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Mosoms and Moccasins . . . Literacy in an Indigenous Context

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Abstract

In this paper Dr. Trudy Cardinal shares stories of her experiences teaching literacy for 13 years in an Elementary classroom and the shifts that she made in her thinking about literacy in an Indigenous context. She draws on work she was engaged in as a professor in Elementary education where she came alongside undergraduate students to create experiences that encouraged a coming together, in conversation, to begin thinking about what was done in classrooms to nurture literacy learning of all students, but especially for the youngest literacy learners.

Introduction

As a Cree/Métis assistant professor in the area of Elementary Education I occasionally get invited to speak about my experiences as an educator or my research (narrative inquiry, identity, and Aboriginal youth) and so it was not unusual when Dr. Dwayne Donald mentioned that he had been invited to speak at the *Centre High Indigenous Literacy Event*, and wanted to put my name forward to Naim Cardinal and the Centre High Indigenous Student Leadership youth, to speak alongside of him and the other invited speaker, Indigenous author Aaron Paquette. He mentioned the event to me in the midst of a lunch that was being held for a few grandmothers and an Elder who were visiting the university campus for the experiential part of a course that is offered. I was having some trouble concentrating on what Dwayne was talking about in that moment because the little room was filled with smiles and laughter and conversation, not to mention stew and bannock, as well as one tiny, little Kokom[1] with beautiful braids who had just arrived and her funny stories had me captivated. It was such a joy to have Kokoms speaking Cree and telling stories on the university campus. This had never been part of my undergraduate university experience. In the midst of all of this, there was Dwayne saying words like *Naim* and *literacy* and *Centre High* and I said yes without really knowing what I had agreed to. We decided we would talk about the details later. My answer of yes without knowing the details came from a place of relationship. I trusted Dwayne and I knew the kinds of talks and conversations he had been part of and I had always gravitated towards those kinds of conversations. I knew about Naim from stories that were told about him in the Edmonton community and about the good things he had done. The stories that held the most weight for me were from the youth that I had worked alongside of in different research projects who spoke highly of him whenever he had crossed their paths. And so in that moment, when we had time only to say *Naim* and

[1] Kokom is how you say grandmother in the Cree Language. There are a number of ways to spell Kohkom. I choose to use the spelling Kokom as that is the spelling my daughter and granddaughter use when referring to me as a grandmother.

literacy and *Centre High*, I based my immediate agreement on these stories of relationships.

The sharing of my coming to the event that inspired this paper is significant because I realized, as I contemplated this request later, the literacy understanding I held as an elementary school classroom teacher had shifted. I had learned in my 13 years in the elementary classroom to break literacy down into teeny, tiny parts—emphasizing reading and writing, spelling and grammar[2]—all geared towards helping students be successful on standardized literacy assessment. During those times, literacy wasn't about conversation or relationships or stories, at least not in the ways that I had come to know. As I recall my initial response I note that I lived what I understood and that was that literacy is about conversations, relationships, and stories.

What Knowledge Counts?

Until this request came forward, the majority of the talks that I had been part of attended to the concept of identity—of who we are and are becoming as Indigenous Peoples—and my stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) and how it was that I had come to know these stories. This searching for coherence, for a story that hangs together (Carr, 1986), was also something I considered as I thought about literacy in an Indigenous context because after I found myself in the current, being swept away on route to Center High's Literacy Event, the words of Indigenous author Thomas King (2003) popped into my mind. Just as someone had once looked at him, not seeing what they expected, I imagined that I might stand before the Centre High youth, and the larger audience, and have everyone look at me saying, "You're not the Indian I had in mind" (King, 2003, p. 43). I feared that I might not share stories of literacy in the way that they might have hoped. As I contemplated the concept of literacy in an Indigenous context or from an Indigenous perspective I noted this urge to silence my own knowing. Once I realized I might not be the literacy-knowing Indigenous educator that some might have had in mind I had an overwhelming desire: to squelch the stories that I knew from my experiences growing up as a Cree/Métis literacy learner; to silence the knowledge I carried from my 13 years of teaching young literacy learners; and to ignore the understandings I had come to from my teaching pre-service teachers, future teachers of the young learners. When I experience this kind of tension I turn to academic experts in the field of research and I seek out the written word to articulate knowing about literacy. And so as I contemplated what I might say for the event, I imagined sharing literature about literacy in an Indigenous context from the literacy-knowing scholars that I had in mind (Fettes, 2013; Peltier, 2010; Sterzuk, 2008; Toulouse, 2013). But I didn't. I weave in this story because this too is important to know in thinking about literacy in an Indigenous context. It is important to think about the ways we know and the ways we share this knowing and the kinds of knowledge we might validate or disregard.

[2] In my experiences as an educator I note that while the Alberta Education English Language Arts program of studies is designed to have the general outcomes be achieved through a variety of listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and representing experiences, the standardized tests are designed to measure success tending to emphasize reading, writing, spelling and grammar in ways that can be measured easily.

Experiences of a Teacher Educator

At the time of the talk in December of 2014, since completing my doctorate in November of 2013, I had taught three undergraduate courses with a language and literacy focus for the Elementary Education program at the University of Alberta. In each of those courses I had asked my students to tell me about their first literacy experiences on their "early landscapes" (Greene, 1995, p. 73) because I believe that stories of experiences shape the way we understand and think about literacy. This task was often more difficult than one would imagine. Sometimes it was because the stories were hard ones that brought back memories of struggle, frustration, and feeling very silenced. Sometimes it was because the memories were great, stories of being read to every night with literature throughout the house and parents invested in the reading and writing skills of their young children. But always, by this stage of the game—the university years—the students looked at me with a bit of panic as I asked them to write so that I could *hear* them. They didn't understand what I meant. Sometimes I wasn't sure I understood what I meant, but I do know that I had an intuitive sense that I couldn't hear them, that they were writing stories and responses that they thought I wanted to hear while I was seeking to *hear* them, their voice, their stories, and their knowing. I wondered then, and I wonder now, where it is that we—my students and I—lost our ability to trust our stories and to trust our knowing.

The evening of the talk, I stood before the audience feeling as if it was my debut public talk about literacy from my Cree/Métis perspective. I knew that as a Kokom, mom, aunty, teacher, and now teacher educator I had been thinking about literacy from my Cree/Métis perspective my whole life. I had also been thinking about how my early landscape stories of literacy didn't always line up with the stories of literacy that educators seemed to covet. The grand narrative of literacy learning is often one of being nurtured by parents snuggling children reading books each night. And as I considered this narrative I felt a niggling sense of unease as I looked to my own childhood and realized that no one read to me when I went to bed and yet somehow I was the quintessential, nose in book, living in the library kind of child, and I still am. And I wondered how many other literacy learners didn't have that experience of family reading to them like in the movies or in the storybooks. I cringe a little now as I look back to my early teaching years and I think about the homework routine that I created. I knew better, from my own experience, and yet somehow I insisted that it would only be those children who read every night with their family, signing the little log book, who could be successful as literacy learners. I am not saying that those experiences are not wonderful—relationships being formed in the snuggles, conversations being held in the midst of the reading, and stories of experience being created to be retold in undergraduate classes. But what I am trying to ask, in this roundabout way, is what stories of literacy learning have I, and the undergraduate students in my education courses, silenced and which have we privileged and what might we learn from returning to those early landscapes and retelling stories that we had once disregarded?

When I said yes to speaking about literacy in an Indigenous context, many stories flooded back filling me with memories. Yet I was reluctant to bring them forward to the literacy event. I felt that perhaps they wouldn't be the literacy stories people had in mind. In the end I was compelled to share them anyway. I felt that I was supposed to share them

because they were there—my stories of experience as a literacy learner, the stories that once I had disregarded as not academic enough to bring to university courses.

I had come to understand over the three courses I taught as a teacher educator, and a lifetime of wonders, that literacy is about how we make sense of the world and who we are and are becoming in it. Literacy is about stories: stories we tell; stories we hear; and stories we come to live by, to retell, and relive again and again. But once, as a young and uncertain teacher who was beginning, I broke literacy apart into teeny, tiny sections called reading, writing, grammar, and spelling. Now, teaching undergraduate courses, I try to attend to those many, many parts while striving to honor inner knowing—my inner knowing—and to hear the voices and the inner knowing that my students bring into the classroom.

I don't disregard best practice or great pedagogy or the need for understanding curriculum as planned and curriculum as lived (Aoki, 2005), but I have to come to know that I need to recognize and acknowledge experience and stories because that is what literacy in an Indigenous context means to me. While research articles validated much of this knowing, I know that this inner understanding came to me in relationships, in conversations, and through the experiences I lived alongside of those who helped me make sense of the world.

Mosom Stories

One of the first stories I thought of for literacy in an Indigenous context was the memory of my Mosom.[3] He came to me once in a dream, speaking only Cree as he did in life, and taught me how to make one of those fur trapper hats with the flaps that come down and cover the ears. I don't understand very much Cree and so even in the dream I sort of nodded, smiled, and laughed as I do when I don't quite understand. But he was persistent and with the help of drawings of what he wanted me to do I understood. I was to sew and make a fur trapper's felt hat. I woke up that night and drew the pattern of the hat he wanted me to make in that dream although I never did make it.

This dream reminded me of forgotten memories of how he really did teach me as I was growing up, even though we did not speak the same language. For a time my mom and siblings and I lived with him in his cabin during my childhood. We had no running water, no power, and no heat so using a wood stove and coal oil lamp was how we managed. I have a memory of one particular morning when we were gathered at the kitchen table eating instant porridge. On the packages of instant porridge were pictures of animals. I remember my Mosom saying something in Cree, pointing at the image on the porridge package. I nodded, smiled, and laughed as I do when I do not understand, hoping he would quit talking before he realized that I had no idea what he was saying. But he persisted. I think my big sister caught on first and started repeating after him. I followed suit and so we, over breakfast, learned a few Cree words, learned to name some of the animals on the instant porridge package. What I didn't realize at the time, or even after that dream, what I didn't realize until this talk, was that this was an example of my early landscape stories (Greene, 1995) of literacy. This was literacy in an Indigenous Context, yet this was a story that never made it into my own writing or into my course

[3] Mosom is the word for grandfather in the Cree Language.

planning. Even as I shared this story with my sister in preparation for this talk, I heard the hesitation in her voice about how it might be received. I kept it in anyway because if I was going to ask my undergraduate students to share their early landscape literacy stories then I should do the same. I understand the vulnerability of sharing our stories and this too is what literacy means to me—sharing stories and vulnerability.

Stories of Moccasins

Just about a week before the literacy event I dreamt again of my Mosom. This time he was being honored. There was a healing Sundance[4] being held for him and his family in this dream. I was not raised to know the spiritual traditions of my Cree ancestors. My Mosom didn't indicate to us that he had any of this spiritual knowing or if he did, he did so in Cree and I didn't understand. I only know of these kinds of spiritual ceremonies through my work alongside Elders as an adult. And yet, in this dream my Mosom was being honored in this way. There I was, with my daughter, granddaughter, and my siblings in my dream. As we gathered, my sister noted that we were all in need of new moccasins. The ones we were wearing looked awkward and didn't fit. In this dream I knew things were good. I knew that as a family we were healing but I still felt like I wasn't the Indian I had in mind because my moccasins didn't fit. When I have these kinds of dreams I immediately talk to my sister, as I have done our whole lives, because while I didn't acknowledge it in my scholarly work, I have intuitively known that dreams are how I make sense of my world and who I am and am becoming. For me, dreams are part of literacy in my Cree/Métis context. And yet, I have never, as a teacher, a learner, or a professor, created any spaces where dreams might be welcomed.

So I filed that Mosom dream away, thinking it was interesting but over. Then, just a few nights before I gave the talk about literacy in an Indigenous context, I dreamt of cousins visiting me, my Mosom's other grandchildren. In this new dream I was telling them about the moccasins that didn't fit in my other dream. They looked at me, looked at my moccasins and said, "but they do." I looked down at my feet, in my dream, and I realized that they did, they really did fit. I realized that once again my Mosom was probably telling me something. He was telling me that the moccasins do fit. These stories, these dreams, are not the literacy I teach from the required textbook for the courses I teach about language arts and literacy, and yet they are literacy. So while I was full of angst, trying to negotiate which stories needed to be told for this talk, my Mosom and some of my cousins came to me in a dream to tell me that there was no need to worry; that I should tell the stories that showed up. They reassured me that somewhere in the audience there would be someone who would *hear* the story in the way that it needed to be heard and that this too, this sharing of stories of dreams, is literacy.

So now, while I still urge the pre-service teachers in my courses to learn about so-called best practice and to investigate good pedagogy, and to create a list of the current reading and writing strategies, I seek mostly to understand, to *hear*, their stories of literacy. I strive to use good children's literature to gently encourage the sharing of stories of literacy and I seek ways to care for them, to honor them, to hear them in ways that aren't always possible.

[4] The Sundance is a traditional ceremony practiced of several North American Indigenous Peoples.

Literacy in an Indigenous Context

My Mosom and I were not close. My story of him barely existed because I couldn't understand him. I couldn't have a conversation with him, not then when he lived and not now in my dreams of him. He spoke Cree and I understood (and still understand) very little. He was away or I was away and so my stories of him seemed small. It seemed like he and his stories belonged to my sister who tried harder to speak in Cree to him; or to my mom, a fluent Cree speaker; or even to my cousins who were closer to him. I have stories of my paternal grandma who spoke English to me, told me I would grow up to be queen, and to value schooling. I have stories of aunties who helped raise me and who read and wrote and finished their own education, telling me to value schooling. But I didn't have stories of my Mosom until I was ready to hear them, until they started to come to me in dreams and in memories, until I started to tell those stories too.

I understand now that stories that I think of as silenced, as voices that I cannot hear, might be just waiting for the right time to come forward. Maybe they are waiting until the grandmothers lure them to a gathering with the scent of stew and bannock, where a trusted colleague might be waiting to entice them with stories of Indigenous youth leadership, literacy, and Indigenous authors. I might never be the Indigenous educator who understands literacy in the ways you might have imagined, or the ways you might have hoped. I always take the long way, where I smile, nod, and laugh because I don't understand. But I do know that Literacy in an Indigenous context includes building and sustaining relationships, engaging in conversations, and telling and hearing stories of the ways we make sense of the world.

I end with the story of me, as I go back to my course planning where I take up those teeny, tiny, little pieces of literacy that I broke apart as I silenced stories of Mosoms and moccasins to become really good at stories of pedagogy and curriculum. I will continue to dream up a new story, possibly a story that starts with a Mosom, along with the grandmothers, teaching me to listen with more than my ears (Archibald, 2008, p. 8),[5] and then I just might hear the voices of my undergraduate students in ways that will help them to hear the stories of their youngest literacy learners. And then, maybe someday I will share another talk and tell a different story of literacy in an Indigenous context.

[5] Archibald (2008) speaks of learning to listen "with three ears: two on the sides of [my] head and the one that is in [my] heart" (p. 8).

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What Every Social Studies Teacher Should Know about Simulations

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Abstract

Simulations are of growing interest within the social studies in terms of research and practice. Although the findings of early research were unfavorable to simulations in terms of student learning, recent research has revealed new and interesting findings related to different domains of student learning that earlier research did not. In light of these conceptual and practical findings, it is important that teachers be granted access to the growth of knowledge in this burgeoning area of inquiry. To date, few scholars have disseminated to teachers the findings of existing research about simulations as it pertains to student learning, and to practitioners' planning and practice. In this article, I provide an account of research on simulation that will be helpful to teachers. The paper includes five critical areas that seek to help teachers better understand what simulations are, their affordances and challenges, as well as suggestions relating to the implications for teachers' curricular planning and implementation of simulations in their classrooms.

Introduction

Simulations and other related activities have seen a surge of interest in recent years. Researchers are finding new and innovative ways to explore how teachers are using simulations and what students are learning from their participation in simulations in their social studies classes. Recent research in the United States reveals that simulations and role-plays are commonly used by a majority of social studies teachers, and that those teachers who used simulations and role-plays were significantly more likely to value critical thinking over content acquisition than their peers who rarely or never used these activities (Stephens, Feinberg, & Zack, 2013). Further, teachers' use of simulations and role-plays were positively related to an emphasis on democratic skills (Stephens, Feinberg, & Zack, 2013). What is compelling about their findings is that the use of simulations parallels two critical components of 21st century skills—critical thinking and democratic skills—that have become central to the focus of educational innovation in recent years (e.g., Bellanca & Brandt, 2010; Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Still, simulations remain a bit of a mystery to us. As a profession we are only just starting to uncover their potential, and in many cases their use remains a gimmick rather than a vehicle of deep student learning (Dack, van Hover, & Hicks, in press). At the same time, while there is a lot of learning ahead for the field, there have been some interesting and important findings that may be useful for teachers in terms of their thinking, planning, and practice with simulations. In this paper I propose to offer a brief guide to thinking about how the theory and research on simulations can help us to develop more robust uses for these tools in social studies classrooms. In the first two sections, I emphasize two key facets of theory and research with simulations meant to support our understanding of these tools and what may be the most appropriate uses for them in the social studies classroom. In the last three sections, I outline three facets of practice

that may help teachers to implement and run simulations more effectively: the importance of weaving simulations and other forms of teaching together; the role of control in simulations; and how to prepare and support diverse students to successfully navigate simulations.

A Theory of Social Simulations

Why we need a theory of simulations, or what counts as a simulation?

Simulations are not new to the social studies, so as teachers we are familiar with the idea, but that familiarity has led to a lot of confusion (Wright-Maley, 2015a). In part this is because we all assume that we are talking about the same thing when we say "simulation." This assumption is problematic.

I found as I talked with potential candidates for my dissertation study on teachers' beliefs and practices around simulations that when I asked what they thought a simulation is, I did not receive a common response. Rather, teachers tended to lump simulations together with a variety of other activities: it's a role-play; it's a game; it's a model; it's a re-enactment; it's a play; it's a demonstration (Wright-Maley, 2015a). The fact is that we have not been operating with the same activity in mind, and we don't have the same ideas about what counts as a simulation. This makes it difficult for teachers to talk about using simulations in social studies classrooms. Let's imagine for a moment that you have created a simulation that works marvelously to teach students about how the legislative process works, they're engaged as legislators, lobbyists, and citizens trying to pass legislation. Through this activity they've learned not only how the process works, but have also developed a nuanced understanding and can articulate the complexities of legislators' lives in ways they never could before (e.g., Ganzler, 2010).

Your colleague tried to demonstrate the same process, using students to act it out for the class, while their peers watched. She put a lot of effort into the activity—writing out cue cards, finding props, directing students to act in certain ways—her students seemed to like it but their test scores did not improve enough to warrant all the extra work. When you bump into her you tell her that your simulation on legislation went so well and that she should try doing a simulation like it. She lets you know that she's already tried a legislation simulation. It was a lot of work and didn't work for her, but she's glad it worked for you. You leave wondering why it didn't work for her when it worked so well for you. Oh well, different strokes.

In my experience these exchanges are altogether too common among social studies teachers. *Simulation* is a term used much too loosely, and without a common understanding about what a simulation is, it is difficult for teachers to work with one another to strengthen their practices and their ideas about how to make social studies simulations effective tools for learning the critical skills that our students need. Therefore, even while teachers may refer to different kinds of activities—games, role-plays, models, and re-enactments as simulations, these tools actually have very specific and different purposes. This lack of convention may be partly responsible for why some teachers and teacher educators believe simulations have little value for social studies students (Fogo, 2014; Thieman & Carano, 2013).

Until recently, simulations haven't been exposed to the same rigorous analytical and theoretical framing and evaluation that other concepts like citizenship (e.g., Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) or historical thinking (e.g., Levesque, 2008) have. If we are going to understand simulations and their potential, we have to be clear about what this concept means; it is

important to be clear when we talk about what a simulation is, because simulations are a very specific kind of activity.

What is a simulation? They are "pedagogically mediated activities used to reflect the dynamism of real life events, processes, or phenomena, in which students participate as active agents whose actions are consequential to the outcome of the activity" (Wright-Maley, 2015a, p. 8). In other words, activities are really only simulations if students are active, and the decisions they make during the simulation create a yet-to-be-determined outcome that nevertheless represents a real process, event, or dynamic. At the same time, there must be a reason—framed and guided by the teacher—for using the simulation such that it informs students' understanding of the simulation's real-life equivalent. Let us unpack that: When evaluating an activity that claims to be a simulation, there are several questions you can ask to help determine the answer.

Does this activity represent a real-life process, event, or phenomenon? In order for a simulation to be meaningful, it must somehow illuminate the real world; it must simulate what is happening outside of the classroom. So if it does not represent a real-life process, event, or phenomenon, then it is not a simulation. For example, Model U.N. represents a real institution and the process by which decisions are made within this organization. So, too, does an assembly line simulation, which asks students to compare between artisan and industrial models of production. In contrast, putting historical actors from the French Revolution on trial in a modern courtroom does not have verisimilitude—approximation—to real life processes, events, or phenomena of the historical time in question.

Do the actions of my students have the chance to alter the conclusion of the activity? We must also ask whether students have the latitude to make decisions that will help to determine the outcome of the simulation. This dynamic aspect of simulations might be their most quintessential component. The consequential outcomes proceeding from real life events are rarely, if ever, predetermined; individuals involved in these events are autonomous, and react sometimes in unpredictable ways. If our activity is going to be a simulation, our students must be able to act autonomously to make decisions that lead to potentially unexpected outcomes. For example, in a Darfur Peace Conference simulation I observed, some regional representatives ended up declaring war on Sudan, even though this contradicted their explicit goal of finding a peaceful solution to the crisis; this led to learning about the failure of parties to negotiate effectively (Wright-Maley, 2015b). In contrast, performing the musical *1776*, may teach about the events surrounding the signing of the Declaration of Independence, but it fails to give students the latitude to act autonomously, or make decisions that are not already dictated by the script.

Are my students actively involved in this activity, or are they passive observers? If students are not involved in the activity, but instead mere observers, then it is not a simulation; it is theatre. In much in the same way that going to the movies is not a simulation of being a superhero, watching others participate in an activity does not simulate the phenomena for the students. Watched activities situate students as passive recipients of knowledge rather than as embodied and embodying participants living out the phenomenal experience. Without such participatory action, students are not able to bridge actual experience with theoretical or intellectual knowledge (see Geurts, Duke, & Vermeulen, 2007). Students must be engaged in the process as it unfolds—just as individuals are in the real world—in order to fully appreciate how the culmination of many individual actions can lead to specific (if often different) outcomes. To be sure, they only experience the simulation through the lens of their own experiences, but this is also representative of the real world.

Am I able to use this activity to teach something specific and meaningful about the phenomenon or process it is meant to represent? Simulations are too time-consuming to be used as a gimmick. At their best, they can illuminate important understandings that are not possible to convey, or are not conveyed as powerfully, by other means. For example, a teacher can explain why collusion is difficult to orchestrate within oligopolies and also why an oligopoly does not function in the same way as a monopoly. But the OPEC simulation reveals that despite their best efforts, collusion is difficult to manufacture and maintain. Likewise, a teacher can try to convey the fear people feel during epidemics, but a plague simulation can embody the sense of impending doom even within the safety of the classroom. But simulations that do not have a clear pedagogical aim are often, as Dack, van Hover, and Hicks (in press) noted, purposeless (at best) and miseducative (at worst). They noted that teachers' use of historical simulations had an identifiable pedagogical aim only some of the time.

Moreover, it is not enough to have a purpose for using simulation, but to have a purpose that is appropriate to the function of simulations (i.e., the illumination of processes underlying events and other phenomena). As Dack, van Hover, and Hicks (in press) reported in their research when teachers did have a purpose their simulations were often used to illustrate actual events rather than the processes that shaped them. As such these activities were frequently derailed by students' dynamic choices and detracted from student learning by illustrating historical misconceptions in a majority of the cases where these experiential activities were used. This highlights that if the activity does not serve to highlight a process or phenomena, then it fails to simulate that reality, and thereby fails to be a simulation. As such, our purposes for using simulation must be aligned with what these activities are suitably able to accomplish.

Using this definition. By asking the above questions teachers can help themselves determine whether the activity in question is a simulation, and would function to achieve the purposes of simulations. This definition is necessary because the purposes of simulations, role plays, models, and games in a classroom environment are different, and so, too, are the reasons why we might choose to implement them in our classrooms. Furthermore, knowing what a simulation is, and what its appropriate uses are helps us to figure out how best to use them.

Now that we have a working definition for simulations and have determined the circumstances for which it is appropriate to use simulations, we can start to make sense of what we know about simulations and their impact on student learning. Renewed research into teachers' practices with simulations is just beginning anew, but findings in recent years are beginning to create a clearer picture of what some of the intrinsic strengths and weaknesses of simulations are that build upon some of the seminal research of decades past.

What are the affordances and challenges associated with simulations?

Like any pedagogical tool, simulations have strengths and weaknesses. They can be powerful activities when our goals align well with what simulations afford, but can also fall flat, or prove to be a waste of time when we use them inappropriately or for ends they are not meant to serve. Below, I provide a snapshot of some of the research findings around simulations in social studies research that can help teachers to see where these strengths lay and facilitate their decisions about how best to use them. In Table 1, I have included some key findings relating to the topics I will discuss in this section. The reader should be aware that this is not an exhaustive list, and also includes some additional sources not discussed in greater detail below.

Table 1
Key findings relating to simulations' affordances and challenges

Source(s)	Finding	Affordance or Challenge
Bredemeier & Greenblat (1981); Corbeil & Laveault (2011); Druckman (1995); Pierfy (1977); Randel, et al. (1992)	Simulations are no more effective than other approaches to learning related to the accumulation of factual knowledge, but requires more time.	Challenge
Barton & Levstik (2013); Dack, van Hover, & Hicks (In Press); McCall (2012); Schweber (2003); Totten (2000); Totten & Feinberg (1995)	Simulation risk being miseducative, leading to shallow historical learning, or trivializing the past if not used carefully	Challenge
Blaga (1978)	Simulations are time consuming	Challenge
Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973); Milgrim (1963); Wright-Maley (2014a)	Some simulations may risk psychological harm to students	Challenge
Gilley (2004); Glavin (2008); Schweber (2003); Wright-Maley (2015b)	Simulations require teachers to shift roles and address content and process flexibly in response to shifting simulation dynamics	Challenge
Parker, et al. (2011)	Using simulation without sufficient background content and process knowledge can "leave students floundering" (p. 552)	Challenge
Pierfy (1977); Pate & Meteja (1979)	Simulations can lead to better content retention over time	Affordance
Parker, et al. (2011)	Simulations can contribute to increased achievement both in terms of standardized exams and deeper conceptual learning.	Affordance
Johnson, Boyer, & Brown (2011)	Simulations can lead to significant gains in understanding about the phenomena being simulated.	Affordance
Corbeil & Laveault (2011)	Students learn about issues in non-linear ways, enabling them to recognize the complexity of concepts in tangible ways	Affordance
Colella, (2000); Parker, et al. (2011); Niv-Solomon, et al. (2011); Stephens, Feinberg, & Zack (2013); Williams & Williams, (2007)	Simulations can facilitate the development of critical and systematic ways of thinking and problem solving, as well as foster democratic skills	Affordance
Bredemeier & Greenblat (1981); Ganzler (2010); Gehlbach, et al. (2008); Gehlbach (2011); Ioannou et al. (2009), Yukhymenko, (2011)	Simulations can lead to increased engagement with specific content,, social studies as a whole, and in related domains such as the political process.	Affordance
Cherryholmes (1966); Dunleavy, Dede, & Mitchell (2009); Wright-Maley (2015b)	Simulations appear to reduce rather than exacerbate discipline problems	Affordance
Ben-Peretz (2003); Byrnes' & Kiger (1990); Else (2006); Ganzler (2010); Maitles & McKelvie (2010); Schweber (2003)	Simulations can foster perspective recognition, empathy, and care for others	Affordance
Gehlbach et al. (2008); Johnson et al. (2011); Lay and Smaric (2006)	Simulations can lead to more realistic understandings for participants of their actual levels of knowledge and competency.	Affordance
(Ciciora, 2009)	Simulations can provide students with opportunities to grapple with "difficult knowledge"	Affordance

Engagement

We have known for decades that simulations help engage students (Bredemeier & Greenblat, 1981; Dunleavy, Dede, & Mitchell, 2008; Gehlbach, Brown, Ioannou, Boyer, Hudson, Niv-Soloman, et al., 2008; Yukhymenko, 2011) and that engagement is at least one reason why simulations are used (Dack, van Hover, & Hicks, in press). But as I argued in the previous section, student engagement on its own is not a sufficiently compelling reason for using

simulations. Engagement may, however, be an entry point into content that promotes learning (see Parker et al., 2011). For example, one compelling finding revealed in early research on simulations, is that the use of simulations may cue students ability to remember lessons from simulations over a period of time that extends beyond the memories held by peers who did not experience the simulation (Green, 1980; Pierfy, 1977). These memories tend to be enduring, outlasting many other memories of schooling long past (Alleman & Brophy, 1994). Although student engagement may lead to a longer period of remembering, we have to keep in mind what it is students are most (and least) likely to remember from having participated in these simulations.

Rote content learning

Research into rote content acquisition resulting from simulations proves to be quite damning for this strategy. Decades of research illustrate that simulations are a poor choice for filling students with content knowledge, at least when compared to lectures or book learning (Bredemeier & Greenblat, 1981; Cherryholmes, 1966; Corbeil & Laveault, 2008; Pierfy, 1977; Randel, Morris, Wetzel, & Whitehill, 1992). Given simulations' central purpose for illuminating dynamic processes that underlie events (see Wright-Maley, 2015a) it is easy to see why their use could fail to help students recall dates, statistics, events, and other content information that are traditionally focused on in student assessments (e.g., tests). If this is your purpose for using simulations, they are being misapplied.

The focus of simulations' apparent weaknesses for the acquisition of rote content knowledge with when compared to their peers who did not participate in simulations led scholars in the past to dismiss simulations as an overly cumbersome way to teach social studies—which is still, unfortunately, what many social studies classrooms emphasize (see Russell, 2010). But, as the social studies is becoming more process driven—albeit slowly—the emphasis on rote content knowledge has given way in small part to other forms of knowledge development for which simulations appear to be well-suited.

Content for use in complex thinking

In particular, simulations appear to be helpful in fostering the kinds of skills and capacities such as critical and creative thinking, problem solving, adapting to changing circumstances, and collaboration and communication. These skills form the basis of what has come to be called *21st century skills* (see Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). The changing demands of the social studies for a more powerful practice within the discipline is one in which teaching and learning are less about content acquisition, and more about what students can do with the content (NCSS, 2008). One great example of this focus on learning with simulations is the recent award-winning research conducted by Walter Parker and his associates (2011, 2013) that demonstrated that embedding simulations as a centerpiece within units can actually significantly increase student performance on standardized tests. They set out to test the theory that by engaging students first with the challenge that simulations provide, that students would be able to make better use of the unit's content. Parker and his team developed simulations and the curricula around them to be used in AP Civics classrooms, where the simulation would be used to engage students in complex thinking around particular units throughout the course. For example, the first simulation—used to engage students in learning about "constitutional underpinnings" (p. 538)—

was a simulation called "*A Government for Xlandia*, [where] students are members of a UN task force advising a new nation just emerging from a long dictatorship about the various forms and features of constitutional democracy" (p. 541). Parker and associates (2011) looked at performance data from the AP test as well as those from a pre-/post-test of their own design that they refer to as a "Complex Scenario Deep Learning Assessment" (p. 545). What these researchers found that the academic performance of the simulations group outperformed their peers in the control group at the same high performing school, and the simulations group at a lower-performing school performed in line with the control group (which constituted a significant change from the pre-intervention findings). The findings of this study point to the conclusion that simulations can help students to develop their capacity to think through complex problems and more expertly use content towards those ends. They can even contribute to higher standardized test scores (DiCamillo & Gradwell, 2012; Parker et al., 2011, 2013)

Soft skills development

Although it would seem to be enough to suggest that using simulations helped improve students thinking and learning as well as their performance on tests such as the AP Civics test, there appears to be additional benefits that contribute to the development of soft skills, which scholars define as "personality traits, goals, motivations, and preferences that are valued in the labor market, in school, and in many other domains" (Heckman & Kautz, 2012, p. 451). According Heckman and Katz (2012), who reviewed the scholarship on soft skills, concluded that these skills, "predict success in life…[and] causally produce that success," (p. 451). They conclude further that efforts to improve soft skills have "an important place in a portfolio of public policies to foster human development" (p. 464) in which education surely plays and important role.

Research on simulations helps to reveal some of the ways that simulations serve not only to boost achievement, but also have the potential to foster students' pro-social and soft skills: increasing students' willingness to engage in the political process (Ganzler, 2010); developing student empathy for their peers and for people who have had to suffer under and struggle against circumstances of discrimination and oppression (Byrnes & Kiger, 1990; Else, 2006; Maitles & McKelvie, 2010); altering students' sense of self-efficacy in ways that more accurately reflect their actual present abilities (Gehlbach, et al., 2008; Johnson, Boyer, & Brown, 2011); and learning how to collaborate and communicate to achieve their goals (Niv-Solomon, et al., 2011; Williams & Williams, 2007). Although these outcomes do not show up on tests of knowledge, it is clear that these are important life skills that contribute to the goals of 21st century learning (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). Moreover, the active nature of simulations asks students to engage flexibly, adapting to circumstances within a context of "in situ practice" that abstract learning simply cannot provide (Kirkwood-Tucker, 2004). This kind of practice also lends itself to questions of morality. But as I will describe in the following section, simulations uses for these purposes hold the potential to be both liberating and also fraught with pitfalls.

The moral dimension

The use of simulations poses a moral quandary: Is it right to use simulations to address issues of a deeply moral nature, such as those addressing discrimination and oppression—the domain of "complex and tragic historical episodes of the human experience" (Wright-Maley,

2014a, p. 19) such as the Holocaust and slavery? Some scholars have argued that there is no place for simulations of this type in social studies classrooms because they trivialize and misrepresent the past (e.g., Totten, 2000; Totten & Feinberg, 1995). How after all could students pretend that their simulated experience gives them any relevant insight into the horrors and depravities of the past? Even more concerning, such simulations also have the potential to be psychologically harmful to if teachers are not careful about how they implement them. This was certainly the case of the slavery simulation that led to a human rights complaint in Hartford, CT (see Wright-Maley, 2014a) where students were not sure whether what they were experiencing was real or a simulation.

Schweber (2003) likewise started from this point of departure, she argued that "to simulate [the Holocaust] experientially might be to reduce it *ad absurdum* to kitsch" (p. 140) and represented "the conflation of contradictory genres, in a sense—the tragedy of the Holocaust itself and any nontragic representation of it—which becomes aesthetically and morally 'vulgar'" (p. 141). But as she came to evaluate students' understanding of the Holocaust, she came to recognize that students, such as one named Calypso, may have missed out on some of the historical details, but demonstrated a "moral learning" that "dwarfed her informational gap," learning "about Jewish victimization, if not in all its historical complexity, at least in meaningful, moral depth" (p. 180). I argue that there remains value in simulations of this kind when they are used with caution and care by adept teachers (Wright-Maley, 2014a).

Similarly, Else's (2006) and Byrnes' and Kiger's (1990) work around the (in)famous blue-eyes/brown-eyes simulation reveals both deeply problematic and yet significant counter-discriminatory outcomes from this activity. The tension at the heart of this particular simulation and the quandary it presents is whether the potential for harm in putting people in the position of an oppressor is outweighed by the clear and profound ways in which being the victim and victimizer in this simulation may lead to significant reductions in discriminatory attitudes in the real world. This is difficult to answer; it is a quandary in which one value is pitted against another. In some cases, such as the Milgrim (1963) and Stanford Prison (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973) experiments demonstrate, these trade-offs are clearly imbalanced toward harm, but other like the brown-eyes/blue-eyes simulation are less clear. We must, of course, concern ourselves with our students well-being above all else. At the same time, we must not confuse psychological harm with emotional stress. Such stress, in supportive environments may help provide students ways of processing difficult knowledge (Ciciora, 2009), while at the same time enabling the development of empathy (Ben-Peretz, 2003) on the part of students for humans with whom they are unlikely to share either time or space (see also Wright-Maley, 2014a).

In my own experience, simulations that do not pit students against each other are much less ethically fraught than those that do. One of the lessons that Milgram's (1963) and Zimbardo's (1963) works reveal is that the realization that "I" have the innate capacity to harm others is deeply scarring and psychologically harmful. As such, I suggest that teachers avoid structuring simulations in this way. I have found from my own practice as a high school teacher, where I developed my own totalitarian simulation, that setting up a dynamic where I, as the teacher, am the locus of oppression—much in the same way that Ms. Bess was in Schweber's (2003) case study—which allows students the permission to act in response to evil, rather than being forced to embody it. Payne, Hoffman, and DeJulio (2015) offered yet another alternative structure in which the "controller" that embodies the morally dubious position of power is an imaginary construct with whom students interact.

Summary

Like all pedagogical tools, simulations have their strengths and weaknesses. Most importantly, simulations provide students with engaging and memorable circumstances that enable them to: think critically; act and react to dynamic circumstances; develop both academic and soft skills; and consider the moral dimensions of human experience palpably and meaningfully. At the same time, simulations are not effective for producing gains in rote knowledge, and they have the potential to do psychological harm or be miseducative if they are poorly conceived or implemented carelessly. Simulations have great potential, but teachers must also put a lot of thought in how to execute these simulations effectively to bring that potential into reality. In the following three sections, I address three areas of interest from which teachers may draw important lessons regarding the implementation of simulations in their classrooms.

How can I plan for getting the most out of using simulations for learning?

The research of Walter Parker and his associates (2011, 2013) demonstrated that even in courses where content coverage is of central concern (AP Government classes in this case), the use of simulations as the centerpiece of each unit led to significant increases in students' AP test scores compared to the control group (discussed earlier). The key here is that the simulations were integrated with other forms of teaching and learning.

Facilitating this process

It seems that students may be most successful when they have adequate background knowledge to draw upon during the simulation and when the simulation can act as a touchstone for students to return to over time in order to make sense of further learning. In this way, simulations may serve as an intermediary activity that helps students to link explicit (content) knowledge to tacit (experiential) knowledge (Geurts, Duke, & Vermeulen, 2007). In other words, they act as the glue that holds the content together for students. For example, in government courses, students need to understand how the legislature and legislative processes function (explicit knowledge) before they can engage effectively in a legislative simulation that is reflective of those functions and processes. At the same time, following the simulation, students need to be able to use their experience as legislators, lobbyists, aides, etc. (tacit knowledge) to make meaning of other aspects of knowledge about the history or proceedings of the legislature (knowledge synthesis).

There may be, however, cases where students participating in a simulation prior to conversations about highly politicized issues may lead to more productive engagement (although that requires a simulation that does not require specialized knowledge that will be developed later in the lesson sequence). This priming may help to circumvent dogmatic or ideological positions because the primary mode of engagement is experiential, not conceptual. If the experience precedes students' intellectual engagement with the topic, it may be possible for students' experiences to trump their preconceptions. Several examples of using simulations in this way exist. For example DiCamillo (2015) and Wright-Maley (2013) both describe simulations that prime students to discuss issues that are tainted by preexisting ideological positions: immigration policy and economic inequality, respectively.

It is starting to become clear, however, that the more central the simulation is to the core learning outcomes of the unit in which it is used, the more useful it becomes in generating meaningful learning (Parker et al., 2011; 2013). That is to say, simulations should not be thought of as one-off activities used to generate interest, but rather as catalysts for deeper and more richly textured learning experiences grounded in a larger curricular context. Even while teachers sometimes recognize this potential, it is my experience that many of them shy away from simulations because they worry about the apparent chaos that simulations tend to engender; teachers are concerned that they'll lose control over their class if they use simulations. In the next section, I provide some insight into the ways in which teachers may create space for dynamism without feeling as though their classes are out of control.

How do I control the simulation?

The answer to this question may surprise most teachers: Your goal should be to control the simulation as little as necessary and as subtly as possible. Simulations are dynamic and "chaordic"—chaos within an ordered system (Leigh & Spindler, 2004); simply put, teacher-control can—and often does—interfere with this core attribute. The more the teacher interferes with the natural flow of the activity by trying control it, the more likely it is to fail to live up to its potential.

In my own research found that when teachers tried to limit student participation (e.g., no you can't do that) within the simulation or impose actions upon students (e.g., you must do it this way), their simulations fell apart (Wright-Maley, 2015b). I refer to this form of interference as "hard control." Interjecting in these ways interrupts students' flow, bringing them out of the micro-world created by the simulation, and back into the world of the classroom. As Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) point out, students' attention needs to remain focused within the activity to reach a level of optimum experience, and students' complete, attentive immersion in the experience is ultimately the purpose of the simulation.

This is not to say that the teacher does not have a role to play or should not have any directive role in the simulation. On the contrary, I contend that teachers have a responsibility to make sure students know exactly how the simulation works, what is expected of them during the simulations, and what their goals are within the simulation (referred to as organizational control). I also found that teachers who use "soft control" within simulations to help ensure their effectiveness, know that students' decision making can be *nudged* by insinuating ideas that may change the way they think about the scenario or the options in front of them. Teachers can also reboot a simulation when student decision-making has led them to fail in their objectives, instead of trying to make sure they don't fail to do so in the first place (Wright-Maley, 2015b).

To be certain, a teacher is responsible for keeping their students safe and making sure that the simulation does not spin out of control to wreak havoc on students or the classroom; this is true of any classroom activity. Nevertheless, a well-organized simulation in a well-informed class of students provides a lot of latitude for dynamism. Ultimately, the teacher's role is to make sure that learning happens as a result of the simulation, not to micromanage how students act and react within the simulation (Wright-Maley, 2015b).

This conclusion can come across as Pollyannaish to teachers of students with low levels of academic proficiency, who may feel like the use of soft control specifically, or simulations generally, just would not work for their students. As someone who spent my teaching career working with both high- and exceedingly low-performing students, I understand the reticence

and apprehension teachers may feel. In the next section, I will illustrate how simulation may actually serve low-performing students better than traditional forms of teaching. At the same time, I will illustrate how two teachers prepare different kinds of students to participate in simulations. The variable needs of the students require differentiated approaches to scaffolding. It is this scaffolding that makes it possible to use simulations with all students, not just high achieving ones.

But can simulations work with *my* students?

I have heard many teachers express that simulations sound great in theory, but would "never work with my students." Teachers can feel uncomfortable using them with their students who they perceive to lack the academic skills or behavioral dispositions they believe to be prerequisites for such activities. Such thinking is mistaken.

DiCamillo and Gradwell (2013) discuss this "myth" in detail, pointing out that the teachers in their case study successfully integrated multiple simulations into their curriculum for a lower-performing class in which approximately a quarter of their students were in special education. One of the teachers in my own study—Josh Pollan—taught both honours-level and remedial-level courses of the same subject. In those courses, he used the same simulations, and found that his students were receptive to, and benefited from, these activities. Students at all levels of academic ability benefited from the opportunity to apply their knowledge in practice, to deepen their critical thinking skills, and link their lived experiences to academic learning (Wright-Maley, 2014b; see also Parker, et al., 2011; Geurts, Duke, & Vermeulen, 2007). Further, it may be—as Freire (1970) brought to light—that more academically challenged students may perform more expertly in the activities most similar to life itself, which can serve to bridge these lived experiences to abstract, academic thinking and learning that may be more challenging for low-performing students. Interestingly, I found that behavioural problems with these students actually decreased during the simulation when compared to the content lesson preceding it (Wright-Maley, 2014b). I am not alone in this conclusion (see Cherryholmes, 1966; Dunleavy, Dede, & Mitchell, 2009).

It is very important, however, to consider the needs of your students as you implement your simulations. There are different, albeit equally successful, ways of approaching simulations (Wright-Maley, 2014b). For teachers with more academically inclined students, they might spend time teaching their students the processes, practicing the procedures they will use with students (such as in a model U.N.), and then letting students run the process with little interference. This is how Rosalie Green ran her international relations course (Wright-Maley, 2014b, 2015b).

With less academically inclined students who may lack confidence in their abilities, the teacher must take a more hands-on role in supporting students through the process of the simulation in a step-by-step manner, while also supporting students' autonomous decision making. For example, in my paper, I described how Josh Pollan walked students through the stages of a democratic town hall meeting, helping a student to be confident as an elected representative while talking to her constituents—the rest of the class (Wright-Maley, 2014b). This approach might be akin to a live action choose-your-own adventure, where students have a great deal of structure and support, but still get to make the decisions that lead to unexpected outcomes, and thus opportunities for empowerment and reflection. In diverse classes, teachers may also blend these two approaches so that the more confident students are left to their devices,

while the teacher actively supports struggling or special needs students. In his senior elective course, Pollan initiated his simulation in a similar way to Green's typical approach, allowing his more capable students participate in the bronze-age market simulation without much interference from him. Meanwhile, he dedicated his time to one high needs student, treating her as an apprentice; he taught her over the course of three rounds how to trade independently (Wright-Maley, 2014b). Although both approaches varied in the types of scaffolding that he used, both were effective for supporting students who might not typically be given the opportunity to participate in simulations.

My work with teachers across a range of courses has demonstrated for me that it is the failure of the approach to simulations that may not be appropriate or sufficient for certain students (e.g., insufficient or ineffective structures of support) that is the primary source of the simulations' failure to be an effective learning tool. With the right scaffolding, simulations can be, and are, used for the benefit all students.

Conclusion

It is clear that not every activity we call a simulation is, in fact, a simulation. Rather, simulations constitute a very specific strategy to teach about real life events, processes, and phenomena, in a dynamic fashion. This realization has implications for how we use simulations in our classrooms. Teachers should be careful to plan their teaching such that simulations support and build upon material taught in other lessons. Moreover, their purposes for using simulations must extend beyond the acquisition of content knowledge to the use of that knowledge to understand complex phenomena and processes. Further, teachers should understand that simulations can benefit all students, but that how we prepare them to engage in these activities and how we manage simulations while they are in motion is consequential for our students' experiences, and ultimately, their learning.

It is vitally important for our society that students have opportunities to develop their: critical thinking skills; abilities to act in situ; understanding of how/when to work together or compete; communication of ideas in convincing ways; capacities to engage in democratic processes; as well as other skills and forms of knowledge not easily developed through transmission-teaching. This is not a new idea, but one borne out of the progressive era. John Dewey (1997/1938) believed firmly that education should more closely resemble the lives that our students will live. Simulations are one way that we can approach this reality, certainly to a much greater degree than more traditional pedagogies. Thus, it is essential that teachers become capable of integrating and orchestrating simulations effectively. In this paper I have attempted to provide a glimpse into this nascent body of research to provide the basis for the first important steps that teachers can take to bolster their understanding of simulations, and to improve or expand upon their practices in their social studies classrooms.

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Book Review

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Review of:

VanSledright, B. (2014). *Assessing historical thinking & understanding: Innovative designs for new standards*. New York, NY: Routledge.

History education researchers and history teachers have shown a growing interest in the teaching and learning of historical thinking. However, little has been said about how to assess disciplinary thinking in history. Bruce VanSledright, professor of history and social studies education at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, attempts to fill this void with this timely and important book, entitled *Assessing Historical Thinking & Understanding*. Throughout the book, VanSledright proposes new methods of history assessment that utilize best teaching practices that are aligned with the American Common Core English Language Arts strand concerning history (Common Core, 2015). This book is relevant to the Canadian context as well. Provincial curricula in Québec, British Columbia, Manitoba, and now Ontario emphasize historical thinking and as a result this book is a useful resource for teachers faced with teaching and assessing historical thinking.

The main is focus in this book is using diagnostic assessment in order to provide formative evidence of students' understanding of historical thinking so that teachers may give feedback to the students, and adjust their teaching process accordingly. VanSledright has organized the book around the assessment triangle identified by Pellegrino, Chudowsky and Glasner (2001) where the three pillars of assessment are: a theoretical model of domain learning, tasks that allow for performance observation of learning goals, and the interpretation method for making inferences from student evidence. This part of the book is arguably the most important because it demonstrates a model for deep learning and understanding in history.

The strong emphasis on historical thinking in this book presupposes a familiarity with the processes and concepts of historical thinking. These concepts have become increasingly well known in the history education field through a number of publications (Lévesque, 2008; Lévesque, 2013; Seixas & Morton, 2013; VanSledright, 2010). VanSledright (2014) reviews these elements; however, the novice teacher or the history teacher without a strong background in the methodologies of the discipline may find his triangular model a roadblock to implementation. This is a valid concern because provincial curricula like Ontario in 2013 and Manitoba in 2014 have shifted towards historical thinking as underpinning learning in history (Government of Manitoba, 2014; Government of Ontario, 2013). Many history teachers lack the proper pedagogical skills in order to fully teach historical thinking in their classrooms. In Québec, where historical thinking has been part of the curriculum since 2007, many history teachers do not have formal training in history pedagogy (Éthier & Lefrançois, 2011). Also, when teachers have been progressively trained in disciplinary methods as history educators their experiences in teacher's college often do not transfer to their own classrooms (Barton & Levstik, 2004). It would appear that there may be difficulty in implementing the assessment mind-shift

when many teachers have not adopted the mindset that teaching historical thinking is, as VanSledright (2014) states, "*sine qua non*" (p. 6).

This book offers teachers an alternate method of assessing student knowledge of historical content, while also incorporating historical thinking concepts. Instead of the traditional multiple choice question, VanSledright (2014) proposes a weighted multiple choice model where students select the best answer from a list that has only one answer that is completely incorrect, but the other possibilities are somewhat correct (p. 59). In this model students would be awarded four points the most correct answer, two points for the next most compelling answer, and one point for the third. This model allows for questions that are at higher levels on Bloom's Taxonomy and point to the complexity of the discipline itself. In weighted multiple choice questions the prompt is important because the purpose of the question is to assess historical understanding based on the procedures and cognitive strategies that the students have been using in class; for example:

> Based on the way the evidence we examined comes together, we can argue that Truman's primary purpose for dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was to
>
> a. avoid a costly and perilous ground invasion of the Japanese mainland.
> b. devastate the kamikaze morale and the arsenal of the Japanese air force.
> c. bring the immediate surrender of axis powers to allied forces.
> d. assert American military strength in the face of communist expansionism.

This model of multiple-choice test has the benefit of assessing deeper understanding and can be used in not only a formative manner because it gives information to the teacher about the level of student understanding, but also a summative way because the information could be used to make a judgment about a student's achievement. While VanSledright is primarily concerned with the diagnostic assessment, the summative aspect is important to teachers who must report on student progress through grades. Here, the weighted multiple choice question could provide teachers an important summative tool that they may use, especially in programs of study that incorporate historical thinking within their standards.

The book also looks at other forms of assessment that are of interest to teachers. Question prompts with documents, interpretation essays, project presentations, verbal reports, and video analysis are considered as methods to corroborate information about student achievement. These other assessment strategies are open-ended and allow students to use evidence to substantiate and contextualize their interpretations.

VanSledright is writing from his position in the United States where accountability rules the day. He is guardedly optimistic that a change in assessment climate may occur: "In order for diagnostic assessment to operate in a large-scale testing culture, that culture in many different ways would need to redefine its attitudes and values regarding the purposes of assessing" (p. 115). The first step in addressing this culture is in the classroom. Teachers need to take ownership of the curriculum and create a classroom assessment environment that promotes thinking and learning with students as partners in their learning (Brookhart, 2003). How might this look in a Canadian context? We can use the example of the imposition of the War Measures Act in order to see a weighted multiple-choice question in action. Primary source material is available through the Virtual Historian website; for example, a possible question might look like:

Based on the evidence we studied, we can argue that Trudeau's primary purpose for invoking the War Measures Act was:

a. to compensate for the inadequacy of the Quebec Police and the RCMP.
b. to project power and strength to a scared population.
c. because of the insufficient powers of the Criminal Code.
d. because of the threat of a well-armed and co-ordinated FLQ.

A diagnostic question like this opens up a number of avenues for the teacher to take the learning. First of all, it is an easy formative assessment in a ticket out the door scenario or lesson plenary. The question could be used prior to students beginning an argumentative piece because it would help the teacher understand the learning that took place during the lesson. As well, it could also help prepare students in developing a thesis statement or it could set up a discussion over whether or not the implementation of the War Measures Act was justified or not. This book offers ideas for the teacher that wishes to implement an assessment process that promotes deep learning of the discipline of history.

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