

CHALLENGES FACING BEGINNING HISTORY TEACHERS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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“Few experiences in life have such tremendous impact on the personal and professional life of a teacher as does the first year of teaching.”¹

Beginning teachers face a myriad of challenges as they enter schools, including a growing emphasis on standards and accountability, an increasingly diverse student population, and lack of support or mentoring. Current attrition rates for beginning teachers are high and continue to grow.² This situation is more pronounced in low-income urban schools and in schools with large numbers of minority students.³ Research on beginning teachers demonstrates that novice teachers often struggle both psychologically and instructionally as they enter their first few years of teaching.⁴

Recent research in the field of social studies also reveals that beginning history teachers struggle instructionally. Studies have examined their use of “best practices” that are often advocated in social studies research and in social studies methods courses—for example, using primary sources to engage in historical inquiry activities. Whether, and to what extent, beginning teachers use such practices or methods remains unclear. However, before this question can even be answered, researchers must acknowledge that the social studies literature on beginning teachers doesn’t adequately address the major challenges and issues faced by beginning secondary history teachers, nor how these challenges influence their instructional decisions and their capacity to realistically incorporate “best practices” into their teaching of history. Therefore, this study examines the challenges faced by three beginning teachers who graduated from a year-long masters/certification program that included an intensive methods course and extensive field experiences, as well as how these challenges influenced their instructional decisions.

In this article, we begin by discussing different components of “best practice” in history instruction, particularly as they apply to methods courses and the instructional decisions of preservice and beginning teachers. Next, we describe the research design and methods, followed by a description of key themes and issues emerging from the data. The article concludes with a discussion of the findings and analysis of implications for social studies teacher education.

“Doing History” and the Preparation of Teachers

Recent research in the teaching and learning of history advocates instructional approaches that engage students in the process of “doing history,” including building historical knowledge through the use of primary sources, conducting historical inquiry, and encouraging students to think historically.⁵ Historical thinking, as described in the *National Standards of History*, involves chronological thinking, historical comprehension, historical analysis and interpretation, historical research, historical issues-analysis, and historical decision-making.⁶ Essentially, this approach involves teaching students to analyze historical evidence, to consider perspective and context, and to go beyond the written word and examine the intention, motive, plan, and purpose of the author. In order to teach students how to “do history” in this manner, teachers themselves must understand the “knowing how” of history; in other words, teachers must possess a deep understanding of what history is and how historical inquiry is conducted.⁷ Thus,

teacher educators face the challenge of teaching preservice teachers the “knowing how” of history as well as instructional approaches that foster historical thinking abilities in children.

Preparation of effective history teachers involves fostering a deep knowledge of their discipline and an understanding of how to teach historical thinking. And, according to Lee Shulman, teacher educators need to emphasize the blending of content and pedagogy, which he refers to as pedagogical content knowledge, or “how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners and presented for instruction.”⁸

Research-based pedagogical approaches that foster the development of historical thinking include the following: the use of primary source documents, historical empathy exercises, development of critical thinking skills, and conducting historical inquiry and research.⁹ Although, as Adler and Segall note research studies of the content of social studies methods courses remain “particularistic and unsystematic,” it appears that many teacher educators are incorporating these research-based “best practices” into their social studies methods courses.¹⁰

A growing body of research has examined different components of the complex task of preparing future history teachers. This includes studies on preservice teachers’ use of primary document instruction during their student teaching, their historical thinking, their epistemological understandings, and their belief structures.¹¹ According to this literature, preservice teachers often possess deeply held beliefs about the nature of the subject matter; these beliefs, combined with prior educational experiences, influence how these teachers interpret epistemological and pedagogical approaches advocated by teacher educators and researchers. Several factors, however, appear to influence beginning teachers’ beliefs, including the nature of the methods course and field experiences, the relationship between student teacher and directing teacher, and the degree to which new ideas overlap with and confirm pre-existing beliefs.

Beginning Teachers and “Doing History”

Beginning teachers face a series of sudden and dramatic changes as they make the transition from preservice student to first-year teacher. Research in general education documents the myriad challenges that many beginning teachers may face, including the following: heavy teaching loads, multiple preparations, the least “desirable” classes, extracurricular duties, few instructional resources, little collegial support, discipline issues, professional isolation, inadequate salaries, high parent expectations, poor administrative support, unfamiliarity with routines and procedures, and a mismatch between their expectations of teaching and the realities of the classroom.¹² Within social studies education, however, only a few research studies have examined the challenges that influence instructional decisions made by beginning history teachers. Examples of the existing social studies research on beginning history teachers include studies on the disciplinary backgrounds of teachers and beginning teachers’ use of historical inquiry. Wineburg and Wilson examined the influence of disciplinary background on the teaching of history by four beginning teachers with different social studies content backgrounds. They found that the students’ disciplinary perspectives clearly influenced their teaching of historical thinking and their goals for instruction.¹³

Hartzler-Miller conducted a study of David, a third-year world history teacher, and examined how his knowledge, beliefs, and school context influenced his instructional decision making.¹⁴ Specifically, she focused on whether David utilized historical inquiry, an instructional approach he encountered in his social studies methods course. She found that David’s interpretation of and beliefs about history influenced how he taught history; he chose not to use historical inquiry, viewing it as an impractical instructional strategy because it exposed students to more than one narrative. As Hartzler-Miller explained, David’s notion of best practice meant “conveying a broad, conceptual narrative based on historical scholarship which his students could recognize and describe.”

Van Hover and Yeager, in an in-depth case study, examined what happened after an exemplary student graduated from a teacher education program that included attention to the “knowing how” of history. In interviews, Angela, a second-year 11th grade United States history teacher, elucidated a

sophisticated understanding of historical thinking, provided in-depth descriptions of key issues raised in her methods course, presented concrete examples of instructional strategies that fostered historical thinking, and stated that her methods course strongly influenced her instructional decisions. Observation data of Angela's teaching, however, revealed a heavy emphasis on lecture, outlines, and textbook reading. She used very few of the methods she learned at the university in her teaching approach. Additionally, Angela used her story of the past to present content to students, infused her instruction with moral lessons for students, and controlled the conclusions drawn by students in order to ensure they learned her interpretation of history. Angela's beliefs about the nature and purpose of history, her beliefs about the ability of her students, her students' validation of Angela's teaching approach, and contextual factors appeared to strongly influence Angela's instructional decisions.¹⁵

The findings in this study clearly point to the powerful effect beliefs and contextual factors exerted on Angela's instructional decision making. The authors, however, believed that they neglected to focus on how Angela interpreted the challenges facing beginning teachers and the effects of these challenges on her instructional decision making. Additionally, the themes and issues emerging from the study compelled the authors to ask the question: What about Angela's classmates who were teaching in different contexts? What challenges did they face? Were they similar to or different from Angela's? What were the effects of these challenges on the instructional decision making employed by these beginning teachers?

Thus, this investigation examines the challenges faced by three beginning teachers, in three very different settings, who graduated from a year-long masters/certification program that included extensive field experiences as well as an intensive methods course that emphasized the "knowing how" of history. Specifically, this article focuses on how these challenges influenced their instructional decisions.

Research Methodology

A case study methodology is used to examine three secondary history teachers (identified by the pseudonyms Angela, Dan, and Greg) in their second year of teaching.¹⁶ The case study approach allowed us to investigate three "bounded systems"—that is, three teachers—in depth. Our research examined the following question: What were the challenges and issues facing three beginning secondary history teachers who graduated from an intensive social studies masters/certification program and taught in very different settings?

Participants

The researchers chose to focus on three secondary history teachers entering their second year of teaching. These teachers were selected on the basis of several criteria. First, the teachers graduated from the same masters/certification program in social studies education from a large state university in the southeastern United States. As graduates of this program, all three teachers took two semester-long social studies methods courses, one on secondary social studies methods and one on middle school social studies methods. Secondly, the teachers taught in the public school system in close proximity to the university. Third, the teachers taught in three very different settings. Finally, all three teachers were entering their second year of teaching and therefore were able to reflect on their first year in the profession.

All three teachers earned bachelor's degrees in history and were members of the same cohort the year they went through their masters/certification program in social studies education. This was a rigorous three semester-long program with thirty-six hours of course work, two three-week pre-internships, and a ten-week full-time internship. The secondary social studies methods course was offered in the first semester of the program and met for a total of six hours each week. For several weeks of the course, the instructor focused on the teaching of history, particularly the use of multiple perspectives and primary sources in historical inquiry activities.

Context and Setting

The teachers are identified by the pseudonyms Angela, Dan, and Greg. Angela, a white female, taught eleventh grade honors American history at a large, diverse high school. In addition to African American and white students, the school also includes Asian and Hispanic students because it houses the district's main ESOL program.. It is also important to note that at this school, students self-selected into social studies honors courses. Dan, a white male, taught two Advanced Placement (AP) American history classes, three honors American history classes, and one ninth grade world history class in a large, predominantly white high school. In this school, honors and Advanced Placement are determined by ability level and parental involvement. Greg, a white male, taught sixth grade world cultures in a middle school with a 98 percent African American student population. The majority of Greg's students read and wrote below grade level, and Greg faced challenging behavior issues on a daily basis.

Data Sources

The data sources for this study include, for each teacher, two semi-structured interviews, two formal classroom observations, and several (five to fifteen) informal classroom observations. The two interviews lasted about an hour each and were audiotaped and transcribed. The first interview protocol was designed to elicit teachers' understandings of and use of historical thinking methods and document-based instruction. The second interview protocol included more general questions about curriculum planning, instructional approaches, school climate, colleagues, and views toward students. Several questions on both protocols dealt with challenges and issues facing beginning teachers. The interviewers probed the teachers' responses in order to more fully explore the thinking behind some of the responses.

The observations took place over a period of one school year. These were conducted in order to gain a sense of the teachers' classroom instruction, teaching style, and classroom dynamics. The two formal observations were scheduled in advance and lasted for one class period. Additionally, the researchers had an open invitation from all three participants to visit their classrooms at any time, without notice. Therefore, the researchers visited the participants' classrooms five to fifteen times informally; that is, while visiting the school for other purposes, the researchers entered the classroom without advance warning and sat in the class for a period of time. Informal observations of each teacher were as following: Angela, fifteen observations; Dan, nine observations; and Greg, five observations. During the observations, the researchers took extensive free-form field notes as well as reflective notes following the classroom visit.

Data Analysis

The two interviews were analyzed by the researchers in several phases. First, each researcher independently conducted a systematic content analysis of the three transcripts, looking for similarities, differences, patterns, themes, and general categories of responses.¹⁷ Secondly, each researcher prepared her own tables for categorization of responses, as well as a research memorandum detailing her analysis.¹⁸ Extensive coding was not necessary because of the small sample size. The researchers then met again to compare and contrast their analyses and draw conclusions about their findings through a process of analytic induction. The observations were analyzed in a manner similar to the interview data.

Findings

Interesting issues emerged from the interviews and observations of these three teachers. Angela, Dan, and Greg described challenges and concerns that broadly fit under four main categories: instructional issues, behavioral issues, beliefs about students, and contextual factors.

Instructional Issues

The three teachers predominantly relied on lectures and textbooks to develop curriculum and instruct students. Coverage of content appeared to be their major concern. Instructional approaches discussed in their methods course (e.g., primary documents, teaching historical inquiry) tended to fall by the wayside as the three teachers focused on covering the information presented in the textbook and dealing with pressures imposed by department heads, AP exams, and state accountability measures.

To plan her curriculum, Angela used her United States history textbook; she divided up the school year into units based on chapters, and allotted time for each unit based on how long she felt it would take her to “finish the textbook” by the end of the school year. To plan each unit, Angela read through the corresponding chapter of the textbook and created an outline. She then distributed a hard copy of her chapter outline to the students and, each day in class, she lectured about a different section of the outline. Angela described her instructional approach as “lecture,” but noted that she often supplemented her lectures with little activities, discussions, and video clips.

In class, Angela, an engaging, dynamic, outgoing teacher, did in fact spend the majority of instructional time lecturing to the chapter outlines. She rarely asked questions, and when she did pose questions she often answered them herself. Angela covered a great deal of content in every lesson, lecturing in a story-like fashion, telling students about the Populist Movement, Westward Expansion, World War I, or other topics of the day.

Angela appeared to control the conclusions drawn in the classroom; for example, during a lesson on the Populist Movement, Angela showed an excerpt from the film, *Wizard of Oz*, to discuss the Gold-Silver debate. Rather than showing the video and asking students to draw parallels between the movie and the Gold-Silver debate, Angela provided running commentary and drew the comparisons herself, as highlighted in this excerpt:

Notice the wicked witch of the East has the magic slippers on, they're supposed to be silver. Do the Republicans want our money system to be backed by silver and gold? No. So she's withholding them from the farmers. On the outline I want you to write the wicked witch of the east and who she represents—the Republicans.

Dan also planned his curriculum around the textbook. He structured his AP class based on the knowledge and skills students needed to pass the AP examination. This, according to Dan, required covering all of the content in the textbook. In his other courses, Dan used the textbook to craft a basic outline of topics he needed to cover by the end of the school year. He also referred to state standards, but noted that the standards aligned well with his textbooks. Dan described his teaching approach as mostly discussion, lectures, and short video clips. He added that he occasionally incorporated group activities, mock trials, debates, and research projects. In all of his classes, but particularly with AP, Dan observed that time constraints severely limited his creativity. He elaborated:

In my AP class there are times when I'd like to do more things but I can't. For example, there are 38 chapters in the book which the students are required to know and can be tested on. There are 36 weeks of school and you have to allow for spring break, winter break. The AP test is the beginning of May so you lose a month. These are the time constraints. We have a test on a chapter every Friday. It's a brutal pace but it's something that we have to do in order to make sure the students have kind of gone over the material.

In his AP class, Dan provided students with an outline on the overhead projector; the heading of the outline identified the chapter and page numbers covered. In his lecture, Dan touched on each point on the outline, usually covering an extraordinary amount of content. For example, in one-half of a class period, he discussed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas, Manifest Destiny, the Gadsden Purchase, the demise of the Whigs, Bleeding Kansas, and John Brown. A superb lecturer, Dan interspersed his presentation with frequent questions; the questions asked students to recall facts, interpret historical significance, make predictions, and summarize important points. During observations of other class periods, Dan lectured in a similar fashion, but often provided 10-15 minutes at the end of class for “Document-Based Question (DBQ) practice.”

During DBQ practice, students received a packet of primary sources. After allowing the students several minutes to read the question and glance through the primary sources, Dan reminded students of

the “DBQ process.” First, he asked the students to brainstorm factual information that would provide a background for their DBQ answers. He then instructed the students to look at each document and consider the author’s point of view, potential biases of the author, and how the document fit the question. Finally, he asked students to write a clear thesis statement and to outline the structure of their response. While these DBQ activities asked students to engage in historical inquiry and perspective taking, Dan emphasized the utilitarian nature of the assignment—that students had to do this for the AP examination.

Greg organized his curriculum around information in the textbook, but he chose to structure this content around six major themes related to world cultures: civilization and society, food, agriculture, economy, family life, and religion. He admitted that due to the “low level” of his students, he could not cover the whole textbook and did not anticipate meeting all of the state standards. Greg explained that his mission, his goal for the year, was to expose students “to some other parts of the world, and encourage them to [realize that], as they say in the *X-Files*, ‘You are not alone.’” Greg also noted that although he used the textbook to structure his presentation of content, he rarely asked students to read from or use the textbook because he realized the reading level was too advanced for them. Rather, he constructed worksheets that provided students with information drawn from the textbook and the Internet, written at a level they could read and understand.

In the classroom, Greg focused on teaching his students social skills and, through discussion and worksheets, he emphasized knowledge and recall of historical facts, dates, and events. As a teacher, Greg demonstrated patience, politeness, and respect towards his students, spoke clearly and calmly, and spent a great deal of instructional time reminding students of behavior expectations. He involved the students in his lecture, asking many questions and attempting to encourage all of his students to answer at least one question. A large percentage of his questions asked students to recall factual information; for example, Greg asked students to identify two physical features in Egypt, and to describe the geographic location of the Nile River.

The majority of class time during observations, however, revolved around the use of worksheets. Greg, referring to the textbook and the Internet, constructed worksheets for his students to complete. Typically, these worksheets involved students reading fact-filled passages in order to locate correct answers to fill-in-the-blank questions. For example, one worksheet entitled “Mummies and More” described the process of mummification. The students were directed to work in pairs to read the four paragraphs on mummification and to answer four short questions. The answers to these four questions could be found directly in the body of the text; the question “How does the climate of Egypt affect the process of mummification?” could be answered by referring to the paragraph beginning “The climate of Egypt affects the process of mummification....”

On assessments, the three teachers emphasized recall of historical facts. Angela gave students a test at the conclusion of each unit or chapter of the textbook. For example, at the conclusion of the unit on Chapter 12, “Westward Expansion,” Angela gave students a test with forty-five multiple-choice items and three short answer questions. The multiple-choice items emphasized factual recall; the short answer questions required presentation of facts, but also asked students to analyze and discuss the historical significance of the event. Dan gave his AP students tests that were tied to each textbook chapter and modeled on the AP exam, with multiple-choice questions and one document-based essay question (DBQ). He also administered an end-of-semester exam; for the fall semester, this test included eighty-five multiple-choice questions and one DBQ question. On the review sheet, David asked students to memorize the first sixteen presidents, their political affiliation, and number of terms served. He provided them with additional factual information that would be covered on the exam. Greg also gave his students tests that emphasized recall of facts related to their unit objectives. He shared his semester grading sheet; students received credit for all worksheets completed as well as tests that assessed student understanding of the content of these worksheets.

Overall, the three teachers appeared to view “covering” the textbook as a measure of success, lecture as the most efficient means of introducing content, and factual-recall items as a primary mode of

assessment. Angela, when asked why she followed the textbook so closely, referred to tension with her department head and explained that if she could demonstrate that she “finished” the textbook, she felt her department head would have little basis for criticism. Angela viewed “getting through” the textbook as a measure of a successful year. Dan also felt pressure to finish the textbook due to the pressure of the AP exam. In his other, non-AP classes, Dan noted that he also tried to get through the textbook because he viewed the textbook as a useful structure for organizing his curriculum and he did not want his students moving to the next grade “behind,” in terms of content. Greg didn’t use his textbook often, due to the low reading levels of his students. Greg explained that he planned to cover the content outlined in his textbook by creating worksheets that presented information similar to the textbook at a level his students could understand. But Greg also mentioned colleagues who appeared to measure academic success by textbook chapters covered; these colleagues frequently asked Greg questions related to his progress (or lack thereof) through the textbook.

Behavioral Issues

The teachers’ approach to instruction was closely related to their concerns about behavior. These new teachers worried about behavior management and appeared afraid to “lose control.” In several observations, Angela frequently answered her own questions, instructed her students on what conclusions to draw, and didn’t allow students to engage in open-ended discussion or to generate their own responses to questions that could potentially encourage critical or historical thinking.

Dan appeared to equate historical thinking and historical inquiry activities with group work and expressed concern about “off-task” behaviors of students in groups, particularly excessive talking and socializing. As a result of “off-task” student behavior and his fear of losing control, Dan expressed reluctance in using historical thinking activities. Dan mentioned particular frustration with the “immature” behavior of his “lower-ability” students. He noted that he tended to avoid group activities with these non-honors and non-AP students because “when I split people into groups to, for example, read a document, it tends to get done more in the higher abilities, higher level [classes]. In the lower ability [classes] I walk around and I hear them talking about the football game and stuff.” Dan, therefore, appeared to equate historical thinking activities with group work, and viewed group work as an instructional approach that fostered “off-task” and problematic student behavior.

Greg was even more focused on control of student behavior. He said that during his first year he was “just trying to stay above water,” and he chose to focus on teaching social skills and keeping students quiet and seated. Similar to Dan, he equated historical thinking activities with cooperative learning and observed: “Cooperative learning is a struggle because these kids don’t know how to work together and they can’t even sit together so you have to teach them a social skill, starting with something like listening and paying attention.” Greg also described some very challenging behavior situations; on one occasion, during his first year, a student threatened to kill him. He estimated that of his twenty students, “five are a behavior problem on a daily basis, five are angels, and ten are, as I would put it, most of the time acting responsibly, but two days a week are irresponsible and act as troublesome as the first five.”

Beliefs about Students

All three teachers appeared to doubt their students’ abilities to think critically about history and to engage in historical inquiry and interpretation. Each teacher listed student ability level as a major barrier to historical inquiry and critical thinking. For example, Angela explained that barriers in her classroom often prevented her from utilizing “those kind[s] of activities,” specifically mentioning students’ academic level, maturity level, and personal background. She found that her students read and wrote at very different levels and believed that several students in her class should drop out of honors classes. Angela reflected:

I thought I would use a lot more critical thinking but I don't. I don't feel like the kids know how to think. I don't think they see the value in it. Every time I try to do a critical-thinking activity they roll their eyes or push it off as busy work. I find I give them the answers or I get frustrated

She elaborated:

I think it is mental, that some of their minds have not developed enough. We actually studied this in some psychology course where your mind develops so far at a certain age. And I think at a certain age some kids cannot think past...the level they are at. I find that lower level kids don't find anything as fascinating. I feel like either they don't get it or I will try to help them but I notice that their writing is lower and as a result I feel like they are not processing the controversy and just kind of see it as boring.

Angela's beliefs about her students extended to her daily lesson planning. She noted:

I read the chapter because I know they don't. It is my goal to teach them and to take this chapter and make it meaningful. At the beginning of the year, I used to put the page numbers on the board of what I was teaching that day and I realized they'd never crack it. And I don't blame them. When you read this, and you're in high school, it's just jargon-bogged information, fact after fact, and it means nothing.

Angela, in this reflective observation and other interview responses, reiterated her belief that as a teacher, it was her duty to "make meaning" of history for the students and to provide them with the information they needed. She read the chapter for her students, outlined the chapter for her students, and provided students with her explanation of each historical event and person listed on the outline.

Dan said that he did not use critical-thinking activities with his lower ability students; he stated that he only felt comfortable incorporating them into his higher-level Advanced Placement classes. He explained:

In dealing with the lower levels, the lower abilities, I'm trying to get everyone on task more often, focused, just simple things like turning in assignments and did you read this. I have to spend a lot more time explaining and going over things, whereas in some of the higher levels I have to do that less and I can do a greater variety of things and at the end of the class period I feel that we've accomplished more.

In his AP courses, Dan asked students to interpret and analyze historical documents when constructing answers to the DBQ questions. He noted that in AP they are "required to do [historical analysis] on the test," so he had to make time for activities that incorporated primary documents and perspective taking. In interviews and observations, Dan tended to tie any historical-thinking activities to practical uses for the AP exam rather than engaging students in open-ended historical inquiry for its own sake. Dan also mentioned other factors that precluded him from structuring historical-thinking activities: time constraints in Advanced Placement, short class periods, student immaturity, and student struggles with critical thinking. Dan consistently expressed doubt about his students' ability to engage in historical analysis.

Greg voiced concern about the ability of his students to read historical sources and relied instead on simplified textbook-like passages to convey information. He cited his students' low reading ability and challenging behavior as a barrier to doing creative things in the classroom. Greg also appeared to believe that his students' background served as a barrier to their desire to learn. He described the situation:

My students, their parents probably send them to school because they don't want them at home. I have kids who come to school who are sick all of the time. I have foster kids, I have kids who live with aunts, uncles, and when I have to write something it's like to stepmom, guardian, grandparent.... The problem is that [students] don't understand what's going on here. They think this is like an education mall. But there's no education going on.

He elaborated:

I have students who are low socioeconomic status, kids barely coming in with clean clothes. I have some kids that don't know how to relate, with a really low emotional maturity, emotional level. I have ESE [students identified as special education]; mine is the one class they come out for. And I'm all alone in my classroom.... This is a school? Someday I'd like to teach students who want to learn.

Contextual Factors

All three teachers said that they received little to no support during their first year of teaching. Angela described the complete isolation that she experienced, explaining that her department provided no assistance, that she did not have her own classroom, and that she perceived her department head as critical and territorial. She noted: “I had to create my own support system...but I think that, in general, if you are a shy person you are not going to find a lot of support because they just throw you in the classroom.” She continued:

We had seven new first-year teachers so we all sat together at lunch and we had the best support system. But I think that if I came in here alone, I'm a really strong person and I would have been fine. But I watched three first year teachers not come back to teaching at all because people, their mentor teachers, just threw them in [the classroom] and watched, like a pack of wolves. If [the new teacher] succeeds, it's a threat to [the mentor teachers'] jobs and if they fail, it makes them feel good. Some of the mentor teachers who are mentors shouldn't be. They're not nurturing people; they've just been here the longest and they want it so they don't have to work.

Angela also struggled with hostile colleagues in the history department and having to “float” from classroom to classroom. She explained:

I felt that if I did a good job I felt shunned by them. They would sit in the classroom where I taught and it was really demeaning. One teacher would come in and put his feet on the desk and watch me teach and throw out facts. It was so degrading. But I overcame it. But I noticed that last year, I shrank. I shrank back so I wouldn't make them feel insecure and I wasn't my true self and so I was kind of just like, don't stir the water. And this year, I have my own classroom and I just shut the door and go crazy and I love it.

When asked to describe the dynamics of the history department, Angela said:

It's all politics. I feel the pressure that because I'm young and I have honors [classes] I feel like the older teachers are jealous and bitter.... High school is so catty, it's all politics. It's really a shame. It's like a hierarchy. In high school, people judge your success, which is so lame, there's this underlying 'oh, they teach AP, they're the best teacher, oh, she's got honors, she's a good teacher.'

Dan voiced concerns about student behavior and having to prepare for many different classes; he had some mentoring from a colleague but very little consistent help. Dan taught six classes his first year (two classes of 11th grade AP American history, two classes of honors 9th grade world history, and two classes of 11th grade American history), and six classes his second year (two classes of 11th grade AP American history, three classes of honors 11th grade American history, one class of honors 9th grade world history) in a school where five classes and two preparations is considered a “normal” load. Dan resented the heavy course load assigned him; he explained:

I sort of showed up in preplanning and had been told about the [six class periods of] American History. There was the idea that if the teachers wanted to teach a seventh class to volunteer and I thought about it and said, no, because I'm taking a night class [at the local university]. I pretty much came in the next day, Tuesday, looked at my class assignments, and there was that third prep/sixth class. I was going to say something to the principal, but he was like, thanks for volunteering. And you know, annual contract so I just said yes, thank you sir!

Greg simply expressed great relief that he had managed to survive his first year of teaching and described his daily struggles with behavior management. He also could not cite any major sources of support from colleagues or his administration. In fact, Greg described a situation in which one colleague, a fellow social studies teacher, explicitly refused to share lesson ideas with Greg. He reflected: “It was OK. Obviously we were not doing the same things as he's been teaching the same stuff for 15 years. But it was unfortunate, you know, my first year, sinking down and getting no help and the kids were horrible.”

Discussion

Interestingly, the data reveal that the three beginning teachers perceived similar challenges, regardless of context and setting. While these interviews admittedly didn't probe sufficiently into these teachers' beliefs about content, it appears that in all three instances the challenges elucidated and observed directly influenced instructional decision making and apparently contributed to the beginning teachers' decisions to choose lecture and textbooks over historical inquiry and other methods incorporating the "doing" of history. Certainly, these teachers graduated from an intensive masters/certification program that strongly emphasized historical thinking and document-based instruction. However, several factors appear to override pedagogical content strategies learned in the methods course.

First, these were new teachers who were worried about behavior management and were afraid to "lose control." Angela frequently answered her own questions, instructed her students what to think, and didn't allow students to generate their own responses to questions that could potentially encourage historical thinking. She seemed afraid students wouldn't reach the "correct conclusion" and shied away from turning control of content over to the students. Dan appeared to associate group work with historical thinking activities and expressed concerns about the behavior of students in groups, particularly off-task behavior and excessive talking. As a result of "off-task" student behavior and his fear of losing control, Dan admitted reluctance to using historical-thinking activities. Greg's main focus in teaching revolved around control of student behavior. He also struggled with low reading abilities and diverse student exceptionalities and seemed overwhelmed by his challenging environment. In all three classrooms, lecture appeared to provide these beginning teachers with a comforting means of maintaining control of their students and the content.

Second, coverage of content presented a major challenge to the three teachers. Angela worked in a difficult, highly political history department and felt insecure about her position as a second-year teacher. As a result, she expressed the need to cover the entire textbook to prevent her department head from questioning her teaching ability. Dan faced a rigorous AP coverage schedule, and followed a brutal pace of a chapter per week. He believed that historical inquiry was a "time eater" that detracted from his AP coverage mandate. Greg hoped his students would acquire a basic understanding of world history and, as a result, he emphasized important facts, dates, and events. The three teachers viewed lecture as the most efficient means of introducing content, and therefore appeared reluctant to use historical-thinking activities that they perceived as time-consuming. Also, they viewed "covering the textbook" as a measure of success and seemed hesitant to incorporate outside primary sources into their lessons in a substantive way.

Third, all three teachers appeared to doubt their students' ability to think critically about history and engage in "historical wrestling."²⁰ Each teacher listed student ability level as a major barrier to using historical-thinking activities. Angela doubted her students' mental maturity and expressed frustration with their unwillingness to think critically about history. Dan said he didn't use historical-thinking activities with his lower ability students; he only felt comfortable incorporating them into his higher level Advanced Placement classes. Even then, Dan indicated doubt about students' ability to engage in historical analysis. Greg, overwhelmed by low reading levels and behavior problems, doubted the ability of his students to read and analyze historical sources and relied on simplified textbook-like passages to convey information.

Finally, these three teachers received little-to-no support during their first year of teaching. Angela described the complete isolation that she experienced as a first-year teacher. Her department provided almost no assistance, with the exception of a few observations that Angela perceived as jealously judgmental rather than helpful and supportive. Also, she didn't have a classroom and moved from room to room throughout the day, adding to her stress. Dan briefly touched on certain challenges he faced during his first year of teaching, including student behavior concerns and having to prepare for two different classes. In only his second year of teaching, the administration assigned Dan to the high-pressure Advanced Placement classes and gave him an extra class to teach. Greg expressed relief that he survived

his first year of teaching and described his daily struggles with behavior management. In fact, he indicated that historical thinking ranked dead last on his list of priorities during his first year of teaching, while survival came first.

Implications

This study clearly highlights two key issues: 1) the “disconnect” that may take place between what preservice history teachers learn in their social studies methods courses and what they actually encounter and do in the “real world” of the history classroom, and 2) the need that beginning history teachers may have for ongoing, long-term mentoring that provides support specifically related to history teaching and learning.

First, this study illustrates the importance of teachers’ beliefs about subject matter and students in the instructional decisions they made, and it points out a substantial discrepancy between what a social studies methods instructor attempted to teach and what some of her best students actually did when they became teachers. Moreover, the study suggests that social studies methods instructors must attend to other, more general concerns that preservice teachers have about classroom management, student behavior, and student ability; they must help beginning history teachers recognize and capitalize upon the link between engaging history instruction and effective classroom management.

From our findings, we concluded that we need to do a better job of addressing the beliefs our students bring to our methods courses and to gain a better understanding of their epistemologies of history—in other words, using as a starting point how and why *they* want to teach history, and what *their* version of history seems to be. Only then can we begin to effectively challenge them to broaden their notions of what it means to teach and learn history. Specific course assignments, such as lesson plans and writing assignments could be restructured with this approach in mind, so that we can guide our students toward an expanded repertoire of history teaching methods, but also allow them the opportunity to problematize and critique various methods as a first step towards taking ownership of ideas that may be new to them.

Furthermore, we also pointed out in this article how a teacher can be strongly influenced by the contextual factors of his or her school. Yet, as teacher educators, we agreed that we have often found ourselves in an oppositional stance to contextual factors on a regular basis—that is, trying to teach our students to be as creative, challenging, and idealistic as possible in their repertoire of teaching methods, based on the assumption that they will have the opportunity and autonomy to do so in their own classrooms. What became clear to us from this case study was the importance of challenging *ourselves* to address more directly the realities of the school environments into which our graduates move. If we want to be a factor in how our graduates operationalize what they learn in our methods courses, we concluded, then we need to find ways to “be there” *after* they graduate in an ongoing mentoring capacity. In this way of thinking about what we do, follow-up becomes essential; the methods course can even be considered an extended “workshop” that is only the first step in a more holistic approach to developing the kind of history teachers we advocate. Angela summed up this point of view:

I think that there needs to be some sort of outreach program for first-year teachers, where people are genuine and they’re not just getting paid for what they’re doing, and they’re not having to assess you, they’re just there. As a mentor.

Gold concurs, citing the vital need for beginning teacher support in two major areas: instructional-related support that includes assisting the new teacher with the knowledge, skills, and strategies necessary to be successful in the classroom and school; and psychological support to build the new teacher’s sense of self through confidence building, developing feelings of effectiveness, encouraging positive self-esteem, enhancing self-reliance, and learning to handle stress that is a large part of the transition period.²¹

Our findings, then, raise provocative questions for social studies teacher educators and researchers: How can social studies teacher educators better understand preservice teachers’ beliefs about the subject matter and their students? How can they “meet the preservice teachers where they are” in terms of these

beliefs while also attempting to influence beliefs and teach what they believe to be important? How can they move preservice teachers beyond some pitfalls of teacher education programs—for example, “lip service” to ideas, compliance in an academic course or internship in order to earn good grades or recommendation letters, or, in Angela’s case, enthusiasm that burns out in the real world of classroom teaching—and towards a sense of ownership of instructional approaches that emphasize active student engagement in the doing of history? In other words, the challenge is to help preservice teachers find ways to make this approach to history work for them on a practical level in their particular instructional context. This study clearly points to the need for further research on beginning history teachers in order to more deeply examine factors that may influence their instructional and behavior management decisions.

NOTES

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