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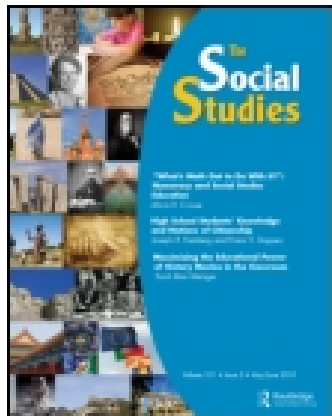
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Historical Thinking Inside the Box: Preservice Elementary Teachers Use Journey Boxes to Craft Counter Narratives

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This article details the “journey box” project process enacted by two elementary preservice teacher cohorts. Engaging in activities and projects that promote a sense of investment in not only consuming but producing historical narratives, preservice teachers potentially become interested in sharing this type of learning with their students.

Keywords: elementary education, social studies education, historical thinking

Elementary school teachers are expected to play the complex roles of historian, linguist, scientist, mathematician, caregiver, and myriad others all within the course of a single school day. As time and space for social studies content in elementary classrooms continues to be pushed to the side and reduced to arbitrary tidbits of information, elementary preparation programs face the urgent challenge of sharing strategies with preservice teachers that will strengthen social studies content knowledge, so they may gain the confidence needed to integrate social studies in meaningful ways each day in their classrooms. In this article we share one successful strategy used with two cohorts of preservice teachers, the Journey Box project. Labbo and Field (1999) describe Journey Boxes as “quite simply a journey in a box” (178) constructed to give elementary students the opportunity to learn from the “journeys” that their teachers had embarked on during breaks from school. In their foundational article the authors describe creating boxes containing artifacts and primary source documents that provided students with the opportunity to explore places and historical events they may have never been exposed to before. The lineage of the journey box project in this particular teacher education program spanned both the elementary and secondary programs (Salinas, Blevins, and Sullivan 2012).

While the scope of social studies in the elementary classrooms extends beyond history, we found that using the journey box project in the university classroom helped students to move toward a deeper understanding of historical thinking from a practical standpoint (Seixas and Peck

2004; Wineburg 2001). In addition, we hoped the journey box itself could exemplify an elementary-friendly vehicle for using primary source documents and successfully identifying credible documents (Dopen and Tesar 2008; James and McVay 2009). In our university teacher preparation students, the Journey Box Project served three goals: (1) to provide preservice teachers with an experience for distinguishing between primary and secondary sources, with an emphasis on using images as historical documentation; (2) to lead the preservice teachers to a deeper exploration of social studies standards to discover missing narratives; and (3) to guide preservice teachers in procuring historical resources for use in their own future classrooms. In addition to helping preservice teachers to think historically, teacher educators are challenged to provide much-needed context to help deepen historical understanding of the selected historical events and figures included in textbooks and curriculum as well as figuring out effective ways for including important figures, events, and contexts often ignored and/or erased from textbooks and other curriculum materials. We also aimed to help teachers experience thinking like historians by asking them to focus on sharing historical narratives that might dispel myths and/or investigate topics seldom explored (Kent 1999; Kohl 2007; Czatoski and Hickey 1999).

The Journey Box Project

The coauthors implemented the journey box project with two different preservice teacher cohorts in their required elementary social studies methods course. During the planning phase of this project we decided it was important for our students to begin with the standards listed in the state curriculum as a starting point for choosing journey box topics. While the ultimate goal was to lead them to focus

on historically marginalized groups and events, we believed it was important for them to become deeply familiar with the standards first. While the journey box assignment served as a culminating project due at the end of the semester, two class sessions were devoted to building the knowledge needed for enacting the project. First, we explored the notion of historical thinking using Seixas and Peck's (2004) idea that sociohistorical agency and empathy are keys to understanding significant historical events. We also drew on Barton's (2001) work using images as historical documents in the elementary classroom so that our students would have practical experience with gathering resources that would be usable in their own classrooms. Drawing on these critical examination skills, the preservice teachers also crafted questions and a narrative to accompany the documents included in the journey box, potentially making it an interactive teaching tool in addition to a coursework product.

This project was implemented in three phases. The first provided both the context for thinking about history and the tools for conducting this type of research project. The next phase involved providing students with guidelines that would help them organize their research as well as instructional time devoted to instructor/student engagement throughout the process. The third phase included students sharing their finished products. □

Phase One: Building Background and Understanding

Our framework also informed the pedagogical decision to craft an end product that would be useful in the elementary classroom either as an instructional tool or as a model for replicating the project in its entirety with students. Early in the course we explored the notion of historical thinking using Seixas and Peck's (2004) critical approach to examining historical texts. After looking at examples of common primary source documents, we crafted questions that draw attention to the points of view that were most represented and reported. We built on this work by exploring the ideas of historical agency and empathy to more deeply understand the sociocultural circumstances surrounding historically significant events. We then moved from using text-based documents to including images as primary source documents. One in-class activity that brought these ideas together and served as a preparation for the larger journey box project explored the role of women during World War II.

From here, we segued to drawing on Barton's (2001) work using images as historical documents in elementary settings. The exercise provided practical experience with gathering resources that would be useful both in their own teaching and for completing the journey box project. As noted, we had begun to formulate crafting questions that could help to shed light on a variety of sociohistorical contexts but also recognized the need for a more pointed focus

on question writing for elementary age students. We also used Seixas and Peck's (2004) taxonomy for writing document-based questions as a framework to provide guidelines for ensuring that students' questions remained focused on the content of the documents while prompting students to engage in discussions of the context of the images. A secondary advantage was discovered as the students used these guidelines to inform decisions about which documents to include and determine what type of supplemental material might be provided to their students as they learned to use documents to study history. VanSledright's (2010) work describing sourcing provided a final integral component for scaffolding the students toward selecting credible sources. While his framework is quite complex, we mainly focused on distinguishing primary source documents, identifying credible sources based on author's (or historical actor's) point of view and understanding the concept of epistemology in the context of studying history.

Phase Two: Enacting the Project

As mentioned, the preservice teachers were free to choose their topic of study based on two criteria. First, the topic should be one that had not been represented adequately or at all within the state curriculum. Second, the topic was historically significant. The question of historical significance was broadly defined in our classes to provide space for students to engage in discussion about decision making in history. Once the students identified their topics, we shared the following checklist for use as an organizational tool while compiling the necessary components of the journey box.

The guidelines for the project asked for eight to twelve primary source documents, three to five questions to accompany each document, a written narrative to accompany the documents as a vehicle for creating a cohesive story, and an index to help orientate viewers to the materials. Crafting their own portrayals of historical events and figures provided preservice teachers with the experiences of both thinking historically and the work of historians.

Providing a checklist and "check ins" during class time throughout the process served to help our students hone the skill of analyzing artifacts (both photographs and written documents). As the semester progressed, the preservice teachers built confidence in their ability to craft questions that would require the reader to think critically about the material included. One of the greatest challenges in creating the journey boxes seemed to be locating enough information about the one individual or event. This stumbling block proved a valuable teaching moment as we talked through the reasons resources were so hard to find. Top realizations included the fact that some stories communicated via oral tradition were probably lost, and more effort has been given to preserving dominant historical

narratives. Both points seemed to resonate with our students. One student, Sara, described her process in researching Dolores Huerta's role in the United Farm Workers' Movement during the 1960s: "So I did mine over Dolores Huerta... so I wanted my journey box to be about him. I realize more and more...there wasn't a lot of her story...everything always came back to Cesar Chavez...it was odd because I wanted to know what she did." During the presentation of her journey box Sara revealed the sometimes confusing nature of searching for reliable resources and the process of making decisions about which to use. Sara explained her research challenges in saying, "What was difficult was that every source had something different. There were sources that said...her father owned a hotel...that she had to take it over...another source...said that they lived there because they didn't have anywhere to go...that's why I think it is important to have your kids research." As depicted in the image below, Sara included a variety of photographs from the United Farmworkers movement as well as moments from the contemporary moment.

Their commitment to thinking differently about history was shown in that oftentimes they ended up including more information than was required for the project. As an instructor it was encouraging to hear students enjoy the process of thinking historically. One student commented, "...this class has taught me the most about using my resources to help me in the classroom." Preservice teachers who participated in this learning opportunity focused on the counter narrative and moved beyond abstract notions of historical thinking. They became aware of the importance of conducting history lesson preparation as research as they moved to more fully comprehend the information they would be responsible for teaching to their students. More importantly, they gained a sense of the underlying messages communicated to elementary students via the state curriculum standards on a daily basis. During

another student's presentation we learned her motive for her own topic selection. She shared, "so I did my box on Josephine Baker...[I wanted to talk about her] during the African American [History] month... she was a performer and a civil rights activist...one of the reason that I wanted to use her is because the [state curriculum standards] talk about MLK...they don't mention how she was one of the female speakers (only)... they don't talk about one of the reasons that she left to France [as an activist and performer]" In this section the preservice teacher makes a connection to the curriculum while also describing her desire to include a more complicated version of the Civil Rights Movement. She not only draws attention to the gendered tensions of the time period but also a form of activism different from Martin Luther King Jr.

Throughout the journey box project, we asked preservice teachers to reflect upon and talk about the process to give us insight into the impact the project was having on their understanding of historical thinking and teaching. We also hoped to use the insights they shared to refine our own practices when enacting this project in the future. One noteworthy experience was that topic selection could prove to be a daunting task for university students who may not be familiar with myriad historical events. To overcome this barrier, we implemented procedures aimed at helping our students investigate the state social studies standards. This investigation informed topic selection that interested them and would add valuable perspectives to the narratives most often included in the state curriculum. Then, through the use of questions (i.e., Who do you think was involved? Is anyone missing from the explanation?), we encouraged students to conduct preliminary Internet searches to determine the types of resources available to them. Once the instructors and students verified there would be an adequate amount of information available for them to analyze, chosen topics were approved. This scenario provides an example of the ways in which we engaged in the process of, not only encouraging but, crafting a more inclusive curriculum. The journey box project culminated with a gallery walk, so students were able to see each completed box. The gallery walk was followed by student presentations that included an explanation of the topic with an emphasis on new learning and the discussion of the ways in which this project might be of use for elementary school teachers. We used the following rubric to score the journey boxes.

Phase Three: Sharing the Projects

The beauty of the Journey Box Project is that even when projects are duplicated, the narrative constructed varied. This proved a subtle yet valuable moment when students realize that history is indeed influenced by the reporter and is not an objective representation of facts. Topics covered in our classes ranged from the Navajo Code Talkers to



Fig. 1. Pre-service teacher's topic: Dolores Huerta.



Fig. 2. Pre-service teacher's topic: Navajo Code Talkers.

Dolores Huerta. This range not only demonstrated variety but the extent to which students became comfortable with exploring historical figures and events that were not familiar to them. As one Latina student commented during her presentation, "I had never realized she [Dolores Huerta] was part of the United Farm Workers movement...it always came back to Cesar Chavez...I wanted to know what she did." (student presentation April 2013). In some cases, students selected well-known historical figures and events (i.e., World War II and the Holocaust) and worked to expand taken-for-granted narratives. In other cases, students chose events and figures that are seldom included in the state standard curriculum (i.e., The Navajo Code Talkers and Angel Island).

The images included represent two of the journey box projects that extend mainstream historical narratives. The



Fig. 3. Pre-service teacher's topic: Angel Island.

Table 1. The Journey Box summary is provided at the beginning of the course. The instructor reviews the summary with the pre-service teachers prior to their selecting topics and creating journey boxes

Journey Box Project Summary

Step 1: Choose a topic

You are to choose a topic that will enable you to explore a person (e.g., Dolores Huerta), a time period (e.g., The Jim Crow Era), or event (e.g., The Bombing of Pearl Harbor) that has the potential to be taught in the elementary social studies. You want to select a topic that you can gather enough sources to develop a story or narrative. Your Journey Box should focus on traditionally marginalized populations in American history and/or present a counter narrative to the traditional history found in textbooks, curricula, etc.

Step 2: Selection of Sources

You are to select at least twelve sources for this project. You are to select a variety of sources and artifacts that will help to construct your story. Sources can entail: letters, memoirs, magazine covers, propaganda posters, pictures, speeches, news articles, and journal articles. The ideal journey box will have a variety of sources to draw from to tell your story. I will give some authorship discretion for selecting what is appropriate to tell your story. However, your Journey Box should have at least four images and four texts. In other words, you should not have eight images in your journey box. Ideally, you will have some images, some news print media, letters, and speeches. Think diversity of sources! Up to four of your sources can be secondary sources.

Step 3: Summary/Narrative

You are to develop a one- or two-page narrative/summary for your Journey Box. Your summary should answer the following questions:

1. Why is your topic relevant to social studies education?
2. What story are you trying to tell through your journey box?
3. How would you teach this topic in an elementary classroom?

Step 4: Developing Questions

You are to create three to five questions for each source. Your questions should show cognitive development in the kinds of questions you ask about the source. You should have the following kind of questions:

1. Questions that solicit students' prior knowledge
2. Questions that ask students to analyze and compare
3. Questions that invite students to feel empathy or relate to the image or the text. You are to print out and paste these questions to the back of your sources.

Step 5: Present

On our last class day together you will present your Journey Box. However, we will have it set up more like museum. So on the presentation day you will exhibit your materials for your classmates and other visitors to observe.

first expands the World War II narrative in showing how a historically marginalized group, the Navajo, were called on to help the United States during the war. Including this story not only shares a little known piece of history it also opens a

Table 2. The journey box checklist is provided as a tool to help preservice teachers organize themselves as they work on the project. Preservice teachers also are able to make sure that all components of the journey box were completed prior to submitting it

<i>Journey Box Checklist</i>	
<i>Do you have the following?</i>	
<i>Components</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Creative box display selected	
Narrative (summary of topic)	
Index of Items	
Integrated Lesson Plan (with picture or YA book)	
3 to 5 DBQs for each source	
12 Total Sources:	
4) Visuals/Image Primary Sources <input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you have citations in APA format?	
Is there adequate context?	
4) Texts/Participant account Primary Sources	
Do you have citations in APA format? <input type="checkbox"/>	
Is there adequate context?	
4) Your choice –Primary or Secondary Sources <input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you have citations in APA format?	
Is there adequate context?	
Final Comments/Other	

Table 3. The journey box rubric is provided to preservice students at the beginning of the course. The rubric is referenced several times throughout the semester and completed for each student. For the purpose of this article, the point allocation per component was removed

<i>Journey Box Grading Rubric</i>				
<i>Component</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Needs Improvement</i>	<i>Insufficient</i>
<i>Sources</i>	Journey box contains at least 12 relevant, sources (min. 5 primary), at least 4 of which are visual, at least 4 are textual, all with citations	Journey box contains somewhat relevant sources and/or slightly fewer than 12 sources or min # of visual or textual, with citations	Journey box contains minimally relevant sources and/or far fewer than 8 sources or min # of visual or textual, with citations	Journey box contains minimally relevant sources and/or far fewer than 8 sources or min # of visual or textual, with citations
<i>Document-Based Questions</i>	Each source has 3–5 accompanying, age-appropriate DBQs that address notions of prior knowledge, analysis, comparisons, connections, and empathy	Each source has most of the 3–5 age-appropriate DBQs that mostly touch on notions of prior knowledge, analysis, comparisons, connections, and empathy	Each source has some of the 3–5 age-appropriate DBQs that somewhat touch on notions of prior knowledge, analysis, comparisons, connections, and empathy	Few or no DBQs or DBQs do not address notions of prior knowledge, analysis, comparisons, connections, and empathy
<i>Narrative</i>	Assignment contains clear narrative that summarizes topic, relevance of items, and overall story/counter-story	Assignment contains somewhat clear narrative that summarizes topic, relevance of items, and overall story/counter-story	Assignment contains minimally-clear narrative that summarizes topic, relevance of items, and overall story/counter-story and/or is missing elements	Missing narrative or key components are absent.
<i>Index</i>	Journey Box contains thorough index of contents listed	Journey Box contains index with most of contents listed	Journey Box contains index with some of contents listed	Journey Box does not contain an index of contents

(continued on next page)

Table 3. The journey box rubric is provided to preservice students at the beginning of the course. The rubric is referenced several times throughout the semester and completed for each student. For the purpose of this article, the point allocation per component was removed (Continued)

<i>Journey Box Grading Rubric</i>				
<i>Component</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Needs Improvement</i>	<i>Insufficient</i>
<i>Presentation</i>	The presenter demonstrates understanding of the topic by clearly explaining the historical narrative and the contents of their Journey Box	The presenter demonstrates fair understanding of the topic by clearly explaining the historical narrative and the contents of their Journey Box	The presenter demonstrates minimal understanding of the topic by clearly explaining the historical narrative and the contents of their Journey Box	The presenter does not demonstrate understanding of the topic by clearly explaining the historical narrative and the contents of their Journey Box
<i>Creativity</i>	The Journey Box is neat, decorated, and shows high level of creativity	The Journey Box is somewhat neat, decorated, and/or shows moderate level of creativity	The Journey Box is minimally neat, decorated, and/or shows low level of creativity	The Journey Box is not neat, decorated, nor shows high level of creativity

space for discussion of the complicated relationships that develop during wartime. The second example depicts expansion of the Ellis Island immigration narrative. Again, the student who chose to research Angel Island reported never having heard of this place prior to an article we read for class. She was alarmed to find a completely distinct and separate story of immigration in US history.

Assembling a collection of artifacts based on often marginalized events or individuals, the preservice teachers were able to disrupt the type of stories generally told in social studies textbooks and provide a deeper, and at times more accurate, depiction of the triumphs and challenges marginalized groups have faced historically and continue to address. In fact, one preservice teacher was so disturbed by the portrayal of certain groups and the subsequent perception of these groups in society that she now wishes to work toward changing the current curriculum. After conducting research on her topic, she stated, “One thing that stood out to me was the importance of agency, and how the agency of certain groups is often trivialized or [made] invisible in traditional narratives.” This student’s comment provided evidence that this project helped facilitate her thinking beyond recounting facts to understanding history as an evolving narrative. It is our hope that participating in such projects will also lead her to enact teaching practices that incorporate experiential learning along with expanding existing historical narratives.

Conclusion

Given the shrinking space for intentional social studies teaching in the current educational climate, sharing this work with other teacher educators is particularly important. As we continue to pursue practices that facilitate our

students acquiring sound teaching practices, we must also prepare them with the resources needed for extending state standards beyond the dominant, often exclusionary, historical narrative. By engaging in activities and projects that promote a sense of investment in not only consuming but producing historical narratives, preservice teachers become interested in sharing this type of learning with their students and prepared to do so. As suggested by Barton’s (2001) work examining the ways in which elementary students engage with images, the preservice teachers drew on images to craft document-based questions as a scaffold toward thinking deeply about historical narratives. Furthermore, the student who created the Angel Island Box made connections to the current immigration crisis at the Texas/Mexico border. Her connections and interest in understanding the dimensions of the immigration narrative demonstrated her understanding of Seixas and Peck’s (2004) notion of historical empathy. It is important that we, as teacher educators and researchers, share the results of these practices within the research community to continue and further goals for making social studies education inclusive of multiple voices and perspectives.

This article shared an effective teacher education strategy aimed at strengthening preservice teachers’ understanding of historical thinking and honing research skills needed for preparing meaningful social studies lessons in the elementary classroom. An equally important result of students’ participation in this project is that they came away with the sense that choice in student learning creates a more engaging and rigorous learning opportunity. One student shared with us her thoughts about including an expanding historical narrative as well as the value that student choice has in classrooms. She stated, “I want to offer many various sources for children to come to their own decisions about the particular subjects they study. I want

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them to see the counter narrative in everything they come across. I believe now that choice and comprehension are what is incredibly important for students; having students use their own selves to explore a topic is what will make their experience of the event memorable." She describes students' ability to come to their own conclusions by implementing projects, such as the journey box, in her future classroom and expresses the confidence to facilitate student learning. It is our goal to continue to enact projects in our elementary methods courses that evoke both student learning and teacher development.

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