July 2010

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Complicating Students' Historical Thinking through Primary Source Reinvention

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To best challenge students' thinking, researchers and educators must locate or create innovative ways to spark enthusiasm and facilitate criticality. This paper investigates how middle school students analyzed various primary and secondary historical documents to construct original political cartoons. Students articulated newly generated understandings about the complex historical event within these original political cartoons. Students then examined and discussed peers' original political cartoons. This approach was novel because the research literature indicated students rarely are asked to construct original political cartoons to express opinions and understandings. Political cartoons mostly are used as tools for interpretation and usually only with gifted and older students. This approach was successful because of the positive impact that original political cartooning had on students' engagement, interpretational skills, criticality, expressivity, and the class's discussions. The original political cartoons served as engaging teaching and learning tools that enabled students to see history's complex and unsettled nature.

Key Words: Criticality, Engagement, Expressivity, Middle school, Political cartoons, Social studies

Introduction

Many researchers have argued it is important, even essential, for the social studies to more fully engage and excite youth who increasingly find it uninteresting (Bogner, Cassidy, & Clarke, 1996; Cassidy & Bogner, 1991; Marshall, 2008). Social studies teachers must find new methods to actively engage students in historical events and facilitate critical thinking. Teachers, especially at the middle school level, must develop hands-on tools that enable students to express their opinions and understandings. This paper describes how to enable students to use technology to reinvent an underused primary source, the political cartoon, to positively impact learning, engagement, criticality, and expressivity (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998).

Diverse technologies can facilitate students' active learning and expressivity (Swan,

Hofer, & Levstik, 2007). This is especially true for today's youth who live in a technology-saturated culture where visual images abound (Buckingham, 2003). Visually-minded students are more engaged when utilizing various technologies during hands-on approaches.

Rich primary source material can interest students and complicate their thinking in ways that textbooks cannot (Holt, 1990; Kobrin, 1996). Political cartoons, for instance, are a rich primary source with visual appeal (Greene, 2001; Thomas, 2004). Political cartoons have been underutilized and can be employed more productively and creatively. This paper offers ways for students to express opinions about history by reinventing political cartoons.

To do this successfully, students must first develop understandings about the historical event. Many social studies researchers suggest creative ways to enable students to interpret, examine, and contextualize primary source

material (Holt, 1990; Kobrin, 1996; Wineburg, 2001). While these initial analysis approaches are compulsory, students' historical understandings can be more fully expressed, complicated, and refined through construction of, and discussion about, original political cartoons. Students' awareness that history is complex and unsettled is enhanced through interpretive analysis of, and discussion about, peers' original political cartoons. Students, especially young adolescents who crave hands-on learning and technology, are more actively engaged in the curriculum when they create and express their own understandings (Buckingham, 2003; Swan et al., 2007). Moreover, Lorin Anderson and David Krathwohl (2001) would argue this creative expressivity – based on newly created knowledge – represents the highest levels of thinking skills.

To properly contextualize this research, I will describe the curriculum, review the literature regarding classroom uses of political cartoons, detail the data gathering and interpretation methods, and examine the positive impact that students' original political cartooning had on learning and engagement. (All names used herein are pseudonyms.)

"Students' historical understandings can be more fully expressed, complicated, and refined through construction of, and discussion about, original political cartoons. Students' awareness that history is complex and unsettled is enhanced through interpretive analysis of, and discussion about, peers' original political cartoons."

The Curriculum

Research indicates that students learn best when cognitively challenged and actively engaged (Zemelman et al., 1998). To facilitate students' engagement and higher order thinking, social studies teachers must provide rich and diverse primary and secondary historical documents for examination (Dewey, 1933; Holt, 1990; Wineburg, 2001). By examining personal accounts, primary documents, and historical fiction literature, students can better comprehend complex or distant historical events (Kobrin, 1996; Lindquist, 2002; National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 1994). By synthesizing interpretations of multiple but related sources, students actively construct usable knowledge and employ higher order thinking (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Integration of varied and rich historical documents and historical fiction novels is needed.

In a unit on the Japanese-American internment during World War II, students read and analyzed various primary historical documents (i.e. evacuation notices, presidential speeches), secondary interpretations (i.e. editorial political cartoons), and a historical fiction novel by Barry Denenberg (2003). Over a one-week period, students worked individually and in small groups. The class discussed, synthesized, and negotiated the meanings of these accounts in order to develop a comprehensive and complex understanding of the internment. Students then expressed newly constructed understandings within original political cartoons using Microsoft *PowerPoint*, Microsoft *Paint*, and Internet imagery. Large and small group discussions ensued as students interpreted the meanings of peers' original political cartoons. Walter Werner (2002) argued that a receptive classroom context is needed for students to candidly share divergent interpretations. Consequently, these specific methodologies enabled students to successfully examine primary sources, create understandings by con-

necting analyses of various documents, and construct and share original political cartoons. Each of these activities connected strongly with four interrelated intended learning goals, which involve both complex historical thinking and higher order thinking skills (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Wineburg, 2001).

First, students were expected to critically examine primary documents and secondary accounts to develop historical understandings. Second, students were asked to create political cartoons to express newly constructed historical understandings. Third, students were expected to engage in productive dialogue with peers regarding the distinct and sometimes conflicting historical understandings expressed within original political cartoons. Finally, students were asked to develop a stronger recognition that historical understandings are complex, debatable, and based on a multitude of historical sources. Students' successful completion of the first two learning goals determined their attainment of the latter two. Since many researchers have previously examined and theorized about the first, third, and fourth learning goals (Dewey, 1933; Holt, 1990; Kobrin, 1996; Lindquist, 2002; Wineburg, 2001), this paper focuses on the second learning goal --- political cartoon construction --- and its impact on the latter two.

While how these students used technology and media to express their historical understandings was novel, the use of professional (read: published) political cartoons as a teaching tool is not new to educators, especially social studies teachers. Previous researchers and educators, however, have not made full use of political cartoons.

Traditional Uses for Political Cartoons

Many researchers and educators, especially within the social studies, have investigated political cartoons as a teaching tool to determine students' ability to decode professional

cartoonists' (visual) interpretations of an event, infer meaning from artists' use of symbolism, understand imagery's role(s) in shaping public opinion, and/or detect cartoonists' historical and/or political perspective (Frost, 2000; Ramsey, 2000; Rolling, 2008; Rule, Sallis, & Donaldson, 2008; Werner, 2002, 2003). Based on a thorough review of the literature, two patterns emerged. First, political cartoons are utilized most frequently with gifted and older students. Second, there is an intellectual and/or creative stagnation in how teachers use political cartoons. These two patterns are not positive.

By Age and Ability

Teachers of upper level and gifted students use political cartoons far more frequently than middle and elementary school educators. In fact, most researchers who investigated teachers' uses of political cartoons did so with college, high school, and/or gifted students (Edwards, 1999a, 1999b; Frost, 2000; Greene, 2001; Johnstone & Nakhleh, 1987; Larson, 1999; Martinez-Fernandez, 1998; Mjagkij & Cantu, 1999; Percy, 1999; Ramsey, 2000; Risinger & Heitzmann, 2008; Sperry & Sperry, 2007; Thomas, 2004). While some researchers suggested their effectiveness in elementary and middle schools (Larson, 1999; Rolling, 2008; Rule, Sallis, & Donaldson, 2008), most explicitly stated, or implicitly suggested, political cartoons' "rhetorical devices" were too complicated for young adolescents (Greene, 2001; Heitzman, 2000; Johnstone & Nakhleh, 1987; Mjagkij & Cantu, 1999; Werner, 2002, 2003). Most deemed younger children not capable of complex historical thinking and analytical work. This age and/or ability preference (or bias) has a limiting effect since it ignores a large portion of students. This paper will demonstrate that middle school students are capable of higher order thinking and can employ the "taxonomy of subskills" needed for political cartoon interpretation (Heitzman, 2000). While the age or ability preference is

not inherently negative, but is limiting, the second emergent pattern is both negative and regrettable.

For Interpretation Only

There appears to be an inherently negative creative or intellectual stagnation in classroom uses of political cartoons. This claim is based on the observation that most educational researchers studying political cartoon uses described how they utilized professional (read: published) political cartoons to only facilitate students' interpretations of and understandings about historical and current events (Edwards, 1999a, 1999b; Frost, 2000; Johnstone & Nakhleh, 1987; Greene, 2001; Larson, 1999; Martinez-Fernandez, 1998; Mjagkij & Cantu, 1999; Percy, 1999; Ramsey, 2000; Risinger & Heitzmann, 2008; Sperry & Sperry, 2007; Thomas, 2004). These researchers did not develop innovative techniques to challenge students in some area other than interpretation. This suggests the researchers were more interested in modeling a pedagogical strategy than in developing new methods to elicit higher order thinking. This is unmistakably intellectual stagnation.

Many researchers did little more than detail how they used political cartoons while providing teachers with Internet resources for political cartoons (e.g. Edwards, 1999a, 1999b; Frost, 2000; Martinez-Fernandez, 1998; Percy, 1999; Ramsey, 2000; Risinger & Heitzmann, 2008; Thomas, 2004). In other words, the researchers enabled teachers to follow their approach and find relevant political cartoons. While this is not unproductive, it is problematic because they only challenged older and gifted students' abilities to interpret professional cartoonists' historical understandings, which may lead to a "guess what the teacher is thinking" discussion (Smith & Wilhelm, 2006). They did not design creative pathways to enable students' expressions of original historical understandings. While a few research-

ers' proposed enabling students to create original cartoons, they focused on involving students in understanding the process of political cartoon creation and not on expressing original ideas (Greene, 2001; Larson, 1999; Rolling, 2008). This is clearly creative stagnation.

This argument does not suggest that the researchers' aforementioned goals were not constructive or productive. It is worthwhile to research how teachers can better challenge students' interpretational skills. It is useful to provide teachers with resources and methods to engage students. But these goals are certainly not innovative; their approaches are not the only uses for political cartoons; and these goals and approaches should not be limited to only older and gifted students. This indicates an intellectual and creative stagnation in political cartoons usage. The four learning goals associated with the research reported here demonstrate innovative techniques for political cartoons. While later sections illustrate its successes, the subsequent section will detail how data was gathered and interpreted.

"These specific methodologies enabled students to successfully examine primary sources, create understandings by connecting analyses of various documents, and construct and share original political cartoons."

Methods for Gathering and Interpreting Data

Data were gathered and interpreted both on students' political cartoons (the second learning goal) and on the political cartoons' impacts on class discussions (the third and fourth learning goals). To do so, I examined the content of students' original political cartoons,

videotaped class discussions, coded students' discussion contributions, and interviewed students. The data were methodologically triangulated to verify findings (Golafshani, 2003; Uddin, 2002).

To interpret students' political cartoons, I used a multi-step approach. I initially examined the document and noted the (potentially) embedded symbols. I used these symbols to interpret the cartoon's message(s). To verify initial interpretations, I asked, in an interview or during class, the cartoonist to describe the intended message(s) and embedded symbols. I distinguished the complexity and clarity of students' political cartoons based on the number of embedded symbols, the intricacy of the intended message(s), and the cartoon's "readability".

To interpret the political cartoons' impact on class discussions, a multi-step approach also was used. Upon viewing class discussions, students' dialogic contributions were transcribed and each comment was categorized based on the perceived purpose and impact on discussion. Five types of dialogic contributions were noted: a new idea, an unconditional agreement with a previously stated idea, an agreement with and extension of a previously stated idea, a disagreement with a previously stated idea, and an off-topic comment. Using this approach, I measured the political cartoons' impact on class discussions based on students' comments.

"Based on a thorough review of the literature, two patterns emerged. First, political cartoons are utilized most frequently with gifted and older students. Second, there is an intellectual and/or creative stagnation in how teachers use political cartoons. These two patterns are not positive."

Students' comments during interviews were used primarily to verify interpretations of their political cartoons. They are included in this research paper to provide rich corroboration of students' attainment of various learning goals.

As shown, a multi-step approach and various data sources were used to interpret students' political cartoons and on the political cartoons' impacts. The purpose of the next section is two-fold: to provide examples of students' original political cartoons and to offer illustrations of the cartoons' impacts.

Original Political Cartoons and Their Impacts

Students constructed original political cartoons to express historical understandings acquired from examination of various primary documents, secondary sources, and a historical fiction novel. The class interpreted the meanings of these cartoons by analyzing messages encoded through symbolism, imagery, and text. These student activities illustrate the first three learning goals (examination of historical evidence, cartoon construction based on historical understandings, and interpretation of peers' work). Students' successful completion of these three learning goals determined their attainment of the final goal: students' recognition that history is complex, contentious, and derived from various evidence sources (Dewey, 1933; Wineburg, 2001).

To demonstrate students' successes, it is necessary to first examine representative examples of students' original political cartoons and then illustrative examples of students' comments about the cartoons both during class discussion and within individual interviews. For brevity and clarity, three students' original political cartoons were selected. Later, I will describe the cartoons' impact both on the class's discussion and within students' interviews.

Original Political Cartoons

To construct an original political cartoon, students saved an Internet image as background on a *PowerPoint* slide, implanted other images onto the background and, at times, modified the imagery using *Microsoft Paint* or other tools on their *PowerPoint* toolbar. On occasion, students inserted text (sometimes in “speaking bubbles”) onto the image(s). Arissa (pseudonym) constructed Figure 1. Reggie created Figure 2. Courtney (pseudonym) crafted Figure 3.

Figure 1

Arissa. “We pledge for America,
We pray for Japan.”

“Students’ interpretations of others’ original political cartoons provided the context for peer interpretation and enabled students’ to recognize that history is complex, contentious, and derived from various forms of evidence. This was quite palpable in their discussions.”

Figure 2.

Reggie. “The Japanese did it. Lock them up!!!”

Figure 3

Courtney. Untitled.

These students’ cartoons were representative examples in many ways. First, the students started out with an idea and searched the Internet for images that could bring their ideas to fruition. Second, they spent the majority of work time finding the “right” images to use. Finally, students found the technology exceedingly easy to use and effortlessly created their ideas; there was not a technological learning curve to which they had to adjust. This methodology and these technologies effectively en-

abled students to express historical understandings generated from examination of historical sources within original political cartoons. Their work elicited significant and meaningful interest among the students.

Original Political Cartoons: Class Discussions

Students' interpretations of others' original political cartoons provided the context for peer interpretation (the third learning goal) and enabled students' to recognize that history is complex, contentious, and derived from various forms of evidence (the final learning goal). This was quite palpable in their discussions.

After reflectively answering some questions to elicit thinking (What images do you see? How did the cartoonist use images and words to express their message?), students enthusiastically and expertly applied historical evidence to their interpretations of the political cartoons' expressed historical understandings. Students then dialogically negotiated the original political cartoons' meaning(s). For illustrative purposes, this section focuses on discussion about Courtney's cartoon. The easiest-to-create cartoon was purposefully selected to demonstrate how seemingly simple work can stimulate prolific discussion. Students' indented comments with two backslashes (“//”) signify when one subject interrupted another.

Teacher – Kids, let's look at Courtney's cartoon.

Seth – I see the American flag.

//Ben – Plus another one.

Seth – Yeah, the Japanese flag.

//Ben – But it's different, it's got lines coming off the red circle.

Rachel – She put the two together to make one flag. Why did you do that Courtney?

Teacher – Don't answer that, Courtney.

Seth – I think she wanted to show that Japanese-Americans were both Japanese and American.

Teacher – Here's one idea: the cartoon shows two flags like how the Japanese-Americans had ties to two countries, Japan and America. Anyone agree? Disagree? Something different?

Shaylee – I think I disagree. Why change the American flag like that? Why not just have two whole flags? Why did she have to take out the stars?

Reggie – Maybe to show that Japan attacked us first and took away our power. You know, like the stars mean the states and the states were attacked. It shows that Japan is like trying to take over America, like Japan's flag is taking over the American flag.

//Ben – Yeah!

Teacher – So, here's another idea, the Japanese flag is taking over the American flag like Japan was trying to take over America. Anyone agree? Disagree? Something different?

Shaylee – It makes sense because she took out the part that makes the American flag.

//Seth – I like this idea.

Shaylee – If you think about it, the American flag here looks a lot like the Japanese flag.

Teacher – How so?

Shaylee – It's now only red and white stripes.

Jason – I think it's that. I think it's showing how Japan attacked us first. And...I don't know.

Teacher – Think about it, Jason, we'll come back to you.

Dustin – It's definitely about them attacking us and trying to make us different 'cause the Japanese flag didn't change, just our flag did.

Teacher – Ok, let's think about this. Let's just say that Courtney is trying to show with her cartoon that Japan tried to change America with war. Is that historically accurate?

//Ben and Seth – Yes! ... Yeah!

Teacher – What historical evidence do you have to back that up?

Shaylee – That map of the Pacific Ocean that showed all the islands they [read: Japan] attacked!

Rachel – Plus, they treated the American soldiers bad. Like on the [Bataan] Death March.

Seth – Yeah, they [read: Japan] didn't just attack Pearl Harbor, they attacked lots of islands.

Teacher – Islands or something on the islands.

Multiple students – Military bases...army bases...army stuff.

Teacher – Okay, so we now have historical evidence to back up the idea that Courtney might have been showing how Japan was trying to take over America, trying to change America through war, like how the American flag is changed in her cartoon.

//Shaylee – And how the Japanese flag isn't changed at all.

Teacher – Thanks, Shaylee. Should we ask Courtney what she meant?

Multiple students – Yeah!

Courtney – You're wrong. I was trying to say what someone said earlier: that they were both Japanese and American. That no matter how much they felt American, they

were still looked at as Japanese. They were citizens, but they were locked up 'cause they looked Japanese.

//Rachel – Seth said that.

Teacher – Any evidence to back up that they felt American but were treated like Japanese?

Arissa – The [historical fiction] book said that exact thing.

Courtney – That's where I got it from.

//Natalie – We read letters from Japanese-Americans inside the camps that said that.

The class discussion demonstrated five meaningful findings that may be of interest to social studies teachers and researchers. Courtney's original political cartoon elicited much peer participation. Eighteen of the twenty-three students voiced at least one opinion about Courtney's production and many contributed multiple ideas. While there are many possible explanations for the elicited interest, it was interpreted by this researcher as at least partly due to students' enthusiasm in sharing their work, the novelty of interpreting peers' work, and/or students' ability to question the cartoonist about intended messages. In my experience, professional political cartoons rarely have elicited such interest and engagement while students' original work quite frequently did.

Students expressed differing interpretations, which further invigorated the discussion. Since enthusiastic and constructive discussions are built on a healthy mix of agreement and disagreement, teachers must cultivate contexts in which students can express differing views without fear of personal criticism (Lindquist, 2002; Werner, 2002, 2003). Through coding students' discussion contributions, it was noted that three students expressed new ideas, five agreed categorically with an earlier comment, 12 extended a prior idea through agreement, and three students disagreed with a preceding interpretation. These codings illustrate authen-

tic dialogic negotiations of various possible meanings of one cartoon. In this researcher's experience, professional political cartoons rarely elicit such divergent interpretations while students' original work quite frequently does.

The catalyst for this discussion – Courtney's original political cartoon – strongly and positively impacted the discussion. Students' original work enlivened class discussions possibly because of the ability to question the creator's intent, which does not usually occur with professional work.

Students ably connected their interpretations of the cartoon's expressed historical understandings to historical evidence. Natalie, for instance, effortlessly provided historical evidence from a detainee's letter to corroborate her reading of the political cartoon's expressed historical understandings. Many other students employed historical evidence to confirm the accuracy of their interpretations. This is especially important because activities lose educational significance if students cannot apply evidence to interpretations, which connects strongly with the final point.

Students recognized that interpretations of political cartoons can differ from the cartoonist's intended message. Many students, for example, agreed with Reggie's suggestion that, "[Courtney had two flags to show] that Japan is like trying to take over America, like Japan's flag is taking over the American flag." Courtney later revealed she had simply tried to express that detainees felt American, but were treated as if they were only Japanese. Students thus realized their interpretations did not cohere with Courtney's intended message. To understand that interpretations of the same historical documents can differ is to better understand history's contested nature (the final learning goal), which is especially meaningful within a social studies classroom where students interpret various historical documents.

In summation of this section, Courtney's original political cartoon generated a high per-

centage of peer involvement as measured through discussion contributions. The students' comments represented a diverse range of expressed ideas, many of which were novel while others agreed, extended, or disagreed with the previous student's comment. This lively discussion indicated a social context in which students felt comfortable offering opposing opinions. Students ably applied previously analyzed historical and secondary historical documents to the various interpretations. Finally, students recognized how an interpretation can differ from the cartoonist's intended message(s). This evidence suggests students' achievement of each of the learning goals.

The prompt for these understandings – Courtney's original political cartoon – demonstrated the effectiveness of original political cartoons in eliciting engagement and stimulation of both critical and historical thinking. This assertion is substantiated upon examination of what the cartoonists said about their political cartoons and their work as political cartoonists.

Original Political Cartoons: Students' Reflections

During individual interviews, as in class discussion, students enthusiastically shared opinions. To conduct the interviews, I set topics on which to focus, but allowed the interviewees to control the conversation's path (Buckingham, 2003). The following sections illustrate Arissa's and Reggie's reflections.

While many students cited various primary and secondary documents to substantiate their original political cartoons' expressed historical understandings, these students did so with contrasting opinions about both the necessity of the internment camps and the qualities that determines the "best" political cartoons. The two students formed vastly different opinions based on the same primary and secondary historical evidence, and expressed divergent opinions about the artistic characteristics of

quality political cartoons. The students were able to express their newly constructed historical understandings through political cartooning.

Arissa's and Reggie's reflections are compared and contrasted as examples. Arissa spoke in fervent opposition to the internment due to its impact on Japanese-Americans citizens, specifically the interned young people whom she perceived as patriotic. While Arissa might have constructed these understandings without cartooning, the four subsequent findings suggest its positive impact.

Arissa applied understandings garnered from various historical readings during conversation about her original political cartoon. When asked about the accuracy of the detainees' loyalty to the U.S.A., for example, Arissa stated, "We read some interviews ... Plus, the [historical fiction] book said that exact thing." Much like how technologies lose effectiveness when the "bells and whistles" detract from educational content, the educational value in this activity is lost if students cannot employ historical content to describe their historical representations' (i.e., the cartoons') meanings. Arissa's comments indicated proficient employment of historical understandings based on interpretations of historical evidence.

Arissa effortlessly reflected about the purposeful artistic decisions she made within her political cartoon to express historical understandings. In her words, "I showed people pledging to the flag to show that they wanted America to win ... [and] praying hands to show that they were praying for Japan to not get ruined. I said basically the same thing with the words." Arissa purposefully selected the text's color to express a coherent message with the two images. In her words, "I chose ... blue because black might show death, which is sad, and other colors wouldn't fit, you know, red might mean blood, green might mean money, and the other colors [would not fit the detainees' feelings]." Arissa deliberately reversed the image to show the detainees' left hands

over their heart for dramatic effect. In her words, "I flipped the pic [sic] so that everyone would see that something is wrong because there was something wrong [with the internment]!" This demonstrated not only Arissa's artistic expressivity, but also the historical thinking that enabled such expressivity. In other words, while Arissa's creative use of image reversal, symbolism, and color was meaningful in and of itself, its meaning was strengthened because she purposefully based it on historical understandings garnered from concentrated readings of historical documents. That Arissa based her expressivity on historical understandings while constructing an original political cartoon suggests the educational strength of this activity.

Arissa noted she found pleasure in ruminating about cartoonists' intended messages as she located new details upon which to focus and find meaning, "You can look and look and you can find new stuff that may mean something that you didn't think about. I love that about [political cartooning]." Arissa smiled when she realized some missed her encoded messages. These articulations illustrated the educational value of enabling students to create original work that challenges others' thinking.

Finally, Arissa verbalized contentment in being able to creatively express historical understandings in this manner. "I also loved how I got to do more than just tell people what I think. I got to show them." Arissa claimed it was more meaningful to her to inventively articulate (and hide) historical understandings using such methods than to verbally communicate opinions in a discussion. She felt her peers were compelled to more fully listen because they actively interpreted her ideas rather than hearing them in a discussion. This demonstrated the educational value of providing students innovative avenues to express historical understandings.

Arissa and Reggie differed in their opinions about the validity of the internment camps and the specific traits that typify quality

political cartoons. Both ably constructed these opinions using historical evidence and skillfully expressed them within political cartoons.

Reggie spoke intensely about his knowledge of World War II and his support of the American government's decision to intern Japanese-Americans. Reggie constructed these understandings through reading relevant historical documents such as soldiers' letters about and newspaper accounts regarding the Pearl Harbor attack. He then deftly expressed them within a political cartoon. Reggie's interview demonstrated three significant findings regarding the positive impact cartooning can have on learning, criticality, and engagement.

Like Arissa, Reggie actively applied critical understandings garnered from historical document readings both during the interview and within his original political cartoon. Reggie used historical evidence to infer that fear of another attack likely shaped Roosevelt's decision to intern Japanese-Americans. In his words, "We saw tons of photos from during and after the Japanese attack. ... You had us read [news]papers and listened [sic] to Roosevelt's speech. And, since it was a surprise attack, lots of people thought they'd attack us again." Reggie further articulated an original idea based on historical readings when he noted that the internment possibly curbed another "surprise attack". The inference made here by this researcher is that when students actively apply historical evidence to justify historical expressions within their work, they demonstrate the effectiveness of original political cartoons as a learning tool. When students' political cartoons stimulate peers' thinking it becomes a teaching tool, which connects to the next point.

Reggie expressed cartoonist-like thinking as he worked and pondered how others would interpret his work as did Arissa. For instance, Reggie talked about his purposeful selection of a Hollywood movie image instead of an authentic photograph because the color might

better depict the event's reality to his audience. Thus, Reggie took into account an awareness of his audience. His cognitive adoption of a cartoonist's mentality was interpreted as signifying that the activity challenged students to think and create in new and complex ways. Reggie's political cartoon becomes a teaching tool when it challenges others' thinking. While students' work can be both a teaching and learning tool, it also can be a tool for engagement. This is the final point derived from Reggie's interview. Reggie expressed pleasure in his work. He appreciated his original political cartoon's purposeful simplicity and argued clarity of message to be most important for political cartoons. His cartoon's clarity of message differed dramatically from Arissa's hidden symbolism of praying hands, image reversal, and color of text, and from Courtney's indefinite juxtaposition of flags.

Reggie's and Arissa's contrast of opinions and educational successes are both apparent in the data. Arissa enjoyed finding new and potentially meaningful aspects of political cartoons while Reggie argued historical understandings should be expressed clearly. This is an indication of this activity's potential for eliciting creative expression.

Reggie expressed confidence in the legitimacy of Roosevelt's decision to intern Japanese-Americans while Arissa disagreed. She argued Japanese-American youth were blameless victims. Both based their assertions on historical evidence, an indication of this activity's effectiveness in eliciting critical historical thinking. This demonstrates students' completion of the first and second learning goals.

Both students referenced how their work elicited productive dialogue and engagement among peers. They mentioned an interest in expressing historical understandings through original political cartooning and in having peers interpret their work. This suggests that the political cartoons were as much a teaching tool for the class as they were a learning tool

for the individual cartoonist. This demonstrates students' completion of the third learning goal.

Reggie's and Arissa's historical understandings were sharpened through political cartooning. Such cartooning made possible students' recognition that history is complicated, unresolved, and based on historical evidence, which was the fourth learning goal.

Summary and Implications

This paper offers a unique strategy to complicate students' historical thinking. The social studies unit described here accomplished four interrelated student learning goals (a) critical reading of primary documents and secondary accounts to develop historical understandings, (b) construction of original political cartoons to express historical understandings, (c) interpretation of and discussion about the messages expressed within peers' original political cartoons, and (d) recognition of history as complex, debatable, and based on various forms of historical evidence. Here, however, I have focused on the second learning goal – political cartoon construction – and its impact on the latter two. This curriculum elicited seven meaningful educational findings, in which all four aforementioned learning goals are inextricably intertwined.

These strategies challenged students to think historically, critically, and creatively. Through original political cartoon creations, students creatively expressed historical understandings developed through intense readings of various primary and secondary historical documents.

While students' original political cartoon was a learning tool for the cartoonist, the projects also were used – through peer interpretation – as a teaching tool for the rest of the class. Individual student's analyses of peers' original political cartoons challenged their interpretational skills. Students independently analyzed and expressed multiple interpretations of peers' original work. They then

articulated both the message(s) they perceived the cartoonist intended to convey and the “rhetorical devices” that enabled its expression (Werner, 2003).

Individual students' interpretive articulations enabled productive whole class discussions. Large class analyses of and discussions about students' original political cartoons created an interpretive “community” where multiple and divergent interpretations emerged (Werner, 2002). As evidenced in the discussion about Courtney's work, students expressed individual opinions as the class dialogically negotiated the cartoon's message(s).

Students recognized differing interpretations of a single political cartoon and conflicting historical understandings expressed in multiple political cartoons. Knowing these interpretations and historical understandings to be based on the same primary and secondary historical documents, students understood more clearly the complex nature of history. Many researchers promote curricula that elicit recognition of history's complexities (Dewey, 1933; Kobrin, 1996; Lindquist, 2002).

Students were better able to grasp that history and historical understandings are unresolved. The class discussions were healthy and robust due to divergent interpretations of various historical documents expressed within multiple political cartoons. Many researchers encourage curricula that enable students to actively recognize the unsettled nature of history (Fehn, 2007; Holt, 1990; Wineburg, 2001). Similarly, it is of great importance that students' historical understandings were contextualized, historicized, and grounded using primary and secondary evidence. This was evident within both students' cartoons and students' interpretations of peers' cartoons.

Students ably and reflectively employed historical evidence as basis for historical understandings expressed within their own original political cartoons, and to support interpretations of peers' cartoons. This further indicates the activity was both a teaching and

learning tool. It was significant that this manifested during all phases of the curriculum: cartoon construction, interpretation, discussion, and reflection.

Finally and most important to teachers looking for engaging pedagogical strategies this curriculum fully interested students. Criticality and expressivity cannot be accomplished without rich content and engaging strategies. This is especially important when teaching today's tech-savvy youth living in a visual culture.

These findings provide evidence about the ability of this innovative approach to connect social studies content area with technology to enable students to construct and *reinvent* political cartoons. Students' engagement, historical thinking, criticality, and expressivity were stimulated. While I have examined how one teacher employed these tools within a social studies intra-disciplinary unit that focused on history and reading, there are indications that they might easily fit within other curricula. While previously utilized in a limited way, researchers have employed cartoons as teaching tools in science (Rule et al., 2008), art (Rolling, 2008), current events (Larson, 1999), and media studies (Buckingham, 2003).

"The catalyst for this discussion – Courtney's original political cartoon – strongly and positively impacted the discussion. Students' original work enlivened class discussions possibly because of the ability to question the creator's intent, which does not usually occur with professional work."

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Citation for this Article

Bickford, J. H., III. (2010). Complicating students' historical thinking through primary source reinvention. *Social Studies Research & Practice*, 5 (1), 47-60. Retrieved from <http://www.socstrp.org/issues/PDF/5.2.5.pdf>

"Students recognized that interpretations of political cartoons can differ from the cartoonist's intended message."