

Attempting Issues-Centered instruction in a challenging environment

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INTRODUCTION

Even though inquiry-based instruction has been envisioned by John Dewey (1933) and championed by Hunt and Metcalf (1955), Oliver and Shaver (1966), Newmann and Oliver (1970), and Engle and Ochoa (1988), it has not been adopted in the majority of our social studies classrooms, especially in classrooms with students who are perceived to be “low achieving”. (Rossi & Pace, 1998). Teachers often believe that only advanced level students are capable of complex reasoning and critical analysis, therefore students perceived as low-achieving receive typically rote, low-level instruction (Metz, 1978; Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, 1992; Gamoran & Nystrand, 1992; Onosko, 1991). Saye and Brush (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004) have studied the struggles and successes of teachers as they sought to implement Problem Based Historical Inquiry (PBHI). In their studies, Saye and Brush consistently used regular education classrooms that included students with diverse racial backgrounds, socioeconomic levels, and multiple learning levels. This paper will examine the experience of one teacher attempting PBHI for the first time in an impoverished school in the rural Southeast, with a class that included 30% special needs students. The questions guiding our study were:

- What challenges do teachers face in attempting PBHI for the first time in challenging educational settings?
- What impact does a support network and individual teacher decisions have on meeting the challenges of PBHI?
- What shifts might occur in a teacher’s thinking about active student learning and the role of instructional support to encourage it as a result of planning and implementing PBHI?

OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

Most classrooms do not feature inquiry practices (Goodlad, 1984; Shaver, 1996). This trend has been attributed to a number of factors including the disposition of the teacher, pragmatic concerns such as class sizes, lack of support or even chastisement from peers, and the

intense effort involved in inquiry based instruction (Onosko, 1991; Rossi, 1995; Saye, 1998b; Schlechty, 1993; Windschitl, 2002). Other significant factors in teachers failing to adopt inquiry practices include beliefs about students' capabilities, especially adolescents perceived as low achieving (Metz, 1978; Oakes, Gamoran, & Page, 1992; Gamoran & Nystrand, 1992; Onosko, 1991), and the belief among some educators that inquiry practices are inappropriate for the developmental level of adolescents (King & Kitchener, 1994; Leming, 1994). Additionally, factors common to low achieving students, such as lack of motivation, low reading abilities, and lack of interest in public issues exacerbate the tendencies of educators see inquiry practices as too daunting for this population (Rossi & Pace, 1998).

This project continues a larger project started by Saye and Brush (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004) studying teachers using Problem Based Historical Inquiry (PBHI) to structure learning around two overarching principles: (a) units are centered on a persistent, ill-structured question requiring students to evaluate evidence and defend an argument; and (b) students' exploration is supported through embedded expertise, teacher probing, multiple perspectives, multiple intelligences, and collaboration (See Table 1). These teaching practices have been incorporated into a technology-enhanced support network (<http://www.pihnet.org>) that provides model lessons, instructional design tools, classroom video cases, and forums intended to foster professional growth and collaboration as teachers design lessons, implement them in classes, reflect on their experience, ask for advice and share ideas.

Because of the complexity involved in PBHI, we nurtured mentor teachers to support mentees in a collaborative effort to plan and implement a PBHI unit. To develop a common language and experience with PBHI instruction, we worked with six teachers to individually plan and implement a PBHI unit. At the end of the school year, we held group reflection meetings

where university researchers asked the teachers to reflect together about the challenges and benefits of PBHI instruction. These six teachers participated in a summer workshop of teachers new to PBHI. They provided anecdotal evidence of the challenges and benefits of PBHI for students.

We then paired interested seminar participants with each of our mentor teachers to collaboratively plan and implement a PBHI unit. We had seen with our six mentor teachers, the group collaboration developed a shared professional knowledge which integrated teacher craft knowledge with research-based knowledge (Hiebert et al., 2002). We hoped the mentor/mentee relationship with continue this transition both for the mentor teacher, but also for the mentee. Hiebert (2002) found when teachers collaborate with a set of shared principles for instruction, they become more sophisticated in their understanding of inquiry practices and committed to continuing to develop them with their students. In the case discussed in this paper, our study teacher (Dana) worked with a mentor teacher (Ann) as they jointly designed two lessons for a PBHI unit during the 2004-2005 school year. Ann was teaching modern U.S. history to 6th graders and Dana was teaching the same course to 11th graders. Dana's case also provided a unique opportunity to study not only her first attempt at PBHI, but using PBHI with a population of "low achieving" students. Dana had numerous concerns about her students' abilities to succeed with this approach which were consistent with research (Rossi & Pace, 1998). She worried they were unmotivated in her class, had poor reading skills, and had little to no interest or knowledge of public issues. We were interested in knowing what challenges she would face, how she would potentially meet those challenges, and how her thinking might change as a result of attempting PBHI with these students.

RESEARCH STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Participants

Our project began in the fall of 2004 following a week long summer seminar introducing new teachers to the PBHI principles of curriculum design. The seminar was led by university researchers and assisted by six mentor teachers who had gone through previous training to plan and implement a PBHI lesson during the 2003-2004 school year. The workshop participants were all in-service teachers, of which Dana was one. Dana came to the workshop with twelve years of teaching experience and an interest in learning more about challenging her students in her history courses. After the summer seminar, we paired interested seminar participants with each of our mentor teachers. The program requested each pair write a curriculum unit proposal for development during the 2004-2005 school year. The pair wrote the unit in the fall and implemented it in the spring. Dana teamed with Ann, who had eleven years of teaching experience, to write a U.S. history unit on the 1920's, focusing on the central question: Was the government justified in limiting civil liberties for the sake of peace and security? (Table 1) Dana would teach her unit to 11th grade students, while Ann would teach hers to 6th grade students.

Dana and Ann taught in schools over three hours driving time from each other. The group met twice at the university for an all-day development session but all other planning was done electronically through on-line forums on the PIH web site and e-mail. Besides the geographic distance between the two schools, the socio-economic gap was also wide. Dana's school is located in one of the poorest counties in the nation (See Table 2). Her students come to school with a variety of challenges facing them, most significantly extreme reading challenges. For example, seven of her twenty-seven students were mainstreamed into her U.S. history course for the first time in their academic careers. In addition to these challenges, this would be her first

experience teaching a PBHI lesson requiring historical perspective, analysis of evidence, and dialectical reasoning as her students would need to use historical evidence to make a value judgment on the behavior of historical figures. In the case of Ann and Dana, they would have their students research, debate, and defend an answer to the question: Were the Palmer Raids justified? She felt by teaming with a 6th grade teacher, together they could help each other increase the critical thinking of their students by developing instructional scaffolds to facilitate their reading comprehension and then analysis of complex historical events.

Data Collection and Analysis

In our attempt to learn more Dana's experience planning and implementing her unit with her students, we collected data from three perspectives in multiple formats: (a) from her students, we gathered their written work and video taped the class sessions on the Congressional Hearing; (b) from Dana, we collected transcripts of two planning sessions, her on-line journals in the on-line forum, pre- and post-implementation interviews, and her reflections after watching clips of her video during the summer following her unit implementation; and (c) as researchers we kept on-line research journals and transcripts of our weekly research meetings. To analyze this data, we reviewed the transcripts, videos, and forum journals to look for themes and patterns about Dana's thinking regarding her challenges, her ideas about meeting those challenges, and how teaching this unit impacted her thinking about her teaching and her students. We focused our analysis on the challenges Denise faced in conceptualizing, planning, and implementing PBHI instruction with her students, the role of the support network in her conceptualization, and any shifts in her thinking about history, PBHI instructional philosophy, her students, and her practice. We used analytic induction, typological, and content analysis to guide our analysis of the data. Staff researchers analyzed and coded data independently and met to compare findings,

develop and refine categories, and produce data-based speculations about the findings' implications for the challenges she faced, how she met those challenges, and how the experience influenced her thinking about PBHI and her students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Dana demonstrated perseverance and flexibility in her first attempt with PBHI practices. She faced several challenges in teaching these lessons, but demonstrated the possibilities issues-centered instruction holds for low achieving students when they are supported and encouraged. Our analysis takes us through the three stages of Dana's experience: the obstacles teachers face in designing and implementing PBHI lessons with low achieving students, how the support network of the university staff and her mentor, Ann, affected her approach to those challenges, and shifts in her thinking about active student learning and the amount of teacher-provided support necessary for student success.

Challenges Facing Dana

The challenges Dana faced in teaching a PBHI lesson for the first time were numerous but can be categorized in two areas. First, she was apprehensive about her students' motivation and ability to take responsibility for their own learning. Second, she was nervous about her ability to construct an entire unit around a problematic question that would both engage and support her students in having empathy for the perspectives of historical actors, and carefully considering the ethical and historical value questions inherent in this complex event.

Student Challenges

Dana was teaching two U.S. history classes, one that her school labels as "advanced" and one as "regular." She inquired several times during the planning sessions if she could write this unit for her advanced class because she felt they were more used to this type of instruction. She

was nervous about trying this with her regular class for several reasons, all of which echoed findings from previous research (Rossi & Pace 1998). First, her students in this class were apathetic toward history, social studies and public issues. “These students live in poverty situations and don’t come to school with much readiness for school. I was very nervous about teaching this [unit] to this class. My biggest fear was they wouldn’t do anything. I wasn’t afraid they’d misbehave, but they would be apathetic and wait for me to cue and feed them.”

Second, these students were reading at low levels and struggled greatly to read complicated texts. “This class, because of the No Child Left Behind ruling, had seven (of 27) students who were in their first regular education class in their entire school career. It was going to be a huge challenge to support them in this type of setting so they could maintain their dignity and not feel left out, to have an active role.” The state requires all high school graduates to pass a “graduation exam” in the four major content areas. The students take these exams in their sophomore year and retake (up to twice a year) until they pass. Only two of the twenty-seven had passed the exam the year before.

A third area of concern for Dana was the fact these students had seldom, if ever, been asked to consider historical empathy or multiple points of view. They were accustomed to either finding the simplest answer in the textbook to put into a worksheet or expressing opinions without a requirement of defending it with evidence. The PBHI unit would require the students to consider an ethical question from multiple perspectives, then make a judgment on the question, defending it with historical evidence.

Teacher Challenges

In preparing her students to face the challenges the PBHI unit would pose to them, we recognized three challenges facing her as the instructor. First, she lacked an understanding of the

ethical value conflicts inherent in the 1920's unit. In the past she had planned this unit as a series of interesting events, people or topics. She enjoyed teaching this decade because of all the interesting trends and enjoyed sharing with her students the stories of speakeasies, flappers, movies, stunts, inventions, and big business, but she had not considered the inherent tension between the desire for increased freedom and the reactions of the government and conservative groups to restrict the rights of minority groups. She needed to study a great deal about people and events she had previously not encountered, such as Eugene Debs, Emma Goldman, the Palmer Raids, the various points of view on immigration, Prohibition, and the Scopes Trial, in order to enhance her understanding of the various points of view on the ethical question of when the government is justified in limiting individual liberties. "Before this, the 1920's wasn't a topic I really knew a lot about. Teaching the 1920's has always been a fun period, but now seeing these connections of the political climate to today, it was really interesting for me to go back and do some reading and research, read some novels, dig up movies. Also, that idea of teaching history through the persistent issue really helps students and teachers keep coming back to the same question and see the links between units."

Dana's second area of concern was she had not attempted this type of instruction with this group of students because she felt she lacked an understanding of how to motivate them and support them in complex reasoning. She did not see how students who didn't care about history or who struggled to understand basic texts could see multiple points of view, much less empathize with those views and argue a position. She feared her students would not engage in the issues and if they did, they would be unsuccessful because she lacked an understanding of how to support their thinking throughout the process. In her pre-implementation interview, Denise said, "I'm nervous about this activity and if they'll be able to juggle all the information.

How do I get them from the first day through the final product and still understand the big concepts?”

The final challenge facing Dana was beginning to conceptualize the level of instructional support necessary to structure her students’ investigation, analysis, and synthesis of the multiple perspectives on the central question. They would need documents providing multiple points of view on the Palmer Raids and accompanying scaffolds to guide their comprehension of those documents. They would then need scaffolds to move them from comprehending their assigned perspective to making an argument in the form of a poster, speech, or questions. Ultimately there would need to be an assessment of their ability to evaluate the central question by stepping out of their assigned role and seeing the multitude of ideas presented in the hearing. The students would become Senators and write a letter to their constituents defending their vote on whether the Palmer Raids were justified. This letter would serve as the final assessment of the students’ dialectical reasoning using historical evidence for support.

In on-line forums throughout the planning stages, Dana showed concern for how to support her students through this process. “I do have a few concerns. First, I need to consider how to modify this assignment (essay, scaffolds, etc) for special education students. I was looking over IEP’s today and I have 4 students (11th graders) who are reading on a 4th grade level. With the "No Child Left Behind" mandates, I think this is a problem many teachers will face. Basically, I love how this unit is taking shape, but I guess my concern is if my lower level students will be able to assimilate all this information into something that makes sense to them. I guess that's where the scaffolding comes in. I'm really not sure where to start, but I'll try to generate some questions over the next week.”

Because our central question exposed areas where her historical knowledge was lacking, Dana researched perspectives she had not studied or taught in the past. She read secondary sources, historical novels, and watched a movie about the Palmer Raids in order to increase her understanding of the time period. “One more note, there's a wonderful scene about 3/4 of the way through the film *Reds* where the police raid John Reed's home looking for evidence of communist sympathies - I think they even mention Palmer. I don't know if we want to try to use a film clip but this is a wonderful movie about the early socialist party (I had seen it years ago but had forgotten the gist of it). It's definitely too mature and too long for students but there are some good scenes that might capture the essence of the period. I'm also reading *Ragtime* - I hope to watch that movie soon.” This quote provides evidence of the effort Dana put into not only researching the various perspectives on the Palmer Raids, but also considering ways to use those materials to engage her students in the issues.

Meeting the Challenges

Once Dana acknowledge the challenges of attempting a PBHI unit with her “regular” U.S. history class, she worked diligently to provide her students every opportunity to be successful with this format and level of critical analysis. In owning her and her students’ challenges, she was well equipped to recognize and anticipate points in the activities where the students would struggle. This allowed her to fully engage with a collaborative team to develop scaffolds, documents, rubrics, and assessments that would engage her students, demand expertise, but support them and encourage success. Dana met the challenges of this demanding teaching model in three important ways: (1) she fully engaged in the support network of university researchers and her mentor teacher provided by the on-linen forum and collaborative planning meetings; (2) she made important planning decisions by consistently considering her

students in every activity and working to ensure their success in the hearing; and (3) made critical in-time decisions that enhanced the written lesson design and made it fit the needs of her students.

Using Planning Support Network

The design of the mentor-mentee relationship was to create a partnership between a teacher who had planned and implemented a PBHI unit the previous year with a novice teacher. Dana was paired with Ann, a veteran teacher of 6th grade. Dana and Ann talked a great deal about the challenges of using the PBHI model with young students (in Ann's case) or low achieving students (in Dana's case). Both of their students shared many of the same challenges and Ann was able to share success stories from her craft knowledge (Hiebert, et. al., 2002) with Dana that encouraged her to "just try it" more than we university researchers could have. Specifically, the two teachers talked about reading levels which was of great concern to Dana. We will explore this issue in detail in a later section. One obstacle to developing a strong mentor-mentee relationship was Dana's school being located over 3 hours driving distance from Ann's school and the university. Therefore face-to-face meetings were limited to two, but the university staff had created an on-line discussion forum and requested Dana and Ann write weekly journals. We could post scaffolds, documents, and materials on the forum for review as well as discuss our concerns, ideas, challenges, and inspirations.

This journal entry from November indicates Dana's initial use of the forum:

1. I looked at the National Archives cartoon analysis, I think it will work great for 11th grade. It may need to be altered for 6th graders.
2. My goal for this week is to develop some questions my students can use when considering drawing their own cartoon. Also, I'm continuing to look at political cartoons.
3. I think it would be very helpful at this point for me to sit down with everyone and compare notes. I'm definitely interested in meeting next week.

Then on the week after our first planning meeting, she wrote:

1. Much relief after our meeting Thursday. I feel much better about the project and the process, as I can see the end product in sight for the cartoon lesson.
2. My goal for this week is to review the posted lesson material and to continue reading the information about the Red Scare.
3. At this point, it's just a matter of finding some quiet time to actually digest all this information. Should we post or e-mail observations about the cartoon lesson lecture notes?
4. Again, I feel much better about this process since we met face to face Thursday. I'm really pleased about the cartoon activity.

These forum entries indicate the usefulness of the face-to-face meetings, but because of the distance we relied heavily on the on-line forum as a place to share ideas and advice. Ann taught the unit first to 6th grade students and provided Dana with some useful advice. The most important switch we made was moving the Congressional Hearing back in the unit after a political cartoon lesson. We felt the cartoon lesson introduced three issues: immigration restriction, the Scopes Trial, and prohibition in an engaging way and would provide background information the students would carry over into the Congressional Hearing on the Palmer Raids. All four issues focus on the value conflict of personal freedom v. security/unity so the cartoon lesson would introduce the students to the value conflict they would address in the hearing. We suggested the modification to Ann after she taught her lessons and she agreed saying, "I think switching the activities would be a good idea. The cartoon activity is fun and it moves pretty fast. The Congressional hearing took my students a looong time because of preparation and 50 min. classes." Dana used this suggestion along with Ann's suggestion to put a strong leader in each group and a verbal student to play the historical role. Ann also posted examples of her students' political cartoons and essays to encourage Dana by showing her the products her 6th grade students produced as inspiration for Dana.

During these planning sessions, Dana took great care in critiquing and developing the instructional scaffolds for her students. The unit was designed for multi-level learners by using the overall format for both 6th and 11th graders, but with learning support for struggling students of any grade level in the form of scaffolds and activity format. However, the first concern for Dana was apathy and engaging her students enough to motivate them to do the hard work required for this activity. While brainstorming the value conflict of the 1920's, security v. freedom, Dana thought of an issue that her students would be very concerned with. She decided to create a grabber in which she would read an "official announcement" from the principal that there would be a mandatory breathalyzer test at the junior-senior prom, which was scheduled to take place two weeks after her unit began. Dana listed out reasons on both sides of security and freedom in order to create probing questions and help her student see the benefits on both sides. She then worked to create links to the unit and explain they would be studying the same value conflict in a different time period by showing a brief clip from the movie "Ragtime" showing a Palmer Raid. When we asked her how the grabber went, she reported, "We started on the initial day with the question about what the government should do and we had the prom sponsor come in and say they would be breath tested at the prom. A riot almost ensued and they really got involve din thinking about that. From time to time I would bring that up again because they really took that to heart." Her quote demonstrates the important decision to make the unit of the 1920's personally relevant to the students by finding an issue they could relate to that involved the same value conflict. This helped them empathize with the people of the 1920's they would be studying.

Another important concern for Dana and Ann was the reading ability of their students. During a lengthy discussion during a planning session, they expressed skepticism about their

students' abilities to read the character sketches that would explain each historical figure's point of view. Dana suggested in the forum that we break the 1.5 page character sketches into categories such as: "biographical data, political views, complaints, goals." She also knew her students would need to answer comprehension questions but was afraid the students would lack the motivation to tackle the two page character sketch and possibly 5-10 questions. We suggested instead of having two separate sheets of paper, one with the first person account of a historical character and the other being a series of questions, we would instead imbed reading comprehension questions after each paragraph or two in the character sketch. Her initial reaction on the forum said, "I'm very impressed with the characters. They seem very "alive" and I think the students will find their lives interesting. I think the embedded questions will definitely help my students." In her post-implementation interview, Dana said, "One of the best things was the decision to put those questions in the reading. We had just tested the students and half the class was reading at a 6th grade level. I think with the embedded questions, it made the group stop and discuss the reading before they moved onto the next section. This helped all the students in the group understand the basic perspective of their character, even if they struggle to read it themselves."

Once Dana established relevance and modified the readings to accommodate struggling readers, she worked to create a meaningful role for each student to play with a scaffold specifically designed for each of those roles. This allowed her to find a student's strengths and assign them to an appropriate role. For each historical figure, there was the "historical character" who would give a speech in first person at the hearing. They had an attorney who would ask them three questions to help them clarify their position and sit beside them during their testimony. A graphic artist would draw a poster that would visually represent the ideas put forth

in the speech. Finally, a senator would research the four historical figures representing the opposing side and prepare three questions for each of them. They could also help the attorney and speaker prepare for critical questions that would come from those opponents. For each of these roles, a specific scaffold was made to assist the students in preparing and increase the likelihood of success. Dana found this to be extremely important for every student to have a meaningful role, especially her special needs students. “I think the way the lesson was set up with multiple activities and roles, I could assign those students a role where they could contribute and be productive. Even if they weren’t strong readers, they could take the concepts and make a poster or cartoon.”

In-Time Pedagogical Decisions

Successful teaching of PBHI starts with careful planning, but its ultimate success relies on the skill of a teacher to make careful and subtle adjustments to fit the needs of specific students in a specific context. In four significant decisions, Dana created an environment that maximized the potential for her students’ success. First, while providing a clear vision of the end product and central question, she limited their immediate responsibility to one manageable task at a time. Second, she carefully selected students to play each role matching interests and abilities with the responsibilities to maximize success. Third, she tirelessly monitored their progress providing assistance, clarification, encouragement, and prompts. Finally, she modeled a presentation using one of the roles she did not assign to give her students a clear vision of a successful speech, poster, and questions from the lawyer and senator. All four of these critical decisions demonstrated Dana’s insights into her students and her belief that if she modeled success and supported them through each step of the process, they could tackle this complicated issue.

Often, teachers organize materials for large projects into “packets” they give to individuals or groups of students to work through. Dana was concerned her students would be overwhelmed with the number of scaffolds and procedures if she showed it to them all at once. Therefore, Dana decided to clearly explain the idea they would be preparing for a Congressional Hearing and would be “voting” as Senators on the Central Question: Was the government justified in its actions? This gave them a purpose for each activity, but instead of giving them all the scaffolds at once, she explained each task on a “need to know” basis. She said, “They worked very well in their groups. I broke it into smaller segments and only gave them little bits at a time.”

Dana also showed sensitivity and understanding of her students in her selection of roles for her students to play. While some teachers assign roles to students randomly or allow the students to choose these themselves, Dana knew she needed to carefully assign roles to students to match their abilities and learning styles so the entire class would benefit. Each group consisted of four students with an interdependent role. The speaker, lawyer, Senator and artists needed to collaborate to ensure consistent messages and preparation for cross examination. The same is true for the other roles. However, they each had an individual responsibility requiring each person in the group to contribute to the success. In addition, the rest of the class depended on each group accurately portraying each historical position so they could debate the question once they stepped out of character for their letter to their constituents explaining their individual vote. Dana carefully chose students who like to talk and debate as the speakers, students who struggle to read or speak for the artist role, and chose a “leader” for each group based on students she felt were not only motivated themselves, but could motivate others in the group. “One of the most crucial decisions in this class was putting them in groups and making sure there was at least

one strong student in every group, a student who would take a leadership role. I did not let them choose the roles, I assigned them their roles. I wanted to make sure the primary role would actually talk. There were a lot of difficult types of roles so that made sure everyone felt included or engaged.” Dana also realized there were some historical characters for the hearing more crucial to the overall debate than others so she considered that in her role assignment decisions. “I also knew of the eight historical characters there were four key perspectives to be presented to the class, so I chose my most talented students for those groups. I needed to make sure those perspectives were represented by a student who wouldn’t mind talking and debating.”

Because Dana had not seen evidence of rigorous, academic work from this class of students in previous units, she decided to demand rough drafts of the speeches and in the future plans to do the same for the posters and questions. “I had them do a rough draft of their speeches and I looked at them and gave suggestions. I would say ‘this is a really good point so bring this out.’ Looking back, this probably would have helped with the questions. I should have them generate a list of ten questions and look at them. I shouldn’t just wait and see the finished product.” During their preparation, she also circulated throughout the room probing their work, questioning their positions, probing for deeper answers, and answering countless questions. She noticed they struggled with the idea there might not be one, simple, “right” answer and had to constantly encourage them to read a passage again for themselves and decide what they felt was the “best answer.” “They called me over a lot because they weren’t sure they were doing this correctly and wanted reassurance they were doing it right.” She admitted in her post-implementation interview to giving them the answer too quickly and will try to probe more the next time she teaches this activity. “I think I did lead them a little more than I wish I would have. I wish I would have let them struggle a bit more on their own. Because I haven’t done

anything like this, they were so unsure of themselves. I finally had to stop at some groups and say there might be more than one right answer. Maybe I should have them read it and have them tell me what they just read or look at this sentence and tell me what they thought it meant.”

Dana did say she noticed by the end of the activity they were asking her opinion less and less and becoming more comfortable making a decision about what their answer should be. “I watched them improve over the week with the interpretive part of it and not looking for just exactly what I wanted them to say.”

Dana’s decision to model a presentation was a last-minute choice that was inspired by Ann’s experience. In Ann’s 6th grade class, the presenter for one of the groups was absent so she filled in for that students. She reported that she was the only presenter who didn’t read straight from their paper and her students asked her a lot of questions because she had engaged them more than the other speakers. Dana remembered that so on the day prior to the presentations, she took one of the characters she had not assigned to the groups (because she didn’t have enough students to use all eight characters). She prepared a speech, made a poster and created questions for the lawyer and senator to ask the character. She “performed” this for the class modeling a first-person speech “in character” and showed her poster, interpreting the symbols and slogans. She then had a student read her attorney’s questions and she answered them in character. She then had a different student ask critical questions from a senator and answered those in character. She felt this led to much better student products than she would have gotten with out providing an example. “I really think one thing that helped them empathize was my modeling a speech for them – play act, not report the research they had done. During their presentations, they were a bit stilted at first, but as they continued in the role and interacting with other members of the class, they started taking on the roles and enjoyed the play acting. I hadn’t originally planned on

letting the historical characters begin debating with each other, but once the controversy started emerging, the group members were itching to ask questions and that was when things really got interesting.” By setting an example of a quality performance, she provided clear expectations historical accuracy and empathy.

Shifts in Dana’s Thinking

Dana’s decision to attempt PBHI with her “regular” class of students created significant shifts in her thinking about her students and her teaching. She saw her students differently after the hearing and vowed to make significant changes in her future teaching practices with them.

A new view of her students

During Dana’s post-implementation interview, she said:

“I was very, very nervous about doing this lesson with this class. My feeling immediately after doing this, I was humbled, because they did a great job. They were interested and interesting. They worked well in groups. I was amazed they bought into this like they did and took ownership of the roles. They were very excited about it. The last day of class, a couple of the students stayed after and wondered if we could start a debate club because they really enjoyed the back and forth. At the beginning of the year, only two of these twenty students had passed the graduation exam. This was a low-achieving class and really rose to the occasion. I have not been expecting enough of my low-achieving students. If I set the bar higher, they will rise to the occasion. That really did humble me to see I’ve been letting them get by without challenging them enough. If they’re interested and it’s structured well, it was really rewarding.”

Her quote is evidence of a fundamental and honest change that occurred when she watched her students demonstrate complex historical reasoning as a result of her carefully developed instructional supports for the hearing. She saw her students engaged at a level not previously experienced in prior units. She was skeptical they could handle the complex reading, empathy, argumentation, and analysis required to successfully debate the ethical question of whether or not the Palmer Raids were justified. She now believes that all students, regardless of label, are

capable of complex historical reasoning when engaged in authentic tasks supported by instructional scaffolds.

In a later reflection, we asked Dana how her experience impacted her impression of her students. She said:

“The biggest impact it’s had is it’s changed my thinking about working with the less motivated or achieving students. I’ve not been expecting enough of them, letting them off the hook. If I hold them to higher standards, they’ll perform. I’ve been teaching thirteen years and I’ve forgotten they’ll do what I expect them to do. They’re capable of doing some pretty sophisticated thinking and preparation. Especially with these struggling students, I had begun to buy into their “we can’t do this.” I had been doing things like this with my more advanced classes, but this made me rethink what I do with struggling students.”

In specific terms, Dana watched her students empathize with historical characters and defend their positions, even though those were different from their own personal views. A young lady was assigned to portray Emma Goldman, one of the characters targeted by A. Mitchell Palmer. In the final debate, the students stepped out of their historical role to argue the justification of the raids from their personal point of view. In spite of the historical character she had portrayed, she was supportive of the government’s need to monitor people they see as a threat to national security. Her position surprised Dana because she had played Goldman so convincingly. Similarly, the students portraying A. Mitchell Palmer expressed reservations about the government arresting people because of their views and felt it put our freedom of speech in danger. Dana recognized her students were capable of historical empathy, evaluating the credibility of witnesses and arguments, defending a position and supporting it with historical evidence, and considering multiple perspectives before making a decision.

A renewed view of teaching

Dana concluded she had fallen into a rut in her teaching with her “regular” class. She had bought into their apathy and felt the pressure of a high stakes graduation exam to teach lower order comprehension of history. This experience caused her to re-evaluate her approach to history with this group of students. “They’re so apathetic, but they’ll remember these characters on the graduation exam. We’re so test driven, but if they’re not taking ownership, they’re not learning it. Expect more – hold higher standards.” She realized that lower order, knowledge based tests do not have to mean lower order, knowledge based teaching. By engaging her students in PBHI, she feels she increased the likelihood of their success on the graduation exam, at least for the items connected to the 1920’s.

This experience also shifted her view of her subject. Developing the congressional hearing around the central question of whether or not the government’s actions were justified, forced her to re-think the topic of the 1920’s and the approach she had used in the past:

“Teaching the 1920’s has always been a fun period, but now seeing these connections of the political climate to today, it was really interesting for me to go back and do some reading and research, read some novels, dig up movies. Also, that idea of teaching history through a Persistent Issue question, I think it really helps students and teachers. You keep coming back to the same questions. Now when the students ask, ‘why do I need to know this?’ this approach answers that question. I hope the students will say, ‘oh we talked about this before’, they’ll see those links.”

Dana now believes in the importance of establishing the relevance of the unit to the students immediate concerns, but also showing how the unit connects them to people across time and space. Her students saw the value conflict of freedom v. security as an on-going dilemma connected to current political debates, but also their own personal situation with the breathalyzer at the prom.

After this experience, Dana expressed appreciation for the support she received through the PIH network. She felt she could not have developed these materials in isolation which supports other research demonstrating collaboration develops more professional knowledge among teachers (Saye, et al. 2005, etc.) She encouraged other teachers to “just try it” for the first time and not let their preconceived notions of their students hinder their efforts. Dana acknowledged that because her role as the teacher shifted, she will need continued work in the role of facilitator. “I like the facilitator role and I’m bouncing back and forth between that and the teacher at the front. It’s difficult because there is so much more preparation. You have to be clear about expectations, but I like this model. I don’t think I’ve fully embraced it yet, but I do like having the students being historians, researchers, and taking a more active role in their learning.” She went on to say that she struggled with a desire to give them the answer instead of letting them investigate and draw conclusions. “The work is different, the background work. You have to give up the limelight and let them struggle some, which is hard, because I know the answers, but I needed to let them struggle without jumping in to quickly to save them.”

Even though her first attempt was challenging and even a bit stressful, Dana stressed she will continue because of the life she saw in her students. Her classroom was a different place and she was encouraged to see her students enthusiastically participating in an activity that required a great deal of complex thinking. She expected apathy and got enthusiasm. She will do this again to improve her own skills as an inquiry-based teacher and continue developing the investigative, analytical, and communication skills she saw emerge in her students.

IMPLICATIONS

Dana’s experience provides many lessons and inspires future questions as we explore the possibilities and challenges of engaging typically low-achieving students in PBHI. Dana

demonstrated that under the right conditions, even novice teachers can succeed in engaging students in complex historical reasoning. She was able to motivate her students to work much harder than they were typically accustomed and engage her students in a level of empathy, analysis, and debate not frequently seen.

Several factors contributed to her success. First the support of the Persistent Issues in History Network provided craft knowledge through her mentor teacher and research-based suggestions through the university team. This corroborates other studies demonstrating when teachers and universities collaborate in long-term projects, teachers gain a more sophisticated professional understanding of their practice (Saye, et. al, 2005; Hiebert, et. al. 2002). We have plans to continue dialoguing with Dana as she continues using this unit in subsequent semesters, monitoring the adjustments she makes to the unit and changes in her thinking about the unit, her students, and teaching.

A second contributor to Dana's success was her full engagement in researching the many perspectives in the case and carefully critiquing the planning ideas and scaffolds for her students. The university team was apprehensive about the ownership Dana would feel for the lessons since we had taken the lead in researching and writing the character sketches and designing and numerous instructional scaffolds. We were uncertain Dana would fully understand the complexities of the historical characters. She proved us wrong. She "owned" the various characters, fully appreciating what each character brought to the trial. She was able to tease out the details of each character's story with her students to help them defend and articulate their unique point of view. We are aware of the time and energy it takes to research units and lessons from multiple points of view, and Dana's ability to use character sketches developed by the research team makes us optimistic as we continue forward with curriculum development

collaborations with teachers. We felt Dana's concern regarding her students' abilities in PBHI contributed to her level of critical analysis of the materials. She fully engaged in the collaborative design of the unit by evaluating the materials with the specific needs of her students in mind. This partnership of craft and professional knowledge further supports the collaborative community of practice research by others (Saye, et. al. 2005 & Hiebert, 2002). As we continue this work, we will continue to explore the integral relationship between the theoretical understanding of rigorous teaching and the specific, classroom context a teacher brings to the analysis of the materials being designed.

Dana was successful for a third reason, which was her in-time decision-making about organizing the instruction with her students. The results of her decisions demonstrate that students can be motivated to reason about complex historical problems in a rigorous way if they are convinced it is worth their effort and they know how to succeed. Her grabber hooked them from the beginning because it was relevant to them personally but also carefully aligned with the issues the Congressional Hearing would raise. Her modeling an exemplary presentation gave them a clear vision of success. Giving them only the hand-outs and instructions they needed for each portion of the process kept them motivated by not overwhelming them. Carefully choosing roles for each student and grouping students wisely give us practical suggestions for increasing the motivation of students and their chances for success.

Dana's testimony about her being humbled and realizing she had not been expecting enough of her "regular" students inspired us to write this paper. We saw in her experience students who previously had been lifeless came alive and thought carefully and rationally about a complicated issue our society grapples with today. Dana's experience gives great hope to those who argue history education should be taught with the clear purpose of preparing tomorrow's

citizens to tackle complex societal questions (Barton & Levstik 2004, Saye & Brush 2004) and those who have advocated for the inclusion of all students in complex inquiry activities (Rossi & Pace, 1998). Pre-collegiate social studies is the most important avenue for preparing tomorrow's citizens. With her support network, Dana has demonstrated teachers can help students considered "at-risk" to gain the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of citizens in a participatory democracy.

Table 1. Dana and Ann's PBHI Unit

<p>Topic: 1920's in U.S. History Persistent Issue: In what circumstances is the government justified in limiting personal freedoms? Unit-specific Central Question: Was the government justified in limiting civil liberties to promote peace and prosperity during the 1920's?</p>
<p>Culminating Activity: Students will be divided into groups according to the various topics covered in the unit, such as Palmer Raids, Prohibition, Scopes Trial, etc. Each group will create a museum display answering the central question related to their specific topic. At the "museum opening" the students will visit the various exhibits, noting the interpretation of the curators. They will then write a review of the interpretations and the implications for history.</p>
<p>Unit Progression:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The instructor introduces the unit by having the class experience and then debate the justification for a school-based example of the school administration limiting the personal freedoms of students. For example, Denise told students there would be mandatory breathalyzer tests at prom. The teacher links this example to the Persistent Issue and the Unit-specific Central Question and introduces the culminating unit activity. 2. Teacher provides an overview of major events during the 1920's highlighting the consistent struggle between freedom and security/peace: Prohibition, Scopes Trial, immigration restriction, Palmer Raids, etc. 3. Students analyze political cartoons in three ways on three topics: Whole class evaluates cartoons on immigration restriction, small groups analyze cartoons on the Scopes Trial, individual students create cartoons on the question of Prohibition. 4. Students study one of eight perspectives on the Palmer Raids (four government and four anti-government witnesses). They prepare testimony and questions for a Congressional Hearing on the Central Question. 5. Students prepare and display the museum exhibits.

Illustrative Lesson – Congressional Hearing on A. Mitchell Palmer’s Raids

1. Expert Groups: Students are assigned one of eight groups. Each group is responsible for becoming an expert on the views of one person representing either a pro or anti-government position. Government: A. Mitchell Palmer, Henry Ford, a small business owner, a police officer; Anti-Government: Eugene Debs, Emma Goldman, an immigrant worker, and a priest.
2. Prepare Testimony: In each expert group, there are four roles: Historical Impersonator, Lawyer, Congressional Committee Member, Graphic Artist. In these groups they help prepare a speech for the historical figure, the attorney prepares questions for their client, the Senator prepares questions for the four witnesses on the opposing side, and the artist prepares a graphic representation of their main points.
3. Hearing: The class hears testimony from the eight witnesses, listens to the lawyer ask questions, then asks their own questions of each witness. Senators are free to debate with the historical figures.
4. Conclusion: Students step out of their assigned roles to debate the Central Question.

Table 2: Census Data on Harper County

Category	Harper County	United States
High School graduate	65%	80%
Bachelor’s Degree	8%	24%
Average income	\$25,807	\$41,994
% living below poverty line	27%	12.4%
Free/Reduced lunch	75%	----
White residents	40%	75%
Black residents	60%	12%

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