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The History You Don't Know, and the History You Do: The Promise of Signature Pedagogies in History Education

Abstract

The persistent separation of subject-matter content and pedagogical training in traditional teacher education programs has made it difficult for many beginning teachers to establish a base of knowledge they can use to develop pedagogical content knowledge as their careers unfold. While existing efforts to bridge this gap have focused on intensive collaborations between education faculty and their colleagues in disciplinary fields, or on the integration of disciplinary knowledge into teacher education coursework, work still can be done to address the problem of providing beginning teachers with the balance of deep and flexible content knowledge complemented by practical teaching maneuvers that so many of them crave. This chapter explores the possibility of addressing this gap via the development of signature pedagogies, following the lead established in many other professional fields, paying special attention to Lee Shulman's conceptualization of the idea and its potential impact on teacher education in history.

Keywords

history, history education, teacher education, social studies

Disciplines

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ABSTRACT

The persistent separation of subject matter content and pedagogical training in traditional teacher education programs has made it difficult for many beginning teachers to establish a base of knowledge they can use to develop pedagogical content knowledge as their careers unfold. While existing efforts to bridge this gap have focused on intensive collaborations between education faculty and their colleagues in disciplinary fields, or on the integration of disciplinary knowledge into teacher education coursework, work still can be done to address the problem of providing beginning teachers with the balance of deep and flexible content knowledge complemented by practical teaching maneuvers that so many of them crave. This essay explores the possibility of addressing this gap via the development of signature pedagogies, following the lead established in many other professional fields, paying special attention to Lee Shulman's conceptualization of the idea and its potential impact on teacher education in history.

Inspired by the Greek philosopher and essayist Plutarch, Harry S Truman once declared that "it was the same with those old birds in Greece and Rome as it is now: the only thing new in the world is the history you don't know."¹ It may be this fact, more than any other, that makes learning to become a history teacher so difficult.

This is, of course, because there is so much to learn: new history is being made every minute, not just with the passing of time but also with its interpretation and re-interpretation. It's no wonder, then, that new teachers of history often feel compelled to focus on one thing above all others: how to master the illimitable body of knowledge they think they will have to know in order to teach the subject effectively. But as Lauren McArthur Harris and Robert Bain

¹ Samuel W. Rushay, "Harry Truman's History Lessons." *Prologue Magazine* (2009), <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2009/spring/truman-history.html>.

have written, concern about the content knowledge held by teachers—especially beginning teachers—often focuses on university coursework as a proxy for the knowledge teachers need to teach effectively.² Meanwhile teacher educators, in the estimation of Harris and Bain, have increasingly embraced the idea that the content knowledge of teachers has an “instrumental quality” that is focused less on the amount or disciplinary depth of teacher knowledge and more on “the particular type of knowledge teachers need to help specific students learn specific content, including subject-specific facts, concepts, and skills.”³ Finding a way to bridge the gap between subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge has proven to be a vexing problem for teacher educators and new teachers alike.⁴

This essay offers up a new way of thinking about how to address that problem. While existing efforts to bridge the gap between content and pedagogy in teacher education have focused on intensive collaborations between education faculty and their colleagues in disciplinary fields, or on the integration of disciplinary knowledge into teacher education coursework, work still can be done to address the problem of providing beginning teachers with the balance of deep and flexible content knowledge complemented by practical teaching maneuvers that so many of them crave. To be clear, this is not a report of a formal empirical

² Lauren McArthur Harris and Robert B. Bain, “Pedagogical Content Knowledge for World History Teachers: What Is It? How Might Prospective Teachers Develop It?” *The Social Studies* 102 (2011): 9-17.

³ Harris and Bain, 9.

⁴ See, for example, Robert B. Bain, “Into the Breach: Using Research and Theory to Shape History Instruction,” in *Teaching, Learning, and Knowing History: National and International Perspectives*, eds. Peter C. Seixas, Peter N. Stearns, and Samuel S. Wineburg (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 331-353; Robert Bain and Jeffrey Mirel, “Setting Up Camp at the Great Instructional Divide: Educating Beginning History Teachers,” *Journal of Teacher Education* 57, no. 3 (2006): 212-219; and G. Williamson McDiarmid and Peter Vinten-Johansen, “A Catwalk Across the Great Divide: Redesigning the History Teaching Methods Course,” in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, eds. Peter Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York: NYU Press, 2000).

research study; it offers an exploration of an idea that has not been given enough attention in teacher education, one that holds the promise of potentially helping to assuage the concerns of beginning teachers preoccupied by fears that they may not be adequately prepared to marry their knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy effectively once they enter the classroom.

As it happens, such an approach has been elaborated but never fully applied to the problem of preparing new teachers of history. In a piece he published in 2005, Lee Shulman, then of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, explored the notion of “signature pedagogies” as a way of explaining how induction occurs in most professions.⁵ In the piece, Shulman describes signature pedagogies as something we all know how to identify intuitively: “these are the forms of instruction,” he says, “that leap to mind when we first think about the preparation of members of particular professions.” He provides vivid examples of pre-professional instruction in fields as diverse as medicine, the law, and engineering. He argues that signature pedagogies “can teach us a lot about the personalities, dispositions, and cultures of their fields.” He reminds us that signature pedagogies play a “critical role” in “shaping the character of future practice and in symbolizing the values and hopes of the professions” that have adopted them.⁶ And he raises important questions, in passing, about the role signature pedagogies play in the induction of new teachers.

This essay explores the usefulness of signature pedagogies as a solution to an old educational problem. As Shulman observes, signature pedagogies play a critical role in shaping the experiences of people preparing to enter a variety of different professions. But what utility

⁵ Lee S. Shulman, “Signature Pedagogies in the Professions,” *Daedalus* 134, no. 3 (2005): 52-59.

⁶ Shulman, 52-53.

do they have in teacher education? To answer that question we'll first look more closely at the separation of content and pedagogy in traditional teacher education programs, which has proven to be a significant obstacle for teacher educators interested in helping future teachers of history and the broader social studies develop pedagogical content knowledge. Next we'll explore Shulman's definition of signature pedagogies and the ways they are used to induct new members into various professions. Finally we'll ask some other important questions. Why don't signature pedagogies seem to exist in teacher education, especially where the preparation of history teachers is concerned? Can they be developed, and, if so, what would it take to develop them? And, finally, what might teaching in elementary and secondary schools look like if pre-service history teachers had induction experiences centered on the use of signature pedagogies? What difference might they make?

In the end, this essay will hopefully spark new conversations about the efficacy of signature pedagogies as an approach to educating future history teachers. Ultimately it will be up to teacher educators, scholars, and teachers themselves to decide if such an approach could be implemented and, if so, how it might look to do so. In the meantime, however, giving renewed attention to the problem of helping teachers develop deep and meaningful knowledge of subject matter and connecting it to effective and high-quality teaching practices can at least demonstrate the promise of signature pedagogues as a professional tool for teacher educators to consider as part of their own practice.

Into the Breach, and Across the Great Divide

Simply put: in many, if not most, traditional teacher education programs, education about *teaching* happens in education courses, while education about subject matter *content* happens somewhere else. “Somewhere else,” in this case, is in courses taught by instructors with very different goals than those of teacher educators. But simply being aware of the need for these two types of knowledge is not a guarantee of success. As Avner Segall has pointed out, citing the work of Barton and Levstik, “the premise that teachers should be exposed to the work of scholars in their discipline and to the best pedagogical approaches to make that knowledge instructional for students—a notion university courses in disciplinary knowledge and education as well as professional development programs have long advocated—does not always result in much of either filtering into classrooms.”⁷ This is probably because future teachers are often left to figure out for themselves how content and pedagogy interact to form pedagogical content knowledge, that unique form of professional knowledge identified by Lee Shulman as the special province of professional teachers.⁸

There is, as yet, no scholarly consensus on how this happens in the minds of history and social studies teachers.⁹ While many studies of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) development exist across other subject fields, from science to English language arts to mathematics and even in fields like instructional technology and physical education, in social studies this has proven to be a harder nut to crack. Conceptually, social studies poses unique problems for researchers interested in nailing down the foundations of PCK since social studies

⁷ Avner Segall, “Blurring the Lines Between Content and Pedagogy,” *Social Education* 68 no. 7 (2004): 480.

⁸ Lee S. Shulman, “Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching,” *Educational Researcher* 15, no. 2 (1986): 4-14.

⁹ Dave Powell, “Brother, Can You Paradigm?: Toward a Theory of Pedagogical Content Knowledge in Social Studies.” *Journal of Teacher Education* 69 no. 3 (2018): 252-262.

is not, as it happens, a “subject studied in college” like literature, math, or history, and therefore is not, as Peter Seixas has put it, the “starting point for student teachers in the way that the study of literature or history could be.”¹⁰ But even in a more focused subject like history, the literature on PCK is relatively thin. Where scholars have concentrated on the elements of PCK in history they have often zeroed in on ideas like disciplinary knowledge, historical thinking, and concepts like “content knowledge for teaching” without specifically naming them as components of pedagogical content knowledge.¹¹ Only a handful of studies have explicitly focused on Shulman’s conceptualization of pedagogical content knowledge. Even Shulman himself only wrote explicitly about PCK in social studies once, focusing on the differences between novice teachers and experts rather than on how PCK is developed in the first place.¹²

Making matters worse, new teachers often find themselves entering schools and classrooms where knowledge about the past is perceived as fixed and unchangeable—very much in contrast to what most of them were probably taught in their university coursework. According to Susan Adler, prevailing expectations of teachers that they “maintain control and cover the material” are more powerful than the combination of content knowledge and

¹⁰ Peter Seixas, Review of Research in Social Studies,” in *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, ed. Virginia Richardson (Washington, D.C.: AERA, 2001), 546.

¹¹ See, for example, Deborah L. Ball, “Bridging Practices: Intertwining Content and Pedagogy in Teaching and Learning How to Teach.” *Journal of Teacher Education* 51 no. 3 (2000): 241-47; Suzanne Wilson and Sam Wineburg, “Peering at History Through Different Lenses: The Role of Disciplinary Perspectives in Teaching History.” *Teachers College Record*, 89 no. 4 (1988): 525-539; and Sam Wineburg, “Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts.” *Phi Delta Kappan* 80 no. 7 (1999): 488-99.

¹² Sigrun Gudmundsdottir and Lee Shulman, “Pedagogical Content Knowledge in Social Studies,” *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 31 no. 2 (1987): 59-70.

pedagogical knowledge most novice teachers bring to the classroom.¹³ As Chauncey Monte-Sano has put it, students “typically enter middle and high school classrooms believing that history is a static set of names and dates that they are to memorize,” impressions that they no doubt gained from “routine instruction” in other history courses that involved “lecture, textbook work, and multiple choice assessments—all tools and strategies that preserve a notion of history as fixed information and obscure traces of how such knowledge was produced.”¹⁴ It should come as little surprise, then, that many beginning teachers, confronted with students who have been conditioned to view history as, in the words of Thomas Holt, “the ordering of already-known facts into agreed-upon chronologies,” find themselves discarding what they learned about the discipline of history once they enter secondary school classrooms.¹⁵

The question is: how can beginning teachers overcome the obstacle of connecting subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge given the divide between the two that so often exists in teacher education programs? It should be said at the outset that surely there are teacher educators who effectively bridge these gaps in their own practice; they may, for example, integrate immersive and thorough examinations of historical knowledge into their methods courses. If so, not many have written about the success of their experiences. It seems likely that this is because the structure of teacher education—in which, again, future teachers learn their history from historians and then practice methods and address other “practical” concerns in their education coursework—makes finding the time to do so difficult indeed. Moreover, most

¹³ Susan Adler, “The Education of Social Studies Teachers,” in *Handbook of Research in Social Studies Education*, eds. Linda S. Levstik and Cynthia A. Tyson (New York: Routledge, 2008), 344.

¹⁴ Chauncey Monte-Sano, “Learning to Open Up History for Students: Preservice Teachers’ Emerging Pedagogical Content Knowledge.” *Journal of Teacher Education* 62 no. 3 (2011): 260-272.

¹⁵ Quoted in Monte-Sano, “Learning to Open Up,” 260.

teacher educators earned their terminal degrees in teaching or education and naturally focus their research agendas on those fields as well; rarely are teacher educators, in schools of education, also engaging in disciplinary scholarship. Expecting them to remain abreast of new developments in historical scholarship while simultaneously preparing new teachers and maintaining scholarly agendas of their own is a tall order, indeed.

And, yet, the current arrangement leaves much to be desired. Efforts to bridge the gap between content and pedagogy in teacher education have yielded promising results for some teacher educators, but often come with substantial drawbacks. In one case, dubbed by the authors as an effort to “build a catwalk across the great divide,” a collaboration between professors of education and history resulted in a reconfigured teaching methods course focused on historical thinking.¹⁶ After explaining that such collaborations can be exceptionally difficult to enact for a variety of reasons, the authors explained that focusing too much on historical content in an initial experiment left many students feeling unprepared for the “practical” challenges of teaching; in a subsequent experiment they found that focusing on curriculum development seemed to address some of the concerns expressed by students after the first experiment, but with time only to develop one curriculum unit it seems reasonable to ask if the program would effectively overcome the problems described by Segall, Adler, and Monte-Sano above. Monte-Sano, meanwhile, has reported on how strong disciplinary knowledge enabled one novice teacher to expand the evidence-based thinking and interpretive skills of her

¹⁶ G. Williamson McDiarmid and Peter Vinten-Johansen, “A Catwalk Across the Great Divide: Redesigning the History Teaching Methods Course,” in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, eds. Peter Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York: NYU Press, 2000).

students, but while future teachers in this case study received instruction in a methods course sequence focused on teaching history as an “inquiry-oriented subject,” the separation of history coursework from those methods courses was still apparent.¹⁷

Another promising approach has been employed by Harris and Bain, whose “history lab” innovation was designed to help students in a world history course see the “pedagogical moves” being made by the instructor of a history course they were all enrolled in.¹⁸ The important question to ask here is about the impact such an innovation might have on the practice of these students once they become teachers. And while Harris and Bain’s experiment does indeed look like a promising innovation, it too depends on the collaboration of faculty in other departments—a difficult lift for many teacher educators.

In contrast, signature pedagogies could potentially address the shortcomings of each of the approaches described above while bringing the benefits of them aboard as well. One way this could happen is by encouraging collaboration between teacher education faculty and faculty in the disciplines not in the shared space of a classroom but in a different kind of shared space: in the kind of collaboration that scholars engage in when they seek to understand each other’s work. The development of signature pedagogies would depend on mutual cooperation between professionals with a stake in ensuring the future of their profession. In fields from medicine to engineering to law, new professionals are inducted using pedagogical approaches that are remarkably consistent across time and space. In law, for example, scholars of legal history and trial lawyers don’t share the same classroom as they attempt to prepare lawyers to

¹⁷ Monte-Sano, “Learning to Open Up.”

¹⁸ Harris and Bain, “Pedagogical Content Knowledge for World History Teachers.”

do their work; they instead have contributed to the development of a professional ethos that lends itself to specific pedagogical approaches when future professionals complete their induction experiences. Consensus on goals and on the expected outcomes of legal education no doubt contributes greatly to the success of this enterprise as well, but the clarity and purpose provided by tried and true teaching approaches undoubtedly strengthens that consensus.

Before we get too far ahead, however, it makes sense to explain more fully what signature pedagogies are, and how they function in other professional induction experiences.

What are Signature Pedagogies?

“If you wish to understand why professions develop as they do,” Shulman has written, with an homage to the work of the psychologist Erik Erikson, “study their nurseries.” He means by this that one of the best ways to understand the work of professionals is to see how they are prepared—to look closely at their “forms of professional preparation,” which offer a window into the ways members of those professions conceptualize the three “fundamental dimensions of professional work”: to think, to perform, and to act with integrity.¹⁹ Professionals are born in classrooms, as well as in clinical settings, in field placements, in internship sites, in studios, and wherever else they are taught about the nature of the work they plan to undertake. Those experiences do much to communicate to them what it means to be a member of the profession they hope to join, and also set the course they will travel as they seek to become initiated into the professional work they plan to do.

¹⁹ Shulman, 52.

Aspiring lawyers, for example, are accustomed to participating in intense, teacher-driven investigations of case law. After visiting a class on contract law, Shulman observed that instructors in such settings tend to focus on particular students for extended bouts of interrogation in which students are quizzed about their knowledge of specific cases and challenged to carefully read the precise wording of contracts or rulings under investigation. In these classrooms it's the language of statutes and contracts and court decisions that provides the foundation for student understanding, and a common text for everyone to draw on as learning occurs. This text-based back-and-forth between instructor and student is at the heart of the learning process, but careful preparation by both instructors and students is critical to the success of the enterprise.

By way of comparison, Shulman offers up an example of a class in fluid dynamics taught at an engineering school. In that setting, desks are arranged differently—instead of a theater-style arrangement like those common in law schools, this engineering classroom has all students facing forward in rows so they can see the “mathematical representations of physical processes” drawn by the instructor, whose back is turned to his audience, on the blackboard.²⁰ In a third example, Shulman describes the work of other engineering students in a design studio. In contrast to their cohorts in fluid dynamics, these students are assembled “around work areas with physical models or virtual designs on computer screens.” It's not clear where the front of the room is located; it's not even clear who the instructor is. The classroom is a place of experimentation and collaboration where the “designed artifact,” rather the teacher, is the

²⁰ Shulman, 53.

focus of instruction. The artifact, like the contract or statute in the legal classroom, is the thing that holds the knowledge students are after. Unlike in that classroom, however, the teacher prods students and pushes their thinking in a less aggressive and more congenial way.²¹

Finally, Shulman offers up an example from medical training. Here, doctors and other health professionals are taught in clinical rounds where the classroom is the hospital and the “clinical triad” —the patient, the attending physician, and the intern—work together to facilitate learning. As Shulman describes it, “The ritual of case presentation, pointed questions, exploration of alternative interpretations, working diagnosis, and treatment plan is routine.” There is “no question,” he adds, that “instruction centers on the patient, and not on medicine in some more abstract sense.”²²

What makes all of these approaches *signature* pedagogies is their ubiquity within the fields they represent: they are “modes of teaching and learning that are not unique to individual teachers, programs, or institutions,” as Shulman puts it. Indeed, he says, it is the pervasiveness of these pedagogies that makes them so important. “They implicitly define,” says Shulman, “what counts as knowledge in a field and how things become known”; they also “define how knowledge is analyzed, criticized, accepted, or discarded,” and they “define the functions of expertise in a field, the locus of authority, and the privileges of rank and standing.”²³ The pedagogical approaches employed by instructors in each of these professional fields have been tested by others and handed down to those charged with initiating new members into the professions they will serve. They are used because they work: they enable the transmission not

²¹ Shulman, 54.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Shulman, 54.

only of knowledge to aspiring professionals but also common values, skills, and dispositions. And they are used consistently.

It doesn't take much imagination to figure out what the future professionals in each of the classroom settings Shulman described will be expected to do once they begin their professional work. In the case of the students learning about contracts, the emphasis on close and careful reading of text—where every word matters, and where every interpretation must be made very carefully—signals the importance of such skills in the practice of law. The future engineers absorbing knowledge from a blackboard being hurriedly filled with information are receiving a different kind of signal: they had better get this information, and get it right, because in the field of fluid dynamics a single mistake made while working with volatile liquids or gases can lead to catastrophe. The design engineers, on the other hand, are learning how to study objects closely, together with others, to think about creative ways of tweaking the form and function of those objects. Finally, the future doctors completing their rounds with attending physicians are learning largely by observation and via pointed questioning: they are going through the motions of the work they plan to soon do independently, studying charts, asking probing questions of patients, drawing on the volumes of knowledge they internalized earlier in medical school. The education they receive is carefully tailored to prepare them for that future work.

The question teachers and teacher educators may want to ask themselves is: what are the prevailing signature pedagogies in our field? Are there any? One striking conclusion to be drawn from Shulman's examples is that elements of each of the pedagogical approaches he features—(somewhat) discussion-based, Socratic learning; direct transmission of knowledge

from teachers to students; carefully managed cooperative group work; and practice-oriented work undertaken in the field itself—are present in most teacher education programs. Indeed, it is probably not unusual for future teachers to be exposed to each of these pedagogical techniques within even a single *course*. But are there pervasive approaches to the education of new teachers that help them define the boundaries of the professional work they plan to do? Do these approaches implicitly define what counts as knowledge in history education? Do they help define how that knowledge is analyzed, criticized, accepted, or discarded? Do they define the functions of expertise for history teachers, the locus of their authority (especially in relation to scholars, but also to teachers of other subjects), and the privileges that come with history teaching?

To be fair, the signature pedagogies Shulman describes are not the only ones in use in the education of the future professionals he observed. Doctors, for example, have substantial amounts of knowledge about body functions, disease, and treatment transmitted to them in fairly traditional ways alongside their clinical experience. Lawyers, too, have to not only master the skills of argumentation and critical thinking but also a massive body of case law and statutory information that will guide their work. Engineers can't just design new things; they have to test them to ensure they work as well, especially within established safety protocols. Some pedagogical diversity should be expected in every field.

But the *signature* approaches particular to each field say a lot about how it is conceived by the people in it. Where they don't exist it seems fair to conclude that there is not much agreement on the knowledge and skills needed to do the job well. That may well be the case in teacher education. Shulman seems to have concluded as much, having written that “teacher

education does not exist in the United States,” pointing specifically to the “cacophony of pathways” into teaching, which signal to outsiders that professional teachers do not really care how new teachers are brought into the field.²⁴ It may seem unfair to blame teachers for that—politicians and policymakers wield a great deal of influence over who is allowed to work in classrooms as teachers—but one of the marks of a true profession is its ability to police itself.

One could argue that the absence of signature pedagogies opens the door to the “cacophony of pathways” bemoaned by Shulman, and feeds the notion that teaching is a “natural” skill that some people have and some people don’t. In this conceptualization, teaching is “spontaneous and non-deliberate and occurs whenever a person” with certain tendencies “is with any other person.”²⁵ Those tendencies include collecting and manipulating things, talking about what you know, correcting the mistakes of others, jumping in to provide knowledge when others are grasping for it, and “pointing to the moral,” as Frank Murray puts it—saying, in other words, “I told you so.” If this is the best definition we have of what it means to be a teacher it is not hard to see why teachers lack the respect afforded to other professionals. In the “natural” conceptualization of teaching, teachers come off as officious know-it-alls, not knowledgeable professionals.

The suggestion here is that while there may be many approaches taken to educate new professionals, if specific signature approaches are consistently in use wherever new professionals are being educated the induction of new members into professional work is likely

²⁴ Lee Shulman, “Teacher Education Does Not Exist,” *The Stanford Educator* (2005), 7.

²⁵ Frank B. Murray, “Beyond Natural Teaching: The Case for Professional Education,” in *The Teacher Educator’s Handbook: Building a Knowledge Base for the Preparation of Teachers*, ed. Frank B. Murray (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996): 3-13.

to be more focused and more coherent. At the very least, it could be said that one characteristic of high-quality professional preparation—one that is consistent across many different professions—is the presence of signature pedagogies. And the consistency of these approaches is important because that consistency helps establish routines that enable professionals to extend their learning in important ways. Routines can be dangerous and stultifying, as Shulman acknowledges, but they have their virtues. As he puts it,

Learning to do complex things in a routine manner permits both students and teachers to spend far less time figuring out the rules of engagement, thereby enabling them to focus on increasingly complex subject matter...Pedagogies that bridge theory and practice are never simple. They entail highly complex performances of observation and analysis, reading and interpretation, question and answer, conjecture and refutation, proposal and response, problem and hypothesis, query and evidence, individual invention and collective deliberation. To the extent that the substance of these complex performances changes with each session, chapter, or patient, the cognitive and behavioral demands on both students and faculty would be overwhelming if it were not possible to routinize significant components of the pedagogy."²⁶

It's difficult to overstate the value of this point: when we establish high quality routines, we enable ourselves to focus on balancing the competing demands of the work we do—and we also enable creativity to flourish. Each of the professional endeavors Shulman spotlighted in his discussion of signature pedagogies is a demanding one: lawyers, doctors, and engineers often

²⁶ Shulman, "Signature Pedagogies," 56.

face complex ethical and moral dilemmas that would be debilitating if the people facing those dilemmas were not prepared to spring into action without even really thinking about it.

In another setting, Shulman once compared the work of being an elementary teacher to being an emergency room physician during a natural disaster—while noting that this is what elementary teaching is like every day. The need to address the individual needs of students is not unlike the work of diagnosing patients, deciding whose needs are most urgent and whose can be addressed after those with the most critical needs are met. The knowledge required to engage in this kind of educational triage—knowledge of content, of learning theories, of the larger teaching context, knowledge of the students themselves—can be overwhelming. It speaks to the complexity of teaching as an everyday act. “To put it simply,” Shulman says, “signature pedagogies simplify the dauntingly complex challenges of professional education because once they are learned and internalized, we don’t have to think about them; we can think with them.” He argues that the “routine of pedagogical practice cushions the burdens of higher learning” by shifting “new learning into our zones of proximal development, transforming the impossible into the merely difficult.”²⁷

Teachers may not face life-or-death decisions every day but the work they do is no less important than the work done by other professionals, and in many ways it is more important. In the end, Shulman’s advocacy for pedagogical routines offers a compelling rationale for the education of teachers: coming to some consensus on the signature ways we want new teachers

²⁷ *Ibid.*

to be educated could go a long way toward establishing a foundation for responding to the challenges of teaching that currently seems to be missing for many of them.

Toward Signature Pedagogies in History Education

So what would such signature pedagogies look like in history education? Shulman identifies three dimensions of signature pedagogies that may be helpful to consider here. First is the surface structure, which consists of “concrete, operational acts of teaching and learning, of showing and demonstrating, of questioning and answering, of interacting and withholding, of approaching and withdrawing.”²⁸ We might think of the surface structure as the elements of teaching that are most readily observable: these are the parts of a teacher’s practice most likely to be evaluated by outsiders because they can be *seen*.

The second dimension of signature pedagogies is what Shulman refers to as their deep structure. Shulman describes the deep structure as “a set of assumptions about how best to impart a certain body of knowledge and know-how,” which rests on the assertion that what is really being taught is not just that body of knowledge but theories about how best to put it to good use and how to think and act like a member of the profession someone hopes to enter. Both the surface structure and deep structure are reminiscent of Joseph Schwab’s delineation of the “substantive” and “syntactic” structures of academic disciplines—structures that provide a foundation for Shulman’s elaboration of the concept of pedagogical content knowledge.²⁹ The

²⁸ Shulman, 54-55.

²⁹ Joseph J. Schwab, “Education and the Structure of the Disciplines,” in *Science, Curriculum, and Liberal Education: Selected Essays*, eds. Ian Westbury and Neil J. Wilkof (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1978): 229-272.

syntactic structure of a discipline, which mirrors the deep structure of a signature pedagogy, is comprised of the discipline's epistemological foundations and the methods used within the discipline to establish truth; likewise, the deep structure of a signature pedagogy encompasses valued ideas about what truths are to be taught, zeroing in on the sometimes hidden "secondary curriculum" imparted by teachers. A history teacher, for example, might employ a pedagogical approach with a surface structure that is clearly focused on the substantive history she wants students to learn: the names, dates, facts, and key interpretations that form the foundation of historical understanding. But the teaching may also have a deep structure as well, focused on skills like contextualization, corroboration, close reading, and sourcing of materials—the skills historians use to establish the veracity of an account of the past or to determine the validity of the resources they encounter.

Shulman also describes a third dimension of signature pedagogies: the implicit structure. He defines the implicit structure as "a moral dimension that comprises a set of beliefs about professional attitudes, values, and dispositions."³⁰ The implicit structure, needless to say, is critical to the development of conscientious professionals, and the teaching of young people is, of course, a profession in which conscientiousness is of paramount importance. But the implicit structure also sets expectations for how professionals should *carry* themselves, and where the primary focus of their work should lie. To place the three dimensions in context Shulman returns again to the example of a course on legal case methods; with regard to the implicit structure of the education provided in such courses he writes:

³⁰ Shulman, 55.

We observed several interactions in which students questioned whether a particular legal judgment was fair to the parties, in addition to being legally correct. The instructor generally responded that they were there to learn the law, not to learn what was fair—which was another matter entirely. This distinction between legal reasoning and moral judgment emerged from the pedagogy as a tacit principle.³¹

If the reputation of lawyers has never progressed much further than Dick the Butcher's famous suggestion in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*—"the first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers"—it may be because the aphorism speaks to the cool, calculated way lawyers go about their business. It should come as no surprise that lawyers approach their work the way they do because it's what they were taught to do.

Applying these ideas to the preparation of teachers—history teachers, in particular—is not as straightforward as it may seem to be at first. One relationship that must be untangled is the relationship between the work of historians and the work of history teachers. It may be true, as Avner Segall has written, that the line between "scholar" and "teacher" is much more blurry than it might appear to be at first glance, but the blurring of that distinction has not yet fully permeated teacher education.³² Robert Bain illustrated this nicely when he described the dissonant experience of trying to earn a graduate degree in history while also working as a high school history teacher. He described the history he studied at night, away from his classroom, as "a way of knowing the universe," an exhilarating assimilation of knowledge and skills to be mastered so the world would make sense, but when he got back to school it was transformed

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Avner Segall, "Blurring the Lines Between Content and Pedagogy," *Social Education* 68, no. 7 (2004): 479-482.

into something much more prosaic. There, history became “a subject students took and teachers taught, differing from other subjects only in the facts covered.”³³ Lendol Calder made a similar point while bemoaning the fact that survey courses in history are often perceived by undergraduates to be not all that different from the introductory courses they take in other subjects—as one student described it, it’s “first you listen to a lecture, then you read a textbook, then you take a test.” Calder continues,

When the only history course most people ever take from a professionally trained historian tempts students to believe that there is little difference between history and sociology or history and biology except for the facts to be learned, it is not surprising that teachers occasionally sense they might be “doing it wrong.”³⁴

No doubt many students across all levels feel the same way about the history they encounter during their school years. The truth is that many young people will only encounter history formally while they are in school, and if that experience leaves them with the sense that it is, to pick up the old saw, “one damned thing after another,” the chances that any but the most dedicated among them will continue to expand their knowledge of history is slim, to say the least. “Here historians flirt with calamity,” says Calder. Teachers do too.

So, ideally, any effort to articulate and develop signature pedagogies in history education would effectively bridge this gap between teachers and scholars, and also between “coverage” models and models of teaching focused on “doing” history. Joel M. Sipress and

³³ Robert B. Bain, “Into the Breach: Using Research and Theory to Shape History Instruction,” in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, eds. Peter Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York: NYU Press, 2000): 331-352.

³⁴ Lendol Calder, “Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey,” *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (2006): 1358-1370.

David J. Voelker attempted as much by pointing to the value of moving “beyond the coverage model” that has traditionally defined history instruction and focusing, instead, on “doing” history rather than just “learning” it. Of course the idea that learning and doing history are separate things is a problematic one; historians *learn* about the past by *doing* the things historians do to make sense of it. It is in the doing that things get learned. While it is certainly true, as Sipress and Voelker argue, that the transmission model limits the time students are able to spend practicing the work of interpreting the past, no doubt a viable solution to the problem of improving history teaching will bring these two ideas into accord with each other. Students can't do history without learning it any more than they can learn it without doing it.³⁵

Still, Sipress and Voelker do suggest a path forward in the quest to define signature pedagogies in history education. In the first place, those signature pedagogies must incorporate the structures of the discipline of history, which, in turn, would form the basis of the surface structure and deep structure of the pedagogies to be employed. Many historians are already trying to do that. Sipress and Voelker point to several examples, including Calder's, of historians actively trying to push the field past the coverage model and toward more active approaches to engaging students in the study of the past. They note the support provided by the American Historical Association, which has commissioned reports on overhauling the education of history teachers and sponsored panels to discuss the challenges associated with it, and they observe the increasing number of articles published in venues like *The History Teacher* that are focused on promoting more effective approaches to teaching and learning. They also

³⁵ Joel M. Sipress and David J. Voelker, “From Learning History to Doing History: Beyond the Coverage Model,” in *Exploring Signature Pedagogies: Approaches to Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind*, eds. Regan A.R. Gurung, Nancy L. Chick, and Aeron Haynie (Sterling, Va.: Stylus, 2008): 19-35.

cite federally-funded programs like the now-defunct Teaching American History grants funded by the U.S. Department of Education, which facilitated dialogue between post-secondary scholars of history and K-12 history teachers. All of this work points in the direction of a possible paradigm shift in the teaching of history—as yet unrealized, but promising nonetheless.

Furthermore, as Sipress and Voelker rightly note, “the systematic investigation of student learning” that would need to serve as a basis for attempting to define signature pedagogies “must begin with a clear definition of what we want our students to learn.”³⁶ In this way they hint at the importance of defining an implicit structure for these pedagogical approaches as well: what we want students to learn is intimately tied to who we want them to *be*, and what kind of society we hope to live in. As such, attempts to elaborate signature pedagogies for history education should focus on defining what it means to act ethically as a history teacher, not just on what teachers need to know and be able to do from an academic standpoint. To do this the field will have to grapple with difficult questions. What role should the teaching of controversial subjects play in history classrooms? What does it mean to be objective or dispassionate when studying the past, and how important is it to approach the past in these ways? What are the political implications of teaching history in certain ways, and what is the place of political content in schools? To be sure, no teacher should seek to indoctrinate his or her students with specific political views, but the act of teaching is a political one by its very nature—it is the act of transmitting and transforming knowledge in collaboration with others,

³⁶ Sipress and Voelker, 32.

an act of empowerment. In this sense, the presence of political questions and concerns in history classrooms is simply an inescapable fact of life. How teachers are taught to grapple with that is as important as anything else they learn.

So, needless to say, there are many pieces to this puzzle that will need to be assembled before history teachers, scholars, and teacher educators can begin to think about the widespread adoption of signature pedagogies. Certainly zeroing in on what history is good for—why students should learn it, what skills it imparts, what value it has in a democratic society—must be a centerpiece of this effort. There is undoubtedly a great deal of agreement already about some of these issues, but they will be need to be taken up explicitly if consensus is to be built around them. It will also be important to begin thinking about how specific people, events, eras, topics, and other historical phenomena are taught. Ideas about the past change over time as historians uncover new sources and develop new interpretations. It may not be true, as George Santayana supposedly opined, that history is a pack of lies about events that never happened told by people who weren't there, but it is true that knowledge about history is rarely fixed, and surely interpretations do shift, as they should, when new knowledge comes to light and as political and social conditions absorb the attention of scholars and teachers. Earlier ideas about the Reconstruction era following the Civil War, for example, suggested that it was an unmitigated disaster (interpretations that were more than likely shaped by political considerations, not historical ones³⁷); now scholars have coalesced around a much more nuanced view of what happened and what it represented, especially for freed former slaves.³⁸

³⁷ Eric Foner, "The New View of Reconstruction," *American Heritage* 34, no. 6 (1983).

³⁸ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014).

We might call the prevailing interpretations of the past at any given time “signature interpretations” —the generally agreed-upon, but never fully permanent, interpretations of past events about which historians have reached some consensus. When attempting to define the surface structure and deep structure of signature pedagogies in history, signature interpretations will need to figure prominently.

Of course, Shulman’s definition of signature pedagogies in the professions does not address such fine details. His interest was not in addressing the content of the courses he observed where signature pedagogies were in use so much as it was in describing the pedagogies themselves. But such questions have to be addressed by professionals concerned with the education of new members of their professions. To be clear, the goal of identifying signature interpretations would be to map the current paradigms in place in our collective understanding of history—it would not be to somehow curtail the ability of scholars to push our understanding in new directions. The bottom line is that teachers do need to know what they are being expected to teach, and establishing some consensus on that would be immensely helpful to many of them.

It would also be helpful to teacher educators. One explanation for the endurance of the content/pedagogy divide in teacher education is that teacher educators lack the subject-matter knowledge of scholars, and therefore depend on them to provide it to future teachers; this could be addressed, of course, by encouraging more historians to take up the challenge of preparing teachers, and by allowing more teacher educators time to study, teach, and write about history. But another explanation is that teacher educators have no way of knowing what their students have learned where disciplinary content is concerned or what they will be asked to teach. We

can blame broad-field certification policies for this, in part, and we can blame the interference of political actors with axes to grind too, but we should also look inward and think about the role scholars and teachers play in shaping the school curriculum. By encouraging teacher candidates to recognize signature interpretations in the service of developing signature pedagogies, we might not only alleviate some of the tension associated with learning to teach but also actively reframe the elementary and secondary school curriculum in ways that more accurately reflect and build upon current scholarship. This, in many ways, would be a winning situation all around.

Still there is one final dimension of the problem of defining signature pedagogies that should be considered as well: are there signature pedagogies in teacher education more generally that would apply here? Traditionally, as Calder and others have pointed out, historians have concerned themselves mostly with the transmission of knowledge they had already internalized to the students they taught, at least when they were teaching survey courses; most historians, it seems, paid little attention to learning theories or commonly-accepted ideas about effective pedagogical practice. That is beginning to change, but historians still have a long way to go in this regard to catch up with their colleagues in teacher education programs and in elementary and secondary schools. (This street goes both ways, of course; traditionally teachers and teacher educators have struggled to keep up with the work of scholars as well.) Students of history are not engineers of fluid dynamics; the substantive knowledge they gain in history class needs to be connected to the methods and ways of knowing that are central to the work of historians in a symbiotic way. To do that, anyone associated with the teaching of history will need to be aware of prevailing paradigms in the

psychology of education and will need to pay more attention to the way pedagogical experiences are structured and organized.

This was a problem taken up by Linda Crafton and Peggy Albers in an exploration of the idea that it may be possible to elaborate a signature pedagogy (note the singular form) in teacher education. Crafton and Albers concerned themselves chiefly with the concept of teaching as a form of self-discovery, and as “both a moral and an ethical commitment.”³⁹ They point to the classic work of Kenneth Zeichner and Jennifer Gore, who identified functionalist, interpretive, and critical traditions in the education of teachers, to elaborate the claim that teacher training, teacher preparation, and teacher education are all supposedly synonymous terms that actually describe very different professional induction experiences.⁴⁰ As work is undertaken to begin rethinking the way new history teachers are brought into the profession, attention should be paid to these traditions. Is teacher education primarily a functionalist enterprise, driven by the need to transmit information from one generation to the next? Historians and teacher educators seem to be moving away from this approach, which leaves the interpretive and critical traditions—or something else not yet defined—to help guide the development of signature pedagogies. Crafton and Albers argue that the interpretive stance “recognizes the importance of an individual’s subjective experience in understanding the social world.”⁴¹ Within this tradition, teachers might be encouraged to adopt approaches to teaching

³⁹ Linda K. Crafton and Peggy Albers, “Toward a Signature Pedagogy in Teacher Education,” in *Exploring More Signature Pedagogies: Approaches to Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind*, eds. Nancy L. Chick, Aeron Haynie, and Regan A.R. Gurung (Sterling, Va.: Stylus, 2012), 218.

⁴⁰ Kenneth M. Zeichner and Jennifer Gore, “Teacher Socialization,” in *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education*, ed. W. R. Houston (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 329-348.

⁴¹ Crafton and Albers, 219.

that are more closely aligned with ideas about “doing” history—that is, that are more focused on teaching students the interpretive and analytical skills historians use to make sense of the past. It is, after all, through interpretation of the world that we come to understand it, but not everyone’s interpretation is quite the same. Teachers who are trained to view teaching as an act undertaken to encourage students to find themselves and their place in the world are more likely to employ pedagogical approaches that emphasize these goals.

The third tradition stands in opposition to the other two by encouraging practitioners to challenge the status quo. In the critical tradition of teacher education, individual teachers are given “agency to transform within the often deeply rooted structures that comprise the field of education,” as Crafton and Albers put it.⁴² The emphasis in critical approaches is on education for liberation—liberation of the mind, body, and soul through the acquisition of knowledge. At first blush, many historians may be deeply uncomfortable with critical approaches to history teaching since even the most radical of contemporary historians still believe in the importance of tethering the conclusions they draw to the evidence that is available to them. Of course, just because an approach is critical doesn’t mean its proponents seek to undermine the methods of establishing truth; they may simply advance an orientation toward what knowledge is useful for. The historian Howard Zinn is often excoriated by members of his own profession for writing “subjective” history that advanced personal views that he was not shy about sharing. But Zinn countered that students “should be encouraged to go into history in order to come out

⁴² *Ibid.*

of it, and should be discouraged from going into history and getting lost in it, as some historians do."⁴³

His point was that history ought to be useful in helping us resolve moral, ethical, and political dilemmas, that we can, indeed, learn from the experiences of others in the past to improve our prospects for the future. He was perhaps the most ardent of the new wave of historians intent on bringing the voices of the invisible from our past into the spotlight, and the critical lens he employed is one that many historians themselves use, even if they are not as strident in promulgating their political views as Zinn was.⁴⁴ At any rate the debate engendered by Zinn's approach, amplified by the continuing popularity of his *A People's History of the United States*, points toward the important role controversy plays in determining what we know and believe to be true about the past. Surely more students of history would benefit from exposure to controversies like these, which expose not only the enduring truth that history is so much more than just "what happened," but is in fact eternally contested, sometimes passionately so.

The point is that anyone interested in the development of signature pedagogies in history will need to grapple with the existence of these three traditions, which compete with one another for predominance in the socialization of teachers. It could well be the case that a favored approach to teaching history in schools (and/or to teaching history teachers) will

⁴³ Barbara Miner, "Why Students Should Study History: An Interview with Howard Zinn," in *Rethinking Schools: An Agenda for Change*, eds. Robert Lowe, Robert Peterson, and David Levine (New York: The New Press, 1995): 89-99.

⁴⁴ Zinn, of course, is a polarizing figure among historians and history educators. Sam Wineburg published a critique of Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, titled "Undue Certainty: Where Howard Zinn's *A People's History* Falls Short," in *American Educator* in 2013, and historian David Greenberg also published a scathing critique of Zinn in *The New Republic* himself in 2013, "Agit Prof: Howard Zinn's Influential Mutilations of American History."

straddle the line between the interpretive and critical traditions, with some of the old functionalism thrown in for good measure—surely students can be expected to internalize bodies of knowledge while also learning to interpret the past and questioning the society they live in. Zeichner and Gore, of course, were primarily interested in exploring the ways teachers are socialized, but in the process they helped explain some of the disconnect that exists between teacher education programs and the teaching that happens in schools. Crafton and Albers, for their part, are interested in picking up on the influence of these traditions to argue for a signature approach to teacher education that advances critical goals. As the terrain of potential signature pedagogies in history education is mapped, it will no doubt be important to consider both perspectives: that traditions do exist, and that understanding them can help lead to changes in the way teachers are educated.

Conclusion

In the end, the promise of signature pedagogies in history education is the promise of education itself: if taken up as a framework within which scholars, teacher educators, and teachers can begin to engage in conversations about the kind of education teachers need, signature pedagogies could help bring coherence, clarity, and a well-articulated sense of purpose to teacher education experiences. As he reflected on what he had learned by observing the signature pedagogies in use in other professions, Shulman concluded simply that

One thing is clear: signature pedagogies make a difference. They form habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of the hand. As Erikson observed in the context of the nurseries, signature pedagogies prefigure the cultures of professional work and

provide the early socialization into the practices and values of a field. Whether in a lecture hall or a lab, in a design studio or a clinical setting, the way we teach will shape how professionals behave—and in a society dependent on its professionals, that is no small matter.⁴⁵

He couldn't be more correct. The habits of hand, heart, and mind engendered by the deliberate and carefully planned education of new professionals made possible by signature pedagogies could bring renewed emphasis to all the things that matter most to those of us who care deeply about the study of the past. By carefully defining what professionals should know—and by doing so in a way that encourages consensus building by drawing on the collective insights of scholars and teachers—teachers could begin to approach their professional work from day one with routines in mind that would allow them to respond to challenges more effectively and, eventually, meet even their most ambitious goals.

It's perfectly understandable for beginning teachers of history today—and even veterans—to be preoccupied with the history they don't know. As long as coverage prevails as a teaching paradigm in history, that uneasiness will continue. But if signature pedagogies can be developed to guide the education of teachers, it at least seems possible that some of that anxiety can be dissipated. If the only thing new under the sun for most people is the history they don't know, the only thing new under the sun for historians and history teachers may be what they have not learned yet about signature pedagogies. If they can grasp that, the first problem—at least for those who go into classrooms to teach every day—could certainly be mitigated.

⁴⁵ Shulman, 59.

