspiring against them. Although the railroads did charge farmers discriminatory rates, the idea of a mass conspiracy against the farmer goes unproven and is more attributed to the frustration of the farmer instead of factual data. Second, farmers were angry because the government did not advocate free coinage of silver and cheap money. This also was an invalid complaint because had inflated currency arisen, depression and panic would result causing the farmer more injury than prosperity. Finally, farmers were upset that they had to sell their products in a fierce unprotected market while industry could sell their goods in a protected market. This complaint was valid and it could be listed as a contributing factor to the decline in prices of cotton and wheat, which were the major crops in America at the time. Thus, although there was some substance to the complaints and reasons of discontent of the farmers, many of their grievances were partially or completely invalid and more attributed to the severity of their circumstances instead of factual information and reasoning.

What can we see here? First and most striking is Paul's own personal stance: A child of the urban rust belt felt no sympathy for farmers from a century ago. His own views in favor of protectionist markets surfaced

when he supported the farmers' complaint about that issue, but, generally, he assumed that totally external factors caused the farmers' plight and that their (the farmers') attributions were sadly misguided. In putting forth his conclusions, Paul wrote an eight-sentence, temporally situated conclusion that fit tightly with the question that was asked. He made use of causal connections between major ideas. His mastery of the use of documents was substantial. The documents are no longer thrown in as an added bonus but are integrated throughout the essay and then summarized seamlessly in the conclusion. Paul also managed to keep a steady hand on the voice in his essay, using an at times artificial, almost condescending third person. (Note: I am not arguing for using such a voice as historically appropriate, only noting that learning how to use one is not trivial.)

Learning to write history—or English, for that matter—is really very hard. Paul is engaged in a type of mimicry, but not a thoughtless or mindless kind. He is truly trying to understand how to make an argument that functions, and in his conclusion he pointed out somewhat reflexively that the “argument” of the farmers did not work (“the idea of a mass conspiracy against the farmer goes unproven”). His struggle with and growing mastery over a particular rhetorical form is worth acknowledging, and the nuances of exactly how brilliantly he positioned himself politically—he was, after all, sixteen years old—should not detract from his accomplishment.

In analyzing these essays, I am not suggesting we grade for or teach the use of connectors or node-link diagrams; nor am I suggesting that such increasing competence just develops. I am suggesting that by studying these features of essays, we can gain an appreciation of how hard the task of writing such essays truly is. We will realize that we need to go beyond telling students to “be coherent,” “take a stance,” or show their “personal voice.”

A question that emerges after considering Paul's gradual mastery of the genre of writing DBQ essays is: How did he do that? If we reject simple development, we need to consider what role instruction played, if any. What might he have learned differently? How could he have been even more fruitfully supported? The data do not directly support answers to the follow-up questions but there are some hints.

One of the activities that was going on concurrently with Paul's writing activity was his responses in class to the discussion of historical facts and ideas. The talking and writing activities seem to have been mutually

constitutive rather than directionally supportive. In some ways Paul made more rapid advancement in his speaking, while in other ways his writing improved more dramatically. Analyzing talk is more complex than analyzing writing. Where should a unit of speech be declared to start or end? (It is arbitrary, for example, where one inserts punctuation in a transcript, since we do not speak in punctuated forms.) Often the object of one incomplete sentence becomes the subject of the adjoining one. Modifiers float over a list, selectively enhancing some portions and not others; the listeners rarely have difficulty distinguishing, but transcribers and readers may flounder. The voices of other participants are literally and figuratively present, making the task of interpreting the talk more difficult. It is important to trace the development of talk because it is an indicator of disciplinary engagement. Talk appears more frequently than writing and is corrected more immediately. Although we do not address that point here because of space limitations, the development of spoken reasoning has been explored somewhat elsewhere.<sup>12</sup>

Over the course of the term Paul learned to balance the constraints of the ongoing class discussion, the new “facts” to be added, and the development of a causal story that made use of his knowledge and understanding. The development of this type of language skill is partly learned but partly constructed anew for each class. The teacher prompts and prods the students in each incoming group to reach the level of detail, exposition, and coordinated group conversation that he or she feels is appropriate. The constant rehearsal of pulling together ideas, supporting assertions with data, and presenting a coherent view to other students supports the mastery of similar activities in writing, but it is not directly instructional.

Paul learned to write history better both because of his own diligence and effort and because of the design efforts of and feedback from his teacher Sterling. The feedback on spoken explanations was ongoing and regular. However, Sterling gave more modest feedback on the written work. For the written work, she set increasingly complex goals. In the beginning of the year Sterling emphasized the issues of voice and thesis; as the year progressed she set goals of increasing the sophistication with which the documents in the various essays were incorporated. Further, in class discussions she became relentless in her insistence that students source their oral arguments and weave into their discourse not only their own voices but also those of the authors of textual positions. Paul was listening, and he seemed amazingly capable of responding to these

cajolings by integrating others' arguments into his spoken and written efforts.

Paul learned a content of history, a manner of writing history, and a manner of discussing history. He learned that there were multiple perspectives and positions, and he learned how to express his own. His educational experiences flooded him with resources and opportunities. He had little time, however, to reconsider, recraft, and rebuild a case or position. Once considered, an idea was left, and he moved on to the next one. Instruction might have been even more effective if it had permitted or required a return to and a reexamination of both written and oral arguments.

### *Expanding the Questions and Locations for Study*

The story of Paul's development in explanatory and narrative sophistication is interesting and goes on to a substantial level of proficiency. But, that is not the only point. Another point is that we have at our disposal a battery of tools for textual analysis that can help us learn how students and teachers gain command of and control over the rich details of history as well as the intricacies of building and developing a case within it. These tools allow us to consider very small local developments, such as the appropriate use of causal connections between concepts, or larger more global developments, such as the core structure of an argument and its use of supporting evidence. These analytic tools also allow us to consider those issues in the context of elements of accuracy and completion, not simply as uninterpreted indicators.

My research emphasizes the textual nature of history because I think that one of the gifts of history is its powerful use of language, in addition to its support for the development of one kind of understanding of who we are and why. The research also focuses on the classroom, on the practices of teaching, and on the consequences of teaching. I think it is critical to advance a program of research that continues to examine in detail how classroom activity works, thus developing a corpus of instructional cases. But, there are other venues where more informal learning of history occurs, such as museums and the media, which we need to start to explore in systematic ways. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, history provides many opportunities, and we should come to understand

those opportunities in the school setting, but exposure to historical ideas goes on beyond the academy and we should know more about how those opportunities contribute to historical understanding as well.

One function of history instruction is to lead students to the awareness of the "pastness" of things—to problematize the present. We live in a world of crises, successes, and patterns that do not spring forth unattached. Yet, students, and many adults, not only do not know the specific routes and roots of current circumstances; they also do not know that they could and should look for them. I am arguing for an increased awareness that the question of the past should be raised. To return to our hypothetical students at the beginning of this chapter, I would want them to know there is a past and to go looking for it when they confront important issues of the present. I want them to search out support for and opposition to their own dearly held positions. History requires a rigor of thought and behavior that may be even greater than its gift of helping us to understand who we are and how we got here. It presses on a flexibility of thinking and uses of evidence that can make us more mindful human beings. Our instruction must help to support people's search for themselves and their contexts while providing tools for distinguishing truth from fantasy.

I close with an anecdote that illustrates this issue of truth and fantasy. Part of my research in museums has led me to observe informally the behavior of visitors to our local natural history museum, particularly in Egypt Hall. One Sunday, I noticed a group of four middle-aged visitors clustered around a small, triangular, display case. They attracted my attention in part because they were so absorbed in the display and in part because they did not exactly seem to be typical museumgoers. From their broad Western Pennsylvanian accents, their clothing, and their interactions, I presumed they were retired blue-collar workers, a group not normally seen in Egypt Hall. This group appeared to be fascinated by a collection of small, metal objects that might have been hair ornaments but were labeled as "unknown." The men exclaimed repeatedly to the women that the metalwork was unbelievable and amazing, given that it was more than 3,000 years old. Their appreciation of the metalwork led me to further presume that the men might be retired steelworkers. Yet, I was still puzzled, since it was not obvious exactly what about the items in the display case was so intriguing. Finally, I heard one man say clearly, "See, that's what I'm telling you. It's impossible for them to have done that

3,000 years ago." Ah, thought I, historical skepticism. "They had to come from outer space—that's what they showed on T.V." Leonard Nimoy had defeated Flinders Petrie.<sup>13</sup>

Our move.<sup>14</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Suzanne Wilson has pointed out that there are some weaknesses in the particular chain of reasoning that has been followed in this and other work. In my work I identify highly effective teachers (through examining the performance of their students, through peer nomination, through supervisor nomination, and from personal visits—a selection process that can take up to two years). Identified teachers are then observed and their lessons recorded daily for a period of up to two years. The resulting data are analyzed and the effective practices described. What is missing from this process is an experimental manipulation that introduces the identified behaviors into a setting in which they are not present to see if they produce improved or excellent student performance.

2. See Terri Epstein, "Deconstructing Differences in African American and European American Adolescents' Perspectives on United States History," *Curriculum Inquiry* (in press); Peter Seixas, "Popular Film and Young People's Understanding of the History of Native American-White Relations," *The History Teacher* 26, no. 3 (1993), pp. 351-370; Peter Seixas, "Confronting the Moral Frames of Popular Film: Young People Respond to Historical Revisionism," *American Journal of Education*, 102 (1994), pp. 261-285; Peter Seixas, "Towards a Conception of Prior Historical Understanding," in A. Pace, ed., *Beyond Prior Knowledge: Issues in Text Processing and Conceptual Change* (Norwood, NJ, 1994); James V. Wertsch and Mark Rozin, "The Russian Revolution: Official and Unofficial Accounts," in James F. Voss and Mario Carretero, eds., *Learning and Reasoning in History*, International Review of History Education, vol. 2 (London, 1998), pp. 23-38; and Samuel Wineburg and Susan Mosborg, "Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA, April 1998, [www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kwin9903.htm](http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kwin9903.htm)

3. See Madelcine Gregg, "The Impact of Museum Visits on Student Teachers' Understanding of Civil Rights and Racism," manuscript in preparation, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa (1999); and Linda S. Levstik, "Articulating the Silences: Teachers' and Adolescents' Conceptions of Historical Significance," this volume.

4. These observations consist of more than 200 audio- and/or videotaped history lessons in middle- and high-school classrooms in different states as well as pre- and postinterviews with teachers and students, copies of all classroom handouts, and photocopies of student work.

5. A.P. (Advanced Placement) courses are offered in high school as college equivalency courses. They are considered challenging and are used to prepare students to take a national exam. A high score on the exam may allow a student entering college to be excused from a course or to be placed at a higher level in a sequence of courses.

6. For a discussion of this teacher's conceptualization of history, see Gaea Leinhardt, Catherine Stainton, and Salim Virgi, "A Sense of History," *Educational Psychologist*, 29(2) (1994), pp. 79-88. For a description of students' and teachers' historical explanations over time, see Gaea Leinhardt, "Weaving Instructional Explanations in History," *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 63 (1993), pp. 46-74. For an analysis of historical reasoning, see Gaea Leinhardt, "History: A Time to be Mindful," in Gaea Leinhardt, Isabel L. Beck, and Catherine Stainton, eds., *Teaching and Learning in History* (Hillsdale, NJ, 1994), pp. 209-255.

7. See Kathleen McCarthy Young and Gaea Leinhardt, "Writing from Primary Documents: A Way of Knowing in History," *Written Communication*, 15(1) (1998), pp. 25-86.

8. In the complex ways of the school systems, schools receive additional funds for educating special students if and only if those students receive something different. Gifted students are considered special students; therefore, if A.P. classes are reserved for them alone, the school can get extra money for the courses.

9. See Gaea Leinhardt, "Paul's Voice, Paul's Pen: Learning to Reason in History," manuscript in progress, University of Pittsburgh, Learning Research and Development Center, Pittsburgh, PA; and note 7.

10. See note 7.

11. See Samuel Wineburg, "Historical Problem Solving: A Study of the Cognitive Processes Used in the Evaluation of Documentary and Pictorial Evidence," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 83(1) (1991), pp. 73-87.

12. See Gaea Leinhardt, "Weaving Instructional Explanations in History," *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 63 (1992), pp. 46-74.

13. Leonard Nimoy is an actor who played the original role of the Vulcan Mr. Spock in *Star Trek* and who has gone on to become a television commentator and host of programs about the paranormal and fantastic. Flinders Petrie (1853-1942) was a renowned archeologist and Egyptologist "who made valuable contributions to the techniques and methods of field excavation and invented a sequence dating method that made possible the reconstruction of history from the remains of ancient cultures." ("Petrie, Sir [William Matthew] Flinders," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, <http://www.eb.com:180/bol/topic?eu=60991&sctn=1>).

14. I am grateful to Sam Wineburg for his helpful comments and enthusiastic encouragement as I prepared this chapter. I also wish to thank the anonymous teacher and student who were the focus of my research for allowing me to observe them in action and Joyce Fienberg and Mary Abu-Shumays for their thoughtful assistance.