This study analyzed the experiences of elementary teachers who engaged in archival research with primary sources, then used their new knowledge and materials to create elementary curriculum. The teachers located and identified primary source material then determined its reliability. They placed the source and its author in the correct historical context and evaluated perspectives and biases. By engaging in this process, teachers developed a greater understanding of primary sources, a key component of historical thinking, advancing their subject content and pedagogical knowledge. The teachers developed lessons centered on primary sources rather than using them in a more superficial manner. They came to view primary sources as tools to: develop historical empathy, advance the teaching of multiple perspectives, and construct meaning. Further, they developed meaningful lessons that not only motivate their students, but also enhance their students’ higher order thinking skills and ability to conduct historical research.

Keywords: primary sources, archival research, historical thinking, social studies, elementary, teacher education

Introduction

Elementary school teachers are called upon daily to teach a variety of subjects to a diverse group of learners. To prepare elementary teachers for teaching in the different content areas, most teacher preparation programs are comprehensive, teaching methods courses in the five major content areas, language arts, reading, social studies, math, and science. This is unlike secondary teacher preparation programs, which focus more heavily on content in one subject area. As a result, elementary teachers are generalists and rarely are presented an opportunity to delve deeply into any one particular subject area. Without the opportunity to develop deep understanding of subject material and the means to teach it to students, elementary teachers cannot become experts who engage their students in more meaningful, discipline specific learning.

How do we, as teacher educators, facilitate the ability to think historically by engaging elementary teachers who seldom have had experiences with archival primary materials? In this article, we explore the rationale for the development of historical content knowledge and describe our effort to develop such knowledge through an archival research project in a graduate course. The teachers in the course learned to analyze primary sources. They then utilized them in an elementary classroom. Using an interpretive case study approach the researchers analyze the experiences of 15 certified elementary teachers who advanced their ability to think historically through primary source work. An interpretive case study approach allowed the researchers the researchers to utilize multiple data sources and consider how the respondents made sense of the experiences. This archival research project required the teachers to visit an archive and learn how to locate and access its materials. Finally, we conclude with a discussion.
of the implications of our research for teaching history in the elementary classroom and for professional development.

The purpose of this study was two-fold. It first was designed to engage certified elementary (Kindergarten through grade 6) teachers enrolled in a graduate social studies curriculum and teaching course in locating and analyzing archival materials to advance their historical thinking. We then purposed to have each apply the new knowledge to develop an integrated unit for the elementary classroom. Since teachers are tasked with providing developmentally appropriate experiences in the study of culture and cultural diversity (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2010), the teachers’ archival research focused on either a famous African American individual or event from the state’s history. Two research questions guided our study:

1. What perceptions do elementary teachers enrolled in a graduate course have about locating and evaluating archival primary source materials and using these sources when developing a teaching unit for elementary students?
2. How were these teachers’ knowledge and use of archival of primary sources manifested in their elementary teaching units, and did their beliefs about primary sources change from the beginning of the course?

Review of Literature

A teacher’s knowledge affects all aspects of his or her practice (Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997; VanSledright, 1996; Wilson, 2001). An able teacher is one who possesses the subject knowledge to engage students in the learning process. Two areas of subject knowledge, content knowledge (also called subject matter knowledge) and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986) are the most significant factors that influence effective teaching (Shulman & Sherin, 2004). Subject matter knowledge, or content knowledge, involves understanding the first principles of the problems, topics and issues of the curriculum (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). Teachers should possess and utilize a depth and breadth of understanding that consists of factual knowledge organized around a conceptual framework (Feiman-Nemser, 2008).

Content knowledge is a pre-requisite for pedagogical content knowledge (Kleickmann, et al., 2013). Teachers with good pedagogical content knowledge not only have a deep understanding of the knowledge in their field and how it is constructed, but also they possess an understanding of the needs, motivations, and abilities of their students to make the knowledge available in meaningful ways (Segall, 2004; Wineburg, 2001).

Pedagogical content knowledge consists of the substance of the discipline and how best to represent this content to a diverse group of learners (McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008), combining deep subject knowledge with a discipline specific understanding of effective teaching strategies. A body of research (Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997; Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005; Kennedy, 1991; McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008;) identifies pedagogical content knowledge as a significant factor in teacher effectiveness. In the field of history, pedagogical content knowledge means teachers have a deep understanding of how historical knowledge is constructed and how to convey this process to their students (Barton & Levstik, 2003). A high level of pedagogical content knowledge benefits both: teachers and students. Teachers who possess high levels of subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge are able to construct more meaningful learning experiences for students in their classrooms (McDiarmid &
Clevenger-Bright, 2008). In a constructivist environment, students regularly engage in inquiry-based learning to develop deep understanding of subject matter (Richardson & Placier, 2001). In the social studies classroom, this means teachers should have a deep understanding of the concepts, persistent issues throughout history, and complexities of events and people that have shaped history. They also should have an understanding of how to utilize primary and secondary sources to engage their students in inquiry-based learning.

Often, non-history majors, including many elementary teachers, believe the teaching of history is arcane and dull (Fragnoli, 2005; Slekar, 2001; Wilson, 2001). Their experiences in learning history often consisted of two to three years of history courses in high school and six to 12 hours of social science at the university level, only a portion of which may have consisted of history courses. Generally at the university level, required history courses are taught during the first two years and in large lecture based courses. Although elementary teachers would benefit from increased study of history, taking more traditionally taught courses would only reinforce their negative notion of the subject and its pedagogy (Wilson, 2001; Yeager & Davis, 1995).

What individuals learn in a given subject is related to the opportunities they have had to learn that subject (Wilson, 2001). To enhance their subject knowledge in history, teachers should learn in active, inquiry-based environments. As teachers’ experiences, both at the preservice and in-service levels, shape their knowledge and ultimately their classroom practice, teachers need to be provided with opportunities to learn to begin to think historically and engage in the doing of history by engaging with a variety of primary sources (Fallace, 2009; Levstik & Barton, 2011; VanSledright, 2004).

Good historical thinkers are tolerant of differing perspectives because these perspectives help them make sense of the past. At the same time, such thinkers are skilled at detecting spin, hype, snake oil sales pitches, partisanship, and weak claims. They also know what it means to build and defend evidence-based arguments because of practice enterprises, know good arguments when they hear them, and who engage their constructing interpretations rooted in source data. In short, they are informed, educated, thoughtful, critical readers, who appreciate investigative world with a host of strategies for understanding it (VanSledright, 2004, p. 233).

Historical thinking necessitates the active doing of history (Levstik & Barton, 2011; Russell & Pelligrino, 2008). To facilitate historical thinking, individuals must have the opportunity to work with primary sources. Source work is a complex cognitive process requiring individuals to identify sources, to locate the source (and its author) within an historical context, to judge perspectives, and to determine reliability (VanSledright, 2004). Utilizing a variety of historical evidence requires learners to consider chronology, interpretations, and multiple perspectives, as often these sources are contradictory (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996). Only after grappling with such discordant information can learners begin to construct supportable narratives of the past (Barton, 2005; Ohn, 2009).

Many teachers believe elementary students are incapable of thinking historically (Barton & Levstik, 2003). In a 1997 study, Jere Brophy and Bruce VanSledright found even young elementary students are capable of engaging with history. Many elementary students have little opportunity to work with primary source materials. These experiences are essential to students learning to think critically (Potter & Schamel, 2005 as cited in Patterson, Lucas, & Kithinji, 2012), students need to be able to: raise questions, engage with primary source materials,
consider the interpretive nature of historical narratives, and consider multiple perspectives surrounding historical events (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996). Learning to think historically is not intuitive and must be taught and practiced (Barton, 2001; Wineburg, 2001). If teachers are to engage their elementary students in historical inquiry, or the active doing of history utilizing primary sources, teachers must be afforded the opportunity to participate in this type of disciplined inquiry, for they cannot teach their students to do what they do not know how to do themselves (Neumann, 2010; Ravitch, 1998).

Method

Participants and Setting

This study took place in a graduate social studies class at a state university in the South. The university is of medium size, with a population of approximately 25,000 students. The College of Education offers a variety of programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels, with the most popular being elementary education. The majority of students in the elementary education program are White and female. The participants in this study were certified elementary (Kindergarten through grade 6) teachers enrolled in a graduate course on social studies teaching and curriculum. Fifteen of the 20 graduate students enrolled in the course agreed to participate in the study. All the teachers were female with varying years of elementary teaching experience. Most were early in their teaching careers with only one individual exceeding five years of teaching experience. A few of the study participants had received certification, but had not begun their elementary teaching careers. Students were given Institutional Review Board (IRB) informed consent letters at the beginning of the semester. To reduce coercion, students were instructed to place their letters in a sealed envelope. Envelopes were not opened until after the semester was over and all grades were posted.

The course began with instruction in working with primary sources. Required readings and discussions included Levstik & Barton’s (2011) Doing History: Investigating with Children in Elementary and Middle School to enhance the teachers’ knowledge of strategies for teaching history to elementary students through inquiry based lessons incorporating primary sources. Cooperatively, these teachers worked with photos and documents that, at times, were contradictory. They considered issues of reliability and multiple perspectives. To effectively utilize the primary sources, the teachers had to place the sources and their authors in the correct historical context and evaluate perspectives and biases. During class discussions, the teachers indicated they had a deficit of state or national knowledge of African American history beyond some cursory knowledge of Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Civil Rights Movement. The researchers, therefore, designed the course research project to require these teachers to utilize archival primary sources related to an African American individual or event related to U.S. or state history and to incorporate their research into a three-day integrated unit or a three-day WebQuest for use in an elementary classroom. After classroom instruction on primary sources, the teachers took a field trip to the nearby Historically Black College or University (HBCU) archive to learn more about the resources available and how to conduct research in an archive. The university archivist gave the teachers a tour of the facility, introduced them to primary sources available for use in their research, and explained the archive’s procedures. The teachers made use of national and state socials studies standards in the construction of the integrated units and WebQuests. As the state had not adopted College and Career Readiness Standards in English Language Arts, common core standards were not considered for this project.
Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected from pre/post survey responses, weekly journals, and the research projects. The Survey of Experiences and Beliefs (Appendix A) was developed by the researchers in an effort to collect demographic information, to examine students’ prior experiences with historical research, to assess their attitudes toward using primary sources in the elementary classroom, and to examine how their beliefs changed over time. The teachers maintained weekly journals chronicling their work by noting their feelings about different aspects of the project. The weekly journal topics assigned were general in nature and followed course topics. During week two, for example, the teachers were asked to reflect on visitation to the archive (See Appendix B for a complete list of journal topics). The journals were graded only for completion and comprehensiveness, not for content, to allow the teacher to express their feelings freely. The teachers’ research projects were examined to reveal how these teachers incorporated their newly constructed knowledge and primary sources into their classroom practice. The research projects consisted of an introduction to the unit, a comprehensive narrative of background knowledge needed by the teacher to teach the unit effectively, the lesson plan, and a reflection on the project as a whole.

This study utilized an interpretive orientation for case study research. Case study research is holistic, utilizes multiple sources of information, and allows researchers to study a phenomenon in its natural setting (Merriam, 2001; Willis, 2008). An interpretive orientation focuses on how individuals experience and interact with their social world, and how they make sense of their experiences (Merriam, 2002). Microanalysis, or the process of employing data analysis through open and axial coding, was used to identify underlying themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During open coding, data from the teachers’ journals and open-ended survey responses were analyzed phrase by phrase (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and concepts were noted. These concepts were compared across respondents to determine categories. “Axial coding is the process of relating categories to their subcategories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). This relation of categories and subcategories “allows for a more precise and complete explanation” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124). While it is possible coding and content analytic procedures are replicable, the initial category development is unique to these graduate students in this particular course. It is likely another setting with other participants might produce different results. Because the emerging themes are evidenced within the framework of both research questions, the results and conclusion sections of this paper are presented in a narrative context.

Results

Research Question 1: What perceptions do elementary teachers enrolled in a graduate course have about locating and evaluating archival primary source materials using these materials when developing a teaching unit for elementary students?

Two major themes emerged from the participants’ journals and projects. First, the teachers experienced a similar pattern of emotions and feelings during the processes of locating primary sources and determining which sources to use for their grade level. A second theme was the change in the teachers’ beliefs about primary sources: They progressed from viewing primary sources as motivational tools, to discussing how these resources could enhance their students’ higher order thinking and analysis skills.
A Survey of Experiences and Beliefs was given to the teachers to complete at the beginning of the first day of a graduate course in social studies curriculum and teaching. The survey collected basic demographic information and asked open-ended questions. The researchers compared the participants’ responses to the survey questions and how these responses may have changed from the beginning to the end of the course. The survey results indicated that prior to the study, none of the teachers enrolled in the course had conducted any type of historical inquiry or archival research and few had experience working with primary sources. Of those who indicated they had some experience with primary sources, these experiences consisted of limited exposure during their undergraduate social studies methods course. Surprisingly, none of the study participants indicated they had engaged in historical inquiry or utilized primary sources during undergraduate history courses. Joanne, (all names used are pseudonyms) a practicing teacher, indicated she had used primary sources, such as maps and photos, while teaching a unit on the Oregon Trail to her first grade class.

Throughout the course, the teachers chronicled their experiences with the archives and their work with primary sources in weekly journal entries. Examination of the journal entries revealed most of the teachers shared a common pattern of emotions throughout the course of the project: excitement, frustration, and accomplishment. The teachers initially expressed surprise about their visit to the archive. When queried in class, the majority of the teachers indicated they had never visited any type of archive previously; they had no idea of the vast resources available for use in research. Alexa noted, “I did not know resources like the archives existed so close to home.” Similarly, Joanne stated, “I was amazed at how much history was stored in these archives. They had rows upon rows, boxes upon boxes of history!” Lisa explained, “This was interesting because there were so many articles, documents, and photographs that only can be viewed [here].”

The teachers, overwhelmingly, became engrossed in the materials they encountered. Emily shared, “I found myself reading every single document I picked up. I was enjoying it because I was finally getting somewhere.” Victoria shared Emily’s sentiment, “Every photograph I found was exciting and interesting.” Molly said, “As I searched through the photos and documents in the archives, I can’t describe the feeling I had… excited, overwhelmed, in awe…that I was holding in my hands historical significant sources.” Some teachers found personal connection to the materials they encountered. For example, Lindsey shared:

I found out he [Booker T. Washington] worked for and lived with my great, great, great grandparents, Lewis and Viola Ruffner…its so neat to me to have family members associated with him. I always hated history growing up but now I feel like I have a real connection to history.

Another teacher, Molly, noted, “As I looked over the primary source document, I tried to imagine Dr. Gomillion and all that he had witnessed and took part of. I imagined him sitting at this desk as he reflected on the Civil rights issues that were taking place at the time as he wrote the article.” Charles Gomillion was the Dean of Students and Chair of the Social Science Division at Tuskegee Institute. He organized several voter registration drives for the town’s African American residents and was the lead plaintiff in the 1960’s U.S. Supreme Court Case, *Gomillion v. Lightfoot*, a case that was instrumental in leading to passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act (Mendenhall, 2014). Echoing Molly’s sentiments, Victoria reflected:

I came across a folder containing one picture of a little boy being walked into a school by his father. This happened in Huntsville, at a school some of my
family went to. I told my mom about the picture, and she said she knows who that little boy is now. She told me the story of when that boy went to school for the first time there and also what he had accomplished since. It was so exciting to find something that I was able to connect and relate to. I hope I can provide experiences like that for my students.

Although most of the teachers initially were amazed at the materials in the archives, their outlook quickly changed as they began the arduous task of seeking primary sources appropriate for use with their lesson units. Some had difficulty choosing a topic with so much data available. Ann stated, “I’m not sure what to do my project on.” Lindsey lamented, “I’ve change my mind again about my project.” Other students found the task of choosing among the resources overwhelming. Robin shared, “It was kind of overwhelming seeing that there are so many pictures, documents, and artifacts…at first I was again overwhelmed at the stuff that we had to go through.” Sandy and Susan shared that they initially were overwhelmed, but once they “got going” it was not as difficult as they had anticipated. Molly reflected, “A lot of the work was just looking to see what all is out there in the way of resources and then trying to narrow down what to use. I guess that’s a good and bad thing.”

Whereas some teachers expressed frustration at having an abundance of data to wade through, other students became disillusioned when they were unable to locate resources related to their chosen topics. Elizabeth shared, “Finding information about his [Charles Gomillion] life is much easier said than done.” Emily had a similar experience noting, “It was a little harder to find documents and pictures than I thought it would be…His [Booker T. Washington] speeches were hard to read and I couldn’t find any letters that I really wanted to use in a lesson…I became very frustrated because I had been looking for about an hour and I was stuck.” Other students felt that the resources available would not be appropriate for their students. Joanne became frustrated at working with materials, but not finding anything she felt would be useful. “I looked through about five or six boxes trying to find documents that were interesting to me. I found a lot of board minutes and found letters announcing meetings, but I still was not finding anything that was really interesting or unique.” Caitlin stated, “I am still struggling to determine how I will somehow in my lesson plans or web quest engage the students.” Joanne also worried about the appropriateness of her sources, “I was trying to find things that I could use in my classroom, and none of these things seemed like they would interest students very much.”

At the beginning of the project, most of the teachers stated they thought primary sources should be used in the classroom. Ann was not sure if primary sources were appropriate for the elementary classroom and Alexa indicated she needed more help in how to use such sources. When asked the same question at the end of the study, all participants indicated primary sources should be used at the elementary level. Responses such as “Yes!” and “Absolutely!” were noted. When asked about the advantages of using primary sources in the elementary classroom at the beginning of the project, the teachers responded primary sources were “hands on” and would “allow students to connect with history”. Molly commented, “What better way to learn than seeing it first hand and experiencing the real artifact.” The responses focused on increasing elementary student’s motivation to study history. After the completion of the project, the participants continued to comment primary sources “bring the past to life” for elementary students, but these comments were interspersed with statements that a primary source “allows students to use higher-order thinking skills,” “bring up controversial issues, challenge common beliefs/ideas,” and “teaches them [elementary students] how to analyze, helps students develop
questions.” These responses indicate although participants still felt working with primary sources would be motivating for elementary students, they recognized a deeper understanding of the rigorous cognitive processes associated with historical thinking.

Similarly, when asked about the drawbacks to using primary sources in the elementary classroom at the beginning of the course, many of the teachers were unsure what challenges might exist. Others noted challenges such as “difficult to get your hands on” and “distracting if not used properly.” At the conclusion of the project, a few respondents felt utilizing primary sources was time consuming; other answers were more nuanced. Sandy noted, “[teachers] have to tailor to younger grades-figure out what they can understand and what is appropriate.” Likewise, Emily noted some sources are hard to read or understand and teachers must choose primary sources carefully. Robin stated teachers “need to check validity.” Although the teachers were concerned about the time required for locating primary sources, the focus of their worries shifted from concerns about themselves, such as taking too much time, to a focus on students’ meaningful learning.

After initially grappling with locating appropriate primary source material and utilizing the material in lessons appropriate for an elementary grade audience, the teachers noted they had developed confidence in their ability to successfully work with primary sources. Not only were they pleased they had been able to complete the task, but they also expressed great satisfaction about creating lessons that would be useful in their classrooms and would motivate their students. Carol shared, “I have learned to[o] much from completing this project.” Joanne stated, “I actually feel excited about teaching social studies now, so hopefully my students will be excited to learn about social studies.” Lisa said, “I have really enjoyed working on this and I feel like I will definitely be able to use this lesson in my future classroom.” Lindsey, who previously related her dislike of history, shared, “Doing History’ is such a great concept that I was never taught. It carries over into my teaching as well; which is short-changing my students…my students and I know that they will want (& need) to use other sources besides the Internet.” After completing her project Robin shared, “Overall, this was a great way for us to experience doing work in archives and planning with primary and secondary sources. Had we just learned about it in class I do not feel that I would be as willing to step out and try it in my own classroom.”

**Research Question 2: How were these teachers’ knowledge and use of archival of primary sources manifested in their elementary teaching units and did their beliefs about primary sources change from the beginning of the course?**

A theme that emerged from the analysis of this research question included the use of primary sources as the focus of a lesson rather than a supplement to a lesson. A second theme suggested teachers were more confident and were likely to use primary sources in their classrooms in the future.

Despite these teachers’ overall limited knowledge and experiences with historical analysis of primary sources prior to this course, they were not afraid to incorporate several types of sources for various purposes into units for their elementary students after their graduate classroom experiences and research at an archive. An examination of their units revealed teachers used their learning experiences with archival research to select primary sources that included, but were not limited to: historical photographs, letters, journals, newspaper articles, historical video footage, and text documents. Examples of these items were copies of a poll tax receipt and legal documents for use with their students. All the teachers selected many different
types of sources that were an integral part of their units. Rather than using primary sources as a supplement to a lesson, these teachers developed lessons centered around the primary sources they selected in their archival research with the focus on student engagement and learning. An analysis of these teachers’ instructional goals and objectives revealed they wanted their students to: (a) connect the past to the present through local and state history; (b) develop empathy; (c) recognize and wrestle with multiple perspectives; (d) construct historical meanings; and (d) conduct historical research. These goals are congruent with those of historical comprehension, historical analysis, and historical research capabilities as stated by the National Historical Thinking Standards (NCHS, 1996). Ann, for example, developed a unit for her third graders entitled, “Fight for Your Right to Vote.” Her overarching goal was for her students to be able to explain the poll tax and the voter registration process for African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement from the perspective of African Americans during the time. She selected a set of primary sources that included: a copy of a poll tax receipt, a copy of a dinner invitation in honor of George Bender (Vice Chair for the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax), a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt written by Jennings Perry (Chair of the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax) and Virginia Durr (Civil Rights activist), a photograph of three African Americans preparing to take the Alabama Literacy Test in order to register to vote, and a photograph of a meeting of the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax. In her rationale for her selection, she commented she wanted to:

“…spark my third graders’ curiosity about people who lived in the past, what their lives were like, and to develop their questioning skills through their analysis of a multiple sources. I wanted to challenge my students to ask “why” and “what if” questions and to consider fairness to all.”

Sandy, a second grade teacher, chose to develop a web quest that her second graders could complete independently. She expressed that she wanted her second graders to think critically about the historical photographs and text she presented to them. By doing so, she not only provided real and meaningful examples of the past, she also hoped to develop students’ visual literacy and questioning skills. She describes the following:

This activity [archival research] showed us how we can use primary sources with our students to engage them in thought provoking questions and open a door into the past. It seems to me that most of my students when we talk about history can’t seem to make the connection that yes these were real people, and yes this really happened. We read so many books, and I think my second graders sometimes can’t make out the difference between what really happened and what’s in a storybook that is fiction. The primary source pictures will help students to see that these were real people, not made up imaginary characters with a nice story.

As teachers reflected on the primary sources they encountered in their archival research, they began to think of ways they could address standards across the curriculum into their unit. Although social studies is not tested on the state exams for this particular state and is afforded little instructional time in many schools, the teachers discussed ways that they could infuse social studies content into other subject areas such as language arts. Caitlin explained:

…there are a number of other things I thought of to use the primary sources in the classroom. For example, one of the [primary] sources [I examined] was an autobiographical essay written by [Alfred “Chief”] Anderson in 1976.
This would be a great opportunity to tie in language arts and have the students write their own autobiography.

Most of the teachers in the graduate course did not know how they would use primary sources in their classrooms prior to beginning their archival research. After the projects were completed the teachers indicated they planned to use primary sources, as well as the lessons that they had created, with their classes. Molly said, “Now I will definitely locate photos online…I think primary source analysis is a great tool.” Susan used photos of school integration. Carol was looking forward to using photos of William Dawson, Nat King Cole, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Joanne indicated she hadn’t used primary sources much in the past, but planned to use them in a class study on famous individuals from the state.

At the conclusion of the project, the teachers planned specific uses for primary sources in their teaching. The teachers were excited to try these new resources with their students not only to motivate students about the subject matter of history, but also to allow the students to make personal connections with subject matter and to engage them in the higher order thinking skills utilized when students engage in historical inquiry.

All the teachers used their experiences doing archival research to locate sources they could use in their classroom. They chose sources that would challenge students to think critically about the past through inquiry-based lessons. These teachers’ lessons also revealed a deep knowledge of the content they would teach. They were committed to having their students not only recognize who famous African Americans were, but to also discover what challenges and successes they experienced. They required their students to wrestle with complex subjects such as discrimination and equal rights. These teachers’ goals and objectives in their lessons, additionally, demonstrated their commitment to provide in depth critical thinking rather than superficial exposure to primary sources.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

Prior to beginning their research project, these elementary teachers had little experience with historical or archival research and were uncertain as to why or how primary sources should be used in the classroom. Similar to Barton and Levstik’s (2003) earlier claims, these teachers seldom incorporated authentic historical inquiry in their classroom. The resounding question is why are teachers not incorporating historical inquiry into the elementary classrooms? Many factors can influence the reasons, such as time, or the lack of time, committed to the social studies (VanFossen, 2005), teachers’ prior negative experiences learning history (Fragnoli, 2005; Slekar, 2001; Wilson, 2001), limited content knowledge (Feiman-Nemser, 2008), or lack of knowledge of history skills based instruction (Beyer, 2008). Rather than reinforcing a negative notion regarding the doing of history through traditional lecture and do as I say format, the researchers attempted to develop a graduate course that would provide elementary teachers with the opportunity to develop their content knowledge with sustained historical inquiry through archival primary source work. Prior to this course, these teachers saw the potential for their students to become motivated about history when given primary sources to work with, but had little understanding of the rigorous cognitive process associated with primary sources and historical thinking. After completing the project, the teachers continued to see primary sources as motivating student engagement, but they also understood the higher order thinking, as defined in Bloom’s taxonomy (Bloom, 1956), required for students to engage in meaningful ways with the material.
During their primary source work and subsequent unit development, teachers had to locate and identify primary source material and determine its reliability. To accomplish this end they had to place the source and its author in the correct historical context and evaluate perspectives and biases. By engaging in these processes, the teachers developed a greater understanding of primary source work, a key component of historical thinking, as well as the joys and frustrations of this complex cognitive process. These findings support earlier research (Fallace, 2009; Levstik & Barton, 2011; Van Sledright, 2004) that teachers need to be provided with opportunities to learn to think historically by engaging with a variety of primary sources. An examination of the teachers’ integrated units demonstrated the teachers enhanced their subject matter knowledge while also furthering their pedagogical content knowledge. In each unit, the teachers had to provide a narrative of the content background needed by a teacher to effectively teach the unit. Not only did the teachers need to develop deep background knowledge on the topic they chose for developing their lessons, but they also had to examine the primary source material from the perspective of the learners that would be encountering the lessons. The teachers had to consider what materials would be most appropriate for their particular grade level and how to actively engage the students with the given material. In some cases, the teachers had to adapt the primary sources for the skill level of the students in their classrooms. This is consistent with Shulman’s concept of pedagogical content knowledge (1986b). The teachers, additionally, expressed greater confidence in their ability to utilize primary source material in meaningful ways with their elementary students.

The authors recognize these results are applicable to this group of teachers enrolled in the described graduate course and are not generalizable to all courses and teachers. These findings suggest, as do those of other researchers (Patterson, Lucas, & Kithinji, 2012), the need for elementary teachers to have skills, knowledge, and practice with historical research when planning similar inquiry based historical investigations for their students. These experiences could be provided as professional development or a special topics graduate course.

The results confirm while evidence exists that supports the benefits of elementary students wrestling with complex historical issues through the analysis of primary sources, the practice is often missing in the classroom. This could be due in part to teachers’ often-lacking content knowledge or their lack of pedagogical content knowledge. The authors suggest a follow up of the teachers’ implementation of their lessons would be insightful, as well as a longitudinal study to see if the teachers’ continued to utilize primary sources long-term. Follow up studies with more teachers and with varied topics might also provide useful information for teacher educators. Additional studies that examine this type of learning experience for pre-service teachers might be beneficial. As social studies continues to become marginalized in elementary schools (Busby, 2011), advancing teachers’ knowledge and use of primary sources in the classroom continues to be an important focus of teacher education and professional development.

References


**Web Based References**

Appendix A

Survey of Experiences and Beliefs

Name ___________________________ Date _________________

Years of teaching experience ___________ Grade level ___________

__________________________________

__________________________________

__________________________________

__________________________________

I have conducted or participated as a researcher in the following types of research. Check all that apply.

Historical Inquiry ________________

Case Study ________________

Action Research ________________

Ethnography ________________

Quantitative Study ________________

Other ________________ Please specify __________

_________________________________________________________________

In a short paragraph, please explain your participation in the above research.
Describe your personal experiences in working with primary sources.

Do you believe that elementary children should utilize primary sources in learning Social Studies? Why or why not?

What do you believe are advantages and the drawbacks to utilizing primary sources in teaching elementary grades?

How often do you utilize primary sources in teaching elementary social studies? Please provide at least one example of how you have incorporated primary sources in the teaching of elementary social studies.
Appendix B
Project Journal
Criteria and Grading Information

Criteria
The project journal should include at least one entry each week. Entries should reflect on archival work, class work, successes and difficulties with the project. Think about what you like about this project and what would improve it. Feel free to share what you have learned about content throughout the course.

Entries should include:
Week 1 Entry on working with primary sources and an entry on working with web quests (your efforts on Quest Garden)
Week 2 Entry on visiting an archive
Week 3 Primary sources and fieldwork
Week 4 Project work and Doing History chapter
Week 5 Project and reactions to the course

Grading Information
This assignment will be graded for completion and comprehensiveness rather than content so that you will be able to reflect freely.

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<td>Completion</td>
<td>Entries for only a few weeks are included</td>
<td>Entries for most weeks are included</td>
<td>Entries for each week are included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensiveness</td>
<td>Journal includes entries for few areas: content learned, successes, difficulties, and archival experiences</td>
<td>Journal includes entries for most areas: content learned, successes, difficulties, and archival experiences</td>
<td>Journal includes entries for all areas: content learned, successes, difficulties, and archival experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Authors’ Bios

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