

Tell Me About It! How Preservice Teachers Interpret U.S. History

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Abstract

The design and delivery of programs that prepare social studies teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners should (a) interpret teachers' understandings of history; (b) clarify and remedy these understandings where necessary; and (c) facilitate their awareness of methods enabling their students' understandings. This research paper presents the interpretations of five aspects of pre-1877 U.S. history (1492-1877) by early childhood, elementary education, and middle level preservice teachers at three institutions of higher learning. The researchers collected data as part of an online survey instrument that contained 25 multiple choice items and a pool of five open response prompts. The findings raise concerns about the inability of preservice teachers to articulate the content knowledge that they are responsible for teaching to P-8 students.

This work is based on the belief that the design and delivery of programs that prepare social studies teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners should (a) interpret teachers' understandings of history; (b) clarify and remedy these understandings where necessary; and (c) facilitate their awareness of methods enabling their students' understandings. In doing so, teacher preparation programs work to develop candidates who prepare future citizens. These citizens should have common understandings of historical events along with interpretations that connect with their backgrounds. This study relates to our recent disclosure of poor U.S. history understandings among teacher education majors (Lucey, Hawkins, & Giannangelo, 2009), and the importance of interpreting preservice teachers' abilities to articulate understandings of content.

An effective teacher education system requires that teachers possess sufficient knowledge to engage students in meaningful conversations about content. Nowhere is this need more urgent than in early childhood, elementary, and middle school classrooms. In an era that emphasizes literacy and mathematics in elementary grades, social studies often becomes relegated to a day-ending learning option. The authors believe that, when not taught as a separate subject, social studies becomes integrated into (often commercialized) reading curricula where select stories are employed to provide politically correct interpretations of historical persons or events.

This situation presents a challenge for a 21st century United States that teaches a Eurocentric national history to a population of increasing cultural diversity. Early childhood, elementary, and middle level teachers have the responsibility for facilitating their students' learning of societal history; however, unless these teachers possess firm understandings of this information, they lack the ability both to intelligently dialogue with students about history's interpretative nature and to validate students' historical identities.

This paper presents the interpretations of five aspects of pre-1877 U.S. history by preservice teachers at three institutions of higher learning. It intends to stimulate conversations about how teacher preparation relates to these interpretations and offer suggestions for plans of action. It conveys results of a study that reveals how preservice early childhood, elementary education, and middle level teachers interpreted events in U.S. history from 1492 through 1877.

Literature

Studies (e.g., Fritzer & Kumar, 2002; Lucey, Hawkins, & Giannangelo, 2009) document the poor understandings of U.S. history among teachers and preservice teachers. While these studies tend to employ methods that prompt respondents' recognition of historical events and interpretations, there is scant research that seeks teachers' and preservice teachers' explanations of specific historical events and processes, particularly those that they are expected to teach to their pupils.

Research largely concerns preservice and inservice teachers' understandings of history itself, rather than specific events or concepts (Evans, 1988, 1989, 1990; Virta, 2001; Yilmaz, 2008), and indicates that the presence of five conceptions (storyteller, scientific historian, relativist/reformer, cosmic philosopher, eclectic) may affect patterns of teaching and learning. The storyteller believes "knowledge of other times, people and places" (Evans, 1989, p. 215) is the reason for learning. The information acquired is the basis for learning. The scientific historian considers current events in the context of the past; history contains loose ends that require exploration. The relativist/reformer connects the past with the present, providing background information for addressing existing challenges and improving society. The cosmic philosopher perceives laws and definite patterns. The eclectic has no dominant tendencies and may combine two or more of the conceptions presented above.

Early childhood, elementary, and middle level teachers' conceptions of history have particular relevance to classroom learning processes and resultant student attitudes and dispositions towards the subject. For example, a story telling history teacher who focuses on "facts" risks alienating students who may be prone to conceptualizing history in one of the other modes.

James's (2008) work with elementary preservice teachers illustrated the challenges preparing these candidates to overcome their protectionist dispositions

towards children and associated “safe” understandings of history. These preservice teachers experienced challenges realizing the abilities of young children to reconcile diverse perspectives and conflicts and to apply these abilities to conflicting views of historical events. The association of these tendencies with “factual” or text dependency, theoretical obsolescence, and deficit views of child learning would appear to indicate that the teacher education community experiences challenges in preparing its candidates to overcome the preconceived notions of history and child development that they bring to their learning. This challenge may result from the nature of teacher preparations themselves. Ross’s (1987) observation that preservice teachers model the ideals and practices of their cooperating teachers, more than theories espoused in university classrooms indicates that programs need a stronger emphasis on candidate critique of field experiences, thereby fostering preservice teachers’ realization of both the strengths and weaknesses of these settings (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005).

Yet, critically analyzing these environments depends on preparing early childhood, elementary, and middle-level teachers to think critically about history, not just relate the official line in a school or district text. Particularly in an era that relegates history as a topic within literacy instruction, early childhood, elementary, and middle-level candidates must possess the skills to consider history in manners that may challenge the myths that occur in trade books and contextualize the stories to facilitate authentic historical understandings, not just fictional renderings (Fallace, 2009; Fallace & Neem, 2005).

This paper relates the results of a study about how early childhood, elementary, and middle-level preservice teacher candidates conceptualized five historical events or concepts. The work conveys the challenges that preservice teachers face in articulating the common historical understandings that they are responsible for conveying to their students. In doing so, it provides an indictment of the preparations of these teachers to teach history and calls for a dialogue among teacher educators about remedying this problem.

Methodology

Sample

The study involved all early childhood, elementary, and middle-level teacher education majors at three higher-education institutions. Institution A was a large Mid-western public institution in a midsized community. Institution B was a medium-sized urban Southern institution. Institution C was a small Southern private liberal arts college. Table 1 conveys the sample and response rates for each participating institution.

Table 1

Patterns of Responses among Institutions

	Institution A	Institution B	Institution C
Prospects	1,702	1,018	64
Respondents	61	39	3
Response Rate	3.58%	3.83%	4.68%

Instrument

The researchers collected data as part of an online survey instrument that contained 25 multiple choice items and five open response prompts that measured respondents' understandings of U.S. history. Lucey et al.'s (2009) survey of teacher education students interpreted understandings of U.S. history from the era of European exploration through modern times. The current study represented a refinement of that effort by amending the instrument to focus on items through 1877 and to survey respondents at three, rather than two institutions.

These multiple choice items were derived from five sources: The Elite College History Survey (Center for Survey Research and Analysis: The University of Connecticut, 2000), the New York Regents' High School Examination (2002, 2008), an assessment guide of a middle level American History text, (Ancient Civilizations Progress Assessment Support System, 2006) assessments from the website <http://www.historyteacher.net/> (n. d.), and Loewen's (2007) best-selling critical analysis of U.S. history textbooks. There was one item from Loewen's work among the items for each era.

Because multiple choice items measure respondents' recognition of presented topics, the researchers considered other methods by which respondents' understandings of American history could be construed. Open response items were developed to interpret respondents' recollection or understanding of historical topics or ideals without the use of memory aids. The first author developed questions for Eras 2 and 4; the second author developed questions for Eras 1 and 3; the third author developed the question for Era 5. Descriptions of each Era are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Description of Eras

	Era	Dates
1	Three Worlds Meet	Beginnings to 1620
2	Colonization and Settlement	1585-1763
3	Revolution and the New Nation	1754-1820's
4	Expansion and Reform	1801-1861
5	Civil War and Reconstruction	1850-1877

From a pool of five open response prompts, the online survey randomly assigned each respondent with two items for completion. The five prompts consisted of the following items:

- What was life like for the people living in the Jamestown colony during the first few years?
- What were key events of the French and Indian War?
- How did Jeffersonian democracy change the new nation politically, economically and socially?
- What were the circumstances surrounding the Louisiana Purchase?
- Describe the effects the Civil War had on American society.

The items required respondents to conceptualize history in two manners: story telling (prompts 1, 2, and 4), and scientific historian (3 and 5). The authors' varied preparations in understandings of U.S. history and the random assignment of questions to students provided for an appropriate balance of general and specific questions.

Procedure

The survey was posted online by the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology at the midwestern institution. During October 2008, prospective participants at all three institutions received two mass email invitations to complete the survey. The invitations were sent two weeks apart, and the survey was available for completion for one week after the transmission of the second invitation. The invitations provided the link to the survey website. No incentives were provided to prospects to complete the survey.

Analysis

For the purposes of this paper, only the answers to open response items are analyzed. The responses were analyzed for patterns of accuracy with regard to generally accepted historical interpretation. While it is recognized historians may disagree and even change their conventional interpretations about historical patterns (e.g., understandings of American colonists, as explained in Fallace and Neem, 2005), early childhood, elementary, and middle-level majors are viewed as less sophisticated than professional historians in this regard. Thus, the analysis process was considered to be reasonable for the respondents' preparations and expertise.

Additionally, the researchers classified responses into three categories: general information with some accuracy, specific information about the content in the question, and inaccurate information. General information responses with some accuracy would

include broad statements that lack specific details, which would indicate content knowledge beyond the obvious cliché ones. There are numerous examples of this type of response that helps to illustrate this category in the results section. Responses that were coded as specific information about the events included information that described specific historical events or themes that suggested that the respondent has an elevated level of historical content sophistication relative to the prompt provided in the survey. An example of this type of response is provided in the section of the paper that discusses responses to the French and Indian War prompt. Teacher candidates also provided responses that were historically inaccurate for the prompts. These responses are described in the results section of this paper. Categorizing responses in this manner helped the researchers to better understand the levels of historical thought expressed by the teacher candidates in this sample.

Results

From 104 respondents, there were 91 responses to the prompts. The survey generated two random prompts for each respondent; however, no information is available concerning the number of times each prompt was offered. If the survey had offered the prompts an equal number of times, there would have been approximately 42 opportunities to respond to each prompt. In this section, the findings are organized by the five prompts. Regardless of the historical conception indicated by the prompts, respondents experienced difficulties articulating information concerning the prompted historical issues. The number of responses related to the nature of the prompt, with those that concerned precise events drawing more responses and those that concerned more abstract or inferential ideas drawing less. Although responses were generally accurate when provided, many respondents confessed ignorance, misinterpreted events, and expressed superficialities. Responses to specific prompts are discussed below.

Life for the People Living in Jamestown during the First Few Years

Out of 42 potential respondents, 26 (61.90%) teacher candidate participants in the research study responded to the “life in early Jamestown” prompt. More teacher candidates responded to this prompt than any other. Responses ranged in length from two words to three or four sentences. In every case, responses focused on the basic survival conditions faced by the inhabitants of Jamestown. The conditions listed or described included, fear, disease, hunger, cold, and poor shelter.

The prompt called for a description of life in Jamestown and in broad terms teacher candidates provided a bleak picture of colonial life. Their depictions, while not inaccurate in terms of the struggles faced by early colonists, exclusively reflect the storyteller conception of history as described by Evans (1988; 1989; 1990). Tendrils of storyteller levels of knowledge emerged in most teacher candidate responses when they attempted to describe the colonists’ relations with the native peoples of the region. Responses reflected the myth of Thanksgiving (Loewen, 2007) as these future teachers

described how Native Americans “helped the settlers out” or as portrayed in another response were “the only reason they survived.”

Of the 26 responses, 25 (96.15%) would be categorized as “general information with some accuracy” about the topic. One response (3.85%) was inaccurate, “They [the colonists] did not know how to work for themselves, so they often starved to death. Disease killed millions of Indians.” Table 3 organizes these categories based on the preparation areas of the respondents (middle, elementary, early childhood) and the nature of the responses to the prompt.

Table 3

Patterns of Responses that Described Events Associated with Early Life in Jamestown

	Total	Early Childhood	Elementary Education	Middle-Level
Total Responses	26	2	19	5
No Understanding	0	0	0	0
General Information, Some Accuracy	25	2	18	5
Inaccurate information	1	0	1	0
Specific Events	0	0	0	0

Key Events of the French and Indian War

Of the estimated 42 chances to address to this prompt, 18 (42.86%) respondents did so. Of the respondents, more than one-third (38.89%) conveyed little or no understanding. These seven were comprised of three (16.67% of all respondents) who provided one term responses (i.e., freedom, battles, compromises, Indian land), and four (22.22%) indicated that they did not know about the events.

The researchers coded the remaining 11 responses into three categories: providing specific information about events, general information with some accuracy, and inaccurate information. Nine responses were found to provide general information with some degree of accuracy, one that provided information about specific events, and one providing inaccurate information. Table 4 organizes these categories among the professional intentions of respondents.

Table 4

Patterns of Responses that Described Events Associated with the French and Indian War

	Total	Early Childhood	Elementary Education	Middle-Level
Total Responses	18	2	13	3
No Understanding	7	2	4	1
General Information, Some Accuracy	9	0	7	2
Inaccurate information	1	0	1	0
Specific Events	1	0	1	0

Most historians would agree that the French and Indian War consisted of a series of North American conflicts between the French and British during the middle of the 18th century. While the wars provided English colonists with access to the land west of the Appalachians, their costs led to increased taxes on the colonists and contributed to the American Revolution.

Because elementary education majors provided most of the responses, the focus is on their interpretations of these events. Most (7 or 53.85%) responses by students provided general information about the war with some degree of accuracy. The general information provided by elementary education majors tended to agree with this understanding. Examples consisted of the following posts:

Washington was a general. The colonies learned that they could defend themselves without Britain. It sparked the idea that they should be free and independent from Britain. (Response A)

I know that the battle of Quebec was an important battle and that the war was between England, France, and the native peoples of the area. Not really fought by French against Indians. It was the French and the Native Americans against the English. It was over land in America mostly. It was also not all Native American tribes, just those that sided with the French. (Response B)

These responses indicate that students knew pieces of general information about the conflicts; however, they lacked sufficient knowledge of information to communicate specific events related to these conflicts, which contributed to the American Revolution.

The one response that did mention a specific event conveyed this problem from a different angle. Rather than providing general information about conflicts themselves, the respondent conveyed information about an event that was irrelevant to the overall conflict.

The conflict at Draper's Meadow where Indians attacked a small, remote settlement, killed many people, and took women and children captive. Mary Draper, who was greatly pregnant with child, gave birth on the trail as the Indians were moving her.... (Response C)

While the story of Draper, fictionalized through James Alexander Thom's *Follow the River* (Thom, 1981), characterizes a heroic story from colonial America, it represents an insignificant event in the broad view of the French and Indian War. Draper's Meadow provides the basis for a good story and illustrates the difficulties for the settlers; however, the events had no bearing in the conflict, were militarily insignificant, and conveyed little about the resultant tax burdens. Thus, the response conveys some knowledge about history; it does not provide knowledge about the provided prompt.

How Jeffersonian Democracy Changed the New Nation

One of the least chosen prompts invited respondents to "describe the effects of Jeffersonian democracy on the new nation." Only ten out of 42 possible participants (23.81%) attempted to respond to this prompt. Tellingly, four of the ten respondents admitted that they knew nothing about this topic. Of the six that ventured a description, three were factually incorrect providing comments such as, "... allowed for religious freedom- there couldn't be any government forced religion or church," and "Jefferson patterned the constitution after the British system of government. He helped establish three different parts of government..." Three of the responses included general information with some accuracy. It would appear that the stories told by teacher candidates about Jeffersonian democracy reflect late eighteenth century U.S. history instead of Jefferson's presidential and post-presidential period.

Even the three somewhat accurate responses submitted were exceedingly broad and general by nature. One response was, "It made things more equal." None of the responses attempted to connect Jeffersonian democracy to current events, nor did they indicate perceptions of laws or general patterns that would inform current citizens or pupils about the nation. Table 5 indicates the respondents' degree program and response type.

Table 5

Patterns of Responses that Described events Associated with Jeffersonian Democracy

	Total	Early Childhood	Elementary Education	Middle-Level
Total Responses	10	2	7	1
No Understanding	4	1	2	1
General Information, Some Accuracy	3	1	2	0
Inaccurate information	3	0	3	0
Specific Events	0	0	0	0

The Circumstances Surrounding the Louisiana Purchase

Of the 42 presumed opportunities to address to this prompt, 20 (47.62%) were accepted. The information provided involved few specific details. Of the respondents, eight (40.00%) expressed little or no understanding. These responses were composed of four (20.00% of all respondents) that ventured short and general responses (i.e., manifest destiny, it was owned by France, someone wanted to buy the land) and four (20.00%) who indicated that they did not know about the events or “didn’t have time to answer.”

The remaining 12 responses were coded for accuracy, and specificity, with ten responses found to provide general information with some degree of accuracy and two providing inaccurate information. Table 6 organizes these categories among the professional intentions of respondents.

Table 6

Patterns of Responses that Described Circumstances Associated with the Louisiana Purchase

	Total	Early Childhood	Elementary Education	Middle-Level
Total Responses	20	4	13	3
No Understanding	8	3	3	2
General Information, Some accuracy	8	0	7	1
Inaccurate information	4	1	3	0
Specific Events	0	0	0	0

Historians generally concur that the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803 during Thomas Jefferson’s presidency. Negotiations for purchase began when Spain transferred control of the land to France in 1801. The purchase was motivated as a manner of deterring Napoleon’s ambitions to establish a North American empire. What knowledge existed about the territory at the time of purchase was based on the explorations of René-Robert Lasalle – Lewis and Clark were commissioned by Jefferson after the purchase.

Because elementary education majors provided most of the responses to this prompt, the focus is on their interpretations of these events. Most (7 or 61.54%) responses by the students provided general information about the purchase with some degree of accuracy. Elementary education majors conveyed generally accurate information about this transaction and related circumstances; however, there seems to be confusion associated with the sequence of events, as illustrated in the following sample posts:

The United States purchased the land from the French under Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson wanted the land because he did not want the French to get in the way of trade routes- especially New Orleans. (Response D)

Part of the Lewis and Clark expedition was to survey this area. The United States bought this land for an extremely cheap price. (Response E)

The U.S. bought land west of the Mississippi river. The president (Jefferson) sent Lewis and Clark to explore this territory and they were only able to find their way around because of the help of the Native American woman, Sacagawea. (Response F)

The immediately preceding responses indicate that students can communicate general informational sound bites; however, they lack sufficient information to convey contextualized renderings of the purchase. The following three inaccurate responses confuse the facts and insert other pieces of information to provide inaccurate accounts. These misunderstandings are amplified in the following explanations:

America paid around \$6 million dollars to buy Florida from Spain and gain ownership of Louisiana. (Response G)

U.S. wanted to gain territory west of Mississippi and took from native people to make money. (Response H)

The Louisiana Purchase doubled the land mass of America and enforced the ideals of Manifest Destiny by acquiring new land as well as resources. (Response I)

The Effects the Civil War had on American Society

Of 42 possible respondents 17, (40.48%) chose to respond to the Civil War prompt. Responses were generally longer (more words) and more detailed than the responses from the other prompts. Due to the compelling themes that typify the Civil War (slavery, sectionalism, and intra-fraternalism), it is not surprising that all but one of the responses fall in the storyteller category of historical knowledge. One response attempted to tie freeing of the slaves and Jim Crow segregation to current practices of discrimination in America. Although the connection included in the response is tenuous, it would seem that this particular respondent has moved into the scientific historian category explanation for the prompt.

All 17 responses to this prompt fall in the general information with some accuracy category. The general information contains greater details than some of the other prompts. The responses below typify the details that are included in these responses.

America retained the union of states and kept the country together – the primary goal for Lincoln. (Response J)

The Civil War legally freed the slaves but began the long struggle for equal rights for those of African descent and left the former confederate states in a financial pickle. (Response K)

The Civil War killed many, elevated Abraham Lincoln to hero status and freed many slaves, leaving plantation owners with more land than they could farm alone. (Response L)

Sadly, only one teacher candidate, as mentioned above, seemed to recognize the potential to connect the Civil War and its aftermath to current social and political issues that affect our nation today. This lack of historical sophistication in our future teachers is part of the malaise in social studies teaching and learning in many of America's schools. Table 7 organizes responses by the respondents' degree program.

Table 7

Patterns of Responses that Described Events Associated with the Civil War

	Total	Early Childhood	Elementary Education	Middle-Level
Total Responses	17	0	17	0
No Understanding	0	0	0	0
General Information, Some Accuracy	17	0	17	0
Inaccurate information	0	0	0	0
Specific Events	0	0	0	0

Discussion

Respondents know many "facts" about American history, but are unable to piece them together to conceptualize them within a meaningful context. The responses to these prompts appear to be very much like trying to tell what happened in a *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997) novel a few weeks after reading it. The respondents are stating facts that they recall from their coursework; however, they have forgotten elements of the storyline that make sense of the facts. In a sense, the students lack points of reference to make meanings of the previous information that they've learned.

Fallace and Neems (2005) described a new understanding of history that combines factual knowledge gained from primary sources with knowledge about the impact that secondary sources have made on our understandings of historical events. While acknowledging that it is difficult to move secondary history teachers to develop an ability to teach these skills to high school students (Fallace, 2009), they argue that teachers responsible for teaching history should have the ability to analyze and teach history in this new approach. We believe this expectation should extend to teachers of

early childhood and middle level programs. James's (2008) work with preservice teachers and their teaching of Columbus illustrates the misunderstandings of history that are perpetuated in classrooms because of resistance to authentic accounts of past events that discredit mythological renderings.

Participants in this study were teacher candidates in elementary, early childhood, and middle-level programs. Their subject matter preparation is minimal in most cases, so that even their storytelling capabilities are limited, or even non-existent, as noted in the analysis of the Jeffersonian democracy prompt. Moving this group of future teachers to the level of historical sophistication suggested by Fallace and Neems would be a daunting task.

The results provide additional dimensions to findings of previous works (Fritzer & Kumar, 2002; Lucey et al., 2009) that documented poor understandings of American history among teachers. First, although findings cannot be extended to students at other institutions, this study interpreted understandings of preservice P-8 teachers from three universities of different sizes, locations, and settings. Second, the present study provides evidence that respondents are unable to recall the requested information, rather than being simply unable to recognize it. The respondents' difficulties explaining these five topics portend education challenges because these prospective teachers are entrusted to teach impressionable youth about the past and yet they appear to experience vulnerability to historical deception and mythology. Thus, they have limited knowledge and little basis to challenge historical inaccuracies perpetuated among American history texts (Loewen, 2007). Nevertheless, preparation programs certify that these candidates possess the knowledge to perform their professional responsibilities. Thus, this paper supports the findings of Lucey et al. (2009) that challenge claims made by Art Wise, former NCATE President that teacher candidates are better prepared than they were before No Child Left Behind, at least with regard to United States history (Toppo, 2007). More succinctly, the P-8 preservice teachers at these three institutions who responded to this survey do not know the U.S. history content that schools would expect them to teach.

The authors believe that P-8 candidates' coursework tends to focus on courses related to education theory, child development and psychology, curricular foundations, and literacy methods. Absent course work related to sociology, conflict resolution, and communication, existing processes prompt narrow interpretations of child development that foster the protectionist tendencies described by James (2008) and readily discount literature that documents youth's abilities to grasp conflicting social ideas and work to resolve them (e.g., Bickmore, 1999; McCoubrey, 2009).

Limitations

The researchers acknowledge that the low response rate provides a challenge to findings. Nevertheless, because survey prospects were not offered incentives to complete the survey, findings have particular merit in that those who completed the

survey were likely those preservice teachers who had the most interest in the survey topic: American History. The low response rate would appear to be indicative of the topical disinterest. That said, the articulation challenges of those who did respond to the survey indicate that those who are interested in U.S. history have much to learn about the issues presented in this work.

It is also recognized that responses may relate to the survey conditions. Respondents completed the surveys online and had no choice in the topics provided. Future research may consider paper surveys that provide participants with choices of response topics. Research may also use focus groups to facilitate dialogues about history, with consideration to how conversations may improve or worsen participants' interpretations.

The researchers also acknowledge that the patterns of response may have conveyed respondent challenges with understandings of the five topics; however, these patterns of ignorance may not extend to other events. For example, prompts that sought explanations of the Boston Massacre, the signing of the Declaration, or Trail of Tears may have yielded more encouraging responses. Further, the survey did not generate prompts associated with American myths, such as the Columbus and Thanksgiving stories (Loewen, 2007), which allow for broader interpretation. Additional research should determine how prospective P-8 teachers interpret these historical events.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The research found that P-8 preservice teachers at three universities were unable to articulate substantial understandings of five topics in U.S. history from 1492-1877. Although respondents to this survey are minimally responsible for social studies content, this study has much relevance to the education community. The findings heighten concerns about the inability of P-8 preservice teachers to articulate the content knowledge for which they are responsible.

Given the constraints of economically weary parents who demand that their children finish college in no more than four years, and the pressure of teacher education programs to meet the standards of national accreditation, state certification requirements and legislative mandates, additional coursework in these types of programs appears to be an unlikely solution. The following recommendations are offered for consideration.

First, P-8 social studies methods courses should place a stronger emphasis on content, through collaborative student inquiry that examines the connections among history, economics, citizenship, geography, and social structures and how the active instructional methods empower students to examine these relationships. Several potential benefits to this approach exist. Preservice teachers communicate with peers about the content and realize its broad and multidimensional nature. Additionally, through peer support, preservice teachers gain confidence of their content

understandings and their abilities to articulate their meanings. Preservice teachers also gain an appreciation for history content and develop knowledge and motivation to review and challenge textbooks that provide inaccurate information. Furthermore, preservice teachers develop a peer network to support them in professional environments that do not employ authentic history teaching methods.

Second, clinical experiences associated with P-8 social studies methods should require the critical analysis of history content taught by cooperating teachers and the types of historians that their instructional methods prepare their students to be. James's (2008) lesson that requires examination of Columbus's arrival from different viewpoints represents an excellent example that uses problem solving to convey the multi-interpretive nature of events that many consider through a politically correct lens.

Finally, continuing teacher education programs at the in-service level may provide opportunities to shape P-8 teachers' social studies content knowledge and teaching approaches. This strategy would broaden conventional teacher preparation partnerships between universities and schools or districts (commonly realized through Professional Development Schools). This approach could provide practitioners with important content understanding and skills while offering university faculty additional outlets to disseminate their knowledge.

All of these strategies could counter the historical illiteracy that occurs among P-8 preservice teachers. This illiteracy relates to their awareness of various ideas that lack meaning in the greater context of the American story as told by the dominant culture. Further research into the history understandings and preparations of P-8 preservice teachers is encouraged. Students' social identities are at risk.

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