Research in social education over the last forty years has broken new ground in such areas as historical understanding, civic education, cultural studies, and curriculum and assessment. This collection is comprised of reflections on the professional trajectories of nineteen leading social studies scholars. Demonstrating that their professional interests have emerged from their autobiographies, the scholars write about their personal influences, professional choices, and contributions. The book reveals how social justice, difference and diversity, and a commitment to the ongoing project of democracy have been central to their work. The chapters in this volume reveal leading social educators’ determined sense of urgency about making the world a better place through their leadership in the field.

Each essay provides students, practitioners, and researchers alike with background on the nineteen scholars. Also, the scholars provide lists of their favorite publications as well as the works of other scholars that influenced them. Taken together, the chapters in this volume offer thoughts on the past, present, and future of social studies.
Leaders in Social Education
LEADERS IN EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

Volume 5

Series Editor:

Leonard J. Waks
Temple University, Philadelphia, USA

Scope:

Leaders in Educational Studies provides a comprehensive account of the transformation of educational knowledge since 1960, based on rich, first-person accounts of the process by its acknowledged leaders.

The series provides unique insights into the formation of the knowledge base in education, as well as a birds-eye view of contemporary educational scholarship.

The initial volume, Leaders in Philosophy of Education: Intellectual Self Portraits, contains personal essays by 24 leading philosophers of education from North America and the United Kingdom. The second volume, Leaders in Curriculum Studies: Intellectual Self-Portraits, contains similar essays by 18 leading curriculum scholars. The volume on historians of American education contains essays by 25 leaders in this field. The current volume on gender and education has essays from 16 leaders from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Volumes on other fields of educational scholarship are now being prepared.

Until the 1950s school teachers were trained for the most part in normal schools or teacher training colleges. The instructors were drawn from the teacher corps; they were not professional scholars. Those offering classes in so-called ‘foundational disciplines’ in education were not trained in these disciplines. Educational scholarship was generally weak and cut off from contemporary work in the so-called ‘parent’ disciplines. Professors relied on textbooks featuring out-of-date, dumbed-down knowledge.

In the late 1950s plans were made to bring a higher level of professionalism to school teaching. In the United States, the remaining normal schools initially became state colleges, and eventually state universities. In the United Kingdom, the training colleges were initially brought under the supervision of university institutes; eventually teaching was transformed into an all-graduate profession.

Commentators on both sides of the Atlantic argued that if education was to become a proper field of university study, educational scholarship itself would have to be transformed. Scholars were recruited into educational studies from social sciences and humanities disciplines to contribute to teacher education and to train a new generation of educational scholars in contemporary research methods.

Under their influence the knowledge base for education has been completely transformed. In addition to major accomplishments in philosophy, history, sociology and economics of education, interdisciplinary work in educational studies has flourished. The series documents this transformation.
Leaders in Social Education

Intellectual Self-Portraits

Edited by
Christine Woyshner
Temple University, Philadelphia, USA
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Leonard J. Waks</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>James A. Banks</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Christine Wyshner</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legacies of the Chat-N-Nibble</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Keith C. Barton</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tex/Mex Border Roots and Beyond</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gloria Contreras</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Accidental Educationian</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Margaret Smith Crocco</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity, Challenge and Change Over the Course of a Professional Career</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Terrie Epstein</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forty Days and Forty Nights</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ronald W. Evans</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framing a Scholarly Life</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>S. G. Grant</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies and Social Change from the Local to the Global</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Carole L. Hahn</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Power of a Past</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Linda S. Levstik</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossing Cultures and Global Interconnectedness</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Merry M. Merryfield</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressing Through Education</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jack L. Nelson</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Bridges Between Rice and Potatoes</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Valerie Ooka Pang</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Travels with (Un)Conventional Wisdom 151
   Walter Parker

A Sense of Where You Are 163
   E. Wayne Ross

On Being Critical 179
   Avner Segall

From Social Reconstruction to Social Education in a Tragic Context 193
   William B. Stanley

Identifying What Matters 211
   Stephen J. Thornton

The Poorly Planned Trajectory of a Slow but Impulsive Apprentice 225
   Bruce VanSledright

The Evolution of a Civic Educator 237
   Elizabeth Yeager Washington

What Kind of Scholar? 247
   Joel Westheimer
The aim of the Leaders in Educational Studies series is to document the rise of scholarship and university teaching in educational studies in the years after 1960. This half-century has been a period of astonishing growth and accomplishment. The volumes in the series document this period as seen through the eyes of its leading practitioners.

A few words about the build up to this period are in order. Before the mid-twentieth century school teaching, especially at the primary level, was as much a trade as a profession. Schoolteachers were trained primarily in normal schools or teachers colleges, only rarely in universities. But in the 1940s American normal schools were converted into teachers colleges, and in the 1960s these were converted into state universities. At the same time school teaching was being transformed into an all-graduate profession in both the United Kingdom and Canada. For the first time, school teachers required a proper university education.

Something had to be done, then, about what was widely regarded as the deplorable state of educational scholarship. James Conant, in his final years as president at Harvard in the early 1950s, envisioned a new kind of university-based school of education, drawing scholars from mainstream academic disciplines such as history, sociology, psychology, and philosophy, to teach prospective teachers, conduct educational research, and train future educational scholars. One of the first two professors hired to fulfil this vision was Israel Scheffler, a young philosopher of science and language who had earned a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania. Scheffler joined Harvard’s education faculty in 1952. The other was Bernard Bailyn, who joined the Harvard faculty in 1953 after earning his Ph.D. there, and who re-energized the study of American educational history with the publication of Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study (University of North Carolina Press, 1960). The series has been exceptionally fortunate that Scheffler provided a foreword to the volume on philosophy of education, and that Bernard Bailyn provided a foreword for the volume on the history of American education. It is equally fortunate that this volume contains a foreword by the eminent scholar James Banks of the University of Washington, who has been a creative force in social education for decades and the prime mover in the field of multi-cultural education.

The Leaders in Educational Studies series continues to document the growing and changing literature in educational studies. Research conducted within the established academic disciplines of history, philosophy, and sociology comprised the dominant trend throughout the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1980s educational studies diversified
considerably, in terms of both new sub-disciplines within these established disciplines and new interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary fields. Curriculum studies, both in general and in the particular school subject matter fields, drew extensively from work in philosophy, history, and sociology of education. Work in these disciplines, and also in anthropology and cultural studies among others, also stimulated new perspectives on race, class, and gender.

This volume brings together 19 personal essays by established leaders in the field of social education, curated masterfully by its editor, Christine Woyshner. It is the first in a projected set of volumes in the series that will provide intellectual self-portraits of leaders in research and teacher training in the core school subject areas. Further volumes are projected for science education, language and literature education, and mathematics education.

Subsequent volumes in the series will also attend to other emerging disciplines, sub-disciplines, and inter-disciplines that continue to be shaped by the ‘new educational scholarship’ emerging after 1960.
The social studies, like other school subjects, reflects the social, political, economic, and ideological context in which it is embedded. Prior to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the social studies—like US society writ large and other curriculum areas—presented views of US society and culture that were hegemonic, Eurocentric, patriarchal, and that marginalized the histories and cultures of groups such as people of color, women, people with disabilities, and LGBT people. It also presented geography, history, and culture from the perspectives of dominant and mainstream perspectives and points of view. Concepts such as the Westward movement, American exceptionalism, and Frederick Jackson Turner’s (1989) thesis that American democracy had its genesis in the exploration of the West—which was a “wilderness”—were salient in social studies textbooks and lessons.

One of the major goals of the social studies and the school curriculum was to assimilate diverse cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious groups into mainstream American culture and society. The histories and cultures of ethnic groups of color as well as those of Southern, Central, and Eastern European ethnic groups such as Jewish, Polish, and Italian Americans were ignored or marginalized in the mainstream school and social studies curriculum prior to the 1960s. William Greenbaum (1974), in a noted article in the *Harvard Educational Review*, stated that White ethnic groups experienced “hope” and “shame” in the schools. They were taught to be ashamed of their family and community cultures and languages. However, they were given hope that if they assimilated they would experience economic success and structural inclusion. Ethnic groups of color, such as African Americans and Latinos, experienced shame in the schools but were given little hope that assimilation would lead to structural inclusion and full participation in American civic and cultural communities.

During and after the Civil Rights Movement a number of factors combined and interacted to significantly change the perspectives and visions of the leaders of social studies education as well as the social studies curriculum. One was the social studies curriculum revolution that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. In September 1959, approximately 35 scientists, scholars, and educators gathered at the Woods Hole Conference Center in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, to discuss how science education might be improved in the nation’s schools. Based on this 10-day meeting of eminent American scholars and educators, Bruner (1960) wrote a book that was destined to revolutionize thinking about teaching and learning not only in the sciences but in all subject areas, including the social studies.
In this book, *The Process of Education*, Bruner (1960) presented his now-famous contention, “Experience over the past decade points to the fact that our schools may be wasting precious years by postponing the teaching of many important subjects on the grounds that they are too difficult ... The foundations of any subject can be taught to anybody at any age in some form” (p. 12). Bruner also argued that the fundamentals of every discipline could be reduced to its *structure*, by which he meant its key concepts, key generalizations and principles, key questions that the discipline asks, and its unique mode of inquiry or investigation. Bruner stated that the structure of each discipline could be identified and that this structure could be taught to all students in some form, regardless of age or stage of development. Bruner’s ideas strongly challenged Hanna’s (1963) “The Expanding Communities of Humans” framework that was deeply entrenched in social studies textbooks and within the nation’s schools.

Based on the idea of the structure of the disciplines and other key ideas set forth by Bruner, social scientists such as historians, geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists became heavily involved in the development of social studies curriculum projects during the 1960s and 1970s. Like any educational movement that tries to change the schools from the outside, the social studies revolution of the 1960s and 1970s had mixed results. It created vigorous discussion, debate, and innovation in the social studies and had a significant influence on social studies development at the state and school district levels and on textbook writing. However, for many complex reasons, the influence of “the new social studies”—as it was called—on classroom teachers and actual practice was far less than its architects had envisioned (Banks, 2001).

Between 1960 and 1980, social movements that pushed for civil rights and societal reform echoed throughout the United States. These movements included quests for the rights of groups of color such as African Americans and Latinos, the rights of women, people with disabilities, and protest over the war in Vietnam. During this period, the United States enacted some of its most progressive legislation that protected the rights of marginalized groups such as women, students who spoke a first language other than English, and students with disabilities. The social reform and civil rights movements during this period influenced the social studies curriculum as well as its leaders and theorists. Some social studies theorists and leaders began to criticize Bruner’s structuralist position and to argue that it was not sufficient to teach students the key ideas and methods of social scientists. Bruner’s critics argued that the main goal of the social studies should be to develop reflective citizens for a democratic society. Lawrence Metcalf (1971), Donald Oliver and James P. Shaver (1966), and Shirley Engle and Anna Ochoa (1988) argued that to become effective citizens, students needed to learn how to apply social science knowledge to the solution of social problems in society such as racial discrimination, discrimination against women, and poverty. The citizenship and public issues curriculum theorists also argued that students needed to take civic action to improve society and develop a sense of political efficacy.
The social studies curriculum reflects its historical and social context as well as the personal biographies, values, and epistemological communities of social studies researchers, scholars, and leaders. Many of the contributors to this engaging and timely book were deeply influenced by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the protests over the war in Vietnam, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Robert Kennedy, and by the quests by people of color and other marginalized groups to attain recognition (Gutmann, 2004) within society and the schools. Some of the contributors to this book, such as Valerie Ooka Pang, Gloria Contreras, Margaret Smith Crocco, and Carole Hahn were “insiders” (Merton, 1972) whose personal observations and experiences led to deep commitments to make changes within both society and the social studies curriculum.

I grew up in the segregated South and came of age during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Banks, 2006). Because of my personal biography and epistemological journey, I also endorsed a social issues and civic action focus in the social studies. I authored a social studies methods book with a focus on decision-making and citizen action (Banks with Clegg, 1973). The subtitle of this book reveals its central focus: Teaching Strategies for the Social Studies: Inquiry, Valuing, and Decision-Making.

I was an elementary school student in the Arkansas delta in the 1950s. One of my most powerful memories is the image of the happy and loyal slaves in my social studies textbooks (Banks, 1998). I also remember that there were three other Blacks in my textbooks: Booker T. Washington, the educator; George Washington Carver, the scientist; and Marian Anderson, the contralto. I had several persistent questions throughout my school days: Why were the slaves pictured as happy? Were there other Blacks in history beside the two Washingtons and Anderson? Who created this image of slaves? Why?

The image of the happy slaves was inconsistent with everything I knew about the African American descendants of enslaved people in my segregated community. We had to drink water from fountains labeled “colored,” and we could not use the city’s public library. But we were not happy about either of these legal requirements. In fact, we resisted these laws in powerful but subtle ways each day. As children, we savored the taste of “White water” when the authorities were preoccupied with more serious infractions against the racial caste system.

The other contributors to this book who were influenced by the civil rights and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and who developed a commitment to social change and to an issues-oriented social studies curriculum were sympathetic “outsiders,” or what I have called “external-insiders” (Banks, 1998)—individuals who are socialized within the mainstream culture or society but who acquire many of the values and perspectives of marginalized communities. Social studies scholars who constructed the public issues and civic education curricula such as Lawrence Metcalf, James P. Shaver, and Fred Newmann epitomized the external-insider, as do social studies educators who contributed to this book such as Jack L. Nelson, Terry Epstein, Walter Parker, and Joel Westheimer.
FOREWORD

Social studies teaching, research, and practice reflect the major social, political, and economic developments in US society and the world. However, as scholars such as Sandra Harding (1991), Lorraine Code (1991), Patricia Hill Collins (2000), and Matthew Jacobson (1998) have extensively documented, knowledge also reflects the values, personal biographies, and epistemic communities in which scholars are socialized. The informative and myriad intellectual and personal biographies of the noted and influential social studies educators that are contained in this informative and illuminating book provide important lens for comprehending how theory and research in social studies education are constructed in colleges and universities in the United States. It also gives vivid and interesting descriptions of the personal and academic lives of today’s intellectual leaders of social studies education.

REFERENCES


INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to have been asked to edit this volume on influential scholarship in social education, which traces the field over the last 40 years through the personal and professional experiences of its leading scholars. It is the fifth book in the series “Leaders in Educational Studies,” following volumes on philosophy of education, curriculum studies, the history of US education, and gender studies in education. This book presents (both the authors and us) with an opportunity to reflect on their personal influences, professional choices, careers, and contributions. The collection reveals the ways that questions emerged from personal experience, cultural and family background, early questions about social justice, difference and diversity, and the ongoing project of democracy.

The original thought for the series was to include scholars from a range of international institutions. However, this volume follows the history of education volume by including contributions by American scholars, although two of them are at Canadian universities. This decision was made in part to make the book manageable in terms of the number of chapters, but also served to focus the chapters around key themes which emerged only after the drafts were submitted and I read them all together. 38 scholars were invited. I solicited names from leading scholars in social studies. Of the 38, the work of 19 researchers is included. Some declined and others did not respond to invitations. As with the other volumes in the series, the essays are organized alphabetically.

Influential scholarship in social education since 1960 encompasses a range of investigations that can be grouped into several broad categories. One grouping, the study of teaching and learning history, includes the work of Keith Barton, Terrie Epstein, and Linda Levstik. Another category, civic education and democracy studies, is the focus of the work of Carole Hahn, Walter Parker, and Joel Westheimer. Cultural studies includes the research of Gloria Contreras, Merry Merryfield, and Valerie Ooka Pang. Explorations in critical pedagogy in social studies have been forged by Avner Segall and William Stanley. These topics and others, such as curriculum and assessment, have occupied researchers in social studies for the last several decades.

As I read and re-read the chapters, three themes stood out to me in this collection of essays. The first notion is that serendipity played a major role in shaping many of the scholars’ choices of research topics and career moves. SG Grant is particularly attuned to this theme in his essay, in which he describes his peripatetic career in
educational leadership and social studies which has taken him to various locales around the eastern seaboard and Midwestern United States. Others write about paths not taken, chance meetings, and moves to new places without much of a sense of a clear direction, only to find that clear direction once they arrived and dug into the work of researching social education. This phenomenon is not unique to social studies scholars, as other volumes in this series amply demonstrate, and it might not even be limited to the experiences of scholars in general, but it is a clear refrain in the chapters in this volume.

The second idea that occurred to me after reading the essays as a group was the social justice emphasis and politically liberal efforts, publications, and activities of social education scholars. Most professors in most fields are left-of-center, but this group in particular brings a sense of urgency to their work, as well as the belief that they are not just researching and writing for publication’s sake, but they are doing so in order to change the world, to have an impact on schools, society, and the curriculum. In this volume are essays written by scholars who have served in the Peace Corps and marched in demonstrations. Merry Merryfield and Keith Barton write about racism that they witnessed and how it shaped their worldviews. Gloria Contreras reflects on her cultural heritage as a Chicana and how it fueled her desire to write about the need for diverse curricular materials. Margaret Crocco remembers how she participated in marches and sit-ins while in college. In this volume it is striking to see how advancements in social education research align with politically progressive ideals.

Finally, and relatedly, to borrow a maxim from the women’s movement of the 1970s, this group of essays reveals that the personal is political. For social education researchers, nothing could be truer. Whether it’s serving community members at the Chat-n-Nibble in Keith Barton’s essay or Joel Westheimer’s learning about his mother’s leaving Frankfurt on a kindertransport during World War II, this group of scholars has had its past, its family and community influences, and the changes in life stages over the years shape its professional and political interests. Some contributors, such as Valerie Ooka Pang, put the claim up front, that family have shaped career goals and identity. Likewise, her small town led her and her sisters to begin to ask questions about gender and ethnic equality.

Beyond the themes that emerge by reading across the chapters, it struck me that we have a treasure trove of oral histories in this volume, not just on American history and such major events as the Depression, red baiting, and the Civil Rights movement, but also on the development of the field of social studies. Carole Hahn writes about attending graduate school during the height of the New Social Studies movement. Bill Stanley claims that having taken a Problems of Democracy course in high school made social studies come alive for him. Some lived through tumultuous times, which shaped their work in the field.

In conclusion, after having spent some time editing the essays, and hearing some of the authors present their chapters at a recent conference, I was struck by how daunting this task must have been for them. Imagine what it would be like to be asked
to make sense of one’s own scholarly life, to order the chaos of deciding on research topics, collecting data, and writing it all up for publication. Think about the request to reveal one’s background and family influences and to share one’s concerns, fears, hopes, and dreams in a genre that scholars don’t usually deal with. These intellectual self-portraits have revealed to me the inescapable link our work as academics has with our pasts, our families, our experiences, no matter how small or seemingly ordinary. That said, this collection of extraordinary essays—if I may say—is borne of ordinary lives. You will read about scholars from America’s heartland, the West Coast, and New England. In this volume are humble beginnings, honest appraisals of work gone awry, paths followed and not followed, and throughout what stands out is the clear, determined sense of urgency about making the world a better place through a commitment to social justice and democracy by researching topics in social education.
KEITH C. BARTON

LEGACIES OF THE CHAT-N-NIBBLE

I grew up in Eminence, Kentucky, the kind of small town that people remember as an idyllic remnant of a former age. This was a place where everyone knew each other, watched out for each other, brought each other vegetables in season. We didn’t always lock our doors, because we felt secure under our neighbors’ watchful eyes. I even remember accepting car rides as a child from people I didn’t know—they could hardly be called strangers, because I was sure my parents knew them even when I didn’t. (When I told these stories as an elementary teacher in California, my students were convinced I must have grown up on another planet.) Many people in town were my relatives; “That’s your cousin” was my mother’s constant reminder. Most families had lived in the same county for generations, and their shared experiences stretched across the years: “Oh you know who Juanita is,” began a typical conversation. “Her sister married an Arnsparger—Cleatus’s oldest boy, the one that walked funny from the accident. They lived on that farm over by Six-Mile, the one Old Man Foree used to rent out.” History, geography, genealogy: These formed the web that bound us together.

My family was well-placed in this network, not because we were financially well off (we weren’t) but because my parents owned the local restaurant, the aptly named Chat-N-Nibble. This restaurant—it might be called a diner in other parts of the country—sat squarely in the middle of town, physically and socially. All day, every day, the Chat-N-Nibble was the community’s informal meeting place. (Okay, admittedly Sunday nights were a little slow.) Farmers, businesspeople, and store clerks came in for breakfast and lunch; teenagers dropped by on their way home from school or after Friday-night ball games; and the church crowd packed all 25 tables on Sunday. (You had to get there early if you wanted to beat the Baptists, whose piety was no match for their appetites.)

But most distinct in my memory was the steady stream of coffee drinkers. From dawn until the waning afternoon, the front half of the restaurant was populated by a revolving crowd of men and women (at separate tables), newspapers at their sides. Here they discussed the world’s pressing issues: high politics and low gossip; broken water mains and where to get a deal on a used tractor; new cake recipes and whether to join the teachers’ strike. I witnessed this gathering nearly every day, for when I was young the restaurant supplied my childcare, and later I provided its labor; at one time I knew how nearly everyone in Eminence took their coffee. That’s not very useful information anymore, but by spending my early years in this setting I learned

C. Woyshner (Ed.), Leaders in Social Education, 5–15. © 2014 Sense Publishers. All rights reserved.
how adults are supposed to pass the time: drinking coffee and discussing their shared concerns.

I also learned some things about civic responsibility, for in a tight-knit community a business is never just a way to make money. The town and its countryside relied on a volunteer fire department, and fire runs were common in the days of poor wiring and open burning (and before smoke detectors). Afterward, volunteers had to drink coffee and debrief, and this could only be done at the Chat-N-Nibble. The coffee was free, and if the fire began in the middle of the night, my father, Earl, dutifully got out of bed, drove to town, and awaited their arrival. During the day, my mother showed the same civility and generosity in other ways. Even in a small town, people sometimes don’t know each other, and she couldn’t abide such a thing: “Boots” Barton made sure no one left the Chat-N-Nibble a stranger to anyone else. These were also the days of rural transients known as hoboes, and whenever someone down on his luck showed up at our restaurant, she gave him a free meal. I once asked her why. “That’s just what you do,” she said.

People looking out for each other, that’s the idyllic face of my hometown. There was also poverty, and violence, and abuse, but I was largely sheltered from those. I was never shielded, though, from one of the more conflicted elements of small-town Southern life: race. About 25% of my town’s school-age population was African American; I derived that statistic, in one of my earliest empirical studies, by counting the photos in the yearbook. Moreover, Eminence was too small for us not to know each other, play with each other, study with each other (but not, usually, go to each other’s homes). This early experience with diversity led me to appreciate and expect the company of those different than myself; in fact, I start to get a little claustrophobic when I’m around too many White people. But it also allowed me to see racism from an early age. There was little overt conflict in Eminence, and schools there integrated quietly (although I realize now that many of the African American teachers must have lost their jobs). The Chat-N-Nibble also passed through this era peacefully. The first time an African American sat at a table to be waited on (rather than coming to the back door for take-out), our waitresses held a hasty conference to decide on a course of action. Their plan: Give him a menu and see what he orders.

But there was plenty of prejudice nonetheless. A nearby town had once been a hotbed of Klan activity, and my own family displayed a range of racial attitudes. I remember my uncle looking through Christmas cards at my grandparents’ house one year and remarking, “Here’s one with a bunch of damned coloreds.” My grandfather gave him a look that seemed to say, “Well, don’t they have Christmas too?” I found out later that he had long been disgusted with his son’s racism. In their rural farming community, my grandfather had a reputation for the unusual practice of being friends with African American families, and he refused to listen to the racist talk of his neighbors—walking away whenever it began. At school I saw more racism over the years, beginning when my first-grade friend Timmy took a step backward in line at the water fountain so as not to drink after an African American classmate.
Racial attitudes were related to an uglier face of small town life: conformity. Growing up, I was continually annoyed when people followed tradition rather than developing conclusions of their own. People in Eminence didn’t stray too far from the norm in their ideas about society or politics or religion. I remember one elementary teacher’s reaction to anti-war protests at the University of Kentucky: “If they don’t like the country, then why don’t they just move out?” He said this without any particular rancor; he just didn’t understand why anyone would protest against the government. Yet my oldest brother—a conscientious objector—was one of those protestors, and through his eyes I saw other ways of thinking about the world. By the end of elementary school, it was clear just how different those ideas—and my own—were from most people around me. By high school this was a source of constant frustration.

Time and again, it seemed that my classmates (and some of my teachers) took a position not because they had reflectively considered the issue but because it was what they had always believed, and what people around them believed. I saw myself as an aspiring scientist (first a geologist, then a physicist), and it galled me that people couldn’t support their positions with logic and evidence—nor did they even think it necessary to do so. Different ways of thinking just weren’t “common sense,” I was told time and again, by people who thought that African Americans were inferior, that homosexuals were recruiting in schools (this was the time of Anita Bryant’s anti-gay campaign), that the Equal Rights Amendment would require mixed sex restrooms, or that a great flood killed all life except the animals on Noah’s ark. How could people think that these illogical and unsubstantiated ideas were common sense? My mother, a successful businesswoman and accomplished cook (both of which required intelligence and experimentation) even believed to her dying day—despite the derision heaped upon her by my brothers and myself—that a horsehair placed in rainwater would turn into a snake.

It can be easy to overstate the influence of conformity and tradition in a small town like mine. After all, Eminence was racially diverse, and debates among coffee drinkers demonstrated a certain level of political and ideological diversity. In high school my friends included a small handful of liberal and critical thinkers. But most discussions took place within clear boundaries, and more radical perspectives usually were met with suspicion and contempt. There certainly weren’t many other socialists, feminists, or atheists among the 42 people in my class, and I found the limits of thought in my hometown far too constraining. Bringing each other vegetables hardly seemed as important as being able to think critically about the world, and by adolescence I couldn’t get away from Eminence fast enough—so much so that I left high school a year early to enroll at the University of Kentucky.

At the university I found myself among people with a wider range of perspectives—except usually on economic issues. Still in the midst of the cold war, most people I knew were unwilling to consider alternatives to capitalism, which they regarded as the natural state of humanity and the only possible means of organizing the economy. (My freshman roommate didn’t object to my poster of Karl Marx only because he
didn’t know who he was.) But fortunately, on the first day of my freshman year (in *History of Europe to 1713*, the only history course I took as an undergraduate), I met Shaunna Scott. Later I learned that we agreed on every important social, political, economic, and religious issue. With such a high level of consensus, I concluded quite rationally that she must be who I loved, the woman I wanted to spend the rest of my life with. Although it took a while longer to convince her of that logic, we eventually began dating, and we married a few years later. We’ve been together ever since.

I majored in anthropology, which I saw as the most comprehensive of the human sciences—a way of understanding people and society that was both scientific and humanistic. (Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., also an anthropology major, once described it as “a science that’s mostly poetry” [Vonnegut, 1977].) I became increasingly interested in the public use of social research, and particularly in studying the impact of political and economic policy on people’s lives. I assumed I would become a professor of anthropology, but my goal was not only to engage in scholarship but to do so in a way that contributed to the public good. I enrolled in graduate school at UCLA with the intention of studying the impact of agricultural development on small farmers in East Africa.

My career took a different turn, but this early identification with anthropology influenced my later scholarship in a number of ways. First, the role of culture and society has always been at the forefront of my thinking, and much of my work has sought to explain how teaching and learning is influenced by social context—whether at the level of classroom, community, or nation. This interest may also explain why I have been so drawn to international teaching and research, and why I look forward to the challenge of understanding other settings. It takes time and effort to make sense of community division in Northern Ireland, ethnic diversity in New Zealand, or nation-building in Singapore, and these can easily be interpreted through stereotypes and simplifications when viewed from afar. Rather than seeing this difficult task as a frustrating obstacle, though, I have always considered it a key motivation for undertaking projects in new places.

Second, I have always had a broad view of scientific research. Within and across subfields, anthropologists use a variety of methods. Some of these are more ethnographic and some more quantitative, but even this distinction is misleading, for numerical data is often an element of ethnographic observation. My advisor at UCLA, for instance, was not only a trained psychoanalyst but the author of *Quantification in Cultural Anthropology* (Johnson, 1980). Some of the debates within educational research, then, have always struck me as misguided. Until I entered education, in fact, I had never heard anyone suggest that ethnographic research was not “scientific,” or that qualitative and quantitative methods were based on differing epistemologies. I find this distinction so misleading and unproductive that I once taught an entire course on research methods without mentioning either of the “q-words.”

I also took from anthropology a concern with understanding society holistically. Each of the social sciences imagines that it can best explain everything important
about humanity, but anthropology has a better claim on this distinction than most. Culture, social relations, material life, linguistics, biology: all these are part of the field, which at its best examines both spatial and temporal dimensions of society, in a way that is simultaneously generalizing and particularizing. Although individual studies rarely aim for such holism, the overall field aspires to an integrated understanding of people and societies. As a social studies educator, then, my interest has always been in helping students understand society as a whole (past and present, near and far) rather than developing their facility with the purportedly unique perspective of academic disciplines such as history, geography, or economics.

While at UCLA, I spent much of my time with faculty and graduate students in African Studies—anthropologists, political scientists, geographers, economists, historians, and urban planners. Despite being in different departments, many of us read the same works, investigated overlapping issues, and shared similar ideas about the nature of social inquiry. This similarity of interests and perspectives across disciplines was largely taken for granted; my roommate, a molecular biologist, told me that people in seven academic divisions at UCLA did the same kind of research he did. Such cross-disciplinary commonalities, combined with the varied and integrative nature of anthropology, have contributed to my conviction that the notion of “disciplinary thinking” is a misrepresentation of how scholars work—much less how they think.

I didn’t complete this first doctoral program, though. During my time at UCLA, I travelled to Kenya as part of a Swahili language program, but by that time I had become less committed to a career in academia or to spending my time in other countries—an ironic development, considering that I would later embrace each of those again. I had also grown suspicious of the idea of “applying” Western academic knowledge to the problems of developing nations, because such application can be used for good or ill—frequently the latter. Somewhat impulsively, I switched to a career I thought had a more immediate prospect of improving the world, and of keeping me close to home: teaching. After completing a graduate certification program at UCLA, I taught elementary school for five years, first in Los Angeles and later in the San Francisco Bay Area (where Shaunna was completing her doctorate in anthropology at Berkeley).

Like most educators, I found teaching both rewarding and challenging. Rewards came from the inherent pleasure of helping young people develop intellectually, and I think I was particularly good at establishing rapport with students—even though they were terrified of me at first. This rapport came, at least in part, from the respect I had for their thinking. I was never interested in having students reproduce low-level factual information or engage in rote procedures; I always wanted them to understand the deeper meaning of content and to apply skills in new situations. Moreover, students in my first class of fourth-graders spoke 11 languages and spanned a wide range of English fluency, so a curriculum limited to textbooks and worksheets was out of the question. My certification program had stressed working with students from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds, so I knew from the beginning that
students needed plenty of chances to communicate, and that I couldn’t confuse limited English with limited understanding. Listening to students, and taking their ideas seriously, was the most fulfilling part of teaching—and later, of my research.

My challenges, though, differed from those of many teachers. Elementary schools can be stifling environments, where both the dead hand of tradition and the gendered expectations of compliance govern many teachers’ lives. Once again I ran up against ideas that made no sense, mostly coming from district administrators—such as the belief that students learn to read by pronouncing letters, to spell by writing lists of words, to think mathematically by completing worksheets, or to use computers by doing keyboarding exercises. But I didn’t pay much attention to these beliefs, because as a strong-willed man in an elementary school, I faced little opposition to teaching the way I wanted—using manipulatives in math, taking a process approach to writing, or focusing on women, minorities, and labor activists in history. This even freed up some of my colleagues to take risks they didn’t think they could get away with before (“Keith can use trade books instead of basal readers? Well, then, I guess I can too!”). I was fortunate to work with thoughtful teachers who were willing to expand students’ educational experiences in meaningful and creative ways.

Unlike many teachers, then, my challenges didn’t lie primarily in struggling against the pervasive contextual constraints of teaching. Instead, I found myself frustrated by the difficulty of developing students’ conceptual understanding. Too often, despite my students’ generally enthusiastic participation in concept-based lessons, they didn’t really understand what I hoped they would learn. In my first year of teaching, I was already frustrated trying to teach about society when students apparently couldn’t tell the difference between a river and a state capital. And yet I knew that having them memorize rivers and capitals, or look up definitions in a dictionary, weren’t sensible ways of meeting that challenge. It wasn’t facts or definitions they lacked, but concepts.

During five years of teaching I gradually learned more about how to develop students’ understanding, especially through my participation in professional development programs such as the Bay Area Writing Program and the EQUALS mathematics program at Berkeley. A switch from elementary school to junior high (to accommodate my responsibilities as president of the teachers union) brought a fresh set of challenges, but soon afterward my wife was offered a faculty position at the University of Kentucky. In many ways, this seemed like the perfect move. Our daughter Hannah had just been born, Shaunnna had just finished her doctorate, and this was one of the rare openings in precisely her specialty—Appalachian community studies. Moving to Kentucky also took us back home and closer to our families, which seemed the ideal setting for raising a family of our own.

But teaching jobs weren’t nearly as plentiful in Kentucky as in California. I spent several months looking for work as a teacher, civil servant, or political organizer, yet my only offer was as statewide coordinator for abortion rights—a position I turned down because I thought it involved too much travel. Finally, I decided to go back to graduate school at the University of Kentucky, where at least I could pick
up a salary as a teaching assistant. In California I had begun giving professional development workshops from time to time, and I found that I enjoyed working with fellow teachers as much as with students. A career preparing teachers, then, seemed like a logical move, and to my great good fortune the Kentucky faculty included one of the nation’s preeminent social studies scholars—Linda Levstik.

I quickly found that Linda was the perfect mentor for me—someone whose temperament, interests, and teaching practices meshed perfectly with my own. During my first year in the program I often stopped by her office to chat, and these impromptu conversations sometimes went on for an hour or more. (Only later, when I had doctoral students of my own, did I realize how much of her time I had been taking up.) Moreover, Linda involved me in her own work from the very beginning, usually as a full collaborator. By the end of my first year we had planned a study of children’s understanding of historical time, and as soon as we presented those findings we began research on historical significance. Before I graduated, she had invited me to collaborate on the book that became *Doing History: Investigating with Children in Elementary and Middle Schools* (Levstik & Barton, 2011 [orig. 1997]).

Just as important, Linda apprenticed me into the professional norms of the field—giving conference presentations, proposing sessions, serving on committees, and the like—and introduced me to most of the other leaders in the field.

Linda and I have worked together so closely, for so long now, that I don’t always know which ideas I picked up from her, which I came up with on my own, and which we developed together. Even ideas I think of as “my own” derive in large part from the example Linda has set in her scholarship, teaching, and commitment to the field. (I’m sometimes reminded of this when I read work she published before or soon after we met—“So that’s where I got that idea,” I’ve thought more than once.) Linda’s dedication to empirical research, her concern with students’ thinking, her sense of responsibility toward teachers and children, and her interest in good writing—all these have contributed significantly to my work and career. And perhaps most important, our many conversations have contributed to the pivotal theme in much of my work—the role of history in understanding society.

I began this doctoral program in 1990, a time when efforts to reform history education in the United States were gaining visibility among educators, historians, and politicians. Linda and I were part of a small but rapidly growing group of researchers interested in how students made sense of the past. These were exciting times, and not just because I was a newcomer; I think we all held out great hope that our findings could help move school history away from its long-standing association with textbooks, lectures, and student boredom. I believe the sense of community we developed during those years was essential to developing the critical mass of scholarship that allowed the field to take off. Throughout the 1990s this group of colleagues traded manuscripts, awaited each other’s publications, served on committees together, and went out for countless meals, as the community of history education researchers steadily grew. It wasn’t quite like the coffee-drinkers in the Chat-N-Nibble, but close enough.
Since this beginning, most of my work—both with Linda and on my own—has focused on how children and adolescents understand the past. Much of this research has shown that history, particularly with proper scaffolding, can be accessible and relevant even for younger students. In some cases this work has pointed to obstacles students encounter in trying to make sense of the past. And throughout this research, the influence of context has been paramount; learning history is never simply an encounter between students and content, for classroom circumstances and larger societal settings always affect not only how students experience the past but how they interpret it. (For more extensive reflections on this body of work, see Levstik and Barton, 2008). But like most researchers in history education, Linda and I wanted to do more than investigate students’ understanding: we wanted to change the way they were taught. Empirical evidence contributes to that effort, but history education takes place in schools (among other settings), and teachers are not necessarily avid readers of research. They can hardly be blamed for that, because most of us write primarily for other scholars, not for those who we hope will use our findings.

Our goal of influencing practice led to our first book together, Doing History. We wanted to introduce teachers to current theory and research in history education, but we wanted to do so in a way that was readable and accessible, and that would help them apply those ideas to the world of practice. This meant we had to avoid a dry recounting of findings; we doubted that would make much of a dent on practice, no matter how convincingly we reviewed the research. But we also wanted to avoid simple recommendations or lesson plans, for we knew there was little value in prescribing specific tasks or pretending the same activities would work in every setting. Instead, we built the book around realistic vignettes of what we considered outstanding practice, followed by our explanation of how these practices reflected important principles of history education—such as engaging students in interpretation, scaffolding their participation, building on background knowledge, and so on.

We knew the success of Doing History would depend in large measure on the quality and authenticity of the classroom vignettes; if these weren’t realistic, teachers would dismiss the book as being out of touch. But we were fortunate to know several elementary and middle school teachers who were doing interesting work with students, and we were even more fortunate that they allowed us to spend so much time in their classrooms—watching their teaching, talking with their students, and sometimes even trying out our own ideas. To this day, the most rewarding part of my job involves working with good teachers and talking with them and their students about their ideas. I’ve tried to use this immersion in the world of teaching and learning to bridge two communities that need each other—the communities of scholarship and practice.

Yet just as in my hometown, I haven’t always shared the same perspectives as everyone in the communities around me. My understanding of the nature of historical inquiry, for example, differs markedly from many of my colleagues. As a doctoral
student, I took almost as many courses in history as in education, and in a series of these I pursued research on slave-hiring in antebellum Kentucky. This practice was more prevalent in agricultural areas than previous historians had realized, and it raised some puzzling issues: It certainly didn’t conform to the usual image of labor-intensive plantations, and many of those who were hired out were women, children, and the elderly. Why was there so much demand for slaves who weren’t contributing to heavy agricultural labor? Through research into probate registers, census and tax records, divorce cases, and other sources, I was able to establish that slave-hiring was a widespread, market-based practice that provided flexibility for larger farms in the mixed agricultural economy of the Upper South, and that hirers sought slaves to relieve their wives of household drudgery—a practice consistent with evolving norms of middle-class domesticity (Barton, 1997).

The most important outcome of the project was that I became immersed in historical research. And what I learned from these efforts flew in the face of ideas that have become prevalent in the educational community. Scholars and practitioners alike have latched onto the idea that in order to engage in authentic, “disciplinary” thinking, students should be evaluating documents through sourcing and corroboration “heuristics.” Yet this is almost precisely the opposite of what historians do. Historical research isn’t about evaluating documents; it’s about a process of inquiry designed to answer engaging questions. I pursued this investigation not because I wanted to know what a set of documents said; I pursued it because I wanted to know why so many slaves were being hired. To answer that question, I looked for evidence about hirers and their motives; I never “sourced” a document, because like all historians, I selected the documents in the first place—they weren’t handed to me as part of a packaged exercise. Historians do evaluate documents, but they rarely do so by “sourcing” or “corroborating” them; their evaluation takes place when they consider what evidence the sources can provide to answer their questions (Barton, 2005). We can’t expect students to construct historical knowledge by giving them a set of documents to “source.” That’s like expecting to get a snake out of a horsehair dropped in rainwater.

I also differ from some in the history education community because I don’t think history is an end in itself. When I entered the profession, I assumed everyone believed, as I did, that studying history was a useful way of understanding contemporary social issues. This is the view that Linda and I laid out in Teaching History for the Common Good (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Inspired in part by Walter Parker’s exploration of education’s role in preparing students for democratic participation (Parker, 2003), we argued that history education should contribute to students’ willingness and ability to investigate and deliberate important social issues. We’re not alone in this view, but I often feel that we’re waging an uphill battle. For many educators, researchers, and historians, the study of history simply is. Its place in the curriculum is taken for granted, and it needs no further justification; any contribution to democracy or other valued social purposes is incidental. Those holding this view
generally want to reform history so that it better matches their image of disciplinary norms, but as Stephen Thornton and I have argued, focusing on historical methods without engaging the subject’s purpose renders choices about content impossible (Thornton & Barton, 2010). Deciding what to teach must be grounded in a broader understanding of why we require students to learn history in the first place.

For me, that justification lies in the needs of a democratic society. To take part in democratic deliberations and decisions, students have to know about work, gender, politics, culture, and countless other topics; they need to have explored the nature of human knowledge, agency, expression, and belief; they need to have considered the differing ways people think about the world, and the varied ways they organize their social lives; they need to grapple with issues of human rights, economic development, and environmental change. The past provides a rich context for investigating such topics, and so too does the present-day world. Surely students who have experience investigating these issues in both historical and contemporary contexts will be better prepared to participate in the public life of their communities. Deeper knowledge, greater reflection, and more inclusive participation can surely make conversations at the Chat-N-Nibble richer and more productive. I think I’ll have another cup.

FAVORITE WORKS

Mine


Others


REFERENCES


