Chapter 2
Historical Thinking and Narrative in a Global Culture

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2.1 Globalisation, Historical Narrative and the Construction of National Identity

Discussions of the relationship between globalisation and education policy have tended to neglect the curriculum, yet the transnational flow of capital, people and ideas has exerted a profound impact on this aspect of education policy: on the one hand, the curriculum must equip students with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for success in the global economy, yet it is also an instrument for the construction of national identity in increasingly multi-ethnic contexts (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The tensions that arise from these conflicting imperatives are evident in the curriculum. Nowhere is this more clearly apparent than in history. Although the history curriculum is pivotal to nation-building (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Chia, 2012; Zajda & Smith, 2013; Zajda & Whitehouse, 2009), it must offer students more than a grand narrative if they are to be equipped for life in the twenty-first century. What is the most productive direction for history curriculum in a global culture? In the absence of a grand narrative approach, what is the role of narrative in the practice of history teachers?

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J. Zajda (ed.), *Nation-Building and History Education in a Global Culture*,
Globalisation, Comparative Education and Policy Research 13,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9729-0_2

2.2 Historical Narrative and School History

Researchers distinguish between different types of history in schools. Peter Seixas (2000) identifies three forms of the subject. The first type – 'enhancing collective memory' – presents history as heritage. Following Hegel, the proper subject of this form of history is the state: the nation constitutes the means by which progress is achieved. The grand narrative charts the progress of the state. David Lowenthal (1998) argues that this approach is 'heritage' rather than 'history' as it does not foster historical inquiry but instead favours transmission of knowledge in a way that ignores disciplinary processes. Pierre Nora (1996) calls this 'memory history' due to its epistemological naïveté and conservative function. In the absence of disciplinary structures, this form of history is adrift in a perpetual present, unconscious of the processes through which historical knowledge is established. It lacks the ability to critically evaluate the uses to which it is put. Stéphane Lévesque (2008) employs the term in his critique of the limitations of such history: 'memory history, as an unscientific study of history, subject to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, supplies no formal evaluating principle or adequate answer to the challenges of the new global (dis)order and the conflicting memories and collective claims about the past that it has engendered' (pp. 6–7). In an increasingly complex, multifaceted and integrated world, memory history offers a simplistic, narrow and one-dimensional perspective.

'Disciplinary history' is the second type of history identified by Seixas (2000). It also represents the second form of the subject in the dichotomies postulated by Nora (1996) and Lowenthal (1998). In *The Process of Education* (1960), Jerome Bruner holds that the disciplines can be taught to school students in an authentic manner. This insight has had a profound effect on the practice of many history teachers, but its full implications are yet to be realised. Building on the work of Bruner, Paul Hirst and Philip Phenix developed the 'disciplines thesis' – the notion that there are distinctive forms of knowledge and that they may be used to define the curriculum. For Hirst (1974), seven forms of knowledge shape a liberal education: 'mathematics, physical sciences, human sciences, history, religion, literature and the fine arts, philosophy' (p. 46). Each of these forms is distinguished by the method(s) it uses to test a proposition. Forms differ in their key concepts, structure and modes of inquiry. Phenix (1964) concurs that disciplines should shape the curriculum, but his definition of disciplines encompasses notions of activity. Kenneth Ruthven (1978) argues that the definitions of disciplines offered by Hirst and Phenix are not sufficient: practice and common sense are important. Practice is shaped by purpose. Howard Gardner and Veronica Boix-Mansilla (1994) observe that the disciplines thus represent the most effective ways to respond to foundational questions about the world in which we live.

Disciplinary history uses the meaning-making processes of history to foster learning. The student is invited to engage in historical inquiry. This means that students analyse source material for use as evidence in the construction of historical interpretations. Peter Lee and Rosalyn Ashby (2000) observe that this involves the

use of substantive concepts related to the period under study such as democracy, revolution and immigration, as well as procedural concepts such as significance, causation, continuity and change. Brunerian in character, disciplinary history draws students into the practices of the discipline for the purpose of pedagogy (Husbands, 1996). Although this form differs from heritage history, learning and teaching in disciplinary history also occur in a sociopolitical context. It links the individual and society through examination of shared stories. Its magisterial effect in public debate makes it a site of contest. Furthermore, the historical arguments formulated by students as a result of disciplined inquiry may have implications for the present. In terms of globalisation, the procedural concepts that underpin disciplinary history offer a way to discuss learning and teaching that is not confined to issues of substantive content (subject matter).

In addition to memory history and disciplinary history, Seixas (2000) offers a third form: 'postmodern history'. Informed by the postmodern critique of knowledge, this form of the subject regards historical interpretation as an imposition on the past. Postmodernism regards meaning as unstable, inherently subjective and inextricably bound up with language. Here, the question of narrative is central. Alun Munslow (1997) observes that in postmodernist thought, it is the historian who creates the past as text. This approach has gained little traction in schools; curriculum as policy favours the first two forms. Moreover, the prevailing discussion in research on learning and teaching history adopts a focus on the second form, subject as discipline. The restrictive parameters of history as heritage, the first form, close down more opportunities for learning than they open up. To support the practice of teachers, the present research favours the second form. Before discussing the relationship between disciplinary history and narrative in schools, it is important to consider the nature of historical narrative.

2.3 Understanding Historical Narrative

Munslow (2000) offers the following definition of the place of narrative in history:

> Narrative is central to historical explanation as the vehicle for the creation and representation of historical knowledge and historical explanation. What is narrative? For the historian it is the telling of an event or connected flow of events, by a narrator (the writer/historian) to a narratee (the actual/imagined reader) and rarely is it so obtuse (akin to a scientific narrative) that it is cast in other than a relatively jargon-free language. (p. 169)

The dominant mode of historical explanation is narrative. This is the case in the discipline and the classroom. Anne Curthoys and John Docker (2006) observe that a fundamental tension has existed in history as a form of critical inquiry since its inception in classical antiquity: history as rigorous inquiry into the past and history as literary endeavour. Historical narrative is defined by this duality. One of the ways in which historians use primary sources is to discern causal relationships between events. The resultant chains of cause and consequence are the building blocks of

narrative. This means that historical narrative is an explanation of the past; it is not the past. For W. B. Gallie (1964), historical understanding *is* the ability to follow such a narrative. His position overstates the case, but teachers must consider the place of historical narrative in the classroom carefully.

In his reflection on history as discourse, Michael Stanford (1994) suggests that narrative consists of twelve elements: *beginning*, *subject*, *events*, *characters*, *setting*, *sequence*, *plot*, *perspective*, *verisimilitude*, *internal time*, *ending* and *truth*. Lévesque (2007) adapts the work of Stanford to make it manageable in the classroom. Lévesque's model consists of six parts: *subject matter*, *characters*, *sequence of events*, *evidence*, *moral* and *perspective. Subject matter* refers to the content of the narrative. Historical narrative takes as its focus human action in the past. *Characters* (historical actors) are necessary to set the narrative in motion. Historical actors encompass groups of people or institutional structures (such as nation-states). *Sequence* pertains to the organisation of events in time. In historical narrative, events are held together by causal chains. This necessitates the inclusion and exclusion of events, defence of that selection and the imperative of understanding the events in question. These first three elements of this narrative framework, as well as the fifth and sixth, may also apply to fiction. The fourth component, *evidence*, grounds the framework in history as a discipline. Sources must be selected, interpreted and evaluated for use as evidence. The fifth part of the framework is the *moral*. Implicit or explicit morals are at work in every story. The value structure of the historian informs the selection of events, the depiction of historical actors and authorial comment. The final component of the framework is *perspective*. Historical actors and narrators are anchored in time. Values at work in the past are not necessarily those of the historian. Nevertheless, ideological frameworks define the way in which people, ideas and events are perceived during the period in question and across time. Historical narrative must negotiate these complexities. It provides a structure for historical understanding.

2.4 Models of Historical Thinking/Reasoning

One of the most productive lines of research on learning and teaching in history is the exploration of historical thinking. The key imperative of this research is to identify second-order concepts in history to enable them to be explicitly taught. Directed by Peter Seixas, The Historical Thinking Project (2014) offers a valuable six-part model of historical thinking: *establish historical significance*, *use primary source evidence*, *identify continuity and change*, *analyse cause and consequence*, *take historical perspectives* and *understand ethical dimensions of history*. One of the key strengths of this research is that it invests agency in the learner. Students explore why certain aspects of the past have historical importance. They come to understand the value of primary sources through their use. Students discern patterns of continuity and change. Causal relationships are analysed. Students engage with the paradox of history: the historian wants to understand the past, but is anchored

in the present. Moreover, people in the past often understood their world in ways very different to our own. Such perspectives require consideration if we are to know the past. Addressing the ethical dimension of historical interpretation is a further complication for the student of the past. Lévesque (2008) presents an insightful explication of this model.

In contrast, Kathryn and Luther Spoehr (1994) hold that historical thinking consists of five abilities. First, historical thinking involves the use of imagination. We cannot experience the past directly. It is a paradox of historical inquiry that it seeks to understand the perspectives of people in this past, yet it is impossible to stand in their shoes. Such inquiry demands the use of imagination constrained by primary source material. Second, disciplinary thought in history involves the development of hypotheses about causation. Here, the researchers adopt the position held by E. H. Carr (1961): 'The study of history is a study of causes' (p. 81). Not all causes are of the same type or importance. For example, ever since Thucydides, historians have distinguished between immediate and underlying causes. Third, hypotheses must be tested against historical facts. The interest that Spoehr and Spoehr demonstrate in the interplay between historian and fact also reflects the influence of Carr:

> The historian starts with a provisional selection of facts and a provisional interpretation in light of which that selection has been made – by others as well as by himself. As he works, both the interpretation and the selection and ordering of facts undergo subtle and perhaps partly unconscious changes through the reciprocal action of one or the other. And this reciprocal action also involves reciprocity between present and past, since the historian is part of the present, and the facts belong to the past. (p. 24)

The task of the historian is to construct a hypothesis that matches the facts. Historical thinking is concerned with the construction of an argument about the past. This should include engagement with counterarguments. The fourth element of the model is engagement with abstract concepts, the meaning of which has changed over time. Historical inquiry frequently embraces ideas such as freedom, democracy, industrialisation and immigration. Arguments about the past may depend on such themes, but their meaning is not constant. For example, the concept of freedom for the political elite in Republican Rome was synonymous with the liberty of the Senate; this differs from contemporary understandings of the idea. Historical thinking accounts for these differences. Fifth, the researchers note that historical thinking includes awareness of one's own values. The object of historical inquiry is to understanding the past, not to impose the mindset of the present on it.

The components of historical thought identified by Spoehr and Spoehr inform the model of historical reasoning formulated by Carla Van Drie and Jannet Van Boxtel (2008). *Asking historical questions* is the first component of this model. It presents the classroom as a learning environment based on inquiry. If the capacity to pose questions about the past is foundational to learning, then history teachers need to provide students with activities designed to ask, refine and evaluate such questions. Teachers must foster students' propensity to ask questions. Van Drie and Van Boxtel discuss four types of questions that may be used to drive historical inquiry: *descriptive*, *causal*, *comparative* and *evaluative*. These questions can be

asked about sources and the past. First, descriptive questions pertain to the realm of historical fact. What kind of source is it? What was the Industrial Revolution? Such questions support basic understanding. Second, causal questions examine relationships between events. What motivated the author of a document to write it? Why did the Industrial Revolution take place? Third, comparative questions invite students to consider similarities and differences. Are statements about the past made in one document supported by other sources? What was the nature of social life before and after the onset of the Industrial Revolution? The fourth category is the evaluative question. How useful is the source to the investigation? To what extent is the concept of an Industrial Revolution a useful way to describe developments in Britain between the mid-eighteenth and the first part of the nineteenth centuries? Research suggests that evaluative questions such as these promote historical understanding more effectively than other types (Van Drie, Van Boxtel, & Van der Linden, 2006). Research by Sam Wineburg (1998) supports the view that questions are central to learning about the past and that understanding results from the interaction between the historian, questions and source.

The second component of the model of historical reasoning advocated by Van Drie and Van Boxtel is the use of sources. Engagement with primary sources is the foundation of historical reasoning. Bruce Van Sledright (2004) underscores the centrality of primary sources to historical thought. Furthermore, Wineburg (1991) presents three heuristics for interpreting sources: sourcing, contextualisation and corroboration. Sourcing involves consideration of the provenance of a document. Contextualisation entails approaching the source with the knowledge that it is the product of a specific author, time and place. Corroboration involves consideration of the similarities and differences between one source and another. Van Drie and Van Boxtel (2008) draw upon this research by linking it to the first component of their model. For them, students read sources as part of a process of historical inquiry. Sources must be evaluated in order to be used as evidence in support of a point of view about the past.

The presuppositions that students bring to the history classroom shape their learning. This is clearly the case in regard to the third component of the model: contextualisation. If sources present information in a direct and unproblematic way, then there is no apparent need to place them in context. Denis Shemilt (1987) observes that this is precisely the view that many students bring to the history classroom: perspective does not matter. Such a belief is at odds with disciplinary understanding. Before a source can be used as evidence, it is vital to consider the time and place in which it was produced. Subsequent work by Van Boxtel and Van Drie (2012) examines this aspect of historical reasoning at length. The researchers conclude that contextualisation requires the development of an effective network of key concepts and temporal landmarks. Evaluation of sources necessitates contextualisation. This means that instruction must promote understanding of key turning points, the central ideas connecting aspects of the past and the ways in which historians organise time itself.

The fourth component of the model is argumentation. The capacity to construct an argument in response to inquiry questions is foundational to historical reasoning.

Students produce such arguments by drawing on the final two components of the model: substantive concepts and meta-concepts. Substantive concepts arise from the specific period under study such as revolution, immigration and industrialisation. This knowledge is propositional in character. It would be unwise to assume that substantive concepts are unchanging. For example, democracy in classical Athens was participatory (and confined to a small part of the population); democratic government in the contemporary world is representational in nature. Such changes in substantive concepts offer valuable opportunities for comparative study. Indeed, thematic history would not exist without them.

Using meta-concepts is the sixth component of the model developed by Van Drie and Van Boxtel (2008). Meta-concepts constitute the building blocks of knowledge in history as a discipline. The researchers draw on the work of Margarita Limón (2002) in noting the following meta-concepts: 'evidence, cause, explanation, empathy, time, space, change, source, fact, description and narration' (p. 101). The *Using primary source evidence* component of the Van Drie and Van Boxtel model combines *source* and *evidence* from Limón. It is also useful to examine the connections between these meta-concepts and the model developed by Seixas in his work with the Historical Thinking Project (2014). Seixas and Limón share an emphasis on causation and change. Furthermore, Limón refers to *empathy*, whilst Seixas invites students to *take historical perspectives*. Limón includes *explanation*, *time*, *space*, *fact*, *description* and *narration*, whereas Seixas invites students to *establish historical significance* and to *understand ethical dimensions of history*. Emphasis on the use of disciplinary concepts by students underpins the above-mentioned models. Van Sledright (2009) refers to historical thinking concepts as 'knowledge-in-use structures' (p. 453). This emphasis on process resonates with the work of philosophers such as Alfred North Whitehead. History teachers need to employ pedagogies that foster the use of procedural concepts by students. A systematic understanding of the uses of narrative in disciplinary history can help teachers to meet this challenge.

2.5 History, Narrative and Pedagogy

Narrative is central to the way in which students understand time: story offers a means of making sense of the past (Levstik, 1992). In a way, the past is gone. It is pursued through imagination. This makes the study of the past an adventure of the mind. Bruner (1986) distinguishes between two ways in which the mind constructs reality: narrative and paradigmatic thought. Each mode creates meaning in different ways; one cannot be reduced to the other. Narrative thought enables the construction of meaning through story. Its object is verisimilitude. In contrast, paradigmatic thought verifies truth claims through proofs and experimentation. Narrative grapples with subjective human experience; the paradigmatic mode engages with abstract forms and the universal. Narrative thinking underpins the humanities; paradigmatic thought is foundational to the sciences. If the distinction that Bruner draws is correct,

then history offers disciplinary processes to the narrative mode of the mind. It may be a simplification to confine the discipline of history to narrative; Husbands (1996) holds that history draws on narrative and paradigmatic thought. Nevertheless, the research of Bruner underscores the centrality of narrative to learning. Having said this, the work of the history teacher involves more than interaction with an individual mind: teachers engage with groups of students. In this light, what is the place of narrative in the history classroom?

The present research presents a five-part model to inform the work of teachers of disciplinary history. The first component of the model is *involvement and engagement*. Richard Prawat (1998) observes that dealing with motivation and learning separately is not helpful; expert teachers do not doubt the importance of capturing the imagination of students as instruction moves these learners from the known to the unknown. Fine historical writing reflects this understanding. Consider, for example, the way in which Christian Meier (2000) opens his history of Athens:

> In the late summer of 480 BC, most likely towards the end of September, a dramatic, heartrending scene played out on the coast of Attica. Athens' entire population, including men, women, children and slaves, was fleeing from the approaching Persian army. Only a few people remained, mostly the old, the infirm, and a few priests. The Athenians left behind the graves of their ancestors, their shrines, homes, fields, and plantations, entrusting them to the protection of their goddess, Athena. Horses, donkeys, and dogs may have accompanied the convoy as far as the harbour, but there they, too, presumably had to be left behind. There was hardly enough room on the ships for the 100,000 or more human beings, much less their animals. The Athenians did take along the statues of some gods, at least the wooden figure of Athena, for safekeeping and probably also to invoke the goddess's assistance. (p. 3)

This is evocative historical writing. The reader experiences a sense of being transported to Athens. Every detail that the historian includes is replete with pathos. We encounter the fear of the Athenians as they flee the Persian host. We feel something of the loss of the men, women and children as they abandon their home. The few people who remain face death at the hands of the invading army; the atmosphere is foreboding. Hoping for the protection of their patron goddess, they carry the statue of Athena from the old Parthenon. In a way, she has been cast out with them. As they board the ships, they step into an uncertain future. They may never return home. The world has been shattered and it is unclear how, or if, it will be restored. In the hands of a teacher, such a narrative can be used to foster the predisposition to learn and to engage students in historical thinking.

The second way in which the teacher employs narrative in the history classroom is as a *mode of explanation*. The historian uses narrative to explain the past, so too do teachers and students. To discuss the explanations offered by teachers, it is useful to return to the four types of historical questions considered by Van Drie and Van Boxtel (2008): *descriptive*, *causal*, *comparative* and *evaluative*. These are not the only kinds of questions that might be asked in a history classroom, but they form a useful guide. We will begin with the first three types in the context of the previous example. What were the Greco-Persian wars? What caused the conflict? What were the similarities and differences between the Greco-Persian Wars and the Peloponnesian War? The explanations offered in response to such

questions afford teachers the opportunity to model historical thinking for students. The first question invites the teacher to present a basic account of the past. This provides a springboard for further learning. The second question draws attention to the causal relationships that enable the narrative offered by the teacher to retain coherence. Identification of further causes may call aspects of the initial account into question. Comparative questions may lead teachers to present accounts of the past that students can read against each other. This affords rich opportunities for historical thought. Evaluative questions invite judgments of worth. For example, how much emphasis should we give war as a catalyst of historical change? Such questions offer many opportunities for teachers to model and guide. Furthermore, the explanations of the past that students bring to the classroom are the starting point for learning. As a result of instruction, the narrative explanations of the past that students offer should reflect historical thinking. Teachers need to design learning activities that enable students to use, and to explain their use, of historical thinking concepts. Historical understanding must also be captured in the assessment tasks that students complete.

Third, teachers use narrative to provide a *context for historical inquiry*. An investigation of the causes of World War II, for example, could open with an account of Neville Chamberlain and the events of 30 September 1938. It was on this day that the British Prime Minister returned home from Germany. In his meeting with Hitler, Chamberlain signed the Munich Agreement that permitted Germany to annex the border regions of Czechoslovakia. Speaking at Heston Aerodrome, Chamberlain announced the fruits of the policy of appeasement: the pact was 'only the prelude to a larger settlement in which all Europe may find peace'. In triumph, he held aloft the declaration as evidence of a peaceful future before reading it to the crowd. Later, outside 10 Downing Street, he proclaimed that the note with his signature and that of the German Führer heralded 'Peace for our time'. In less than a year, Great Britain and her allies would be at war with Germany. It is hard to overstate the tragedy of these events.

What was the historical significance of the policy of appeasement? What caused the British government to pursue this policy? How were the events of 1938 understood by people at the time? How does our own position in time shape the way in which we perceive the same events? These are rich questions for historical inquiry. Although the key primary source for this inquiry could be the Anglo-German Agreement, the film footage of Chamberlain disembarking from his airplane and delivering his speech is far more engaging. Moreover, the cheers of the crowd demonstrate the perils of regarding appeasement as the sole responsibility of Neville Chamberlain. Time has generated many interpretations of the events by historians, some more sympathetic to the British Prime Minister than others. Historical inquiry would need to reach back to the Great War and its aftermath, as well as forward into World War II. Narrative thus enables teachers to construct a framework for inquiry. It is through such inquiry that students can use the procedural concepts presented in the various historical thinking models.

Robert Mayer (1998) observes that students need both to attend to the narrative offered by the teacher and to consider the way in which it has been constructed. Historical narrative rests on source material. The distinction that Frederick Drake and Sarah Drake Brown (2003) draw between first-, second- and third-order sources may be applied here. The first-order source is foundational to the inquiry. Second-order sources confirm aspects of the initial source or call it into question. Third-order sources are discovered by students through their own inquiry. The narrative that the teacher constructs to contextualise the first-order source shapes learning. The creative tension between the first- and second-order sources generates further opportunities for teachers to explain and contextualise. The treatment of the first- and second-order sources provides a springboard for students to engage in historical inquiry using third-order sources.

Fourth, narrative is a *form of source*. The selection and specific use of primary sources by the teacher enable students to engage in historical thinking. Indeed, Van Sledright (2004) holds that historical understanding depends on the application of disciplinary heuristics that enable historians to interpret and synthesise sources. He presents a useful, four-step approach to source analysis. The first step of this approach, *identification*, is foundational. It is necessary to recognise a narrative to produce a meaningful interpretation of it. The features of narrative identified by Lévesque (2007) are useful to the identification of narrative and the analysis of its features. The second step of this approach is *attribution*. Who constructed the narrative? The answer to this question anchors the source in place and time. The third step is *judging perspective.* How does the speaking position of the author influence the meaning of the narrative? This asks students to abandon a naïve perception of a source as unproblematic and free of bias. The final step of this approach is *reliability assessment*. This invites students to evaluate the sources. What aspects of the past does the account present? What are the gaps and silences? The *corroboration* heuristic identified by Wineburg (1991) underpins this component of the model: a source must be read against others to determine its reliability. In discussing narrative texts, Linda Levstik (1996) observes that critical analysis of such material by students rests on mediation by the teacher. It is helpful to apply this insight to the use of textbooks. Teachers and students frequently make extensive use of narratives in a textbook, but historical inquiry necessitates analysis of this as a source (and engagement with further sources).

The fifth component of the model is narrative as the *outcome of historical inquiry*. Narrative is the preferred form of writing for many students, but the argumentative essay tends to promote greater understanding (Voss & Wiley, 2000). Nevertheless, narrative is central to the practice of history. Should it not follow that a Brunerian treatment of the subject invites students to write about the past in the form of a narrative? There are opportunities and dangers here. It is necessary for teachers to formulate activities that position narrative as the *outcome* of an investigation. This approach means that students are not required simply to impose a fictive overlay on material from a textbook or repeat an account in their own words. Instead, the narrative is the response to a question. The narrative must explain the past. Narrative connects events through causal chains. The arrangement of causes constitutes an

interpretation, an argument. Such insights must be manifested in the writing. The student's narrative must be supported by evidence. In short, it must reflect historical thinking. Disciplinary rigour matters.

2.6 Conclusion

One might object to the focus on procedural knowledge and narrative in this article by arguing that it fails to engage with the selection of substantive content. In the context of his own research, Rom Harré (2009) rejects this kind of objection as the enchantment of substantivalism. Excessive focus on substantive content often works its spell on the development of history courses. History as heritage falls victim to this imbalance; the result is an epistemologically naïve rendering of the subject. Substantive knowledge does not offer all of the answers for learning and teaching. This is not to suggest that substantive content has no place in planning the curriculum, but it is not the only game in town. The mutual interdependence of substantive and procedural knowledge means that teachers must address both aspects of the discipline to foster historical understanding. Attention to the procedural domain enhances the scope and depth of curriculum development and makes greater reform possible. Narrative is central to such matters; it is part of the syntax of history. Its explanatory function combines substantive and procedural knowledge. The history teacher can use narrative to foster *involvement and engagement*. It is also a *mode of explanation*, a *context for inquiry* and a *form of source*. Teachers can also employ narrative as the *outcome of inquiry*. Deeper understanding of its multifaceted role through the model offered in this paper can enhance the work of teachers in fostering historical thinking.

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