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Socioemotional Learning and Historical Empathy: Exploring Creative Strategies for Teaching History in a High School Context

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The purpose of this study is to answer the question: Does incorporating SEL and historical empathy lead to a more meaningful understanding of history and why it is studied? Pedagogically, I am aiming to aid students in their retention of historical events, their understanding of complex influences and chronologies, and their perceptions of the relevance of ordinary and noted historical actors. My study occured over the course of the spring semester of two freshmen Patterns of World History classes in a suburban high school in the Midwest. The instruments used to measure this qualitative grounded theory study are surveys before and after the lessons, student reflections, and observations. The lessons included activities that involved introducing multiple perspectives, discussing current events, metacognitive thinking, journaling and reflection, discussion, check-ins, and problem-solving exercises. Before and after the lessons, students took a survey consisting of the same questions to gauge their level of historical empathy. The results of this study show that students did exhibit some changes and growth in historical empathy and SEL skills based on their surveys, reflections, and observations, but it is difficult to say whether the original purpose of the study has been achieved. With the constraints in time and the consequences of the COVID 19 pandemic, there is still much more research to be done and I intend to continue to pursue action in these areas of history and SEL.

Keywords: Historical empathy, socioemotional learning,

It is a common impression that history is taught as facts, dates, and timelines for students to memorize and regurgitate, only for them to forget most of what they learned after that class has ended. The discipline of history goes much deeper than that, though. History is a rich, interdisciplinary subject of study and can provide lessons to be learned in more than just timelines and chronologies. Historians study history for vastly different reasons: some believe it

is a way for human beings to avoid repeating it, some believe it is a key to understanding the present, and some believe it provides insight into other disciplines like sociology, anthropology, psychology, and many others. Students are often required to study history, and my research investigates how history is delivered to students and their perceptions of it. Thus, the purpose of my study is to understand whether socio-emotional learning (SEL) and historical empathy—the ability to perceive, emotionally experience, and contextualize a historical figure's lived experience—lead to a more meaningful understanding of history and why it is studied. Pedagogically, I aim to aid students in their retention of historical events, understanding of complex influences and chronologies, and relevance of ordinary and noted historical actors.

Review of Literature

There is an growing research interest on SEL, including in different cultures, age groups, and subjects, with mostly positive results . The widespread definition of SEL focuses on five main tenets: self-management, self- awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These tenets represent the skills that educators are aiming to teach to students in their classrooms. What seems to be lacking in existing studies of SEL is connecting it to topics in history, specifically cultivating historical empathy. In many of the studies, historical empathy is viewed as distinct from SEL. The purpose of this study is to incorporate facets of SEL with historical empathy in order to cultivate a more meaningful understanding of history and why it is studied, as well as develop students' ability to empathize across all areas of their lives. With the philosophical perspective of critical theory as a foundation, I hope to help students become culturally relevant, humanistic, and critical thinking citizens.

This action research are informed by and extend three studies on historical empathy that have similar goals but vary in their definitions and measures of empathy. All three studies highlight the benefits of historical empathy: humanizing historical figures, aiding in the understanding of historical content, connections to present-day and students' lives, deepening comprehension of complex or difficult topics, identifying change over time, student ability to face moral and ethical issues, and more (Endacott and Sturtz, 2015; Cunningham, 2009; and Rantala et al., 2016). They also discuss how historical empathy involves the element of imagination. The majority of studies featured qualitative work, usually a case study of one or a few teachers. Due to the nature of researching empathy, the studies required a lot of interpersonal data via interviews and observations, which is difficult to study in large numbers. Some articles say historical empathy is the end goal, some say it is the tool to reach an end goal, and others say it can be both. This means that historical empathy can be viewed as a means and an end simultaneously; it is a skill for people to learn as well as a state of mind. There are also some articles that attempt to have formal parameters for measuring historical empathy, and there are others that do not. This action research address these gaps.

In a Finnish study titled "Stepping into Other People's Shoes Proves to be a Difficult Task for High School Students: Assessing Historical Empathy through Simulation Exercise," the authors explain how there is still debate over the usefulness of historical empathy: there are those

who say it is useful in the process of learning history, and there are others who say that it can easily lead to misunderstanding of the lesson as well as not fully being achieved. The study focuses on historical empathy as an end goal, using a scale executed by Rantala et al. (2015) to measure it. The scale, which was originally classified by P. J. Lee and R. Ashby, goes in order from lowest levels to highest. One on the scale is the "divi" past which views history as unknowable. Two on the scale is generalized stereotypes, which represents the use of stereotypes to rationalize the past. Three on the scale is called everyday empathy, defined by the day-to-day understanding people develop for other human beings and situations, but is not historically specific. Four represents restricted historical empathy, and at the highest is five with contextual historical empathy, where people are able to reject presentist biases and empathize and contextualize historical events and people (Rantala et al., 2015). This type of empathy can only be achieved with enough context for the historical actor. Otherwise, according to the relevant research, historical empathy is impossible to achieve. The overall issue of this research is how the combination of emotions, personal experience, context, and historical empathy is an important part, or even the most important part, of history education. Yet, the fact that this study was conducted in one of the best schools in Finland and had a small sample size makes it difficult to determine whether the students were successful or unsuccessful in "achieving" historical empathy simply due to access to resources.

Another study asks the question "How does one experienced social studies teacher reason pedagogically as she incorporates historical empathy in an existing instructional unit to promote enduring understanding?" (Endacott and Sturtz, 2015, p. 1). The case study takes place in a middle school in a Mid-Atlantic state, where they observed one teacher, conducted a series of interviews with her throughout the study, and videotaped her lessons. The teacher pseudonymized, Sophia Ardactos, was making a first attempt at including historical empathy in her unit on Ancient Athens. This study defined "three interrelated and interdependent aspects" of historical empathy; historical contextualization, perspective-taking, and affective connection (Endacott and Sturtz, 2015, p. 4). This study does not explicitly name whether historical empathy was the goal or a tool, but it is used in the study as a tool rather than something to be "achieved" by students. They also divided the process of utilizing historical empathy into four phases for Sophia to execute: an introduction phase, an investigation phase, a display phase, and a reflection phase (Endacott and Sturtz 2015). The findings of the study were that students were quick to be presentist, looking at the past with a present-day bias. Additionally, even though Sophia utilized all four phases in her unit, she still was not completely successful in integrating historical empathy. In her reflection, Sophia suggested that "being aware of the need to synthesize historical context, perspective-taking, and affective connections during the planning phase of instruction only accounted for a fraction of the pedagogical reasoning needed to integrate historical empathy into an existing instructional unit," (Endacott and Sturtz, 2015, p. 15). This conclusion infers that the successful execution of historical empathy requires in-depth thought from instructors.

The third study was done with four secondary school teachers from southern England. They taught three different age groups (between ages twelve and sixteen). Half of the teachers taught in co-educational schools with relatively advantaged students while the other half taught in gender isolated schools with a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The point of the study was to find ways to effectively utilize historical empathy in the classroom. Methods were mostly interview and observation. The author had all four teachers define empathy, finding that what they had in common was that "they focus upon 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." (Cunningham 2009, p. 684). All of the teachers agreed that historical empathy is a tool, but three out of the four agreed that it is also an end goal.

Results were also differing in viewing empathy as a skill, an exercise, or a habit. Similar to the other two studies, the teachers' concerns when discussing historical empathy were ensuring that students did not misinterpret the past, insert their own present feelings onto historical figures, or engage in presentism. In terms of measuring empathy, all of the teachers stated that empathy is not something that can be measured, but rather it is a stepped achievement. Despite this, all the teachers provided six informal parameters: personal or historical empathy, your feelings or their feelings, obviousness or subtlety, stereotypical or differentiated empathy, including the complexity and changeability of figures over time, descriptive or explanatory empathy, and empathetic understanding of feelings or thoughts (Cunningham, 2009). The findings were that the following strategies best support historical empathy: giving descriptive and genuine feedback to students, involving different activities, taking students out of the classroom (literally or figuratively), supporting humility and respect for people in the past, engaging in explicit empathetic discourse, asking students to contextualize actions of a historical figure, and encouraging students to consider alternate views.

In addition to these three studies, other studies focus on SEL and other similar socio-emotional development practices. These practices, such as Invitational Education (IE) and Positive Youth Development (PYD), were meant to be used in tandem with SEL. As stated earlier, the main components of SEL are relationship skills, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and self-awareness. In close alignment with that are IE's three foundations: democratic ethos (the idea that people count and grow through self-governance), perceptual tradition (behavior is based on the perception of the individual and their place in a larger community), and self-concept theory (perception of one's identity) (Walker and Martin, 2020). IE essentially focuses on respecting student choice; they can either accept or reject the invitation to learn. This approach is vital to teaching historical empathy, as it would be hypocritical to attempt to cultivate empathy while one is not exemplifying empathy. PYD "focuses on enhancing young people's strengths, establishing engaging and supportive contexts, and providing opportunities for bidirectional, constructive youth–context interactions," (Taylor et al. 2017, p. 1,156). Findings of incorporating PYD into lessons were that students had improved self-control, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, higher-quality peer and adult relationships, commitment to schooling,

and academic achievement (Taylor et al. 2017). Developing students' emotional intelligence is an important part of IE, PYD, and SEL, and should be included in historical empathy; doing so creates a sort of interdisciplinary emotional education.

Other studies focused on utilizing historical empathy as a way to help students deepen their understanding of content. Güney and Şeker (2012) discusses how historical empathy can be applied to the sciences in order to cultivate empathy in science. The study focused on incorporating life stories and histories of scientific figures to encourage student interest as well as comprehension of a topic. They developed two aspects of empathy: affective aspects and cognitive aspects. The affective aspects focused on the more socio-emotional and personal parts of empathy, and the cognitive aspects focused on the academic and skill-based parts of empathy. Through the qualitative case study of 9th graders, the researchers found that when students could relate to the scientific figures or disagree with them over their controversial ideas, they were more motivated to engage with the material and make their own connections. The other study purely focused on historical empathy as a guide to inquiry. The researcher asserts that historical empathy is not just an exercise of asking students to imagine they are a historical figure, identify with historical people, or sympathize with historical people, but instead to view historical empathy as an active process (Foster and Yeager, 1998). This study addresses dissonance in the research of historical empathy, stressing that whether or not historical empathy is an outcome or a process is unnecessary as it is most likely both. One shortcoming that the author names is that history itself is an incomplete entity, meaning it is difficult to form feelings of empathy when one may never have all the details of an event. The authors argue that it is still worth the effort to fully contextualize events in history to the best of one's ability before forming opinions.

While instructive, these studies leave multiple gaps. For one, the way of measuring empathy is inconclusive. Many studies have their own ideas of how to measure it and many give informal parameters to follow, but it is evident that there is yet no objective way to measure empathy or historical empathy. Second, there it remains unclear whether historical empathy is something to be achieved or a tool to be utilized. Third, there is not much research on incorporating SEL into historical empathy. Much of the focus has been on developing a deeper understanding of content with helping students grow in emotional intelligence and maturity as a bonus or a secondary focus. Fourth, there is not enough research to determine exactly what strategies are best to use to avoid misinterpretations or misidentifications. The best conclusion to be drawn is that it can change on a case-by-case basis, and it depends on the students and the teacher, so I did not attempt to address that in my research.

My study focuses on the first three gaps. It does not insist on a comprehensive measure of empathy. Instead, I attempt to show that historical empathy as a performance may be difficult to pin down but can certainly be measured informally and relationally. Second, my research conceptualizes historical empathy as a means as well as an end goal. Similar to Endacott and Sturtz (2015), I also name empathy as a skill, an exercise, and a habit to form. Essentially my study attempt to demonstrate empathy as a multifaceted action. Third, my study attempts to incorporate

SEL and similar practices in tandem with historical empathy. This will be done by incorporating both into learning objectives, activities, and unit plans, as well as the way I develop student relationships. Finally, my action research demonstrates that the "incompleteness," or the unknowns of history are a strength in teaching historical empathy. Learning the ability to empathize with historical figures or actors despite not having all the information or the ability to fully contextualize is an important skill to learn. Similar to history, there are always gaps in information in the present day. Even for those who have lived through events, there are things that remain unknowable. However, that should not inhibit people's ability to empathize. Rather, it should enhance their openness to new information and perspectives, thus widening emotional bandwidth. There is still much room for more research to be done in this arena, and this action research only adds to an unfolding body of work on the subject.

Methodology

The aims of my research are to integrate the tenets of SEL into the practice of historical empathy as a skill, an exercise, and a habit to form, so that students can better retain the disciplinary content and skills in history as well as utilize empathy in action. My study occurred over the course of the spring semester of two freshmen Patterns of World History classes in a suburban high school in the Midwest. Adequate parental informed consent and student assent were obtained, and the voluntary nature of student participation was protected throughout the study. Study instruments include surveys before and after the lessons, student reflections, and observations.

The data was collected over the course of four weeks, which corresponded to the the four weeks of "total teach" when I was the primary teacher in the classroom and had complete control over the instruction, grading, and assessment as part of my preservice student teaching experience. The lessons included activities that involved introducing multiple perspectives, discussing current events, metacognitive thinking, journaling and reflection, discussion, check-ins, and problem-solving exercises. These activities were selected based on previous research on successful SEL strategies and were also used as a measure of growth through observations and said journal entries.

1. Before and after the lessons, I provided the students with a survey consisting of identical items to gauge their level of historical empathy. I measured their initial understanding by providing a survey before I began the lessons, and then measured their improvement based on their responses afterward. As can be seen in the results section, the primary survey questions are polar interrogative, but in order to not confine them in a binary of yes or no, students are asked to explain their reasoning. In addition, I accounted for student answers to have a middle ground, so a section for "maybe" answers was provided, as students may have found themselves somewhere in between yes and no, or may have said "yes but" or "sometimes".

Results

The original purpose of this research was to collect tangible evidence to examine whether SEL and historical empathy lead to a more meaningful understanding of history and why it is studied. The results of this research include survey responses, journal entries, and observations during lessons. The pre- and post-survey provide the most explicit form of analysis, where student responses provide direct insight into their values and rationale for history as well as exhibiting growth in historical understanding. Student historical understanding as a whole is measured by how many responses were "yeses." The phrasing of the questions was intended to be answered "yes" if students were developing basic historical understandings and empathy. In survey one, 24 out of 38 students said yes to question one, "Is history relevant to your life or experiences? Why?" Seven students had replied with "maybe", those responses were usually due to certain conditions that they listed in their explanation. For example, one student said, "I think so but I don't really know how or why right now." One student had left the answer blank throughout all their answers in survey one, so their responses were excluded from the rest of the analysis. The six students who said "no" had no explanation. In survey two, 28 out of 32 students said yes to the same question. Despite the decrease in overall student participation, there was still an increase of four students responding with "yes." Only one student said "maybe" but did not provide an explanation. The three students who replied "no" had given the rationale that they did not feel their life was "historical" or that their lives felt "ordinary." This reasoning for providing answers other than "yes" is pervasive throughout both surveys.

Question two posed the question "Do you think that ordinary people are important to history?" In survey one, 26 out of 38 students said "yes." Many students pointed to the fact that history depends on the lives of the ordinary, and history is being made through everyone. Two students said "maybe," using the word "probably" in their response but saying that there are conditions, one student said that only those who did good in history are important. Nine students responded with "no," most of them reasoning that someone has to do something remarkable or take some sort of action to be important to history, and others gave no reason. Interestingly, two students who said that ordinary people in history are not important in the same survey said later (in question four) that they could relate to people in history. In survey two, 29 out of 32 students said "yes," pointing out that most famous figures began as "ordinary," and similar sentiments as the first survey. Zero students said "maybe" and three students said "no," listing the same reasoning as survey one. Those who did not change their minds on this question had almost the exact same reason (or none at all). The rest of the "maybes" and "nos" became "yeses," or were missing in the survey.

Question three asked students "Does history repeat itself?" In survey one, 23 out of 38 students said "yes." Many students who said yes point to the war in Ukraine and Russia as evidence of that, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. Others who said yes seemed to give an explanation that reflected something about human nature, listing people's emotions, behaviors, or mistakes as an example of history repeating itself. Of the nine students who said "maybe," most of the

responses said that history "can" repeat itself, or history "sometimes" repeats itself, but with certain conditions. Four students said "no," either reasoning that history stays in the past or that people learn from their mistakes. In survey two, 26 out of 32 students said "yes," some remarking that it should not but we do not learn from our mistakes, others detailed how they learned from this class that there are patterns throughout history. Interestingly, zero students said maybe. The four students who said "no" repeated similar sentiments from the last survey, or talked about how it can be very similar but does not repeat explicitly.

Question four asked students "Do you ever feel you can relate to the experiences of people in history?" This question had the lowest number of "yeses" in both surveys, with only 11 students responding with "yes" in survey one. They elaborate by naming the pandemic as something that connects them to people in the past or that they can attempt to relate to anyone no matter the time period. One student specifically stated, "I think that I can relate to history because I face adversity every day and so have a lot of people in history." 10 students in survey one said "maybe," their reasoning being that they can relate sometimes, or they do not know how they can relate to historical figures. Fifteen students said "no." Many of them listed how hard it is to relate when it feels so long ago. One student elaborates, "Personally, I don't feel like I can relate to the experiences of people in history. I have not faced as big of conflict as many people in history have, and I can confidently say that my life has been easier than those in history." In survey two, there were only 10 "yeses," with similar reasoning to survey one. There were 11 students who answered "maybe," relaying ideas of how distant the past feels but sometimes during times of crisis they can relate, like the COVID-19 pandemic. Eight students said "no" in survey two, point to a decrease in the "nos" overall.

Question five is reflective of a concept that students have been familiar with all semester; "Does learning about history provide a way for you to see outside a "single story" (i.e., does history help you see more than the incomplete narrative)?" The number of "yeses" was consistent in both surveys. In survey one there were 31 out of 38 students who said "yes," their reason mostly being that they get to learn about multiple perspectives, highlighting the complexities of diversity in history. Only one student fit the "maybe" category, replying with "I don't know." Student attention might have gone down by question five because there were five students who either left a blank response or made a joke in their response. Finally, there was only one "no" in survey one, and that student did not elaborate on their answer. Survey two had less diversity in answers, with 30 out of 32 who said "yes." The reasoning reflected the rationales given in the first survey. Only one student said "no" but gave no explanation, and one student left their answer blank.

Observations within the classroom during instructional time brought some insight into their growth not just with historical empathy, but SEL. One class period, in particular, class period A, was an especially rambunctious group. Classroom management was going to be a major part of my incorporation of SEL in the classroom. I did notice overall growth with both class periods, but especially class A. Class A had multiple students who would interrupt me and their peers constantly, and I made it a point to teach them to regulate themselves. I started to notice by week

3 that when things started to derail, a few students who were usually a part of the side talking or interrupting would ask other students to bring their attention back to the class. Not only were these few students self-regulating—they were noticing their own heightened emotions and behaviors and calming themselves down—but they were regulating each other. This was a process that I encouraged and gave explicit positive reinforcement in response to it as I witnessed it in the classroom.

A key part of SEL incorporation in the research was including a discussion of current events. When the invasion of Ukraine began, the following week I had decided to collect as much information as I could and as many school-appropriate clips surrounding the war as fitting and spent a week with the students informing them of the basics of the crisis; walking them through the history of the two nations, giving them background on the tensions, what is at stake, and the political, economic, geographic, and social causes and consequences of the war. I also incorporated aspects of media literacy, showing clips of reporters talking about Ukrainian refugees versus Middle Eastern refugees and asking students to think critically about the language being used to compare them. Students were invested and engaged in the discussion. I made sure to have an explicit discussion about the importance of talking about current events and asked students to share their perspectives as to why we were talking about the invasion.

The other aspect of SEL that was key in this research was continual reflection. At least once a week, I had students reflect on what we were learning. In the final few lessons, I asked them to make connections to their own lives, modern day events, and other historical events. The final lesson that was used for the sake of this research was about the rise and fall of the Aztec Empire and some other early Mexican history. I had students reflect on five questions, "Why is learning about the history of Mexico important? Why do you think we're talking about it? What is something you learned about Mexican history or culture that challenged your single story of it? What similarities or differences do you see between the events of Mexican history (that we've learned about so far) and current events? What similarities or differences do you see between the events of Mexican history and other historical events?" The following are some samples of student responses:

Student 1: "Learning and understanding the history of Mexico is crucial to eliminate any possibilities of narrow perspectives so we don't develop a single story of Mexico today and its history. Learning about Tenochtitlan interfered with my basic understanding of Mexican history. Tenochtitlan was a grand city with art and rich culture. This contributed to broadening my perspective because prior to learning about this, I had no perspective on Mexican history, to be honest I never thought about it. A similarity in events from Mexican history and current events are the outbreak of disease that killed many people. In Mexico, they experienced Smallpox, today, the globe is facing Covid-19. A similarity between Mexican history and other historical events was when Cortes conquered the Aztecs, just like Christopher Columbus conquered the Native Americans and colonized the land."

Student 2: "Learning about the history of Mexico because it is important to learn about other countries outside of our own to gain a better and more broad perspective of our world. We are probably learning about Mexico because people often immigrate from Mexico to the U.S and it is important to understand where they are coming from. At first I believed that Mexico was in much worse living conditions than the U.S, after learning more I realized Mexico is a very diverse and developed country. I see a similarity between people creating single stories about Ukraine and Russias situations which are very relevant in our world today and the single stories created in Mexico. A difference is that the Russia and Ukraine war has more developed technology unlike Mexico where it was a long time ago and there were things like empires involved."

Student 3: "Because learning about Mexico and its history challenges our simple story of it and its people. I also see a connection in the history of Mexico and the history of Africa and Monsa Musa. They both had great empires that fell and are now portrayed by the media as poor and poverty struck land. The difference though is how they fell. Mexico's great empires fell to outsiders and African empires fell to the death of their emperor."

These responses are consistent with most of other student responses to this specific reflection. Many students pointed to the pandemic, immigration tensions in the United States, the conflict in Ukraine, and other wars in relation to Mexico's history. Other students have begun to bridge some of those connections, but due to low student motivation in the classroom, it is hard to tell who could have come to these conclusions but hesitated. Historical empathy is not something to be perfectly measured nor is it easy to pin down, but these reflections exemplify many of the tenets of historical empathy as discussed in previous research. To return to Rantala et al. (2015), the highest form of historical empathy on the scale used in their study was "contextual historical empathy." Here students are exhibiting contextualization of historical events of the world, modern-day events, and the Mexican history that they are learning about.

Endacott and Sturtz (2015, p. 4) also touched on this pointing to "three interrelated and interdependent aspects" of historical empathy; historical contextualization, perspective-taking, and affective connection. Students were effectively contextualizing through describing details about Mexican history that they deemed important and the worldwide impact of that history. They also began basic perspective taking on their own, with Student One discussing how the smallpox brought by the Europeans was similar to her experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Perspective taking has proven to be the most difficult aspect of historical empathy for these students, and is the weakest point of their growth towards historical empathy. Part of this is due to the questions that I asked during and after my lessons, and another part is due to where they are developmentally. Thirdly, affective connection is ever-present in their reflections. Their ability to bridge these connections is highlighted the most in their responses.

Discussion

It is important to clarify that these findings were conditioned by a major disruption to observation data collection during weeks three and four of my student teaching experience when

I contracted COVID-19. Similarly, my teacher mentor/cooperating teacher for the Patterns of World History class starting week six due to a family emergency. This prompted my me to begin my total teaching three weeks early and to pick up an additional class period of Patterns of World History. With limited insight into subsequent weeks of the curriculum (one other Patterns teacher provided the topics being taught a week beforehand), instructional planning uncertainties further constrained data collection. It became difficult to plan out details for lessons that would explicitly incorporate historical empathy or SEL. Plans for administering the first survey at the start of total teaching was adjusted to the uncertainty of my cooperating teacher's return, which would have abruptly disrupted my instruction and further weakened any connection one could make to student SEL or historical empathy. Similar disruptions to student attendance, including due to COVID-19-related health issues, affected response rates to surveys and students' overall engagement and motivation, as evident in the responses with jokes.

The first consideration in the interpretation of the results is that there was not enough time to fully test the thesis. Going into this action research, it was evident that four weeks (the time I would be teaching as the primary teacher) would not be enough time to fully test these ideas. Question number five in the survey was the most revealing of the issues with time constraints. Students had been talking about the idea of the "single story" all year long, so they have had time to process its meaning and come to their own conclusions as they continually participated in activities and discussions that encouraged them to practice explicit critical thinking of their single stories of other people, places, and cultures. The fact that most students agreed that history assisted them in dismantling those single stories and that number remained consistent over the four weeks was partial evidence of the importance of time and persistence. Additionally, historical empathy was hard to teach as it was difficult to incorporate discussions surrounding presentism. I did not have many opportunities in the curriculum to explain presentism, what it is, and that there is a harmful impact in ignoring someone's experience or the context of people's actions or situations. As I continue to teach, I will ensure that I have more precise references to it and see if that helps students put a name to a thought process that makes historical empathy more difficult. Overall, I needed more time to have those discussions and to guide them in practicing historical empathy, questioning presentist beliefs, and teaching them SEL skills.

Throughout the surveys as well as written reflections, there was a pattern amongst student answers of "historical dissociation." For the sake of this research, this is a term I coined to describe the phenomenon that students do not feel their lives have been eventful enough to be considered relatable to history or historical actors. It should not be used as an antonym for historical empathy, but it is a stance that can prohibit historical empathy. It is an attitude due to the belief that because someone has not lived through a war, worldwide disaster, or other trauma their lives themselves are not "historical." This brings up an interesting point about how students view their own lives, as well as how they view history. Why is it that students do not find their lives apply to the past lives in history only on the condition that their life was not traumatic enough? These student responses reflect a general view that history is filled mostly with tragedy and death, which is only

partly true. History is also full of "ordinary" people who may have been around during the tragedies students read about but were not immersed in the events. Ironically, these students have all lived through the first African-American United States president, multiple natural disasters, an ongoing pandemic, the first-ever siege of the United States Capitol, a conflict in Ukraine and Russia, and new waves of social justice movements for African Americans, LGBTQ+ individuals, and women. What is being taught in history classes that is giving them the impression that these are not a part of their lives and consequently, their lives are a part of history?

Action Plan

To conclude, the purpose of this research was to determine if combining aspects of SEL and historical empathy would lead to a more meaningful understanding of history and why it is studied. Also, the aim of this study was to aid students in their retention of historical events, understanding of complex influences and chronologies, and relevance of ordinary and noted historical actors. With the constraints in time and the consequences of the COVID 19 pandemic, it is difficult to say whether that purpose was achieved. In a way, it is evident that there has been some growth and change in the students based on the surveys, reflections, and observations. The changes in answers between the two surveys demonstrates that some students did shift their views on history and people in history over a short time. Classroom observations of self-regulation and student reflections that demonstrated tenets of historical empathy scratched the surface of the potential of combining SEL and historical empathy. Despite these improvements and observations, there is no way to say that these results are directly correlated with my interventions. Moving forward, what is clear is that presentism is a symptom of historical dissociation and a reflection of stereotypes human beings hold about history as well as people, places, and cultures. In future contexts, it is key to continually tackle this head-on via explicit conversations and instruction on the meaning of these terms, as well as how to practice historical empathy and SEL skills in order to avoid such biases.

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