"Because I was Curious": Oral Histories and Web 2.0 in Elementary Social Studies Methods

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Elementary preservice teachers, enrolled in elementary social studies methods courses, conducted oral history projects using digital video cameras and Web 2.0 tools. The findings indicate that although able to engage in historical inquiry, additional attention is needed in order for them to connect their inquiries to a larger historical narrative. Together these findings highlight the need for technology integration in methods courses and the need for preservice teachers to develop their knowledge of historical inquiry by engaging in activities that they will design for their future elementary students.

Keywords: teacher education, social studies, digital cameras, Web 2.0, oral history

> *I was curious to know more about my father. I wanted to know more about his world.*

Involving elementary preservice teachers in historical inquiry within their social studies method course is a necessity. These future teachers need to engage in the experiences of "doing history" (Levstik & Barton, 2005) in order to facilitate similar experiences and learning of their student. Advances and availability of Web 2.0 tools have made technology integration in elementary classrooms accessible and user-friendly. Within the elementary social studies classroom, the use of digital video cameras, such as the *Flip camera*, allow students to easily and actively engage in the social studies. However, future teachers must be aware of and have facility in the use of these technologies and their pedagogical implications. A goal of this project was to do both: to teach future teachers how to conduct oral/local history projects using video cameras as a tool, and how to integrate these cameras and Web 2.0 tools effectively in the elementary social studies classroom. In this paper, I draw upon the larger study and address one of the research questions: In what ways do elementary preservice teachers engage in historical inquiry using *Flip* video camera to conduct oral histories and what are their perceptions of this engagement? I present data related to the experiences of the preservice elementary teachers. The digital projects created by the preservice teachers and their respective *learning* are presented and analyzed in this paper. This is followed by a discussion of implications for social studies teacher educators.

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FRAMEWORK

This study was situated within overlapping frameworks: the integration of social studies and technology and teacher education. Hence, this section addresses three areas: elementary social studies, specifically engaging learners in historical inquiry; technology integration and Web.2.0; and elementary teacher education.

ELEMENTARY SOCIAL STUDIES

"Inquiry is a basic part of what history is about in our society" (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 185). Involving students in forms of historical inquiry is common within social studies teaching and learning and is a complex task. Ultimately, the goal of social studies and history education is to prepare students for civic participation with competence (NCSS, 2010). In order to better understand the importance of engaging elementary preservice teachers in historical inquiry, it is also needful to examine such engagement of elementary students; they are part and parcel of elementary history education.

Within the elementary classroom, helping students to become historical thinkers and to gain historical knowledge ideally occurs as disciplined inquiry. The social studies classroom can and should be a place for students to learn to question sources and *truths* and to develop their own historical inquiries (Wineburg & Martin, 2004). Brophy and Alleman (2008) informed us that young students are interested in and able to learn historical content when presented in a manner that attends to big ideas and within narrative structures. Structured narratives are the means by which young students connect historical knowledge.

> When elementary students are asked to recount what they know about particular historical topics, they often respond in the form of narratives, and they tend to simply the historical content they learn so that it better matches their expectations for the structure of stories." (Barton, 2008, p. 240)

These general narratives frequently include misconceptions that can be mediated and explored by further engagement in appropriate historical inquiry activities.

Levstik and Barton (2005) highly encourage educators to engage students, as early as kindergarten, in historical inquiry. Engaging elementary students in conducting authentic historical research and interviewing relatives is a powerful way to introduce young students "to important aspects of historical inquiry" (Levstik & Barton, 2005, p.54). Developing oral and local histories is one way to engage students in historical inquiry (Waring, 2008). Oral history projects in the elementary classroom can help young learners learn historical content, feel a personal connection to the past and to the community, develop critical thinking skills, and develop interpersonal skills (Walbert, 2000). Clearly, oral histories are rich, complex, and multi-faceted (Chandler, 2005); as such, the oral histories conducted by elementary students vary dramatically from those conducted by an adult historian (Jenks, 2010).

VanSledright & Allerbach (2000) indicated that elementary preservice teachers may have difficulty in engaging in historical inquiry. Seixas (1998) demonstrated that often, such skills are not taught in social studies methods courses. These issues can be exacerbated by several factors (Lanahan & Yeager, 2008) including the fact that many elementary preservice teachers simply lack social studies content knowledge (Fritzer & Kumar, 2002, Slekar, 1998). This lack of historical knowledge may also be a factor in elementary preservice teacher negative attitudes towards social studies (Henning & Yendol-Hoppey, 2004; Owens, 1997).

In order to develop elementary preservice teachers historical content knowledge and to help them learn how to effectively teacher social studies in the elementary classroom, it is logical to engage them in activities that do both. The elementary social studies methods course is an ideal setting to seek both outcomes, and it is also the place to provide future teachers with the tools to integrate technology in their social studies curriculum and instruction.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology integration in social studies encourages students and teachers to embrace and develop a variety of technologies as well as digital classrooms. Crocco and Cramer (2005) indicated that technology can greatly impact social studies education as it allows for a move away from transmission-oriented teaching. Over the past few decades, increased attention has been given to the integration social studies and technology (Friedman & Hicks, 2006). The growth of the Internet has allowed students to connect with resources outside of the classroom. The availability of online primary and secondary sources, digital archives, virtual fieldtrips and other web-based resources supports constructivist learning theories and enables students to engage in inquiry (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003).

In her analysis of all articles in *Social Studies and the Young Learner* that addressed the inclusion of technology in elementary social studies, Bennett (2010) indicated that most recently young learners have been invited to contribute "to the digital world and become lifelong learners as digital citizens" (p.39). She noted that, with the recent themed technology issue [see *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, March/April 2009], the focus has moved technology and social studies education into the Web 2.0 environment. Increasingly, there has been a call to broadly use Web 2.0 tools within the social studies classrooms (Solomon & Schrum, 2007). These tools, although nearly ubiquitous today and used by millions of people, remain underused or elusive to many educators. Web 2.0 includes "free new tools such as blogs, wikis, photo and video sharing, and social networking" (Solomon & Schrum, 2007, p.1). Within the elementary social studies classroom, teachers and students can easily be involved in podcasting, making digital movies, using the Internet to research, becoming digital citizens, and using Web 2.0 tools (Berson & Bennett, 2009). This free software and tools enable educators and students to engage in an Internet community beyond the school and despite budgetary constraints.

Lee and Hicks (2006) called for increased research and scholarship on specific technologies used in social studies classrooms, "There is a need to begin to examine clearly and to detail how technology influences student learning in both K-12 and teacher education settings. This effort will require a sustained focus on specific technologies used in social studies classrooms" (para. 3). Greenhow, Robelia, and Hughes (2009) described the contexts in which today's students use Web 2.0, how this influences teaching and learning, and called for a focus on learners—what learners do with Web 2.0 technologies and its educational benefits.

Several factors must be in place in order for effective technology integration to occur in elementary classrooms; these include access and availability, adequate preparation in *how* to use the technology, and purposeful integration of technology into content (Franklin, 2007). The literature also informs us that teacher belief and attitudes, self-efficacy, administrative support and time are factors that also influence technology integration by elementary teachers (Franklin, 2007, Mumtaz, 2000). Preparing future teachers to connect curriculum and technology necessitates the integration of technology into teacher preparation. Mason, et al. (2000) set forth five guiding principles for the

"appropriate infusion of technology in social studies teacher preparation programs. These included introducing technology in context, extending learning beyond what could be done without technology, and including opportunities for students to study relationships among science, technology and society.

Therefore, the elementary social studies method course is a fruitful environment in which to integrate technology and to help future teacher learn how to integrate technology into their teaching. Within the methods course, preservice teacher should engage in learning experiences in which they use a variety of technologies, and faculty should integrate technology into coursework and in-class sessions--thusly, providing examples and experiences for the preservice teacher.

TEACHER EDUCATION

Teacher preparation matters (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996) and can make a positive difference for teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Adler (2008) noted the 40-plus year progression within teacher education from a training approach, to an effective teaching approach, and eventually to professional thinking/decision making approach. Thus, we find ourselves, as teacher educators, currently attending to knowledge, skill, and dispositional development of preservice teachers. Seminal to this current positioning are pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) and the professionalism of teaching (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999).

Shulman (1987) describes the complex expertise essential to teachers as pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). According to Shulman, teaching "begins with a teacher's understanding of what is to be learned and how it is to be taught" (1987, p.7). Within the field of elementary social studies education, this means preservice teachers must know social studies content and develop an understanding of how to engage students in a variety of complex, inquiry based tasks; that is, a flexible and multifaceted comprehension of content and pedagogy. This can be dicey within a teacher preparation program. Ideally, we approach subject matter from a pedagogical perspective and pedagogy from a disciplinary perspective (Darling-Hammond, 2006). However, in order to engage elementary students in historical inquiry, to help them develop conclusions based upon evidence and create historical knowledge; elementary teachers must know how to do these themselves and know how to facilitate these experiences within their classrooms (Barton & Levstik, 2004). According to Monte-Sano and Cochran (2009) novice history teachers must develop their knowledge of subject, the ability to translate understanding into action, and the disposition to reflect on students and personal beliefs.

Correspondingly, within the field of technology, *The National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers* (NETS*T) (ISTE, 2008) called for teachers to be better prepared to use a variety of technologies, to teach with technology, and to engage learners in technology integrated activities. Teacher preparation programs have a responsibility to prepare future teachers to seamlessly integrate a variety of technologies into curriculum and instruction (Bell, 2001). Franklin and Molebash (2007) stated that elementary teacher preparation, in which technology is integrated, can make a long-lasting and significant difference in how inservice teacher integrate technology in elementary classroom.

Therefore, this study was positioned within the context of technology integration in elementary social studies methods courses. Bridging theory and practice is a fundamental in teacher preparation courses; this stance underpinned the design of the study. We need to help preservice teachers better understand social studies, specifically history, and to assist them in developing pedagogical content knowledge in order for

them to engage their students in historical inquiry and historical thinking (Seixas, 1998; Wilson & McDiarmid, 1996).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study drew upon the aforementioned frameworks. The research questions addressed in this paper were "In what ways do elementary preservice teachers engage in historical inquiry using *Flip* video cameras to conduct oral histories, and what are their perceptions of this engagement?"

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

This study was conducted with 50 elementary education majors at a majority-minority public university within their elementary social studies methods course. Over half of the student population of this institution identifies as Hispanic and/or Native American. The participants in this study are representative of the university.

The elementary teacher preparation program is a three-semester undergraduate program. The elementary social studies methods course is taught in the second semester of the program, and the study was conducted in two sections of this course. Each section was taught by the same instructor. The researcher was not the instructor for either of the sections. Participation in this project was voluntary. In addition to other required coursework, the preservice teachers worked in a field-based practicum experience two days per week for the entire semester.

The computer skills of the preservice teachers as a whole were limited. Although 80% of the preservice teachers indicated ease of use with their cell phone cameras, only three of the preservice teachers had used any other type of digital video camera. Nearly 50% of the preservice teachers stated that they had limited experience with computers (i.e. email and word processing).

BACKGROUND

As part of the elementary methods course, the preservice teachers conducted a brief family history before this project began. The methods instructor indicated, "I just had them complete a genealogy." However, the preservice teachers had spent several weeks reading and discussing ways to engage elementary students in inquiry-based activities. Therefore, to introduce this project, the researcher facilitated one-hour class discussions about ways to engage young learners in historical inquiry (personal histories, timelines, family histories, etc.). Historical thinking includes skills and processes related to students' abilities to understand and relate to history in a meaningful, personal way (Levstik, 1996). Class time was devoted specifically to oral histories—the purpose, identifying significant events, strategies for conducting interview, interview question development, and usefulness of creating historical source materials (Waring, 2008).

During a second class period, each preservice teacher received a *Flip* video camera and was taught how to use these digital video cameras. The *Flip* camera is unique in that it is one of the first video cameras that can be easily used by elementary students. There is an *on* button and an *off* button and no cords are needed to connect it to a computer. The *Flip* has a "thumb drive connection" that *flips* open and inserts into the USB drive of the computer. In class, the preservice teachers conducted short interviews with classmates following sample questions developed in the previous class session, and set up their

FlipShare (FlipShare.com) account. In *FlipShare* (a Web 2.0, free corresponding editing and movie making tool) the preservice teachers uploaded, edited and e-shared their videos. In the two subsequent weeks, the preservice teachers conducted oral histories, using the *Flip* cameras, with individuals they identified as significant and used *FlipShare* to upload, edit, and share these histories. The preservice teachers engaged in additional activities using the *Flip* within the elementary social studies classroom, but, as stated previously, for this paper, data relating only to the preservice teachers experiences are discussed.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Preservice teacher data consisted of observational notes taken during the methods course sessions, pre-post surveys, online discussions related to *Flip* camera use, the completed projects, and final reflections. Both surveys addressed questions related to historical inquiry and the recording of history as well as usefulness of the *Flip* tools.
The data were analyzed in several ways. Observational and narrative comments were coded and analyzed for themes by multiple readings and memoing the data (Patton, 2004). By using a variety of data collection methods, triangulation of data occurred (Denzin, 1970; Maxwell, 1996).

FINDINGS

This investigation sought to understand ways in which preservice teachers engage in historical inquiry using *Flip* video cameras to conduct oral histories and their perceptions of this engagement. Several themes emerged in this piece of the study: use of technology (camera and Web 2.0 tool), the interviews (participant and questions), their learning from conducting an oral history, and reflections about historical inquiry.

TECHNOLOGY

All of the preservice teachers indicated ease-of-use with the *Flip* cameras. PST 21 captured the sentiment of many,

> You could really capture the expressions and feelings (facial expression)
> through the camera. It was useful because it was easy to use and you
> caught the interview. If we were to have to write it down, we could never
> capture it all.

Another preservice teacher noted, "It gives an audio-visual recording which I believe is the best way to record history (PST 14). "Because the camera is so easy to use, I was able to use a technology that allows us to capture individuals' stories which are saturated with beautiful history" (PST 22).

Some difficulty using the Web 2.0 tool (*FlipShare*) was encountered by 35% of the preservice teachers. Of those who had some difficulty, two indicated, "It is because I have a Mac", ten identified difficulties in downloading the *FlipShare* software, "it didn't pop-up on my computer like it was supposed to", and six indicated that they preferred other software. Of those who indicated difficulty with downloading software, only two were unable to solve their initial problems. 98% of the preservice teachers were able to edit their interviews and produce a digital oral history of their participant. 50% of the teachers e-shared their videos with a classmate and jointly edited their videos. All of the preservice teachers posted their final products in *FlipShare* and e-shared them with classmates and with their interview participants. The entire group noted the ease of e-sharing projects within and from *FlipShare*.

Noteworthy, but not a dominant theme, were elementary classroom connections. Several preservice teachers identified benefits of using *Flip* cameras and *FlipShare* within elementary classrooms. Some of their suggestions were recording lessons for viewing and reviewing by students, sharing videos with parents and students to help build classroom community, sharing and collaborating with other teachers by videoing lessons, having student record field trip and make movie of the trips, and of course, having elementary students conduct oral histories. " I would most certainly feel comfortable that a first grader could use this camera for projects, field trips, and interview each other or family"(PST 11). PST 47 suggested, "These would be a great tool for oral historys [sic] or unique projects for the students to work on, add another aspect to the school society." Approximately 5% of the preservice teachers highlighted the fact that *FlipShare* is free (with purchase of the camera) and 85% showed interest in having a class set of cameras.

INTERVIEWS

The sole guideline given to the preservice teachers regarding selection of the oral history participant was to select someone whom they considered significant. 60% chose to conduct an interview with a relative; these were particularly rich in terms of importance due to the multicultural contexts of the families. 40% chose to talk with neighbors or community members with whom they already had a relationship. 20% chose to interview more than one person, and 15% chose to interview children, in addition to interviewing an adult. Nearly half of the preservice teachers indicated surprise that participants were hesitant or uncomfortable about "being videoed".

The categories of questions asked during the interview were fascinating. The interviewers asked questions regarding *significant events* in the life of the participant and *change*. The significant event questions such as, "Tell me an important thing that happened in your life?", "What memories do you have of (an event or time period)?" were all framed within the context of the past influencing the present. The second theme had to do with *change*, typically framed within local history. For example, "How have things changed in Albuquerque since you were a child?", "What memories do you have of elementary school and how is school different now?" Additional interview questions were queries into the participant's past and seemed to provide a common connection between interviewer and participant, "What was your childhood like?", "What kind of things did you like to do? These broad themes could have been used to frame the final oral history projects, but few of the preservice teachers did so.

All of the preservice teachers provided rationales for their selection and framed the participant within a historical context and personal interest. For example, "I chose to interview her because she is from the Taos Pueblo, and I wanted to know what differences she had noticed from back then in Taos compared to now and the differences from my life"(PST 01). PST 37 interviewed two women and indicated, "…I wanted to know what has changed in the school system." Another noted, "He grew up in the North Valley and has lived down the same street since he was little. I thought his perspective would be interesting" (PST 48). The selection of the participant is important as each preservice teacher defined the *significant* criteria for herself. Students, of any age, need to be able to engage in inquiry that matters to them, to ask questions that matter to them, and to investigate these questions.

Although the interviews of family members were of great personal value and emotionally laden, only 52% of the preservice teachers made historical connections beyond the interview. Limited historical context was provided in many of these, and even fewer (only 9%) included perspectives beyond that of the interviewee in their final video projects. None of the preservice teachers attempted to verify their findings. "I

learned a lot about my cousin, but the entire time I was wondering if I was asking the correct questions" (PST 31).

PRESERVICE TEACHER LEARNING AND REFLECTIONS

Several dominant themes emerged relating to preservice teacher learning. The importance of the individual and of the creation of history was the dominant theme throughout all of the data. "I learned that everybody has their own history and it is worth telling" (PST 42). "I never knew that she was the person who fought for separation of church and state in our county—she made history and never told anyone" (PST 36). This was also, perhaps, the most poignant learning for the preservice teachers.

Nearly all of them (95%) mentioned *change*. "I learned how much the city has changed just within the 30 years that my mom has been here. I thought it was really interesting how the new buildings were replacing a part of my mom's life" (PST 49). "It was interesting to see how he had to adjust to changes in his life" (PST 03). Personal change was referenced by 65% of the preservice teachers: the fun of conducting an oral history and change in attitude toward history in general. "History has always been boring for me, I am beginning to see that it can be informative and interesting" (PST 18).

Most of the preservice teachers (75%) noted increased confidence in using the *Flip* cameras and 90% noted increased confidence in simple video editing and production of a final product within the *FlipShare* environment. This is significant as so few of the preservice teachers considered themselves comfortable with technology at the outset of the project, and so many of them had limited experience with technology.

The findings from this one piece of a larger study indicated that preservice teachers benefit from engaging in historical inquiries similar to those that their future students will hopefully be able to engage. The oral histories that these preservice teachers conducted were not much more sophisticated or different than what we would expect from elementary students. And, although, we often assume that *everyone*, especially undergraduates, have high levels of use of a various technologies; this was not true for the majority of these 50 preservice teachers.

DISCUSSION

> Historical inquiries…retain the critical components of reflective thought—asking questions, gathering and evaluating relevant evidence, and reaching conclusions based upon that evidence. That, for us, is what historical inquiry is all about" (Barton& Levstik, 2004, p.188).

The findings in this study indicated that the preservice teachers were able to engage in historical inquiry and genuinely enjoyed the process. In many respects, their level of engagement and their processes paralleled those suggested by Levstik and Barton (2005) for elementary students. They chose topics of study that were personal to them, people or events about which they were curious or had a connection. This does not necessarily infer an inchoate level of historical inquiry; we all prefer inquiry topics that matter to us.

The preservice teachers asked question and gathered evidence quite aptly. They also began to frame their oral histories within a larger historical narrative, local history. However, few of them actually evaluated their interview data against existing evidence. For example, in one oral history a claim was made that "gasoline used to cost 33 cents a gallon". Within the final project the preservice teacher wondered about this statement, but did not verify the claim. This overall missing component may be due to the

insufficient focus placed upon evaluation of interview data against existing evidence; an error on the researcher's part.

The evidence indicates that the preservice teachers were all able to use a simple technology, the *Flip* camera. Although this wasn't the focus of the project, it is important to expose preservice teachers to the technologies that we hope they will use in elementary classrooms. This seems intuitive, but all too often, teacher education faculty gloss over these simplicities and neglect building upon preservice teacher prior knowledge. Use of the Web 2.0 tool proved easy for most of the preservice teachers. Only two of the preservice teachers had previously heard the term, "Web 2.0" prior to participation in this project, and none of them knew the meaning of the term. Again, this is informative to social studies teacher educators; we ought not to assume the prior knowledge of our students.

Hofer & Swan (2005) reiterated the importance of engaging preservice teachers in technology infused tasks in methods courses,

> Moreover, it is the view of the authors that innovative practice with technology and teaching should be explored in a university setting similar to that noted above before applying it to the K-12 classroom. By trying the project in a university course, the researcher will develop intuitions about the implementation process, the challenges with the technology, and other logistical issues. In addition, the theoretical and research frame can then be refined before implementation in the K-12 classroom. (p.108)

I am in agreement with them, and the evidence from this study substantiates this stance. As preservice teachers pedagogical content knowledge begins to emerge, they need space to learn to teach content with technology. Also, in accordance with Hofer and Swan, it is necessary to implement such projects within a teacher preparation setting and then within an elementary classroom environment. The findings of this study, in particular, responds to the call to continue to focus research on specific technologies used in social studies classrooms with respect to often underrepresented perspectives.

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