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IMPROVING HISTORY INSTRUCTION IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY LANGUAGE-ENRICHED CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Efforts to address the burgeoning needs of second-language learners in college history courses, particularly Spanish-to-English (ELL), are finding their way to leading historical organizations. At the same time, historians continue to perceive a deficiency in helping students to think and write as historians. A prominent example comes from the Organization of American Historians (OAH), which recently called for researchers to share how "to support the growing number of English-language learners while balancing the writing demands essential to our discipline" (see OAH's call for articles on "Writing in the History Classroom," email, to OAH members, June 18, 2020). Unfortunately, the lack of interdisciplinary collaboration may be a barrier to useful solutions; that is, the integration of the work of historians and pedagogy and language experts, among others. This research works to close this gap in two ways: It integrates studies across disciplines that have potential to promote student success—from cognitive and instructional science, history teaching and learning practices, and English and Spanish language acquisition. The author then describes an application of these ideas, a limited set of data to highlight examples of student's work, and a brief analysis of the data with closing thoughts.

Keywords: *Second-language learners, history teaching, writing in history, language-acquisition research, cognitive science and the classroom, college history teachers, interdisciplinary research, cross-discipline faculty collaboration, cognitive and instructional processes in history, American history, doing history*



"In this book I learned that Theodore Roosevelt had ADD (attention deficit disorder) or what the author calls it[,] "artistic temperament."

– One of my history student's interpretations of Mary Beth Smith's *The Joy of Life: A Biography of Theodore Roosevelt* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013).

INTRODUCTION

Exploring better ways to teach history can be complicated by meeting the needs of dual-language learners. I taught the standard history courses, "U.S. to 1877" and "U.S. Since 1877," at a college near the border with Mexico.¹ Many of the students were ambitious learners struggling with both their at-home language, Spanish, and college-level English. They were working hard to read the required textbook (*The American Journey: A History of the United States, Volume 1 and 2*, Pearson), navigate in-class lectures, absorb what was presented in overhead power point slides and videos, and respond to required assessments in multiple formats. In other words, these English-second-language learners (ELL) had to learn to listen, read, write, and speak, in a second language, while learning the history of—in the slang of some—*norteamericanos*.² This is partly to remind us that "Writing in the History Classroom" cannot be compartmentalized as one of many specialized devices in a plumber's toolbox. Thus, the instructional task presents both a challenge and an opportunity for student and instructor alike.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH INFORMING PRACTICE

Because I have engaged a wide assortment of experiences, training, and research in language learning and history, I came to the task of teaching these college students with an orientation different from monolingual, U.S. history collegiate instructors.³ For example, at one time or another, I have taught in dual-language (Spanish/English) classes, first to fifth graders, and in high school and college-level courses for native English-language learners of Spanish.⁴ I have also completed nearly a major in Spanish-language coursework, including classes such as "Spanish Second Language Acquisition" and the "Foundation of Bilingual/Bicultural Education," and the required complement of history courses as an undergraduate and graduate student. But what informed my practice in teaching the U.S. history survey course to ELL, as much as all this experience and academic preparation, was the research I have explored.⁵ Useful selections of this will be elaborated here, as applied to my course in the next and last part of this article.⁶ For example, Nancie Atwell and her practitioner-based evidence in the book *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents* (Heinemann) is a wonderful starting point to set up a classroom

¹ Names of places, schools, colleagues, and students are omitted or changed to protect the participants. The techniques I discuss, and data examples illustrated, were collected from both courses.

² While I use the acronym ELL, a colleague has noted that EAP (English for Academic Purposes) may also be used in this instance. It is important to keep in mind that language acquisition research distinguishes between types of language competence (i.e., "informal"/"conversational" versus "academic"), the former generally accomplished long before the latter; see James Crawford discussion on "cognitive-academic language proficiency," in his *Educating English Learners: Language Diversity in the Classroom* (Bilingual Educational Services, 2004), 34-37, 232-234; also see concepts such as "register" and multiplicity of meanings of language proficiency, in Jim Cummins, *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire* (Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters, 2000), esp. Chapter 3 and pp. 118-125.

³ I grew up with English as my sole language and only began studying Spanish decades later, in various venues.

⁴ I use the term "dual language" here because researchers label "bilingual" as an end state that signifies proficiency that often may not exist in either the home (primary) or second language of students.

⁵ Useful sources to support conclusions in this project come from various reviews of research and related case studies; see, for instance, Mario Carretero and James F. Voss (eds.), *Cognitive and Instructional Processes in History and the Social Sciences* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994); see esp. Chapter 9—active exploration of topics—expressing views, elaborating reasoning, citing evidence—and "participatory classrooms" related to increased levels of student interest and enjoyment, and feelings of efficacy, versus passive lecture and recitation and forgetting, disinterest, boredom, or constructivism and narrative remembering, and so forth. Variations of these challenges have been identified by historians collecting data more than half a century ago in American schools; see Baxter, Maurice G., Robert H. Ferrell, and John E. Wiltz, *The Teaching of American History in High Schools* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964).

⁶ It is important to underscore that leading efforts of present-day historian-reformers of teaching and learning (e.g., University of Colorado-Boulder panel, 2020 AHA annual conference session, or the recent articles on teaching and learning history in the *Journal of American History* 106, no. 4 [March 2020], 985-1019), are rehashing the same debates addressed by earlier researchers during the educational reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, without sufficient attention to the earlier studies or results. One might look, for example, to Carole Hahn's review in "Controversial Issues in History Instruction," in Carretero and Voss (eds.) *Cognitive and Instructional Processes in History*, 202-203.



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protocol, modified for college, of course.⁷ (See her book appendices, especially Appendix J, for examples of underlying research conclusions.) And in conjunction with Atwell's practice, it is worth repeating that ELL students must engage interactively in all the communication skill sets—understanding through hearing, verbalizing, reading, and writing. With this in mind, and the sometimes embarrassing attempts at learning that go with it (especially among second-language learners), the focus of Richard and Patricia Schmuck's *Group Processes in the Classroom* or Ronald Vansickle's "Practicing What We Teach: Promoting Democratic Experiences in the Classroom" are useful; that is, the interpersonal constructs that make a classroom effective in terms of influence structures, feelings of socio-emotional security and support, and social status as bases of power, among other variables.⁸

Bruce VanSledright's action research has provided data on students' (younger than college-aged, to be sure) exploration and interpretation of primary sources, then, their efforts at reading and writing interpretative accounts and the successes achieved and obstacles encountered (e.g., affective and cognitive struggles with uncertainty, referential illusions, static epistemologies, and presentism).⁹ These challenges are not so far removed from those facing older students, based on my experience and informal reasoning research.¹⁰ Other researchers, Robert Bullough, Jr. or Seymour Sarason, VanSledright, Carole Hahn (among others in Mario Carretero and James Voss) inform larger questions of systemic issues that reach beyond the artificially compartmentalized writing-history course conundrum, but that are central to facing an honest reckoning with all the elements—internal and external to the course—needed to succeed in each separately.¹¹

INTERVENTION AS PRACTICE

In this section I will address the following questions as they intersected with my practice of teaching the course. It is important to keep in mind, however, that they are interconnected in terms of my instructional method and the instructor and student expectations.

1. What does it mean (in this context) to prepare students to write historically?
2. What can an instructor learn (and teach students) about writing through transdisciplinary teaching collaborations?
3. What are strategies to support the growing number of ELL while balancing the writing demands essential to the history discipline?

Following Atwell's method of teaching language arts, I required students to use one of the class meeting times each week principally to read, then, write about (using history-related prompts I provided), whatever self-selected biography sections they had engaged. They were encouraged to share interesting findings or anecdotes with the whole class on occasion. Since each class session lasted an hour and fifteen minutes, this permitted substantial time for independent reading. Generally, I would request students to begin their question-prompted writing reactions to that day's reading, 5-10 minutes prior to the end of class, though, of course, most took a few notes while reading. A substantive paragraph-length response—four sentences or more, with attention to good writing (addressing the prompt and clear communication) was emphasized as part of the effort evaluated, up to 20 percent of the participation grade.¹² The paragraphs also served to enhance opportunities for student sharing of points of biographical interest. My engagement during the 'reading and writing' in-class activity was to discuss the previous week's paragraphs as a point of departure with individual students that I found needed more intensive

⁷ Nancie Atwell, *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1987.

⁸ Related to these ideas are second language development and engagement (e.g., "silent period" or "low-anxiety environments"), in James Crawford, *Educating English Learners*, see esp. "Considering Program Alternatives," in Chapter 9.

⁹ Bruce VanSledright, *In Search of America's Past: Learning to Read History in Elementary School* (Teachers College Press, 2002), 51. For quick lessons found in VanSledright's book, see Douglas A. Dixon, "Can Elementary School Students Learn the Skills of Historians?" *Theory and Research in Social Education* 31, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 136-140.

¹⁰ James F. Voss et al. (eds.), *Informal Reasoning and Education* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991); see, for example, Chapter 18—"Informal Reasoning in High School History," and also, chapters 4, 9, 14.

¹¹ Robert V. Bullough, Jr., *First-Year Teacher: A Case Study* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1989) and "First-Year Teacher" Eight Years Later: An Inquiry into Teacher Development (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997); Seymour Sarason, *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990); VanSledright, *In Search of America's Past*; Carole Hahn, "Controversial Issues in History Instruction," in Carretero and Voss (eds.) *Cognitive and Instructional Processes in History*, 201-220.

¹² I did not penalize a student for poor writing unless s/he continued to ignore previous corrections (especially noteworthy in accumulative metrics or did not write sufficiently lengthy responses to the reading/writing prompt.



individualized feedback ("conferencing" in Atwell's system) and to return the class paragraph evaluations.¹³ This method of feedback permitted me to monitor student reading less intrusively while moving about the auditorium.¹⁴ Students were required to choose U.S. historical figures as their book foci, within the time frame covered by the course, constrained only by what was available at local or college libraries or bookstores in mind. I placed no strict limits on category or person (e.g., political, social, business, etc.), and even more, I permitted students to choose a second book as the course progressed if the initial selection proved uninviting. Agency in choice, the "proximal zone" of difficulty of material engaged, and student accountability for learning are important criteria in student engagement and learning as discussed by educational theorists and empirical researchers (e.g., John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Ronald Vansickle, and the many examples in Carretero and Voss, cited earlier, among others). These researchers have found increased learner motivation is tied to piquing student interest, setting a healthy class climate (less status conscious interaction), making learning personally meaningful, engaging intellectual curiosity, and/or meeting students' potential for learning, among other factors.¹⁵ At least one student in the course chose to read a less challenging children's book, an indicator of the difficulties reading and writing English posed for her. I also permitted students to write their reading responses in Spanish, if this allowed for a greater level of comfort, but only one decided to do so. Of course, if a history instructor does not possess Spanish (or other) language competency or a deep understanding of language acquisition issues, this calls for some collegial collaboration and/or personal research.¹⁶

As is apparent from the instructional method I introduced, the mix of writing and history teaching and learning cannot be divorced from reading. With the in-class biography reading-writing response, history instructors can understand better the level of reading comprehension and address writing needs of students while also prompting them to think beyond merely reading history as one would a standard history textbook, but with self-selected content that likely evokes more interest. In my course, the first week's response required students to provide a paragraph overview of what they had read that day. In the remaining weeks, the reading prompts turned to various aspects of historian interrogation methods.

A useful instructor's roadmap to guide students to interact with their biographies as historians is Mary Lynn Rampolla's *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*.¹⁷ While the purposes it serves is much broader than ours here, several sections lend themselves to framing student thinking in weekly historian-perspective writing exercises, as students respond to" (in Atwell's terms) what they are reading in their self-selected biographies. Rampolla's guide serves as an introduction to important ways to think historically ("mini-lessons," in Atwell's system).¹⁸ I provide several examples below of historical question prompts and a few of the students' responses to them, but these just

¹³ Many students were pressed with outside-of-school work or other demands that did not permit scheduled office visits outside of class sessions.

¹⁴ There were approximately 40 students in the course in a lecture hall setting. It is fair to say that a few students were not as engaged in this as I desired, and there were rough patches that pushed me to hold students to the level of reading attention required. As one might expect, too, the diminished time to lecture on weekly topics reduced verbal course content coverage or entire-class interaction; yet, it must be acknowledged given the research, that students do not benefit as much as instructors would hope from traditional passive student learning. I encouraged students struggling with textbook readings to come to office hours and/or to seek help at the language lab.

¹⁵ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (Free Press, 1997/1916); L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Richard A. Schmuck and Patricia A. Schmuck. *Group Processes in the Classroom* (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C Brown Co., 1983); Ronald L. Vansickle, "Practicing What We Teach: Promoting Democratic Experiences in the Classroom," in Mary A. Hepburn (ed.) *Democratic Education in Schools and Classrooms* (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1983); Doug Dixon, "Lions, Tigers and...Dora La Exploradora? Past and Present as Prelude to Spanish Competency," *Texas Foreign Language Association Journal* 60, no 2 (Summer 2013): 16-17.

¹⁶ Excellent overviews of research on second-language acquisition and cultural or policy constraints can be found in reviews of the following: Susan M. Gass and Larry Selinker, *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Crawford, *Educating English Language Learners*; Cummins, *Language, Power and Pedagogy*; Barbara A. Lafford and Rafael Salaberry (eds.), *Spanish Second Language Acquisition: State of the Science* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003). A colleague has reminded me too to be sensitive to the concept of "translanguaging", the students' use of his/her full set of language skills and resources to respond. For a brief review of this, see <https://www.languagemagazine.com/2018/09/10/a-pedagogy-of-translanguaging/> (accessed August 9, 2021).

¹⁷ Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History* (Boston: Bedford, 2012); another helpful source for reading-writing prompts is the present author's discussion of "checks on historical account objectivity" in *Beyond Truman: Robert H. Ferrell and Crafting the Past* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield/Lexington Books, 2020), esp. 76-77.

¹⁸ "Mini-lessons" on English language topics are unrealistic given the time constraints and course focus.



capture a glimpse of the possibilities. Even more, they highlight lessons for history instructors in classrooms filled with second-language learners.¹⁹

DATA AND DISCUSSION

In one writing prompt, students were to quote a claim made by the biographer, then examine and discuss the evidence and logic used to support the claim. It is important to keep in mind, organizationally, that with each day's reading, students wrote the bibliographic citation (and 'short form' after the first day), the day's date, the page number they started and stopped reading (for accountability, logistics, and my understanding of their reading progress), and on which page the quote was found—partly to allow me to inquire about the quote and the section of the book cited. In the following example, one student, "Carla," drew on Ronald Reagan's *An American Life: The Autobiography*.²⁰

"Once I was back on the campus, I was seduced by Eureka all over again." (p. 49)

Ronald Reagan loved being in college[.] He was so excited when he got a scholarship to play football[.] He join[ed] a lot of clubs [and] became captain and coach of [the] swim team. He became [s]tudent body president his last year of school. He mentioned through the chapters that he experimented with alcohol, which he didn't enjoy the next day.... On one of their out-of-town trips his team was staying in Dixon [Reagan's hometown][.] but the motels refused to let two of his colored teammates ["to"-delete] stay there. So Ronald told his coach that they could stay at his parent[']s house.

Another student, "Marcos," used the following quote, though inexact copy, from David Herbert Donald's *Lincoln*, as a claim to examine:

"Large [of/for] his age, and had an axe put into his hands at once." (p. ?)

When Abraham Lincoln's dad died of a [gun shot/gunshot], his [son's/sons] took over. Abraham was one of the [son's/sons] that mature[d] more quickly [then/than] anyone else. At the age of eight he had his own axe which he used for the land he had. Thomas Lincoln[.] the oldest son[.] was surprise[d] about his younger brother that mature[d] quite quickly.

"Savanah," a third student, discussed the claim found in Fred Kaplan's *Lincoln: The Biography of a Writer*:

"He [Lincoln] was always full of stories." (p. 18)

Abraham Lincoln loved to [entertain/entertain] his family members by telling them stories he learned [on/in] books. A year after Lincoln's mother [death/died], his father married a widow named [Sahra/Sarah] who brough[t] new books to Lincoln's house and the opportunity to learn other stories from outside the Bible, since his family was poor and not able to buy any books.

Another writing prompt required students to evaluate the authority of the author's knowledge of the topic discussed based on the use of sources or specific expertise, as this reading response from Marcos demonstrated:

The author David Herbert Donald knows [how/what] Abraham Lincoln[']s life was all about [be]cause he did his research by reading books and looking into websites. This author talks about Lincoln's family, education, and the events that occurred to him [has/as] a child to adulthood. It probably took him days, maybe even weeks[.] to write about Lincoln's life[.] Mr. Donald [must've/must have] taken classes as well to learn more about [A]braham [L]incoln[']s events as he was growing up. People think that publishing a book is easy but it [ain't/is not] [be]cause they (as in the authors) have to learn the history of that person to write a book about [them/him or her].

¹⁹ See Rampolla's discussion on historian "techniques for evaluating primary sources," p. 13., or her list of "Questions for Evaluating Secondary Sources," and discussion of these, pp. 16-21; see also Rampolla's elaboration of reading and writing in Chapter 3, i.e., "Reading actively in history", "Writing about reading," and using primary and secondary sources. Several of these could be combined for out-of-class, short-writing prompts (e.g., investigation of the publisher, comparisons with alternative primary sources, author contradictions with other experts, etc.).

²⁰For illustration (and sometimes for clarity), I quote the students' work as written in their responses, adding brackets to highlight grammatical corrections and in some cases, provide the example of incorrect usage (e.g., [has/as]—the first word/phrase is the student's: the second, "as" is the correct word; in this case, the student's confusion arises among Spanish-second-language learners of English because the "h" is silent in Spanish, so phonetically, the two appear the same).



Students were also asked to state their own interpretation about the subject of the biography in a writing prompt, culling evidence, examples, etc. from the cumulative sessions of readings, beginning the paragraph with his/her argument as a topic sentence. Marcos, for instance, wrote:

Abraham Lincoln wanted some way to transport all goods in a much faster way. He had all sort of plans to do something about it, then he came up with a brilliant idea[./] [delete "Which was"] the railroad tracks[.] [, it will/It would] be the best idea he had ever had in his life. Many people wanted to use the canals to move around the area which means it [would've/would have] taken much longer. But with the railroad tracks going through the land[.--delete] and streets of the city, it would just [taken/have taken] a few minutes.

Savanah interpreted Lincoln's boyhood as exceptionally challenging:

Lincoln grew up in a poor family with a lot of limitations. He learned to read and write with the use of the [H]oly [B]ible [delete .] because his family was very engaged in Christianity. His first teachers were his mother and a neighbor. He had a sister named Sara[h] and a brother who died at an early age.

Carla believed that Theodore Roosevelt "had ADD [attention deficit disorder]":

The author mentioned that Theodore would get anxiety attacks when he was a teenager[,] but he would [work?] through them. There[']s times he would play sports. [t/T]imes he would read and just do about anything to get through the attacks. Other things the author mentioned was that Theodore would never stay still[.] [h/H]e was alway[s] in a hurry but had an amazing concentration when he was reading. He also had photographic memory[.]

Marcos told us something about the historical significance of his biographical focus in this prompt for a writing response: Do you think the focus of the book is historically important, and why?

The book I have chose to read is called *Young Patriots*. The reason being is because it includes two very important people in our history[,] and they are James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. Without these two men, we wouldn't have the most important document of all time[,] and it was called "the Constitution." So[,] if these two men wouldn't have met, the United States Constitution would have not existed[,] and the future could have been so different.

Savanah found Lincoln of value historically (aside from the obvious, I suspect) due to his personal attributes and activities and to the thoughts of those around him.

Abraham Lincoln was different from the people around him. He was interested in being well educated and spent most of his time reading rather than helping [in/on] the farm. People described him as very intelligent and being capable of remembering everything he had learned as if he [was/were] reading in the moment. Lincoln and the people around him knew that he was going to be an important person in society. He was inspired by reading Benjamin Franklin[s] and George Washington's biograph[ies]. One day he said that he was going to be president of the United States.

What can be gleaned from this limited set of data?²¹ Its analysis tells us something of the status of students' writing skills and opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration and for student feedback (see my "Grammar/Writing Checklist" and "Writing Improvement Metric" rubrics in Appendices 2 and 3 respectively), second-language-acquisition struggles and their causes, and rich potential for 'mini-lessons' related to the work of historians. Though an exercise as hurried as this each week does not speak to polished student writing, with opportunities for revision, grammar corrections, etc., it can facilitate upgrading student skills. With this paragraph-writing response approach, repeated errors in grammar, syntax, morphology, and so forth, likely signal more than temporary lapses, and with the use of comprehensive rubrics, instructors can address efficiently student writing problems without overly burdensome out-of-class time spent.²²

²¹ As the course writing response matrix used for each student suggests, these examples of student work provided do not include the full range of writing responses, thus, my conclusions draw on a wider sample.

²² For a useful overview and discussion on basic concepts of second language acquisition (e.g., syntax and semantics, morphology, or interpretation of errors), see Gass and Selinker, *Second Language Acquisition*, Chapter 1 and 2 (esp. pp. 35-38—syntax and morpheme development), and Chapter 4, esp. "Error analysis," 102-110.



A closely related, even overlapping, issue with writing competence among ELL is the common errors made by learners in transition from Spanish-to-English usage that experts identify.²³ Several examples drawn from the history reading-writing-prompt responses of Carla, Marcos, or Savannah speak to the richness that this research field offers instructors of history, especially if they collaborate with specialists in language departments to address their history students' English writing needs. Marcos may struggle with punctuation and plural and possessive forms; Savannah and Carla, as seen from these *limited* examples, may suffer from a more diffuse set of writing issues, but certainly repeated missteps in lexicon and capitalization. Taken together (with the addition of many more of their peers' responses), these students show a marked ability to communicate their message, yet also exhibit shortcomings worthy of attention based on what language acquisition experts label "errors" (systematic) versus "mistakes" (one-time).²⁴

Two areas of second language acquisition research particularly relevant as applied to these students' reading responses are what Gass and Selinker label "interlingual errors" and intralingual errors.²⁵ The first are those "which can be attributable to the NL" (native language). The second are errors "that are due to the language to be learned, independent of the NL. Before continuing, it is critical to underscore that limited data from any one student (or multiple students), whether longitudinal or cross-sectional is rife with problems of interpretation or imputation of causation and/or lack of attribution to multiple causation. *This caution is useful if we impute the source of difficulty that students exhibit in this limited sample.* An example of what *might be* the cause of students' miscues with respect to signifying the possessive (e.g., parent[']s house, sons/son's took over, Lincoln[']s life, Lincoln[']s events) is that Spanish does not signify the possessive this way, but instead with phrases such as *la casa de los padres* (house of the parents) or *la vida de Lincoln* (the life of...). These second-language learners, thus, are attempting to learn a new form of possessive, an interlingual difference. Marcos's and Carla's responses reflect a noticeable inconsistency with English-appropriate punctuation (e.g., periods, commas, apostrophes). A host of other intermittent errors may only signal lack of care. Gass and Selinker provide a roadmap to conduct error analysis: "collect data, identify errors, classify errors, quantify errors, analyze source, and remediate."²⁶ The idea here, however, is not to require experts in language acquisition among history instructors, but through collaboration, to help one be sensitive to the types of language problems encountered and the plausible sources of, and solutions to, the challenges.

The reading-writing prompts also serve as an introduction, early on, to historians' ways of interrogating the past, or better said, its surrogates.²⁷ How does context of the times shape the historian's treatment of the person? In what ways does the historical period differ from the contemporary one, and what meaning might this have for the historian's interpretation versus that of our own times? How might have significant events tied to the focus of the biography been different if s/he had not lived? These, and other prompts, push students to engage ideas such as cause/effect, contingency, 'great' man/woman versus other forces, context of the times, presentism, or counterfactuals. Student reading-writing responses, good and poor, can serve as mini-lesson prompts to discuss the historian's work, interrogation of sources/texts, and historical interpretation in all its richness, complexity, and uncertainty.

CONCLUSION: RESTRUCTURE AND COLLABORATE

The seemingly impossible task of teaching second-language learners in history courses requires an instructor with an unusual assortment of experience and training, and/or more importantly, the willingness to collaborate with colleagues across disciplines, in my example, English Department instructors and language specialists. This is no easy task for an assortment of reasons. Faculty members have unique attitudes toward cross-disciplinary collaboration, as many are driven by competing sets of priorities, dictated in part by their level of experience

²³ It is important to underscore the "additive" nature of language learners (not deficit) to celebrate increased competence that comes with engaging another language.

²⁴ Though addressing English-to-Spanish acquisition, Lafford and Salaberry (eds.) *Spanish Second Language Acquisition*, for example, offers some potential for understanding language development of these students; see their chapters 2, 3, or 5; also see Gass and Selinker, *Second Language Acquisition*. For an insightful but brief review of effective instructional practices that overlap with the reading-writing-feedback approach discussed here, see Charles Grove, "The Role of Instruction in Spanish Second Language Acquisition" (esp. pp. 304-310) in Lafford and Salaberry (eds.), *Spanish Second Language Acquisition*.

²⁵ Gass and Selinker, 103.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ See Mark Donnelly and Claire Norton, *Doing History* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 5; Callum B. Brown, *Postmodernism for Historians* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 6-31.



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teaching and personal goals, their college's promotion system, or their comfort level. Other factors can be as powerful. I decided to leave this college behind, in part, because the administration had adopted a wholesale approach to textbook imposition on instructors and student assessment, pressed by a financial agreement with a major textbook and assessment company. These are examples of the external-to-classroom factors that make (or not) successful teaching and learning reform viable.

These examples and associated evaluative rubrics are presented here to demonstrate several broad thrusts. First, that history instructors can shape students' ways of thinking historically outside the too routine practice of content coverage via textbook assignments, lecture, and recitation and testing, much of which has been shown to be ineffective, even for minimal, short-term memorization (and even less, for enjoyment) of history. Students' work, used with anonymity, can be wonderful starting points to conduct in-class mini-lessons on the historian's craft, as Atwell has demonstrated while teaching language arts. Secondly, these student writing samples exemplify the herculean task facing history teachers as they address the obstacles to ELL, and more importantly, the necessity of creating cross-disciplinary collaboration with colleagues in English or global language departments.²⁸ Finally, by using a modified system of Atwell-ian 'reading and writing' in-class responses that is geared toward specific historian thinking prompts, history instructors can balance, even integrate, the issues of ELL with the demands (according to research) of more effective history education.

As the citation to the introductory quote to this article suggests, our history students may not have a fundamental grasp of how to select and/or interrogate what might constitute a professionally acceptable work of history, in this case written by a computer programmer, perhaps in her spare time. This response is an opening to the historian's world. It provides student-generated thinking that takes little time to evaluate while providing valuable insight into language competence issues that may need to be addressed at the same time. Taken on throughout the semester, it is a cumulative record of each student's engagement, both process and product. Requiring students to put in chronological order weekly produced work with instructor feedback in a folder, permits instructors to record and evaluate errors that diminish (or not) over time on an end-of-course "writing matrix" (see Appendix 3). Of course, the reading-writing response method presented here has plenty of room for improvement and variety: assigning longer (one-page), out-of-class writing responses tied to larger purposes; pushing students to compare other historians' takes on the subject matter; attending to primary sources not found in the self-selected biography, and how they might inform the in-class biographer's interpretation, and so forth. Nevertheless, this method has great potential to inculcate aspects of the historian's work, inform student writing, and provide for the needs of second-language learners.

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²⁸ Studies in second-language acquisition suggest various causes, and thus, potential ways to address underlying language development; moreover, there is some consistency in results across child and adult results; see for instance, Gass and Selinker, Chapter 5, "Language morpheme order studies." Since history instructors are unlikely to gain substantial subject knowledge in Spanish-language acquisition, or Spanish itself, establishing a sensitivity to common student issues, acquaintance with colleagues in the field or with on-campus peer-to-peer/preparatory studies learning labs is essential.



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Appendix 1. Example of Student Writing

Author's Name: David Herbert Donald
Title: Lincoln

2-5-14
Page: 23-24

Page 23, Paragraph 2, Line 9-10
Page 24, Paragraph 1, Line 9
Page 25, Paragraph 5, Line 4-7
large of his

"Large of his age, and had an axe put into his hands at once"

When Abraham Lincoln's dad died at a gun shot, his son's took over. Abraham was one of the son's that mature more quickly than anyone else. At the age of eight, he had his own axe which he used for the land he had. Thomas Lincoln, the oldest son, was surprise about his younger brother that mature quite quickly.

Appendix 2. Grammar/Writing Checklist

Grammar/Writing checklist

- mw/Conf= Missing words/confusion in meaning
- Pro = Unclear pronoun reference
- Sp = misspelling
- Ap = apostrophe needed/used incorrectly
- Wf = Words (besides verbs) in wrong form (e.g. no matters the slave opinion)
- Ww = wrong word (more death than alive)
- Parll = faulty parallelism
- Sv = subject-verb agreement
- Frag = sentence fragment
- ProShif = shift in pronoun
- Incoh = incoherent
- Cap = need to capitalize
- L/c = incorrectly capitalized (need lower case)
- c/s = indep clauses are incorrectly joined by a comma
- Com = problem with comma (missing or placed where should not be)
- Pun = inappropriate/inadequate punctuation
- Inf = informal expression (rally up support)
- IP = indent initial paragraph sentence
- Vf/Tense = verb form/tense incorrect (Lincoln was surprise or They was...)
- Contr = use of contraction
- PAS = passive voice
- semi = inappropriate use of semicolon
- R/o = sentence run on (two indep clauses joined without punctuation)
- Wf = word form incorrect—adv, adj, etc. (e.g., treated equal; should be adverb form—equally)



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Appendix 3. Writing Improvement Matrix

Directions: For each paper that I mark, you will identify (and keep track of) your errors on the matrix given to you below. The hope, of course, is that by the end, you will begin to eliminate the types of errors that you commit—and be rewarded for it on an end-of-course writing assignment. Thus, on individual papers returned (e.g., 6th Paper), mark the appropriate “error code” that you committed (see example at the bottom).

Example

Error Code (see email with these provided): AP = apostrophe; etc....

Error Code	Papers #1-5	6 th Paper	7 th Paper	8 th Paper	9 th Paper	10 th Paper	11 th Paper	12 th Paper	13 th Paper

*Improvement Matrix/Table concepts borrowed from Mr. Donald Crouse and Ms. Ela Newman.

Example Student: John Doe

Error Codes*	Papers #1-5	6 th Paper	7 th Paper	8 th Paper	9 th Paper	10 th Paper	11 th Paper	12 th Paper	Final Paper
POS		POS							
C/S									
CAP		CAP							
FRAG									

*To identify the correct error codes, see the email attachment I sent to the class on February 4.