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The Validity of Historical Narrative and Its Use in Teaching History

by

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Approved _____

Date _____

Abstract

There is an effective way to teach high school history, put the content into narrative form. 'Narrative form' can be expressed in various ways: from historically-based literature to in-class creative-writes, from museum visits to book clubs, etc. Many educators across the United States recognize that incorporating 'narrative' into the classroom is conducive to greater student-learning than other methods of history instruction. These conclusions are supported by several recent studies from cognitive scientists who demonstrate that humans are predisposed to understand information in narrative form. Last, I provide evidence from my own teaching experience: analysis of previously taught lessons, along with commentary on general student response to narrative-style learning.

Table of Contents

1. The Validity of Historical Narrative and Its Use in Teaching History	1
2. Appendix A: A Reflection on the Skills of Historians Using Narrative Arcs	16
3. Appendix B: The Validity of Historical Narrative	18
4. Appendix C: Lesson Plans for Analysis of Narrative in the Classroom	25
5. Bibliography	28
6. Integration of Faith and Learning	32
7. Bibliography for Integration of Faith and Learning	37

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The Validity of Historical Narrative and Its Use in Teaching

Introduction

What is an effective method in teaching high school history? The question of pedagogy as it pertains to high school level classes has been widely studied and consistently answered through new curriculum, congressional acts, state testing, etc. It is not uncommon to find revised instructional methods in the subjects of math, reading, writing, and science; but one seems to rarely encounter any regarding the subject of history. My impression is that revising history curriculum is not widely discussed at the national levels of educational administration simply because the subject is understood to be less important than the other “core subjects”. History is one of the least tested subjects (state testing) and the amount of years students are required to take the subject is less than others. High school history is often a neglected and forgotten subject in high school—indeed throughout grade school—yet it is one of the most important (Goudvis and Harvey, 2000, p. 52).

My hypothesis centered on the notion that there is a more effective way to share, tell, and teach history; this method focused on including narrative-based instruction, which would draw, in a meaningful and enticing way, its readers and students into the past¹. In other words, my mission centered on taking seemingly uninteresting, boring, and neutral historical facts and figures and transform them into events and characters, which my students would be intrigued to learn more about. I predicted that students would care to pursue historical knowledge if the form of that content was in narrative form.

¹ *For those who might argue that history is an umbrella term that incorporates other social sciences, refer to **Appendix A**.*

However, the deeper I researched the topic of narrative, the clearer it became that historians do not agree on narrative as a proper vehicle for bearing historical knowledge.² Yet, after a substantial amount of research and wrestling with the philosophical debate of narrative, I remain convinced that narrative is both a valid way to speak truthfully about the past and an effective way in which to teach.

A Definition of Narrative

Throughout this paper, I use *narrative* in two distinct ways. The first and primary definition of narrative is as an umbrella term for a specific style of communicating information.³ Narrative, in general, refers to the presenting of information through connected events (plot), which are situated in a specific time and place (setting), and are populated with characters. Narratives tell stories that present challenges and responses to those problems by building up settings and characters; then, narratives end by concluding the developed plot, or by posing another issue to be answered later.

While *narrative* is broad, *historical-narrative* attempts to be more focused. Historical-narrative is comprised of literary devices, with both the settings and characters being historically-based. There are several ways to approach historical-narratives: examples are provided in the sections, “Arguments from Theories and Strategies of Pedagogy” and “Putting Theory into Practice: A Validation of Using Narrative to Teach History”.

² *It is important to note that entering any philosophical debate concerning subjects such as language, truth, memory, the past, etc. can be a slippery slope into a quagmire of never ending back-and-forths. Therefore, I will not engage in this conversation during this project. Any of these details, authors, or themes could be the subject of an in-depth debate, and it is not my intention to do these topics an academic injustice by devoting only a cursory examination of the material. Please refer to **Appendix B** for my discussion of the philosophical debate concerning historical narrative.*

³ *Other terms that refer to this routine use of narrative include “narrative form”, “narrative-style”, etc.*

Note that not all narrative is historical-narrative. The main difference between the two is that general *narrative* and *narrative form* refers to any information with the structural parts of plot, setting, characters, problem, solution, etc. *Historical-narratives* maintain these literary structures, but constrain them so that historical accuracy and integrity is preserved. Historical-narratives can enter the realm of fiction; however, their readers and teachers must be vigilant not to promote fiction as fact. To be clear, historical fiction is not the same as historical-nonfiction. This difference does not mean historical fiction offers nothing to the students of history—historical fiction can be useful in bringing to life certain features of a historical era such as physical and emotional environments. I will highlight the uses of historical fiction through my writing.

Below, I provide three main arguments forming an affirmative view of the inclusion of narrative in the classroom; one, from educators; two, from neuroscientists; and three, from my own teaching.

Arguments from Theories and Strategies of Pedagogy

Research shows and personal experience (refer to Section III) confirms the notion that stories are best way to communicate history and social studies information (Cronon, 1992, p. 1349). While a brief story may take a few more minutes of concentrated time than a class-lecture, the student retention of information is increased. Not only may students remember the who, what, and when for the next test, but stories stick with students for some time after the assessment (Barnes, 1978, p. 509). Furthermore, students are more likely to try to enter the mindsets of historical peoples, place themselves in the locations of events, and navigate the evaluative terrain of historical interpretation if they first care about, then understand the content

(Daniels and Zemelman, 2014, p. 293-303) The all-important question then, is how do we get students to care about and understand content? Put the content into narrative form!

I have encountered a considerable number of academic reflections concerning the use of narrative in history classes. Among these sources, there is consensus that using narrative form is an effective way to teach history in secondary schools. Trost (2009) states that traditional social studies classes emphasize the theoretical issues and therefore generalize about experiences (p. 178). For these classes to promote stronger student engagement Trost suggests incorporating historical-narratives into instruction.

"Narrative" in a school environment generally takes the form of both historical fiction and historical nonfiction short stories, novels, movies, etc. Most students encounter this type of narrative in English class (or a first language class), but English classes should not hold the exclusive rights to narrative. Trost suggests that history classes use narratives in class with writing assignments that foster critical thinking skills about the world (p. 183). Trost argues that these narratives should follow four criteria: they must be primarily about everyday life and non-elites; they must be highly readable and a manageable length; they must shed light on some global issues; and they must have concrete information about history, political, economic system, religious beliefs, and culture of the country (Trost, 2009, p. 181).⁴ Trost (2009) concludes that students are better equipped to answer the historian's questions "What happened?", "What was it like?", and "What does it mean?" (p. 180).

⁴ Trost's criteria for historical narratives highlights the balance which narratives must strike in order to be both historically accurate and captivating. This relationship between fact and approachability must be carefully maintained. On one hand, narratives are designed to draw emotion and elicit personal connection from emotionless and impersonal historical facts. On the other hand, narratives must be built on a foundation of substantiated fact and historical argument. Refer to **Appendix B** for a fuller treatment of the discussion of the validity of historical narrative.

Frost (2012) highlights the same idea in her "Using "Master Narratives" to Teach History: The Case of the Civil Rights Movement". Frost states that students should learn how to tell history as a story. In her example, the author shares that students engaged with short thematic units such as "Montgomery to Memphis" (p. 439). These units presented students with a specific historical motif i.e. non-violent protest. Based on this central concept, units focused on connecting key characters such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks to settings like Montgomery and Washington D.C. These theme-based stories instructed students by incorporating primary-source anecdotes, key figures and places, with a concentration on a focused concept.

Along with thematic narratives, Frost (2012) suggests that students could write their own historical-narrative of the period under study based on their current knowledge. Then, after the end of the unit, students would engage in the task of writing a new historical-narrative to which they could compare their learning progress (p. 442). These narratives would serve as a reflective tool to students as they see how their opinions and knowledge of the era changed.

As our national education curriculum have narrowed on critical reading and writing skills (as seen in the Common Core standards) there has been a push to align learning goals across subjects. Incorporating narratives (and the skills required to engage with them) into social studies classes can build a bridge between social science and English classes. Saidel, Thorstensen and O'Connell (1980) argue that when English and history classes work together—through curriculum, field-trips, etc.--there is greater continuity in student learning, "students develop skills of imaginative historical inquiry--such as close observation, precise reading, accurate data interpreting, hypothesizing, and generalization" (p. 333-334).⁵

⁵ *History teachers should be appropriately wary of equating literary truth with historical fact.*

The more difficult question is, how do we get students to encounter these narratives in a constructive use of time and space in the classroom and home? According to Daniels and Zemelman (2014), book clubs are an effective method in providing differentiated, grade-level reading (p. 244) because they allow students to choose their own reading. These readings are intriguing and go beyond presenting historical information—they make history feel present!

Depending on the amount of time a teacher may want to spend on the book club activity, there is the possibility for weekly (or bi-weekly) meetings for students who share the same book. These gatherings allow for students to engage with one another and the text: Socratic seminars, online discussion boards, and group projects can encourage further growth (Daniels and Zemelman, 2015, pp. 244-255). Students are less likely to feel as if they are pounding vocabulary into their minds, and before they realize it, they will likely have increased their historical/social studies lexicon—even adopting secondary and tertiary words and phrases.⁶

Daniels and Zemelman (2014) also show that there are many movements across America to incorporate more reading into the classroom: in all subjects (p. 11-18). The question is, what kind of written and oral material should be used and what are the best methods for engaging students with this content? The answer is not simple. It seems to me, and as the authors, Daniels and Zemelman (2014) suggest, short texts are generally more effective than longer ones; multiple texts provide a more truthful account than a single source; easy texts (easy does not mean non-informative or non-challenging) generally are more inviting than hard readings; and a mixture of fiction⁷ and non-fiction pieces give the best range of literature to students (p. 70-77).

⁶ Refer to Section III for the analysis of vocabulary usage in student work.

⁷ It should be noted again that historical fiction poses the risk of trading fact for emotion. To ensure that students receive fact-based history, there must be proper pedagogical scaffolding on the part of the teacher.

Using engaging historical-narratives capture historical themes or tell historical facts entertainingly allow students to wrestle with material in a personal way. That is the power of narratives, they identify and present the humanity in events. Students relate and understand better to the people, places, and events about which they care. If students might be able to appreciate the historical-narratives they read, then they are already engaging with the history. Caring produces motivation to understand, and a motivation to understand is the foundation of the historical process (historiography).

Arguments from Neuroscience

While many U.S. educators argue and provide evidence for the inclusion of historical-narrative in teaching, the field of neuroscience also defends this position. There are a multitude of studies and papers concerning the topic of learning through story and narrative, but I have selected just three to buttress the claims of the previous section.

Narrative is an effective vehicle for information retention because humans are predisposed to interpret their realities through the lens of a narrative structure. According to researchers at the Association for Psychological Science, humans engage in a mental process called "Event Structure Perception", "if changes in neural activity occurred at the same points that the subjects divided the stories, then it could be safe to suggest that humans are physiologically disposed to break down activities into narratives" (Speer, 2007). Educators can utilize this natural process by designing lessons that are centered on narrative-based instruction.

In another study, researchers at the Association for Psychological Science found that young-adults see their lives as redemption stories. For young people, these stories "sustain hope that sacrifices and suffering today may produce positive dividends in the future, helping generative adults to persevere in their commitment to promoting the well-being of future

generations.” (McAdams and Guo, 2015). This study proposes that humans may conceptualize their own lives in narrative-form—that there is a purpose and legacy to their living. Educators, such as Trost (2012) recognize that students who are able to tap into this endowed meaning (either in others or themselves) establish a strong connection to the content material.

Furthermore, scientists at Washington University in St. Louis claim that humans, when reading, “build vivid mental simulations of narrative situations.” Mirror neurons—neurons that are stimulated as if the main subject were performing the action of the observed secondary subject—are activated as readers place themselves in the shoes of the characters at hand. If mirror neurons are producing the same mental stimuli in humans who are observing a scene or reading a text, then perhaps one might be able to experience “how it was.” Mirror neurons may become an invaluable tool if educators incorporate historical-narratives that elicit emotion and critical thinking.

Putting Theory into Practice: A Validation of Using Narrative to Teach History⁸

Along with reading and synthesizing research on narrative in the classroom, I had the opportunity to put my research and hypotheses into action. This past year, I student-taught in a high school where I instructed both 10th Grade World History and 12th Grade Senior Civics classes. Over the course of my student-teaching experience, I utilized some of the techniques and suggestions put forward by national educators (as seen in section I) and neuroscientists (as seen in section II). Here, I share a specific example that affirms my hypothesis of narrative as an effective way to teach history.

⁸ *This is where the rubber meets the road, where theory and third-person argument meets reality. Below is a commentary on my experimentation with narrative in the classroom (for more detail, refer to Appendices A & C.) Within this commentary, the reader will recognize the aforementioned theory and research connected to this specific lesson and analysis of student-work.*

In this example, I taught three lessons over the course of a week to two classes of 10th grade World History students. These three lessons focused on the history of Latin America from the Mayan, Incan, and Aztec Empires to European Colonization (up until the year 1800 CE). My lessons followed a general thought progression of fact→interpretation→evaluation; meaning, the first lesson tasked students with collecting facts on the Latin American empires; the second lesson asked students to interpret the interactions among Native Latin Americans and European explorers; the third lesson required students to evaluate the transforming relationship among Europeans and Native Latin Americans⁹ as it led to European Colonialism.

While I employed several narrative-based learning strategies such as incorporating text from Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel* and inducing thought-experiments from both the Native and European perspective, the main narrative-based tool was my summative assessment: a creative-write¹⁰. The creative-write (for more information reference Appendix C) asked students to either adopt a Native, Slave or European perspective and write a story from such a person's perspective. My primary grading criteria stipulated that the stories reflect accurately the time in which they were set. Students were required to incorporate at least 8 content-specific words in order to aid their efforts to capture a realistic environment (both physical and emotional).

As with all our tests, students are allowed to use their resources, such as in-class notes, handouts, and other written materials. This testing philosophy permits more difficult and higher-

⁹ Refer to Appendix C for Lesson Plans.

¹⁰ While the assignment is in Appendix C, it may be helpful to specifically state the concept of a creative-write. The creative-write asked students to develop a historical fiction story, which incorporated the unit's vocabulary i.e. geographic and cultural terms. Students were told explicitly that while their story might be fiction, it should reflect as closely as possible the real experiences of the peoples who lived during the era of study. Historical accuracy was aided by students' use of notes, online resources, and in-class work.

level questions and challenges. Through these resources, which hold geographic and cultural information, students can reflect on and create an environment—visual, emotional, and historically accurate—which conveys their understanding of the content. This was the purpose of the creative-write, to provide students an opportunity to enter the mindset and atmosphere of those under study. Due to the time constraints of the unit (four weeks to learn the history of Latin America), I focused more on drawing students into the basic themes of the region's history—this creative-write focused on the progression and development of European colonialism in Latin America.

Below, I provide commentary regarding the patterns of learning and engagement revealed by the creative-write. It is important to note that I refer to 3 "Focus Students". These were students whose works I dissected more thoroughly and intentionally to gather a clearer understanding of student learning. As I evaluated students' creative writes I noticed two main themes that correlated with the requirements and criteria by which I graded.

1. **Stories were historically accurate:** Though the creative-write is historical-fiction, students were tasked with being historically accurate in terms of the physical and emotional environments. My expectations for the class were not that they remember a specific set of names and dates, but that students would gather a general sense of "What happened?", "What was it like?", and "What does it mean?".

My evaluation criteria were primarily centered on painting the most realistic picture of life during the historical period of study. This assessment was not focused on reciting specific dates or names, but capturing the feeling and likeness of the events. Students' stories were historically accurate in the sense that they reflected 'what it would be like to live in that time, in the shoes of those studied'. As reflected in the work of the

three focus students, students showed that they could reconstruct the environment, both physical and cognitive, of the peoples under study. This type of assessment allowed for and demonstrated a more substantial and deeper type of learning and understanding compared to a test structured for fact-based multiple-choice.

2. **Stories were emotionally-charged:** Evaluation is a subjective measure; it requires one to pass judgment and personally engage in decisions of supposed right and wrong. My criteria for the creative-write were focused on capturing the emotion and thought-processes of the peoples under study. To meet these requirements, students had to write resourcefully and imaginatively while maintaining historical accuracy.

Most students completed this task well. As reflected in the work of the three focus students, student-writing captured the pain and hope of the peoples under study. Focus students #1 and #3 wrote from two different perspectives; #1 wrote as an Incan slave girl and #3, a Portuguese slave trader. While their imagined viewpoints and goals starkly contrasted, both writings invited the reader into their reconstructed historical world.

Both the historical accurateness and the emotion of the stories affirm the idea put forward by the researchers at Washington University in St. Louis who claim that “readers build vivid mental simulations of narrative situations.” Asking students to put themselves in the shoes of someone else agrees with Trost’s (2009) suggestion of keeping narratives down-to-earth and relatable; students wrote themselves into the historical era and in ways that kept the period accessible to them.

Following the creative-write, I asked students to reflect on their own learning. Through grading I recognized that students seemed to engage better with the creative-write compared to a traditional test, but I was curious to hear their own opinion. I asked students to respond

to several questions that would help them navigate their self-reflection. First, I restated the learning target for the lesson, “I will research, analyze, and evaluate the development of contact among the peoples of Latin America and those who migrated, forced and other, to the ‘New World’.” Then, I prompted students to show how the creative-write reflected the learning target. Following this, I asked two questions, which invited students to explain how the creative-write provided the opportunity to demonstrate their learning about Latin America, and which parts of the creative-write worked best and challenged students.

Students responded overwhelmingly that the creative-write assisted their understanding of content-specific words. Students' self-reflections state that the creative-write gave students the opportunity to use the words they thought best fit into their created worlds. Indeed, there were over **50** different content-specific words used in the class' stories—significantly more than I could have demanded students remember for a traditional test. These words ranged from references to vegetation and agriculture (coffee, sugar, chocolate, etc.) to geographic locations (Peru, Haiti, Amazon Rain Forest etc.) The inclusiveness of high level words affirms Daniels and Zemelman (2015) studies of student growth as they participate in narrative-based instruction.

As captured in the responses for the 3 focus students, students felt that they were able to use vocabulary organically. Since students were not required to memorize dates, names, and other vocabulary terms (as they might for a traditional, multiple-choice assessment) students discovered a more authentic context for their content-specific words. For example, instead of simply reciting the definition of the Encomienda System, students explained it through a personal story (the creative-write). This type of ‘first-person’ encounter permitted students to draw out the meaning of the concepts they included; students included other content-specific

vocabulary to build a more coherent, realistic picture of the era. Focus student #1 said that, “including the vocabulary led me to put in more historically based context into my creative write”. This ‘historically-based’ context was reflected in the self-assessments of others as well.

Historical-Context: Our learning target centered itself on the idea of contextual understanding of the historical era. Throughout the unit students were asked to gather information on Latin America and its people (foreign and native), then develop and build interpretations and evaluations of these peoples’ interactions with one another and their environments.

In the students' self-reflections, most claimed that they enjoyed the creative-write because it allowed them to focus on and develop the part of the historical era they found most interesting. Students utilized their notes from throughout the unit to construct a fictional historical-narrative of Latin America. Focus students #2 and #3 highlighted this connectiveness among fact and historical imagination. Focus student #2 says, "The creative-write reflected the learning target by using research, analyzing those notes then evaluate the overall development of contact among the peoples of Latin America". Focus student #3 is more specific about the his learning progress of the historical era, "[the creative-write] helped me understand why people had slaves and how they used [them] for money".]

My evaluation of students’ creative-writes affirmed the research of both national educators and neuroscientists. I argue that this type of assessment allowed students to enter more authentically the historical era. Not only did most students enjoy the creative-write, students also gained a richer, personal understanding of the history of colonization in Latin America.

Conclusion

There is an effective way to teach high school history, put the content into narrative form. 'Narrative form' can be expressed in various ways: from historical-nonfiction to in-class creative-writes, from museum visits to book clubs, etc. Many educators across the United States recognize that incorporating 'narrative' into the classroom is conducive to greater student-learning. These conclusions are supported by several recent studies from cognitive scientists who demonstrate that humans are predisposed to understand information in narrative form. Last, I provide evidence from my own teaching experience: analysis of previously taught lessons, along with commentary on general student response to narrative-style learning.

Students are primed to understand their world in terms of stories. Therefore, I argue that students will engage with content material in more meaningful ways when that content is put into narrative form. Narrative-based pedagogical methods are numerous and can be used in almost every type of lesson. As reflected in my own experiences, students responded well when tasked with placing themselves in the shoes of the peoples under study. It is both encouraging and empowering when educators find techniques for promoting great student learning. Historical-narrative is such a method.

Appendix A

A Reflection on the Skills of Historians Using Narrative Arcs

“History” is a broad concept. If historians were carefully to explain the different thought processes employed in deciphering and constructing their historical work, it might be revealed that there is a myriad of social-science skills used. For example, when analyzing the American Revolution, the historian utilizes geographic, ethnographic, historical, and sociological information and skill-sets to inform the seemingly simple questions, “What happened?”, “What was it like?”, and “What does it mean?” It is, of course, naive to think that these questions can be answered without knowledge of human environments, cultural precedents, and past happenings. However, it seems that we expect students to gather the necessary information without first developing the proper tools.

Practiced historians are practiced geographers, ethnographers, sociologists, etc: why aren't our students? It is one thing to have students learn geographic and cultural knowledge, it's another thing to have students understand the skills of gathering and synthesizing that information. Effective history instruction results not solely from narrative form; effective history instruction is a product of learning specific skills that form the foundation of historical understanding.

Breaking down social-studies skills in clear and repetitive pedagogical methods can greatly assist students in grasping the larger "context" of an historical era. I suggest "Narrative-Arcs"—a pedagogical tool that is used to teach history chronologically, yet with thematic structure—as one example of bridging the gap between ungrounded historical fiction and

emotionless historical fact. Narrative-arcs can focus on one part of an historical era I.e. economics, human-environment, government, etc.

For example, when teaching an American History class, the teacher might be able to split the course into three narrative-arcs. For example, if on a particular week I were to teach my students about Colonial America—let's say the 1760s—then I would devote a day (or days) to each narrative-arc. On Monday, our objective would be to understand the cultural and religious atmospheres, key figures and events of that decade. Then, on Tuesday and Wednesday our goal would be to decipher the myriad of British economic policies and the Colonial responses they generated. On Thursday and Friday, our class would finish the week with an examination of British and Colonial governments and the beginning of the formation of the American republic. To recap, in one week our class would study culture and religion, economics, and government for the 1760s. Then, the next week—when our period of study moved to the 1770s and 1780s—our class would again intersect with the narrative arcs. Perhaps on Monday and Tuesday our class would focus on culture and religion, Wednesday, economics, and Thursday and Friday, government.

Through narrative-arcs, students can specifically develop the skill-sets of the particular context (economist, geographer, etc.), which aid students' understanding of the greater historical context. These narrative-arcs can be supplemented by short-readings such as primary sources from journals and newspapers, role-playing games, and other narrative-oriented activities.

Appendix B

The Validity of Historical Narrative

The Discussion of Historical Narrative

Clarification and distinction are necessary to ensure this brief discussion of historical narrative proceeds smoothly. It is important to note that I will strive to analyze each argument/subject by itself; however, with complicated debates such as this, there are several concepts and ideas at play in each moment. This brief discussion will touch on three general themes in the discussion of historical narrative: the epistemological and narrativist traditions, the issue of language, and the problem of assigned meaning.

Two Types of History

It is necessary to establish a working definition of truth. It is the idea of "truth", which is at the heart of the debate concerning historical narrative. It must be noted that the subject of "truth" is a black-hole conversation, for it has the ability to suck even the most powerful minds into a never-ending chaotic whirlwind of questioning without clear answers.

In his "The Dilemma of Contemporary Anglo-Saxon Philosophy of History," F.R. Ankersmit (1986) highlights two different philosophies of history that deal with these two different types of truth: the epistemological and narrativist (p. 2)

From an epistemological perspective, a statement is not true if the historical claim does not closely correspond with any single historical reality—it is an evaluation, a meaning assigned to a selected set of data. Historical truth is limited to simple, factual statements that are void of subjective judgment. Narrative, on the other hand coerces a neutral past to accept artificial value as determined by the historian.

Yet, McCullag (1987) defends the narrativist position when he claims that “Historical knowledge is but an extension of our everyday knowledge of the past, and should be regarded accordingly. Certainly it is a construction, but when the construction is well supported by evidence, then it is worthy of belief as a true account of what has actually happened.” (p. 33). He reiterates this idea by later saying that it is not irrational to believe something even when there is a slight chance it is false (p. 34).

An Issue of Language

The issue of narrative is an issue of language. Language is a medium through which information is conveyed. Humans, even those who speak the same language in close proximity to one another may have different definitions and meanings assigned to the same words. For example, take the word *boot*. On the surface, most English speakers know that *boot* refers to a type of footwear. However, the image that *boot* conjures or the experiences in which we encounter *boot* differs based on geographic location, profession, and culture. This variance in language also imparts challenges when speaking about the past.

The goal of the historian is to make a "representation" of the past, meaning "to make present again something that is absent right now"; Ankersmit (2006) states that “We have historical writing in order to compensate for the absence of the past” (p. 328). If historical writing is a substitute for the past, then it is up to the historian to construct a substitute that is as close in likeness to the original as possible. However, this task is accomplished and held in different validity depending on the epistemological or narrativist tradition.

Nietzsche notes, in an epistemological sense, that the historian and the past get in the way of each other. This challenge is located squarely in the language used (Ankersmit, 1998, p. 189). In the epistemological tradition, it may be impossible to describe anything as 'it was'. For

example, when describing the boots of American colonial soldiers, how truthful can the historian convey its likeness? The historian can labor for pages describing in detail the style, color, material, and feeling of wearing the boots; but can the author mirror perfectly—perhaps, even bring to life—the experience of those boots? Ankersmit (2006) proposes that perhaps the only way in which one might understand the boots of American colonial soldiers is by a parallel process: to wear them, to march where they marched, to freeze in Valley Forge, etc. (p. 331).

The narrativist tradition attempts to move past the exactness of language. Narrative strives for 'true descriptions' "...We do not look at the past through the historian's language, but from the vantage point suggested by it. The historian's language does not strive to make itself invisible like the glass paperweight of the epistemological model, but it wishes to take on the same solidity and opacity as a thing" (Ankersmit, 2006, p. 19). This idea challenges Nietzsche's argument that the past and the historian interfere with one another; Ankersmit claims that historians can speak truthfully about the past, even if language cannot bring to life the exact likeness of the past.

Does the Past Have a Meaning?

Epistemological Position

The question of 'meaning' highlights the largest rift among those who disagree on the form of historical information. MacIntyre once claimed that "Stories are lived before they are told" (Norman, 1991, p. 123). Norman states that, "Historical realism is the idea that history as a determinate, untold story until discovered and told by the historian. Such a position naturally inclines in the direction of a high regard for narrative's epistemic legitimacy" (Norman, 1991, p. 122).

Narratives have basic literary features: plot, characters, problems, solutions, etc. But can the past also be characterized by basic literary features? If something is already emplotted, then who authored it, how, when, and for whom (Norman, 1991, p. 126)? Norman (1991) judges, “The fact that a true historical account has a plot structure does not imply that the past it articulates has a plot structure, any more than the fact that “the sky is blue” has a grammatical structure implies that the sky has a grammatical structure” (127).

McCullag (1987) highlights several problems with imposing historical facts into a narrative structure. First, historical narratives “encompass more events than people normally experience as temporal wholes in everyday life” (p. 44). Here, the author speaks to the idea that narratives produce a story that provides more actions, feelings, and experiences than are felt by an individual. The issue, anti-narrativists claim, is that this bird's-eye view of reality is not a truthful representation of 'what happened'--humans do not have bird's-eye perspectives of reality.

MuCullag (1987) posits that there is discontinuity in historical narratives because many subjects have no significant conclusion or outcome. In literary creations, characters and events serve a purpose: they advance the plot and propel the story towards its conclusion. In reality (in the past and present), do the people who live in it and the actions they perform have a purpose? Clearly, that question could lead us into another topic. On the surface, however, it is important to reflect on how historians ascribe meaning to those few people who have significantly shaped the world and its history; yet, historians grossly ignore the millions who really do not contribute to the 'story'. Therefore, narrative applies only to some people and events in the past (p. 44).

Narrativist Position

Most narrativists hold the notion that the past has an inherent meaning: something to be uncovered and told to the present. The Stanford Encyclopedia of History cites an argument from

R.G. Collingwood, who posits that "history is constituted by human actions. Actions are the result of intentional deliberation and choice." This idea highlights a pertinent question, does the fact that human actions are value-laden make it impossible for the historian to provide a non-value-laden account of those actions?

Human history is constituted by human actions, responses, and events. At a quick glance, there infinite moments—thoughts, words, actions, etc.—which compose human history. Cronon (1992) notes this when saying "...narrative is the chief literary form that tries to find meaning in an overwhelmingly crowded and disordered chronological reality" (p. 1349). Crowell (1998) reiterates this position by claiming that, narrative is redemptive in two senses. One, it idealizes reality by "forming a meaning out of chaos"; and two, it redeems names and dates by giving them a "fixed identity by fitting them "proleptically" into a completed context of significance" (p. 225).

These historians claim that narrative is necessary to discern any real and useful meaning out of the chaotic, maelstrom of past happenings. Narrativists argue that it is impossible to derive sense out of the past without imaginative and explanatory tools. Topolski (1987) asks can science be void of imagination? The author states, "First, usually quite unwittingly, one imagines a relationship between facts which is a metaphor (for example, the concept of "connection" which derives from ties binding physical objects), and only then one translates this relationship into logic" (p. 204).

F.R. Ankersmit (1986) equates the past to a text in which the historian must interpret it. The act of narrativization is the act of translation. Historical narratives act as guides or keys to understanding the text of the past (p. 19) Ankersmit (1986) proceeds to claim that narratives perform the same task as a picture frame. The historian's construction (the narrative) helps

"define the boundaries" of chaotic reality and demarcated meaning (p. 333). Topoloski (1999) highlights the same idea, "Constructing narrative wholes, that is, passing from single pieces of source information to the historiographic text, is impossible without general concepts, which, like strange attractors in chaos theory, focus the individual pieces" (p. 207).

Conclusion

The debate surrounding historical narrative is divided into two traditions: the Epistemological and Narrativist. Epistemologists argue that history is inaccessible to narrative interpretation because the past does not inherently possess a narrative structure: historians impose their own form on a formless past. When historians attribute literary features such as plot, causation, and conclusion to the past they create a false truth, a subjective caricature of a neutral reality.

Epistemologists argue that language interferes with inquiries seeking to understand the past. The role of the historian is to draw the past to the present and make it real again. However, language acts as a barrier because no matter how descriptive, words fall short of resurrecting the exact experiences of "what it was like". The only accurate truths are found in simple factual statements.

Narrativists argue that truth can extend beyond exact historical facts, that there can be true descriptions of the past. It is not irrational to believe a well-supported claim, even if that claim's truth is not 100% present or visible: narrative-based evaluations and interpretations are justifiable. Narrativists claim that imagination does not impede truth; some argue that connecting historical facts and tying them within narrative structure produces meaning out of chaos—imagination is a valid part of the historical science.

Narrativists claim that human history is not inherently neutral or void of meaning because it is comprised of deliberate and purposeful actions. Neuroscience suggests that humans are hardwired to perceive their lives, past, present, and future in narrative terms. Based on this evidence, I argue that is not only logical for historians to treat the past as a narrative, but narrative form is a valid method for getting at historical truth.

Appendix C

Lesson Plans for Analysis of Narrative in the Classroom

A link to the lessons is provided below.

<https://1drv.ms/w/s!AsJo26VGJpsUik58mLqwd2pbMcKM>

European Colonialism in Latin America—Poster and Creative-Write

Introduction: *After the initial contact among European explorers and Latin American peoples, a slow (and at times, dramatic) shift took place among their relationship. We will trace this relationship from both the European and Native perspective in four specific places: Brazil, Mexico, Peru, and Haiti. Please respond to the following guiding questions.*

For the poster: *You and your group will be responsible for researching and creating a poster that represents the perspective of either the European or Native perspective in your country. Canvas will have resources for you to begin gathering your information. Please make your answers large and neat so others can read them.*

Vocabulary (Please define on one side of your poster): Hacienda, Mestizo, Plantation, Encomienda, Creole, Precious Metals, Cash Crop, Missions

1. *Please list the European country who attempted to colonize this geographic location*
2. *Please list 3 natural resources that your country possesses*
3. *Please choose one of these resources and explain how either the European's or Natives desired or traditionally used it. Compare or Contrast this use to the other side. (2-3 Sentences)*

4. *Explain how Europeans decided to rule the people and land of your country. Did they use an encomienda, plantation, or hacienda system? (2-3 Sentences)*
5. *Explain how Europeans and Native peoples interacted with each other? Were they equal? Did they marry and have children? (4-5 Sentences)*

For the creative-write: *You will visualize and imagine what it would be like to live during the colonial period in Latin America. You must pick either a European or Native/Slave perspective. You may use the posters hanging around the room and your notes as resources to build your story.*

Requirements:

1. *You must include 8 vocabulary words (any content specific word from your notes and handouts). Please underline/highlight these words in your story.*
2. *Your writing must attempt to be realistic in terms of how your person would act, think, and the physical environment in which he or she lives.*
3. *Your experiences must show the type of life that this person would have lived—the good and the bad.*

Types of Stories: *You will have several options for your story format. Note that there is a limited amount of time, so your writing should be short. You will be given only two sheets of lined paper, this will help with your time management.*

1. ***Journal Entry:*** *This is the most common, and straightforward type of story. Journal entries are written from the first person, which means that you will use “I” and write from your “own” perspective. Journal entries are usually more personal.*

2. **Report/Survey:** *Another common type of historical document is a report or survey. This style of writing is more formal and is usually written by someone on commission (a person sent out by a higher authority) to report on a situation or take notes on a physical landscape and its people.*

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INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND LEARNING

The Intersection of Faith and History: My Story

Effective scholarship requires a thorough understanding of one's own background, current field of study, and thoughtful preparation for the imminent future. Faithful scholarship begins with introspection. Like an explorer who catalogs his supplies before venturing out into the world, a scholar notes what he or she is carrying into his or her academic journey. Understanding one's strengths and weaknesses greatly enhances the integrity and insight of scholarly work. So, to answer the question 'What kind of scholar am I?' I find it pertinent to ask simply, 'Who am I?'

There are many forces and events which have influenced me as I have grown, but I shall focus primarily on my faith background; of course, discussing my faith background will reveal other aspects of my upbringing such as family and community.

I am from Colorado Springs, Colorado. My city has often been labeled the Evangelical Christian Mecca (home of Focus on the Family, Navpress, Navigators, etc.), and throughout my life I was as much a product as contributor to this largely accurate stereotype. I have found myself actively participating in and influenced by late 20th Century Christian Evangelical movements: I would use "90s, Focus on the Family" to describe my childhood Christian environment. This means that our family actively attended a charismatic, nondenominational (or loosely affiliated) church. This means that my mom served in the nursery, and my dad performed usher duties. This means that at home, prayer, bible study, and VeggieTales were common. Growing up as a "90s, Focus on the Family" kid, morality was viewed black and white, America was the greatest country in the world, and in politics, Republicans were the only choice. I loved

being a “90s, Focus on the Family” kid, because who doesn’t like living in the greatest country to ever exist, where we practice perfect Christianity.

Clearly, I poke some fun at my upbringing, and not all of these stereotypes were prominent in my life; but for the most part, these were the ideas that shaped and formed my growing up. However, when I reflect back upon my pre-college years, I find that my parents encouraged me to learn and pursue knowledge, not shun it. In Mark Noll’s *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* the author discusses American Evangelicalism’s basic tendency to eschew the world and its history: evangelicals adopted the nineteenth-century tendency to “deprecate insights from the past” (Noll, 1995, p. 128). My parents both are teachers (my dad is a principal and my mom taught special education for most of her career), and they have encountered many ‘worldly’ things. They have seen poverty, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, assault, divorce, criminal activities, etc. but they have learned to find the best in the children they teach, the parents they deal with, and the coworkers with which they work.

Growing up, I attended public schools and my parents were consistently invested in my education. While they definitely shielded me from some ‘worldly’ things (i.e. Harry Potter due to its use of ‘witchcraft’—ironically, my family treated *Lord of the Rings* like it was scripture), they were never afraid of my exposure to learning about the world. Throughout my schooling I endured stages of balancing evangelical fundamentalism and ‘secular’ academics. For example, I wrote numerous papers in the defense of the Bible or Intelligent Design for class assignments. My parents backed me in these endeavors, but they never pressured me to choose a religious topic. For my own sake, I was interested in the validity of my beliefs. This apologetic approach to academics faded as I moved through school: partly because I realized that I could be an effective ‘evangelizing’ force without being preachy. If I were to name the largest influence of

my parent's affecting my academic life, perhaps it would be that they spared me from the intellectual disaster of evangelical fundamentalism.

My parents' love for school greatly benefitted me throughout elementary and secondary schooling, but it did more so when I entered into college. For the past three years, I have been studying to be a high school history and social studies teacher. I have grown immensely during my time at SPU, and I owe that growth largely to my studies. As a history major who has taken a plethora of classes in the social sciences, along within the University Scholars curriculum, my eyes have been opened to a vibrant world full of challenge, joy, mystery, and revelation. History has taught me that, as Faulkner (1951) says, "The past is never dead. It's not even past". Learning history, whether History of Africa or History of Christianity in America, has challenged many of the Evangelical ideals that influenced my early life. I have learned that history is a powerful tool of reconciliation; it is not made up of notions which might contaminate a holy mind. In my opinion, knowing history leads to holiness: how are we supposed to effectively relate God's love to those whose stories about which we know nothing?

I have discovered that the best historians are the scholars who practice an active humility. They approach life's situations with an open mind, understanding that the best judgements and interpretations of human experience are buttressed by listening and 'paying attention' to the world (Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen, 2013, p. 1). This perspective on scholarship has changed the way in which I approach my faith. Instead of assuming the world is bad or sinful—with Christianity as the only purifying force (an Evangelical mindset) I have become less judgmental and a better listener. I have focused less on the minute details of my faith and more on the general themes. Instead of viewing the debate on evolution and creationism, or opinions on homosexuality, or the charismatic church movement, or whether or not one drinks alcohol, or

says curse words, etc. as a necessity in having ‘true’ faith, I understand God’s relationships with humans and this world to be more complex than a single black and white perspective. The more I have discovered about people’s stories (their histories), the less I have judged them—I have found myself reflected in the lives of others.

Yet, I am more than a historian: I am also a teacher. I have understood the empowering value of education through the years as I have watched my parents positively affect their students. Furthermore, I am the person I am today because of the teachers in my life who have encouraged and shaped me. I have been a teacher long before I decided to officially enter into the education program; I have taught children’s sports camps, delivered sermons in youth groups, and headed reading and math groups at my father’s elementary school. I find great joy in “[presenting] information so that others might understand it” (*Scholarship Reconsidered*, 1). The role of the teacher is to provide avenues by which he or she may encourage students to find their academic interests. Teaching is simply the transmission of academic passion.

Using the functions of scholarship as defined by Ernest Boyer and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, I would place myself in the *teaching* and *integration* categories. As a historian, I “seek to interpret, draw together, and bring new insight to bear on original research”; and as a teacher, I ask the question, “How can knowledge best be transmitted to others and best learned?” (Boyer and Carnegie, 1997, p. 1). Of course, I am not limited to these two functions, for historians participate a great deal in the process of *discovery* and teachers actively pursue the *application* of knowledge in a way that best serves humanity.

In Tracy Kidder’s *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, Paul Farmer is the type of scholar who allows scholars like me to do my work. Doctor Farmer saves the lives of those which most of the world overlooks. I am not in Haiti, or in Russia, or in Peru, or even Boston: I am not saving

lives. But one day, I will learn and write their stories. Paul gives me and other historians a chance to include the histories and narratives of people who would otherwise be lost forever, “Of all the world’s errors, he [Farmer] seemed to feel, the most fundamental was the ‘erasing’ of people, the ‘hiding away’ of suffering” (Kidder, 2004, p. 218). When the stories of humans are captured and their histories are written down, then Faulkner’s statement becomes true—except, I replace some of his words with my own, ‘Humans are never dead. They never pass away’. Paul Farmer might save someone’s life once, maybe even twice, but the historian saves a life forever.

Moving into the future, I find myself appropriately positioned to perform genuine and substantial scholarly work. Humbly, I approach the responsibility of capturing and understanding the stories of humans who have lived, live, and will live. Furthermore, I passionately accept the task of sharing these stories with my students in order that they may discover the complexities of the world around them and in turn, thoughtfully respond with a sincere critical lens.

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