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PREPARING PRESERVICE SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS FOR COMMON CORE

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Abstract

For history and social studies educators, the Common Core standards present a new challenge, asking teachers explicitly to integrate literacy skills into their instruction. As K-12 and higher education institutions think about how to support teachers to meet this charge (Gewertz, 2012b; Sawchuk, 2012), this study uses the work of preservice teachers to examine how they address and fail to address Common Core standards. Our findings are based on qualitative analysis of unit plans (105 lessons) from preservice secondary history teachers. Analysis was completed on individual lessons and then on each unit holistically. Finally the units were analyzed collectively in order to draw more generalized findings. This study identifies specific aspects of the standards where educators are more likely to struggle with implementation of the Common Core ELA standards and provides suggestions on how teacher educators can better prepare preservice secondary history teachers to attend to the framework.

As educators grapple with the implementation of the Common Core standards, there is a prevailing sense that the initiatives for mathematics and English language arts offer a major departure from previous reform efforts (Alberti, 2012/2013; McTighe & Wiggins, 2012; Shanahan, 2012/2013) and require “profound shifts” in instructional practices (Gewertz, 2012a). For history and social studies educators, the Common Core Standards present a new challenge, asking teachers explicitly to integrate literacy skills into their instruction. Recent Common Core-aligned assessments indicate a lack of preparedness of teachers and students (Ujifusa, 2013). As K-12 and higher education institutions think about how to support their teachers to meet this charge (Gewertz, 2012b; Jones & King, 2012; Sawchuk, 2012; Zygouris-Coe, 2012), this study uses the work of preservice secondary history teachers to examine how they address, and how they fail to address, Common Core standards, offering suggestions on how to revise methods courses and construct professional development opportunities to meet gaps in current practice.

Literature Review

This study utilizes the *Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (CCSS) as a lens to examine how the work of preservice history teachers addresses literacy skills. Designed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) primarily as a guide

to foster “college and career ready” skills in English language arts (ELA), the standards provide broad skills-based guidelines for reading, writing, speaking/listening, and language. In addition, the document outlines specific reading and writing skills germane to the disciplines of history and social studies. These standards prompt students to engage with complex primary and secondary sources, identify significant textual details and structures, integrate new knowledge, and produce writing that synthesizes multiple texts and perspectives. As states have yet to adopt a national framework for content and skills in social studies,¹ the CCSS has become central to framing social studies instruction around the explicit integration of literacy skills. This new shift places disciplinary literacy at the center where content and literacy are developed in tandem (Zygouris-Coe, 2012).

Disciplinary literacy “is an emphasis on the knowledge and abilities possessed by those who create, communicate, and use knowledge within the disciplines” (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012, p. 8), and each discipline has its own discourse, particularly around the use of text (O’Brien, Moje, & Stewart, 2001; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). In particular, “disciplinary literacy emphasizes the unique tools that the experts in a discipline use to engage in the work of that discipline” (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012, p. 8). Subject-specific reading and writing practices require different metacognitive skills and strategies across the disciplines. When examining social studies texts, readers utilize historical thinking heuristics (Wineburg, 1991) around sourcing, corroboration, and contextualization. Their reading of text is informed by their knowledge of the source’s author, time period in which the source was created, and the source’s relationship with other historical events and other texts.

The Common Core’s emphasis on literacy surfaces amid concerns that as students face increasingly complex texts in middle and high school, they lose the necessary literacy instruction to sufficiently interrogate the texts (Zygouris-Coe, 2012). To address this gap, the role of secondary teachers, therefore, is to explicitly provide discipline-specific literacy instruction. Research suggests that even secondary preservice teachers who have taken literacy methods courses tend to ignore literacy strategies in teaching their content area (Bain, 2012; Lenski & Thieman, 2013).

Although our work is informed by research around disciplinary literacy in social studies, the purpose of our study is more pragmatic and granular. The CCSS outlines a particular set of skills that social studies teachers will need to address. As teacher educators, we examine the extent to which our preservice history teachers considered those specific literacy skills in their lesson planning. Our intent was not to debate whether or not the CCSS literacy skills are the most appropriate skills for social studies instruction but to examine how our instructional practices align with new CCSS expectations in order to best support our teacher candidates to meet the new charge.

¹ In 2013, the National Council for the Social Studies released the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History* to inform state revisions to social studies curriculum, but the framework, at the time of this article, has not been adopted nationwide.

Research Methods

This study draws upon unit plans developed by 15 preservice secondary history teachers in an undergraduate methods course at a small, liberal arts college in a large city in Massachusetts during their junior or senior year in fall of 2012. The participants were all white and ranged in age between 20 to 22 years old. These demographics are representative of both the college and the teaching force in surrounding communities. This was the only course the preservice teachers took that focused specifically on learning to teach history at the middle/secondary level. The final assessment in the course – a unit plan – asked students to create seven sequential lesson plans related to an essential question and a culminating performance-based assessment. These 15 units (105 lessons) provided an opportunity to identify which aspects of the CCSS, if any, preservice teachers considered in their planning at the time the state adopted the new standards. The limited sample size is due to the small size of the education program at the college. The 15 units collected were a nearly complete set of units from one cohort of secondary history prospective teachers.

As the two researchers in this study, our background includes teaching preservice social studies/history methods courses at various colleges and universities in Massachusetts for nearly a decade. One of the researchers taught the methods course from which the units in this study were collected. After reviewing the related literature, we designed our study to address the following question: How did preservice secondary history teachers integrate ideas from the Massachusetts Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies (MACCSS) ² into their unit plans during the “transition period” that occurred after statewide adoption but before implementation of the standards? ³ Our findings are based on our individual and combined qualitative analysis of 15 unit plans, where each unit plan was considered a case. As George and Bennett (2005) suggest, the strongest means of drawing inferences from cases is a combination of within-case and cross-case comparison of a relatively small number of cases. As such, we first completed independent analysis of the individual lessons in each unit. Next, each unit was examined holistically, and finally, the cases (units) were analyzed collectively in order to draw more generalized findings. We developed a detailed rubric to identify each lesson’s focus/or lack of focus on key elements found in the MACCSS. For grades 6 to 12, the MACSS outlines 10 standards for reading and 10 standards for writing in history/social studies. We structured each within-case analysis around the general categories of the reading and writing standards (see Table 1).

Evidence of each standard was identified on a three-point scale (“0” no evidence, “1” limited evidence, “2” sufficient evidence). We worked together to develop inter-rater reliability in use of the rubric prior to independent analysis. This process included lengthy discussions about what qualified as “limited” and “sufficient” evidence. We selected exemplars denoting what did and did not qualify as both “limited” and “sufficient” evidence. After completing analysis, we discussed each point where our analyses differed, and determined a final score for each lesson.

² See full document at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/commoncore/>.

³ The preservice teachers in this study finished their preparation program after Massachusetts adopted, but had yet to implement, the CCSS. Many of these participants were novice teachers during the first two years of state implementation of the standards.

TABLE 1

Categories for Reading and Writing Standards

| Reading Standards | Writing Standards |
|---|---|
| Key Ideas and Details | Text Types and Purposes |
| Craft and Structure | Production and Distribution of Writing |
| Integration of Knowledge and Ideas | Research to Build and Present Knowledge |
| Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity | Range of Writing |

Note. Adapted from the Massachusetts Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011.

Collaboratively, we identified key elements of individual cases and then compared them across cases. The process of identifying thematic similarities along with variation led to developing assertions about what preservice teachers emphasized and failed to emphasize. Our intention was to bring into view areas where preservice history teachers already met the expectations of the MACCSS and those areas where a gap existed. To do this, we created a series of matrices, which substantially reduced and decontextualized individual case data and allowed us to see patterns across the 15 cases (105 lessons). We examined the lessons exclusively through the lens of the MACCSS; this paper does not address the degree to which teacher candidates incorporated elements of what we consider to be best practices in social studies instruction (such as engaging students in historical thinking and inquiry) but rather the literacy practices in these lessons.

Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies Grades 9-12

The MACCSS reading standards are grouped into four categories: key ideas and details, craft and structure, integration of knowledge and ideas, and text complexity. Table 2 illustrates the scores we assigned to all of the lessons based on their attention to the reading standards. As a whole, the preservice teachers lacked significant attention to these standards.

Key Ideas and Details

The three standards under the category of *key ideas and details* focus on helping students evaluate evidence in order to analyze primary and secondary sources, make sense of relationships among details, and evaluate explanations. This category received the highest scores. All unit plans included at least one of the three standards and all but four units included each of the three standards. The first standard—cite textual evidence to analyze primary and secondary sources—was included in just 21 lessons. One of these lessons asked students to read Copernicus’s “The Earth and the Heavenly Spheres” and complete a worksheet examining the text, context, and subtext (Lesh, 2011), using questions such as:

TABLE 2

Reading Standards in Literacy for History/Social Studies

| Standard | Score | | |
|--|-------|----|----|
| | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Key Ideas and Details | | | |
| Cite textual evidence to analyze primary and secondary sources (like date or origin of info—see how fits with understanding whole) | 18 | 16 | 5 |
| Central ideas of source and make sense of relationship among details (summary of source) | 69 | 34 | 2 |
| Evaluate explanations for actions/events (like cause/effect) | 86 | 18 | 1 |
| Craft and Structure | | | |
| Determine meaning of vocabulary in context | 100 | 2 | 3 |
| Analyze how a complex source is organized (how parts contribute to the whole) | 104 | 1 | 0 |
| Evaluate different authors' viewpoints on same topic | 95 | 9 | 1 |
| Integration of Knowledge and Ideas | | | |
| Integrate and evaluate diverse sources of information (including quantitative sources, media, etc.) | 94 | 9 | 2 |
| Evaluate an author's argument by corroborating or challenging them with other info | 100 | 5 | 0 |
| Compares 2 or more sources to build knowledge, noting discrepancies (note difference between primary and secondary sources) | 88 | 14 | 3 |
| Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity | | | |
| Text complexity is determined using a combination of researcher determination and Lexilea ^a score when possible. | 78 | 7 | 20 |

Note. The standards were adapted from the "Massachusetts Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies" by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011.

^aA Lexile score is a measurement developed by MetaMetrics that is used in many schools to identify the reading level of a text and match readers to grade-appropriate text.

- Examining the context: What was going on during the time period? What background information do you have that helps explain the information found in the text?
- Examining the subcontext: Who created the source and what do you know about that person?, For whom was the source created? Why was this source produced when it was?

However, the example was an exception. On the whole, the preservice teachers failed to provide the necessary scaffolding for students to develop skills of textual analysis used by historians.

Most of our preservice teachers included at least one of the two remaining standards into their unit—identifying central ideas of a source/making relationships among details and/or evaluating cause and effect. An example was found in a lesson where students read *The History and Description of Africa (Timbuktu)*, attributed to Leo Africanus, and answered specific questions to guide student thinking. Questions included: What are some important points the author made? How does this help you understand the history behind it? What facts does the reader need to know in order to understand the author's message? Such questions provided a centralized focus on student comprehension of the text and highlighted the relationship between the text and other historical events from the time period.

Craft and Structure

The three *craft and structure* standards for secondary history center on vocabulary understanding, text organization, and evaluating viewpoints on the same topic. Our analysis found almost no lessons with explicit focus on either vocabulary development or learning about text organization. The third and final standard asks students to “evaluate different authors’ viewpoints on same topic.” Although evaluating viewpoints was a topic highlighted in the methods courses, six of the fifteen units failed to incorporate even one lesson addressing different viewpoints, while the remaining nine units featured only one lesson with this skill in each unit.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Our analysis of the three standards under *integration of knowledge and ideas* found limited emphasis on either of the first two standards—integrating and evaluating diverse sources and assessing arguments through corroboration. In fact, just five lessons asked students to practice the skill of corroboration. Figure 1 details an example of an assessment from a Great War unit where a preservice teacher had an opportunity to introduce corroboration but failed to do so. The lesson provides evidence of the third *craft and structure* standard, previously described, about evaluating author's argument or point of view. However, it fails to take the next step in evaluating an author's argument by corroborating.

The final standard under *integration of knowledge and ideas* asks teachers to provide opportunities for students to “compare two or more sources building knowledge, noting discrepancies.” This supports students as they learn to corroborate two or more sources. Across the analyzed units, it was clear the preservice history teachers generally expected a superficial understanding of sources. They expected students to be able to read and understand the sources with little scaffolding of the comprehension process. For instance, some preservice teachers used terms such as text, subtext, context (Lesh, 2011) or sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration (Wineburg, 1991) in lesson plans, but failed to deconstruct the terms with their students. In one lesson on the Byzantine Empire a preservice teacher wrote:

The primary sources provided for the students are edited but are still challenging to read, which will allow the students practice using primary documents as well as using their skills in subtext, text, and context.

FIGURE 1

Packet of primary sources leading up to the United States entering The Great War

Great War Assessment

Read each excerpt provided, make sure to note the date and author of each and answer on a separate sheet of paper, the following questions for each document.

Sources include: U.S. Declaration of Neutrality: (1914); *Lusitania* Warning from Germany; U.S. Protest to Sinking of *Lusitania* (Bryan, 1915); Zimmerman Telegram (1917); Zimmerman's Comments on His Telegram; and Wilson's Declaration of War (1917)

- Who is the source?
- Describe the context.
- What is the author's point of view?
- Why is this important?
- How does this help you understand the history behind it?
- What facts does the reader need to know in order to understand the author's message?

We selected this example because it shows how the preservice history teacher expected students to be proficient in using advanced skills to analyze primary source information but provided little scaffolding to help students achieve this goal of “doing history” (Lesh, 2011), which was explored at length in the methods course.

Text Complexity

The reading standard *range of reading and level of text complexity* suggests preservice history teachers should include an assortment of readings with varying levels of difficulty in their unit plans. This standard received the most frequent scores at the highest level, with 20 lesson plans receiving a score of “2.” Examples of sources used in the lessons included quotes by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*, Rousseau's *Social Contract*, an excerpt from Adam Smith, President Wilson's war declaration, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, *Declaration of Rights of Man*, a political cartoon on the Six Day War in Israel, and a speech by Fidel Castro. Although inclusion of such sources provided clear evidence of intent to challenge students, there was little scaffolding of the reading comprehension process. Preservice teachers expected students to be able to read, comprehend, and analyze these challenging documents on their own for homework or during class time. For example, in one lesson, students were asked to read the United States Declaration of Independence in 10 minutes and summarize the main points. Such expectations are of concern because the documents would be challenging for many college students to understand at the level described in the lesson plans.

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies Grades 9-12

The preservice teachers in this study were more likely to address the MACCSS standards for reading than the writing standards. Overall, these preservice teachers created lessons that required minimal writing activities, and when they did incorporate writing, their assignments

rarely met the intent of the MACCSS writing standards. As Table 3 illustrates, the majority of the lessons that we examined received a “0” or a “1” with minimal attention to the writing standards. There were only three lessons that scored a “2” on any of the writing standards.

Text Types and Purposes

The first MACCSS writing standards for *text types and purposes* identify three different types of writing: argumentative, informative/explanatory, and narrative, and emphasize the use of evidence and details to support written claims. When preservice teachers in this study planned instruction, they provided few opportunities to write extensively and often saved writing assignments as a final culminating assessment. For the individual lessons, preservice history teachers mainly asked students to write short answer responses to worksheet questions or exit tickets. The short answers often focused on writing down the definition of a concept or recalling a fact covered in class. For example, one preservice teacher described his assignment as follows:

In closing, I will ask students to write down the three most interesting/new things they learned in class and why they found them so interesting. They will pass in their responses before leaving class. This will allow me to see what really engaged the students as well as see what they learned in class.

TABLE 3
Writing Standards in Literacy for History/Social Studies

| Standard | Score | | |
|--|-------|----|---|
| | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Text Types and Purposes | | | |
| Establish clear relationships among claims in writing Introduce claims, develop counterclaims, use formal style | 95 | 24 | 1 |
| Production and Distribution of Writing | | | |
| Produce clear/coherent writing | 99 | 20 | 1 |
| Plan, revise, edit and rewrite | 115 | 5 | 0 |
| Use technology to produce, publish, and share writing | 117 | 3 | 0 |
| Research to Build and Present Knowledge | | | |
| Conduct short and more sustained research projects | 100 | 20 | 0 |
| Gather sources and draw evidence from multiple types of sources | 105 | 14 | 1 |

Note. The standards were adapted from the Massachusetts Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011.

As formative assessment, this prompt asks students to recall discrete pieces of information but it does not promote extensive articulation of thought through writing.

Production and Distribution of Writing

The set of standards under *production and distribution of writing* focus on the writing process, revision, peer collaboration, and the ways in which students distribute their writing. Preservice history teachers spent little time addressing the planning and revision of writing. We found no examples of preservice teachers creating opportunities for students to write an outline, construct multiple writing drafts, or engage in peer editing. Assignments did not explicitly mention or require revision, which suggests that these preservice teachers did not think about the process or presumed students would revise on their own. Similarly, there were no examples where students were asked to use technology to produce, publish, and share writing. Clearly, the production and distribution of writing was not a priority for these preservice teachers.

Research to Build and Produce Knowledge

Standards under *research to build and produce knowledge* focus on short and sustained research, gathering various sources, and using textual evidence to support analysis. Few units explicitly asked students to conduct research or synthesize multiple sources to support their argument. When preservice teachers asked students to use evidence, it was superficial. For example, students were asked to provide a one-page response to the following prompt: “Do you think the U.N. made the correct decision with the creation of Israel? Why/why not? Feel free to use information from past classes to support your answer, as well as from the exercise today.” To thoroughly answer this question, students would need to gather and analyze multiple sources of evidence and viewpoints, as indicated by the MACCSS. However the prompt states, “feel free to use information,” which suggests that research is an afterthought. Assignments like the example above provided few directions or scaffolds on how students could gather their own sources to conduct research. The underlying assumption of these assignments is that students will conduct research for their writing but there was no guidance in the description – or in any of the supporting lesson materials we analyzed – to guide students in the research process.

Range of Writing

The standard range of writing looks at the degree to which students routinely write for short and extended time frames for a variety of purposes. On the whole, there were minimal opportunities for writing. During individual lessons, preservice teachers engaged students with short writing activities such as exit tickets. These prompts were primarily recall or narrative where students wrote short answers or a paragraph related to the work they completed for homework or in class. Instances of sustained writing were more likely to appear in culminating assessments for the unit. In the assessments we examined, preservice teachers assessed student understanding through items such as a scrapbook, a newscast, or a written diary. These assignments were frequently performance-based, which meant that students did not engage in formal writing or focus on argumentative claims. Every unit included an opportunity for students to undertake a sustained research project but the assessments varied in depth and lacked scaffolds, detailed instructions, and/or structure.

Conclusions and Implications

This study provides only a partial glimpse into the practices of teacher candidates at a time in their preparation where the Common Core ELA standards were not an instructional priority. As such, we recognize that our account is incomplete and plan to use our findings as a baseline for future study. As a result of these findings, we plan to implement changes in our methods courses and then conduct a follow-up study looking at the next cohort's unit plans.

This work has a number of implications for social studies instruction and the Common Core. First, the preservice teachers in this study routinely met and often exceeded the standards for text complexity. The primary source texts they used would be considered above grade-level. A central focus of the methods course was using primary source texts, and it is a practice accepted as strong social studies instruction (NCSS, 2013; VanSledright, 1996). This suggests that social studies educators are comfortable with complex texts. The challenge for these preservice teachers, however, was to think about how to support students as they decode and make meaning from these complex primary sources. We see the need to better integrate the concepts under the *craft and structure* standards as a way to address historical thinking skills. Historians look at the craft and structure of a document within its historical context. The shift for the Common Core places a greater emphasis on author intent and language, whereas novice history teachers may be more focused on content and historical context. Encouraging teacher candidates to adopt approaches such as the Stanford History Education Group's framework on reading and historical thinking, which incorporates "close reading" by analyzing language and structure (Wineburg, Martin, & Monte-Sano, 2012), would be one way to integrate reading comprehension and historical thinking.

Although the lessons we examined provide only a sample of what would be a year's worth of instruction, the lack of opportunity for brief or sustained research and writing assignments suggests that these preservice teachers will also need to incorporate more research and writing opportunities to meet the goals of the new standards, as well as integrate scaffolds and requirements for their students to plan and revise writing. Addressing how to support student research skills and writing in a secondary social studies methods course would help preservice teachers recognize how to support their students in this process. The preservice teachers in this study were not required to take a literacy course during their preparation program. At a minimum, we urge social studies and ELA methods instructors to collaborate and integrate literacy skills within some aspect of the program, whether that is within the methods course or as a separate literacy course.

Another shift for social studies instruction and the CCSS is a transition in the terminology and language. It is notable that we were unable to find the term "claim" – a word used throughout the CCSS – in any of the lessons analyzed here. However, this is not surprising, since the term was not widely used in the methods course. Exposing teacher candidates to the language used in the standards will help them align their lessons to the standards.

Although we share concerns that embedding social studies within the ELA standards of the Common Core further marginalizes social studies as a discipline, we recognize, alongside others (NCSS, 2013; Wineburg et al., 2012), that literacy is central to the discipline. It is critical that

students are able to synthesize and evaluate complex texts, construct claims, and articulate their understandings in writing. The challenge now is to be more transparent and explicit about our literacy practices as we prepare new teachers to do the same with their students.

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