Student-Centered Teaching Methods in the History Classroom:

Ideas, Issues, and Insights for New Teachers

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Using student-centered teaching methods presents a great challenge to many new middle and high school history teachers. Having experienced mostly teacher-centered instructional approaches (such as lectures and teacher-led discussions) in secondary school and college classes, they begin student teaching with few models for how to teach using less traditional forms of instruction. This paper discusses "Ideas, Issues, and Insights," a strategy for prospective history teachers, as they explore the use of student-centered teaching methods with middle and high school students. It analyzes written reflection papers where history teacher candidates identify their ideas for three student-centered instructional methods — small group work, primary source analysis, and historical role-plays and simulations — as well as issues that arise when these student-centered methods are implemented in the classroom. As history teacher candidates respond to their ideas and issues, they generate insights about how they can best use student-centered teaching methods in their future classrooms. The first-person perspectives of history teacher candidates are highlighted to show how college students in one university-based teacher preparation program think about their student teaching experiences and their choice of instructional methods to use with students.

Introduction

New teachers tend to teach as they have been taught, basing classroom lessons and instructional methods on the styles and strategies they have experienced in their own schooling, or observed in the schools where they are teaching (Lortie, 1975; McCann, Johannessen, Kahn, & Flanagan, 2006; Smagorinsky & Whiting, 1995). Even when college or university teacher education courses present alternative instructional approaches, the familiar outweighs the new (Britzman, 2003).

In middle and high school classrooms, teaching history and social studies as one has been taught typically featuring lectures by the teacher, whole class discussions, memorization of facts, content drawn primarily from textbooks, an emphasis on the histories of the majority White culture, and multiple-choice tests (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hydge, 2005). These methods reflect a more than a century-long tradition of teacher-centered instruction in American education (Cuban, 1993, 2009;

Evans, 2004), heightened by an education reform movement in which "test-based accountability — not standards — became our national education policy" (Ravitch, 2010, p. 21).

Tight budgets, larger class sizes, and a standards-based educational reform movement that includes mandatory statewide competency tests have further entrenched traditional modes of teaching (Grant, 2003, 2007; Wiersma, 2008). Many history and social studies teachers who might otherwise use student-centered instructional practices now view teacher-centered instruction as the best way to teach students the large amounts of material needed for the test.

At the same time, college teacher education programs (Doppen, 2007), professional organizations including the National Council for the Social Studies (1994), and social studies educators (Cornbleth, 2002; Dunn, 2000) strongly advocate the use of student-centered teaching methods such as interactive discussions, small group work, cooperative learning, primary source analysis, creative writing, dramatic read alouds, children's and adolescent literature, democratic dialog/debate about historical issues, civic participation/community service learning, and performance-based assessments. In this view, student-centered methods prepare middle and high schoolers to become critical thinkers and decision-makers who can use the decisions and choices of people in the past to understand the issues of present and the future.

> *Teaching methods are what teachers make of them.*

For college students preparing to become middle and high school teachers, these differing emphases between teacher-centered and student-centered instructional methods create conflict and confusion. Most attended secondary schools and college history classes where teacher-centered history instruction was the primary mode of instruction. Their teacher preparation programs now urge them to employ student-centered teaching methods that are outside the norm of how they have seen history taught in schools. Teacher candidates find themselves "hugging the middle," in historian Larry Cuban's (2009) succinct phrase, between the promise of student-centered and the reality of teacher-centered instructional approaches.

In this paper, we discuss a new teacher preparation strategy called "Ideas, Issues, and Insights" that asks history and social studies teacher candidates to thoughtfully consider the "hows" and "whys" of using student-centered instructional methods with middle and high school students. "Ideas, Issues, and Insights" is a central feature of the history/social studies teacher education program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. To illustrate this approach, we present a summary of written reflections from teacher candidates about their use of three prominent student-centered teaching methods; small group work, primary source analysis, and role plays/simulations. Our analysis of these teacher reflections illustrates both the possibilities and complexities of incorporating student-centered methods into the instructional repertoires of new history teachers.

Ideas, Issues, and Insights in a History Teaching Methods Course

"Ideas," "Issues," and "Insights" encapsulate dynamics that occur whenever a teacher uses a teaching method in the classroom.

- ***Ideas*** are the academic gains and learning accomplishments that teachers believe will result from using an instructional method with students. Teachers choose teaching methods because they believe that such methods will promote student engagement, inquiry learning, individual problem solving, thoughtful analysis, individual decision-making, or some other skill or competency essential to successful history and social studies education.

- ***Issues*** are the interpersonal dynamics and instructional complexities that accompany a teaching method when it is used in actual classroom settings. Real world uses of teaching methods can produce outcomes different from those presented in teaching theory. Since no teaching approach is without potential complications, teachers must be aware of what happens — positively and negatively — when using an instructional method with students. Negative experiences, left unaddressed, may make new teachers reluctant to continue using various teaching methods with students in the future.

- ***Insights*** are the strategies that occur when teachers thoughtfully reflect about the "Ideas" and "Issues" of a teaching method **and** make plans for how they will use that method differently in the future. By synthesizing ideas and issues into insights, teachers envision new ways to use a teaching method, while discovering the essential ingredients that must be in place for that method to succeed in classroom settings. Insights generate future-focused strategies for improving how teaching and learning will happen in the future.

We have used "Ideas, Issues, and Insights" with more than 250 new history/social studies teacher candidates over the past ten years. These middle and high school level teacher candidates, all enrolled in a history teaching methods and school-based pre-practicum course, are required to teach five lessons in schools using different student-centered history teaching methods drawn from the list presented in Table 1. Candidates are then asked to obtain student feedback about at least two of these teaching methods when they use them again during the student teaching component of their program.

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Table 1. Student-Centered History Teaching Methods

Group work or Cooperative Learning (includes students working in pairs, trios, and small groups; cooperative learning using a specific cooperative learning structure).	***Technology and Research*** (includes using primary, secondary, and Internet sources correctly to analyze historical and contemporary events.
Multicultural Histories and Herstories (the experiences of people of color, women, working classes, non-western societies and cultures, and others typically excluded from the school curriculum).	***Primary Sources*** (using first person narratives, photographs, newspaper articles, speeches, artwork, or other documents as part of lessons).
Writing (incorporating students' own creative writing and self-expression).	***Literature*** (children's and adolescent fiction and nonfiction, adult fiction and nonfiction, and poetry)
Civic Ideals and Community Sercice Learning (involvement in social issues and community life, citizen involvement in politics)	***Controversy, Dialog, Debate*** (focus on controversial issues, current events, social problems, origins and problems of democracy, resistance to oppression)
Art/Music (focus on student involvement through dramatic or artistic self-expression).	***Drama, Role-Play, Simulation*** (engagement through historical re-creations, plays, and social simulations)

Note: All Student-Centered Teaching Methods are based on ***Active Learning*** includes strategies for engaging students including large and small group discussions, active note taking, visuals, materials other than the voice of the teacher, and other student involvement strategies.

After each teaching experience, our students write a two to four page reflection paper focusing on the "Ideas," "Issues," and "Insights" raised by one of the methods, explaining:

- **Ideas** gained about this teaching method for promoting student learning.

- **Issues** that arose from the lesson.

- **Insights** about future lessons that resulted from using this method.

Although we require six reflection papers, we encourage teacher candidates to teach and reflect at least ten times during their school-based prepracticum, and many more times during student teaching. As a result, candidates are constantly thinking about the "Ideas," "Issues," and "Insights" presented by student-centered teaching methods. In addition, we spend time in our methods classes on what are called "I-Team" presentations. Candidates

share the "Ideas," "Issues," and "Insights" they have as they use different methods with their students.

"Ideas, Issues, and Insights" assume that no teaching method is automatically student-centered or teacher-centered. Teaching methods are what teachers make of them. Discussing the methods in Table 1, we emphasize that teachers create student-centeredness by doing some or all of the following activities every time they teach:

- Creating opportunities for meaningful interactions and conversations among teachers and students throughout a class period.

- Using materials beyond one's own voice as a teacher such as videos, photographs, audio recordings, primary and secondary sources, and interactive websites.
- Changing the mode of instructional delivery regularly during a class period

so that there is small group and individual work time as well as large group teacher presentations.

- Incorporating student ideas and suggestions about how classes are organized and delivered as a way to promote greater student engagement and commitment to learning.

A focus on teaching and reflection differentiates "Ideas, Issues, and Insights" as a teacher preparation approach. Candidates must use different teaching methods with students, even methods they are not always comfortable with from past personal experiences. In so doing, they become a *teacher of students* and a *student of teaching*. They perform the role of teacher by designing and delivering lessons to middle and high school students. They learn about teaching by analyzing the possible advantages and potential issues associated with every instructional method, and then formulating action plans for how they will use those methods in the future with students. History/social studies teacher preparation is thus defined as a process of continual growth and development where college students learn about different instructional methods and how to make them a substantive part of their daily work in the classroom.

We have seen history and social studies teacher candidates grow as professionals as they thoughtfully consider what worked, what did not work, and what they might do differently when using student-centered teaching methods. We share that growth in the following summaries and analysis of candidate comments about small group work, primary source analysis, and role-plays and simulations.

Small Group Work

Small group work is the first student-centered teaching method we ask teacher candidates to explore in our history teaching methods course (Table 2). In theory, small group work reduces the size of the classroom for middle and high school students, making it easier for individuals to express their ideas, while becoming actively engaged in a topic of study. It offers opportunities to share ideas and information, deepening everyone's understanding of historical content. Small group work breaks the one-way flow of teacher lectures and it promotes teamwork among students, many of whom might not otherwise work and learn together (Cohen, 1994).

Table 2. Ideas, Issues, and Insights for Small Group Work

Student-Centered Teaching Method	Ideas (benefits and accomplishments)	Issues (complexities and tensions)	Insights (future plans and strategies)
Small Group Work	Groups gain the attention of students and get them to start thinking about ideas, whereas lecturing may lose their interest.	Students refuse to participate, do not get along, or one person does all the work for the group.	Groups need clearly focused academic activities that can be finished in a reasonable amount of time.
	Group work activity can ground abstract ideas in more concrete terms that are easier for students to understand.	Teachers are unsure how to assign students to groups, how long to let groups work together, and how to let groups share what they have done with the rest of the class.	Make each member of the group responsible for a portion of the group activity.

	Group work simulates the roles of citizens in a democratic society where collective action is essential to effective government.	Students may be loud and animated and spend time talking about unrelated topics, possibly distracting classmates (Build "down time" into activities).	Develop methods for moving students from large group to small groups and back to large groups.
		Standing in the front of the room and urging students to stay focused on group work is usually not sufficient to keep students on task.	Assign grades to students for group participation to focus energy on their common activity.
			Develop extension activities to give to individuals or groups who finish an activity before others.

Our teacher candidates see multiple benefits to small group work. One high school student teacher noted that, "*not only can students benefit from other students work, but . . . it is more fun to learn by talking and sharing ideas with other people*." A middle school candidate found that group work increased student involvement as they analyzed the text of The Mayflower Compact:

> *I found these methods of teaching to be very helpful in gaining the attention of the students and getting them to start thinking about the ideas, whereas lecturing on a subject may lose the interest of many people. The activity grounded the abstract ideas that we were talking about in concrete and current terms that are easy for students to understand.*

Teacher candidates commented how group work changes the classroom experience for students, sometimes in dramatic ways. One noted that group work, "*helps to promote equity in the classroom, and allows all my students to have an opportunity to learn because this method teaches students to take control of the conversation, encourages respect of other opinions, and promotes debate and critical*

thinking." Another candidate noted how "*some students who are normally shy and non-participatory in class opened up and excelled as group leaders*," although there were others who "*did not enjoy group work, felt uncomfortable and participated minimally*." Reading feedback from students after small groups completed a geography lesson on Southeast Asia, a middle school candidate was surprised by the impact of group work on student attitudes. One of this teacher's students wrote: "*I was so shy to work with people, but Mr. L. helped me to talk to people and I made new friends.*"

Our teacher candidates also tell us that small group work increases student understanding of history. Historical events become seen as more nuanced and complex when small groups consider the perspectives and actions of different societal groups. Students begin thinking about the power of ideas as well as the choices that individuals and groups make in various situations and circumstances.

Initially, teacher candidates see group work as a straightforward process; divide the class up into smaller units and conduct a planned activity. In practice, group work does not work that way, as one high school candidate stated: "*I thought that working in a group would be easy; what I learned was for some students it*

was quite difficult coming up with a consensus about classroom protocols with other students." Teacher candidates found they were unsure how to assign students to groups, how many students to put together at one time, how long students should spend in groups, and how to let groups share their work with the class. Noted one middle school student teacher:

> *I asked the students to break into groups of four, which I thought would be an easy task. Some dragged their feet while others were in groups of four or five. I could have given them a number or devised a different way to get them into groups.*

Another candidate observed that many times, "*when you allow students to choose their own groups, students who are already marginalized become even more marginalized and humiliated because no one wants to work with them.*"

Once underway, group activities do not always proceed smoothly or quietly. Students often become quite animated and loud. They spend group time talking about friends, fashion, and food rather than academic topics. Some individuals do most of the assigned work, while others do little but free ride on the efforts of peers. Some groups finish ahead of others and sit, awaiting instructions for what to do next. Some students refuse to participate, creating a potential clash of authority between the teacher and class members.

Reflecting on how to make group work succeed, teacher candidates offer four main insights. First, they recognize the importance of managing the flow of group activities, seamlessly moving students from a whole class to small groups and back to a whole class. This means that teachers need many different ways to group students, rather than relying on students to choose groups on their own. "*One way I have attempted to address this issue during larger projects that take more than one or two days,*" noted one high school teacher

candidate, is to ask "*students to write on paper who they want to work with.*" Taking into account student requests, the teacher tried to "*form the groups based on who I think will work best together.*" Students could switch groups once, but everyone received a daily grade based on how they contributed to the success of group work.

Second, new teacher candidates recognize they face regular decisions about how much to let students engage in conversation and socializing during group time. Noted one teacher candidate:

> *Students who were finished with the spreadsheet began talking about unrelated topics, possibly distracting their classmates. Through this insight, I was able to further understand student differentiation and that it is alright for certain students to have a minute or two of "down time" if they have finished an assignment early.*

Third, comparing their students' responses to small group activities versus whole class lectures, teacher candidates tell us that student passivity, not student activity, is a significant barrier to effective instruction. It is easier to refocus students engaged in conversation and a learning activity than to try to motivate youngsters disengaged by lectures or teacher-led question/answer sessions. It is also essential to have extension or independent activities ready for student group members who finish first so no one is sitting idly waiting for their peers to complete the assignment.

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Finally, teacher candidates are struck by how important it is to give middle and high school students' meaningful academic work to complete during small group time. Without activities that students find interesting and relevant, all the teacher-made rules, regulations, and routines in the world are not likely to produce learning results. One high school student teacher created a 5-4-3-2-1 activity where small groups analyzed the distribution of wealth in the world. Students were asked to list five countries they deemed rich or poor, and then place a sticky note on a large world map for each one. Once all the group choices were displayed, the students were asked to generate four observations about the map and three questions about their observations. The students then had to offer two possible explanations for one of the questions before deciding on one explanation that best explained their observation. The students responded positively to this activity, demonstrating for this teacher candidate that students will do small group work that they consider purposeful and meaningful.

Primary Source Analysis

Primary source material is the second student-centered instructional method we discuss in our history teaching methods class (Table 3). Written by real people dealing with complex issues and problems of their times, primary sources have a unique capacity to engage students in the study of the past (Schur, 2007; Veccia, 2003). Some sources are essential documents of American democracy such as the Magna Carta, Declaration of Independence, Constitution, Bill of Rights, and Declaration of Sentiments. Students gain an understanding of the principles of our society by reading and discussing these materials. Other sources (Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" or Martin Luther King's "Letter From a Birmingham Jail") present history as it was lived, from a first-person point of view that invites interpretation and analysis. As one history teacher candidate concluded:

> *Teaching the 'agreed upon' history presented by textbooks is boring and often times unfaithful to history, whether deliberate or not. Primary source documents allow us to give the students the sense of 'being there,' as well as to teach them that there are many different viewpoints of history that must be taken into consideration.*

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Table 3. Ideas, Issues, and Insights for Primary Sources

Student-Centered Teaching Method	Ideas (benefits & accomplishments)	Issues (complexities & tensions)	Insights (future plans & strategies)
Primary Sources	First-hand accounts give a more enriched understanding of how life was lived in the past. They give students the sense of "being there" as events happened	Language in sources can be difficult for students to read; students become bogged down and frustrated by not just individual words, but syntax as well.	Provide primary source texts in larger fonts with plenty of space for students to write comments and responses.
	Primary sources teach students that there are many different viewpoints that must be taken into consideration when analyzing events.	Students may not have developed their abilities to draw conclusions, think critically, and carry on a conversation about what they are reading or watching. (When students struggle with terms in a reading, stop the activity and engage in a class-wide discussion).	Use stimulating openers to get students engaged with sources; for example, use the Peters Projection Map as a way to start looking at historic maps.
	Visual primary sources (maps, photos, political cartoons, art, drawings) engage the interest of many students.		Have specific questions for students to answer while reading or after reading a primary source.
	Sources offer useful ways to connect modern day events to historical ones; for example Prohibition and marijuana repeal or the wars in Vietnam and Iraq.		Develop an ongoing vocabulary list of unfamiliar terms and concepts from sources.
	As students read primary sources more frequently, their level of comfort increases, as does their ability to interpret the material and draw out important information.		
			Preview sources before handing them to the students as a way to set the context for the material and to identify potentially confusing language and concepts.
			When students struggle with primary source material, stop a reading activity and discuss the source as a whole class.
			Invite students to create modern everyday language translations of sources.

Repeatedly in their reflections, teacher candidates described how primary sources make history meaningful for students. "*Students do not get the full impact of any event when they read history textbooks,*" stated one candidate. "*All they get are the facts. When a student reads the firsthand account of someone during any time period, they get a much more enriching understanding of how life was during the time being studied.*" Primary sources also bring historical events alive in uniquely compelling ways as one candidate found when she taught about the Lowell Mill Girls during the early industrial period in Massachusetts:

> *Students can read the factual information about a time period, but they can also get the feelings that some people had during the time. . . Students will learn that some women went to work in order to get a male family member through school. They get this fact, but they also get the feelings of the women.*

Still, using primary source materials in class raises significant issues for new teacher candidates, and for their students as well. The language of primary source documents can be difficult to read, as one new teacher candidate recalled after asking his students to interpret World War I propaganda posters. He found these documents "*bold and exciting, much more colorful and emotional than text reading,*" but some students found "*the language of images, symbols, etc. on the posters challenging to the point of frustration.*" Another candidate put her students in groups of three to read and explain the first five paragraphs from Thomas Jefferson's First Inaugural Address: "*I discovered that the students got caught up too much in the language and became bogged down and frustrated by not just the individual words, but by the syntax the address was written in.*"

Other candidates noted that many important primary sources are lengthy documents so there is never enough time in a 45- or even 90-minute

class period for students to read one entirely. Candidates found themselves unsure how to decide which parts of a document they should ask their students to read.

Developing strategies for reading and analyzing primary sources proved to be a puzzling issue for teacher candidates. Asking individual students to read dense text silently was generally ineffective. Students became bored and did not finish the assignment. Having not read or understood the material, the students were unable to discuss these documents, creating even more boredom and frustration. As one candidate noted after having his students read Martin Luther King, Jr's "I Have a Dream" Speech:

> *I expected students to understand the material without any insight from me. I thought the document was easy to understand, but I don't think that is reasonable anymore. In the future, I will analyze each document so every student has a good foundation and starting point.*

Putting students in small groups to help each other interpret a document after it has been read aloud can also be problematic. Middle and high school students often have not developed their abilities to draw conclusions, think critically, and carry on a nuanced conversation about what they are reading. Groups become stymied by the task of interpretation and efforts to discuss the material and may end up in arguments about personal opinions or beliefs.

Despite problems, teacher candidates offered the following insights about using primary sources in the classroom. First, continued exposure to primary source material generates improvements in students' analytical and interpretive skills. Noted one high school student teacher, as "*students read primary sources more frequently, their level of comfort and their ability to interpret and draw out important information will increase.*"

Second, middle and high school students need specific questions to answer as they read primary documents. One teacher candidate had his class, "*keep a running vocabulary list so the next time they read a source they will be familiar with the words.*" Another suggested, "*when students are struggling, stop the reading activity and begin a class-wide interpretation of the source.*" A third teacher used group work and a real-world scenario to focus on historical comprehension and understanding of primary sources related to Prohibition:

I explained to the students that it was 1925 and they are going to have a meeting with their Congressional representatives to try to influence their vote for or against the following proposition: 'Should the production, sale, and consumption of alcohol continue to be prohibited under the law?' I split the room so that half of the students were on the pro side of prohibition and half of the students were on the con side of prohibition. I selected five students to be our Congressional representatives. I then gave the students a selection of primary source readings that I complied along with a document analysis sheet and told them to take time to read through and mine the documents for three stellar points they could use for their debate to emphasize their position.

Third, middle and high school students enjoy creating everyday language translations of primary sources. When students re-state key terms and ideas in their own words, they gain a greater sense of ownership of the material. One middle school teacher candidate displayed a copy of the Declaration of Independence on an interactive whiteboard in the front of the classroom. As his students discussed the document and proposed everyday words as synonyms for 18th century language, he added

them above the text on the board for everyone to see. The result was lively class participation and a broadened understanding of the document by the students.

Finally, students respond when teachers use primary sources that are not just text-based documents, as one candidate after:

Musical lyrics and artistic images are great ways to foster critical thinking. When listening to music and looking at images, the information is not always there for the taking, you have to dig a little deeper to really understand it. By looking closely at each line and asking, 'Why do you think this one was written?' 'What is behind it?' 'What do they mean when they sing this?' It forces the students to look in-depth and make an interpretation. Just like when I spoke about having to listen and dissect what an artist is singing, the same is true when having to create a political cartoon or political poster.

Another candidate saw the importance of combining multiple primary sources as part of a lesson on the Vietnam War:

*After reviewing counter-culture and mainstream movements, the students had to interpret them and demonstrate their interpretations by creating "hawk/silent majority" or "dove/hippie" political cartoons or political posters. . . We read an excerpt from [*President Richard M.*] Nixon's Silent Majority speech, looked at cartoons from a counter-cultural perspective, and listened and read the lyrics of protest song.*

Role Plays and Simulations

Role-plays and simulations are a third student-centered teaching method highlighted in our history instructional methods class (Table

4). As a teaching strategy, role-plays and simulations encompass a wide range of activities from dramatizing pivotal moments (Constitutional Convention of 1787), to re-enacting key events (1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott), to conducting mock trials (famous Supreme Court cases). Such activities can be highly engaging instructional methods in history classrooms. Many students like to perform in front of an audience and the opportunity of playing a role produces greater involvement and discussion than when teachers lecture and ask questions.

Table 4. Issues, Insights, and Ideas for Role Plays & Simulations

Student-Centered Teaching Method	Ideas (benefits and accomplishments)	Issues (complexities and tensions)	Insights (future plans and strategies)
Role Plays & Simulations	Role-Plays and simulations provide fun-filled and informative ways to illustrate the multiple perspectives that are part of any historical event.	Some students are shy or experience stage fright in front of the class.	Give students sources and information about people and events so everyone has information on which to base their roles.
	Use role-plays to recreate historical situations (for example, factory labor for children in English factories can be defended or opposed as part of the study of the Factory Act).	Students may overact their parts, or become silly or disruptive, and the role-play thus presents a classroom management problem.	Go over rules for appropriate behavior and conduct before beginning a role-play or simulation activity.
	Students become invested in what they are learning since it is from the point of view of historical individuals or groups.	Students find it difficult to role-play a famous historical figure.	Assess preparation as well as performance in giving grades for students. Some students may have understood their roles, but not performed them well in class.
	Use role-plays to teach otherwise abstract ideas or concepts (for example, having students create skits and songs about the economic and taxation policies that contributed to the start of the Revolutionary War).		Give roles to groups, not just individuals, to broaden the activity.
			Debrief after a role-play to restate key points and clarify any historical misunderstandings or misinformation.
			Establish more concrete way of evaluating role-plays than asking one person to speak on behalf of the group, such as a combination of oral and written responses by all members of the group.
			Use short (one to five minute long) role-plays and simulations to illustrate a particular concept or event.

Teacher candidates find that role-plays and simulations bring historical moments alive for students. As one high school candidate stated, "*as a student I preferred lectures and reading to more interactive methods. However, using the role-play methods showed me how much students want to interact with the content when the content allows students to express themselves creatively.* A middle school teacher asked his students for their feedback after a role-play activity and found he "*was encouraged by responses that said they enjoyed being part of the history. More than one student liked role playing because they could 'visualize what happened back then'.*"

Names, dates, facts, and places are made memorable by theater-like experiences, staying in for students' memories longer because they are personally attached to the activity. More importantly, the factors and forces that motivate historical people to take certain actions are rendered more understandable. Participating in a role-play or simulation, students connect immediately and emotionally to historical situations, asking, for example, why Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a segregated city bus, why Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, or why President Truman chose to drop the atomic bomb on Japan.

…, middle and high school students need specific questions to answer as they read primary documents.

Role-plays and simulations make abstract ideas real to students. As a middle school student teacher noted, *"I taught 'no taxation without representation' by having the students create skits or songs to illustrate the economic and taxation policies that contributed to the start of the Revolutionary War."* The students were then able to explain the concepts of taxation and the government's role in individual lives. Another middle school candidate created a geography-based role-play lesson, and said

> *by putting the students in the shoes of countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Ecuador, I had them think about what they would need and what they would try to take advantage of in order to create the most successful economy possible.*

At the same time, role-plays and simulations are complex instructional methods for teacher candidates. Students sometimes overact their parts, resulting in everyone losing focus on historical information and themes. In other cases, students have not learned enough about their historical roles, resulting in inaccuracies and misrepresentations that take additional class time to explain and correct. Some middle and high school students, despite sincere effort, are not able to step outside their modern-day frame of reference to imagine what an historical person might say or do and why. Noted one student teacher: *"I have found it challenging to get students to interact with material where they are truly stepping into a different perspective than their own, when there is not a drawn out activity to encourage thinking from an alternative frame of reference."*

After reflection, teacher candidates offer the following insights about using role-plays and simulations. First, role-plays and simulations do not have to be lengthy, time-consuming activities. When one high school student teacher taught the political and economic events leading to the American Revolution, he pre-

tended to arrest a student for not having a stamp on a piece of paper (to illustrate the Stamp Act), and then asked the students in the last two rows in the room to stand during part of the class (to illustrate the Quartering Act). His short (less than 30 seconds-long) role-plays memorably established the impact of the Stamp Act and the Quartering Act in the minds of students.

Second, teacher candidates understood the importance of giving students sufficient information about the individuals or groups they will play in a role-play or simulation. As one candidate observed, *"It should be customary to consider the multiple perspectives that are a part of understanding any historical event/person, and simulations make taking on that role fun and informative."* Other candidates remarked about the usefulness of letting student role-players base their performances on primary source material. One student teacher used oral histories from the book *Voices of Freedom* (Hampton, Fayer, & Flynn, 1991) to recreate the Montgomery Bus Boycott in her class.

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Multiple ways for students to discuss and process a role-play or simulation was a third insight of our teacher candidates. Role-plays are not ends in themselves, but ways to engage students more deeply in questioning historical material. One candidate remarked that in the future he would ask his students to comment directly about what motivated different historical figures to act as they did, noting that "*simulations provide the space for learning to take on a more first-person perspective with the material, rather than seeing the information from a 'birds-eye' view."*

Conclusion

For a decade in our teaching methods classes, we have asked history and social studies teacher candidates to use student-centered teaching methods with middle and high school students, and then identify specific "Ideas, Issues, and Insights" based on their experiences. Analyzing their written reflections, we found important professional learning happening in two key areas of teaching practice. First, the reality of designing and teaching classes to include student-centered teaching methods pushes teacher candidates outside their comfort levels, asking them, in most cases, to venture beyond the familiar experiences of how they were taught. Such journeys are not easy, and our candidates report that they feel considerable anxiety, especially before using student-centered methods with their classes. Yet, when student-centered methods succeed, and middle and high school students become actively and thoughtfully engaged in academic work, future teachers see new possibilities for using these methods to promote learning in history and social studies classes.

Second, the opportunity to reflect and write about teaching experiences, framed by the "Ideas, Issues, and Insights" assignment, becomes particularly revealing for these aspiring teachers. Putting feeling and thoughts on paper helped reveal the surprises and

impressions that happen when teaching history and social studies for the first time. Over and over again, candidates use the word "surprise" in their written reflections; "*one thing that surprised me*" or "*what surprised me most*" appeared often as they grappled with how the realities of teaching differed from their beginning assumptions. Our students were recognizing first-hand how there are no problem-free, guaranteed successful teaching methods for the history classroom. Every instructional strategy has strengths that can be maximized and limitations that can be minimized by the actions of a teacher.

The idea that teachers can control the outcomes of their teaching is especially important for new teachers. Instead of concluding after a frustrating experience that a student-centered teaching method is not useful for them or does not fit their style, our candidates saw that teachers can adjust and adapt their instruction to make a method work for students. What works in one class, however, may not work the same way in another class with another group of students. In that class, a different set of adjustments may be needed, as one candidate noted after using music from different countries and cultures as a primary source:

> *One class enjoyed the reading of lyrics and hearing the music and identifying the songs, while the other class seemed to want nothing to do with it. This was helpful because it showed to me how I can approach the classes and what I can do to improve the classes.*

We conclude that beginning teachers can continually improve their practice by making explicit the "Ideas, Issues, and Insights" that underlie different teaching methods. It shows that success in using student-centered teaching methods comes from how those lessons are designed and implemented by teachers. "Ideas, Issues, and Insights" gives new teachers a powerful framework for continually designing,

expanding, and improving their practice in the history and social studies classroom.

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