

Classroom–Library Connections in Elementary Teacher Education: The Journey Box Approach

As an educator of pre-service elementary teachers, I emphasize social studies education as key to achieving meaningful civic understanding and engaged citizenship. In my courses, we get at this engagement by looking to understand root causes of social issues and learning to value the multiple perspectives represented in counter narratives. Possessing this type of content knowledge helps teachers recognize social action within historical and current contexts. Collaborating with library professionals is vital to promoting this type of civic literacy. This article highlights the Journey Box project as an approach for engaging students, the instructor, and library professionals in a collaborative inquiry project that centralizes learning about the significant contributions of historically marginalized groups. Furthermore, projects like the Journey Box and partnership with library professionals provide valuable opportunities for pre-service teachers to see themselves as agents for social action within schools. School librarians might look to this project as a model for developing collaborative teaching and inquiry opportunities with social studies teachers.

The Journey Box Project

The Journey Box (JB) is an interactive inquiry project and is comprised of several components. After choosing topics that highlight multiple perspectives (e.g., lesser known historical events or historically marginalized groups), each pre-service teacher compiled a set of primary and secondary source documents. They used the document sets to create a visual and narrative representation of their topics. In addition, they created document-based questions for each source to help students hone historical thinking skills. Each JB included a narrative description meant to provide context for the event or historical figure highlighted. Finally, all materials were placed into a box decorated to give a creative, visual representation of the topic. Building background knowledge for the JB project began early in the semester and continued for about six weeks. Our class met once per week for about two and a half hours. I typically reserved from fifteen to thirty minutes of class time for work on this project each week, except for the weeks we visited the library. The time provided for that work was substantially longer.

Prior to the initial visit to the university library, course material highlighted the principles of historical thinking and considering multiple perspectives in historical narratives (Wineburg 2010; Siexas and Peck 2004). Next students worked in small groups to brainstorm historical topics they were already familiar with and then to imagine perspectives that might be missed or overlooked when teaching about the topics. The latter part of the discussion informed the topics ultimately selected for the Journey Box project.

In previous writing, I have elaborated on the significance of choosing JB topics that highlight counter-historical narratives (Alarcón, Holmes and Bybee 2015). However, in this article I focus on the significance of the partnership forged with library professionals. Without their expert guidance, the work with primary source documents and images would not have been as meaningful. Our school of education research librarian was positioned as a partner who helped us learn to

Integration journey box

1. identify credible sources,
2. distinguish between primary and secondary sources, and
3. learn tips for engaging in document-based research.

Our university archivist was positioned as a partner who helped us to

1. learn to analyze primary source documents and
2. use archival material to create a narrative that represents multiple perspectives.

In addition to providing important inquiry-based learning experiences for pre-service teachers, the partnerships modeled possibilities for working with library professionals, which could be adapted for K–12 settings. The photos depict two example projects demonstrating the impact of our library partnership.

Purposeful Partnerships

The research librarian, Amy Harris Houk, and I corresponded prior to the class's visit to the library to ensure that she provided the most appropriate support for the project goals. She also incorporated the students' initial ideas into her presentation in order to maximize our time with her. Each pre-service teacher used a computer during the session to follow along as Amy shared the content of our research guide. She used the students' own topics to model the strategies she would use to conduct a literature search while highlighting the myriad digital pathways for accessing primary source documents. Importantly, she included information about which sites were appropriate for each topic and topic type. We left the session equipped with several useful tools. Table 1 depicts the connections between the library activity and the course content and skills it supported.

Table 1. Connections between library activities and social studies course content and skills.

Library Activity	Social Studies Content/Skills Supported
Navigating the research guide created for our class	<p>The research guide included databases that were relevant to the topics selected. This created an easier pathway for pre-service teachers to find useable source material.</p> <p>The National Archives and the Library of Congress were directly linked for ease of access</p> <p>A video link to a talk given by Ronald Takaki was included. He was one of the main authors we studied to prepare for understanding counter narratives and multicultural history</p> <p>A simple guide for determining source credibility was included, making it useful for students as they</p>

	conducted searches and chose images and documents to include in their projects
Guided practice for conducting database searches	This activity provided exposure to a wider range of historical events, documents, and eras than the pre-service teachers had previously encountered The pre-service teachers gained confidence in choosing audience appropriate materials that could be used for teaching
Guided practice for distinguishing between primary and secondary sources	The pre-service teachers acquired skills they would be expected to teach to students The activity resulted in the pre-service teachers understanding the usefulness of each type of source

After Amy helped us to identify and locate credible primary and secondary sources, Kathelene Smith, our university archivist, modeled a hands-on experience using primary source documents. Importantly, the activity centralized a well-known historical event from multiple perspectives. The story of the Greensboro sit-ins is most often told from the perspective of the four North Carolina A&T State University students who initiated the sit-in at the Woolworth's counter in downtown Greensboro. After reviewing what the students knew about the topic, Kathelene was able to share primary source documents that provided other perspectives on the event. These included the perspectives of the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina students who joined the protest, the chancellor of the Woman's College, parents, and the manager of Woolworth. She led the group in analyzing the documents and then crafting a new narrative that involved these other perspectives. This resulted in the pre-service teachers' acquiring a deeper understanding of the socio-historical context for the event. Additionally, it helped them realize that social activism, in most cases, involves groups coming together rather than relying upon single individuals. Table 2 depicts the connection between the archives activity and the course content and skills it supported.

Table 2. Archives activities with primary source documents, with course content and skills.

Archives Activity	Social Studies Content/Skills Supported
Presentation defining multiple perspectives, primary and secondary source documents, and the university archive	The pre-service teachers gained exposure to another type of available data; in particular, they learned that there are several archives in our local area that could prove useful They gained exposure to thinking about multiple perspectives as a way to make sense of historical events and figures
Hands-on, small group activity that provided practice with reading primary source documents and analyzing content	The activity provided practice working with group members to bring together multiple perspectives to create a full narrative of how the Woman's College was impacted by the Greensboro sit-in Pre-service teachers engaged in co-construction of social studies knowledge Counter narratives were explored as a means for considering perspectives that may not have been considered before

From University Setting to K–12 Setting

Collaborating with library professionals in this way need not be reserved for university campuses. In fact, in order to move toward imagining teaching as a space for social action and libraries as hubs for civic activity, partnerships such as those described here are key. In this final section, I would like to offer explicit ways that my library partners supported my instruction and student learning that may be helpful to school librarians in K–12 settings.

First, shared teaching space offered the chance for students to see the instructor and librarian or archivist as possessing distinct expertise. This shows students that a single "teacher" is not all knowing. Further, the three of us were able to model culturally responsive teaching in that the librarian and archivist planned instructional activities that supplemented the content I was teaching while also finding out ahead of time the students' topics of interest. Although Amy's basic presentation for conducting research does not change structurally, she consistently changes the topic focus to meet student interest. Perhaps most importantly, purposeful instructional partnerships between school librarians and teachers help students see that libraries are learning hubs that do more than house books.

Works Cited

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