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Understanding How to Use the Methods of History: The Training of Pre-service  
Educators

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In exploring the methods employed by classroom teachers of history, it is evident that a crisis exists in education that begins with the earliest teaching of history. Zhao and Hoge (2005) have noted that elementary students are incredibly bored with the teaching of history and find it to be dull and lifeless. Students in their study decried that history is dull and boring, did not apply, and was not as engaging as subjects that were more hands-on. Stoskopf (2001) identified a reason for this when he noted that the typical history curriculum was inundated with a massive number of indicators to cover, which lends itself to direct instruction. This becomes even more evident in the age of high-stakes assessments.

Yet when exploring the realm of teaching history, there are numerous examples that support using primary sources as a form of engaging, challenging, and thought provoking curriculum (Vansledright, 2002; Wineburg, 2001). It is this type of teaching that promotes higher-level thinking and engagement that leads to the understanding of material and masters the application of knowledge (Burenheide, 2006). This ability allows the student to excel in the state assessments they are required to pass in order for schools to be accredited. When exposed to this, pre-service teachers have been very receptive to the idea of using

primary sources as a means of instruction, but are challenged as to how to implement this method in their teaching. Thus a need exists to teach pre-service teachers how to effectively utilize this material at all levels of history education.

To explore what students know about utilizing primary sources in instruction and offer methods of how to use it, Project History Methods was a workshop instituted at Kansas State University during the Spring 2009 semester. Through a grant sponsored by the Midwest Center for Teaching with Primary Sources at Illinois State University and the Library of Congress, the Kansas State University College of Education's Center for Social Studies Education created the workshop to train students how to utilize the digital archives of the Library of Congress to teach basic historical concepts and use these sources to engage students in the study of historical phenomena. The college students who participated in the workshop explored strategies of teaching history, received instruction from an academic historian, and created a product that could be used in their teaching. These products were built as lesson plans for use, subjected to the review of workshop participants, and utilized primary sources from the digital archives. In doing so, not only were the participants exposed to the issues of teaching and exploring history, but were engaged in the development of skills to understanding how the discipline of history functions. The remainder of this paper explores how the workshop affected pre-service teaching understanding of

historical thought, as well as the implications for training future teachers of history.

## **Methodology**

### *Selection of Participants*

The workshop selected ten pre-service teachers from different stages of their development. Five of the participants were elementary track students and five were secondary track students. These students volunteered to participate in the workshop and completed their work over six nights during the second half of the semester. The participants received scholarly monographs dealing with the teaching of history as part of the grant's initiative to develop teachers who could appropriately use primary sources.

### *Data Collection*

Participants completed a pre-assessment as a baseline of data. The pre-assessment contained ten Likert-scale items as well as a continuum rating from 1-10 on the same items. The post-assessment contained the same ten Likert-scale items and a pre-treatment and post-treatment continuum rating from 1-10 to be used as a post-then-pre evaluation along with four short-answer written items to further probe how students developed during the experience. The post-then-pre

evaluation of the items helps to eliminate problems of truly understanding how a participant feels about their understanding of a topic prior to undergoing the learning of the skills and ideas contained within the treatment. It also provides the participants with the opportunity to better debrief and reflect upon the learning that occurred during the learning activities (Benjamin, 1982; Linn & Slinde, 1977; Rockwell & Kohn, 1989). The instrument used to gather data is included as an attachment in the appendix.

#### *Data Analysis*

The data collected from the post-then-pre evaluation instrument was subjected to a paired sample T-test using SPSS. The results of the analysis are contained in Table 1. The short-answer responses were also analyzed for data that could provide insight into how the workshop affected pre-service teacher's ideas about using primary sources in historical instruction. By treating the short-answer responses as a small case-study, the data could be coded and analyzed for potential patterns as noted in Cresswell (1998).

#### *Workshop Activities*

The activities of the workshop were conducted over six nights during the second half of the Spring 2009 semester at Kansas State University. Sessions

lasted typically one and one-half hours per night. Table 2 (see appendix) shows the activities that were conducted each session.

### **Results**

As noted in Table 1 (see appendix), the post-then-pre assessment of evaluation items denoted a significant change in participant's dispositions and understanding of key historical terms and concepts. While this may be predictable because of novice pre-service students being exposed to a new way of understanding, the statistically significant findings of the post-then-pre assessment denote a new way of looking into pedagogical techniques. This development provides a change in the development of how these teachers see history. Especially surprising was the change in the attitudes of the elementary participants who may have been dissuaded in the teaching of history because of its lack of importance in the "No Child Left Behind" legislation and testing.

The post-assessment's short-answer questions provided insights into the changes in attitudes of the participants. In looking at the understanding of the pre-service teachers, the power of utilizing primary sources became evident in how these students perceived the teaching of history. The responses that the students provided can be organized in four related concepts.

The first and perhaps most important benefit of using primary sources was bringing a level of engagement and interest in the teaching of history. These pre-

service students found a vast importance in getting their future students involved in the areas where Zhao and Hoge (2005) noted the ennui experienced by students of history currently in the classroom. Some of these comments that denote that are found below:

“It allows students to explore history not just read and respond to questions.”

Historical thinking with sources “will help students to relate to history and think of it as real.”

“It will be a way for me to help engage the students and get them interested to learn more.”

“...primary sources because they are a lot more engaging and impacting!”

“I will be able to plan my lessons using hard facts and evidence. Students will be engaged through the exploration of history.”

“By using primary sources students are able to engage and explore with learning and are able to ‘do history.’

“Students have to search and critically think instead of being completely spoon-fed.”

The second development impacting these future teachers is having students actively participate in interpreting sources and developing their understanding of historical phenomena. What the students called “doing history,” is the process that professional historians do. As noted by Husbands (1996),

having students create their own interpretations and analyzing of sources has a different outcome than what professional historians do. Where the professional historian is bound by the constraints of writing to show their findings, the classroom historian can utilize the other forms of assessment (product and performance) to demonstrate their knowledge. This freedom can allow students to do more than just write to demonstrate their knowledge and can provide students with the opportunity to be creative and explore things how they want.

Examples of this can be found in the quotes below:

“It will help my students gain knowledge of “doing history”.”

“I plan to have students try and “do” history as much as possible. Explore and engage will be the goal in history courses.”

The third concept identified from student responses was the development of realism or authenticity of learning experiences in the future classrooms of these participants. This was evidenced by how several of the students stressed the fact that this form of history will promote authenticate investigations. This development shows that history becomes a viable and realistic experience rather than an artificial and non-connected form of understanding. Evidence of this can be found in the quotes below:

“Primary sources will allow me to bring interest to my students. Having these artifacts makes learning real.”

“Primary sources make history real and applicable. For this reason, they are of the most importance.”

“...to make history more relatable to the students.”

The final component gleaned from the pre-service teacher’s open responses is the pedagogical aspects of teaching. These students see the use of primary sources, especially from the Library of Congress, is an accessible resource that provides the teacher the ability to reach all of their students. These novices were able to use multiple strategies in conjunction with primary sources and reach higher-order thinking for their students. This key development can be seen in the quotes from the participants below:

“FULL IMPACT! They are a free tool for a teacher to use!”

“For younger students, I will have them look at pictures and compare them.”

“Allowing students to explore history through primary sources, facilitating students learning, not lecturing them.”

“Students will compare pictures, and get to see how real history is.”

“I would want my students to explore history and to do history by giving/asking scaffolding questions to aid them in their exploration.”

“Primary sources tie into most anything.”

“Helps bring in different learning modalities. Stimulates higher level thinking and questioning.”

### **Discussion**

The students who were not familiar with the deeper understandings of the concepts explored (e.g. context, interpretation, and inference) initially struggled with grasping how these concepts are important to the teaching of history to students. But by experiencing how primary sources can be utilized in the classroom, they were able to find lessons can be designed that will have students engaged, involved in critical thought, and participating in learning that is conducive for deep understanding of the proposed material.

The implications for future teaching are important as these novices showed. The four concepts gleaned from their responses: engagement, “doing history,” authenticity, and pedagogical understanding are key components to the development of future teachers and should form the core of learning about how to best teach students in their classrooms. Project History Methods provided some confirmation of how students are learning to become effective teachers and most importantly how their future educational experiences will be shaped. Furthermore the development of having students involved in designing primary source activities provides students the opportunity of learning the bigger concepts of history. The result is a greater appreciation for the discipline of history and perhaps with enough teaching of using primary sources, our students can create a discipline that is exciting, interesting, and stimulating for students to learn.

### Appendix

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*Table 1: Paired Sample T-Test Analysis*

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Brief Item Description	t score	df	significance
1. Usefulness of curriculum	-3.143	9	.012
2. LOC materials meaningful	-6.630	9	.000
3. Accessing LOC	-7.125	9	.000
4. Understanding Context	-4.385	9	.002
5. Explaining Inference	-4.583	9	.001
6. Explaining Context	-4.070	9	.003
7. Explain Interpretation	-3.515	9	.007
8. Designing Historical Lessons	-5.543	9	.000
9. Skilled in Using Sources	-6.000	9	.000
10. Students use of LOC Sources	-6.584	9	.000

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*Table 2: Summary of Workshop Activities*

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Session	Description of Activities
1	Pre-Assessment; Discussion of Historical Understanding; Overview of Activities
2	Discussion of Historical Thinking--Synthesis of Ideas, sample historical problem: Who fired first at Lexington (Vansledright, 2002)
3	Pedagogical Strategies of Historical Inquiry; DBQ's
4	Content Presentation--Dr. Charles Sanders, Kansas State University Department of History: Using the Digital Archives to Get Students Engaged in History
5	Guided Work Night with Professor Available for Assistance
6	Presentation Night

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For the following prompts, please respond in short answer form

11. How easy was it for you to navigate the Library of Congress website?

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12. What is the impact of primary sources to your history teaching?

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13. How will you use the LOC website for designing primary source activities?

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14. What are the pedagogical strategies you employ with primary source activities?

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