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# **HISTORICAL THINKING SKILLS OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES METHODS COURSE**

by



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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the historical thinking skills and pedagogical reasoning of pre service teachers in a social studies methods course. The purpose of this study is to describe and compare the historical thinking skills and pedagogical content knowledge of the participants. Differences in the level of historical thinking abilities and pedagogical reasoning illustrated the differences between the participants. This study adds to current research about the teaching and learning of history by focusing on the relationship between historical thinking abilities and the ability to plan effective history lessons.

Along with interviews and lesson plans, through this study I identified that participants with very strong and robust historical thinking skills possessed not only excellent historical knowledge but also excellent general knowledge that includes political, economic and geographical knowledge. In possessing a varied repertoire of knowledge enable their mind to flexibly make in depth and critical analysis, and interpretation of historical primary sources. Participants that were able to select appropriate numbers of primary sources which represent different perspectives were able to plan potential effective teaching and learning activities to develop historical literacy. Participants who possessed the two above abilities seems able to translate the abilities into sound pedagogical reasoning by developing lesson plans that are potentially effective.





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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Chapter I provides an overview of this study's rationale, setting and analytical framework. The chapter concludes with a brief description of the research methodology employed in this study and the limitations of this study.

#### Overview

The purpose of this study was to describe and compare the historical thinking skills exhibited by five social studies students in an American midwestern public university. The participants were attending the social studies methods course in the college of education at the university and they each gave their consent to participate in the study (See Appendix A for Human Subject Clearance and Consent Form). This study sought to describe and analyze the lesson plan that the participants designed to teach historical thinking skills. It is also the purpose of this study to describe relations between the historical thinking skills that the participants exhibited and the lesson plans that the participants designed.

The goal of the social studies methods course was to enable students to articulate a coherent theory of social studies teaching and learning. This articulation included the ability to professionally write a complete lesson plan and the ability to present the lesson plan to peers. The course outline included a session about a source-based lesson plan related to teaching history. This purpose was manifested through the ability to design an effective lesson plan and implement the lesson plan in demonstration teaching sessions.

A theoretical framework based on Wineberg's (1991, 2001) conceptualization of historical thinking skills and Shulman's (1987) theory of pedagogical-content knowledge supported my inquiry as I attempted to develop assertions based upon the participants' historical thinking skills and their lesson plans. I formulated these interpretations through a qualitative inquiry.

### Setting for the Study

The setting of this study is the secondary social studies method course of a midwestern public university in the United States. The social studies course was taught during the fall semester of 2003. The course began on 25 August and ended on 16 December, 2003. Six students in the class volunteered to take part in this study, but only five were chosen because one of them did not choose to teach history as the demonstration lesson. This study was conducted in early September when the participants began to prepare their lesson plans and concluded at the end of November, 2003.

As a requirement for the course, students needed to design a lesson plan to teach their peers. Both activities were analyzed, discussed and evaluated in the class, and the grades were included in the final grading of the students. The students were required to design and teach a complete lesson to their peers.

### Rationale for the Study

The rationale for this study was twofold. First, because the goals of teaching history are not just delivery of the content but also to learn the historian's craft that could lead to a more critical mind (*National Standard for History*, 1996), this study attempted

to shed light on the pedagogical thinking process of pre-service history teachers. Second, this study sought to reveal valuable information for teacher educators as to the different and similar elements of historical thought processes of those who would become history teachers as they seek to enhance the teaching and learning of history.

The above rationales are based on the view learning history utilizes critical and specific thinking skills and teachers could teach those skills using appropriate materials and teaching techniques. Effective history teachers should themselves be proficient in both aspects. This study provides further understanding regarding the historical thinking skills of prospective history teachers and how they plan to develop historical thinking skills through development of history lessons.

### The Research Questions

My investigation centered on the historical thinking skills exhibited by the research participants and the teaching strategies that they employed to teach historical thinking skills to their peers in a lesson plan. For this study, three questions were formulated:

- a. What are the characteristics of the participant's historical thinking skills based on Wineburg's (1991, 2001) historical thinking skills theoretical framework?
- b. What are the differences and similarities with regard to the participants' historical thinking skills compared to each other? What are the similarities and differences in teaching strategies that they developed to teach those skills?
- c. What are the relationships between the historical thinking skills that the participants exhibited and the lesson plans that they developed based on



Wineburg's (1991, 2001) historical thinking skills and Shulman's (1987) pedagogical content knowledge framework?

### Theoretical Framework for Analysis

The theoretical framework that I chose for this study is grounded in the notion of historical thinking conceptualized by Wineburg (1991, 2001), as well as Shulman's theory of pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). The theory of constructivism underlies both of the frameworks.

### Historical Thinking Skills

Wineburg (2001) posited that the essence of understanding history is not to be found in lists of facts but in synthetic forms of thought such as the ability to grasp cause and effect, a capacity to follow a sustained argument, and the power to evaluate historical documents (p. 38). Understanding history requires more than memorization of historical events and personages. It requires a deep understanding of the processes involved in investigating the past: knowing where to obtain sources of evidence, understanding how to read difficult texts and artifacts, and refining the ability to get into the hearts and minds of people whose worlds were different from our own without imposing our contemporary assumptions on them (VanSledright, 2004).

Historians recognize text's hidden and latent meanings, i.e., subtext. Subtexts of historical documents can be divided into two distinct spheres: the text as a rhetorical artifact and the text as a human artifact. Texts emerge as speech act, social interactions set down on paper that can be understood only by reconstructing the social context in which they occurred. The comprehension of texts reaches beyond words and phrases to

embrace intention, motive, purpose, and plan -- the same concepts we use to decipher human action.

In the first sphere, the text as a historical artifact, the historian tries to reconstruct an author's purposes, intentions and goals. But the subtext goes beyond a reconstruction of the author's intentions. In fact, many subtexts include elements that work at cross-purposes with the author's intentions, bringing to the surface convictions of which the author may have been unaware or wished to conceal. These aspects frame the reality and disclose information about an author's assumptions, world view, and beliefs. Weak historical reading of primary sources results from failure to recognize and understand author's intentions, failure to grasp the polemic of the text, the inability to recognize connotations of words or images, and the failure to situate the text in the disciplinary matrix of history (Wineburg, 2001, p. 68).

In Wineburg's formulation, historians work through primary sources as if they were prosecuting attorneys; they do not merely listen to testimony but actively draw it out by putting documents side by side, locating discrepancies and questioning sources and delving into the historical conscious and unconscious motives as revealed through multiple sources. The locus of authority for historians is in the questions they formulate and meanings they construct rather than the content of the sources per se. In the final act, historians synthesize documentary evidence into a coherent interpretation of what happened in the past and why historical events and developments took place (Wineburg, 2001, p. 77).

Wineburg discovered that historians who are not experts in a particular historical period or region still made good sense out of documents and evidence unfamiliar



documents placed before them because they knew how to think historically. The thinking processes included (a) making interpretations of historical documents; (b) understanding the nature of different kinds of sources, their strengths and limitations; (c) checking and cross checking details and versions of events contained in the sources; (d) judging the validity and reliability of the sources in order to construct defensible interpretations; and (e) making sense of an author's position in the account. Wineburg (1991, 2001) found that these thinking processes are revealed by "expert" historians as they interpret historical artifacts and documents.

These heuristic processes what historians perform even before reading the content of historical documents (sourcing heuristic), what they do to relate the documents to each other (corroborative heuristic), what they do to describe the time frame and conditions when the documents were produced (contextualization). Historians narrated documents by placing them within the context of historical developments in other times or places (comparative thinking). These are the basic processes of historical thinking and their presence, or lack thereof, can stand as measures an individual's historical thinking ability (Wineburg, 1991).

Historical thinking is actively constructed by a person and is subjective and context bound (Wineberg, 1991, p. 74). It involves active construction of meaning, problem solving, and critical thinking. Historians examine primary sources by "asking" about a credentials, purpose, motivations, and biases of a document's author at the time a document was written. Professional historians also evaluate for whom the document was intended. They contextualize the content of the historical sources. Altogether these processes enables them to detect ways of perceiving and thinking that are distinctly



historical. Historians differentiate, moreover, between their perspectives and those of people in the historical documents (Wineburg, 1991, p. 74). To confirm their interpretation of historical sources, they corroborate sources by comparing them with other primary sources (inter-documentary comparisons) as well as among other historians' perspectives (Wineburg, 1991).

Wineburg's pathbreaking methodology was used in subsequent studies on historical thinking skills conducted by Seixas (1994, 1998), Levstik and Barton (2001), Yeager and Wilson (1997), Fehn and Koeppen (1998), Bohan and Davis (1998), and Wunder (2002). The constructivist nature of Wineberg's heuristic as a theoretical framework was chosen also for this study because it is both complex and interactive and suits the development of historical thinking skills and understanding (Bohan & Davis, 1998; Fehn & Koeppen, 1998). Additionally, in order to analyze the teaching strategies that subjects of this study utilized to transfer their historical understanding to history lesson planning for secondary students, I based my theoretical assumptions on Shulman's (1987) pedagogical content knowledge theory (PCK).

### Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Shulman (1987) outlines knowledge a good teacher possesses: content knowledge; general pedagogical knowledge (i.e., teaching strategies and classroom activities); curriculum knowledge (e.g., materials and programs); knowledge of the learners and their characteristics, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values (Grant & VanSledright, 2001). Teaching for actualization of student learning is a complex process that involves the interaction of three major components;



students, subject matter content, and learning theory. Good teaching involves successful integration of these three components.

Teaching for student learning instead of transmission of the subject matter requires a thorough, in-depth knowledge of the students, subject matter content, and learning theories (Dunlap et al, 2004). This thorough, in-depth knowledge is referred to as the student knowledge base, the content knowledge base, and the learning knowledge base (Shulman, 1987). A knowledge base refers to a clearly defined body of knowledge and skills held in common by practitioners in the field and not generally possessed by the public. This body of knowledge is undergirded by theory, research, and a set of professional values and ethics (Dunlap, et al, 2004). Possession of these three knowledge bases does not guarantee good teaching, but good teaching requires correct integration, interaction, and balance of the three knowledge bases through pedagogical processes.

Pedagogy refers to various instructional strategies, methods, and processes used by teachers to enable students to learn. PCK includes the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized and presented for instruction (Shulman, 1987, p. 8). PCK requires that the content scope and sequence be aligned with the learning process. In the context of this study, the focus is upon the historical thinking skills and pedagogical knowledge possessed by pre-service history teachers. To what extent did the subjects of this study establish content goals and select instructional processes and activities that revealed “expert” historical thinking skills (Wineburg, 1991) and pedagogical content knowledge in history?





Shulman (1987) described PCK as the cognitive ability to construct ways to represent and to formulate a subject that makes it comprehensible to others. PCK in history includes special attributes that enable teachers to transfer knowledge of content and skills to others, which differentiates a history teacher from a subject specialist such as a professional historian (Geddis, 1993). PCK has an integrative element that blends the knowledge of subject matter, pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of how students learn, as well as curricular knowledge. The process of blending these elements in cognitive terms is the process of pedagogical reasoning and action (Shulman, 1987).

Shulman (1987) assumed that teaching is initiated by some form of “text” either in the form of a textbook, a syllabus, or primary source materials. In the context of this study, these materials include historical artifacts or documents. Given these premises when given a “text” a teacher will begin a cycle of cognitive activities which reflect his or her pedagogical action and reasoning. The reasoning process involves a cycle through the activities of comprehension, transformation, instruction, evaluation, and reflection. At the end of this process the teacher develops a new and richer comprehension of what had been taught and how to teach it.

Before teaching a “text” a teacher must comprehend critically the purpose of the ideas being taught, the subject matter structures and the ideas within and outside the discipline (Shulman, 1987). Teachers are expected to understand what they teach and, when possible, to understand it in several ways. They also should understand how the ideas of the “texts” that they teach relates to other ideas within the subject areas and to ideas in other subjects as well.



With regard to this study, a pre-service history teacher should critically understand the concept of historical thinking skills and the concept of primary sources and artifacts as the content of history. They should be comfortable with the notion of historical knowledge as a human construction. They should understand that students are active meaning makers, building understandings to refine and construct new understandings (Grant & VanSledright, 2001). Pre-service teachers in possession of PCK would employ instructional strategies that encourage students to make meaning by analyzing and interpreting historical documents, demand active student participation, and recognize that students may come to differing conclusions, as expressed for example in the construction of historical narratives (Grant & VanSledright, 2001).

Central to the conception of PCK is the notion of transformation which is a reasoning process by which teachers go from being able to comprehend subject matter for themselves to the ability to organize it in new ways. Through pedagogical reasoning, they transform raw content and abstract thinking skills into meaningful representations of concepts that could be understood and practiced by students. Shulman (1987) explicitly structured the process of transformation into four cyclical phases, which are preparation, representation, selection, and adaptation.

Preparation involves evaluating and critically interpreting the objective of instruction in terms of a teacher's understanding of the subject matter. In the context of this study, the pre-service teachers should understand the interpretive nature of history as a subject. In constructing the objectives of their lesson, they should also understand the purpose of learning history in terms of both process (historical thinking skills) and historical content (*National Standards for History*, 1996). During preparation of lessons





for students the history teacher scrutinizes teaching material and makes decisions concerning what and how to teach it. During the preparation process, the teacher needs to detect and correct errors in the teaching materials and structures and divides the material into forms suitable for teaching. The preparation process draws upon the teacher's understanding of the content and of instructional materials and strategies (Shulman, 1987). The vital part of history teaching is to teach historical thinking and the most appropriate materials to exercise these skills is through the analysis of historical sources and artifacts (Wineburg, 2001; VanSledright, 2004; Drake & Brown, 2003; Levstik & Barton, 2001). So it is essential that pre-service teachers know how to select appropriate historical sources and instructional strategies that effectively cultivate those skills.



In representing the prepared materials and objectives, the teacher needs to think through important aspects of the lesson and identify various ways of representing them to students. The teacher needs to think about analogies, metaphors, examples, demonstrations, and simulations to build bridges between the teacher's comprehension and what is desired for the students. Effective lessons should have multiple forms of representation to adapt to the diverse needs of the curricular materials, lesson objectives and target audience. In this study, the pre-service teachers should select appropriate historical primary sources that represent the topic that they are planning so that the secondary school student may critically analyze them and provide a defensible interpretation of the sources presented to him or her.



The next phase of knowledge transformation is the instructional selection phase. It occurs when the teacher moves from the reformulation of content through representation into instructional forms or methods (Shulman, 1987). Here, the teacher draws upon his





instructional repertoire of approaches or teaching strategies. An effective teacher has a rich repertoire, including conventional alternatives such as lecture, demonstration, recitation, as well as forms of cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching, discovery learning, project methods, and outside classroom activities (Shulman, 1987). An effective history teacher should be able to select and coordinate a repertoire of active learning strategies such as document analysis techniques and group discussion methods that cultivate historical thinking. (Drake & Brown, 2003; Levstik & Barton, 2001; VanSledright, 2004; Wineburg, 2001).

The final reasoning process that occurs before actual teaching is that of adaptation. Adaptation is the process of fitting the represented material to the characteristics of the students and content (Shulman, 1987). The teacher must ask questions such as: What are the characteristics of the domain being taught? What are the relevant aspects of student ability, gender, language, culture, motivations, or prior knowledge and skills that will affect their responses to different forms of representation and presentation? What student conceptions, misconceptions, expectations, motives, difficulties, or strategies might influence the ways in which they approach, interpret, understand, or misunderstand the material? Together, these thought processes will result in a plan, or set of strategies, to present a lesson, unit, or course. The questions enable a kind of rehearsal for the performances of teaching which have not yet been implemented (Shulman, 1987). Well – trained pre-service teachers should be able to blend the nature of history as craft and subject, as well as the characteristics of the secondary school students, in order to plan effective lessons.

After the planning phase of PCK, the teacher will implement what is planned.



Instruction is an activity that consists of observable performance of a variety of teaching acts. It includes organizing and managing the classroom; presenting clear and vivid descriptions; assigning and checking assignments; interacting effectively with students through questions and probes, answering questions, fielding reactions, as well as offering praise and helpful criticism (Shulman, 1987, p. 17).

The next phase of PCK is the evaluation phase. During this phase, the teacher checks for understanding while the lesson is in progress and evaluates assignments, and gives grades and information as feedback. To comprehend students' understanding requires in depth understanding of the processes of learning and the materials being taught and the ability to grasp the comprehension and transformation as described above that is specific to the domain and topic being taught.

After evaluating the implementation of the lesson, the teacher will reflect on the teaching and learning that occurred. The teacher will review, reenact, and recapture the events, emotions and accomplishments, and the teacher will learn through this reflection. The last phase of the PCK process is when the teacher gains new comprehension of the characteristics of the subject to be taught, of the students, and of the process of pedagogy (Shulman, 1987).

The PCK theoretical framework helps clearly formulate and address questions of how pre-service teachers learn to teach subjects and skills that they already know or are in the process of learning. The characteristics of PCK make it a useful choice for researching and comparing the relationship between the historical thinking skills and teaching approaches. This study specifically examined the transformation process by analyzing the pre-service teachers' lesson plans and identifying the historical sources the



teacher selected for their topic and how they utilized them in their plans.

### Methodology

The purpose of this study is to identify and describe thinking processes, specifically the historical thinking and pedagogical thinking processes of pre-service history teachers. For this purpose, and because of the characteristics of the historical thinking and understanding that are being studied, the qualitative research method was chosen. This method is capable of capturing and illuminating the cognitive processes that generate detailed understanding of how people such as teachers think (Croft, 1994). Also, qualitative approaches can unveil the beliefs and thinking of participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1981), which is essential to describe the cognitive processes and the pedagogical reasoning of the research subjects. In other words, the qualitative research method employed in this study helps to systematically describe the historical thinking skills and pedagogical reasoning of the participants of this study. This study was a qualitative inquiry because the inquiry paradigm fit with the epistemological assumptions of the constructivist nature of historical thinking skills (Wineburg, 2001; Fehn, 1998) and the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987).

### The Inquiry Process

Raw data were collected through a semi-structured interview based on document analysis. The interviews were transcribed and data analysis was done by giving codes to the data and assigning those codes to that of the framework of historical thinking skills and PCK that is conceptualized by Wineburg (1991, 2001) and Shulman (1987)

respectively. I served as the data collector. According to Goodwin and Goodwin (1996), interviewing is the best way to ascertain information regarding participants' perceptions and thoughts. Semi-structured interviews utilized in this study allowed for flexibility to gather maximum from the study participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The semi-structured interview used in this study was built around core questions, allowing me to manage the overall direction of the interview and explore emergent ideas.

Document collection was another of my data sources. This method consisted of viewing, coding, and content analysis the participants' lesson plans. The advantages of documents are that they are non-reactive to the investigator and lend stability and credibility to further inquiry. Moreover, they present a natural source of information that is taken from a specific context (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). In this case the context was a secondary social studies methods course within which participants prepared lesson plans designed for use with secondary school history students. Lesson plans that the participants developed were photocopied for analysis. Lesson plans revealed information regarding a pre-service teacher's roles and the communication process of the planned lesson.

### Sampling

Purposive sampling was utilized, which and is appropriate when working with information rich cases (Patton, 1990). The crucial factor is not the number of participants but the potential of each subject to contribute to the development of insights and understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988). The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the pre-service teachers with regard to their historical thinking



skills and pedagogical reasoning. This study intended to ascertain whether or not there were similarities or differences in the historical thinking skills and the reasoning and transference to lesson planning of pedagogical thinking skills among pre-service teachers in a social studies method class. If there were differences between subjects with respect to historical or pedagogical thinking skills, the study sought to explain them. Explanation of differences in performance was detectable from subject interviews as well as the lesson plans the participants formulated.

In relation to the above purposes, the participants of this study were selected because they were students in a social studies methods class, had taken college level history classes, and intended to teach history in the future. They were selected from the same university where the researcher was studying.

### Data analysis

Data analysis consisted of making sense of raw data by organizing them into categories and discerning patterns. This study employed Wineburg (1991, 2001) and VanSledright's, (2004) historical heuristic processes to determine the robustness of the historical thinking skills exhibited by the participants and Shulman's (1987) PCK transformation process to illuminate how subjects planned to use historical primary sources to teach secondary student elements of historical thinking.

### Limitation of the Study

The study is limited to the description of the characteristics of historical thinking skills of five pre-service teachers in a social studies methods course and their lesson plans





employing primary sources to teach historical thinking skills. The description of the participants' historical thinking skills is limited to those framed by Wineburg, (1991, 2001; VanSledright, 2004). The description of the selection and the utilization of the primary sources are limited to the transformation process of the PCK concepts as defined by Shulman (1987) and to the techniques used to develop historical thinking skills without specific consideration of the characteristics of the learners (secondary school students). The description of the effectiveness of the selection and the utilization of the primary sources in teaching historical thinking skills is benchmarked against the criteria suggested in the literature review and specifically suggested by Wineburg, (2001) and, to a lesser extent, VanSledright (2004). Even though the methods course required pre-service teachers to implement the lesson plan with their peers, this study did not analyze the lesson's implementation.

This study was also limited by the ability of the researcher to explain highly critical analysis in the English language. English is the second language of the researcher, and with this limited capability the researcher was only able to narrate the study through language that is within his grasp.





## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study concerns the historical thinking skills of secondary social studies pre-service teachers as they underwent training in a social studies methods class at a midwestern public university. The study is also concerned with the descriptions of their historical thinking skills and the teaching strategies that they designed a lesson plan for demonstration and to describe probable relationships between these two aspects of teaching and learning history.

This study employed the descriptions of historical thinking skills, effective history teachings and PCK that stem from the work of Wineburg (1991, 2001), Shulman (1986) and supported by other researchers such as Seixas (1994, 1998) and Drake and Brown (2003). A significant body of research literature has emerged to elicit and describe the historical thinking skills of professional historians, in-service secondary history teachers, and elementary school history teachers. In addition, theoretical proposals have been described to connect historical thinking to more or less robust methods for teaching history to elementary and secondary students. To provide background for this study's examination of pre-service teachers' historical thinking and their history lesson planning this chapter focuses on three topics: (a) the nature of historical thinking skills and understanding; (b) the teaching strategies that encourages their development; and (c) the concept of pedagogical content knowledge.





History is infinitely more complex and more interesting and profoundly more mysterious than facts. As simple information, history is of little use other than on fact based examinations (Smith, 1977). History is an ill-structured domain because history represents "patterns of thought that take root in particular historical moments, develop, grow and emerge in new successive forms while still bearing traces of their former selves" (Wineburg, 2001, p. 6). Historical knowledge involves reconstructing the past based on what can be interpreted from residues, traces, artifacts, and texts (VanSledright, 2000).

Historical knowledge is cumulative (VanSledright, 2000), and the more one knows the more one is in a position to learn the outcome of previous learning that provides the context within which new learning occurs. Building contextual understanding is fundamental to history, and it requires a combination of source-based inquiry and the study of others' scholarly works. Historical thinking, in contrast to other domains of cognitive processes, approaches all content explicitly. It takes thinking apart, weaves new thinking into old, assesses thinking, and applies thinking. Historical thinking is thinking that connects pieces of evidence in a manner that is clear, accurate, and defensible (Wineburg, 2001).

In order to understand an ill-structured knowledge domain such as history, we have to possess cognitive flexibility. Cognitive flexibility is the ability to reconstruct and reevaluate historical events through metacognition. Understanding history requires the ability to do metacognition and the recognition that thinking is never context free (Wineburg, 2001).

The presence of historical thinking skills in an individual could be identified by