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## Promoting inquiry-oriented teacher preparation in social studies through the use of local history

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### ABSTRACT

The educational reform movement in social studies has focused on constructivist and inquiry-oriented approaches to the teaching of history. Since many social studies teacher education students have had little experience with such approaches in their own schooling, special attention needs to be given to these topics within teacher preparation programs if they are to be implemented in schools. One pathway for accomplishing this is through investigations of local history. This article presents an exploratory qualitative research study investigating pre-service teachers' understanding of inquiry and the impact of a set of lessons in a methods class using local history in the service of inquiry-oriented learning. The results suggest that local history can be an effective tool for stimulating interest in and a deeper understanding of inquiry-oriented teaching.

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In the chapter on teacher education in the most recent edition of the *Handbook of Research in Social Studies Education*, Adler (2008) asks: "How have policy initiatives and politics affected teacher education programs and participants?" (p. 333). Over the subsequent decade, new initiatives such as the *Common Core* have influenced K-12 social studies, along with new performance assessments for evaluating teacher education (e.g., Performance Assessment for California Teachers, edTPA (educator teacher performance assessment), etc.). These reforms have implications for social studies teacher education.

One aspect of these initiatives in social studies has been emphasis on inquiry-oriented instructional practices, including use of primary sources as historical evidence. Publication of the National Council for the Social Studies *C3 Framework*, whose longer title is *Bulletin 113, Social Studies for the Next Generation: Purposes, Practices, and Implications of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (2013) and its companion volume, *Bulletin 114, Teaching the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework* (Swan & Lee, 2014), have contributed useful volumes towards this end. Both publications offer an array of exemplars for "exploring inquiry-based instruction in social studies," as the subtitle of *Bulletin 114* describes its goal. These publications build upon a tradition within social studies research over the last two decades that has been summed up by the phrase, "doing history." Social studies researchers have contributed new knowledge about student capacity for doing history (e.g., Barton & Levstik, 2004; Levstik & Barton, 1997; Van Sledright, 2002) and for teacher instructional practices designed to build student capacity (Mandell & Malone, 2007; Seixas & Peck, 2004; Van Sledright, 2011; Wineburg, Martin, & Monte-Sano, 2013).

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With a few exceptions, most of which have focused on the use of technology in teacher education (e.g., Saye & Brush, 2006, 2007), social studies researchers have not devoted as much attention to teacher education practices that develop understanding of and skill with inquiry-oriented instruction. Nevertheless, several research studies have been published that investigate inquiry within pre-service programs (e.g., Cuenca, 2014; Santau & Ritter, 2013; Wood, 2012). Certain aspects of inquiry teaching may have become more commonplace in schools due to a decade of *Teaching American History* grants, the spread of *Advanced Placement* document-based questions (DBQ), Wineburg's (2001) work, and related approaches to sourcing and solving historical puzzles and mysteries (Gerwin & Zevin, 2011; Lesh, 2011; Williams, 2009). However, what pre-service teachers know and can do in terms of inquiry-oriented teaching when they come into their methods classes remains unclear.

A few recent publications speak to the need for bringing an inquiry-oriented approach into social studies teacher education. Two articles (Lee, Friedman, & Bolick, 2013; Manfra, 2009) published in the practitioner-oriented journal *Social Education* offer models for using local history resources in investigations conducted in K-12 classrooms. Likewise, Manfra (2009) has suggested using critical theory as a framework for inquiry-oriented history investigations. Other researchers (Van Hover, Hicks, & Cotton, 2012) have been working on an assessment protocol for pre-service students gauging disciplinary literacy in history. Such efforts, including methods for supporting constructivist approaches to teaching social studies (e.g., Doolittle & Hicks, 2003), provide a larger context, as does the *C3 Framework* and its companion volume, for the study to be described.

This study represents one effort to introduce a stronger inquiry orientation into the teaching of a semester-long social studies methods course. For purposes of this investigation, we define inquiry as “an educational activity in which students individually or collectively investigate a set of phenomena—virtual or real—and draw conclusions about it” (Kuhn, Black, Keselman, & Kaplan, 2000, p. 47). Based on our experiences as scholars, curriculum writers, and teacher educators, we believe that introducing local history investigations provides an authentic intellectual experience of doing history (Manfra, 2009) and motivates students to study history (Deci, 1992).

The original contribution of this article is to offer a case study of a social studies methods class investigating secondary level teacher education students' pre-conceptions about inquiry. The problem to be addressed in this study has to do with how to enhance pre-service teachers' understanding of inquiry within the methods context. The results indicate that local history and geography investigations provide a powerful tool for raising interest in and building capacity among pre-service students for inquiry-oriented practice in the secondary-level history classroom. This research draws upon the work of cognitive psychologists who investigate inquiry in contexts other than history classrooms and scholars of teacher education outside social studies.

The study is situated within a naturalistic, interpretivist, qualitative research paradigm, with the theoretical grounding deriving from symbolic interactionism (O'Donoghue, 2007). One of the two authors served as the teacher educator for the methods class. The research design flowed from the need to understand the pre-service teachers' conceptualization of inquiry within a social studies context. Further, the research design rested on a problem-focused approach within interpretivist research, with the goal being to develop a better understanding of students' conceptualizations in order to deepen their understanding of inquiry and ultimately strengthen their ability to apply this understanding to their student teaching, although this application in practice was beyond the scope of this study.

## **Problem statement**

Given what we know about teacher education and the challenge of inducting pre-service teachers into inquiry-oriented practice in social studies, we sought to investigate pre-service teachers' understanding of inquiry and see whether local history and geography investigations could provide an effective and motivating method for deepening their understanding. The research took place within the context of a well-regarded secondary-level undergraduate teacher preparation program whose graduates are successful in gaining teaching jobs upon graduation and certification. Despite this success, the pre-service teachers' experiences in the program reflect the dilemmas of coherence (Darling-Hammond, 2006) and enactment (Kennedy, 1999, 2006), which are described in the next section. It should also be noted that support for inquiry-oriented approaches to teaching history is found unevenly across the various elements of the teacher preparation program at this institution.

Like most pre-service teachers, these students feel conflict among the messages received from university instructors, field-based teacher educators, and school mentors. Despite their academic achievements, like most pre-service teachers, “a majority of those studied have only a 'mechanical' understanding of the subject matter they will teach” (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005, pp. 12–15).

Given these challenges, our research questions were: What do pre-service teachers understand to be the meaning of the concept of inquiry? Can teaching a set of lessons involving investigations of local history and geography in a social studies methods class deepen their understanding of the concept of inquiry?

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