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# EXPLORING HISTORICAL EMPATHY IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

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EXPLORING HISTORICAL EMPATHY IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

by

Melanie Alsene

Submitted to the Honors Program Committee

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for University Honors Scholars

Southeastern University

2017

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2017

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis sought to explore the purpose of teaching history, to define historical empathy, to discover if historical empathy is being taught in secondary public schools, and to see what methods of instruction teachers utilize. Research was done by conducting interviews of middle school and high school history teachers from different schools in the area. These interviews sought to find out if teachers could come up with their purpose for learning about history, if they could define historical empathy, and what methods they utilized to teach historical empathy. Some of the teachers were able to define historical empathy and gave specific examples that fit into three categories of instruction. The conclusion of this thesis stated that historical empathy should be used within secondary education classrooms to successfully meet the purposes of learning history.

Key Words: history, historical empathy, social studies, secondary education, instruction

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## EXPLORING HISTORICAL EMPATHY IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

### Introduction

The US experience in history has been characterized by dusty textbooks, rote memorization, and teachers who drone. ... Despite a century of efforts to infuse the history classroom with relevance, problem-solving, active learning, and engaging resources, the same forms of instruction have persisted, unfazed.

(Reisman, 2012, p. 234)

History education for the past few decades has not been a large focus for the public school system. Students are no longer interested in learning about the past, and have become bored in the classroom. Many history teachers teach through lectures, with some class discussion or critical-thinking questions, often met with silence from their students. Critical thinking and engaging with the past is not taught.

To better engage students and make the learning of history more applicable to their lives historians have considered the implications of teaching students historical empathy as a part of the history curriculum. Historical empathy is “the ability to see and judge the past in its own terms by trying to understand the mentality, frames of reference, beliefs, values, intentions, [and] actions of historical agents using a variety of historical evidence ... without imposing today’s values on the past” (Yilmaz, 2007, p. 331). It is looking at history from the perspective of those who lived through history, and empathizing with the people of the past.

In this thesis, the researcher will attempt to show if history teachers understand what *historical empathy* is, how or if it is being taught within the classroom, how it is

being assessed, and what other methods can be used to differentiate the instruction in order to help students further understand history. This thesis will attempt to show that, through teaching historical empathy to students, history can become much more applicable to students' lives and the present day. It will also attempt to show that teaching historical empathy through differentiated instruction can help students engage more in learning.

### **Research Questions**

1. *What is the purpose of teaching history?*
2. *What is historical empathy?*
3. *Is historical empathy being taught in secondary schools?*
4. *How can historical empathy be taught in a public school?*
5. *Are students empathizing with history?*

Through this research and this thesis, teaching historical empathy and differentiated instruction will be blended together. Written through the perspective of the middle school and high school public school systems in Polk County, Florida, the purpose of this paper is to show if historical empathy is being taught in secondary education, how it is being taught, and what different methods are being utilized.

Chapter two will discuss the current literature that exists on teaching history and the problems with historical education, what historical empathy and historical reasoning are, and what differentiated methods of historical instruction are being used. Chapter three of this thesis pertains to the methodology used to gain a better understanding of if and how historical empathy is being taught in the public school system. This was done through interviewing middle school and high school history teachers throughout Polk

County, who were first contacted by email and then interviewed in person at their schools. The fourth chapter of this thesis will analyze the data that was collected from the answers given by teachers throughout the interview process. The fifth chapter will give a more overall perspective and viewpoint of the interviews that were analyzed. In the final chapter, the researcher will conclude and answer the initial research questions on whether or not historical empathy is being taught in the Polk County Public School System, what methods are being used, and what methods should be used to teach historical empathy in the classroom.

## **Review of Literature**

There has been a long discussion over the course of the last twenty years on history curriculum in education and its effectiveness. Are students correctly being taught? Why are there so many students who dislike history and find the ascertainment of this knowledge useless? In too many cases, history has been taught by having students hear and memorize information, with very little comprehension, understanding, or application. To understand why historical education should be changed, it is important to understand the problems within historical education and what has been written about it. It is also important to understand the significance of teaching and learning historical empathy and reasoning, as well as what differentiated methods can be utilized to teach history in a secondary school system.

The first portion of this review of literature will identify what is seen as the overall purpose of teaching history: what students are supposed to understand and gain. The second section will identify the problems that face secondary teachers in historical education, from the structure of the classroom to the method of instruction. The third section will define historical empathy. The final section of this review of literature is split into multiple sections, and will show what methods of teaching historical empathy within a classroom have been documented.

### **Teaching History**

It is first important to understand why history education is important, and what the main goal and outcome of teaching history should be. Kaya Yilmaz's (2008) research suggests that teachers should consider three pertinent areas about the philosophy of history: the goals of historical education, how history should be taught, and how the

curriculum for history should be developed to gain a better understanding of what and how one should teach history. According to Yilmaz (2008), it is vital for history teachers to understand the nature of history and to ask the following: What are the goals of historical education, and how should history be taught? Historical education has many purposes: to assist students to become better citizens, to help students develop reasoning and decision making skills, and to help them understand the current world by understanding the past. Ultimately, “history should be used to help students gain insight into other people’s cultures and world views” (p. 40). History should encourage students to look at the thoughts and beliefs of the people of the past, to understand what the people went through, their actions, and the consequences of those actions (Foster, 1999).

“The history teacher is expected to make the subject matter relevant, interesting, and meaningful to students by making connections between history content and students’ out of school experiences” (Yilmaz, 2008, p. 45). These are the expected duties of history teachers. To be successful in this goal, teachers need to know what content is important and how to develop and implement curriculum. And to ensure students are engaged in the learning, teachers must know what instructional activities to use, as well as what methods are the most helpful in accomplishing the ultimate goal of teaching students history.

To assist in teaching history in a new way, it is important to instill in students a desire to learn history and understand its relevance (Van Straaten, Wilschut and Oostdam, 2016). The research of Van Straaten et al. (2016) suggests that a good exercise to demonstrate the relevance of history to students is by using a historical event to assess, explain, and predict what will happen based on past experiences. There are many

benefits for students learning history better, including becoming better citizens. For these things to be taught, it is important for teachers to plan out how they will teach history and make it applicable to their students.

### **Identifying Problems with Historical Education**

There are many concerns that have led to the problems in historical education. One of the first questions to ask is what do students think about history and its place in the school's curriculum? To better teach history, teachers need to understand what students think about history and whether they believe it is important or not; in understanding this, they can properly communicate the values of history to help students be satisfied with their education. In a study conducted by Terry Haydn and Richard Harris (2010), it was found that students were dissatisfied with the education in secondary school settings. And while it was found that students believed history was important and useful to learn, "there were large numbers of pupils who could not say why it was useful, or who gave reasons which bore little relation to the stated curriculum justifications for the subject" (p. 254). Students need to understand the importance of history. Thus, this adds to the point that even though there is new research showing the effectiveness of teaching history in different ways, many history teachers continue to use the traditional method of teaching. This traditional method of teaching is teacher-centered and lecture-based (Weirisma, 2008), with students memorizing facts with no real learning being done.

Another issue in historical education is the old-fashioned classroom setup and the lack of flexibility within this format. Avishag Reisman's research (2012) starts with an introduction that defines these issues. Specifically dealing with high school history

classes, he notes that students view history and these classes as being boring (Reisman, 2012). As quoted in the introduction of this thesis, history is seen as “dusty textbooks, rote memorization, and teachers who drone ... [with] the same forms of instruction [that] have persisted, unfazed” (p. 234). This system has remained largely unchanged and is not assisted by the things beyond a teacher’s control. In addition, the “state curricula, 50-minute periods, and the textbooks shape and constrain what teachers do” (p. 238). Simply stated, this old-fashioned setup is ineffective.

Furthermore, Foster (1999) points out that students think of history as being a remote, dull, and “dusty” subject that only concerns useless details, dates, and events. Students have to constantly memorize an endless stream of information and facts. “Consequently, for our young people, history becomes sterile, passive, and seemingly unrelated to their lives” (p. 18).

Finally, teachers have become exhausted from the demands of “classes teaming [sic] with 35 or more students, [and] pressure to prep students for exams that test factual recall” (Reisman, 2012, p. 234). This leads to teachers having to work harder to find ways to interest their students in history within the parameters of state curricula, time constraints, boring textbooks, and overcrowded classrooms. It has become more challenging to make history applicable to students.

### **Historical Empathy Defined**

Empathy in a historical context is defined in Dr. Elizabeth A. Segal’s 2010 article entitled “Privilege Through the Lens of Empathy”:

Empathy consists of three primary components: 1) an affective response to another’s emotions or action, 2) cognitive processing of the other person’s

perspective as well as one's own affective reaction, and 3) a conscious decision-making process that leads to empathetic action (p. 83).

For students to understand history, it is important for them to not just be able to know the events that happened but to have an emotional understanding about people from the past, and have those empathies and understandings apply to students' lives.

Some see this empathy as being synonymous with sympathy; however, according to Deborah L. Cunningham's research (2008), this assessment is an incorrect one.

Historical empathy is to help in "understanding perspectives held in the past, while highlighting the importance of context and expressing some degree of wariness about injecting one's own views into the effort" (p. 684). It is meant to assist students in gaining a better understanding of an event or person based on a time period, instead of simply being sympathetic for what the people within a time period lived through (Yilmaz, 2007). To assist students in achieving historical empathy, teachers might consider using videos, making then-and-now comparisons between events of the past and of the present, encouraging them to use their imagination, and working with primary sources (Cunningham, 2009). These strategies can be used to help students understand the feelings and attitudes of the time period and the people of the time being studied.

Yilmaz defines historical empathy as "the ability to see and judge the past in its own terms by trying to understand the mentality, frames of reference, beliefs, values, intentions, and action of historical agents using a variety of historical evidence ... without imposing today's values on the past" (2007 p. 331). Thus, for students to correctly make sense of the past, they should not start by putting their own personal and present social constructs and understandings on past events and people. Instead, they should think of

the past from the perspectives of the people who lived through it, first, before directly applying it to their lives and the present day. According to Kaya Yilmaz, in order for students to be able to practice historical empathy, they should be taught to think critically about primary sources and events in order to grasp the meaningfulness of sources and to provide students with a connection to the past (2007).

Historical empathy can help show students about the importance of learning history and can also assist teachers in instructing students about history. According to research done by Jannet Van Drie and Carla Van Boxtel (2008), the framework for teaching historical empathy should contain six components: “asking historical questions, using sources, contextualization, argumentation, using substantive concepts, and using meta-concepts” (p. 87). Contextualization is defined as understanding events in the context of the time (Dictionary by Merriam-Webster). Substantive concepts are defined as the main substance about which students are learning (Substantive concepts: Section guide, 2017), and meta-concepts are the more minor points that follow the substantive concepts (Dictionary by Merriam-Webster). These six components work together to give historical empathy a foundation within the classroom.

As part of learning historical empathy, students need to be able to ask well-thought-out questions, to help them to interpret history through the viewpoints of those who lived through the past. They need to not only gain surface knowledge about the past, “but also use this knowledge for interpreting phenomena from the past and the present” (Drie, 2008, p. 88). This historical empathy should help students to describe change, make comparisons, and explain things from the past and the present (2008).

Through historical education, students should be able to reason causally through history. However, the actual practices done within classrooms do not match the goals that have been set for historical education. Instead of simply being able to commit facts, dates, names, and events to memory in order to pass tests and classes, students should be able to use historical empathy; this should also include the teacher having knowledge of students' interests, keeping their interests in mind, and understanding strategies to incorporate those interests (Stoel, van Drie & van Boxtel, 2015).

According to G. L. Stoel, J. P. Van Drie, and Carla Van Boxtel's research (2015), there are five pedagogical principles involved in historical empathy. These are as follows: inquiry tasks, social interaction, situational interest, explicit teaching of domain-specific strategies and concepts, and epistemological reflection. They suggest that for students to properly utilize historical empathy, they need to have second-order concept learning. Second-order concepts are "big organizing ideas" of history, which includes understanding changes, causation, consequences, similarities, and differences throughout history (Byrom, 2014, p. 2). While it is important for students to use historical reasoning skills, how these skills are to be garnered is not a common, easy-step process for teachers to instruct to their students (Stoel et al., 2016).

Finally, historical empathy is driven by the desire of history teachers to make history come alive for students, "to put people, not battles and dates, at the heart of the subject" (Lee, 2011, p. 39). Empathy should be used as an activity method to allow for an exercise in historical imagination for the students (2011). Students need to be engaged with the past, to understand the actions and decisions of the past. "The aim is to

understand how it could make sense: why what was done would have seemed to be the best thing to do in the circumstances” (p. 40).

### **Teaching Historical Empathy in a Classroom**

There are many methods for teaching history besides lectures. It is important for teachers to instruct students in ways that they learn best. In looking at the pedagogy used in various history classrooms, teachers are not all in unison on what the best methods of instruction are.

First, for students to even successfully develop historical empathy, they must first access authentic historical sources ... have a balance of imaginative speculation and methodical investigation, relive the thoughts of past individuals through ... contextualization; examine, appreciate, and understand the perspective of people in the past ... and engage in sustained effort and thoughtful strategy to suspend their present world views when examining the past (Yilmaz, 2007, p. 333-334).

All of these items and skills listed are what teachers need to do to able to assist his/her students in understanding before historical empathy can be fully achieved during the teaching process. While there are many different methods to teach students historical empathy, garnering these foundational skills are important.

To be more specific, students must learn to think within the context of the particular difficulties, possible actions, and possible consequences that people in the past would have faced. Retz (2015) notes that “without some effort to see the world through the eyes of others, our attempts to understand and explain their actions and attitudes are bound to the first person perspective” (p. 214). Students need to be able to step outside of themselves, if only momentarily, to understand the actions of the people in the past.

Retz further goes on to state that “it is possible to re-enact the thoughts of other people because thoughts ... are not private items unique to the person that has them, but *publicly rethinkable* propositional contents” (p. 216). However, it is then important for students to make a connection afterwards to their current and present lives and living history.

Teachers who are educating their students with historical empathy should keep in mind that “students of history enjoy the benefit of hindsight – the luxury of knowing how events turned out” (Foster, 1999, p. 19). When students can understand the actions and the mistakes made by people of the past, as well as the eventual consequences of those actions, they can then gain an appreciation for studying history.

### **Differentiated Methods of Teaching Historical Empathy**

In order for teachers to facilitate historical empathy in the classroom, they must implement differentiated methods that will help students acquire this deeper understanding of history. One differentiated method of teaching historical empathy is teaching history through film. According to Jeremy Stoddard and Alan Marcus (2010), films are a good supplemental way to instruct students on history and give them a better connection to the past. Films can help students to engage in “thoughtful and critical exploration of past and contemporary social or political issues” (p. 84). However, it is important that these films are selected carefully and are used at the proper times. “In a world where students and the general public are more likely to access historical information from a television program, film, or even video game, it is important to equip students with the ability to view historical representation critically” (p. 89).

According to Ashley Wiersma’s (2008) research, a student-centered pedagogy is the best approach to teaching history. This approach utilizes primary sources, small

groups, and student-led discussions, as well as uses constructivism as a method of instruction (2008). The usage of primary sources is important for students, as it gives them a direct link to the people of the past -- those who lived through the events being studied. In addition, *constructivism* is a theory of learning that “says that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences” (“Constructivism as a paradigm”, 2004).

Another differentiated method for teaching historical empathy is by having students visit museums, memorial centers, and heritage institutions. These places can be used to “evoke an emotional response that serves to elicit empathy with ... historical events” (Savenije, 2017, p. 832). To properly learn history, students need to be able to engage emotionally and cognitively, and to understand history contextually. One example presented by Savenije was to have students look at exhibits and artifacts from World War II. Where “most students did not feel related to WWII prior to their museum visit, the museum managed to engage many of them with personal stories and artifacts and by offering multiple and new perspectives” (p. 832). Film can be a useful tool when teaching historical empathy to help students make connections to the past and by giving them a more real and holistic experience.

### **Historical Simulations**

Another method of instruction outlined in Lorrei DiCamillo’s (2013) research, which can be utilized to teach historical empathy, is by using simulations. She noted the following:

There are many myths about simulations and that simulations are a defensible teaching activity if teachers enact them to encourage students’ interest in

historical topics and challenge them to think critically and develop empathy for people who lived in the past (p. 155).

Simulations within a secondary classroom can be difficult for teachers to implement. They are time consuming when a class is aimed at preparing for state tests, students may not take the simulations seriously, and it can be difficult to ensure that all students are involved.

However, DiCamillo offered six solutions to the problems with utilizing simulations. First, teachers must choose the topic for the simulation carefully, and have a clear and defined purpose for the simulation (2013). Teachers should also “provide appropriate curriculum and scaffolding for students to fully engage ... [and] assess what students learn from the simulation” (p. 159). Furthermore, it is important to properly set up, plan, organize, and create a measurable outcome for a classroom simulation.

A benefit of using simulations is that they can be used to expand students’ awareness of historical empathy (Rantala, Manninen & van den Berg, 2016). Students can gain more positive attitudes towards history if they participate in simulations. Another benefit of using simulations in classrooms is that teachers can assist their students in improving their decision-making skills (Pellegrino & d’Erizans, 2012). “Employed in social studies classrooms, this tool has the potential to foster historical thinking and empathy by calling on students to engage” (p. 146). On the whole, simulations introduce students to historical empathy and place them within the context of past events and within the figurative shoes of past people. This kind of learning can help students have a more meaningful experience.

## **Examples of Historical Simulations**

Jason Endacott's research (2015) of a middle school classroom looked at the utilization of simulations to teach historical empathy. In this research, the observed teacher used historical empathy to help students to understand "how people from the past thought, felt, made decisions, acted, and faced consequences within a specific historical and social context" (p. 1). Prior to the use of simulations, the teacher had difficulties in inspiring her students to care about ancient persons, since they had died thousands of years before the students were born (2015). Thus, it was important to put the students into the "shoes" of those within the time period in order to allow them to interact with history.

For this simulation, the students, first, were educated on the contextual and factual knowledge of the time. Second, students were placed within the time period. They were told the following: "You are the Athenian Assembly and you must make the difficult decisions that will seal the fate of this great city-state" (p. 2). Next, students looked at primary and secondary sources to better understand the context of the Athenians, and then considered the decisions that they made (2015). Students got the opportunity to show their understanding through debate, discussion, and presentation. And finally, to make it more applicable to the students' lives, the teacher led the students to make connections between the past and the present.

Another example of simulations used to teach history is through a "series of lessons that require high school students to consider the position of British Prime Minister Chamberlain in the months surrounding his negotiations with Adolf Hitler in the fall of 1938" (Foster, 1999, p. 18). This simulation is meant to help students understand

the actions of historical people. Considering Chamberlain's actions, his thought process, possible outcomes, and actual consequences of his actions, students are able to develop empathy with Prime Minister Chamberlain and the decisions he faced.

### **Conclusion of Literature**

The content of the articles and research gathered agrees that historical empathy *should* be taught in secondary education, but *how* it should be taught is not as concrete. As shown by even this limited amount of research, the definition of and purpose for teaching historical empathy in a secondary school system is not exact. This will be further evidenced by interviews, which were conducted with various teachers in the Polk County Public School System.

## **Methodology**

The methodology for this thesis consisted of conducting interviews of history teachers from both middle and high schools throughout the Polk County Public School System in Florida.

The teachers interviewed were chosen from within Polk County. All the teachers taught or had taught history in a standard classroom. Of the interviews conducted, there were four middle school history teachers and four high school history teachers.

These interviews were conducted to give a better perspective of what history teachers believe is important about history, how they teach history, their understanding of historical empathy, and whether or not they believe they are effectively teaching it to their students. These interviews allowed for individual perspectives to be assessed to gain a better overall idea of teachers' views and understandings of history and historical thinking.

The questions were based on information gathered from the literature on historical empathy and the problems with teaching history, which has been outlined in the "Review of Literature" chapter. The questions were formatted to answer the research questions asked within the introduction of this thesis, with the goal to identify each teacher's understanding of teaching history and historical empathy.

All of the teachers were first contacted through email. Each interview was set up again by email. The teacher will be referred to respectively as Teacher #1, Teacher #2, Teacher #3, Teacher #4, Teacher #5, Teacher #6, Teacher #7, and Teacher #8 throughout the paper.

The interviews were conducted at each teacher's school, either before school, after school, or during a planning period. Each interview was face-to-face, and one-on-one. Every teacher interviewed agreed to allow for the interview to be recorded, which was later transcribed to allow for better analysis of the data. Their responses are summarized within the next chapter, and the completed transcripts are listed in the appendices of this thesis (Appendix A). A copy of the initial contact email, consent form, and interview questions are also included within the appendices (Appendix C, Appendix D, Appendix B).

## **Analysis of Data**

For the purpose of analyzing the interviews that were conducted, some of the answers were discarded from the original transcripts and interviews. After consideration of all the transcripts, a few of the answers were found to be repetitive and lacked clear direction from the interviewer; therefore, those answers were omitted for consideration of this thesis. The interviewer tried to give as little prompting with the questions as possible; therefore, some lacked directness or application. Also, because of some of the times that the interviews were done, the teachers had limited time to be interviewed.

### **Background of the Teacher**

The first three questions of each interview were meant to gain preliminary information about each teacher. They sought to see what subject areas each teacher had taught or was currently teaching, as well as how long they had been teaching. The number of years of teaching ranged from a second-year teacher to a teacher who had been in the field for twenty-three years. Question one of the interview was “How long have you been a teacher?” Question two asked, “How many years have you worked at your current school?” Question three was a two-part question, asking “What grade levels do you currently teach? What particular courses do you teach?”

Teacher #1 has been a teacher for twenty-two years. Teacher #2 has been a teacher for roughly twenty-three years. Teacher #3 has taught for five years. Teacher #4 is a second-year teacher. Teacher #5 has taught for eighteen years. Teacher #6 has been an educator for seventeen years. Teacher #7 has been a teacher for eighteen years. And finally, Teacher #8 has been a teacher for seven years. The average length of the eight teachers’ careers is 13 years, with three teachers having taught for over fifteen years,

three teachers having taught for less than ten years, and two teachers having taught for over twenty years.

Teacher #1 teaches government, American history, and world history in a high school. Teacher #2 teaches seventh-grade civics. Teacher #3 teaches American history at a high school. Teacher #4 currently teaches sixth-grade world history. Teacher #5 teaches mainly world history and some American history at the high school level. Teacher #6 teaches at a high school and had previously taught art history, human geography, world history, and economics and government. Teacher #7 teaches eighth-grade U. S. history. And finally, Teacher #8 teaches seventh-grade civics.

Through these first few questions, the interviewer wanted to utilize the background information to see if the number of years of teaching experience had any implications on the teacher's understanding of historical empathy. Also, by knowing and understanding the subject areas within the content that had been taught, it would better explain the methods and grades they had talked about and used in their classrooms.

### **Why History and Historical Education is Important**

Question four asked the teachers why they believed that teaching history was important. Teacher #1 believed that history is important because it allows students to know where they came from so they could understand where they are going and how things work. It is important for students to question everything, to not take anything at face value. Understanding the biases of textbooks and historians is another important part of historical education, as students cannot learn from history unless they can determine what is true and what is not (Teacher #1, 2017).

Teacher #2 agreed that history allows students to know where they come from, with the added statement that “we learn from our mistakes” (2017). Teachers #5 and #6 generally had this same sentiment (2017). Teacher #3 believed that teaching history was important because students can learn to respect their country and to become better citizens (2017). Teacher #4 believed that the study of history is for the purpose of equipping students to make a difference in the future (2017). Teacher #7 believed social studies was a culmination of all other subjects, where skills from other subject areas could be applied (2017). Teacher #8 stated that history education is “important because you are talking about human behavior. You’re using history to basically teach social skills” (2017).

The fifth question of the interview asked what specifically was important to teachers for their students to understand about history. Teacher #1 believed that the students should understand that history has been written by the winners of wars and those who come out on top, and to watch out for historical biases and perspectives (2017). Another perspective posed by Teacher #2 was that students should learn from history -- “where you are going, where you came from, [and] what your rights are” (2017). Teachers #3, #4, and #8 shared a similar perspective, stating that their students should know the successes and failures of history, as well as actions and consequences, and to learn from them (Teacher #4, 2017). This opinion was shared by Teacher #6, who also wanted students to “move beyond dates, wars, and dead white people” (2017). Teacher #5, an American history high school teacher, wanted the students to know the foundation of America (2017). Teacher #7 viewed history for his/her students as a vehicle to teach

other skills, such as map reading, academic writing, analyzing of sources, and being able to use charts and graphs (2017).

### **How History is Taught in Their Classroom**

Teachers were then asked what different methods they used to teach history within their classrooms, and how they differentiated teaching for their students (Questions 6-8). Answers from questions six and seven are combined, as some teachers answered one more than the other and the questions themselves were very similar. Questions number six and seven asked teachers what different methods they used in to teach history and how they taught history in their classrooms. Question number eight asked what were the ways teachers differentiated their teaching for different types of learners in their classrooms.

Teachers were asked what types of methods they used specifically within their classrooms to teach history. Throughout all the interviews, there were six general strategies that a mixture of the teachers used: lecture and note taking; partner- and small-group instruction; projects, hands-on learning, and activities; technology; reading; and writing strategies. Examples from each of the six methods are given below.

Four teachers said they utilized lectures and note taking to teach, while five teachers said they used partner- and small-group instruction (teacher interviews, 2017). Some examples of partner- and small-group instruction were collaborative pairs, shoulder partners, small-group discussions, whole-group discussions, and jigsaw teaching, in which small groups would take a portion of the textbook and teach it to the rest of the class (Teacher #3, 2017).

Four teachers said they used a variety of different projects as a part of historical instruction. These projects included posters, doing research, and hands-on activities. Teacher #2 stated that his/her students made brochures about famous people (2017), and Teacher #1 has students write letters and journals from the perspectives of people in history (2017). One hands-on activity example given by Teacher #4 is movement, to “have [students] move and give physical illustrations of concepts” (2017). An example of this concept was given for a different interview question by Teacher #3, which involved students moving around the classroom to give an example of the process of diffusion (2017).

According to four of the teachers who were interviewed, technology was another important teaching strategy to use. This technology incorporation included video clips, photos, and music (teacher interviews, 2017). Again, half of the teachers found reading, specifically from textbooks and primary sources, to be important (teacher interviews, 2017). And finally, writing strategies were another tool being used by two specific teachers within their classrooms. Specifically, Teacher #3 noted that the RAFT writing strategy is of great use within the classroom (2017). RAFT stands for role of the person students are to write from, audience the student is writing to, format of the writing, and the topic that they will be writing about. In addition, Teacher #5 mentioned that vocabulary is a very important part of learning for students (2017).

For question eight, the answers by Teachers #1, #3, and #5 are not being considered for this thesis, as they were not relevant to the research being done. However, their answers are still included within the appendices. On the other hand, Teacher #6 (2017) and Teacher #7 (2017) both stated that they were not particularly good at

differentiating their instruction for their students. Teacher #2 stated that he/she differentiates by utilizing online resources, workbooks, and student pairs (2017). Teacher #4 noted that he/she tries to address all different learning styles within lessons: the auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners (2017). Teacher #8 said that how he/she differentiates depends on each individual class, ranging from a lot of cooperative and partner learning, notes from lectures, posters, artwork, and activities (2017).

### **How Student Comprehension is Measured**

In the ninth question of the interview, teachers were asked how the measured student comprehension of material. This can be broken into two main categories: formative assessments and summative assessments. All of the teachers utilized both types of assessments in different ways.

Formative assessment is a less formal way of assessing students' knowledge and understanding. Six out of the eight teachers mentioned that they assess students through oral questioning. This includes "yes or no" questions, verbally talking to the students, and discussing the history material being taught. This was also done through the Socratic method of questioning (Teacher #3, 2017) or by having students respond to a question by giving a thumbs up or thumbs down (Teacher #4, 2017). Other ways they assessed student learning was through writing, which was mentioned as a formative assessment by four of the teachers. Journal entries, ticket-out-the-door assignments (assignments at the end of class as a summary of a lesson), short paragraph writing, and bell work (prompts students are to answer right after the tardy bell rings at the start of class) were all examples given by the teachers. Two other ways mentioned by Teacher #4 were

circulating the classroom during partner work to hear what students are saying and have students drawing a picture to summarize a lesson (2017).

Summative assessment is a formal assessment that is supposed to summarize the learning from either a lesson or unit. One summarizing assessment mentioned by all eight teachers was using some form of paper test, including quizzes. Projects, such as creating posters, presentations, or other activities, are a way for students to show what they understood from the unit or lesson taught. Moreover, written assessments were the final way that the interviewed teachers assessed their students. The teachers did this through having students complete research papers (Teacher #1, 2017), quick writes (Teacher #3, 2017), letter to an absent student summarizing what was learned in the class (2017), and DBQs (Teacher #7, 2017) (Document-Based Question writing).

### **Defining Historical Empathy**

For the tenth question teachers were asked first if they knew what historical empathy was, and then if they could give a general definition of historical empathy. Out of the teachers interviewed, three teachers knew what historical empathy was and gave the correct definition, two were unsure and guessed the correct definition, and three said they did not know the definition. For the teachers who did not know what historical empathy was or gave an incorrect definition, the interviewer gave a definition so that they would be able to participate in the remaining questions of the interview.

Teacher #4, who was unsure of the definition of historical empathy, defined historical empathy as understanding the “motives of why people did what they did in history” (2017). The other teacher who was unsure of the definition was Teacher #8,

who defined it as “interacting with history, understanding the motives, consequences and behaviors of the people” (2017).

Teachers #1, #2, and #3 knew what historical empathy was and were able to give a correct definition. All of three of these teachers used the phrase “putting yourself in the shoes/place” of people in history, or understanding the perspective of the people of history (2017). Another point mentioned was the importance of understanding the decisions and feelings of historical figures and the reasoning behind their decisions. Furthermore, Teacher #3 defined historical empathy in this way:

When you try to put yourself in their shoes, so to speak. ... And trying to put yourself in their position to try to understand ... that they had decisions that they had to make, and sometimes it was for a bigger picture that we don't understand (2017).

Additionally, Teacher #1 defined historical empathy as “trying to put yourself in the other person's shoes to see the events at the time through the perspective of the people there” (2017). A specific example given that Teacher #1 used within the classroom was the act of slavery. He/she went on to say that in today's perspective and culture, there is no justification for slavery or for those who owned slaves throughout history. However, it used to be a part of everyday life for people.

On the other hand, Teacher #5 gave a guess, but did not know what historical empathy was. Teacher #6 gave an incorrect definition of historical empathy when asked, and believed it was about empathizing with the people on the outskirts of history (2017). Teacher #7 was also unsure of the definition of historical empathy, and actually guessed

the exact opposite of the correct definition, believing it was looking at history through students' own experiences and his/her own history and knowledge (2017).

### **How Historical Empathy Is Taught**

Question eleven asked teachers how they taught historical empathy in their classrooms. Teacher #1 stated that he/she uses examples and questioning to teach historical empathy to the students.

I'll ask them, what would you call a person who fought against his legitimate government, raised an army up, overthrew the government, created a new government where he was a leader? [They respond saying,] "Well he's a traitor, or that's treason." [Then I respond,] that's also George Washington (Teacher #1, 2017).

Teacher #2 uses journals, play acting, simulations, and mock Twitter and Facebook accounts for famous people of the time periods (2017). Teacher #3 utilizes RAFT, a previously stated writing method. When studying WWI, "they have to pretend like they are soldiers in the trenches" (2017). Videos, pictures, and primary source documents are also used.

Teacher #4 had to be given examples of what teaching historical empathy would look like within a classroom (the example given was *simulations*). After being given a prompt, Teacher #4 stated that he/she taught historical empathy through a form of simulations. For example, to explain the process of diffusion, or how the Native Americans traveled from Asia and the Middle East to America across the Great Strait, this teacher had the students move into one back corner of the room. When the teacher said "go," the students were allowed to spread out anywhere they wanted throughout the

room. Some went to a space completely on their own, while other students moved together in a small group. The teacher then explained that this was how different tribes, communities, and groups of people were formed (2017).

Teacher #5 explained that an important part of teaching historical empathy was research, quotes, and stories from the time periods (2017). Teacher #5 accomplished this by bringing in speakers who lived through the historical events, such as soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War, to share their personal stories. He/she also mentioned that visuals were another good way to help students empathize with the people of the past, such as through pictures and videos (2017).

The context of historical events, looking at history through the eyes of different kinds of people (like artists), and current events are methods used to teach by Teacher #6 (2017) and Teacher #7 (2017). In the same manner, Teacher #8 applies historical empathy in the classroom “through the use of primary sources. Letters and documents that have gone around to be able to step in the shoes [of those] who lived through the moments and interact with what’s going on in front of them” (2017).

### **Student Interaction with History**

With question twelve, teachers were asked if they believed historical empathy was being achieved within their classrooms. In other words, were their students able to empathize with the people of the past? Seven of the teachers interviewed stated that there were different levels of achieving empathy within their classrooms, but that overall their students seemed to be engaging and empathizing. Notably, Teacher #1, Teacher #3, and Teacher #5 were very confident that the majority of their students were achieving historical empathy.

Nonetheless, there were a few teachers that believed they had achieved very mixed levels of empathy. Teacher #2 stated that, because he/she taught middle school, it depended on the maturity of the students as to whether they were able to empathize with the people of the past (2017). Teacher #7, also a middle school history teacher, stated that his/her classes are “too young to fully understand, they haven’t experienced enough” (2017).

Still, Teacher #4, Teacher #6, and Teacher #8 were more mixed in their responses. Teacher #4 said that while he/she was unsure if his/her students were achieving historical empathy, it was the teacher’s ultimate goal in teaching and education (2017). Teacher #6 said that some students saw history classes and assignments as just another class and just another assignment; however, there were some students who are achieving empathy with the past (2017). Teacher #8 stated that it depended on the class and the learning abilities of each individual student (2017).

In question thirteen teachers were asked if they thought there were different levels of interaction with history among their students. All eight of the teachers agreed that their students had different levels of interaction, noting that there was a very large variety. According to Teacher #1,

Some of them are still in that old, “Give me the book, let me memorize the names, and dates and take the test and spit [the information] back out.” They want the easy way out. ... So there [are] some [who] are resistant to it, but you get over half that [are] good (2017).

Teacher #3 stated that some students within the classroom just sit absent-mindedly; it is not possible to reach all of the students (2017). In Teacher #4’s classes,

there are typically two students who are extremely involved and proactive in the class, and two who do not want to engage whatsoever. The teacher explained that, overall, “they are all engaged, they are just not all wanting to actively answer questions and participate” (Teacher #4, 2017). Teacher #5 expressed that students are engaged and interacting, as long as the teacher is teaching them something they are interested in. In this teacher’s classes, there are roughly 50% of students who are engaged and 50% who are not (Teacher #5, 2017).

The fourteenth and final question asked teachers what level they believed the majority of their students achieved. Teacher #6’s answer was not applicable to this thesis and is not being considered. Teacher #4 was unsure, as it was early in the year when the teacher was interviewed and the teacher did not think the students had been in school long enough to tell (2017). Teacher #8 believed that, as long as the students understood the language, they understood the history being taught (2017).

Additionally, four of the teachers believed that 70% or more of their students were achieving historical empathy within the classroom. Teachers #2 (2017) and #3 (2017) both believed 75% of their students understood, while Teacher #5 thought that the ratio of 70/30 applied to his/her students as to whether they genuinely cared and understood (2017). And finally, Teacher #7 said that there was a much lower percentage of students who engaged in historical empathy. Furthermore, Teacher #7, who teaches middle school, stated that, like most students at this age, they are not concentrating on school, but their minds are wandering. He/she added, “If you can get 95% of them engaged, for ten minutes of the day, you’ve done something” (Teacher #7, 2017). Thus,

the majority of the teachers believed that they were successful in achieving historical empathy within their classroom if even a percentage of their students were engaged.

## **Interpretation of the Results**

The purpose of this research and the interviews is to determine if historical empathy is being taught in the classroom and what the best methods are to teach it. The researcher of this thesis believes that historical empathy should be taught in secondary schools, and that it should be implemented as a way to differentiate teaching.

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question for this thesis sought to establish the purpose or purposes of teaching history. From the eight teachers interviewed, there were some differences of opinion on the purpose of teaching history.

The general belief of 50% of the teachers was that the purpose and point of teaching history is to teach students where they have come from in order to be able to understand where they are going. Part of the differences of beliefs that the teachers held may have had to do with the subjects that they taught as well as with the grade levels. Three out of the four high school teachers agreed on the purpose of teaching history, as well as one middle school teacher. Three of the middle school teachers, as well as one high school teacher, looked more at the skills they wanted to teach to their students and focused on equipping students for the future.

### **Research Question 2**

The second research question sought to define historical empathy, through both the research of previous data and through teachers. This was another point that showed some discrepancy among the teachers. Out of the teachers interviewed, only three out of the eight teachers knew what historical empathy was and could define it. Two teachers were unsure. However, there were three teachers who did not know what historical

empathy was and were unable to guess a definition. As to whether the teachers could define historical empathy, this research found no correlation between the subject taught, the amount of years a teacher had taught, or whether the teacher taught in middle school or high school.

### **Research Question 3**

The third research question sought to determine if historical empathy was being taught in secondary public schools. This was done by asking if teachers knew what historical empathy was, and also by having them give examples of how historical empathy was being taught within their classrooms. From the understanding of the teachers, they were all able to discuss ways that they could or do implement historical empathy within the classroom. However, less than half of the teachers could define historical empathy, and therefore this researcher would conclude, were not fully concentrating on helping students to empathize with the past. Even though they gave examples, it would be difficult to empathize with something that the teacher had no prior knowledge of.

### **Research Question 4**

The fourth research question examined how secondary history teachers in the public school system were teaching historical empathy. From the interviews, it was found that the strategies used to teach historical empathy could be grouped into three main categories: simulations, writing, and using primary sources.

First, simulations were used by teachers in many different methods. Some teachers conducted simulations by literally placing students within a circumstance from

the past. Another way was to ask questions and pose hypothetical situations to stimulate empathy within the students.

The second category was writing. This included giving students some form of an assignment to empathize with people of the past. One of the main examples given by Teacher #3 was the use of the RAFT writing strategy to teach historical empathy (2017). And, while none of the other teachers mentioned this exact strategy, it seemed to be a general format that those teachers used. Also, in writing journals or letters, students could take on the role of a historical person to think through and empathize with what that person would have experienced. They are able to address the audience of the time period, using the format of a letter or journal, and the topic about which they are writing (Teacher #3, 2017).

The final main method of instruction used to teach historical empathy was through the use of primary sources and stories. By using stories from people who lived through and experienced events from the past, students can better interact with and empathize with history. This was done by teachers inviting guests in to speak or by using primary sources like journals, letters, or other personal documents. Also, pictures and video reenactments were used to help students to connect better with people of the past (Teacher #5, 2017). All of these examples help to make historical figures become actual people for the students, instead of just being simply a number, statistic, or famous name.

### **Research Question 5**

The fifth research question sought to show whether students within secondary schools were able to empathize with history and people from the past or not. Teachers

were asked if their students were achieving historical empathy, and what levels of interaction their students had with history.

100% of the teachers agreed that there are different levels of interaction with history and with classroom learning among their students. Three out of the eight teachers had concerns about their students being able to understand and becoming empathetic with people from the past, as well as their interactions with history. These three teachers were all middle school history teachers (Teacher #2, Teacher #4, Teacher #7). The three teachers that were more certain that their students were interacting well and empathizing with history were three of the high school teachers (Teachers #1, Teacher #3, Teacher #5). However, one middle school teacher (Teacher #8) and one high school teacher (Teacher #6) each stated that the level of interaction differs by each class. Even within each of these classrooms, not all of the students would be willing or able to achieve historical empathy. Even though they noted that there are different levels of interaction, the majority of the teachers stated that as long as they had 75% actively engaged, they considered themselves successful within the classroom.

As for actually achieving historical empathy, seven teachers' answers were considered out of the eight. Six of those teachers believed that their students could or were achieving historical empathy. Finally, there was only one teacher, a middle school teacher, believed that it was too difficult for the students to be able to interact with the past because they were too young and did not have enough experiences (Teacher #7, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

### **Summarization**

This thesis looked at historical empathy and its implications in secondary education. The research was driven by five questions, in the search to find out if historical empathy was known and taught by secondary teachers, and the methods of instruction they used to teach it. To further the research and to answer the five questions, four middle school and four high school history teachers were individually interviewed. The fourteen questions asked helped to determine current public school teachers' opinions on the five different questions asked.

Based on the information given by teachers from these interviews, it is possible that there is a correlation between student understanding in middle school and high school setting, as an important emphasis is placed on empathizing with the past.

From the teachers interviewed, roughly half of them were able to define historical empathy, with those three also emphasizing the importance of having students empathize with the past. Furthermore, there were three main ways that history teachers taught historical empathy within their classrooms: simulations, writing, and primary sources.

### **Limitations of this Thesis and Need for Further Research**

Due to the small number of interviews that were conducted, this research is incomplete. My conclusion is drawn only from the empirical research and the eight interviews. The number of interviews that I was able to conduct was impacted by Hurricane Irma that hit Florida in September of 2017, which led to cancellation of school days and affected the availability of teachers to interview. To have a better pool of

teachers and information to consider for this thesis, the original number of interviews planned for was 10-15 teachers.

One of the limitations for conducting interviews was due to the time availabilities of the teachers. Because interviews were conducted before school, after school, and during teachers' planning periods, some teachers had more time to be able to give more extensive answers than others.

For any future research, it is recommended the interviews be conducted at more schools, different types of schools other than public schools, or by possibly observing one grade level at a time to determine information for each grade level. To better understand if there is a correlation between middle school and high school teachers' understanding of historical empathy and whether middle school students are able to empathize with history, more attention might be given to having a larger and equal number of both middle school and high school history teachers.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis shows that secondary teachers in Polk County Public Schools are teaching historical empathy, albeit not all teachers. To assist students in accomplishing the goals and purpose of teaching history, historical empathy should be a necessary part of historical education. Historical empathy should be used as a method to differentiate instruction. Through the use of simulations, primary sources, documents and pictures, and writing, students can learn to empathize with the people of the past.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A: Interview Transcripts

### Teacher #1

Q: How long have you been a teacher?

A: *I've been a teacher for 22 years.*

Q: How many years have you worked at this current school?

A: *This is my fifth year here at [school name].*

Q: What grade levels do you currently teach? What particular contents/courses do you teach?

A: *Currently I have 10, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> graders. I am teaching AP Government, Government Honors, Dual Enrollment American History, AP World History, and regular Government.*

Q: Why do you think teaching history is important?

A: *Because if we don't know how we got to where we are, we can't understand the present and we certainly can't get a grasp on what's to come? If you want to understand how things work you have to understand how you got to where you are.*

Q: What specifically is important for your students to understand about history?

A: *There's a couple things. First thing is that history is written by the winners. So just because it's in the history books doesn't mean it's really what happened. You have to be able to figure out the historical bias, and be able to read documents and interpret them, and find out what the author's perspective is, his point of view, is there is any bias, and be able to determine what is true and what maybe isn't.*

Q: What different methods do you use to teach history?

A: *I try to get the students to see things from the perspective of the times because times change, obviously, and you can't judge the past by the standards of today and they have to understand that. So I do a number of different things, from having them do projects to having them read primary documents to writing letters, journals from a perspective of a person in that time period. And to question everything.*

Q: How do you teach history in your classroom?

A: *Lecture, use a lot of primary source documents, try to get them to figure out cause and effect, what motivates people, why they do the things they do, and you asked about historical empathy and that has a lot to do with it. If you can understand what motivates people it's easier to understand their actions and why things happen the way they do.*

Q: What are the ways you differentiate your teaching for the different types of learners in your classroom?

A: *AP and Dual Enrollment classes will do more research and independent work, I have them do group work and mix up, have some high level with low level students to help each other, and sometimes oddly enough sometimes the dumbest questions can be the*

*most thought provoking when you look at it in a serious manner. It works well to mix up the different levels. And just use different level books and documents.*

**Q:** How do you measure student comprehension of material?

*A: Use a variety of formative assessments, some of them are as simple as oral questioning, sometimes a journal entry or a ticket-out-the-door. And then summatives: tests and quizzes, research papers and various projects (like doing an autopsy of an Empire).*

**Q:** Do you know what historical empathy is? Can you give me a general definition of historical empathy?

*A: My definition is trying to put yourself in the other person's shoes to see the events at that time through the perspective of the people there. Slavery, for instance. Now a-days everyone accepts slavery as a horrible thing that there's no justification for. But 200 years ago, that was the norm. I mean Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence-he was a slave owner! The Bible talks about slavery and there's no problem with that. So if we were to judge those people by the standards of today, that wouldn't work out very well. So you have to look at things through the perspective of the people at the time to understand what they were thinking, feeling, why they did what they did. And along with that I like to use the example of Hitler. You ask who was the worst person in history and you say "Hitler." But then, if you look at what he did compared to what some others did, I mean he was bad but maybe not as bad as some others. And you don't realize that unless you look at things from different perspectives.*

**Q:** How do you teach historical empathy in your classroom?

*A: First off I use examples. Like, I'll ask them what would you call a person who fought against his legitimate government, raised an army up, overthrew the government, created a new government where he was the leader? [They respond saying] Well he's a traitor, or that's treason. That's also George Washington. And what would you call a person who was tried for capital offense, convicted, and executed for treason and sedition? [They would say] well that's another bad person, well that's also Jesus. So when they start thinking of some common examples that they can relate to [they think], "oh yeah, you do have to look at things a bit differently." Because we can't judge them by our standards today. To me that's what it means.*

**Q:** Do you believe historical empathy/knowledge/understanding/imagination is being achieved?

*A: I think so; I hope so. A lot of them seem to be catching on to it. And I'll use modern examples like the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. We said we wanted to bring democracy to those countries. Well from our point of view that's a good goal. Bring freedom and democracy! If you look at it from their point of view, they're Islamic countries, and in an Islamic society the religious leaders should be the political leaders. Well if your religious leaders are your political leaders, that doesn't leave a lot of room for democracy. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. It's a different thing ... A lot of them [the students] are the age now where they're thinking about going into the military or*

*they have relatives or friends that are in the military, and they think, “yeah maybe if they had thought this through they wouldn’t be fighting.” It seems to be having an impact.*

**Q:** Do you think there are different levels of interaction [that your students have] with history?

*A: Yeah. Some of them are still in that old, “Give me the book, let me memorize the names, and dates and take and test and spit it back out.” They want the easy way out. But history is more about interpreting, and thinking, and learning from the past, which requires a lot more abstract thinking than math or science. And some of the kids like that, but then some of them just don’t want that. They’ve been spoon-fed so long and in school that [they think], “just give us the answers. Don’t make us think.” So there’s some that are resistant to it, but if you get over half that’s good.*

**Q:** What level do you believe the majority of your student achieve?

*A: I have one regular class and then the rest are all honors or above. So in the Economics county exam, 95% of my students scored satisfactory or higher. Which to me is a pretty good, they’re achieving satisfactory or higher ... most of my students are achieving at a good level. [For my regular class] They are doing pretty good. They probably had 85% score satisfactory on the county exam, so that is pretty good. They’re doing really well. [I’ve had kids who say] I’m not doing really well in this class but I know more than anyone in my neighborhood about government, or my parents are always asking me questions. So I think they’re learning, and some of the stuff is sinking in, and if nothing else, they’ll remember for the rest of their lives how to look at things and think about things a little bit different. And not to accept things just because they see it on the Internet or hear it on the news or someone’s twitter feed. That’s one thing I’ve taught them: question everything, believe what you want, but be able to support what you believe. I don’t care if you agree with me or not, but if you can support your argument, happy days.*

### **Teacher #2:**

**Q:** How long have you been a teacher?

*A: 1994 was my first year, so about 23 years.*

**Q:** How many years have you worked at this current school?

*A: I started in this school in 2007; I’ve been here 10 years.*

**Q:** What grade levels do you currently teach? What particular contents/courses do you teach?

*A: I teach 7<sup>th</sup> grade civics and 6<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. history.*

**Q:** Why do you think teaching history is important?

*A: The typical answer is you have to understand what happened in the past before you can understand what’s going on now. And we learn from our mistakes and all that. I always tell them, “You can’t understand where you come from if you don’t study history.”*

Q: What specifically is important for your students to understand about history?

A: *Honestly to not sound like you're dumb. For one you have to know where we came from, why do we do things like we do today. And besides that, if you don't know about your rights in the Bill of Rights, how are you going to know if your rights are being violated? So, history is very important to know where you're going, where you came from, what your rights are, just as simple as that.*

Q: What different methods do you use to teach history?

A: *We try to have as much hands on as you can. Civics is easy to do that with. In history there is a lot of reading and note taking, there's just no way around it. So reading we will follow up with some kind of research thing that they have to do. Create a poster, or some kind of mini brochure on a famous American or something that has to do with the topic we've been talking about.*

Q: How do you teach history in your classroom?

A: *A lot of reading, note taking, and hands on projects.*

Q: What are the ways you differentiate your teaching for the different types of learners in your classroom?

A: *A lot of times the textbook helps with that. They have some online stuff for teachers. We can supplement the material with other materials, like a workbook. Sometimes we pair up students. Sometimes the students do a better job remediating each other than the teachers do.*

Q: How do you measure student comprehension of material?

A: *Bell work, we will do practice questions in the bell work. We will give them questions and have them answer in a well-constructed paragraph. A lot of the times [we use] verbal questioning. I can tell if someone is getting it that way. Sometimes its hard in middle school because half of them are focused on getting the material and the other half is taking notes and talking at the same time. I give them also a project, which also tells me if they comprehend what we've been talking about.*

Q: Do you know what historical empathy is? Can you give me a general definition of historical empathy?

A: *Yes. Putting yourself in the place of historical figures. Taking a topic or time period and putting yourself into that. As a matter of fact I've done in the past [having them do diaries from the perspective of historical figures and time periods]. Putting themselves in the place of people who lived through it.*

Q: How do you teach historical empathy in your classroom?

A: *Having them do journals. Play acting, simulations (court trials), mock twitter or Facebook account for famous people from the time period we are talking about. Has them get up and do something.*

Q: Do you believe historical empathy is being achieved?

*A: Historical empathy gives them a different perspective on things and when they have to dive in and do the research it makes them understand it. For this age group, it's a maturity thing.*

Q: Do you think there are different levels of interaction with history?

*A: Yeah, definitely. For different classes and the reading level, you may have to simplify it.*

Q: What level do you believe the majority of your students achieve?

*A: Honestly, maybe 75%. You've always got those who don't interact.*

**Teacher #3:**

Q: How long have you been a teacher?

*A: This is my fifth year.*

Q: How many years have you worked at this current school?

*A: This is my fourth year, I taught one year at [a high school].*

Q: What grade levels do you currently teach? What particular contents/courses do you teach?

*A: Currently I'm teaching all juniors. But I have taught 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. U.S. History; starts at Civil War to modern day. I barely get past Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter.*

Q: Why do you think teaching history is important?

*A: I think teaching history is important because I feel like when students learn about their country and to respect and honor citizens who worked hard in this country, and many of them died for what they believed in, that it will produce good citizens one day, and maybe good congressmen to be leaders. That's why I think it's important to study history and specifically to study American History.*

Q: What specifically is important for your students to understand about history?

*A: The old saying "history tends to repeat itself" is kind of true in some ways. And I feel like we need to learn from our history, good things and bad things, so that we don't repeat things. I feel these young people in this generation need to learn more about our great country and have more patriotism and I think we're missing that, and what it means to be a good citizen and give up your time, be respectful to our leaders.*

Q: What different methods do you use to teach history?

*A: I use so many methods because when I was in school I didn't like history. I just think my teachers were boring, they just wanted me to memorize dates, they didn't put any pictures up and I was bored. Now that I'm a history teacher, I love a challenge. I want to be a good history teacher. I want to make history come alive, and that's what I try to do. I use video clips to give them a visual, we work in collaborative pairs a lot, we work on chart paper. We do a jigsaw, where they take a portion of the book and teach it to the class. I'm a very kinesthetic teacher, hands-on. I use a lot of writing strategies, like RAFT. We get in groups of four, [each has a role].*

Q: How do you teach history in your classroom?

A: *No answer given.*

Q: What are the ways you differentiate your teaching for the different types of learners in your classroom?

A: *I think it helps and I get a lot of good feedback from the kids, because so many people want instant gratification. And they're always wanting to be seeing something, like in flashes. So I try to engage them that way. You're going to reach the kids who are visual learners; you're going to reach the kids who are kinesthetic and hands-on. Sometimes I do lectures and have them take notes; I think that's important. So I change it up, I try to be very well rounded, and that can be difficult. I challenge myself.*

Q: How do you measure student comprehension of material?

A: *I do a lot of short, quick writes. I think that that's important. One strategy that I did was doing a letter to an absent student about what we learned in class today. They are regurgitating what I taught them, I'm not telling them. And they're telling their friend what they missed in class. When I read it, it lets me know who got what and how much they got. Of course we do quizzes in here. A lot of it is just feedback; I'll go through things and use the Socratic method and get them thinking. I do a lot of group questions, they learn from each other. I let other students assess.*

Q: Do you know what historical empathy is? Can you give me a general definition of historical empathy?

A: *Yes, I do. Historical empathy is when you try to put yourself in their shoes, so to speak. And try to pretend what it was like to have to make that decision, or how do you think they felt having to do something that will be a big impact. And trying to put yourself in their position to try to understand and sometimes that can be hard to do. I use it a lot, because I want them to feel like they were there (we are so far removed). And I want them to try to understand how people made decisions that they did and use empathy, even though you might not agree with it. At least you need to try to understand that they had decisions that they had to make, and sometimes it was for a bigger picture that we don't understand.*

Q: How do you teach historical empathy in your classroom?

A: *Well RAFT would be one of them, where they have to take on the role of somebody. For instance, in WWI, they have to pretend like they are soldiers in the trenches. The audience is going to be they are going to have to write a letter home to a loved one. The format is a letter, and the topic is going to be that they are in the trenches. When I do that, they have already learned all of the vocabulary that they need to learn, and I put the words up there, and they have to use the vocabulary while they're writing it. Another way I use historical empathy is using them as examples. I'll point out to them, and put them into a position of "what are you going to do?" I try to use really interesting videos to give this generation a visual. And actual pictures, and actual primary source documents.*

Q: Do you believe historical empathy is being achieved?

A: *I think so. I do.*

Q: Do you think there are different levels of interaction with history?

A: *Yes, there are some students that you can tell. It's just their personality; they are just there. You're not going to reach all of them.*

Q: What level do you believe the majority of your students achieve?

A: *For EOS testing my class had a 94% passing rate, so I must be doing something. 75-80% I would say are achieving historical empathy.*

**Teacher #4:**

Q: How long have you been a teacher?

A: *This is my second year.*

Q: How many years have you worked at this current school?

A: *I've been at this school both years.*

Q: What grade levels do you currently teach? What particular contents/courses do you teach?

A: *I teach 8<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. History. I taught 6<sup>th</sup> grade World History.*

Q: Why do you think teaching history is important?

A: *I think it's important, for one because this school is a very high-poverty school; they have no concept of time. I think it's a very unexplored topic, specifically for middle schoolers. And I guess more theoretically, I think history is important because the more our kids understand the past the better equipped they are to go into the future to make a difference. I always tell my kids that history is important, history is the story of man, the story of people, but your history is important.*

Q: What specifically is important for your students to understand about history?

A: *I think the successes and failures of history; certain historical figures, their successes and failures. I think it's really important for kids to see cause and effect, that's something they don't really understand in middle school, that their actions have consequences. I try to stay away from memorization of facts and dates and make it more conceptual.*

Q: What different methods do you use to teach history?

A: *I try to address as many learning styles as I can. I try to stay more away from just writing down notes and lecturing and incorporate more hands-on learning, activity based learning, we do a lot of discussions, for the classes that can actually engage in discussion. And we do some just note taking and stuff like that, a lot of technology integration.*

Q: How do you teach history in your classroom?

A: *Movement. Having them move and give physical illustrations of concepts.*

Q: What are the ways you differentiate your teaching for the different types of learners in your classroom?

A: *I try to address the auditory, the visual, the kinesthetic, and get as much as I can in each lesson.*

Q: How do you measure student comprehension of material?

A: *A lot of just as I go questions. "Yes or No" questions, give me a thumbs up or a thumbs down. We do a lot of partner work, so I can just circulate and kind of check their work and see who's understanding the concept. And for testing I do a lot of paper tests, but I try to mix it up as well, because I have a lot of kids that know the material, but as soon as they sit down to take a test they just blank. So I'll do things like creating a poster and presenting it to the class, or draw me a picture. I try to mix things up as best I can.*

Q: Do you know what historical empathy is?

A: *I'm not super familiar with it.*

Q: Can you give me a general definition of historical empathy?

A: *I would think it's along the lines of motives of why people did what they did in history. Interviewer gave a definition.*

Q: How do you teach historical empathy in your classroom?

A: *(After prompting) For one example we were talking about how Native Americans came to America just a couple of weeks ago. And I was explaining to them that the natives started in the Middle East and then walked across Asia, across the Great Straight and down into America through Alaska. And the reason they did that was because they wanted to have more room, the process of diffusion. So I had all my kids stand up and go in the back corner, and told them to get really close. A lot of them have a personal space thing, so they didn't like all be crammed in that corner. And I said when I say go, you can go anywhere around the room where you feel comfortable. And of course they spread out and I used that as an illustration of the process of diffusion and why the Native Americans spread out across the world and how we ended up with people in South America. Some of the students would come over here by themselves, but then you had a group of five friends. And that's how we came up with tribes and communities.*

Q: Do you believe historical empathy is being achieved?

A: *Yes and no. It is definitely my goal in teaching. It is a challenge, but yes it is my ultimate goal.*

Q: Do you think there are different levels of interaction with history?

A: *I probably have two in every class wanting to be involved, and then the rest not so much. Although, they are all engaged, they are just not all wanting to actively answer questions and participate. I probably only have two who really don't want to engage.*

Q: What level do you believe the majority of your students achieve?

*A: I'm not sure, just because it's so early in the year. Maybe they are quite getting as much as I thought that they were getting. Certain things that I take for granted that they understand, they might not because there is no knowledge base.*

**Teacher #5:**

Q: How long have you been a teacher?

A: *18 years.*

Q: How many years have you worked at this current school?

A: *18 at this school.*

Q: What grade levels do you currently teach? What particular contents/courses do you teach?

A: *10-12 grade. World History, and some American History.*

Q: Why do you think teaching history is important?

A: *In this day and age it's important because of the instant gratification that the students have and important to let them know where they came from, and where everything came from-writing, language.*

Q: What specifically is important for your students to understand about history?

A: *What is the foundation of our country?*

Q: What different methods do you use to teach history?

A: *I use hands on, I use group work, I use anything and everything to keep them interested. I use shoulder partners, I use vocabulary, I use writing, anything that's going to spark a light in someone's eyes. Projects, if the curriculum allows for it.*

Q: How do you teach history in your classroom?

A: *Same as above answers.*

Q: What are the ways you differentiate your teaching for the different types of learners in your classroom?

A: *Especially here, for ESOL you have to modify your curriculum. Each classroom you'll have five different ways to present the same amount of information. It all just depends; think about the children that can't hear, subtitles, larger print, less questions. It's child-by-child, group-by-group.*

Q: How do you measure student comprehension of material?

A: *I don't do a lot of testing. I do quizzes for my honors. But for my regular classes, daily work I'll do a writing assessment to see how their writing is, if they can write, if they can even read. We don't have the materials to give homework-no computer or Internet at home, so a lot of it is in-class assessment.*

Q: Do you know what historical empathy is?

A: *Not really, their perspective?*

Q: Can you give me a general definition of historical empathy?

A: *Interviewer gave a definition.*

Q: How do you teach historical empathy in your classroom?

A: *I would teach that through researching personal experiences, personal quotes, stories from the time there are lots of stories out there. There's lots of great information that you can find on people who were actually there. I've actually brought in speakers, not so much anymore because they've all passed away, to share their personal stories. Research, documents, human being and empathy stories.*

Q: Do you believe historical empathy is being achieved?

A: *Yes, I do. I'll even have them tell something about themselves. They'll have their own parents about events and time periods.*

Q: Do you think there are different levels of interaction with history?

A: *Yes-if you give them something they are interested in. Photographic evidence is huge for these kids. No, I think they are more involved in their technology. I'd say it's 50/50. I definitely use their technology in lessons.*

Q: What level do you believe the majority of your students achieve?

A: *They test well, so I'm doing something right. I'd say 70/30 for caring and understanding.*

**Teacher #6:**

Q: How long have you been a teacher?

A: *I have been teaching for 17 years.*

Q: How many years have you worked at this current school?

A: *All of them, 17.*

Q: What grade levels do you currently teach? What particular contents/courses do you teach?

A: *I teach 10-12<sup>th</sup> graders. I currently teach AP Art History, AP Psychology, and Dual Enrollment College Success Leadership. I previously taught human geography, world history, econ and government, and humanities.*

Q: Why do you think teaching history is important?

A: *I think history is important because we as people have a narrative that needs to be told. I enjoy teaching the history so that way kids know that we didn't just happen right now, that there is a story of us. I like them to know the story of us. How we got here and why we got here and things we've gone through to get here.*

Q: What specifically is important for your students to understand about history?

A: *I want them to move beyond dates, wars, and dead white people. I want them to know of our successes, and why they are successes. But I also want them to know the*

*difficulties, some of our low points, why and what we did to get to those low points and to know our lows and how you can prevent them.*

**Q:** What different methods do you use to teach history?

*A: I know kids don't like to do busy work, so I always gave them reading to do ahead of time, and come into the class being able to contribute to an academic discussion. I don't really lecture, because it is boring for me and for them. There are no word banks, there are no worksheets, just read this, write down a couple of notes, and come to class. I taught it very much through discussion. I put up a prompt and just start talking. They began to take confidence in what they were reading and what they were contributing. Discussion-based.*

**Q:** How do you teach history in your classroom?

*A: No answer given.*

**Q:** What are the ways you differentiate your teaching for the different types of learners in your classroom?

*A: I don't do that as well as I should have. I don't do a lot of differentiating. If I set the bar high enough, the kids will meet it. I push them.*

**Q:** How do you measure student comprehension of material?

*A: Discussion mainly. I can tell if a kid read and didn't get it versus a kid that didn't read. Tests, assessments are a good way to measure comprehension.*

**Q:** Do you know what historical empathy is?

*A: Well I know what historical is, and I know what empathy separately is.*

**Q:** Can you give me a general definition of historical empathy?

*A: I would say, is it teaching history through not just the people who wrote history books, because they won, but the people on the outskirts of history and empathizing through them and their perspective?*

*Interviewer gave more concise definition.*

**Q:** How do you teach historical empathy in your classroom?

*A: Art history we look at history through the artist's eyes. We look contextually how that is impacting them, and then how they in their art can then impact their society. It's not something that I have to teach, but by the nature of my course it happens.*

**Q:** Do you believe historical empathy is being achieved?

*A: I really think in some of my world history classes, they just saw it for an assignment. I hope my Advanced Placement are seeing what you are after. I hope that my kids are seeing it from their viewpoint, from their perspective, of the events that happening around them. And be able to use that in conversation.*

**Q:** Do you think there are different levels of interaction with history?

*A: I would say mostly in the middle. You will have the kids that will sit there and not open their mouths, won't let you call on them, and you will have the few kids who will continually talk. But I would say that most are in the middle.*

Q: What level do you believe the majority of your students achieve?

*A: Yes. I do. They do what they are supposed to, and I can do what I'm supposed to, then they do well.*

**Teacher #7:**

Q: How long have you been a teacher?

*A: I taught 18 years.*

Q: How many years have you worked at this current school?

*A: I've been teaching 15 years here.*

Q: What grade levels do you currently teach? What particular contents/courses do you teach?

*A: Right now I've been teaching 8<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. History.*

Q: Why do you think teaching history is important?

*A: The main thing is that all the other disciplines – English, Math, and even Science – social studies is the subject where they can take those skills they learned in other areas and apply them here. And use them in a more real world situation. I don't buy into the idea that we study our history to learn from our mistakes, because if we did that we wouldn't be doing the same thing over and over again. We're learning about the past, not learning from it. But learning about the past can give you a window into your own personal journey in life. We're planting seeds for them at this age.*

Q: What specifically is important for your students to understand about history?

*A: There's about five basic skills that I think kids can exercise while they're learning history. I believe the actual content itself is the vehicle to teach the skills that they can learn. One is map reading, another is writing in an academic area, another is being able to analyze primary and secondary sources, being able to use charts and graphs and raw data within a historical perspective. Those are skills that they can actually learn that not only apply here but in other areas of their lives. Those skills are more important than actual factual knowledge.*

Q: What different methods do you use to teach history?

*A: Using visual images, which is good for every type of learner. White boards.*

Q: How do you teach history in your classroom?

*A: No answer given.*

Q: What are the ways you differentiate your teaching for the different types of learners in your classroom?

*A: I'm not really very good at that, as I should. I'm working to get back to where I was.*

Q: How do you measure student comprehension of material?

A: *I do it mainly through writing. Our school format school wide is called "TEDDYS." DBQs. It forces them to do some academic writing. I don't do a lot of quizzes and tests; I mainly do assessment through lot of writing. Research shows that if they can summarize things for you in a decent paragraph, get the details right, then it sticks in their brains longer.*

Q: Do you know what historical empathy is? Can you give me a general definition of historical empathy?

A: *Being able to connect with history based off of your experience and also based off of your prior knowledge. Being able to connect to history through your own experience in life.*

*Interviewer gave a definition.*

Q: How do you teach historical empathy in your classroom?

A: *Current event lessons.*

Q: Do you believe historical empathy is being achieved?

A: *They are too young to fully understand, they haven't experienced enough. You have to understand where they are at developmentally first. Listen and know what they understand in life.*

Q: Do you think there are different levels of interaction with history?

A: *It depends. The level of engagement is going to be off because of the way we have to teach. It's difficult to engage them.*

Q: What level do you believe the majority of your students achieve?

A: *No. What were you thinking about in 8<sup>th</sup> grade? They're doing the same thing. They are in and out. Even if you can get them for ten minutes, if you can get 95% of them engaged, for ten minutes of the day you've done something.*

**Teacher #8:**

Q: How long have you been a teacher?

A: *7 years.*

Q: How many years have you worked at this current school?

A: *All 7 years here.*

Q: What grade levels do you currently teach? What particular contents/courses do you teach?

A: *Currently it's 7<sup>th</sup> grade history and then the drama classes for all three grades.*

Q: Why do you think teaching history is important?

A: *I think it's important because you are talking about human behavior. You're using history to basically teach social skills.*

Q: What specifically is important for your students to understand about history?

A: *Just those lessons, those behaviors. I think it's important to know the stories, the reactions and consequences that we know today in American History. There's always a "why did this happen, why did that happen?" Those answers to those questions.*

Q: What different methods do you use to teach history?

A: *There is a lot of technology that's used; videos, photos, music, all of it. Textbooks, other reading sources.*

Q: How do you teach history in your classroom?

A: *Lectures, whole group and small group instruction, cooperative learning, technology.*

Q: What are the ways you differentiate your teaching for the different types of learners in your classroom?

A: *That would depend on the class. If one class can't handle whole group instruction, then they need small group instruction. We do a lot of cooperative learning, like partners, and interacting with groups of that nature. And there's a lot of things that's not just straight lecture. Notes, they're walking around the class, they're doing posters, they're doing artwork, tons of activities that is going to engage more than just my audio learners or visual learners.*

Q: How do you measure student comprehension of material?

A: *It would depend. Tests, written activities, verbally talking to them and discussing the material with them. Data from that.*

Q: Do you know what historical empathy is?

A: *What I'm guessing it means...*

Q: Can you give me a general definition of historical empathy?

A: *What I'm guessing it means is interacting with history, understanding the motives, consequences and behaviors of the people. And not just as whole groups, but individuals. Interviewer gave a definition.*

Q: How do you teach historical empathy in your classroom?

A: *I apply it to the classroom through the use of primary sources. Letters, and documents that have gone around to be able to step in the shoes that lived through the moments and interact with what's going on in front of them, instead of being just like "this is what happened."*

Q: Do you believe historical empathy is being achieved?

A: *Depending on the class.*

Q: Do you think there are different levels of interaction with history?

*A: Yes, definitely. I still think kids are wanting to be like “well if I was there, I would have done things differently.” I do have the kids who just don’t see that, they see themselves as superman or immortal so they approach it that way.*

**Q:** What level do you believe the majority of your students achieve?

*A: That would just depend on the class, the reading levels and the language levels. So in one class I can have a kid who gets it, who understands, grasps the concepts and goes with it. But then I have other kids in the same class who are still learning basic terms. So it really would depend on the class. But I think of the students who can understand the language, they get it. They do understand. They are following along with it.*

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a teacher?
2. How many years have you worked at this current school?
3. What grade levels do you currently teach? What particular contents/courses/areas do you teach?
4. Why do you think teaching history is important?
5. What specifically is important for your students to understand about history?
6. What different methods do you use to teach history?
7. How do you teach history in your classroom?
8. What are the ways you differentiate your teaching for the different types of learners in your classroom?
9. How do you measure student comprehension of material?
10. Do you know what historical empathy is? (If answer is yes or no) Can you give me a general definition of historical empathy?
11. How do you teach historical empathy in your classroom (will define for teachers if they do not know the definition)?
12. Do you believe historical empathy/knowledge/understanding/imagination is being achieved?
13. Do you think there are different levels of interaction with history?
14. What level do you believe the majority of your students achieve?

### **Appendix C: Contact Email For Interview Participants**

Dear (name),

My name is Melanie Alsene. I am a student at Southeastern University; I am majoring in secondary education in social sciences and am in the Honors program. In order to graduate with honors, I will be writing a bachelor's thesis. My thesis topic is on teaching **historical empathy** in the secondary classroom setting. For this thesis project, I am conducting interviews with public and private middle and high school teachers, many of who have been recommended to me, regarding this topic. If you are able to or are at all interested in assisting me with an interview, please contact me at the email address listed below. Attached to this email is a consent form and a list of the questions that will be asked during the interview. I hope you will be willing to join me as I investigate this topic. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Melanie Alsene

Southeastern University, Secondary Education Social Sciences Student

mdalsene@seu.edu

**Appendix D: Consent Form For Participating in Interview Research**

Consent Form<sup>[11]</sup><sub>SEP</sub> I consent to go through the interview process. I consent to having my answers recorded and used as information for Melanie Alsene's Thesis. I understand that none of my personal information will be used, just my answers to the questions asked. This statement signifies that I received a copy of the questions to be asked prior to the interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date