



# Practical history lessons as a tool for generating procedural knowledge in history teaching

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## **Abstract**

Situated in the context of philosophy of history, this article explains the use of substantive concepts and procedural concepts to generate historical understanding and examines the relationship between the two forms of historical knowledge. The paper makes use of both primary (original views of authors) and secondary (views of other authors) materials. The paper notes that substantive knowledge and procedural knowledge play complementary roles in the acquisition of historical understanding. It is argued, in light of the dominant position of substantive knowledge over procedural knowledge, that attention should be given to procedural knowledge as it introduces students to the processes by which history

is constructed. The article proposes the use of practical history lessons as a conduit for developing procedural knowledge and attaining historical understanding.

**Keywords:** History; History curriculum; Philosophy of history; Practical history lessons; Procedural knowledge; substantive knowledge; Teaching of history.

## Introduction

The unbalanced relationship between procedural knowledge (know-how knowledge) – knowing how to do something, and substantive knowledge (know-that knowledge) – knowing that something is the case (Bertram, 2009; Fordham, 2017) in the teaching of history is one of the main challenges in history education. This issue has come about as a result of the emphasis history curricula, textbooks and teachers place on substantive concepts at the expense of procedural concepts. Several research reports and seminal papers in history education have articulated historical knowledge as consisting of two major aspects. This follows the work of Peter Lee, who theorised that historical knowledge comprises substantive and procedural concepts (Lee, 1983). Substantive concepts make up the content of history that often characterise traditional history. The knowledge derived from these concepts, called substantive knowledge, refers to knowledge of the past: people, events, ideas, cultures, societies and organisations (Fordham, 2017). Most often, substantive knowledge is represented in the history curriculum or syllabus under various themes. They are the topics taught in class to help students “understand ideas and concepts which emanate from the study of a historical topic as well as the factual details they are presented with, if they are to ‘transform’ the learning experience into knowledge and understanding” (Haydn, Stephen, Arthur & Hunt, 2014:52). Procedural concepts “are ideas that provide our understanding of history as a discipline or form of knowledge” (Lee & Ashby, 2000:199) and characterise history as an active construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Essentially, procedural concepts are knowledge-in-use structures that shape and guide the disciplinary inquiry of history (VanSledright, 2004, 2009). These include concepts like cause, effect, significance, change, continuity and evidence. The knowledge derived from these procedural concepts is called procedural knowledge, which concerns the knowledge of history as a discipline and how historians do history: the methods of historians, their sources of data, their epistemological assumptions, and their conceptual frameworks (Fordham, 2017).

Substantive and procedural knowledge form the core of historical knowledge and must, therefore, be complementary to each other in history teaching. Shemilt (1980) argues, in light of this, that the working concepts of history are inextricable from the stuff-and-substance of the discipline that support deeper historical thought. However, the available literature suggests a different case, pointing to the unequal attention given to procedural knowledge. Hammarlund (2012), for instance, argues that procedural knowledge often tends to be neglected as a focal point of history lessons. Similarly,

Levesque (2008) notes that procedural concepts are seldom perceptible in use; they are often left hidden in historians' investigations and even more so in teaching in schools, thereby leading to the naive assumption that they do not influence historical inquiry and are, thus, unworthy of study. Some research reports (Rouet, Favart, Britt, & Perfetti, 1997; Wineburg, 1991; Britt & Aglinskias, 2002) indicate that most students lack historical thinking skills that are obtained from procedural knowledge. Oppong (2018) argues that the lack of procedural knowledge among students suggests that students are not exposed to it in history instruction. Perhaps, this may explain why assessment in history is always skewed to favour first-order or substantive knowledge. It is reported that assessment tasks, especially external examinations, do not contribute positively to the development of historical skills, and are quite often focused on low-level cognitive skills without enhancing the promotion of historical skills (Hunt, 2007; Samuelsson, 2019). It is logical to assume that the pressure or the technical need to cover specific contents in a limited amount of time for standardised assessment purposes leaves history teachers with no other choice than to concentrate on substantive knowledge (Boadu, Donnelly & Sharp, 2020). However, Perkins (1992) has argued that history teaching, exclusively designed around substantive historical knowledge, can result in fragile knowledge and students' understanding of history could be limited and rigid. It is essential to note, however, that the situation has not been the same everywhere. In Britain, for example, there has been a shift from emphasis on the facts of historical knowledge to procedural knowledge since the 1960s when the Schools' Council, established in 1963, began to ask fundamental questions about the organisation and structure of the curriculum in England and Wales. The Council eventually developed a tradition of teaching history which emphasised constructivist models of learner engagement with the past, world history, the experiences of a variety of groups, and a focus on historical skills (Bertram, 2009:50). Also, in South Africa, research has shown that history curriculum reformers have embraced the procedural dimension of studying history (Bertram, 2009). The situation in South Africa is such that some scholars are convinced that "there is an inherent danger ... that the focus on procedural knowledge can overshadow substantive knowledge" (Bertram, 2009:45).

We argue, like many other history education researchers, that the history teacher's role must not be limited to the production of the facts of historical knowledge for learners to consume; it must also include the effort to develop learners' skills of historical inquiry and their ability to analyse sources and evidence from historical perspectives (Bertram, 2009). Students must be introduced to the nature of historical evidence, the nature of reasoning from evidence and the problem of reconstruction from incomplete evidence

(Wineburg, 2001). The history teacher must teach students to appreciate the discipline as an inquiry cycle, which begins with learners asking key historical questions; then gathering sources to answer the questions; analysing, interpreting and organising the sources; and communicating the answers (Bertram, 2009). Learners also need to understand the procedures and assumptions that make history a discipline of inquiry. They must be taught to develop critical thinking, to acquire knowledge of classifications, principles and generalisations; to know the interrelationships among basic elements; and to appreciate the view that “historical truth consists of a multiplicity of voices expressing varying and often contradictory versions of the same history” (Bertram, 2009:51). In essence, students need to learn how to know history, as Seixas (1999) argues, and understand history as constructed and contested rather than as an absolute truth (Bertram, 2009).

In view of this, we consider practical history lessons as an appropriate approach to generating a grasp of procedural knowledge which could in turn contribute to historical understanding. This would not only avoid knowledge limitation on the part of students, but also provide the opportunity for students to appreciate the disciplinary nature of history. Hammarlund (2012) emphasises that learning to know and understand history is very much a case of ‘learning by doing’, just as learning chemistry or physics can only be achieved by engaging in some practical sessions. Just as one cannot become a chemist or physicist by only reading chemistry and physics textbooks, one also cannot learn history and become a practising historian by only reading history textbooks and listening to history lectures. One must do history by oneself to grasp and appreciate the methodological considerations involved. This explains the need for practical history lessons that allow history teachers and students to have time to engage in the practice of the historian. Practical lessons provide opportunities for teachers to engage students in the work of historians, as the disciplinary nature requires, and provide effective modelling activities for students. Using both primary (original views of authors) and secondary (views of other authors) materials, this article makes a strong argument for the incorporation of practical history lessons in history education.

## Methodology

This paper is a positional one. A position paper is a piece of work that presents an arguable opinion of experts on certain fields about critical issues. Works of this nature usually express the views of the authors on the issues or problems they address. In order to strengthen their positions, these authors often draw on and make use of the ideas of authors with

whom they share the same views. Accordingly, the views expressed in this paper are the original opinions of the authors, supported by the views of other authors. In light of this, the paper made use of both primary (original views of authors) and secondary (views of other authors) materials in its compilation.

## **The nature and scope of philosophy of history**

Philosophy is the systematic investigation of the principles and presuppositions of any endeavour (Philosophy Lander Education, 2004). Philosophy of history denotes the systematic inquiry into the principles and assumptions of history. History covers the totality of past human thoughts and actions, the accounts constructed about them, and how these shape the present and the future. The nature and scope of history demand two quite distinct categories or separate fields for philosophy or interpretation of history: critical or methodological or analytical philosophy of history and speculative or synoptic or comprehensive philosophy of history. The terms 'formal' and 'material' are also widely used to distinguish between the two kinds of philosophy of history respectively (Mandelbaum, 1952). Speculative philosophy of history attempts to understand the course of historical events. It investigates the content of history in an attempt to discover a general pattern or meaning underlying historical events which the ordinary historian finds difficult to detect. As Gardiner (1972) argues, the fundamental aim of speculative interpretations of history is to provide a general, all-encompassing account of the course of history, presenting it in a way which shows that the events that constitute or form the building blocks of the account form a coherent pattern or reveal the operation of certain pervasive laws or tendencies. The aim of this comprehensive account could also be to suggest that, considered as a whole, history has a meaning or purpose, whose nature can be made clear and intelligible. A speculative philosophy of history is, thus, a systematising of human knowledge and human thought within the realm of historical facts. Usually, a speculative philosophy of history is the personal interpretation, judgement or theory of the individual who formulates it (Gardiner, 1972). Formulators of speculative theories, for example, find reasons for events, and show how events at different times and different places resemble each other. They theorise about the common features of events, by making generalisations and statements that sum up the regularities which they discover. Based on the generalisations, theorists go to the extent of predicting the future. A speculative philosophy of history cannot be verified as can historical events or historical facts. Its validity lies only with its formulator or originator. Nevertheless, a speculative philosophy of history, if logically formulated, can

change the course of history. It provides an explanation of human events and a justification of history as a discipline. Thus, a philosophy of history can exert an enormous influence on the shaping of the world. A good example is Karl Marx's theory of historical materialism, which found political implementation in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and some of the developing countries.

The critical or formal aspect of philosophy of history deals with the methods and inquiry into the nature of history, the relationship between history and other disciplines, and the contemporary scientific and technological values of history. This is done with the basic aim of locating history on the map of knowledge (Dray, 1964). Critical philosophy of history investigates the logic and epistemology of history. It deals with such subjects or topics as methods and methodology in history, the nature of historical explanation, truth and facts in history, objectivity in history, and the argument that history is a science. Critical interpretation of history also considers such issues as the characteristic ways in which historians approach their subject-matter, the manner in which they argue for and validate their accounts and explanations, the kinds of concepts they typically employ and the frameworks and schemes in terms of which they order and arrange their material, the part played by imagination and understanding in their interpretations of human character and motivation, among others (Gardiner, 1972). The critical or formal aspect of philosophy of history is, thus, the systematic study of history as a story.

It must be appreciated that just as philosophy of science still generates interest on the part of natural or physical scientists, so does critical philosophy of history on the part of historians and philosophers. And just as philosophy of nature is now somewhat outdated, so is speculative philosophy of history (Dray, 1964; Gardiner, 1972). However, despite its nature, speculative philosophy of history continues to appeal to some scholars, probably because of the significance they attach to an understanding of historical events, or the strong expectation that history should be meaningful (Dray, 1964:2). Consequently, speculative philosophy of history is studied for its insights or significant viewpoints. The two kinds of philosophy of history play complementary roles. Speculative philosophy of history is like an experiment. Having made a suggestion about the way we should understand a fundamental concept, the formulator of the theory tries to fit the clarified version into the relevant linguistic environment of the concept, unrefined, and test it against the accepted facts which that concept is used to express. Contradiction and disparity count as refuting the thesis that the concept is as the formulator has supposed it to be for purposes of critical analysis.

It could be argued that not only does one realise that procedural knowledge and

substantive knowledge form part of the issues that concern philosophy of history, but one also finds that there is a relationship between procedural knowledge and analytical philosophy of history, on the one hand, and between substantive knowledge and speculative philosophy of history, on the other hand. The reason is that the concepts and methodological procedures involved in procedural knowledge are among those examined in analytical philosophy of history. Furthermore, both speculative philosophy of history and substantive knowledge are concerned with the substance of historical knowledge. Similarly, while the scholarly community of inquiry pays more attention to analytical philosophy of history and advocates for the systematic introduction of procedural knowledge (Barton 2011), evidence from classrooms shows a minimal commitment to procedural understanding as the conceptual tools that procedural knowledge produces are often unarticulated by teachers in history lessons (Samuelsson, 2019). Perhaps, these procedural concepts are not explicit in history curricula as their acquisition is often expected to result from the teaching of the substantive topics without a clear framework as to how both forms of understanding could be attained, a concern for which Boadu (2020) proposes an outcomes-based approach to history teaching. For instance, Levesque (2005) notes that history teachers in Canada commonly expect students to absorb procedural knowledge by osmosis, as they learn the substance of history.

### **Procedural knowledge and substantive knowledge: complementary or competing demands?**

As noted in the introduction, historical knowledge embodies two frames; substantive and procedural concepts. Substantive or first-order concepts include accidents (such as deaths), calamities (such as pandemics), civilisations, democracy, migrations, nation-state, revolts, revolutions, societies and wars, among others. Procedural or second-order concepts, on the other hand, include cause, change, continuity, effect, evidence, and significance.

The question that needs to be asked and addressed is: Do procedural knowledge and substantive knowledge complement or compete in the teaching of history? The ideal response is that the two should complement each other for purposes of achieving the ends for which the study of history is designed. However, this is not the case in most history teaching. Although the two forms of knowledge should co-exist in school curricula to give history its specialised status, substantive knowledge has enjoyed successive prominence over procedural knowledge. History teachers preoccupy themselves with content coverage in history lessons without stressing or taking students through the methods that produce



the substantive knowledge. This implementation gap derives from the curriculum and examination structures of most countries which, in turn, compel history teachers to design and implement history lessons to fit those structures (Hammack & Wilson 2019; Samuelsson, 2019). This is to say that national curriculum content coverage requirements and mandated unit examinations place marginal importance on the acquisition of procedural knowledge in history teaching. Peck and Seixas (2008) assert that history assessment often lacks some of the qualities found in the subject. There is an obvious constraint on second-order knowledge acquisition. Therefore, if students are not assessed on how they acquire procedural knowledge, then it is acceptable, on the part of teachers, not to occupy instructional space and time with procedural knowledge acquisition. Accordingly, it can be argued that if students desire to acquire procedural knowledge in the study of history, then teachers' instructions are not the only option. Perhaps, students could acquire procedural knowledge through finding out, on their own, what frames have been used for the construction of already completed works. Most often, history course books do not describe the process through which a conclusion is supported by factual arguments (Hammarlund, 2012). It implies that the available books that students use in the study of history do not explicitly contain procedural knowledge that students can easily learn.

In view of this problem, research reports and seminal papers in history education have called for a shift in history teaching to address this gap. Consequently, school history teaching has witnessed a change that has often been described as a shifting of balance from content to skills. For instance, The School Council History Project and project CHATA (Concepts of History and Teaching Approaches) argued that history curriculum development should move from traditional memory-based history to one that engaged students in an inquiry process that actively utilised historical procedural concepts in the construction of historical knowledge (Lee, Dickinson, & Ashby, 1996; Shemilt, 1980). However, it seems that content and skills have often been seen as conflicting opposites which has, in turn, led to raging debates when national history curricula are designed (Hammarlund, 2012). This observation is not only true, but also very disturbing, because procedural knowledge still appears to be where it is despite Shemilt's proposal that it should be given more emphasis. That is, procedural knowledge still does not feature prominently in the teaching of history in many schools (Oppong, 2018). Oppong's reasoning appears to substantiate Perkins' (1992) observation. Perkins noted that procedural knowledge is marginalized in most history classrooms. Shemilt (1980) has also stressed that the two concepts are inseparable in history as procedural concepts support the appreciation of substantive concepts. Hence, without procedural knowledge, it would be difficult to make sense of the substance of the

past, as they shape the doing of history (Newmann, 2012). They are inter-twined and are both fundamental to the work of historians. However, all arguments to promote procedural knowledge seem to have been acknowledged and accepted on paper but not in practice. The reason is that history students do not seem to be given the opportunity to engage in any historical activity that seeks to provide procedural knowledge (Martin, 2012; Oppong, 2018). As such, we need to seek alternatives to address the imbalance.

## **History as a science and practical history lessons: the argument**

Several scholars explain history as a study of relevant past events and activities of humans in society (Adjepong, 2020). The emphasis on study draws attention to history as a scientific academic discipline. Some scholars do not accept the view that history is a scientific discipline. However, there is enough evidence to show that history is a science, like any other discipline that employs the scientific method in its pursuit of knowledge. The reason is that when historians set out to discover and interpret human actions and experiences, they employ critical thinking to produce scientific history or a historical work based on objective empiricism. The historian can critically verify and evaluate their facts and write history based on empirical evidence. Ajaegbo (2013:10) insists that “Empiricism is not the monopoly of [natural] scientists. Facts are not tested in laboratories alone; they can be investigated and cross-checked in the field as well”. Ajaegbo (2013) concludes that in the pursuit of their profession, historians draw from many primary sources, employ the knowledge of other disciplines and endeavour to be as scientific or empirical as possible in their quest to establish historical truth. Certainly, without the historian’s interpretation of the records, the records themselves could not help us understand certain basic facts about the human past. Thus, though some people argue that the historian should only reconstruct the past without offering any explanations for the facts, modern historians do interpret their facts to make their works more intelligible and relevant for both practical and theoretical purposes. And these interpretations, as Ajaegbo (2013) emphasises, are done scientifically and, as a result, produce scientific results, which make history a science, both as a body of knowledge and a method of inquiry, and the historian a scientist.

Of course, the view that historical interpretations are scientific, trying to answer the how and why questions of historical events, implies that history is a science. In fact, many historians, and scholars in related fields, confirm the scientific nature of history by insisting that there is no clear-cut distinction between history and the natural or physical sciences,

and, for that matter, history is a science. If we accept the view that science deals with objects, entities, things and their relations, and that the focus of scientific investigations is the study of change in objects, entities and things, then we should appreciate that history is also a science in view of the similarities in the scientific method and the historical method. Hence, history requires practical lessons as do the natural sciences. Practical history lessons could be achieved with recourse to the ontology of history and its associated epistemological and methodological dissensus. It is argued that the diverse ontological and methodological orientations, historians explore in their investigation of the past, present useful opportunities for teachers to guide students through relevant activities to understand the multiple ways of arriving at historical conclusions, which could furnish students with procedural understanding. The scientific method is both deductive and inductive in nature, and this is the same with the historical method. In both natural science and history, the deductive approach is usually adopted to handle questions of consistency – to treat issues of simple generalisations. In dealing with questions of evolution and change, however, the deductive method helps much less towards finding answers, and so scientists often resort to the inductive method. Lewis (1965) maintains that in studying how things emerge and why they change, or to understand how or why something happens, we look at the facts themselves, and that is to say that we apply the inductive method to historical data. Essentially, the historical method, which shares the spirit of the scientific method, is the procedure adopted in history to explain or elucidate a given present by stating its antecedents in time, or to describe how the present came to be what it is. This method involves the recognition of three things: an existent present; a point of departure or beginning; and a series of occurrences connecting the origin with the present (Teggart, 1960). Evidently, history is a science because, although it concerns itself with events, it also studies evolution and change in events in society and, as such conceived, leads to scientific investigations (Teggart, 1960; Boahen, 2000).

As a rider to the practical nature of history, students, teachers, and historians rely on sources of history to acquire historical knowledge. The term ‘sources of history’ refers to a vast and diverse body of materials (or conditions) that serve as testimonies or evidences of human activities and events of the past. The historian works with materials through the medium of traces which past events have left behind them. They were realities of the times in which they happened. Historical events leave impressions, some of which are recorded by observers and non-observers who might rely directly or indirectly on the reports of observers (Burston, 1972). In other words, the subject-matter of history is partially irretrievable. Thus, barring the invention of time-travel, no scholar can experience the past

first-hand or recreate its conditions in a laboratory setting. Historians rely on fragmentary records that survive from the period under study, which necessarily reveal only portions of the stories of the past. For these reasons, the guiding principles behind all historical writing has been selection and interpretation. Thus, thoughtful selection of topics and questions that seem most interesting accompany a reasonable interpretation of sources in order to construct meaningful arguments to guide historical writing. For students to meaningfully select and interpret available materials largely depends on the possession of prerequisite knowledge or skills to carry out the task effectively. Therefore, for students to appreciate the disciplinary nature of history, they ought to have knowledge of procedural concepts.

Again, access to the past is largely governed by artefacts and residue left behind by those who lived. These include diaries, letters, journals, public records, newspapers, archaeological artefacts, pictures, paintings, chroniclers' and historians' interpretations. Those who make a living inquiry into the past, divide the artefacts and historical residue into two types: primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include diaries and personal journals compiled by people who actually witnessed or participated in an event about which they report. Secondary sources include history textbooks or historical chronicles written by people who were not present at the events they recount but who have studied and interpreted the available primary sources. Historical sources form a type of evidence, chain, or trail that must be thoroughly pieced together into carefully reasoned interpretations of past events. This piecing-together that learners and teachers do to make sense of past artefacts and residues has been somewhat dominated by mere recital of historical facts by students. To avoid mere recitals and to do a more skilled interpretation of primary and secondary sources, special practical history sessions in schools are required in history education. In such sessions, teachers and students should be engaged in activities that historians adopt to make meanings from the artefacts and residue of the past. In so doing, students will acquire the appropriate skills of the historian. As Whitehouse (2015) observes, students must engage in historical thinking on the same basis as historians do. This will help to avoid reading historical texts in problematic ways.

A call for practical history lessons in schools is, therefore, not a misplaced one, but rather a need in history education. The pedagogical implication is that the teaching and learning of history should be based on discipline-based theory. This requires that teaching connects students to the active nature of doing history (Barton & Levstik, 2004:7). Therefore, practical lessons enable teachers and students to have hands-on-activity in the classroom. In these lessons, teachers are expected to practise with students how to deduce meanings from historical raw materials. For instance, in a particular session, students can

be taken through primary historical documents. Since, it is a practical session, teachers will have time to guide students to read, analyse, and write critically when evaluating those primary historical documents. This exercise requires really time, like a practical session, to unpack points of view and situate events within historical contexts. Students cannot easily achieve this in a didactic history class. And as Wineburg (2001) notes, students do not mechanically place historical sources in context, source them and corroborate them when reading documents. Therefore, the task is an unnatural act and needs to be explicitly taught to them. This suggests that students should specifically be taught how to digest primary documents as historians do, using, for example, Reisman and Wineburg's (2008) framework: sourcing, contextualization, close reading and corroboration. In the end, students will acquire these skills in practice. Levesque (2008:171) makes the point and argues that students who want to think historically must "engage in analytic practices allowing them to study and question the competing historical accounts they encounter and ultimately to construct their own historical arguments and interpretations, using the agreed-on procedures, concepts, and standards of the discipline".

To add to the study of primary documents, teachers could engage students in the study of other historical relics. How historians work with relics is also important for students to know. Practical lessons could be used to examine such historical remains. As science students work with materials to appreciate the nature of things, as they seek to become scientists, history students ought to be engaged in similar practical sessions as they pursue history to become historians. The practical study of historical remains allows students to, firstly, appreciate the processes of change in history and, secondly, understand the developmental pattern in historical theory. It must be noted that history employs a system of appropriate procedures for the attainment of historical truth. These procedures govern the search for materials, the appraisal and analysis of materials, and the presentation of materials. History students cannot depart from these procedures in the study of history. Consequently, the appropriate procedures that historians use to compile substantive knowledge in history will also be acquired by students through practical sessions. In the end, students acquire historical thinking elements like historical significance, change and continuity, progress and decline, evidence, and historical empathy. In fact, without these concepts, history education becomes knowledge acquisition and memorisation of dates and places.

## **Implication for teacher education, history curriculum and assessment**

The call of this article also leads to questions about the current structure of history teacher education programmes, history curricula and assessment. Practical history lessons without the requisite reform-minded teacher education programmes, curriculum and assessment will create gaps in classroom implementation. This is to avoid teachers being placed in difficult situations when considering the implementation of the proposal of practical history lessons. The strength of teachers' disciplinary understanding, in conjunction with their visions, dispositions, and tools, influences the extent to which they are able or unable to implement reform-minded practices. To avoid a mismatch, teacher education programmes ought to be realigned with this proposal to equip history teacher-trainees with the requisite skills to carry out their work effectively. Given that many aspiring history teachers will enter teacher education without strong disciplinary understanding, trainee teachers should be trained in the rudiments of the discipline to acquire the right disciplinary understanding and the appropriate pedagogical content knowledge needed to execute the reforms in schools. Thus, history teacher trainee programmes should be redesigned to reflect the proposal being made. In the redesigned programme, history teacher candidates should be exposed to designed lessons that promote historical interpretation and learn how to make historical thinking central to their instruction. Similarly, it will be necessary to have practical sessions in teacher education programmes as it is being suggested. In this instance, teacher trainees should be supported by their university instructors to implement practices grounded in the discipline. Courses on the methods of teaching history should provide teachers with professional learning techniques in which they learn with and from their instructors (Westheimer, 2008). This will address the right knowledge acquisition for in-coming teachers. More recent research (Hartzler-Miller, 2001; van Hover & Yeager, 2003, 2004; VanSledright, 1996) has shown that having an understanding of the discipline is important to teaching historical thinking and historical interpretation in today's history classrooms.

Practising history teachers cannot be left out in this proposal. Practising history teachers need continuous professional development training in the thinking skills of the discipline because many teachers may lack adequate disciplinary knowledge and skill to carry out the reform. As Ravitch (1987) points out, it is not likely for history teachers who are themselves unfamiliar with procedural knowledge to engage their students in high levels of historical thinking. But with the necessary support of a professional development

community, practising teachers are likely to embrace the proposed reform.

The study also acknowledges previous research (e.g., van Hover & Yeager, 2003, 2004; VanSledright & James, 2002) that has revealed the challenges of teaching historical thinking within a larger policy context that prioritises standardisation and content coverage. Enacting a proposal that promotes procedural knowledge may pose a challenge to curriculum policy and standardised assessment. Curriculum policy on history education certainly ought to receive reform attention. In most history curricula, coverage of content knowledge is emphasised over disciplinary understanding. This is reflected in the curriculum pacing guides and assessments that prioritise names, places, dates and events in history rather than disciplinary thinking. History teachers are, therefore, compelled to cover the content in the pacing guides within certain time constraints. As such, to overcome any possible curricula challenge, the history curriculum must be redesigned to cater for both content and grounded structures as the discipline is made of. This is to ensure that the two knowledge requirements of the discipline are given equal space and time in the curriculum. Currently, most history curricula and assessments cover a significant amount of content. As already argued, both depend on each other and, therefore, should enjoy equal attention. Instructional materials such as handbooks and teachers' guides should be provided to support practical instructional sessions. School timetables should also have flexibility to accommodate the proposed reform.

The implications extend beyond teacher education and history curriculum modification to assessment. This is more important because if all the suggestions proposed are carried out, but the assessment of students by authorised institutions continue to focus on testing students' substantive knowledge, then the desired change will not be realised. Therefore, if it is established that students will not be assessed on procedural knowledge in their terminal or final examinations, then, obviously, history teachers will not prioritise the teaching of procedural knowledge as it is being recommended. The call here is to suggest that a practical lesson requires practical assessment just as it is done in the natural sciences. In this assessment, primary historical documents could be given to students as examination materials with the appropriate instruction to test specific skills contained in the redesigned history curriculum. Such an approach will provide all the necessary attention procedural knowledge deserves in modern history education.

## Conclusion

This article has reappraised the unequal positions of substantive and procedural knowledge in the teaching of history in schools. As mentioned, substantive knowledge has historically enjoyed a predominant position over procedural knowledge in the history curricula of most countries due to their overemphasis of the substance of history as against its process.

It has been argued that both forms of knowledge must be developed together in order to produce students with a historical gaze (Bertram, 2009:59). The paper presents a reform structure to history education which demonstrates that history as a discipline has a practical dimension which is significant to a better understanding of the substance of history. Consequently, we have attempted here to propose that practical history lessons should feature in the teaching of history as this will encourage students' practical engagement with historical materials. Our belief is that practical history lessons will expose students to the process component of history and its associated procedural concepts and contribute to historical understanding. Ultimately, the use of practical history lessons in the teaching of history can make the subject more interesting to many students.



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