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Reorienting the Past: Impact of a Survey Course on Teaching and Learning History

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Reorienting the Past: Impact of a Survey Course on Teaching & Learning History

Richard Hughes



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What do students bring to the classroom?

- Traditional Knowledge Perspective
- Culturally Responsive Perspective
- Disciplinary Understanding Perspective*

Disciplinary Misunderstandings

- **Most Students and Much of the General Public:**

History = the past

History as a set of essential facts that build a story

History as what (content to absorbed)

- **Historians:**

History = an open and ongoing argument about the past limited by the use of evidence, interpretive discipline, no one is completely objective

History as how and why (content and skills to be developed)

SoTL Project in U.S. History Survey

- Attempt to build, teach, and assess the impact of a new kind of history survey course that would better reflect the disciplinary priorities of historians.
- Hope that the class will better prepare history majors for upper-division courses.
- Hope that the class will better prepare future K-12 history teachers to embrace a new paradigm of history education.

Course Aims and Structure

- Content vs. Skills Debate
- Coverage vs. “Uncoverage”
- Four Case Studies and Final Project
- Argumentative Papers w/ Big Interpretative Questions & Primary Source Evidence (history as a verb)
- Topics: race, class, labor, gender, mass culture, social protest + final project

Data: Part I

- **Four Short Questions on Day 1 and in Final Project**

What is history?

What do historians do?

What do history teachers do?

What do students in history do?

Data: Part II

End of the Semester:

- History Assessments of Thinking: short questions that measure historical thinking skills
- Focus Group: “How has your experience in this course compared to other high school and college history courses (ISU or elsewhere) that you have taken?”
- Think Aloud Interviews: “You have been hired to teach a high school course next year entitled, *U.S. History since 1865* and your school has given you a great deal of freedom to design and teach the course the way you want. Please describe the history course that you and your students would experience.”

Data: Part III

- History Assessments of Thinking: short questions that measure historical thinking skills
- Focus Group: “How has your experience in this course compared to other high school and college history courses (ISU or elsewhere) that you have taken?”
- Think Aloud Interviews: “You have been hired to teach a high school course next year entitled, *U.S. History since 1865* and your school has given you a great deal of freedom to design and teach the course the way you want. Please describe the history course that you and your students would experience.”

Preliminary Findings

Focus Group Quotes:

“This course focused on things that matter, and understanding different arguments in history, not just learning history. “

“In this class we were able to put our opinions more into what we’re learning, in high school they told us what to learn/write about. But in this class it’s like we are are learning two different sides and we can define our own opinions, which helps me more as a historian and writer. “

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