

Personalized LEARNING

in Social Studies Teacher Education

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Abstract

Social studies teachers are asked to do the seemingly impossible: cover a broad array of content during the school year while also instilling critical reading and writing skills and developing a broadly defined civic identity. How can they effectively prepare to meet these ambitious goals? In this guide, I argue for the place of personalized learning in social studies teacher education. Making inquiry the centerpiece of social studies teacher education will facilitate the move towards personalized learning in lesson planning, curriculum design, and assessment. Through inquiry-related activities and projects, supported by digital and communicative technologies and a sociocultural approach to content planning, social studies teachers have the ability to enhance students' personal competencies, facilitating mastery in a broad array of social studies knowledge and skills.

Introduction

Imagine a first-year social studies teacher teaching a segmented survey course, such as United States History, 1877 to the Present (unlike those that teach courses which cover pre-Columbian settlement to the present). This hypothetical social studies teacher has roughly 180 days to cover 250 years of history but has no idea where to begin. If he or she covers events chronologically, assuming no time for assessments and no interruptions like snow days, assemblies, or fire drills, he or she must teach about the historical events of one year and four months every single day. This hardly seems feasible, so this teacher must consider what to include and what to cut. Where does the teacher turn for advice? The standards may be of little help. Consider standard 8.3.9 of the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Academic Standards for History (2009): "Compare the role groups and individuals played in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of the U.S." (p. 11). While the role of groups and individuals in history is important, the teacher will find no guidance as to which groups and individuals are most crucial to his or her students' development. Relying on the textbook is equally problematic, as the historical narratives in

“[P]ersonalization refers to a teacher’s relationships with students and their families and the use of multiple instructional modes to scaffold each student’s learning and enhance the student’s motivation to learn and metacognitive, social, and emotional competencies to foster self-direction and achieve mastery of knowledge and skills.”

– Redding, 2013

textbooks are rarely as coherent as teachers believe them to be (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2012).

What happens in practice? Many social studies teachers simply try to pack in as much content as possible, day by day, with little regard for an overall curricular vision of historical or civic understanding, choosing to cover events they learned about in their own secondary educations (Thornton, 2005). The result is a mile-wide, inch-deep education in social studies content, where teachers inevitably fall short both in providing deep understandings of foundational knowledge *and* their de facto goal of covering all subject matter (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). While by no means a challenge for social studies teachers alone, the problem of coverage is certainly acute in this subject area. So how might teacher educators support preservice social studies teachers in overcoming the dilemma of coverage? This guide addresses the use of personalized learning as a framework for content selection and focus in preservice social studies teacher education.

The Place of Personalized Learning in the Social Studies

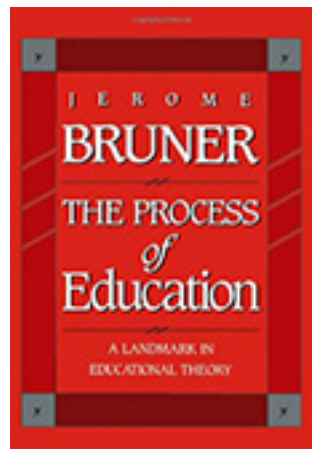
Personalized learning refers to “the use of multiple instructional modes to scaffold each student’s learning and enhance the student’s motivation to learn and metacognitive, social, and emotional competencies to foster self-direction and achieve mastery of knowledge and skills” (Redding, 2013, p. 6). What is the place of personalized learning in the social studies? Much like the social studies teacher described above, teacher educators have tough choices to make. Which disciplines (history, economics, political science, etc.), topics, (civics, etc.), and skills will best prepare preservice teachers to plan and teach in dynamic social studies classrooms? This challenge reflects the reality that

social studies is a school subject without distinct definition or aims. Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977) describe the history of the social studies as a “seamless web of confusion” (p. 10), its purposes marked by debates over whether teachers should inculcate their students with democratic values, help students develop disciplinary knowledge from the social sciences, or foster decision-making skills through reflective inquiry. Thornton (2008) condensed the history of social studies



education into two competing camps: the social education camp, which disregarded disciplinary boundaries in favor of an analysis of the individual in society, and the social science camp, which argued for traditional, disciplinary academic subjects such as history, geography, and political science in social studies classes.

At various times throughout the history of the social studies, elements of personalized learning have been embodied by policy and curricular pushes; at others, they fared worse. Generally speaking, the social education approach has embraced curricular visions that rely on the principles of personalized learning. Take, for example, a series of curriculum materials that were published in the 1960s collectively known as the New Social Studies. These materials were inspired by Bruner's *The Process of Education* (1960), and promoted discovery, project-based approaches, and problem solving using disciplinary knowledge. Bruner's recommended approaches to teaching social studies embody elements of personalized learning, such as student decision-making over key elements of the learning process (Hargreaves, 2005), flexible, project-based pedagogies (Deed, et al., 2014), and the incorporation of learners' personal and social experiences into the curriculum (Campbell, Robinson, Neelands, Hewston, & Massoli, 2007, p. 140). On the other hand, the social science approach, with its emphasis on knowledge transmission, with its one-size-fits-all model, has not generally promoted personalized learning. Consider the educational climate two decades after the New Social Studies: Following the publication of *A Nation At Risk* in 1983 (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), the *Bradley Commission on History in Schools* (1988) recommended a core curriculum for historic themes to be taught in public schools. The standardization of historic knowledge left



little room for personalized competencies such as self-directed learning and project-based learning guided by students' interests. Thornton (2008) observes that the result in classrooms is a compromise in which neither camp has won: "By the opening years of the 21st century, neither view had secured a monopoly on the K–12 social studies curriculum"

(p. 16). Thus, social studies teachers have had and will likely continue to have considerable leeway in promoting personalized learning in their classrooms.



Despite this incoherence in approach to teaching social studies over the last century, one constant theme throughout the history of the social studies is that it exists in schools for the preparation for democratic citizenship (Barber, 1984). Thus, teacher educators must help preservice teachers articulate their vision for active citizenship in a liberal democracy and consider teaching methods to bring this vision to practice. It will likely come as no surprise to readers that a variety of descriptions of civic competence exist within the literature on social studies education. The National Council for the Social Studies (1994), the flagship professional network for teachers of this school subject, envisions students who have the “ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good” (p. vii). Theorists have offered competing and often overlapping strategies for meeting this worthy goal. Some suggestions exist at the classroom level, such as engaging students in critical thinking and value judgments based on current affairs (Engle & Ochoa, 1988) and discussions of controversial public issues (Hess, 2009). Other suggestions involve schoolwide reforms that are bigger than the purview of individual social studies teachers, such as increasing the variety and frequency of interaction among students who are culturally, linguistically, and racially different from one another (Parker, 2005). This brief sample only begins to cover competing and complementary perspectives on student civic competence in the social studies.

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The importance of preparing young people for citizenship in a multicultural democracy has been at the heart of social studies education since the intercultural education movement in the early 1940's (Evans, 2004). As a result, in colleges of education and teacher preparation programs there is near universal agreement that preservice teachers ought to be trained to incorporate their students' prior knowledge and multicultural perspectives into classroom activities (Banks, 2007). Over the last century, the United States has experienced a staggering shift in its ethnic and racial demography; schools mirror this nationwide diversity, presenting challenges to teachers and teacher educators alike (Howard, 2010). Teaching the skills necessary to teach in diverse classrooms is by no means a simple task, especially given the relative homogeneity of the preservice teaching population and the diversity in the classrooms they will serve (Howard, 2010). However, research has shown that White, monolingual teachers can be successful in diverse classrooms when they embrace culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Parsons,



2005). With its emphasis on student choice and access to a wide variety of resources, personalized learning offers culturally relevant pathways between the content of

social studies curricula and the lived experiences of students (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Marrying aspects of social studies education with the approach outlined by personalized learning offers opportunities for teacher educators to impart skills and practices necessary for teaching in twenty-first-century classrooms.

Bringing Personalized Learning Into Social Studies Teacher Education

Redding (2014) notes that personalized learning is not a particularly new approach to K–12 education. However, recent trends have caused educators to rethink how they grapple with the limits of the traditional school setting. An expanding curriculum, which demands greater depth and sophistication of understanding by students and greater coverage of content by teachers (Kaplan & Chan, 2011), requires that teachers consider ways to implement out-of-school learning experiences. In addition, motivating students is among the biggest tests preservice teachers face upon entering the classroom (LePage, Darling-Hammond, Akar, Gutierrez, Jenkins-Gunn, & Rosebrock, 2005, p. 333–335). These challenges suggest that teachers must work to personalize their instruction, and take advantage of opportunities to tap into their students’ home and school experiences. Personalized learning provides teachers and students with the means to support continued classroom learning at home (Halpin, 2007; Leiringer & Cardellino, 2011), creating more time and space to attend to this expanding curriculum. In addition, personalized learning also encourages students’ investment and motivation in their own learning (Deed et al., 2014) by giving students freedom and choice. Thus the hope that novice teachers are prepared to personalize their instructional planning and assessments has greatly increased in recent years.

As Redding (2014) argues, “Through personalized instruction, the teacher is attuned to each student’s evolving personal competencies and differentiates learning assignments accordingly” (p. 13). So it is imperative

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– Redding, 2014

Table 1. Social Studies Teacher Education and Personalized Learning	
Social Studies Approaches and Concepts	Methods and Outcomes of Personalized Instruction
<p>An inquiry approach to teaching social studies casts students as problem solvers, who investigate an historical problem of interest to them, evaluate evidence, construct an argument, and reflect on their learning</p> <p>Can be cultivated in preservice social studies teachers through innovative fieldwork experiences in museums, archives, and cultural institutes</p>	<p>Development of student autonomy (Prain et al., 2013; Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004)</p> <p>Students shape their own learning pathway (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Selwyn, 2009) and have agency to make important decisions (Hargreaves, 2005)</p> <p>Balance of structure and freedom (Deed et al., 2014, p. 70)</p>
<p>Digital technologies provide access to a wealth of primary sources for students at home and in the classroom, supporting independent inquiry projects</p> <p>Preservice teacher attitudes are positively impacted when teacher educators model the effective use of online digital archives</p> <p>Blended learning environments meet content-related learning goals in social studies methodology courses and model techniques in which preservice teachers can develop their own open classrooms</p>	<p>Open classroom concept (Prain et al., 2013)</p> <p>Student control over approaches to learning and technology (Melhuish, 2011)</p> <p>Flexibility in student and teacher use of space and time (Halpin, 2007; Leiringer & Cardellino, 2011)</p> <p>Interactive digital technologies support independent problem solving (Stefanou et al., 2004)</p>
<p>A sociocultural perspective towards social studies content recognizes students' racial, ethnic, gender, and class identities when planning instruction</p> <p>Preservice teachers must be exposed to case studies that provide a "how to" guide for personalizing curriculum around students' sociocultural perspectives</p> <p>Preservice teachers should know qualitative research methods that will assist in the collection of data about students' sociocultural perspectives</p>	<p>Incorporation of learners' personal and social experiences into the school curriculum (Campbell et al., 2007, p. 140)</p> <p>Student investment in the curriculum (Deed et al., 2014)</p> <p>"Sociocultural authorization of individual freedom, community interactivity, and flexibility of time and space" in the classroom (Deed et al., 2014, p. 67).</p>

that teacher educators impart the skills necessary for pre-service teachers to design learning opportunities with the development of students' personal competencies as a complementary objective to content acquisition. Fortunately, there are many opportunities for teacher educators to infuse their methodology courses with personalized learning and simultaneously help preservice social studies teachers avoid the trap of coverage described at the outset of this guide. There are three, interrelated areas where this is possible: developing inquiry pedagogies, integration of digital technologies, and teaching to students' sociocultural perspectives. Each of these areas links well with aspects of personalized learning, and are easily transferable across the disciplines of social studies classes (see Table 1).

Three areas where teacher educators can infuse their methodology courses with personalized learning:

- developing inquiry pedagogies
- integration of digital technologies
- teaching to students' socio-cultural perspectives

Inquiry and Personalized Learning

While many social studies teachers find that their students may know more factual information about the past than the teachers assume (Barton, 2008; Körber, 1997), it is unlikely that students understand how historians develop accounts and interpretations of the past (Pace, & Middendorf, 2004; Shoemaker, 2013; VanSledright, 2010) . When asked to describe how historical narratives are constructed, students may make vague references to artifacts and primary sources, or assume accounts are simply transferred from generation to generation through word of mouth (Barton, 1997). The authoritative tone of most historical textbooks, coupled with a lack of footnotes or citations, reinforces the notion that historical texts have no authors, but are handed down from some unseen watcher who keeps track of notable past events. These misconceptions are likely to continue on into college, meaning that preservice social studies teachers may also be unable to articulate how historical accounts are created, despite taking university-level history courses (Hynd-Shanahan, Holschuh, & Hubbard, 2004). This phenomenon poses a serious challenge for teacher educators. Due to the aforementioned misconceptions, both students and preservice teachers are likely to assume primary sources are truthful and complete accounts of past events (Afflerbach & VanSledright, 2001; Wineburg, 1991). It is hard to imagine an ideal history curriculum that does not involve, at a minimum, research of historical events using some original sources. Likewise, the

Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010) calls for students to present historical analyses using both primary and secondary sources (p. 61). This



According to Barton and Levstik's conceptualization of inquiry (2004), students should:

- define a problem
- develop hypotheses about solutions to this problem
- collect empirical data relating to this problem
- test their hypotheses,
- reassess what they believe to be true based on the strength of evidence

"[I]nquiry should enable those whose experiences have not traditionally been represented in the official curriculum to deepen and expand their historical understanding rather than simply to remain distanced from school history"

– Barton & Levstik, 2009

discrepancy between preservice social studies teachers' knowledge of the historical method and the expectation that they will teach secondary students to use primary and secondary sources creates an imperative that teacher educators prepare preservice social studies teachers to work with primary sources in a classroom setting.

One way to accomplish this task is focusing on inquiry as a method for teaching social studies in teacher education coursework. Barton and Levstik (2004) draw on Dewey (1910) in formulating their conceptualization of inquiry: students should begin by defining a problem, develop hypotheses about solutions to this problem, collect empirical data relating to this problem, test their hypotheses, and finally, reassess what they believe to be true based on the strength of evidence. Inquiry is a powerful method because it levels the playing field in diverse classrooms. Reliance on commonly-used social studies curricular materials, such as textbooks, is likely to alienate minority students because such materials fail to recognize diverse frameworks for understanding and interpreting the past (Epstein, 2009). Inquiry, however, by having students pursue topics that are relevant to their personal histories, expects all students to draw from their own prior knowledge and home lives. As a result, "inquiry should enable those whose experiences have not traditionally been represented in the official curriculum to deepen and expand their historical understanding rather than simply to remain distanced from school history" (Barton & Levstik, 2009, p. 190). [N.B. Inquiry is not interchangeable with traditional research projects, though research projects may be a manifestation of this approach to teaching social studies.]

At its core, this student-centered approach is what makes inquiry an inherently personalized learning strategy. Students pursue historical quandaries of personal interest while "asking questions, gathering and evaluating relevant evidence, and reaching conclusions based on that evidence" (Barton & Levstik, 2004 p. 188), all with the goal of discovery, a key component of personalized learning. The subjects of inquiry hold personal relevance for students, thus they are intrinsically motivated to complete inquiry-related tasks (VanSledright, 2002). Likewise, this approach is consistent with how people pursue new interests in their lives outside of school. Inquiry allows students to make connections between their school learning and home lives, while developing twenty-first-century skills. In addition, technology offers pathways for supporting students' work in inquiry projects. Milson (2002) and Lipscomb (2002) examined students' uses of WebQuests as structured inquiries. Each of the projects they investigated provided scaffolds for the students' web searches and engaged the students in



focused research tasks. Milson (2002) notes that students often engaged in a path-of-least-resistance strategy to finding primary sources for their projects, copying from other groups or using web searches instead of the sites prescribed through the WebQuest. However, he found that the teacher in his study used this setback as an opportunity to have students think about their own thinking, promoting metacognitive skills essential for historical thinking (Wineburg, 1991).

There are a number of strategies teacher educators can use to prepare preservice teachers to utilize inquiry in their classrooms. Preservice teachers should first be made aware of the requisite parts of inquiry in the social studies classroom:

- Students should know that inquiry is both a method and a goal. Inquiry is a technique that helps students learn the content of the curriculum, but equally important to students is the real-world, civic, decision-making skills promoted by inquiry (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 188–189).
- Students should be engaged in all aspects of inquiry, including connecting the content to their previous knowledge, developing a meaningful inquiry question, finding primary and secondary sources, drawing conclusions based on existing and new knowledge, sharing learning with others, and reflecting on their new learning (Stripling, 2009). It is common for social studies teachers to assume that exposing students to primary sources is engaging them in inquiry. An analysis of primary sources is an important part of the process of inquiry. However, disengaged from asking relevant questions and drawing meaningful conclusions, this analysis lacks the reflective quality that makes inquiry a powerful, personalized learning experience.
- A document-based question assessment may be used in the service of inquiry but is not, in and of itself, an example of inquiry (Barton and Levstik, 2004). Document-based questions, which prompt students to answer using their own knowledge and a provided list of primary sources, fundamentally assess students' ability to analyze sources. Students are not expected to formulate questions based on their own interests, nor are they asked to evaluate the usefulness of sources, two key

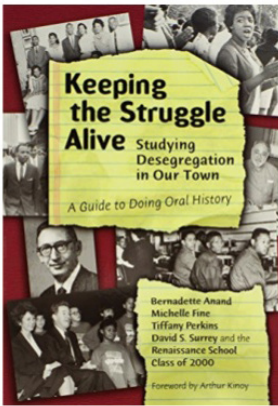
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- sharing learning with others
- reflecting on their new learning



aspects of inquiry.

- Teachers must assist students in developing meaningful questions (Woyshner, 2010).



I recommend having preservice social studies teachers examine and discuss exemplars of inquiry approaches to social studies education. An inquiry-based approach is likely very different from the type of social studies classes they experienced in their own education (Loewen, 2010). Given that inservice teachers are likely to emulate what they recall from their own schooling (Lortie, 1975), it is helpful for preservice teachers to examine successful examples of inquiry in action. One example is *Keeping the Struggle Alive* (Anand, Fine, Perkins, & Surrey, 2002), a book describing an inquiry project conducted by students in a Montclair, New Jersey, public middle school on the history of desegregation in their town. Though social studies textbooks typically portray racism as a southern problem, the northern town of Montclair also struggled to desegregate during the Civil Rights Movement (like many other locales north of the Mason–Dixon Line). Students began by reading local newspaper articles from 1947–1972. From their initial readings of these primary sources, students individually identified topics of interest and sketched out research questions. During whole-group instruction, students learned about the events of the Civil Rights Movement, putting the local primary sources they were reading in a national context. Next, students identified “key players,” or local residents of importance, during Montclair’s desegregation process. Students then conducted oral history interviews related to the questions they asked, and had frank and difficult discussions with their classmates about the struggle for equal access to education in their town. Preservice social studies teachers will see that this project was inquiry-oriented and personalized in the questions students asked, the skills of investigation they developed, and, perhaps most powerfully, their reflections: Some students began to ask difficult questions about their own schools and lives, while for others this project reiterated a history of struggle that had been their family’s history for generations. However, all students were forced to assess their own relationship to a legacy of discrimination in their local community.

Initial teacher certification programs can also craft innovative field experiences that challenge traditional notions of history education, develop notions of inquiry founded on the historical method, and help



preservice teachers construct a philosophy of education tied to personalized learning. One such example is the Cultural Fieldwork Initiative at Temple University

The Cultural Fieldwork Initiative: Collaboration for Better Education

(Patterson & Woysner, in press; Woysner, Reidell, & Brasof, 2013).

A perpetual challenge for teacher educators is helping preservice social studies teachers make the leap from the content knowledge they have learned in their subject matter courses to developing inquiry-oriented projects using the historical method in their education courses (McDiarmid & Vinten-Johansen, 2000). With these challenges in mind, the Cultural Fieldwork Initiative places preservice social studies teachers in Philadelphia-area museums, archives, and cultural sites to intern in a variety of roles. Participants in the Cultural Fieldwork Initiative develop curriculum materials around documents and artifacts in their site's collections, tutor elementary and secondary students who visit the collections while completing their own inquiry-oriented projects, or assist archivists in finding and cataloguing primary sources. Programmatic reviews, which include examinations of preservice social studies teachers' lesson planning and reflective journals, as well as interviews with mentors at host sites, indicate that participating in history in other contexts—outside of their university and secondary classrooms—convinces many preservice teachers of the value of having students conduct personalized inquiries. These fieldwork experiences also make them aware of the variety of digital resources available to social studies teachers through museums and cultural sites (Patterson & Woysner, in press).

Digital Technology, Personalized Learning, and the Social Studies

The possibilities for personalizing learning and extending instruction outside of the traditional classroom have been expanded through evolving technologies:

Personalized learning is enabled by smart e-learning systems, which help dynamically track and manage the learning needs of all students, and provide a platform to access myriad engaging learning content, resources, and learning opportunities needed to meet each student's needs everywhere at any time, but which are not all available within the four walls of the traditional classroom. (Wolf, 2010, p. 10)



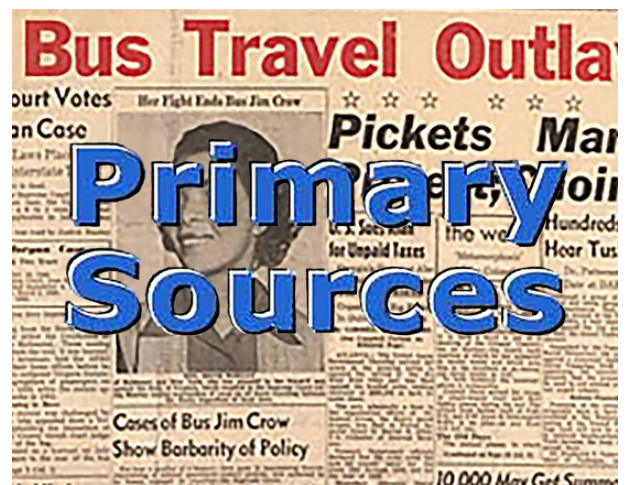
“Technology is not seen as a replacement for the traditional classroom, but rather as a powerful tool to enhance what is already proven pedagogy”

– Redding, 2014

While the elements of personalized learning may be familiar to many teachers, advances in digital technologies can greatly aid in collecting data on assessments in order to track student learning, and better plan the delivery of content in and out of the classroom.

Of course, personalized learning can take place without the use of modern technology, but innovations in social networking, media-rich content, data collection and analysis tools, and blending learning environments (among many other advances) have significantly enhanced the toolkits teachers use in planning instruction and measuring student growth (Halpin, 2007; Leiringer & Cardellino, 2011; Prain et al., 2013). There is no need to fear that the importance of technology signals that the fundamentals of teaching social studies are incompatible with personalized learning: “Technology is not seen as a replacement for the traditional classroom, but rather as a powerful tool to enhance what is already proven pedagogy” (Redding, 2014, p. 123). In personalizing their instruction, teachers use technology to enhance classroom relationships and extend learning beyond the four walls of the classroom (Sandler, 2012). Likewise, social studies teachers, much like their peers in other content areas, report that their teaching practices are not significantly altered by the presence of technology, but they use technology to augment their current instructional routines (Roberts & Butler, 2014). This reality makes it crucial that social studies teacher educators integrate technology in their course work.

How have modern technologies impacted social studies classrooms? Not surprisingly, one common use of technology by social studies teachers is the integration of digitized primary sources into lessons and assessments. Social studies teachers have reported that using digital primary sources is more time consuming than traditional classroom-based primary sources (Hicks, Doolittle & Lee, 2004). However, when a particular primary source is not available in paper format, social studies teachers are likely to find success in seeking out a digital version (Marri, 2005), providing more flexibility in preparing lessons. The picture that emerges from the research on social studies teachers’ integration of digital primary sources into their instruction suggests that the choice they make is not as simple as using these resources or not. Rather, content-specific professional development or training in lesson planning using digital archives, such as those at the



Library of Congress (n.d.) or the National Archives (n.d.), and access to a classroom projector or computer lab significantly impacts whether or not social studies teachers will integrate digital resources in their instruction and assessment (Friedman, 2006; Marri, 2005).



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The impact of training and access to resources appears to be affected by the individual teachers' established pedagogical approach (DeWitt, 2007; Swan & Hicks, 2007). Research on the factors that influence teachers' use of technology in their practice indicates that technology is most often used to enhance existing routines (Cuban, 2001; Windschitl & Sahl, 2002). This finding suggests that teachers will be more likely to utilize technology in service of personalized learning if they are predisposed towards personalized learning in the first place. This signals the



crucial role of teacher educators in exposing preservice teachers to approaches in social studies education that embrace personalized learning. As noted earlier, teachers who have had success in utilizing web-based resources in inquiry-related projects have had to carefully scaffold the students' activities (Milson, 2002). When teachers assume the function of technology is to simply bring a value-added element to students' learning, such as colorful images that make a lecture more engaging (DeWitt, 2007), they overlook the variety of ways technology can be used to personalize instruction to student learning profiles, prior knowledge, and sociocultural backgrounds (Stefanou et al., 2004).

Unfortunately, it appears as though the integration of technology into social studies methodology courses has not been widely adopted by teacher educators (Bolick, Berson, Coutts, & Heinecke, 2003). In the same way that social studies teachers may erroneously assume that their students are digital natives, and therefore more "tech savvy" than they, teacher educators must not assume that preservice teachers come to their courses equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to personalize their instruction and assessment through technology. Preservice teachers bring various levels of competence and confidence in their technological prowess and require the same amount of instruction as their inservice counterparts. Molebash (2004) found that, when teacher educators

Means et al. (2013) found that personalizing learning through blended environments provides more time for student engagement with material, increased student interaction, and the incorporation of additional resources.

model the use of online digital archives in inquiry-related activities, it positively impacts preservice teachers' attitudes towards using digital technologies in their lesson planning. Thus teacher educators need to model innovative approaches to planning and assessment through technology as they relate to personalized learning.

Teacher educators should not feel limited by the physical walls of their university classrooms in aiming to meet the twin objectives of modeling personalized learning and integrating technology. Redding (2014) argues that a powerful tool for personalization of learning is blending online and

traditional in-person learning environments. While the research on outcomes related to blended learning is notoriously difficult to generalize (Sparks, 2015), Means and colleagues (2013) concluded that “blended approaches

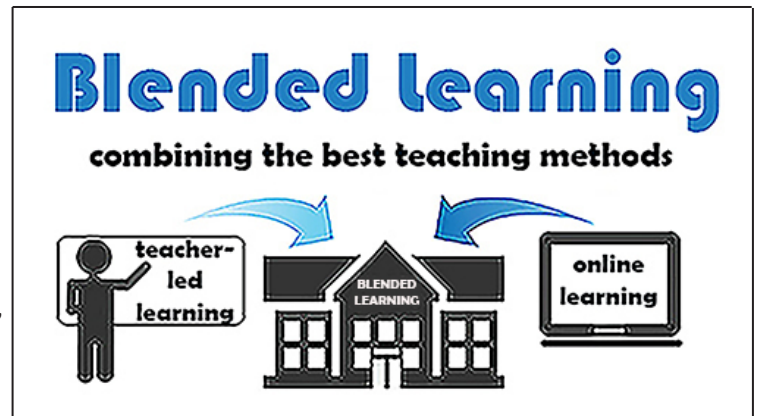
have been more effective than instruction offered entirely in face-to-face mode” (p. 35). Their meta-analysis of 45 studies compared purely online, face-to-face, and blended learning outcomes for K–12 students. They found that personalizing learning through blended environments provides more time for student engagement with material, increased student interaction, and the incorporation of additional resources.

Teacher educators have also found success in utilizing computer-mediated technologies to develop both content goals and asynchronous, online discussion skills in future social studies teachers. For example, Merryfield (2003) designed a blended course on global education, which

employed electronic mail, a course listserv, and online chats to connect 92 American teachers with 22 cultural consultants

from around the world. She argues that the blended learning environment acted as a social veil: “The facelessness of online interaction frees people to interact without at least some of the inhibitions they have in face-to-face classrooms” (p. 161). As a result of this format, teachers in her study experienced true cross-cultural learning when they admitted to prejudices and asked the cultural consultants difficult questions they might not feel comfortable asking in face-to-face interactions.

Teachers in Merryfield’s course not only developed global perspectives, but also participated in technologically supported



personalized learning. The course assignments drew heavily from the teachers' personal backgrounds and experiences, and interactions were designed to promote teachers' cognitive, metacognitive, and social and emotional competencies. While Merryfield cautions that instructors must provide thoughtful scaffolds for the online components of this course, her experiences and the research of other teacher educators (Larson & Keiper, 2002; Mason & Berson, 2000; Zong, 2009) indicate what is possible when teacher educators model the intersection of blended learning environments and personalized learning in the social studies methodology course: student-centered instruction, increased time for thoughtful discussion, and resulting greater depth of understanding.

Sociocultural Perspectives and Motivational Competencies

Perhaps the most powerful opportunity personalized learning brings to social studies teachers is the chance to make meaningful connections between the content of their curricula and the communities their students inhabit. Personalized learning is a pedagogy that advocates honoring students' sociocultural backgrounds and their home lives, expecting that teachers will know their students personally, respect their experiences outside the classroom, attempt to connect with their parents and guardians, and use the knowledge gained from these interactions when developing curricula. This is not a simple task: It suggests that the teacher's job is not limited to his or her interactions with students in the school building. For teacher educators, the key is establishing an attitude in preservice teachers that likely contrasts with the education they experienced as students: They must embrace the idea of drawing on students' interests and sociocultural identities. In so doing, preservice teachers will be engaging students' motivational competency by tapping into stu-

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dents' lived experiences and cultural practices, making mastery of curricular content and skills attainable (Baines & Stanley, 2003; Paludan, 2006). Students' willingness to engage in literacy-based tasks, especially the analysis of challenging primary sources in social studies classes, is connected to their teachers' ability to foster this sort of motivation (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010).

Instilling in preservice teachers the value of developing curricula and learning experiences that honor students' cultures and sociocultural perspectives is a crucial

What is possible when teacher educators model the intersection of blended learning environments and personalized learning in the social studies methodology course:

- student-centered instruction
- increased time for thoughtful discussion
- resulting greater depth of understanding.



objective for teacher educators to meet, as it is common for students of color to feel alienated from the content of traditional social studies classes, which rely heavily on textbooks and rote memorization of names and dates (Loewen, 2010). Epstein (1998, 2001, 2009) has conducted qualitative and quantitative research on students' interpretive stances towards history, analyzing the historical interpretations of 100 elementary and secondary students. She found that Black and White students provided markedly different interpretations of events relating to racial diversity and democracy. Black students tended to identify political and civil rights as having been fought for over time, rather than given by the Founding Fathers. On the other hand, White students identified the Founding Fathers' role in giving all Americans rights. Black students were more likely to attribute historical authority to parents, community members, and documentaries produced by Black directors and were suspicious of textbooks and curricular material. Conversely, White students believed their White teachers presented an unbiased multicultural history due to the inclusion of information about all racial groups. The difference in interpretations appears rooted in home and community presentations of these topics, in particular the perspectives parents impart on their children (Epstein, 2009).

Planning lessons with students' sociocultural perspectives in mind is about personalization of learning, working to build a bridge between the learning that occurs at home and school.

As a result of her research, Epstein argues that social studies teachers should embrace a sociocultural perspective that supports students' racial, ethnic, gender, and class identities. Planning lessons with students' sociocultural perspectives in mind is about personalization of learning, working to build a bridge between the learning that occurs at home and school. The White teachers in Epstein's studies appeared unaware or unconcerned that their students of color had interpretations of U.S. history that often were inconsistent with the official curriculum. Classroom pedagogies tended to confirm or disconfirm students' existing sociocultural perspectives, depending on the sociocultural perspective represented in the curriculum, demonstrating that, for students of color, home learning about history was often incongruent with the mandated school curricula. Dimitriadis (2000) and Grant (2003) reached similar conclusions about the impact of outside-the-classroom experiences on students' sociocultural perspectives and classroom learning.

A lack of personalization is a shortcoming that impacts not only the learning of students of color. Traditional textbooks often fail to present the experiences of women throughout



history, relying on the “great men” approach to history. Textbooks are more likely to present political and economic history, rather than social history and, by extension, women’s history (Loewen, 2010). When women are mentioned in textbooks and curricular materials, they tend to be the wives of presidents. While relegating women’s roles to that of spouses of important leaders highlights the glaring gap in success in electoral politics between men and women, this is a topic rarely discussed in these same textbooks (Avery & Simmons, 2000/2001; Webster, 2000). Relying on a traditional textbook for curricular planning sends the message that the contributions of women—such as the maintenance of the social order, community building, and education of the young—are not considered historically significant. As a result, “not only do women’s lives not count in the story of civilization, but men’s lives ‘stand in’ for women’s lives, essentially rendering women invisible to history” (Crocco, 1997, p. 32). It is no surprise, then, that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) students are also unlikely to hear voices or read about experiences similar to their own in history class. The absence of representation in curriculum reinforces a heteronormative stance towards history (Schmidt, 2010). However, it is also important for preservice teachers to understand that personalization is not just for the benefit of students of color, female students, and LGBTQ students. The methods of personalization described in this section “enable White students to see that phenomena such as race, class, and gender significantly shape who is in political office and who is in political prison...” (Epstein, 2001, p. 47).

“Such an approach would enable White students to see that phenomena such as race, class, and gender significantly shape who is in political office and who is in political prison, who has access to quality health care, schools, and colleges and who does not.”
– Epstein, 2001

Let’s consider the implications of these findings for first-year social studies teachers struggling to cover everything in his or her curriculum. These teachers may allow the textbook to guide planning, missing out on many opportunities to personalize the content with rich narratives and primary sources that represent the diversity of the classroom. Loewen (2010) laments this approach to teaching history, arguing, “Unfortunately, the more teachers cover, the less kids remember. Fragmenting history into unconnected ‘facts’ practically guarantees that students will not be able to relate many of these terms to their own lives” (p. 19). As an antidote to the coverage challenge, one strategy Loewen recommends is that students conduct research into local historical topics of interest to them, using inquiry and technology. Further, Loewen argues that students’ parents and guardians must be active participants



in the research process. Because key elements of the students' work will take place outside of school, Loewen observes that parents and guardians must not only be aware of expectations for the inquiry projects, but must also provide both moral and material support. He recommends teachers host a "Parent Academy," in which

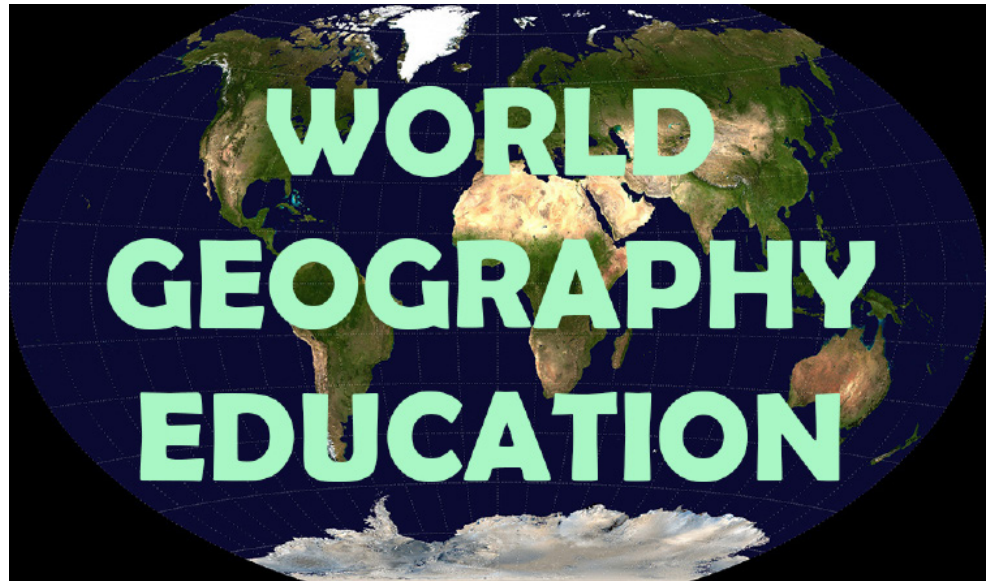
parents and guardians visit the classroom and learn about the research project. Because students' first history lessons will happen at home (Epstein, 2009), parental involvement reinforces the notion that the history learned in school is as important as the history learned over the kitchen table, at holiday gatherings, and other events where young people are likely to learn history from family members. Parents can also assist the teacher in developing a list of web resources relating to their child's topic of interest. Most importantly, the Parent Academy is an easy way for social studies teachers to make vital links to students' families. These links provide the opportunity for teachers and parents to work collaboratively to shape inquiry projects that tap into students' personal, familial, and cultural histories, further personalizing the learning students will experience by honoring the sociocultural backgrounds of students. According to Loewen, combining parental involvement with local history inquiry projects has particularly powerful potential. "In the process of doing history on their own family, school, or community, students will learn that their lives have larger meaning" (p. 95).

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– Loewen, 2010

Preservice social studies teachers must understand that, though the approaches recommended by Epstein (2009) and Loewen (2010) are likely different from what they experienced as students themselves, these new strategies will help them escape the trap of coverage and increase students' motivation to learn new content and skills. Preservice teachers must also be exposed to case studies of teachers who have engaged their students' sociocultural perspectives in other social studies disciplines. These case studies may disrupt preconceived notions about classroom teaching by providing preservice teachers with evidence that engaging students' sociocultural practices can be done, and may act as a "how to" guide for integrating these strategies into their own practice (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2007). For example, a common concern for preservice social studies teachers is how they will support the learning of English language learners in a curriculum that includes much reading and writing. Salinas, Franquiz, and Reidel (2008) have documented the work of one exemplary geography teacher who developed discussions, map activities, and graphic organizers that

allowed her recently-arrived immigrant students to explore complicated topics such as political and physical geography, human relationships to the land, ethnic diversity, and conceptualizations of citizenship through their personal histories and sociocultural experiences. As Salinas and colleagues (2008) argue, “World geography education – as exemplified in Ms. Davila’s classroom – not



only creates academic opportunities for late-arrival immigrant students, it also honors and authentically integrates multicultural identities into the curriculum” (p. 76).

If teacher educators aim to have preservice teachers in their program enact a substantial level of personalization, they may need to build qualitative research methods into their initial certification course work. Moll and colleagues (1992) recommend having teachers conduct research studies of their students’ home lives to better understand their funds of knowledge. These projects link university researchers with secondary teachers, and involve “analyzing the social history of the households, their origins and development, and most prominently for our purposes, the labor history of the families, which reveals the accumulated bodies of knowledge of the households...” (p. 133). The goal is developing a “thick” student–teacher relationship, “taking into account or having knowledge about the multiple spheres of activity within which the child is enmeshed” (p. 133–134). Teachers who participated in this project developed more sophisticated understandings of their students, their families, and their social worlds. The teachers then developed inquiry projects that were informed by their students’ social networks. Parents contributed to the students’ work and became a resource for both the student and teacher. While an ambitious project, it is an example of the power of personalized learning when social studies projects are thoughtfully enacted and are responsive to students’ sociocultural identities. Students who were otherwise disengaged from academic learning were interpreting critical issues in social studies education and developing inquiry projects of their own. Essential to the success of this project was the “individual freedom, community interactivity, and flexibility of time and space” students experienced (Deed et al., 2014, p. 67), hallmarks of personalized learning.

“Personalised learning can be thought of, at the ‘classroom’ level, as a sociocultural authorisation of individual freedom, community interactivity, and flexibility of time and space.”
– Deed et al., 2014

Conclusion

One potential concern preservice teachers might express about personalized learning is the notion that these methods will fail to prepare students to meet district- or state-mandated curricular goals. This concern is understandable but easily soothed. The techniques described in this guide are a set of tools preservice teachers should be taught to use to instill understanding in their students. In order to foster understanding, Blythe (1999) recommends building curriculum around generative topics. A generative topic is central to one or more discipline or domain in a given school subject, is accessible to students, and has real world applications. Preservice teachers should be taught to weave together units in their curriculum by emphasizing the qualities that make each unit generative. This will assist the teacher in personalizing content that might feel distant to students at first blush. A student in a rural classroom might not feel any personal connection to the topic of desegregation. But the generativity of desegregation is easily connected to ideals students feel personally connected to, such as equity, justice, and the quest for a better life.

In addition, making generative topics the foundation of a curriculum provides coherence in linking seemingly disparate student-selected inquiry projects to essential understandings found in state standards. In this way, a student's oral history project about his or her family's experiences in their community also becomes a lesson on evaluating primary sources and developing an argument using evidence (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). It is up to the individual teacher to reveal those connections to his or her students. As noted earlier, a key aspect of inquiry lessons is students' reflection on their new learning (Stripling, 2009). It is during those reflections, be they journal entries or in-class discussions, that teachers must make explicit how their students' inquiry work is connected to the development of new skills and a deeper understanding of history.

During their first years in the classroom, many social studies teachers panic, consumed by the overwhelming amount of material to be covered (to say nothing of the many competing obligations teachers have) and often attempt to imitate the strategies of the teachers they had as students (Lortie, 1975). This speaks to the crucial work of teacher educators in providing preservice teachers with a coherent framework for building lessons and curriculum. When a preservice teacher learns about content planning and assessment in the context of personalized learning, the theories of personalized learning can guide his or her approach to student-teacher relationships in the classroom. As a result, the teacher's central goal is not covering as much material as possible, but presenting important content that is relevant to every student. The teacher has a skill set to develop meaningful relationships with students and can craft inquiry assignments that tap into their cognitive strengths and

sociocultural perspectives. Further, he or she is also comfortable and competent in utilizing digitized primary sources and computer-mediated technologies for extending learning outside of the classroom. Teacher educators have a difficult task in knowing where to begin to facilitate this change in approach for preparing preservice teachers. The elements of personalized learning make up a framework that is complementary with the disciplines, topics, and skills that fall under the umbrella of social studies education.

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