Initiating Historical Thinking in Elementary Schools

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**Document Type**
Article

**Publication Date**
October 2013

**Abstract**

With an ever-expanding focus on reading and mathematics, many elementary schools have chosen to reduce time previously reserved for social studies. Elementary teachers who understand both the relevance of social studies content and the effectiveness of interdisciplinary teaching regularly incorporate applicable history-based children’s tradebooks in their curricula. Locating developmentally appropriate books is simple. Teaching history using children’s literature can be effective. It can be counterproductive, however, if the selected book is replete with historical misrepresentations. Teaching historical thinking in elementary school is problematic no matter what the teaching tool, and there are few methodological roadmaps for elementary teachers. Here, I first suggest ways for teachers to nurture elementary students’ historical thinking using anecdotes from everyday activities and literature with themes germane to history and multiculturalism. Then, I suggest ways for elementary educators to locate and develop engaging, age-appropriate, and historically accurate curricular supplements. Using literature on Christopher Columbus as a reference point to facilitate young students’ historical thinking, I propose an interdisciplinary approach, discipline-specific historical literacy strategies, and history-themed authentic assessments.

**Recommended Citation**

Bickford, John H., “Initiating Historical Thinking in Elementary Schools” (2013). Faculty Research and Creative Activity. 30.
https://thekeep.eiu.edu/eemedu_fac/30
Doing History Now in its fourth edition, this popular text offers a unique perspective on teaching and learning history in the elementary and middle grades. Through case studies of teachers and students in diverse classrooms and from diverse backgrounds, it shows children engaging in authentic historical investigations, often in the context of an integrated social studies curriculum. Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data Levstik, Linda S. Doing history : investigating with children in elementary and middle school / Linda S. Levstik, Keith C. Barton.—4th ed. p. cm. Includes bibliographical references and index. 1. History—Study and teaching (Elementary)—United States. 2. History—Study and teaching (Middle school)—United States. I. Barton, Keith C. II. Title. Discusses important historical thinking and research skills and reviews possible curriculum and lessons. Levstik and Barton use case studies to illustrate the different ways in which children can engage with historical studies in a culturally relevant fashion. They also review a variety of ways in which students' historical understandings can be formally assessed. This book contains a lot of concrete and well explained illustrations of the ways in which students can "do history" in the classroom. Teaching historical thinking in elementary school is problematic no matter what the teaching tool, and there are few methodological roadmaps for elementary teachers. Here, I first suggest ways for teachers to nurture elementary students' historical thinking using anecdotes from everyday activities and literature with themes germane to history and multiculturalism. Then, I suggest ways for elementary educators to locate and develop engaging, age-appropriate, and historically accurate curricular supplements.