Pre-service Social Studies Teachers' "Reckoning" with Historical Interpretations and Controversy Arising from the use of Digital Historical Resources

by

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.01. INTRODUCTION (Return to Index)

The introduction of new historical resources into a body of material that informs historians often results in a reinterpretation of previously held historical conclusions. Revising accepted historical interpretations are in the words of one historian necessary to "challenge socially motivated misrepresentations of the past." The methodology informing these challenges to the past suggests a certain rigor and discipline, but generally historical inquiry lacks the structure and certainty that is found in the sciences. The consequence of this lack of structure and certainty is an emphasis on process over product. No historical finding is the perfect truth, and consequently any given inquiry can result in new interpretations that challenge previously accepted historical explanations. This research study examined pre-service social studies teachers' consideration of the pedagogical uses and the interpretive potential of specific digital historical resources. I begin with a brief review of research relevant to the teaching and learning history using digital resources.

.02. RESEARCH (Return to Index)

The availability on the World Wide Web of a wide range of digital historical resources has made possible a host of new historical interpretations. Current research and teaching in history has been and will continue to be affected by the use of digital historical resources. The examination of previously inaccessible documents has also served to democratize historical practice. The traditional physical limitations of historical scholarship have given way to the portable connivance of the web. While the number of quality historical resources available online is still quite small, the current pace of production suggests that we are rapidly approaching a day when original professional historical research will be conducted solely on the Internet. Digital historical resources provide historians and history teachers with opportunities to use previously inaccessible documents. In addition, historians and educators can organize digital historical resources for instruction and student use.

The use of digital historical resources involves the application of traditional historical skills and a variety of new skills related to the digital characteristics of the materials including finding, navigating, and interpreting digital historical documents. These new digital historical thinking skills are beginning to be combined with existing historical thinking skills in courses on historical methods. Middle and high school history and social studies teachers are also beginning to incorporate creative and meaningful uses of technology into their everyday instruction. Given the changes in historical methodology and k-12 instructional practice, work with digital historical resources should also be included in pre-service social studies teachers' experiences relating to learning history and learning how to teach history.

Web-based digital historical resources offer many pedagogical and methodological advantages over traditional historical resources. In a study of college history students, Kelly found that students engaged in a higher level of recursiveness (returning to the same document) when they used digital historical resources as opposed to print resources. In addition, the author found that students developed a stronger sense of the interconnectedness of history and a better understanding of causation when using digital historical resources. Advantages in the use of digital historical resources in middle and high school history classes have also recently emerged. Warren found that both pre-packed and original/constructed web-based
primary source exercises are an invaluable means of injecting authenticity into high school history classrooms.\textsuperscript{10}

\section*{03. METHODOLOGY \cite{Index}}

This study involved 20 students enrolled in a social studies methods course for secondary school teachers at a large southern university. The course included activities covering numerous methods of social studies instruction including direct instruction, lecture, constructivist strategies, simulation, and inquiry. The course also included components having to do with service learning, discussion, global understanding, and the broad uses of technology. Considerable coursework related to the uses of digital historical resources from the Virginia Center for Digital History's (VCDH) Valley of the Shadow. Participants' coursework included a presentation by the co-director of the Virginia Center for Digital History, discussions about the pedagogical uses of digital historical resources, and the preparation of instructional materials using digital historical resources.

The Valley of the Shadow is an on-line collection of materials related to two communities -- Franklin County, Pennsylvania and Augusta County, Virginia -- before, during, and after the American Civil War. The documents include letters and diaries, newspapers, images, maps, census records, and military records. Although the Valley of the Shadow is not an interpreted resource in the manner of a secondary text, the archive intends to raise questions related to conventional research on the Civil War. The Valley of the Shadow archive explores the Civil War in the context of the people who made up the communities of Franklin and Augusta counties.\textsuperscript{11} The site is one of the most heavily visited history related web sites on the web, receiving traffic from students and non-students alike in countries all over the world.\textsuperscript{12}

Data collected in this study included interviews with students in the class, observations of all the social studies methods course meetings, and assignments involving the preparation of instructional materials that made use of digital historical resources. Participants constructed four assignments, 1) an instructional idea on the issue of substitution during the Civil War, 2) a teaching activity relating to attitudes about slavery in a Northern community, 3) a full lesson plan for an activity making use of technology, and 4) a webquest (an historical inquiry activity that make use of materials on the World Wide Web).

The design of this study and the analysis of data followed from Fredrick Erickson's interpretive research methodology. Erickson argued that individuals create meaning through their actions in social settings.\textsuperscript{13} Using a variety of data collection methods a researcher can reconstruct a limited understanding of the meaning created by actors in the field. A researchers' understanding of the participants' actions is limited by his or her perspective and biases. When constructing meaning from participants' actions, researchers must consider the entire body of data collected from the field.

The analysis of data collected in this study included multiple readings of the data. From the data emerged a set of common themes. I developed these themes into assertions and read the data again with the intention of locating confirming and disconfirming evidence. I discarded assertions that that I could not find supported with adequate confirming and disconfirming evidence. One of the primary assertions that emerged from the data related to the interpretivist and controversial potential of digital historical resources. In the next section a narrative on this assertion with vignettes is presented.

\section*{04. FINDINGS \cite{Index}}

Assertion: Pre-service social studies teachers recognized the interpretive potential of digital historical collections, but downplayed controversial digital historical resources when developing their pedagogical content knowledge.

This assertion contained two components, one dealing with historical interpretation and the second with controversy. The use of digital historical resources such as the Valley of the Shadow collection challenged the conventional interpretations of history as presented in K-12 social studies classes. Unlike typical textbook accounts of the Civil War, most digital historical resources do not contain a narrative. Individual users develop narratives based on their own interpretation of resources contained within the collection. Participants in this study recognized the interpretive characteristics of digital historical resources, but expressed concern about the impact of competing historical interpretations. A significant number of digital historical collections contain potentially controversial documents. For the purposes of this study, I defined controversial documents as materials that elicited a negative response from participants. These documents relate to a range of historical events, such as slavery, that might evoke anger and resentment. Participants responded to the controversial nature of the digital historical documents, and they typically chose to adapt their instructional strategies when using controversial materials. In the remainder of this paper I discuss participants' reckoning with historical interpretations and their concern over the controversial nature of the digital historical documents.

Participants' reckoning with multiple historical interpretations:

All the participants in this study developed lessons using documents from the Valley of the Shadow archive. Most of the documents used by participants were not available before the development of the Valley of the Shadow, and even the available documents (like census records) were very difficult to access. The overall aim of this particular collection of resources relates to both the design of the archive in terms of its content and the consequences of using the archive. Resources from the two communities featured in the Valley of the Shadow have the intended purpose of encouraging the open-ended evaluation of the history of the Civil War. A quote from the Valley of the Shadow's opening page describes the
All participants developed instructional ideas using the Valley of the Shadow for teaching about various topics relating to the Civil War. When designing these lessons, participants expressed a willingness to think about the documents as instruments for re-thinking existing historical interpretations.

Participants recognized the opened ended nature of the documents in the archive and saw it as a tool that could encourage re-thinking existing historical interpretations.

All participants developed instructional ideas using the Valley of the Shadow for teaching about various topics relating to the Civil War. When designing these lessons, participants expressed a willingness to think about the documents as instruments for open-ended inquiry. Doug commented on the open-ended character of the Valley of the Shadow in one of the activities he designed:

I like some of the diaries and letter entries that they had. I think that’s good to have real cases where you’d find out - you’d see exactly how it affected someone. I think I’d do more of an introduction to it than we were given as far as maybe where to go to find some of this information. It was our first time - it was my first time using the Valley. If I didn’t see the search, I should have – could’ve grabbed that. So maybe just point them in the right direction a little more. But, I like the idea of them finding their own information, constructing their own definition of it and how it played out and doing the similar activity.

Doug wanted some structure in terms of an introduction, but generally was willing to allow students to use the archive to construct their own understanding and interpretation of the Civil War.

While working with the Valley of the Shadow, participants also constructed or revised their personal understanding of the Civil War. Often this constructed knowledge challenged participants’ existing beliefs and understandings. Noel had to revise her historical understanding of Northern attitudes about slavery after reading articles from 19th century Franklin County, Pennsylvania newspapers. As she developed a lesson using primary source documents, Noel commented on the need to acknowledge misunderstandings related to Northern attitudes towards slavery:

I found it extremely interesting to see how divided the people in the North were about the abolition of slavery. A common misconception that I think students learn is that the North was united in favor of the abolition of slavery. These two newspapers from the same county obviously illustrated they were not.

Noel’s recognition of the inconsistencies in Northern positions on the abolition of slavery evolved into a desire to teach about it. She saw the issue as important because students generally misunderstood it. Noel developed a lesson using a concept development strategy that reflected her historical knowledge. In the following description of a lesson idea relating to the abolition of slavery, Noel demonstrated her belief that history is interpreted and that new data might prompt a re-consideration of a prior interpretation.

Abolition of slavery is a very interesting topic that many students enjoy learning. The students should learn that not all Northerners wanted [the] abolition of slavery and this question divided society at the time. Students should also know how people justified either keeping slavery legal or ending it. An effective way to teach sixth grade students about abolition would be to begin with a concept development model of teaching. Have all the students give any related information about abolition and have the teacher write their responses on the board. The students would then group their answers according to similarities. After the task is finished, the teacher should hand out copies of the newspaper articles about abolition of slavery from the Valley of the Shadow project. The articles should come from different newspapers and represent different views of abolition. Have the students read the articles and complete questions relating to the content of the articles. The students should then compare their responses from the concept development model to what they have learned in the articles. The teacher should then lead the class discussion and ask key questions. What aspects of abolition did they neglect in the concept development phase? Do students view abolition differently after reading the articles? If so, then how?

Noel expected this strategy to produce an understanding among students that might differ from the conventional view of abolition. She thought the use of selected primary source documents would result in students’ challenging preconceived ideas from history. While it might appear to constrict students’ ability to interact with the materials, Noel planned to select documents that represented what she called “different views on abolition,” because she felt that sixth-grade students would be unable to search effectively within the archive.

Participants believed that any construction of historical knowledge using primary sources might result in interpretations contrary to conventional historical thought. Mandy suggested that using primary sources would cause her students to challenge the accepted interpretation of political party ideologies before and during the Civil War. She described her thoughts about these challenges to traditional historical interpretations while discussing her lesson ideas on attitudes about slavery in a Northern community:

I looked at newspapers before and during the war and I think the main point that I got was that there were
differences in the parties' views on slavery – on abolition really, but [that] didn't necessarily mean there was a good and a bad party. The Republican Party wasn't necessarily anti-slavery or pro-black just because Lincoln freed the slaves. Another point that it's important for them to get is that there were plenty of people in the North who didn't believe that abolition was the right move to make. So, the main point of the lesson, I think, is that it wasn't just South-bad, North-good during the war. It was a lot more complicated than that. I would want [students] to come to that conclusion themselves. I think that [students] definitely have in their head North-good, South-bad. So the point of a lesson, I think, would have to be to sort of eradicate that belief and get people to think a little bit more about the complications of the war and the role that slavery played … the role it partly played in the North as well as in the South.

Despite participants' willingness to open history to more complex interpretations, the reinterpretation of some historical ideas generated considerable debate within the group of pre-service teachers who participated in this study. These debates reflected participants' willingness to challenge accepted historical interpretations. One of the social studies methods classes included a discussion about Civil War historiography and the causes of the Civil War. The following vignette describes participants' feelings about challenges to traditional Civil War historical narratives.

.05. VIGNETTE 1 – A CLASS DISCUSSION ON THE CAUSES OF THE CIVIL WAR

A historian who serves as the co-director of the Virginia Center for Digital History delivered a presentation and moderated a discussion with participants in their social studies methods class. The discussion related to the recent historiography of the Civil War and the place of the Valley of the Shadow in developing that history. The historian put forward three popular views of the Civil War, including the idea that the North was modern and the South was anti-modern, the idea that the Civil War was not about slavery, and the idea that the South could never have won. The historian suggested that primary source documents could be used to challenge and clarify these popular ideas and about the Civil War. Comments by the historian illustrated the current atmosphere regarding the idea of forgiveness and Civil War:

There is this persistent feeling that we know everything we need to know about the Civil War. That America is all better now. It took that bitter pill and it is all better know. It was sick. America was sick at some time but we're all better now. And Americans, Northerners and Southerners, can find something to celebrate in this shared past.

A class discussion began after the historian's comments, with an observation from Betty about the atmosphere surrounding current research on the Civil War:

I don't know that much about the Civil War but, in putting this band-aid over it and saying, "Ok that was the past and it's all better now and we can all get on with our lives" … I can see the negative side to that. But if you look at places in the world where they never get over the past and they never forgive and move on, they keep breaking out … They keep punishing each other for things that happened … That's not progress.

The historian responded in agreement that the band-aid approach was not progress but suggested that Americans were unwilling to deal with the issues related to the causes and consequences of the Civil War. In response, the social studies methods course instructor asked a question about a specific controversy that the Reconstruction period had a deeper impact on our current national condition than did the Civil War. The historian expressed concern with this view, because it confirmed his belief that many Americans think the Civil War is no longer problematic. As an example, the historian suggested that K-12 teachers typically do not consider the causes of the Civil War as an open-ended question. The class discussion quickly shifted to the issue of slavery as a cause for the Civil War. The dialogue on this controversy reflected the participants' willingness to reinterpret accepted arguments concerning the causes of the Civil War.

Professor: How would you lay out the causes of the war?

Historian: Slavery was the main cause and all these other issues were at the edges. The problem is that states rights arguments are used to dismiss the slavery issue. States rights has its place within the context of slavery. I don't think you could go through the Valley project or read 10 years of a newspaper in the North or the South and not think that the Civil War was not about slavery.

Peter: Morality and slavery seemed intertwined. Was it because the issue was a morality issue? …How do we get our students to understand what moral issues were related to the Civil War?

Gail: It may be dangerous to try and place our views on it, because you can't go back, and I think its bad for us to judge.

Erin: But I think at some time you have to say that slavery was wrong. I don't think you can address the Civil War without saying that slavery was wrong.

Betty: You can do that without saying the people in the Civil War were bad. You can do that by using something like this and having them come to the conclusion on their own without indoctrinating them with some moral position from the nineties.
Erin: When you're teaching a lesson, you have learning objectives and you want your students to come out – I want my students to think.

Jennifer: I agree, obviously.

Betty: I agree with Gail, because when we say that all slave owners were bad – I think that slavery was obviously wrong, but there is more there.

Historian: What she is saying is that the past is extraordinarily complicated. The past is not just these dates. It allows us to get close to the past and to be transported to the past with eye on the present.

Jennifer: There is also this feeling that everyone in the North was against slavery and everyone in the South was for it and its not that way. I've been on the Valley of the Shadow and there were racists in the North – all over the country.

The class discussion ended with a brief discussion related to the issue of racism in present day Pennsylvania and Virginia. Two participants commented that racism was as common in Pennsylvania as it is in Virginia.

The dialogue in this vignette illustrated the complexity that an active investigation using primary source documents brings to a history class. Erin thought students should deal with slavery as a cause of the Civil War directly, while Gail was more reluctant. Jennifer recognized some of the complexities related to our incomplete understanding of the issues connecting to the causes of the Civil War. Participants expressed a cautious willingness to revise their positions as new data or interpretations emerged. Recognizing and adapting to new historical interpretation contributed to the development of participants' pedagogical content knowledge. Contrary to participants' general willingness to engage in re-interpretations of the past, participants were reluctant to facilitate new interpretations when the subject matter or the action resulting from the reinterpretation resulted in controversy.

.06. CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECT MATTER AND DIGITAL HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Certain primary source documents associated with the Civil War were cause for concern on the part of most participants. Some of these documents dealt with issues related to social class, but most of the documents involved race-related issues such as slavery. Some participants developed lessons focusing on historical presentism (evaluate the past using today's standards) to cope with the problems they believed would result from the use of controversial digital historical resources. Other participants adapted controversial subject matter related to race by focusing on white institutions and society.

Most participants developed at least one lesson dealing directly with a topic related to race. Jane researched Franklin County, Pennsylvania, newspaper accounts of African American culture and noted that the papers presented contrasting positions. Although racist and derogatory language dominated the southern Democratic Valley Spirit, Jane found one article in the paper that spoke in positive tones about a black social event. She noted similar inconsistencies in the northern Republican Franklin Repository and Transcript. Jane felt the Republican paper was more likely to use neutral language when reporting on African American culture, but found some articles that revealed prejudiced behavior. Overall, she found that the general tendencies of the two papers were similar and noted that the two newspapers treated the topic of African American culture with equal disdain. "The tendencies of these newspapers were certainly to portray African American culture as threatening and foreign." Jane's prior understanding of the subject matter content related to the treatment of African American culture in the Franklin County newspapers was comprehensive but left her feeling tenuous and confused. Referring to an article she found in the Valley Spirit Jane wrote "another article, though, spoke of the entertainment one evening at a church as an evening 'to be remembered'; this positive article certainly confused me."

Jane attempted to transform her understanding of the newspapers' contradictions on issues related to race into a related pedagogical idea. This pedagogical idea was shaped by a concern Jane expressed having to do with the possible controversial content of the lesson. She felt the resources in the Valley of the Shadow archive would pose problems for high school students. Specifically, she was concerned about the language used in the newspaper articles and a quote pertaining to race attributed to Thomas Jefferson. As a pedagogical strategy, Jane suggested that her students examine specific documents as part of a debate. This strategy focused on historical thinking skills and judgment, but avoided the real sense of contradiction that Jane felt. Instead of directing students toward the controversy, Jane planned for students to debate Jefferson's comments about race within a broader set of questions relating to whether Jefferson should be judged using today's standards. This approach allowed students to confront Jefferson's views on race without challenging the status of Jefferson the Founding Father.

Other participants faced similar problems related to offensive language and the issue of race when they developed pedagogical content knowledge. In an interview about an activity she developed using Civil War era newspapers, Noel indicated that certain materials required special consideration:

There are several pedagogical implications drawn from this activity. It is always important to be wary of the language used in primary documents and it is necessary to prepare students for what they are about to read.

Noel's recognition that the language may be inflammatory and that her students needed forewarning about the offensive
nature of the language was consistent with other participants' feelings about using primary source documents. Although none of the participants refused to use the documents, most insisted on mediating students' experiences. The forms of instruction chosen by participants denied their students an opportunity to deal directly with controversial documents. These pedagogical decisions would have the effect of limiting students' historical thinking.

Participants went to different lengths to mediate student experiences. Notable differences between white and African American participants emerged regarding their approach to controversies related to race issues. African American participants did not identify any significant controversies related to race. Conversely, many white participants not only perceived controversy, but also developed unique techniques for dealing with what they perceived as a problem. Several white participants maintained a focus on white institutions when designing lessons that dealt with issues concerning race relations. One technique used by participants involved presenting documents that included racist language or intent in the context of an analysis of larger societal issues. This was the approach taken by Peter as he developed a lesson containing racism.

As part of the social studies methods class assignment, Peter researched perceptions of African American culture as reported in two 19th-century Franklin County, Pennsylvania, newspapers. He initially expressed frustration trying to find any positive reports on African American culture:

In my searches, when the culture of blacks was discussed, most of the time it had to do with how freed blacks were doing and what would happen to White culture if slavery is to be abolished.

Once he found references to African American culture, Peter indicated that the tolerance level for African American culture was very low as expressed in the Franklin County papers. He talked about how this lack of tolerance was expressed in Franklin County's Democratic paper the Valley Spirit:

[When Blacks were seen trying to fit into middle-class society, they were looked upon favorably by the Valley Spirit, but as soon as things got a little bad, the newspaper could be extremely harsh. In one article entitled "Abraham's Pets," whites were very angry about [a] Freedman's Colony in New York, where "blacks were living off the fat of the land" while "white soldiers' families suffered." So far as their attitudes towards African culture goes, the Valley Spirit may have advocated doing away with slavery but if their communities were viewed as being seen doing better than white communities, this was not acceptable.

Peter's approach to teaching about Northern attitudes toward slavery centered on comparison:

In looking at African culture in America, I would want my students to come away with a couple of different understandings. First, I would like my students to know what conditions were like for Blacks in America during the antebellum period. This would include comparing and contrasting the cultural differences and similarities of slaves and freedmen. Secondly, after establishing a foundation for what the lives of African-Americans were like, it would be interesting to look at how Blacks were viewed by the general populace. Much like we did in class, I would want my students to understand how the activities and culture of Black Americans were viewed differently by distinct segments of society, such as Republicans and Democrats.

Peter began by using the comparison of slave and freedman culture as a pedagogical strategy for considering African American culture on its own grounds, but shifted the focus of the lesson to a white perspective of slave culture in the larger context of American society. Instead of having students investigate the racist or "harsh" language Peter focused on when explaining his understanding of the content, he suggested that students conduct a comparison of white political institutions views of African American culture. Peter did not indicate in his description of the instructional activity that Republicans and Democrats harbored racist feelings. The controversial tone of Peter's personal knowledge was not evident in his pedagogical knowledge.

Peter did refer to some race-related issues when describing how he would teach, but instead of considering how African Americans may have been affected by these conditions, Peter considered the bias and prejudice as a condition of white society:

I would want students to know that while newspapers give us an idea of what was going on within different segments of Black society, their reports are biased and often clouded with prejudices. Students would be required to understand what these biases imply about the attitudes of white society towards Africans in America.

Peter centered the lesson on white society by concentrating on bias and prejudice. Additionally, his pedagogical content knowledge was devoid of references to specific content. Instead, Peter focused on themes and trends within the topic. He did not mention any specific references to the biases he wanted students to understand. The explicitly racist tone Peter recognized in the newspapers when writing about his personal knowledge was not present in his pedagogical knowledge.
When participants developed instructional ideas using primary source documents, they recognized the possibility that controversial content could impede their pedagogical intentions. Gail recognized potential controversy in a lesson on John Brown's Raid. The controversy related to a student group that Gail called the sons of the confederacy. She talked about how students might deal with controversy related to the group in an interview:

Somehow you are doing a controversial issue. I think that could be fairly problematic with a group … You know because people would just become too emotional … I think that on their own [they] might be able to deal with it … But, like if you have another person there, it might just like flair up. You know, their own emotions. I think probably, some type of controversial issue could be fairly difficult to do in a group. Because you could just feed off of emotions, and that wouldn't be productive at all.

Gail's selection of the Sons of the Confederacy as a student group resulted from an abundance of digital historical documents related to confederate social and political ideology. In defense of the selection of the Sons of the Confederacy, Gail said she wanted all perspectives represented. Nevertheless, she was still confused about the affect the roles would have on students:

I want everyone to see different perspectives even if you don't necessarily agree with the Sons of the Confederacy. I want [students] to have put [themselves] in a different perspective and be that group. It forces [students] to see that perspective … I want you to see different perspectives.

In her directions for the members of the Sons of the Confederacy group, Gail encouraged students to think about why John Brown was controversial. She avoided directing students toward racist beliefs that an organization such as Sons of the Confederacy might support:

1. Read your role: You do not support the production of this play because it will feature and bring attention to John Brown, a northern sympathizer and abolitionist, who murdered innocent southerners. This was a dark moment in the community’s history and we should not relive or glorify it.
2. Team up with other members of Sons of the Confederacy.
3. Research the history of John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry with special emphasis on Brown's dislike of southerners and the system of slavery in the South.
4. Think about and decide on how, if the play was produced, John Brown should be portrayed.
5. Prepare your argument about how you feel this would harm the community. You will present your argument at the next City Council meeting.

While Gail was careful to choose digital historical resources that would not offend students, she would not concede that her lesson might generate controversy. When asked how she would respond to an African American student objecting to participation in the assignment, Gail said she wanted all perspectives represented. Nevertheless, she was still confused about the affect the roles would have on students:

Gail's selection of the Sons of the Confederacy as a student group resulted from an abundance of digital historical resources related to confederate social and political ideology. In defense of the selection of the Sons of the Confederacy, Gail said she wanted all perspectives represented. Nevertheless, she was still confused about the affect the roles would have on students:

Participants dealt with controversy in digital historical resources beyond the Valley of the Shadow archives. Doug developed a lesson using digital historical resources on the dropping of the atomic bomb. The lesson required students to confront questions related to the value of human life. As Doug designed his lesson, he confronted controversies associated with the value of human life. Instead of focusing the lesson on the value of human life, Doug also developed a lesson that related to presentist ideas concerning the imposition of today's values on the evaluation of actions taking place in the past. Doug talked about presentism in the context of the decision to drop the atomic bomb and the opposing views to which students may be exposed:

I think one big thing is not looking at history from where we are, but trying to go back to where they were and not judge them, but try to understand them. That goes for anything pretty much. That's hard to do, but I think a lot of opinion is based on values and opinions of today pushed back on the past, which can be a hard thing not to do.

Doug's focus on presentism subverted the larger questions of moral responsibility. Although he presented students material that may generate controversy, Doug was not willing to allow the controversial aspects of the documents (and the general content) to impede a discussion about the tactical reasons for using atomic weapons.

.08. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

With the rapid expansion of the World Wide Web and the development of easy-to-use software interfaces like Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator, digital historical resources have become viable in history and social studies. Interest in the World Wide Web has already sparked the development of innovative digital historical archives such as the Virginia Center for Digital History's Valley of the Shadow and The Library of Congress' America Memory collections. Both of these projects provide K-12 students and professional historians unparalleled opportunities to engage in historical research.

Digital historical resources present at least two advantages over non-digital primary source collections. First, after an investment in computer hardware and Internet access, the resources are typically free and the number of digital historical resources available through the World Wide Web continues to grow. Second, collections such as the Valley of the Shadow
include an interface that simplifies the user’s experience. These interfaces allow users to search and browse collections in a manner not possible with non-digital historical resources. Digital historical resources are also accessible from various locations, and search engines eliminate the need to read irrelevant documents.

The use of digital historical resources can be a real change agent in history and social studies classes. Although the restraints of curriculum, standards, and physical infrastructure may limit the actual use of digital historical materials, teachers have the ability to access a range of materials that have in the past been unavailable in history and social studies classes.

Since digital historical resources are essentially primary source documents, their use in history and social studies classes will require teachers and students to use historical thinking skills. Digital historical resources facilitate open-ended inquiry and prompt history and social studies teachers to reconsider their personal historical opinions and attitudes. In this study, participants were unsure about how to deal with controversial subject matter, but they understood the interpretative nature of digital historical collections. The Valley of the Shadow represented a resource that required participants to "reckon" with issues related to historical interpretation.

The lack of interpretation associated with primary source materials influenced the development of participants' pedagogical knowledge. Because participants recognized that multiple historical interpretations could result from using primary sources, they developed pedagogical strategies that centered on open-ended inquiry. Participants also developed strategies for toning down controversies that emerge from the exploration of digital historical resources. Participants dealt with controversies related to race by developing lessons that directed attention away from race onto more benign issues. Participants dealt with other controversies by developing lessons focusing on presentism.

The instructional use of digital historical resources has at least two implications for the preparation of history and social studies teachers. First, teachers and students may encounter historical evidence that contradicts the historical narratives developed in their textbooks. Typically, k-12 history textbooks are written by teams of authors who make use of a wide range of scholarly secondary historical sources. The voice of the historian (such an essential part of secondary historical sources) is typically absent in k-12 history textbooks. Additionally, textbook narratives often lack the irresolution and controversy that is an inherent component of historical research and inquiry. When teachers and students use digital historical resources, they embrace the complexities associated with the construction of authentic historical narrative. Often these complexities include enough ambiguity to blur the question of truth. The use of digital historical resources may result in direct challenges to commonly accepted interpretations. Participants in this research study recognized the interpretive potential of digital archives and saw the value of having students consider primary source documents to better understand the past. They realized that in order to understand the past, students would have to grapple with the ambiguity and controversy associated with interpreting past events.

The second implication of using digital historical resources concerns the controversies sometimes unearthed when studying history. When using authentic digital historical materials, history and social studies teachers have to address their own personal beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions regarding the controversial character of some documents. The pre-service teachers in this study were not very comfortable developing pedagogy from controversial primary sources. Specifically, participants were unsure about how to "reckon" with issues relating to race. If digital historical resources are to have an impact on social studies instruction, teachers must recognize and reconcile their personal beliefs regarding the controversial nature of some digital historical documents. In addition, teacher preparation programs need to help pre-service history and social studies teachers develop the attitudes and skills necessary to objectively address controversial issues in the classroom.

.09. NOTES (Return to Index)


7. For an account of the integration of various technologies within k-12 history instruction see, Keith Dils. "The use of technology to reach the various learning styles of middle school history and social studies students." Journal of the


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