



Panta Rei

Revista digital de Historia
y Didáctica de la Historia

2021





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Revista Digital de Historia y Didáctica de la Historia

2021

Revista anual

Fecha de inicio: 1995

Revista *Panta Rei*. pantarei@um.es

Edita:

Centro de Estudios del Próximo Oriente y la Antigüedad Tardía – CEPOAT

Edificio Universitario Saavedra Fajardo.

Universidad de Murcia

C/ Actor Isidoro Máiquez, 9

30007 – MURCIA – ESPAÑA

Teléfono: (+34) 868883890

cepoat@um.es

Web: <https://revistas.um.es/pantarei>

Ediciones de la Universidad de Murcia – EDITUM

Edificio Pleiades. Campus de Espinardo.

Universidad de Murcia

C/ Campus, s/n

30100 – MURCIA – ESPAÑA

Teléfono: (+34) 868883013

editum@um.es

Web: <https://www.um.es/web/editum/>

Edición 2021

ISSNe: 2386-8864

ISSN: 1136-2464

Depósito legal: MU-966-1995

cepoAt



En portada: Prise de la Bastille.
Biblioteca Nacional de Francia (BNF).

Responsables de los textos: sus autores.

Responsable de la presente edición:
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Doing history for the common good. Interview to Linda S. Levstik

Laura Arias Ferrer
Universidad de Murcia
larias@um.es

 [0000-0003-3121-1882](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3121-1882)

Alejandro Egea Vivancos
Universidad de Murcia
alexegea@um.es

 [0000-0002-6047-2670](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6047-2670)

Recibido: 19/02/2021
Aceptado: 28/02/2021

1. Introduction

Linda S. Levstik, was born in New York (1945), but moved with her family during her high school/secondary school years to Columbus, Ohio, in the Midwest (Midwest) of the United States. She obtained a BS [Bachelor of Science] at Capital University in Columbus (1967) and began to work as a teacher in a public school in the nearby city of Worthington while working on her MA [Master of Arts] at The Ohio State University (OSU), completed in

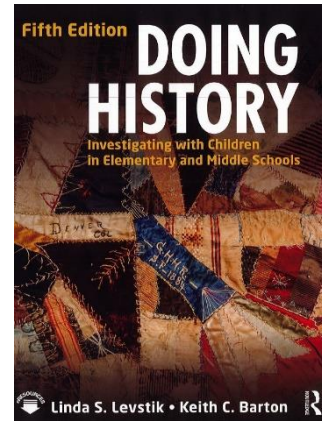


1973. In the autumn of 1972, she began to work as a teacher at the Columbus Torah Academy, a Jewish parochial school. In 1976 she entered the doctoral program at The Ohio State University. A position as a graduate teaching associate allowed her to pursue her academic career full time and she was awarded her PhD in 1980.

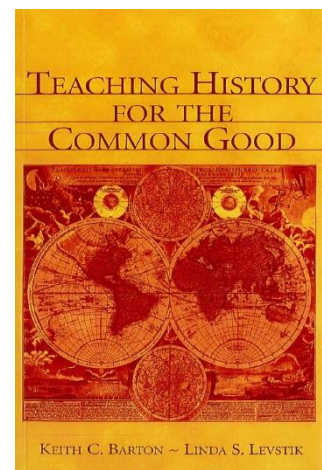
Doctor Levstik taught part-time at OSU for one term until she took a position with the Ohio Department of Education as a consultant assessing teacher education programs across the state. In 1982 she joined the *College of Education* of the *University of Kentucky* (Lexington, KY) as an Assistant Professor, received tenure in 1986, and was promoted to Full Professor in 1990. Until her retirement in 2016, research after research, class after class, she managed to develop a solid career specializing in the teaching and learning of history. Proof of this was the *Jean Dresden Grambs Distinguished Career Research Award* she received from the *National Council for the Social Sciences* (NCSS) in 2007 for her contributions to the field. Some of her main lines of research have been focused on the development of historical thinking in students aged 6 to 12, the teaching contexts for learning history, gender and history education, and most recently, the impact of archaeological inquiry on young people's historical thinking.

Among her hundreds of publications, which have made her a national and international benchmark in the teaching of history, perhaps the best known are those written in collaboration with her former doctoral student, Dr. Keith C. Barton, current professor at *Indiana University of Bloomington*. Their joint research has produced important contributions to the field and some of their publications have become a must for all those who are dedicated to Elementary History teaching.

In that regard, it is worth mentioning *Doing history: Investigating with children in Elementary and Middle schools* (Levstik, & Barton, orig. 1997), a work that has achieved great popularity, with a sixth edition due out in 2021. This book guides the introduction of history through inquiry in elementary and middle schools and provides teachers and researchers with case studies in real classrooms. Among other things, the authors argue that elementary children are capable of taking into account historical perspective on people from the past, as well as considering multiple causation in history.



Equally remarkable is *Teaching History for the Common Good* (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Anyone interested in the relationship between the teaching of history (and the social sciences in general) and civic education and citizenship, must consult this book. They reflect here on the aims of teaching history, arguing that the fundamental aim is civic—preparing students to participate in a pluralist democracy, to be more critical and capable of using the sources at their disposal with criteria, and to be informed citizens.



We conducted this interview in Lexington in 2015, just before Dr. Levstik's retirement, and updated it in 2020. We sought to get to know her (her career, her interests, her thoughts) on a deeper level and to briefly synthesize her vision on current topics related to the teaching of History.

2. Interview

Laura Arias y Alejandro Egea (LA/AE): You taught in Elementary and Middle Schools for 8 years. To what extent has your previous teaching experience defined your research career?

Linda S. Levstik (LL): In terms of how my teaching in elementary and middle schools has influenced what I do now, it actually has a profound effect on it, as did tutoring work with children with learning disabilities. I taught in public and private schools. In each of these settings, I saw that my students were able to do some really interesting things with History, but I kept being told that they were too young to do it, too young to understand it, that they could not manage inquiry-based learning. Also the curriculum materials seemed to me to assume that the kids were pretty stupid, and they were not. Quite the contrary. If

instruction engaged them, they proved over and over how really intellectually adept and excited they could be.

When I first began working on my doctorate, I wasn't entirely sure what research I wanted to do, but I did know that I did not want to investigate teachers. I did not think we could work effectively with the teachers unless we knew the kids. I wanted to get inside the kids' heads, to be able to figure out how they were thinking, how they were making sense, how they learnt... Because only then would you have something to tell the teachers. As a result, when I was teaching undergraduates in my classes, I ended up basing much of what I did on the research that I began doing as a young professor. I wanted to be able to convince my students that their students could do interesting, thoughtful work. In particular, I wanted to offer a model for my students. They did not have to just sit in my classes and listen to me lecture for hours. They could participate in ways that could transfer to the classrooms where they might eventually teach.

I had an advantage in that I taught in schools that did inquiry and my graduate program not only emphasized inquiry but assigned me to supervise students in inquiry-based classrooms. Unfortunately, when I first moved here [Lexington, Kentucky] it was hard to find anybody doing any kind of inquiry. It was seen as a new rather radical kind of thing. I was shocked. When I taught in Ohio inquiry was not that rare nor was it difficult. When I was a doctoral student I worked in two of several programmes that trained teachers in a particular point of view on teaching and learning. My primary work was in a program called Educational Programs in Integrated Classrooms (EPIC). EPIC was inquiry based with a heavy emphasis on children's literature and what was then called a "whole language" approach to instruction. Students would actually be investigating questions and working in teams across subject areas. The 1985 edition of *Integrated Language Learning* (Pappas, Kiefer, & Levstik, 2005) came out of that. Two other doctoral students and I ran EPIC for a couple of years. We were in schools where the teachers understood this kind of work, we saw kids who were excited by the approach, we trained teachers to do inquiry, and we were able to place them in schools that allowed them to teach as they had been trained to do. Our students could always see inquiry in practice as they were doing their fieldwork, and I could see how their students were responding to an inquiry approach.

As I said, when I came to Lexington, inquiry was totally new. It really was a shock for me to see how what had been such a fundamental part of my teaching, was entirely new here. Fortunately, though, I was not the only faculty member interested in inquiry. For example, I met Angene H. Wilson¹, who was the reason I came to Lexington. When I came down for the interview, she and I sat out in the parking lot at the end of the interview and talked for three hours! I thought then 'I can work with her'. She was also interested in an inquiry-based approach. She had her own research interests that were not necessarily the same as mine, but I think that was good as I could learn from her and she could learn from me. It all sort of fit and we got along rather nicely.

¹ Dr. Wilson is retired professor of the College of Education of the University of Kentucky and has a wide international experience which shaped her research interests, focused on global perspectives and cross-cultural learning.

LA/AE: After a long career in the area of Education, we would like you to think about which has been your most direct influence in the way of understanding teaching and research? Which teachers or colleagues have influenced the most your professional career?

LL: As a student myself I had wonderful professors in Undergraduate, Graduate and Doctoral work in terms of history and social studies. I had one weak teacher, and that was all. All the rest of them were really good even if they were not inquiry-based. Most of the history teachers, for instance, were lecture-based.

Even in high school I had an excellent world history teacher. Although he was mostly lecturing, he was very good at it. You would go to his class and the bell would ring and you hardly realized that you have been sitting there for an hour! He was also very encouraging to me as a new student from New York and totally unused to Ohio. I really was missing New York and he was the bright spot in the day. He was good.

By the time I got to graduate school, two of my history professors did more inquiry-based teaching and actually taught their students how to do history. One of them was Gary Riechard. He taught contemporary US history and his assignment in the class was to identify some issue in US history that you wanted to explore. There were a variety of ways to develop the task, but one of the options was to take some aspects of your family's history and put it in historical context. I thought it was a very good option.

I grew up in Levittown-NY, which was one the first planned communities post-war of the suburbs². It was for working-class, blue-collar workers³. Anyway, it seemed to me that it fit with that whole sort of post-war American history kind of thing and I thought to start there. It also had a lot of religious and political kinds of controversies while we were there. It was the 1950s, so it would have been the McCarthy era, and the community was divided. Most of my neighbours were either Catholic or Jewish, and Jews tended to be Democrats, and Catholics tended to be Republicans, not always but often enough. I was also interested in all of that. So, I interviewed lots of relatives and I collected all this primary data on the controversies in Levittown, I found newspaper articles, photographs and books. It was such fun. It was all great until I wrote it all up. Dr. Riechard loved it and he asked if I had shown the work to my parents. He was sure that they would love it. I went against my better judgement and I gave it to my parents. My mother, who usually called at least once a week, did not call during the following days. So I called. Normally she answered the phone, my dad didn't, that was all my mother's work. But this time my father answered the phone, and I thought 'we are in trouble here'. What he said next was: 'I admire your writing, I disagree with your interpretation'. And I said, 'where is mum?', 'Your mother is deeply hurt'. So I learnt that way the second thing about writing history, which is 'perspective'. Nobody tells the story in quite the same way and even though mine was evidence-based, from my

² It refers to suburban housing developments to allocate returning veterans and their families. Levittown was specifically built by William J. Levitt.

³ As opposed to the "white-collars", leaders or senior technicians, the term "blue-collar" refers to the workforce of a factory or a company.

mother's point of view I had gone public with things that I shouldn't have. That was the opening guns of history as controversy, and it was right there in my family.

That was just one professor. During my doctoral degree I had three professors who were probably the most influential for me. One of them was Robert H. Bremner⁴, who was a fine historian. He was interested in the history of philanthropy, childhood and social institutions that were intended to benefit the poor or people with disabilities. He was another one who just came to class, you would mention something, and he would give you things to read, primary sources to look at. The conversation in class was always a careful analysis of sources, so that anything you said you had to be able to back up. He was very, very good, plus he was just personally one of the nicest guys around.

The other one was Charlotte Huck⁵, who was the children's literature professor. Charlotte taught me just about everything I know about how to be a good professor. She was a force of nature. She was about 65 by the time I had classes with her, which seemed terribly old then and now seems really young! Even though children's literature was not my primary area, it was a close second to history. Despite that, Charlotte was supportive and up until she died, she read anything I published. I saw her pretty much once a year at a literature conference at Ohio State. She would talk to me about the work I was doing, she would give me suggestions for things to look at, to read or think about, and she was always there for her students. If we, as her doctoral students, said that we were interested in the history of children's literature, she said 'fine, I will make a course for you'. And she would put it on the books, and then we would come to her house and she would have food, coffee and tea. She would go away and we would just sit there and work on it, and then, when we wanted to talk to her, she would come downstairs and she would tell us where she thought we got it right and where we were off base. It was not a bad thing to just sit at her feet and learn. The books I read related to literacy research had a profound influence on my early research, at least in part because literacy researchers respected young children and were more likely to find interesting and useful ways to explore children's thinking than was the case in social studies education at the time.

Also, when I started the doctoral program, there were very few women who were doing what I was doing and I had no idea whether I could pull it off or not. Once, when I was worried about balancing family and career goals, Charlotte and I had a conversation where she told about the choices she had faced. Back when she first got her PhD she said: if you were a woman and wanted to be a professor, you really could not be married and you certainly could not have kids. She chose to stay single. And, Charlotte said, 'did you know, you still have more options than I had when I was young. You can be married, you

⁴ Dr. Robert H. Bremner (1917-2002) was professor emeritus of history at the Ohio State University in Columbus (Ohio) where he taught from 1946 until he retired in 1980. His research was specially focused on social thought, social welfare, philanthropy, and poverty (Bremner, 1960, 1988, 1996). Retrieved from <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/february-2006/in-memoriam-robert-h-bremner>

⁵ Dr. Charlotte S. Huck (1922-2005) was an internationally renowned children's literature expert. She joined the education faculty of Ohio State University in 1955 where she organized the first course in children's literature at Ohio State, and built a nationally respected program that offers both a master's and doctorate in children's literature. Retrieved from: <http://www.redlands.edu/study/schools-and-centers/school-of-education/childrens-literature-festival-2018/dr-charlotte-s-huck-1922-2005>

can have kids and you can have a career, and just hang on to that'. Other people were telling me very different things: I had a woman professor who told me that if I wanted to be famous I should divorce my husband and give him custody of the kids. And I do not think she was being entirely facetious. Another woman professor asked me if I had young kids, and when I said yes, she said 'you should be home taking care of them'. Almost everybody else at the university was giving women that message: "if you are a woman, yes we let you in, but we really don't think you are going to get very far." And Charlotte was the one who said: 'No, you can do this'. And that was great. I hope I've done that for my own students!

I loved the time I spent in the doctoral program. I had a great time, I had great professors, I was with a cohort of 42 full-time doctoral students in the department where I had my TA [Teaching Associate]. We had the basement of one of the education buildings. It was our office, and there were desks, and desks, and desks. It meant that any time you had a course, you could ask for help, like when we were taking stats (statistics). You could come back to the TA office and say "I need help" and there'd be somebody there who would say 'Oh, yes, we can talk about stats', or whatever it happened to be. It was all good.

It's hard to pinpoint the particular influence that got you from point A to point B, but it was a world full of smart people and specially lots of smart women who weren't embarrassed by being smart, at a time when women outside academia were still supposed to keep quiet, or at least it felt that way.

LA/AE: 3. In Europe, and more specifically in Spain, teaching Social Sciences means in essence teaching History and Geography. We have the feeling of facing a wider understanding regarding what teaching Social Sciences represents in the USA. What does teaching Social Science imply in your opinion?

LL: It is very different here than in Europe and there has been more, just about a hundred years now, of a split between people who want to teach the social sciences as separate subjects and people who come from a social studies perspective where the social sciences are an integrated subject usually for the purposes of civic education. In other words, you would use history, or geography, or any other social science, to explore more complex issues within a society.

We could also say that, in theory, social studies as civic education has historically had more prominence in the U.S. than in the European curricula, but, in practice, it often has not. One of the problems here is that people may say that teaching history, or other social sciences, has a civic purpose, but courses are rarely taught in ways that would make those civic purposes clear to students. Testing pressures mean that, too often, instruction is aimed at getting the kids ready for a test. And the test does not check whether or not kids can make a connection between an historical event and its civic implication. For instance, before Keith Barton⁶ and I wrote *Teaching history for the common good* (Barton & Levstik, 2004) one of

⁶ Dr. Keith Barton is professor at Curriculum and Instruction Department of the School of Education at Indiana University of Bloomington. His main research areas are social and civic education, history education, human rights education and curriculum history. Retrieved from <https://education.indiana.edu/about/directory/profiles/barton-keith-c.html>

the things that pushed us to write the book was a history colleague saying ‘well, history was valuable ‘for its own sake’. You know that does not help much. Others might say that citizenship education was the aim of history or social studies teaching, but rarely explained how that actually happened in the classroom. If you teach history, in what way does it help people to be a better citizen? If we asked that, we often got frustrating answers. Someone might say history teaches critical thinking. Maybe, but so do a lot of other things. So, why history?, why not do it through literature? You can do critical thinking through literature. Why not do it through Science?, Why History in particular? What does History actually have to say to citizens? And most of the time there’s not a satisfying answer. Instead, you get George Santayana’s phrase: ‘those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it’. But if you ask them to give you an example of what people have, in fact, learnt from the past, you do not get anything that is historically accurate. Historians may be better at this, but more common responses from my undergraduate students involve learning from the last war not to repeat that war. Unfortunately, the last war is never going to repeat in quite the same way. When you ask kids about what can be learned from history, they go much more directly to social and cultural issues. They say we learned not to enslave people, women should vote, we shouldn’t discriminate against people because of sexual orientation. Although the fact that the kids think that those things are all cured is a misconception, one of the things they think we can learn from the past is to treat people better, and, perhaps think about ways we could continue to work for the common good.

Interestingly civic education, at least as a separate subject area, is relatively new in Europe, but it has deep roots in the United States. A nation new to democracy thought it necessary to teach democratic citizenship to a people who previously saw themselves as subjects. People today would likely view early civic education as rather heavy handed and closer to indoctrination than to modern conceptions of civic understanding. That has actually been one of the concerns in some parts of Europe. In England, for instance, the civic component in the curriculum has been quite controversial. Perhaps because of their caution about indoctrination they might be able to design curriculum to avoid that, as opposed to what sometimes happens in the U.S.

LA/AE: In the last decades, there have been significant changes in the way of understanding the role of Social Sciences in Education and its meaning and aims as a subject. In your opinion, which have been the most important ones?

LL: I think I would go back to some of my previous comments. There have been significant changes in content emphases: More attention to civic education and to a more pluralist approach to the social sciences. There is more attention to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, to history of more “ordinary” people (history from the bottom up), and more attention to cultural history in general. There have also been methodological changes—or at least recommendations for change—focused on Inquiry-based instruction or project learning. This isn’t exactly new. In the early part of the twentieth century, John Dewey’s recommendations were inquiry or discovery oriented, as were elements of the later Informal School movement in Britain, and the slightly later New Social Studies movement in the U.S. In terms of the aims, I would go back to President Jefferson’s call for an educated citizenry, and highlight modern advocacy for education for a democratic citizenship that engages students with questions about what it means to be human across time and in

different places so that students don't have the idea that there's only one way to be human and everybody else is 'weird'. If you go back to the 1950s in the United States, a sanitized version of middle class life in the US was presented as normal, and the farther away from the United States their study took students, the more exotic, weird, and frightening the world became. If students were studying Europe, for instance, it was relatively familiar, with some attention to different (and often quite out of date) customs, holidays and costuming (wooden shoes, things like that). If you got to Asia, Africa or South America, however, you began seeing increasing, and more negative, stereotypes of people and places. When transcribing all the kids answers and conversations from the study that A. Gwynn Henderson⁷ and I were doing in Davis Bottom⁸ (Levstik & Henderson, 2016), the kids felt that they never learnt how ordinary people lived, even in the U.S.

The other big difference I see between traditionally taught American history and social sciences, as opposed to some other parts of the world, has been the emphasis on individualism, especially in terms of celebration or demonization of historical individuals. There are iconic heroes (Gandhi, Martin Luther King, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and the like) and villains (Hitler and Stalin). What I see in other parts of the world is a little more attention to collective action, to what people in groups do. In England, for example, you get the Kings and the Queens, but you also get how people are living and how conditions changed (or did not change) over time, how collective action influenced events over time. And I do not know if that's the case for Spain as well⁹. I would like to see more emphasis on collective agency here because I think it gives kids hope that they can be part of change and not have to stand all by themselves thinking that my one vote does not count, a walk on a picket line doesn't count, and I am just one person. Attention to collective agency suggests something better: I could join with other people and really make a difference. And that has been interesting in the previously mentioned study (Levstik & Henderson, 2016a), as the kids are all about the collective in the Davis Bottom case of study. Although they have been investigating what people have done to make a difference in their community and their lives, they do not always know quite what an individual can do much less what people collectively could do. But too often we suggest that only heroes make changes. So, students meet Rosa Parks as she sits down on the bus as if she were doing it all by her lonesome instead of learning that she was selected by her community of activists to resist unjust laws. Part of the problem, too often, is that collective political action—especially protest action—leaves too many people in the U.S. uncomfortable.

LA/AE: The concept of “thinking historically” is a mantra which is repeated to exhaustion in the most recent scientific literature. But, what does it represent for you the final aim of getting the students “think historically”?

⁷ Dr. A. Gwynn Henderson is Education Director of the Kentucky Archaeological Survey (KAS) at Western Kentucky University (Bowling Green, Kentucky). Her research and academic activity is specially focused on analysing the potential of archaeology in educational context as well as on public archaeology.

⁸ More information about David Bottom's project: <https://anthropology.as.uky.edu/kas/kas-projects/davis-bottom-project>

⁹ To get an answer to the question posed by the interviewee about the Spanish case, see Arias & Egea (2019).

LL: I don't think "thinking historically" means anything unless you can first say what the point of it is. If there's no purpose to doing history then thinking historically would be a sort of esoteric hobby, wouldn't it? Interesting, perhaps, but not fundamentally important to a democratic society. If thinking historically has civic aims, then it must prepare citizens to understand other people, so that they can be humane and apply that understanding in making more intelligent, humane, decisions in a pluralist democracy. History works differently in dictatorships than it does in democracies, and it also works differently in more homogeneous democracies than it does in heterogeneous democracies. So if I am going to talk about what it means to think historically, I am thinking of it in the context of a pluralist democracy, with people with lots of differences and whose differences are often hard to negotiate. Thinking historically would involve, first, thinking about the ways in which human beings have negotiated such differences over time; second, evaluating evidence-based arguments in different historical contexts, and third, examining the contingencies facing people in the past as they worked to get from one moment in time to the next. From my point of view, that is probably the biggest thing that studying history does for us as citizens and remains the best argument for including it in the curriculum in democratic schools. I should add here, however, that learning history has other benefits that make it as appealing as, say, reading good literature. It can be an aesthetic experience, it can feed passions for or interests in everything from the arts and historical artifacts to old movies, preserving old buildings to walking the Great Wall of China.

In schools, however, history must serve the common good. If you think about teaching in the United States, specifically about teaching the legacy of slavery, for instance, you could go back and learn about what it meant to be a slave, and stop there. And what have you learned? Nothing. I don't think you learn to think historically if you are not applying your knowledge to anything. But if students study the history of slavery and reflect on what our country inherited from the choice to enslave others, and which series of ideas flow from that and can be traced over time, you can make better sense of the present. For instance, David W. Blight (2002), the historian who wrote *Race and Reunion. The Civil War in American History*, talks about how in the Reconstruction Era¹⁰ the United States had a choice to make: either we go with the emancipationist possibilities¹¹ to actually integrate people fully into society or we go with reconciliation, bringing Confederates back into the fold and recreate the old, racist and segregated America. We went with reconciliation and, in doing that, the country abandoned black people. Our students need to understand the resulting problems, resentments and angers that lead to protests, and police officers shooting unarmed black children, as happened in Ferguson¹². If Americans better understand these sorts of things, if they want to know how we got here, then they could begin to discuss what we should do if we are going to go for a different kind of reconciliation. In South Africa, after Apartheid they had a reconciliation committee and it was very controversial. There are a lot of people who said that all they were doing was

¹⁰ The period developed between 1865 and 1877 in US history, just after the Civil War, is called *Reconstruction Era*.

¹¹ Just after the US Civil War, during the *Reconstruction Era* different views emerged: the reconciliationist, the white supremacist and the emancipationist, that sought full freedom, citizenship and equality for African American people.

¹² It mentions the riots occurred in the city of Ferguson (Missouri), after the homicide of the African American teenager Michael Brown, on 9 August 2014.

raising feelings of anger and anguish. But Desmond Tutu argued that if you don't bring all that pain into the light it goes into the dark and it festers and it destroys you. I think that we in the U.S. have too often let historical wrongs fester in the dark. We do not look at them, we do not admit them, we are afraid to teach them to kids.

Thinking historically would allow kids to analyze that past so that they could think about the present and a possible future and make better educated decisions about it. What would that mean? It would mean knowing what counts as evidence, it would be recognizing perspective, it would be understanding agency (and that other people have agency), it would be understanding the difference between cause and effect and correlation, and that the fact that two things happen at the same time does not mean that they caused each other. It would also be understanding the notion of significance: Is something always significant? Probably not, it depends what question you asked. If you are looking at race and you say how it is that we got here, then certain events in history are significant, other ones might not be. If you are asking about gender, certain events become significant that were not significant before. We should be asking students to look at the past through different lenses so that they can see how the questions we ask change our ideas about significance.

If you would learn the skills of doing history—inquiring into questions of significance about human experience—we might learn to think more clearly in an evidence-based and more analytical way about how the past, the present and the future are connected. Some historians would say this might encourage a form of presentism. David Lowenthal (1985), argues that the past is, essentially, a different country. Of course it is, which is part of what thinking historically allows you to know. Past people did not think the same way we do, and we can never fully understand their world, but that does not mean we can not look at it and try to get inside their heads. This is the only alternative if we are going to make any sense of how we got to where we are.

LA/AE: Agency, perspective, evidence, significance... are key elements but with difficult implementation in the classroom when the teacher is not familiar with such concepts. How is it possible to persuade these teachers about the benefits of teaching history under these key concepts?

LL: I have been trying to do that for over 30 years! There are a set of dilemmas in trying to work this out. I used to do professional development where I would go in and I would do something on any one of these elements of historical thinking and the teachers I was working with always loved it. I would get really high evaluations, but so far as I could tell, few took these ideas back into their classroom. Why? Because the culture of the school is such that it does not encourage people to teach kids how to think historically, to use those concepts. School supervisors encourage teaching to high stakes testing. Professional development programs introduce concepts, but rarely have time to help teachers think deeply about them. As a result, teachers may not fully understand the concepts. They especially do not understand agency. Why do teachers find this so difficult? Well, partly because they want to be able to tell a simple, clean narrative. For some teachers, historical events happen for a reason with the inevitable result that the country ended up in a place where it could become an independent nation. They aren't used to considering

contingencies, or used to having their students engage with the uncertainties of “progress” in the historical record, they may not trust that students will be able to do so, and they may fear parental complaint about introducing a less nationalistic history.

Ultimately, the only places where my words can have an effect are in the classroom, through long term professional development or through books and articles. In my experience, professional development is crucial, but it cannot be a one-shot thing. It has to be sustained over time. For instance, some colleagues and I were awarded several grants from the *Teaching American History Grant*¹³ program. I think we actually were able to make a difference. Some of the teachers worked with us for close to 10 years. We saw serious changes in their classrooms; we also saw test scores rise, even on fairly traditional information retention tests. But that program is over and there is very little money to support long term professional development in history and social studies.

LA/AE: Under the categories included when talking about “historical thinking”, and regardless of the author that describes them, evidence has an undeniable position. Which are the benefits in the teaching-learning process when the students work with evidence?

LL: There are downsides as well as upsides for the teachers in having students work with various types of evidence. Sometimes it is just an exercise unrelated to a larger historical question. I suppose that’s relatively easy, but it isn’t significant experience with evidence-based, historical thinking. It is much harder to teach this latter way for various reasons: Evidence-based inquiry does not produce a single right answer, you have to get all the evidence in a row, you have to teach the kids how to use that evidence and you have got to help them analyze. This requires pre-planning as well as on-the-spot interventions to help students do this well. What are the advantages? Just to use the example of the data that I am looking at right now, the kids in all of the three studies that A. Gwynn Henderson and I have worked on make a distinction between archaeology and history (Henderson, & Levstik, 2016; Levstik & Henderson, 2016b; Levstik, Henderson, & Lee, 2014). They see archaeology as actually investigating something and history being just learning something that somebody else tells you. They prefer the former. So if you are using evidence, you actually are doing something that the kids find much more compelling if you do it well. It means that they understand why something they read or hear is believable. They learn how to ask questions about the stories they’re told. Hopefully they become more critical consumers of the stories we tell ourselves about the past. Overall, inquiry can be very motivating. Now, I know, if you do it badly inquiry can be a horrible mess, which is true of just about any method requiring student engagement. You really have to organize it well, you really have to have the kids trust you. They need to know that you mean it when you say that there are multiple right answers, that you are going to help them with all the parts of that. But, in the end, I think they would know better how to connect past and present and I’ve seen that in my own work with students in a variety of schools in the U.S., New Zealand and Ghana.

¹³ The United States Department of Education’s Teaching American History Grant program aimed to raise student achievement by improving teachers’ knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of American history. Retrieved from: <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/past-programs/tah/>

On the other hand, I do not think that inquiry is the only thing you should do in a classroom. I have colleagues who think that is all history should be. But in real life that is not what we are all doing, is it? I mean, you do not start with a question every time you encounter something from the past. Sometimes you learn about the past because you read a book that somebody else wrote. Otherwise historians would have nothing to do. I did not do the research that David W. Blight did for *Race and Reunion* (2002). I read that book and it informs me, and encourages me to ask new questions. I love to read a good history and it is far rarer for any of us to do primary historical research. As a result, I think that we should be teaching kids how to be good, critical consumers of others people's history, and I think teaching them how to do history gets them there better than some other approaches. But I do not think that the only thing they should do is their own original research. They are going to be smart consumers of other people's history, they are going to create their own histories, they are going to see the way in which history is used in public. So, I would want kids to be able to analyze something like what is happening right now, when we have the controversy about whether the Confederate statues should still be up in public places¹⁴. The kids could do some evidence-based research with that, but ultimately that is a public issue and it has to do with what they think the value of memorializing different parts of the past is. We have Shaker Town down here¹⁵, which is a historic preservation project and it is very appealing to people, but you might not want to live there when it was actually active. So, do people go there because they are really doing history? I do not think so. I think they sometimes like to view it for the same reason we watch movies: you see somebody else's presentation, you are not always creating your own presentation of the past. So I would want both of those things in the classroom. And I think you have got a better shot at teachers doing it that way. The teachers I was working with near Chicago were talking about how scared they were because somebody told them they were going to have to do an entirely inquiry-based curriculum, every day all year long. That is exhausting. And no history professor does that either (not to a full class, not to eight periods a day or six periods a day). We need to organize our inquiry based lessons in what I describe as post-holing: an inquiry here, followed by less intensive work with evidence, historical literature, media and places, then another inquiry. And over time, you will increase the number and intensity of the inquiry work you do with students.

LA/AE: You have been directly involved in the Living Archaeology Weekend project, where students can experience with Native American artifacts and understand their way of living. Which is the power of such experiences when teaching?

LL: I brought one of the articles that A. Gwynn Henderson, Mr. Lee, and I did based on that archaeology work with fifth graders that is called *The beauty of other lives: material culture as evidence of human ingenuity and agency* (Levstik, Henderson, & Lee, 2014). The

¹⁴ Some of the news that illustrate the debate: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2015/08/04/jefferson-davis-statue-ky-capitol/31102113/>; <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2015/08/06/kentucky-panel-votes-to-keep-jefferson-davis-statue-in-capitol.html>; <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/06/23/politics/confederate-flag-symbols-capitol-hill-reaction/index.html>

¹⁵ The Shaker Town of Pleasant Hill is located 40 km south Lexington (Kentucky). It is the place where a religious community (shakers) was settled between 1805 and 1910. It is nowadays a place that reenacts the life of that community and it is a quite popular tourist destination.

Living Archaeology Weekend (LAW)¹⁶ experience, it seems to me, works at different levels. On the one hand, if you go to Gladie¹⁷ and you get away from where the visitor center is and just drop down to the valley where the exhibits are, you are about to see an environment similar to the way that the first people who lived there saw it. It is not an old growth forest, but it is a forest with some of the same things that would have been there for the ancient people. So what you are giving kids is an opportunity to see the context for material culture. They can see the reeds and somebody making mats out of them; they can see the clay in the ground and somebody making a pot out of it, so that you have got a really direct connection between the source and the material object. But that only works if you, as a teacher, have done your homework with the kids before they show up, because not all of the demonstrators make those connections when they speak to the students. It is right there, they are sitting in forest, but they do not necessarily make the connection between context and object. If the teacher has done just a little bit of work ahead of time, then the kids are going to begin to make those connections.

The second level of what they get is, they have an opportunity to either observe how a material object is made, or how it is used, depending on the artisan and the object. There is a level of observation, but there is also a level of actually trying a tool out, in a reasonably authentic setting. For example, they get to try the atlatl (spear-thrower), so they get a sense of the physical work involved, the physical feel of it, the skill that would be involved. Or when they were scraping the hide, you would not do that in your classroom, but here they have got a real archaeologist explaining and they can see, and even try scraping the hide themselves. Then they see the *chaîne opératoire*: the chain of operations from the hide to the outline for the foot, to the moccasin, and then the finished product. And what we found was that the combination of seeing the sequence of operations, trying the tool out, and having done a little bit of prep before they came produced an intellectual tipping point where the kids went from thinking people in the past did things the way they did because they were not that bright, and people have simply gotten smarter over time, to saying, no, in fact these people were incredibly smart to have survived and to have made these tools, and to use these implements, and to have crafted a society. The experience is an intellectual tipping point through which the kids begin to understand how hard it was to master life in the distant past. How many of the students could actually hit the target with the atlatl? Not very many. It takes skill. And then, when they looked at the atlatl, could they have invented that? It would not have occurred to me to figure out the system of weights and pulleys that made that thing operate, but ancient people did exactly that. So these were clearly people with a brain, a good brain. Overall, LAW provides both the wisdom of observation and the wisdom of participation.

LA/AE: Concepts, procedures and attitudes. In your opinion, where is the balance?

LL: I do not think that, if you are going to teach kids anything, you can separate those, because, again, it is just like the LAW: you have this concept of a tool, but if you do not ever use it, if you do not see how it works, how it fits in context, all of that, you are not

¹⁶ More information about the Living Archaeology Weekend: <https://www.livingarchaeologyweekend.org/>

¹⁷ The Gladie Visitor Center is located in the Red River Gorge area, in the Daniel Boone National Forest (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/dbnf/recarea/?recid=39566>).

going to learn it. That means the concept needs to be investigated using procedures that allow students to use the concept to answer relevant questions. This requires attention to attend to children's dispositions or attitudes. Are they inclined to ask good questions? Are they disposed to be curious? You need to motivate kids to do this kind of work. That is why I think these elements just go together. If you just say 'well here is a concept', your kids may memorize the concept for the test, we all have seen that, but if they have not used the concept in context they will lose it, and if you have not worked on the attitudes that incline students to do the hard work of inquiry, it will not matter what procedures you force on them.

LA/AE: Anyone who reads current research about how to teach History in schools, would realize that there is still a large proportion of teachers that keep and feel comfortable with traditional methods. Do you think that the advances made in educational research are arriving or influencing the teaching methods? If not, which are the reasons that could explain the distance between the University and the Schools?

LL: That was a whole chapter in our book *Teaching history for the Common Good* (Barton & Levstik, 2004), because everybody says that we want to do a different kind of history and then you hardly ever find it. Why are they doing the traditional stuff?

The usual arguments revolve around testing. Testing rarely assesses inquiry. It tends to just test for isolated bits of information. Do you know the date? Do you know the names?

On the one hand, the pressure of the test is real and has become worse over time, at least in the U.S. But there is also the pressure of experience. Lee Shulman (1987) used to say that what happens when teachers are feeling stressed or threatened in the classroom they'll fall back on the way they were taught. That is their default position, the familiar way in which they were taught and learned (or failed to learn). I have actually had students tell me this: "I learnt, I got A's in all my lecture classes, so why wouldn't I teach my kids that way? Because I know that works". That worked for you, maybe, but you are probably a minority in your classroom. There was an editorial in the *New York Times* where a History professor talked about why we should lecture more and was critical of what he saw as too many courses moving to discussion formats or having the kids do independent research. He makes this plea from his assumed position of knowledgeable expert enlightening students who don't know enough and, therefore, require his content expertise. I have a colleague who calls this approach the "revenge of the history nerds."

In the first book that Chris Pappas, Barb Kiefer and I wrote back in 1985 (last edition: 2006), we were fighting that, because our argument was that if you teach content as a set of isolated concepts or procedures, the kids will learn that for the test and then forget them. There is no transfer. What they learned in class does not apply to anything else. So you think you have prepared them, but, in fact, you have not. It is easy to fall into that trap, especially if teachers do not see their job as teaching students how to think historically in the ways Keith and I outline in *Doig History*. Instead, some teachers see their purpose as giving students a quantity of information that will help them to be successful and get them into college, where somebody will teach them in exactly the same kinds of ways because

they are pretty sure that they know more than those kids do and hope this approach will prepare them to do something later with it. But students will likely be totally unprepared to do anything with it. John Goodlad (1984) talks about something strange happening to social studies when it enters the schoolroom. He said that all life gets sucked out of it. It is stunning how schooling takes something as fascinating as human existence, and make it boring. That happens in bad history teaching, whether it is inquiry oriented or otherwise. I have had professors who were great lecturers and I loved their classes but I am glad that was not the only thing I got. So again, I am not against a good lecture and I am not in favour of only inquiry based instruction. I think exposure to the variety of ways history is made and used is a better way of getting at good history teaching. Ultimately, though, content and method choices should be related to the central civic aim of teaching history in a democracy, which was part of Keith's and my aim in both *Doing History* (Levstik & Barton, 2015) and *Teaching History for the Common Good* (Barton & Levstik, 2004).

LA/AE: Looking back, what do you consider as your main contribution to the scientific sphere of Social Science teaching?

LL: That is probably for other people to say. I think one of the things that I helped do was to bring more research attention to history education and especially to elementary and middle school students' thinking in social studies. When I first came in, there was very little research on how younger kids learned and thought about anything. It was almost all about the teachers. Even the 1960s social science materials were not about how kids thought. It was all about how the teachers could teach in ways that program developers thought kids should think.

The studies by Hallam (1971) drew on Piaget to argue that kids did not do any kind of real historical thinking until they were somewhere around seventeen years of age. I read that and I thought that that was nonsense. We don't do that with reading. While kids do not read like a mature adult until they are older, that does not mean you do not start teaching them how to read when they are five. I think it is the same thing with history. The fact that students are not going to be sophisticated historical thinkers when they are five does not mean they can not think at any useful level and that we should not introduce them to history¹⁸. I would underline that emergent historical literacy piece, but somebody else would have to answer the rest of your question.

LA/AE: Although July 2016 was your time of retirement, your research continues as intensely as always. Are there any topics that you would like to focus your attention on during this new period?

LL: Yes, I am going to continue with the archaeological work that A. Gwynn Henderson and I have been doing¹⁹. That has been interesting, and it is one of those things that does not get much attention within the Social Studies community, and it never has. Keith Barton asked me once if I thought I could have made a career in archaeology. No, not when I came in.

¹⁸ We underline her contribution in that specific field and encourage the reader to consult the next works: Levstik, 1989; Levstik, 1993; Levstik & Barton, 2008; Levstik & Pappas, 1987.

¹⁹ Different interesting contributions can be mentioned regarding this facet of the interviewee: Henderson & Levstik, 2016; Levstik, 2018; Levstik, Henderson, & Lee, 2014; Levstik, Henderson, & Schlarb, 2008.

They were not even doing history, much less archaeology. But I think there is room there now. Archaeology is an area that could get into the literature, but only if archaeologists are willing to see their work as historical and not solely scientific. I have never understood why in American archaeology the notion of being scientists is more crucial to them than the notion of being historians, as if history isn't evidence-based. I mean, you are using science to dig up the past. Wouldn't that be history?

I like Ian Hodder (2012), the British archaeologist, because he certainly is doing scientific work and he is also a social scientist. He is much more theoretical, he is much more philosophical about his work and I find him fascinating.

Other topics that interest me include the whole agency idea. That one really interests me, especially in relation to making sense of civic efficacy in different racial, cultural, gender groups. I began thinking more about that as I advised Lauren M. Colley (2015), who was moving in that direction with her dissertation.

The other thing I am interested in doing is to resume a facet of history I left behind a long time ago. Before I started graduate school I was doing some writing for kids, and I published three non-fiction pieces in children's magazines. A fourth piece, that I thought was for kids, ended up in a newspaper instead (Levstik, 1981). I was using "slave narratives", oral histories conducted with individuals emancipated after the Civil War in the U.S. The interviews were collected during the Great Depression in the 1930s. I used one of those interviews to write the article that was published in the Columbus Dispatch Sunday Magazine. That was one of my favourite pieces. There is also a piece that my husband and I were working on a long time ago, before he died, that maybe I can go back to. I do not know, every time I pull out the box, I close it up again.

Update: Shortly after this interview, I began working with Chinese faculty who came to the University of Kentucky as part of program to move from traditional forms of university teaching to more "active learning" stances. This has been a wonderful challenge and an opportunity to continue my interest in international education.

LA/AE: Related to this last question, do you think that there are any topics in teaching history that the scientific literature and research has put aside and that should be investigated in the next years?

LL: I think the part that still gets left out is the young children. I do not think there is anything close to enough to work on what we might call emergent historical thinking. You know, like the kids you are working with²⁰. What do we know about how those kids learn or make sense of the past? They have such a short past of their own... We know that they do the time chunking: it is like my life, my parents, my grandparents, the dinosaurs. They would organize their timelines with dinosaurs first and then there is grandma. And I do wish that we could get more traction on agency (because I think that has the civic connection). That would be the other big thing I do not think we have done much on: strengthen the connection between history and civic purposes. Keith Barton and I have a chapter in *The SAGE*

²⁰ The interviewee mentions the joint research recently published about historical thinking in Early Years students (Arias, Egea & Levstik, 2019).

Handbook of Education for Citizenship and Democracy (Barton, & Levstik, 2008) where we talk about the civic and history connections.

The other thing we do not know anything about is content. Do kids learn different contents in different ways? There is almost nothing. Nobody dares really to do the content piece. Because if you are going to study agency you can use any content out there, and we usually use what is comfortable for us because we have a good background. As a result, kids learn very specific contents. For example, they get into the mummification idea, which is OK as a motivator but if that is all the kids come away from studying Egypt, or they get this romanticized version of Cleopatra, Caesar and Anthony, they are really far from anything any historian does, much less from any civic connections. If we believe that History has civic connections we need to pick the contents very carefully and to only pick contents that are really worth spending time on.

Just overall, we need to know with more detail about how students respond to specific methods, not how the teacher does the method, and not how the kids in the context of this method exhibit certain skills, but to compare, to see if. in fact. there are some methods are better than others, or maybe variety (multiple methods) really is the key to this. That would be interesting to know.



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More detailed information is available on the website: <http://www.um.es/cepoat/pantarei>.

Examination and assessment process

The Journal will submit the papers to a first examination once received. If the paper follows the presentation guidelines, the subject agrees with the editorial line of this journal, and possess the scientific quality required, it will be sent to the advisory council for a first assessment. If not, the documents which clearly fail to complete the editorial line may be rejected straightaway in this first step.

The Advisory Council will indicate the originality, relevance, structure, writing, bibliography, etc. of the text to the journal; for this purpose, two outside experts will be designated to review the papers; these experts can be (or not) part of this Advisory Council. The selection of the experts will adjust to the subject and methodological characteristics of the paper. Name and affiliation of the author will be eliminated from the text for its review, in this way experts will act anonymously and confidentially.

The experts will fill out an assessment report which will focus on aspects such as formal characteristics, originality and novelty of the papers, relevance and results of the proposal, methodological quality and scientific validity.

Once the process is finished, the acceptance or not of the papers and its publication in the corresponding edition will be decided, as well as the modifications that may be done for its final publication. This notification will be sent by email within 6 months maximum.

