DISCUSSING DIFFICULT HISTORY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: PRESERVICE TEACHER PREPARATION

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Doctor of Education

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by

Katherine Leigh, B.S., M.Ed.

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Abstract

Teacher preparation programs (TPPs) are expected to train preservice teachers (PSTs) who can transfer knowledge and skills into teaching practice. Because most elementary educators teach all subject areas (e.g., language arts, math, science, and social studies), TPPs aim to provide PSTs with opportunities to develop a breadth and depth of understanding of subject-specific content and pedagogy. Specifically, social studies requires that PSTs work toward proficiency in a range of skills and knowledge, including interdisciplinary topics (e.g., history and geography), contexts, inquiry, and civic engagement in a complex, multicultural world. Furthermore, PSTs must learn to engage with topics identified as "difficult history" and to integrate them into their curriculum and instruction. Situated within a politically and socially contentious state, a Mid-Atlantic University's Education School's Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (BSED) degree program faculty and leadership are interested in understanding how PSTs, who represent a range of backgrounds, experiences, and dispositions, respond to and use the curricular addition of teaching difficult history in their Social Studies Methods course. Through an exploratory case study, I sought to understand what teaching strategies PSTs use when practicing in a mixed-reality simulated environment after receiving explicit instruction on teaching difficult history topics. Additionally, I sought to understand the PSTs' perceptions of enabling conditions and potential barriers in doing so and to understand in what ways their backgrounds and experiences relate to the content. Based on the study's findings, I provided recommendations to the Education School's BSED program stakeholders.

Keywords: elementary preservice teachers, teacher preparation programs, difficult or hard history, elementary social studies, mixed-reality simulation

Katherine Leigh

Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education

School of Education and Human Development

University of Virginia

Charlottesville, VA

APPROVAL

This study, "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation," has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education and Human Development in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Dr. Judy Paulick, Chair Signature

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Dr. Stanley Trent, Committee Member Signature

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Dr. Julie Cohen, Committee Member Signature

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Dr. Patrice Grimes, Committee Member Signature

Date: _____

Table of Contents

DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Gretchen Smith, who instilled a love of education in me at a very young age. Nana's dedication to education and the way she loved all people are woven into my life, these pages, and how I approach teacher education and supporting preservice teachers.

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LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Teacher preparation programs (TPPs) are expected to train preservice teachers (PSTs) to be able to transfer knowledge and skills into teaching practice (Elementary Education PreK-6, 2018; Richmond, 2019; von Hippel & Bellows, 2018). In TPPs, elementary preservice teachers (PSTs) learn to provide a well-rounded education for their students (Rickenbrode et al., 2018). Preparing PSTs to provide a well-rounded education necessitates preparation in, but not limited to a) child development; b) understanding educational contexts; c) diversity and inclusion; d) curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices; e) classroom management; f) pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986); and g) disciplinary knowledge and skills in content areas such as language arts, math, science, and social studies (Rickenbrode et al., 2018). Additionally, PSTs bring a myriad of experiences, identities, and dispositions which may impact their ability to be effective teachers (Saultz et al., 2021; Taylor & Wasicsko, 2000). TPPs are tasked with supporting PSTs in being ready to transfer what they have learned to their future classrooms (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015).

Macro Problem of Practice

TPPs are held responsible for the preparation of PSTs by accreditation organizations such as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), which requires TPPs and their PSTs to meet the Interstate Assessment and Support Consortium's (InTASC) standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). The InTASC standards cover a broad range of research-based content knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions (CCSSO, 2013). The InTASC standards outline what effective teaching looks like and what program completers should know and be able to do to support student success (e.g., the learner and learning, content

knowledge, instructional practice, and professional responsibility). It is important to note, however, that PSTs often struggle to transfer what they learned in their TPPs to the work they do with students in schools (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015).

Teachers must have a deep and flexible understanding of content areas and, while supporting their students in gaining a deeper understanding and mastery of the content, be able to provide real-world connections and respond to issues that may arise (CCSSO, 2013). Additionally, teachers must use a variety of instructional strategies to support students in understanding the content, making meaningful connections, and developing the ability to apply their knowledge and skills (CCSSO, 2013). Most elementary teachers teach all content areas in self-contained classrooms, which requires TPPs to focus on preparing PSTs with a thorough understanding of a range of elementary curricular topics in addition to an understanding of how students learn and engage with specific content (Monte-Sano et al., 2020; Shulman, 1986; Tucker, 2016).

Like other content areas, effectively teaching social studies requires that PSTs work toward proficiency in a range of knowledge and skills, including interdisciplinary topics (e.g., history and geography), contexts, inquiry, and civic engagement in a complex, multicultural world (NCSS, n.d.). Despite the urgency and importance of the goals of social studies, teaching social studies methods and subsequent methods courses are often minimized in TPPs (Bolick et al., 2010; Nganga et al., 2020). Furthermore, many PSTs experience clinical placements where social studies content is truncated or not taught at all (Fitchett et al., 2014; Haverback, 2017). Often, elementary teachers focus on reading and mathematics because of accountability initiatives; as a result, social studies has become a “back burner” subject in elementary classrooms (Houser, 1995; Whitlock & Brugar, 2019). PSTs may feel a sense of responsibility to

teach social studies, including difficult or controversial topics; however, they are reluctant to engage with the content and strategies (Bousalis, 2022; Nganga et al., 2020; Saultz et al., 2021; Sleeter, 2017). This may be because they do not feel prepared, or it may be due to aspects of their personal backgrounds and experiences (Bousalis, 2022; Nganga et al., 2020).

PSTs must learn to engage with difficult history and integrate it into their curriculum and instruction (Nganga et al., 2020; van der Valk, 2018), as it can support students in developing necessary critical thinking skills (e.g., distinguishing facts versus opinion, problem solving, and decision making) (Hess, 2009; NCSS, 2017). Difficult history, as defined by Gross and Terra (2018) refers to "periods that reverberate in the present and surface fundamental disagreements over who we are and what values we hold" (para. 5). In other words, it refers to times and events in history that produce discomfort among students, teachers, administration, or parents/caregivers. Commonly identified difficult history topics include, but are not limited to, race, enslavement, oppression, and human rights (Gross & Terra, 2018; Harris et al., 2022; Martell, 2017; Reisman et al., 2020). NCSS (2017) states that elementary students should be given opportunities for "in-depth investigation of concepts that challenge and engage them" (para. 18), as they provide opportunities for students to develop their critical thinking skills (e.g., inquire, evaluate, analyze issues, and challenge sources). It is important that teachers provide students with a comprehensive account of our nation's history in developmentally appropriate ways (Hughes, 2021; Learning for Justice, n.d.; NCSS, 2017). Teachers must also take into consideration how to teach difficult history as open and closed issues (McAvoy & Hess, 2015). History topics identified as open issues have "multiple and competing reasonable answers" (McAvoy & Hess, 2015, p. 38) (e.g., What caused the great migration?), whereas some history topics are closed issues and have an agreed-upon answer (e.g., Was enslavement a defendable

practice?). Therefore, it is critical that TPPs provide specific training for PSTs that supports their success in teaching difficult history (Rich & An, 2022; Sonu, 2020) and helps move them past their hesitations.

Preservice teachers bring a variety of identities, experiences, and dispositions to their work that may impact their effectiveness as a teacher (Jupp et al., 2019; Saultz et al., 2021; Taylor & Wasicsko, 2000). It is important to consider how this, in turn, may impact PSTs' ability to meet the InTASC standards (CCSSO, 2013) and interactions with future students. The InTASC standards about dispositions specifically outline that teachers should be able to weave "cross-disciplinary skills (e.g., communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and the use of technology)" into their practice, as well as be able to "build literacy and thinking skills across the curriculum, and help learners address multiple perspectives in exploring ideas and solving problems" (CCSSO, 2013, p. 4). Such dispositions are necessary for teachers to engage elementary students in difficult conversations (NCSS, 2017). If it is the role of TPPs to ensure that PSTs are effectively and thoroughly prepared with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to become effective teachers (Emerson et al., 2018), then it is important to note that PSTs' identities, experiences, and dispositions, as well as the TPP in which they are enrolled, may impact their readiness (Chelsey & Jordan, 2012; Zhukova, 2018).

Micro Problem of Practice

Within a politically and socially contentious environment in a Mid-Atlantic state, engaging with social studies curriculum, including difficult history topics, can be particularly daunting work for preservice teachers (Bousalis, 2022; Haverback, 2017; Rich & An, 2022; Truscott & Stenhouse, 2022). PSTs have expressed concern (Elementary Program Coordinator interview, August 2022) about being fired for discussing or teaching what the current governor

has deemed divisive topics (Executive Order No. 1, 2022). Even more recently, the state's Board of Education presented a new version of an already revised social studies standards document. The Board of Education's version was led by a five-person, governor-approved committee, as opposed to the originally-revised document which had been created under the previous governor and was led by scholars in the field (e.g., American Historical Association). The original revised document included the perspectives of marginalized groups, discussions about racism and its lingering effects, and debated free-market economy. The new version of the document, however, has been criticized for "lacking content, being politically motivated, and even being 'whitewashed'" (Natanson & Ashbury, 2022, para. 1). A date has not yet been set for the rollout of the new standards, and they are currently under a period of public comment; however, a standards change will directly impact social studies education.

Teacher Preparation Program. This study took place at a predominantly white, Mid-Atlantic University's Education School. The University is 56% white, 56% female, and has approximately 16,500 undergraduate students. The Education School is 62% white, 80% female, and has approximately 530 undergraduate students. The study focused specifically on preservice teachers in the new four-year Bachelor of Science in Education (BSED) in elementary education program. The BSED cohort, from which the study's sample emerged, is 69% white, 88% female, and has 26 undergraduate preservice teachers.

During their first two years, the BSED PSTs take one child development course and one exceptional learner course in addition to their general studies requirements. For years three and four, in addition to completing any remaining general studies requirements, the BSED PSTs take program-specific courses, including those covering education theory, pedagogy, and content

methods. For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that this program requires enrollment in one two-credit Social Studies Methods course in the first semester of year four.

The TPP tries to approach education holistically, taking into consideration the preservice teachers' emotional, social, physical, and academic needs. Additionally, the TPP leverages practice-based methods (Forzani, 2014; Grossman et al., 2009), taught using the implementation of high-leverage teaching practices (Ball & Forzani, 2011). Practice-based teacher education methods include the use of approximations, decompositions, and representations, as ways to scaffold novice teachers in learning how to teach (TeachingWorks, n.d.). The TPP leveraged approximations across several courses in the program. Practice-based teacher education provides opportunities for PSTs to try out skills with direct feedback, as a way to advance the skills of teaching and student learning. Such skills include, but are not limited to, facilitating discussions, eliciting and interpreting individual students' thinking, and building respectful relationships. (Forzani, 2014; Grossman et al., 2009; TeachingWorks, n.d.). The TPP supports PSTs in learning how to facilitate discussions with elementary students through multiple modalities (e.g., direct instruction, role playing, and approximations). It is important for PSTS to be trained in and practice teaching skills, such as facilitating a discussion, before implementing them in their own classrooms.

Furthermore, the TPP strives to implement Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) pedagogy (Gay, 2018), which leverages students' characteristics, experiences, and perspectives as tools to improve the quality of classroom instruction. The TPP values diversity and the inclusivity of multiple ideas and points of view and several programs have undergone evaluations for their use of CRT practices and materials in their courses. While there is room for additional opportunities, the program offers CRT workshops for PSTs and several courses (e.g.,

Introduction to Curriculum and Instruction) have integrated the discussion of CRT and social justice practices into their coursework. CRT integration has been a more prominent focus in the elementary Master of Teaching program, and program faculty are working on ensuring it's consistent across the programs.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Dispositions. PSTs in the BSED program take the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale (CRTSE), among other assessments (e.g., Factors Influencing Teaching Choice Scale, Interpersonal Mindfulness in Teaching Scale, and Short Grit Scale) as one way to explore how the characteristics of incoming teacher education students are related to experiences, attitudes, and practices during the TPP. The CRTSE was designed to elicit information (e.g., beliefs and dispositions) from preservice teachers regarding their self-efficacy for enacting specific culturally responsive teaching (CRT) tasks (Siwatu, 2007). The TPP uses the CRTSE to examine the PSTs' CRT self-efficacy and outcome expectancy beliefs. The BSED PST cohort took the CRTSE upon entering the Education School's TPP. The cohort's average CRTSE overall score was 78.5 out of 100, and the study participants averaged 83.5 out of 100.

Siwatu (2007) notes that "participants who believe in the positive outcomes associated with culturally responsive teaching will have higher scores compared to those who do not believe in the potential outcomes associated with this approach to teaching" (p. 1091). Additionally, the CRTSE scores can be associated with teaching quality since efficacy beliefs can impact decision making in instructional practice and strategy use (Debnam et al., 2015; Lauermann, 2017, p. 177). The CRTSE asks the participant to rate their confidence in engaging certain CRT practices (e.g., build a sense of trust in my students and use my students' cultural background to help make learning meaningful). Many CRT practices align with social studies practices and facilitating

discussions about difficult history topics (Bousalis, 2022; Haverback, 2017; Monte-Sano et al., 2020).

Social Studies Methods Course. The social studies methods course is structured to equip elementary preservice teachers with the content knowledge and skills needed to support the development of dispositions necessary for teaching social studies to diverse populations of students. However, program faculty and leadership have discussed (in the context of making the program more explicitly social justice-oriented) the missed potential of this course as a space to prepare PSTs to engage with the content and pedagogy specifically aligned to difficult history (interview with Elementary Program Coordinator, August 2022). Being able to facilitate the discussions inherent in teaching difficult history—an important outcome on its own—may also be a skill that is transferable to other difficult conversations that arise in elementary classrooms.

Past iterations of the Social Studies Methods course focused more broadly on economics, geography, history, and civics. The current course has been revised so that three of the weeks are specifically dedicated to supporting PSTs in learning how to teach difficult history. As part of the difficult history integration, PSTs were exposed to difficult history topics (e.g., Native American Residential Schools), teaching practices (e.g., discussions), and pedagogy that supports such instruction (e.g., exploring multiple perspectives). Additionally, teaching history that has been labeled “hard” or “difficult” is often inconsistent in its implementation or inadequate across contexts (Harris et al., 2022; Shuster et al., 2018). In other words, depending on the political and social expectations and norms, some topics (e.g., race, immigration, and assimilation) may be labeled as difficult, commonplace, or even divisive based on the context. Therefore, it is important to support preservice teachers in their preparation to engage with such topics.

Within the course, difficult history is framed in a way that helps PSTs learn about the difficult events, beliefs, and questions that resulted from oppression, exploitation, violence, and discrimination in the United States (Shuster, 2018). This is in addition to learning about the work done to overcome those realities and the strategies used to convey those details. This contrasts with common practices that often whitewash or misrepresent realities by providing simple narratives told from one perspective (McCarthy & Sealey-Ruiz, 2010; Shuster, 2018; Stoddard, 2022). Some PSTs do not enter the program expecting that they will be responsible for teaching difficult or controversial topics to elementary school students (interview with Elementary Program Coordinator, August 2022). Program leadership and faculty, who are aware of both the minimization of social studies in TPPs and the importance of preparing PSTs in this area, are interested in understanding how PSTs respond to and use this curricular addition. Additionally, program leadership recognizes that preservice teachers' experiences and backgrounds vary considerably, and with that in mind, the leadership is also concerned that some preservice teachers might leave the program still unprepared. Furthermore, program leadership is interested in how learning the skills involved in teaching difficult history might transfer to the facilitation of other difficult conversation and topics across the BSED program.

Use of Approximations. In the revised version of the Social Studies Methods course, the instructor integrated an approximation of leading a small-group discussion about a difficult history topic. Approximations are opportunities that simulate parts of professional practice before enacting them in the classroom (Grossman et al., 2009). The Mursion, Inc. mixed-reality simulation technology was used for the approximation. Following several weeks of readings, videos, direct instruction, modeling, and discussions about teaching difficult history, the PSTs led a small group discussion with five upper elementary avatar students. They used a piece of

children's literature about assimilation and the harsh realities of Native American residential schools. Specifically, PSTs were tasked with leading a small group discussion and supporting the avatar students in understanding the following: a) the text's content; b) the feelings, experiences, and motivations of characters; and c) the fairness of assimilation and Native American residential schools in their historical context. The use of mixed-reality simulation technology created a low-risk environment for PSTs to use the difficult history strategies they learned and do so with no harm done to students if the PSTs made mistakes (Dalinger et al., 2020). Exploring the PSTs' simulation experiences in conjunction with their identities, experiences, and dispositions, provided the opportunity to identify the ways in which PSTs took up and implemented difficult history teaching strategies and how the TPP can support PSTs in the development of these specific skills.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is rooted in the notion that understanding is situated, or context bound. Cochran et al. (1993) state that "careful attention must be paid to the context in which the development of understanding of teaching occurs, and learning must be situated in a context like the one in which these understandings are to be used" (p. 266).

PSTs possess a range of identities, experiences, and dispositions that have the potential to impact their engagement and uptake of content and skills in their teacher preparation program, which may also influence classroom practices (Fry & O'Brien, 2015; Jupp et al., 2019; Landa & Stephens, 2017; Saultz et al., 2021). It is important for TPPs to identify PSTs' identities and experiences to support their development as educators. Identity is defined as "the qualities, beliefs, etc., that make a particular person or group different from others" (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, and culture) and experience is defined as "to do or see (something) or have

(something) happen to you" (e.g., schooling, programming, community experiences, and family events) (Britannica, n.d.). Taylor and Wasicsko (2000) define dispositions as "the personal qualities or characteristics that are possessed by individuals, including attitudes, beliefs, interests, appreciations, values, and modes of adjustment" (p. 2). With these definitions in mind, it is important to consider how identities, experiences, and dispositions can and should be taken into consideration when preparing preservice teachers to become effective educators.

As previously noted, the PSTs in this study are receiving their teacher preparation at a predominantly white institution, in a predominantly white program, and within a state where the governor has put forth legislation that attempts to constrain what is being taught in classrooms. Specifically, much of what the governor has deemed divisive topics (Executive Order No. 1, 2022) are those aligning to social studies content. For example, the final redraft of the History and Social Studies Standards for K-12 (2022) removes suggested discussions of racism and its lingering effects. Additionally, there are pieces of legislation across the country that are attempting to do the same (e.g., 2022 House Bill (HB) 7 and the "Stop the Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees" (WOKE) Act in the Florida House of Representatives). Preservice teachers going into the classroom may feel as though they need to censor what they teach.

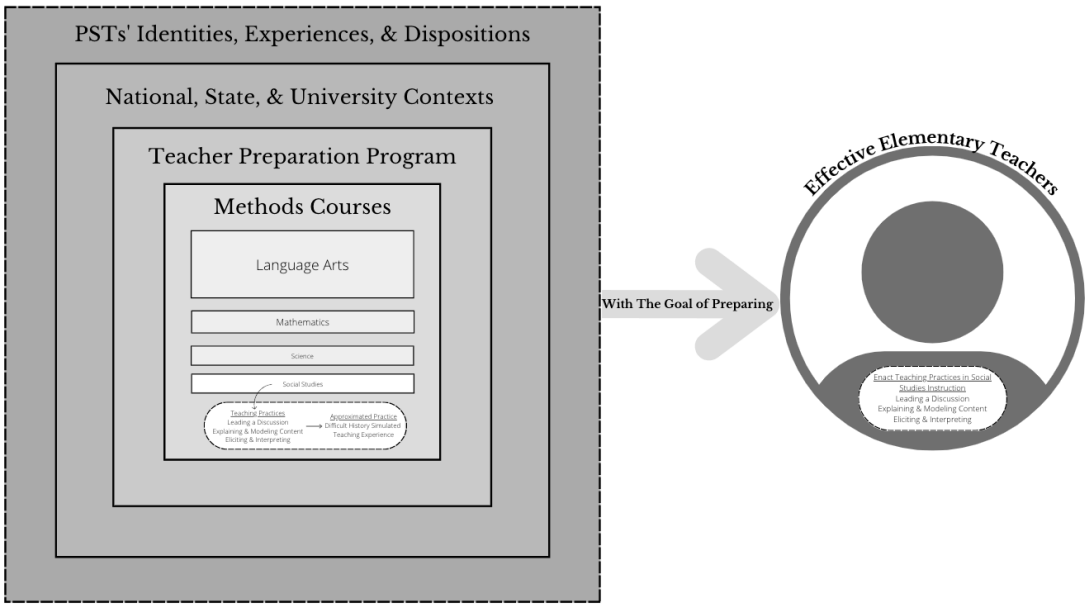
One portion of the content and pedagogy taught in the PSTs' TPP occurred in their Social Studies Methods course. Specifically, within that methods course, teaching difficult history was discussed, modeled, and practiced, as it utilizes a unique set of knowledge and skills (Rodríguez, 2020a) and was one way to practice teaching skills. The PSTs were then given the opportunity to practice discussing a difficult history topic with a small group of students, through a simulated teaching experience. A mixed-reality simulation, also identified as an approximation (Forzani,

2014; Grossman et al., 2009), helped prepare PSTs to practice specific skills they will use in their future classrooms (Cohen et al., 2020; Dotger, 2013).

Teacher preparation programs are tasked with supporting and preparing PSTs to become well-rounded and effective teachers (CCSSO, 2013; Rickenbrode et al., 2018). For the PSTs in this study to become effective elementary social studies teachers who use teaching skills, such as facilitating discussions, TPPs needed to ensure that courses included the content and experiences that supported this development (Grossman et al., 2009; Matsumoto-Royo & Ramírez-Montoya, 2021; NCSS, 2017). Therefore, keeping contextual and PST factors in mind, through intentional course content and purposely designed practice experiences, the TPP aimed to support the development of effective elementary social studies teachers.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Note. The size of the individual methods course boxes reflect the amount of coursework dedicated to the content area (i.e., language arts = nine credits, mathematics = three credits, science = two credits, social studies = two credits).

Problem of Practice

The purpose of this study was to a) identify which teaching difficult history strategies PSTs were explicitly taught and then used in a simulated learning environment; b) understand what PSTs identified as supporting or hindering them in teaching difficult history; and c) identify what dispositions and experiences were related to PSTs' performance. Findings and recommendations were shared to help relevant stakeholders determine how to prepare PSTs to teach difficult history. Utilizing an exploratory case study approach, the following research questions guided this study:

- Research Question 1: How does the social studies methods course instructor conceptualize difficult history, and what specific teaching strategies were taught in the course?
- Research Question 2: After receiving explicit instruction about teaching difficult history, what teaching strategies do PSTs use to facilitate a small-group conversation about difficult history in a simulated learning environment?
- Research Question 3: What factors (e.g., teaching practices and dispositions) do PSTs perceive as supporting or hindering the facilitation of a conversation about difficult history in a simulated learning environment?

Significance of the Study

Research has shown that TPPs are a place for novice educators to try out practices that may be difficult for them to use and where PSTs can engage with approximations (one strategy in practice-based teacher education) (Forzani, 2014; Grossman et al., 2009). These approximations can be used to develop PSTs' capacities to enact responsive instruction and be responsive to students' ideas (Kavanagh et al., 2020), and have the potential to be used for social

justice education (Dominguez, 2021). Social studies is an area into which social justice topics can be integrated (Learning for Justice, n.d.) and, given a lack of mastery experiences in this area (Haverback, 2017), it is critical that TPPs prepare PSTs for this work (NCSS, 2017; Sonu, 2020). Approximations in the form of mixed-reality simulations are one way to support PSTs' training in this area (Badiee & Kaufman, 2014; Cohen et al., 2020; Kaufman & Ireland, 2016). Additionally, gaining an understanding of PSTs' dispositions and experiences as they relate to their performance in the simulation can help TPPs differentiate the curriculum to meet the needs of a variety of PSTs. This exploratory case study allowed for gathering data and findings that were unique to this context, and led to recommendations that were given to stakeholders who understand the specific needs of the context.

Definitions of Key Terms

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: The three main approaches to supporting and teaching diverse students are Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2010), and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris, 2012). For this study, "Culturally Responsive Teaching" will be referenced, but it is important to know the connections and alignment among the three. Ladson-Billings' (1995) Culturally Relevant Pedagogy focuses on engaging and supporting students whose cultural and lived experiences have been historically excluded. More specifically, it emphasizes the synergistic relationship between home/community culture and school culture, noting that schools are situated within a larger culture and set of systems. Gay's (2010) Culturally Responsive Teaching builds from Ladson-Billings' foundational theory and adds specific teaching practices and strategies. For example, Culturally Responsive Teaching highlights that intention without action is insufficient and recommends ways to make learning relevant (e.g., adjusting curriculum/instructional

techniques and building student-teacher relationships). Paris's (2012) Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy draws from Gay's work, but focuses on the evolution of students' identity and culture. It recommends drawing on and sustaining students' culture and language while decentering whiteness. Each of these approaches provides a unique perspective and set of recommendations.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale (CRTSE): The "CRTSE Survey" is used to assess teachers' beliefs that engaging in culturally responsive teaching practices will have positive classroom and student outcomes. The scale is based on the research done by Bandura (1977) on outcome expectancies (anticipated consequences of a person's behavior) and Siwatu (2007) on Culturally Responsive Teaching Competencies. For the CRTSE survey, respondents rate themselves from 0 to 100 on the probability that a particular culturally responsive teaching behavior (e.g., build a sense of trust in my students, use my students' cultural background to help make learning meaningful, and obtain information about my students' cultural background) will lead to positive classroom and student outcomes.

Dispositions: "Dispositions" can be defined as, "tendencies [that] individuals [will] act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs (Villegas, 2007, p. 373). Similarly, the InTASC standards define teacher dispositions as "habits of professional action and moral commitments that underlie [a teacher's] performance" (CCSSO, 2013, p. 6).

Elementary Teacher Preparation Programs: For this study, elementary "teacher preparation programs" (TPPs) are state-approved programs that prepare undergraduate students who are seeing initial licensure to teach in kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms. Such programs require successful completion of coursework, clinical experiences, teaching internships, and licensure examinations.

Hard or Difficult History: Gross & Terra (2018) propose five criteria that support the identification of "difficult history." Difficult histories (1) are central to a nation's history; (2) tend to refute broadly accepted versions of the past or stated national values; (3) may connect with questions or problems facing us in the present; (4) often involve violence, usually collective or state sanctioned; and (5) create disequilibria that challenge existing historical understandings, partly as the result of the other four conditions. They are most often aligned with "issues of social justice and where America failed to live up to its stated values, and the ideas of American exceptionalism" (Weisend et al., 2022). Additionally, Shuster et al. (2018) note that "people have a deep-seated aversion to hard history because [they may be] uncomfortable with the implications it raises about the past as well as the present" (para. 6).

Historically Marginalized: "Historically marginalized populations" are those that have withstood and continue to withstand discrimination, unequal access, and exclusion based on imbalanced power structures (e.g., economic, political, education, health, social, and cultural) that are typically based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, immigrant status, and religion (Nadal et al., 2021).

Mixed-Reality Simulations: Cohen et al. (2020) note that the approximation tool of "mixed-reality simulations" (e.g., *simulated learning environment*) is considered "mixed" reality because "the interface is a virtual classroom, but the student avatars are remotely controlled by a trained actor" (p. 209). Participants interact with student avatars to focus on discrete skills and practice implementing some of the theory of teaching that traditional teaching programs provide without having to enter a physical school. By engaging in low-risk, virtual experiences, participating students build knowledge and skills and practice decision-making without consequence, and therefore, with no harm to real students.

Open and Closed History Questions: McAvoy and Hess (2015) state that "the open–closed distinction rests on whether there are multiple and competing reasonable answers (open) or whether there is an agreed-upon answer (closed)" (p. 38). They argue that both types of questions belong in the classroom but should be taught differently. The researchers, for example, clearly state that "teaching both sides" or "teaching the controversy" is detrimental, not fair or allowing freedom of thought, as some would posit. For example, "We do not expect history teachers to give a 'fair' hearing to Holocaust deniers and similarly, it is irresponsible for schools to present questions as empirically controversial when in fact they are not" (p. 39). The researchers suggest that teachers acknowledge that some people doubt a topic, but to explain that for the purposes of the classroom discussion, students are to start from empirically-based facts.

Practice-Based Teacher Education: "Practice-based teacher education" (PBTE) can be defined as "professional preparation that focuses on novices' learning directly how to teach" (Matsumoto-Royo & Ramírez-Montoya, 2020, p.1), as opposed to focusing solely on theories of teaching and learning. Similarly, Hauser and Kavanagh (2019) define PBTE as "an approach to preparing novice teachers that focuses on the importance of developing novices' ability to enact teaching practices" (Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education, n.d.). In PBTE programs, preservice teachers are provided authentic experiences to practice the work of teaching, often accompanied by reflective practices. Forzani (2014) notes that PBTE opportunities "focus novices' learning more directly on the work of teaching rather than on traditional academic or theoretical topics that may have only marginal relevance to the realities of the classroom" (p. 357).

Pre-Service Teachers: In this study "preservice teachers" (PSTs) refers to undergraduate teacher candidates who are enrolled in a teacher preparation program.

Social Justice: Often used as a broad term to describe efforts to ensure equity for all people, the John Lewis Institute for Social Justice defines "social justice" as:

> a communal effort dedicated to creating and sustaining a fair and equal society in which each person and all groups are valued and affirmed. … It recognizes that the legacy of past injustices remains all around us, so therefore promotes efforts to empower individual and communal action in support of restorative justice and the full implementation of human and civil rights. Social justice imperatives also push us to create a civic space defined by universal education and reason and dedicated to increasing democratic participation (para. 1).

White Fragility: Based on the work by DiAngelo (2011), "white fragility" describes when a white person is in

> a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. Racial stress results from an interruption to what is racially familiar. (p. 56)

Whiteness: A complex and often debated concept, "whiteness" stems from the creation of the term "white," which originates from Virginia slave owners and 17th century colonial rules. The term "white" was created after Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, as a way to separate and privilege based on skin color and continent of origin (Kendi, 2016). The National Museum of African American History and Culture (n.d.) describes it as:

> whiteness and white racialized identity refer to the way that white people, their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as the standard by which all other groups are compared.

Whiteness is also at the core of understanding race in America. Whiteness and the normalization of white racial identity throughout America's history have created a culture where nonwhite persons are seen as inferior or abnormal (para. 1).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In Chapter 2, I examine the literature that frames my understanding of the problem of practice and informs this Capstone project's research methods and recommendations. Through this literature review, I will examine:

- preservice teachers' identities and dispositions
- content and instruction of elementary teacher preparation programs
- teaching difficult history
- the use of mixed-reality simulations in teacher preparation

Preservice Teachers

Preservice teachers (PSTs) are those enrolled in a teacher preparation program (TPP) that leads to preparation for licensure. In addition to coursework, preservice teachers are required to complete a supervised field experience (student teaching), receiving support and feedback from mentor teachers and clinical educators.

Preservice Teacher Dispositions and Experiences

Dispositions, as indicated by the InTASC standards, are "habits of professional action and moral commitments that underlie [a teacher's] performance" (CCSSO, 2013, p. 6). Dispositions can be influenced by the range of characteristics, identities, experiences, perspectives that PSTs bring to their programs. These unique characteristics may impact PSTs' engagement and uptake of content and skills in their TPP, as well as influence future classroom practices and student engagement (Fry & O'Brien, 2015; Jupp et al., 2019; Landa & Stephens, 2017; Saultz et al., 2021). Dispositions represent visible patterns in behaviors with students and habits of mind that influence teacher decision-making (Warren, 2018). Additionally, dispositions include a variety of indicators (e.g., appreciates multiple perspectives and facilitates learners'

critical analysis, recognizes potential of bias in their representation of content, realizes that content knowledge is not fixed, but complex and culturally situated and evolving) that support student engagement and success (CCCSO, 2013).

Much of the current research on elementary preservice teacher dispositions specifically focuses on mathematics (Jong et al., 2021; Mistretta, 2022; Saclarides et al., 2022) or supporting emerging bilingual students (Kim et al., 2022; Kolano & Sanczyk, 2022; Shultz, 2020), instead of elementary teaching overall. Several studies focus on PSTs' dispositions in reference to perceptions of education (Saultz et al., 2021), promoting cultural competence (Landa & Stephens, 2017), and dispositions associated with culturally responsive pedagogies (Ginsberg et al., 2021; Truscott and Stenhouse, 2022).

In their 2021 study, Saultz et al. studied the impact of PSTs' prior experiences on their perceptions of education and education policy. The researchers used archival survey data and supplemented it with data from 151 students enrolled in an Introduction to Education Course, a requirement for all teacher education students at the institution. Participants completed a survey about teacher attitudes towards schools and education policy, and Saultz et al. (2021) noted how PSTs' often brought positive prior experiences (e.g., positive experiences with curriculum and schooling) with them to their teacher education programs. In the study, the researchers indicated that the prior positive experiences were skewing PSTs' understanding of current issues in schools. The researchers encourage TPPs to disrupt PSTs' notions that do not accurately align to the state of education (e.g., optimism regarding school quality) in order to avoid PSTs becoming "complicit in the reproduction of societal inequalities" (Saultz et al., 2021, p. 24). It is imperative for TPPs to assess and understand how PSTs' prior experiences and dispositions impact their approach toward teaching. Landa and Stephens (2017) conducted a case study of one elementary

education preservice teacher. The researchers noted how many PSTs enter college with a limited understanding of social and cultural issues and "maintain their minimal knowledge in undergraduate teacher preparation programs that continue to minimize sociopolitical content, as well as the sociopolitical aspects of teaching and learning" (Landa & Stephens, 2017, p. 55). Similar to Saultz et al. (2021), Landa and Stephens identified that PSTs may leave their programs with a superficial or skewed understanding of the current issues in schools and how to prepare elementary students to take social action. Therefore, it is necessary for TPPs to support PSTs' development of cultural competence through content and pedagogical approaches in courses (e.g., building awareness, opportunities to articulate emotional responses, and opportunities for reflection) as teachers' assumptions can impact their instruction and student learning (Landa & Stephens, 2017).

At times, TPPs may need to reimagine how they are supporting their PSTs. Ginsberg et al. (2021) conducted qualitative interviews and focus groups with TPP stakeholders (i.e., teacher education professors, preservice teachers, and classroom teachers and administrators) in the Blocks program, an innovative model for teacher preparation at a university in the Southwest. The Blocks program physically moves teacher preparation courses from the university's campus into local elementary schools to increase connection to authentic experiences. Ginsberg et al. (2021) were interested in how similar models could be implemented at predominantly white institutions to support PSTs' uptake of culturally responsive teaching practices. Through their study, the researchers identified how the Blocks model helped to develop PSTs' dispositions before graduation by providing PSTs meaningful and scaffolded opportunities to engage in and practice core teaching practices (e.g., lesson planning, coteaching, and student assessment). Ginsberg et al. (2021) note the importance of bridging theory and practice as a way to support

PSTs in their development of teaching practices and asset-minded dispositions. Across these studies on dispositions, it is evident that TPPs may benefit from taking their PSTs' dispositions and experiences into consideration when providing their teacher preparation.

Preservice Teacher Identities and Whiteness

Public school teachers remain predominantly white (79.3%) and female (76%), despite the fact that student and family diversity has increased and become more visible in the United States (NCES, 2019). The U.S. Department of Education data reflect similar statistics in terms of PST demographics, with 76% identifying as female and 79% identifying as white (NCES, 2022). This contrast in student and teacher demographics can have negative implications for students, as experts suggest that many white PSTs may enter their programs with negative beliefs about students from historically marginalized populations (Gay & Howard, 2000; Groulx, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2000; Wade, 1998).

Researchers have explored the concept of "whiteness" in teacher education and the role of a dominant culture (i.e., white culture). As defined by the National Museum of African American History and Culture (n.d.), whiteness refers to "the way that white people, their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as the standard by which all other groups of are compared" (para. 1). Although TPPs often state the importance of preparing social-justice-minded teachers and culturally responsive pedagogies, the majority of programs still certify cohorts that are more than 75% white (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). While white teachers can and do support racially and ethnically diverse students, their whiteness influences their teaching practices and beliefs about historically marginalized students (Bollin & Finkel, 1995; Sleeter, 2017). Sleeter (2017) notes that teacher education faculty, including adjunct faculty, are also over 75% white, which impacts how course curriculum is designed and what is taught. As explained by Milner et

al. (2013), teacher preparation curriculum "mirrors, in many ways, the P-12 curriculum in that it is Eurocentric and white dominated" (p. 346). Therefore, it is important to analyze PST preparation and understand the ways in which the curriculum, instruction, and PSTs' previous experiences and beliefs/dispositions impact their readiness to support all students.

Supporting PSTs in developing an understanding of their race -and the impact it has on their teaching- is one way to counteract whiteness in teacher preparation. Oamek (2019) conducted interviews with 13 white PSTs at a large Midwestern public university and found that participants expressed race-consciousness in a variety of ways. The researcher noted how some participants were unaware that they made assumptions about historically marginalized populations, many of which were framed by white norms. Oamek (2019) also noted how some participants drew from personal experiences to make broad, deficit-oriented comparisons between themselves and the students, while others attributed school outcomes to race. Other participants challenged dominant discourses (e.g., the achievement gap and race-based behavioral issues) and drew from course content and practices to support their challenge. Awareness of PSTs' assumptions, biases, beliefs, and dispositions in conjunction with culturally responsive course content, could help support TPPs to identify areas in which these characteristics impact white teachers' teaching and learning.

At times, PSTs' identities, beliefs, and experiences can cause them to have extreme reactions to course content and instruction that draws from anti-racist and anti-bias pedagogy. Miller and Starker-Glass (2018) conducted a narrative research study at a large urban institution in the Southeast with the aim of better understanding the complicated and deeply rooted nature of whiteness in PSTs and TPPs. The researchers operated under the following definition of whiteness: "the implicit normalization of the inferiority of persons of color as manifested

globally, nationally, and locally" (Miller & Starker-Glass, 2018, p. 131). The study's participants, all of whom were white, were selected based on their extremely negative reaction to a module on African American language (AAL). The researchers conducted a line-by-line analysis of their textual data and described experiences with the participants. Analysis of data revealed that participants felt the module's content was "anti-American," "an indoctrination to anti-American values," and a threat to their personal values (Miller & Starker-Glass, 2018). Participants indicated, for example, that Mexican-American students weren't American, AAL was not legitimate, and their personal experiences of discrimination delegitimized the lives of marginalized people. The researchers discussed how such beliefs and dispositions, aligned to experiences and whiteness, can have profoundly negative and harmful effects on these PSTs' future students. Miller and Starker-Glass (2018) suggest that TPPs try to understand why some white PSTs feel so threatened by diversity and propose the integration of personal interrogations of political and social beliefs and political ideology.

Overall, TPPs are faced with the challenge of supporting PSTs in understanding and unpacking their own intersectional identities as well as unlearning the biases and assumptions that they may have toward historically underserved communities (as well as the impact that those biases and assumptions may have on their students) (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Bollin & Finkel, 1995).

Content and Instruction Within Elementary Teacher Preparation Programs

A review of the literature suggests that there are several key features that TPPs should have to effectively prepare elementary PSTs. This section describes the content and instructional knowledge included in TPPs, culturally responsive teaching practices, the role of practice-based

teacher education, and the preparation that is unique to elementary social studies education and teaching difficult history topics.

Components of Teacher Preparation Programs

TPPs are held responsible for the preparation of PSTs by accreditation organizations such as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). Additionally, TPPs and their PSTs are required to meet the Interstate Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards that cover a broad range of content knowledge, skills, and dispositions (CCSSO, 2013).

Content Knowledge. The InTASC standards (CCSSO, 2013) describe *content knowledge* as a teacher understanding of "the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s)" (p. 24) that are taught and utilized in creating learning experiences. In turn, the goal is to make the core knowledge, skills, and big ideas accessible to students and presented in a way that is relevant and provides opportunities for connection and meaning making. Shulman (1986) also describes "curricular knowledge" as a separate entity. However, for the purposes of this study, "curricular knowledge" will be included under the umbrella of content knowledge, as content knowledge outlines what PSTs will use for the foundation of their content. In other words, it is important for teachers to know and understand what is unique to a given content area, as it will support their instruction and assessments. Both content knowledge and curricular knowledge are interwoven in the public-school system's standards and pre-determined curriculum.

Instructional/Pedagogical Knowledge. *Planning for Instruction,* as outlined in the InTASC standards (CCSSO, 2013), requires the combination and balance of a teacher's knowledge of the content, curriculum, pedagogy, and cross-disciplinary skills, as well as the

needs and funds of knowledge of their students within a given context. *Instructional strategies* require understanding and use of a broad range of effective strategies that support students in knowledge acquisition, developing a deep understanding of the content, and the ability to make connections and apply knowledge and skills (CCSSO, 2013). Shulman (1986) outlines the need for teachers to respond to deficiencies in the curriculum, analyze content for cultural awareness, and transform content knowledge into developmentally appropriate instruction. It is important for teachers to understand that effective pedagogical practices must align with the content, as well as with the strategies by which their students' unique needs will be met.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge. *Application of content*, one category of the InTASC standards, suggests that PSTs should be able to "connect concepts and use differing perspectives to engage learners in critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local and global issues" (CCSSO, 2013, p. 27). Additionally, an important distinction from content knowledge or pedagogical knowledge is that PSTs will be expected to leverage pedagogical content knowledge to help students develop an understanding of complete concepts and the skills to transfer what they learned into real-world contexts.

Shulman (1986) explains that PCK includes effective and accurate representations of ideas (e.g., illustrations, explanations, examples), the level of difficulty within concepts, and strategies to reorganize students' understanding to accommodate preconceptions and misconceptions. Teachers must know how pedagogical and content knowledge are organized from a teaching perspective in order to help students understand specific concepts. Cochran et al. (1993) also indicate that "PCK concerns the manner in which teachers relate their subject knowledge … to their pedagogical knowledge … and how subject matter knowledge is part of the process for pedagogical reasoning" and "PCK differentiates *expert teachers in a subject* area

from *subject area experts"* (p. 263). Pedagogical content knowledge requires the teacher to align their specific content knowledge while applying that content in a way that provides opportunities for students to engage with the material in meaningful and impactful ways.

Preservice Teacher Preparation

Zhukova (2018) suggest that teachers "play a vital role in shaping changes in students' values/attitudes, mindset, ways of thinking/seeing things, skills, behaviors, and lifestyles that are consistent with sustainable development" (p. 102). TPPs are tasked with supporting PSTs in the development of doing so. Research shows that once PSTs enter the classroom as novice teachers, they may not be meeting necessary teaching standards or feel prepared for their work (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015). As an example, Chesley and Jordan (2012) interviewed approximately 30 teachers with three months to three years of experience and approximately 30 more experienced and trained mentor teachers. One major finding that emerged from the focus groups conducted by the researchers was that TPPs reported that had not prepared novice teachers to teach content (e.g., content was too generalized) or had not prepared them to plan for instruction (e.g., contrived assignments and experiences).

Similarly, Zhukova (2018) noted that some of the early-career teachers focused more on classroom management than on content and instruction, an occurrence that is well documented in extant research (e.g., Hogan et al., 2003; Wolff et al., 2015). These findings reflect the importance of providing targeted, high-quality content and instruction as well as meaningful experiences for all PSTs (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2011). Additionally, in a 2018 qualitative study, Miles and Knipe explored the transition from preservice to first-year teaching. Of the 51 first-year teachers who participated in interviews, 13 felt they were "not prepared" [to teach], while 14 felt prepared, but only due to classroom experience. From the data in this study, a

common theme emerged that time spent in placements, or even in the first months of employment, is when the most significant learning to become a teacher occurred (not in PSTs' teacher preparation courses). Studies such as these show the potential positive impact of providing PSTs with hands-on learning opportunities. While there are many methods to support PSTs' preparation, there is evidence that practice-based methods, which approximate classroom experiences, are particularly promising.

Culturally Responsive Teaching and Dispositions

Gay's (2010) Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is a dynamic process that highlights that intention without action is insufficient. Additional, Gay (2010) recommends ways to make learning relevant to all students (e.g., by adjusting curriculum/instructional techniques and building student-teacher relationships). CRT outlines three foundational components, which include the following: a) understanding cultural diversity and differing communication styles; b) using culturally relevant curriculum, resources, and instructional examples; and c) holding high expectations for all students (Gay, 2010), all of which are situated within the work of social justice and pushing back against the unjust status quo.

Truscott and Stenhouse (2022) conducted a mixed-methods study of culturally relevant teaching and teachers' dispositions. (Gay's (2010) culturally *responsive* teaching stems from Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally *relevant* teaching.) Truscott and Stenhouse (2022) were interested if teacher dispositions could be pedagogically specific (i.e., culturally relevant teaching) and if TPPs could support PSTs in cultivating positive teaching dispositions through intentional teacher preparation experiences. The researchers conducted qualitative and quantitative analysis of PSTs' interview data, specifically the language used when discussing teaching and learning experiences in urban schools. Truscott and Stenhouse (2022) found that

PSTs demonstrated indicators such as “respect for diversity, authenticity, learner protection, and meaningful purpose and visions” (p. 966) but lacked attention to critical consciousness or sociopolitical context. The researchers recommend that TPPs identify PSTs’ dispositions, especially those linked to culturally relevant/responsive teaching, and provide PSTs with opportunities to develop those dispositions (Truscott & Stenhouse, 2022).

Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale. The Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale (CRTSE) gathers information (e.g., beliefs and dispositions) about self-efficacy for enacting specific CRT tasks (Siwatu, 2007). Self-efficacy refers to a teacher’s belief that they can promote and positively influence students’ learning (Bandura, 2007). While it does not measure PSTs’ social justice work, the CRTSE is one assessment used in TPPs to explore how PSTs’ characteristics and engagement may be related to their experiences, beliefs, and dispositions (Siwatu, 2007). In a 2020 quantitative study, Cruz et al. found that participants’ (n=245 pre- and in-service teachers) scored highest on the CRTSE indicators aligned with building trust and personal relationships with students. The lowest CRTSE scores were for indicators aligned with specific cultural knowledge, using CRT techniques, and including specific cultural elements in the curriculum. Findings from this study also indicate that participants expressed having comfort with student-relationship-centered strategies and having discomfort with cultural or content strategies. Knowledge gained from assessments like the CRTSE can provide information about PSTs’ beliefs and dispositions and help support the TPPs in preparing PSTs to become effective educators (Siwatu, 2007). Additionally, because PSTs’ beliefs about their self-efficacy can impact their instructional decision making, CRTSE scores may be associated with PSTs’ potential teaching quality (Debnam et al., 2015; Lauermann, 2017, p. 177; Reyes et al., 2012).

Practice-Based Teacher Education

Forzani (2014) describes practice-based teacher education (PBTE) as directly preparing novices how to teach through professional practice, which puts an emphasis on specific core practices in addition to field experiences. Practice-based teacher education methods include the use of approximations, decompositions, and representations, as ways to scaffold novice teachers in learning how to teach (TeachingWorks, n.d.). Grossman et al. (2009) suggest combining theory and practice, while providing opportunities for reflection and refinement through personal reflection and targeted feedback from the professional community. In their comparative case study across different types of professional education programs, Grossman et al. (2009) examined the experiences provided to novices, noting that learning is embedded in such activities. The researchers describe the importance of providing novices with approximations, which focus on key components of teaching that may come naturally to more experienced teachers, yet may be difficult for novices (Grossman et al., 2009). Matsumoto-Royo and Ramírez-Montoya (2021) note how approximations in PBTE provide opportunities to practice skills that may be commonplace in real classrooms. Such practices are guided by decomposition, a process by which essential elements of complex practitioner practices are broken down and identified for the purposes of improved teaching and learning.

High-Leverage Teaching Practices in PBTE. High-leverage teaching practices refer to what PSTs practice to advance their skills of teaching (e.g., facilitating discussions, giving feedback, and building respectful relationships) (Forzani, 2014; Grossman et al., 2009; TeachingWorks, n.d.). Teaching practices are essential to a) leveraging content and pedagogical instruction; b) checking for student understanding and misconceptions; c) probing students' thinking; and d) adjusting instruction and support based on the unique needs of students

(Forzani, 2014; Grossman et al., 2009). Teaching practices are often integrated into PBTE, as the practices are at the core of supporting PSTs in developing the fundamentals of teaching. Forzani (2014) notes the importance of what PSTs are learning and how it's learned, specifically identifying the need to focus on specific practices (e.g., facilitating discussions, modeling, and providing instructional explanations) over time "in the field." It is important for TPPs to identify the ways in which they are supporting PSTs in developing such practices.

Effectiveness of PBTE. Although PBTE approximations help novices to understand discrete pieces of knowledge and to practice skills, scholars disagree on approximations' effectiveness in the preparation of PSTs. Grossman et al. (2009), for example, suggest that such practices can never fully encompass the complexity and scope of real-world experiences. Specifically, Grossman et al. (2019) note that approximations may not be situated within a specified context, which reduces the authenticity of the experience. PBTE scholars acknowledge that a lack of context is often a limitation of PBTE (Forzani, 2014), as teaching is endlessly complex. Nevertheless, PBTE provides opportunities for PSTs to practice discrete skills and receive feedback before attempting those skills in context.

Zeichner (2012), Kavanagh and Danielson (2020), and Domínguez (2021) are also critical of PBTE in instances when it lacks a commitment to social justice, as PBTE typically focuses on practicing instructional routines (Hauser & Kavanagh, 2019). Components of teacher preparation that have focused on social justice have not traditionally been aligned with practice, but instead aligned with internal reflection (Kavanagh, 2017). With this in mind, Dominguez (2021) followed a cohort of 23 PSTs who engaged in a social-justice-minded role-play as preparation for an ethnic studies summer program. Participants specifically engaged in difficult conversations, and Dominguez (2021) observed how the "non-typical" PBTE practice created

space for more than executing an instructional practice, as it also fostered relationships and disrupted dominant narratives. There is more to learn about the connections between PBTE and its impact on novice teachers' instruction, especially when preparing PSTs to engage students in complex and challenging social-justice-oriented topics.

Prevalence of Social Studies in PSTs' Training

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) suggests that the purpose of elementary social studies is to "enable students to understand, participate in, and make informed decisions about their world" (2009, p. 31). With that purpose in mind, social studies preparation requires PSTs to work toward proficiency in a range of skills and knowledge, including interdisciplinary topics (e.g., history and geography), contexts, inquiry, and civic engagement in a complex, multicultural world (NCSS, n.d.). Research has shown that, despite the urgency and importance of the goals of social studies, it is a discipline often minimized in TPPs to make space for literacy and mathematics instruction (Bolick et al., 2010), revealing a gap between what is taught in TPP social studies courses and what future teachers need in order to be successful in the classroom (Nganga et al., 2020; Starr, 2012; Tannebaum, 2015). Additionally, due to policies and accountability measures for other content areas, many PSTs experience clinical placements where social studies is truncated or not taught at all (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012).

In a 2017 study, Haverback explored the extent to which 37 PSTs had opportunities to implement a specific task in their school placements and were able to observe social studies lessons within those placements. Fewer than eight of the participants had mastery experiences and even fewer participants observed social studies being taught. Not only were participants lacking these necessary experiences, but PSTs reported feeling as though their knowledge of

social studies and ability to teach it was also lacking and negatively impacting their ability to effectively teach social studies. Similarly, Bousalis (2022) conducted a mixed-methods study examining 43 elementary PSTs' perceptions and attitudes towards social studies at the onset of their TPP's Social Studies Methods course. Bousalis found that while 91% of the participants indicated it was important to teach social studies, 84% indicated that they knew "fairly little" to "very little" about social studies content, with 2% saying that they were "not at all" knowledgeable. Additionally, regarding teaching social studies, 79% reported feeling only "fairly" or "not at all" comfortable. Researchers suggested that there be practical changes to Social Studies Methods courses, such as new materials, technology integration, and citizen education workshops for PSTs (Bousalis, 2022; Nganga et al., 2020). Relevant research (e.g., Bousails, 2022; Haverback, 2017; Nganga et al., 2020) can help TPPs best support and prepare their PSTs for teaching social studies.

The NCSS suggests that is important for PSTs to have a "willingness to recognize that differing viewpoints are valuable and normal" and "the skill of analyzing and evaluating sources of information-recognizing propaganda, half-truths, and bias" (NCSS, 2016, p. 186). These skills and attitudes can be developed through the study of difficult history topics, some of which have been labeled controversial (NCSS, 2016; Reisman et al., 2020; Rodríguez, 2020a, 2020b; Sonu, 2020). Nganga et al. (2020) conducted a phenomenological qualitative study with 37 PTSs, exploring their preparedness and perception of specifically teaching controversial social studies topics (global and local) (e.g., immigration). The researchers were particularly interested in the intersection of such topics and the participants' Social Studies Methods course. The study revealed that 80% of participants did not have exposure to controversial global and local topics in their university courses, including in their methods course. Participants identified several

motivations for teaching controversial global and local issues (e.g., teacher responsibility), as well as constraints (e.g., lack of instructional skills and experience).

Teaching Difficult History

A review of the literature on difficult history suggests that PSTs must learn to engage with difficult topics and integrate them into their curriculum and instruction (van der Valk, 2018). Therefore, this section describes the significance of teaching difficult history and the role that having discussions about challenging topics can play in elementary social studies classrooms.

Significance of Teaching Difficult Topics

Difficult history, according to Harris et al. (2022), "implies a unique event [in the past or present] that, when studied, has the power to deeply affect those who encounter it" (p. 2). The debate about which parts of history are taught, why, and how is not new (Symcox, 2001), and often reflects challenges that align to given contexts (Harris et al., 2022). Gross and Terra (2018) suggest that what makes teaching difficult history challenging is not how the history aligns or misaligns to the to a student's understanding, but instead how the history confronts and/or diminishes the dominant narrative or belief. McAvoy and Hess (2015) recommend that teachers teach about issues that are authentic, powerful, and recurring. They identify the important distinction between open and closed questions and issues, where open refers to those that have multiple reasonable answers and closed have only one. McAvoy and Hess (2015) show the distinction between the two by providing the following examples:

> Open Policy Question: Should the United States continue sanctions against Iran? (question about policy for which there are multiple and competing views) and Closed

> Policy Question: Should women in the United States have the right to vote? (question that is currently settled, considered noncontroversial) (p. 38).

Experts in the field urge educators to take into consideration whose perspectives and experiences are being told or silenced (and why) in addition to how individuals will relate to the content (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Gross & Terra, 2018; Learning for Justice, n.d.; Miles, 2019).Uncertainty about students' responses, possible backlash from caregivers and community members, and a lack of preparation and knowledge often prevent teachers from engaging with hard history in their classrooms (Gross & Terra, 2018; Nganga et al., 2020; Rogers et al., 2017; Stoddard, 2022; Zembylas, 2014). Therefore, it is critical that TPPs better equip PSTs with the necessary curricular and pedagogical knowledge to successfully teach about difficult history topics (Rich & An, 2022), a nuanced area (Sonu, 2020), to support their overall social studies content knowledge.

Role of Discussions about Difficult Topics

Facilitating discussions with students is a critical teaching practice that can be leveraged to examine difficult history (Gross & Terra, 2018) and other challenging topics, such as race (Bolgatz, 2005; Martell, 2017; Reisman et al., 2020). Although discussions are foundational to educational practices and a working democracy (Dewey, 1916), Kus (2015) found that preservice elementary teachers were less likely to address potentially challenging topics during class discussions than were secondary preservice teachers. Bolick et al. (2010) and Rodríguez (2020a, 2020b) suggest that elementary PSTs do not often receive an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the history content that may support the content knowledge needed to teach difficult history in a developmentally appropriate way. Additionally, Rodgers et al. (2017) also

note that teachers may be hesitant to address challenging topics for fear of pushback from administration and caregivers.

Within this framing, Rodríguez (2020a) analyzed two experienced elementary teachers as they used the children's text, *The Bracelet*, to discuss the difficult topic of Japanese American internment during World War II. The study provided recommendations for classroom practice, including how to engage young learners in critical historical thinking by, for example, using primary sources in conjunction with narrative texts to develop critical historical thinking skills in younger students. These research studies outline the importance of supporting PSTs with both content and pedagogical instruction. As a result, it is imperative that TPPs prepare elementary PSTs to facilitate such conversations in their classrooms (Hess, 2009) and present accurate historical narratives (Rodríguez, 2020a, 2020b).

Mixed-Reality Simulations in Teacher Preparation

A review of the literature on mixed-reality simulation suggests that it is an effective tool to support TPPs. This section describes mixed-reality simulations (MRSs) and the impact of simulated approximations on preservice teachers.

Mixed-Reality Simulations

Kaka et al. (2021) describe simulations as "a learning experience designed to approximate a real-world context in which approximations of phenomena can be experienced by participants, and which responds in some substantive way to participants' actions" (p. 70). Simulation scenarios are used to help prepare PSTs to enact practices that are employed in classrooms and that meet the unique needs of their future students (Badiee & Kaufman, 2014; Cohen et al., 2020, Dalinger et al., 2020; Dotger, 2013; Keeney et al., 2019; Knezek et al., 2015; Matsumoto-Royo & Ramírez-Montoya, 2021). While traditional preservice TPPs include coursework and experiential

opportunities, such as observing classrooms and practicing strategies during student teaching (CAEP, 2022), there are several advantages to also using simulations and approximations to engage in teaching practices.

Simulated Approximations

Approximations can be used to provide PSTs with opportunities for deliberate practice and allow for errors in decision making, which can be part of the learning process (Grossman et al., 2009). Mixed-reality simulation technology in TPPs has been used to engage PSTs in approximations (Badiee & Kaufman, 2014; Dieker et al., 2014; Judge et al., 2013; Kaufman & Ireland, 2016; Knezek et al., 2015; McPherson et al., 2011). Several studies evaluate the effect of simulation use on PSTs' employment of behavior management strategies or perceptions of teaching (Badiee & Kaufman, 2014; Dieker et al., 2014; Judge et al., 2013; McPherson et al., 2011), while others (e.g., Knezek et al., 2015) assess the simulator's effect on PTSs' perceptions of teaching and changes their experiences. Regardless of the content, the purpose of leveraging approximations like MRS is to improve PSTs' performance of well-established teaching practices in a low-risk environment (Dieker et al., 2014; Grossman et al., 2009; Howell & Mikeska, 2021).

When PSTs are practicing new skills in a controlled MRS environment, there may be a) less harm done to K-12 students (Dalinger et al., 2020); b) opportunity for repeated practice (McPhearson et al., 2011); and c) low-risk, safe learning environments for PSTs (Grossman, et al., 2009). Furthermore, despite the downside of the high cost of the technology, MRSs can be successfully used to engage with more nuanced content knowledge and to practice correlating pedagogy. For example, Kaka et al. (2020) leveraged MRSs to support PSTs' facilitation of whole-group discussions of controversial issues, such as immigration and gun violence. Their

mixed-methods study analyzed 35 PSTs from three institutions of higher education: one large public research institution, one small, private liberal arts institution, and one mid-size public institution. Through pre- and post-assessments, written reflections, and review of course debrief session recordings, Kaka et al. (2020) noted the importance of carefully planning for discussions and being reflective and responsive during discussions. While this study was limited to controversial topics (which can differ from difficult history topics), the researchers posit that simulations can support PSTs in gaining confidence in common pedagogical practices such as leading discussions in the classroom.

Summary

Preparing preservice teachers is a complex process that requires an understanding of the ways PSTs can acquire the specific knowledge, pedagogical practices, and dispositions needed to successfully transition into their first year of teaching. Therefore, it is imperative that TPPs support PSTs in developing their skill with teaching practices and support PSTs' unique needs. Teaching difficult history, although only one component of the social studies discipline content area, is an example of an area where PSTs need greater support in developing the necessary knowledge and skills for effective practice. The use of mixed-reality simulations as an approximation of practice represents one way to meet this need.

In this review, I examined literature describing preservice teachers' identities and dispositions, the content and instruction of elementary teacher preparation programs, teaching difficult history, and the use of mixed-reality simulations in teacher preparation. Although there were several studies that could tangentially support the specific problem of practice explored in this study, one limitation in the literature was the lack of empirical studies that explored the concept of teaching difficult history. However, the theoretical underpinnings of and broader

conversations surrounding difficult history are important, as they set the framework for educators' understanding of discussing and analyzing difficult history topics. Additional studies, especially those done at the elementary level, would be beneficial to developing an understanding of how to prepare PSTs in this area.

Chapter 3: Methods

The goals of this exploratory case study were to a) identify which teaching difficult history strategies PSTs were explicitly taught and then used in a simulated learning environment; b) understand what PSTs identified as supporting or hindering them in teaching difficult history; and c) identify what dispositions and experiences were related to PSTs' performance. Therefore, I used an exploratory case study design that utilized video reviews, interviews, and document analysis to gather data to answer the research questions. The findings from the study will help support relevant stakeholders' (e.g., teacher education director, program coordinator, course instructor) understandings of PSTs' needs and will help inform action steps about course objectives, content, and staffing (in both the short and long term) to achieve program goals. This study's findings are intended to answer the following research questions and shape the recommendations made to program stakeholders:

- RQ 1: How does the social studies methods course instructor conceptualize difficult history, and what specific teaching strategies were taught in the course?
- RQ 2: After receiving explicit instruction about teaching difficult history, what teaching strategies do PSTs use to facilitate a small-group conversation about difficult history in a simulated learning environment?
- RQ 3: What factors (e.g., teaching practices and dispositions) do PSTs perceive as supporting or hindering the facilitation of a conversation about difficult history in a simulated learning environment?

Study Design

I utilized an exploratory case study design that explored a particular group, was anchored in a real-life context, and used multiple data collection methods (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

This design provided an opportunity to have a first-hand account of Elementary BSED students' facilitation of a small-group conversation about a difficult history topic in a simulated learning environment. Within this study, the bound case was the BSED students in their fourth year of an elementary Teacher Education Program who were enrolled in a Social Studies Methods course. I analyzed documents (e.g., previously-administered program surveys, course syllabus, course materials, and participant simulation reflections), reviewed videos of the PSTs' facilitation of a small-group conversation about a difficult history topic in a simulated learning environment, and conducted interviews with PSTs and the course instructor to explore the ways in which the program is supporting PSTs in this area. I collected and analyzed multiple forms of data to develop an in-depth understanding of the case (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Problem of Practice Study Context

The study was conducted in the context of an education school at a mid-Atlantic university. Although the school offers multiple certification programs, this case study focused on students in the BSED teacher preparation program in elementary education. This program was chosen because it started two years ago, and relevant stakeholders wanted to understand how this particular group of PSTs was grasping new disciplinary-specific content. The elementary BSED program is a four-year program in which students are required to take program-specific courses in academic years three and four, including courses centered on theory, pedagogy, and subject content. The program requires enrollment in one two-credit Social Studies Methods course in year four. This course is intended to equip elementary preservice teachers with the social studies content knowledge, skills, and dispositions (e.g., appreciates multiple perspectives and facilitates learners' critical analysis, recognizes potential of bias in their representation of content, realizes that content knowledge is not fixed, but instead complex and culturally situated and evolving)

(CCCSO, 2013) necessary to teach diverse populations of students in grades K-6. One objective of the course is for PSTs to understand that social studies teachers have the responsibility to teach students the knowledge and skills necessary for active engaged citizenship in a complex, multicultural world.

Participants

After approval from the Institution Review Board for Social and Behavioral Research (IRB-SBS) and consent from School of Education stakeholders (i.e., the director of teacher education, the associate dean of students, and the teacher education data committee), I collected and analyzed previously administered program surveys and course documents, reviewed recordings of PSTs' individual simulation sessions, and conducted interviews with PSTs and the course instructor.

Pre-Service Teachers

The PSTs invited to participate in the study were in the second semester of their fourth year at the Mid-Atlantic university's School of Education. In the semester prior to the study, the PSTs successfully completed their Social Studies Methods course and engaged in clinical experiences, which included small- and whole-group instruction in local school classrooms. During the semester of this study, the PSTs were completing their full-time student teaching placement. Therefore, this sample included PSTs who had taken foundational courses, spent time in elementary classrooms, completed a Social Studies Methods course, and were continuing their engagement in local classrooms. This is important to note, as the participants were at the end of their program student teaching, where they may have encountered similar difficult history topics and opportunities for small-group discussions with elementary students.

The PSTs in the study were a subset of the population enrolled in the BSED program, selected using a convenience sampling method intended to accurately reflect the characteristics of the larger cohort (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). All fourth-year Elementary BSED preservice teachers were invited to participate in the study. Twelve preservice teachers and the course instructor responded to the email invitation. Nine preservice teachers were selected as the participants for the study (see Table 1). The preservice teachers who were not selected either did not respond to the follow-up email inviting participation or their simulation recording's audio was inaudible.

Table 1

Preservice Teacher Study Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Sample		Population	
	n	%	*n*	%
Gender				
Male	2	22	3	12
Female	7	78	23	88
Race/Ethnicity				
African American/Black	1	11	3	12
Hispanic	1	11	3	12
Asian	1	11	2	8
White	6	67	18	68
Age				
21-23	7	78	22	85
25+	2	22	4	15
Sense of Preparedness to Lead a Small-group Discussion				
Lower	4	44	16	62
Higher	5	66	10	38
CRTSE Survey (out of 100)				
Average Score	9	83.5	26	78.5

Course Instructor

The elementary teacher education program includes instructors who are full-time faculty members, adjunct faculty, and doctoral candidates. The social studies content instructor is a

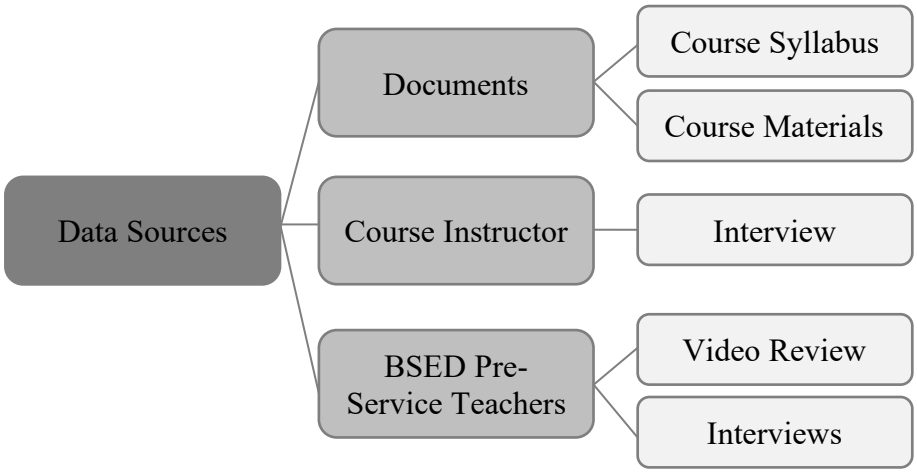
white male adjunct faculty member who holds a Master of Teaching in Elementary and Bilingual Education and teaches in a local elementary school.

Data Sources

The data sources for this study include several documents (e.g., course syllabi and course materials), the video review of PST participants facilitating a small-group conversation about difficult history in a simulated learning environment, and interviews with PSTs and the course instructor (see Figure 2). Using multiple data sources will support answering this study's research questions and enhance data credibility and triangulation (Yin, 2014).

Figure 2

Capstone Data Sources



Documents

The documents for this study were chosen according to the criteria established in the document selection protocol (e.g., current course syllabus, course materials, course assignments, InTASC standards) (see Appendix A). These documents were chosen to help answer RQ 1, as it is necessary to know the intended curriculum and supporting course materials and assignments. All materials listed in the syllabus were obtained from the course instructor through zoom, as it is important to understand what content and methods PSTs were provided and explicitly taught.

Additionally, the InTASC standards (CCSSO, 2013) were included, to reflect the necessary competencies and dispositions PSTs are expected to demonstrate upon program completion.

Course Syllabus. I reviewed the Social Studies Methods course syllabus and identified specific modules in which content or instructional strategies related to difficult history (e.g., anchoring conversation in a shared/equal humanity, centering the story of the oppressed group) were present. Within those modules, I identified required materials or texts and aligned instructional strategies that support teaching difficult history topics. The syllabus provided an opportunity to examine the curriculum for the course, which supported how the prescribed curriculum may have influenced PSTs' facilitation of a small-group conversation about difficult history, which in turn, could help to answer the study's research questions.

Course Materials. The course materials (e.g., instructor's lesson plans, assignments, course surveys, in-class materials) were identified to better understand what PSTs were taught about discussing difficult history (e.g., content and pedagogy). These materials provided information about what specific content and strategies were introduced before the simulated practice. In addition, the PSTs' simulation discussion preparation (see Appendix B) for their simulated small-group conversation about difficult history and post-simulation reflections (see Appendix C) were selected, which aided in identifying the strategies PSTs used, and any issues or challenges that they may have faced in their simulated teaching experiences.

Video Review

The video review conducted for this study was implemented according to the criteria established in the video review protocol (see Appendix D).

Simulation Session. I reviewed the PST participants' simulated small-group discussion video recordings. The simulation scenario focused on the difficult history topic of cultural

assimilation and Native American Residential Schools (see Appendix E for scenario description). Following IRB-SBS approval, the videos were produced and obtained through the university's simulation lab, which hosts and records sessions through a third-party platform. The videos were approximately 15 minutes in length and included the PSTs': a) intended strategies and beginning confidence rating, b) small-group discussion, and c) debrief and ending confidence rating. The video review was conducted to gather data on what difficult history strategies the PSTs used to facilitate small-group conversation about difficult history and support to the semi-structured interview, with the intent to enhance data credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I followed a video review protocol (see Appendix D) when viewing the recordings to focus on how PSTs facilitated the conversation and what strategies they employed. In addition to coding, I wrote reflective notes while watching the recordings to make note of any possible emerging themes. After watching the recordings, I took additional reflective notes to record thoughts and insights (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Interviews

The study interviews were conducted according to the criteria established in the interview protocol (see Appendices F and G). A semi-structured interview protocol was used to guide the 20- to 45-minute interviews, in which participants answered predetermined, flexibly-worded questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). This allowed for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions to participants' responses and created opportunities for new questions to emerge (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The semi-structured interview protocol was developed from previous research studies aligned with this study (Bousalis, 2022; Nganga et al., 2020; Rodríguez, 2020a).

One-on-one interviews were conducted using the Zoom virtual platform to create a space where participants felt comfortable sharing their ideas and reflecting on their experiences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The interviews were recorded and transcribed through the Zoom platform to support future analysis. During the interviews, I took brief notes when I identified examples of significant themes and additional questions that arose, as well as reactions to my own thinking. After conducting all interviews, I engaged in member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the accuracy of the identified emerging themes and revise their responses (Baxter & Jack, 2008). To increase trustworthiness, I took reflective notes to identify any biases and created an audit trail immediately following each interview (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Pre-Service Teachers. PST interviews followed a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix F). Open-ended questions were used so participants could discuss their experiences in a way that was not limited by past research findings or the researcher's perspectives (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Participants were asked to watch their simulation recording and/or read their simulation reflection assignment before the interview to refresh their memories on the experience and consider any factors (e.g., teaching practices and dispositions) perceived as supporting or hindering the facilitation of a conversation about a difficult history topic in a simulated learning environment. Through these interviews, data were gathered and analyzed to answer the study's research questions.

Course Instructor. The instructor interview also followed a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix G) and was designed to help understand the instructor's conceptualizations of and reasons for teaching difficult history. Additionally, the interview responses helped to identify overarching issues or challenges that may have been brought up during class meetings or

assignments. As course meetings and simulation debriefs were not observed, this interview provided useful information to which I did not have direct access (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Through this interview, information was gathered that helped to answer the study's research questions and provide greater context for the study.

Recruitment and Consent Procedures

Prior to data collection, I submitted a protocol to the university's Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences (IRB-SBS). After approval from IRB-SBS, I emailed the fourth year Elementary BSED cohort and the course instructor seeking interested participants for the study (see Appendix H). I assured PSTs that participation in the study was voluntary, that their decision about participation would not affect their grades, and that any information provided would be handled confidentially. Additionally, I noted that participants would receive payment for their participation in the study. The instructor and preservice teachers who chose to participate signed an electronic informed consent agreement. The consent form outlined: a) the purpose of the study, b) what the participants would do, c) the relevant materials I would review, d) the time required, e) the risks and benefits involved, f) the voluntary and confidential nature of the study, and g) the ways in which to withdraw at any time from the study. The course instructor and nine PSTs out of a total pool of 26 agreed to participate.

Data Analysis

This section describes the processes used to analyze the data from video reviews, interviews, and documents. Upon receiving signed electronic informed consent agreements, I reviewed the course syllabus and materials, as well as the participating PSTs' simulation planning form, simulation session video recording, and post-simulation reflection. Additionally, I began scheduling all interviews. I started preliminary analysis during data collection through

notetaking and member checking. I used *a priori* codes (see Appendix I), that were established within the field of social studies teacher preparation and teaching difficult history, to analyze the data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Interview and Video Transcriptions

All interviews were conducted and recorded through the Zoom platform, and its built-in transcription feature was utilized. Video recordings of participants' simulation sessions were obtained from the university's simulation lab and stored in Box, and a computer software program was used to create audio transcriptions of the interview sessions. All audio files were transcribed into text format using Otter.ai transcription software (see Appendix J).

Qualitative Coding

Analysis and interpretation of the data helped to identify patterns, draw initial conclusions, summarize observations, and explain conclusions (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). A codebook was created for analysis of documents, observations, and interviews, and a critical peer provided feedback on the codes' clarity and alignment.

Codes for Documents, Video Review, and Interviews. The codebook (see Appendix I) was created with *a priori* codes that aligned to and are based on existing literature and this study's conceptual framework, which centers on preparing preservice teachers to employ specific strategies and methods to teach difficult history content and pedagogies (Gross & Terra, 2018; Shuster et al., 2018) as well as identify preservice teacher dispositions (Saultz et al., 2021).

Coding Procedures

Dedoose, an online qualitative data analysis program, was used to support data organization and analysis. Using Dedoose, all documents were uploaded securely and *a priori* codes were entered, stored, and labeled, while allowing for the opportunity to make notes of

initial interpretations during the coding process. I first read the data to gain a general awareness of the data, while also writing reflective memos and noting the organization of the data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Then, I coded the data by labeling the text based on key ideas found in relevant literature and informed by the study's conceptual framework and my own observations.

Analyzing for Patterns and Themes

After coding the data and examining my reflective memos, I looked for connections among the data, codes, and notes, which began to form central ideas or themes. Multiple perspectives also emerged, which were important to note and convey. As Hancock and Algozzine (2018) suggest, I engaged in the examination and interpretation of the data and noted any potential conclusions from the patterns. This was accomplished through a spiraling process in which I did the following: a) read through the transcript or document to become familiar, b) wrote reflective memos, c) identified words or phrases that are relevant to the study, d) noted themes that summed up pieces of text, e) organized the themes, and f) drew conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Before beginning the study, I sought approval from the university's Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences (IRB-SBS). This process ensured that my study was aligned with authorized, ethical research practices. Upon receiving IRB-SBS approval, I followed my study's protocol to gather consent and minimize participant risk. I received approval from the Senior Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Student Affairs, the Director of Teacher Education, and the Teacher Education Data Committee to recruit current fourth-year BSED Elementary teacher education students for the study. To gain support and trust from participants, I was explicit about the nature of the study and its purpose (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) and followed the protocol to maintain confidentiality. All participants were

assigned unique code numbers and pseudonyms to protect their privacy, as outlined in the data management plan (see Appendix J). Additionally, I engaged in frequent conversations with a critical peer and committee chair to confirm that my communication and representation of the study were accurate and aligned to my proposal.

Researcher as Instrument

Several factors influenced my decision to explore this study's topic and how the university's BSED program prepares PSTs. As a former elementary school teacher, I believe in the need to train PSTs to teach difficult history topics and that it can benefit all students. I do not remember receiving this type of preparation when I was a PST; therefore, as a new teacher in the field I struggled to engage in this work until I received explicit training. I believe it is imperative that TPPs better prepare PSTs with curricular and pedagogical knowledge on teaching difficult history. Also, I did not have a preexisting relationship with the study participants, but I was the director of a program with which they were engaged for several of their courses. Recognizing that my tangential relationships with the PSTs could influence their interview responses, I emphasized that this study and my role as the researcher were non-evaluative. Although I believe in the integration of difficult history teaching practices and engagement with difficult history in preservice education, I did not share my position with the PSTs at any time during the study.

On a personal note, it is important for me to discuss the work I have done to understand my own identity, intersectionalities, biases, and assumptions. I have worked toward understanding my whiteness, the ways in which I have benefitted from systems that I believe to be unjust, and my responsibility to actively work against personal, institutional, and systemic racism. I also believe it is important to support preservice teachers in examining their own perspectives and strive to integrate this work into the university courses I have taught. I believe

that while we cannot cater to white fragility (e.g., when even a small amount of racial stress becomes intolerable and triggers defensiveness), teachers can play a vital role in providing an entry point for such discussions and understand that gaining the dispositions and skills to engage in this work does not move quickly. It can also require a sustained and trusting connection between the people involved. As a result, I have recognized some of the potential biases and assumptions that I may have brought to this study and the possible impact they could have on data collection and analysis. Because my personal views can never be fully separated from my analysis and interpretation, I regularly engaged in personal reflection and debriefing with a critical peer on my positionality (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. The first limitation related to my role as the director of the study's Mid-Atlantic University's simulation lab. While I did not act in an evaluative capacity in that role, this may have influenced the preservice teachers' decision to participate or not. Having interacted with me in this capacity, some preservice teachers may have been comfortable participating in the study and meeting with me, while others may have seen this as a deterrent. During the interviews, I tried to remain faithful to the interview protocol to create consistency in my reflections, note taking and interaction with study participants. Next, due to the restricted access to classrooms at the time of the study, and in an effort to do the least harm to real students when engaging in this work, the use of recorded mixed-reality simulation sessions was a key tool in gathering data. Therefore, video recordings were reviewed instead of conducting classroom observations. Because of this, the facilitation of the difficult history discussion may not have directly reflected that of being in a real classroom. I reviewed the video recordings several times, in an effort to glean as much information as possible, but this method

did not fully reflect the nuances present in a real classroom. For example, in a simulated learning environment, students' responses can be controlled, whereas in a classroom, it is nearly impossible to anticipate every possible response. Additionally, I do not have a comparison group for this study, so I cannot posit what performance may look like if the PSTs had not engaged with this course and the difficult history content and strategies. A final limitation is that I do not have enough information about the BSEDs' beliefs/dispositions to do a full exploration of how they interacted with the course learning, the CRTSE scores, and their performance in the simulation. This information should be taken into consideration for future research.

Delimitations

There were several delimitations to this study. The first delimitation is that I studied just one of the university's teacher preparation programs. I chose to exclude the elementary Master of Teaching (MT) program, despite their engagement with a similar, yet separate, Social Studies Methods course. It is unclear how much overlap there is between the two classes and determining this would have extended the timeline of the study. Studying just the BSED program was done to narrow the scope of the study (because BSED program stakeholders are currently working on the culturally relevant teaching practices and social justice aspects of the program) and to provide specific feedback for one context. Next, I chose to take note of the PSTs participants' preparation for the simulation by looking at the required course preparation form, which they completed in small groups during class. While all participants noted the positive factor of completing the preparation document, I did not explore the impact of peer interactions for this study. As set by the instructor, the preservice teachers in the course completed the preparation document in self-selected small groups. Observing group interactions and noting

possible supports or hinderances of that experience were not included in this study; however, such data could prove to be valuable for preservice teacher preparation in future study.

Summary

I used an exploratory case study method to answer the following research questions:

- RQ 1: How does the social studies methods course instructor conceptualize difficult history, and what specific teaching strategies were taught in the course?
- RQ 2: After receiving explicit instruction about teaching difficult history, what teaching strategies do PSTs use to facilitate a small-group conversation about difficult history in a simulated learning environment?
- RQ 3: What factors (e.g., teaching practices and dispositions) do PSTs perceive as supporting or hindering the facilitation of a conversation about difficult history in a simulated learning environment?

I collected data from multiple sources, analyzed the data using *a priori* codes, and employed member checking, critical peer engagement, and triangulation methods to enhance the accuracy of the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Gathering data in this way allowed me to generate findings that answered the research questions, which I will present in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Findings and Interpretation

The goals of this exploratory case study were to (a) identify which teaching difficult history strategies PSTs were explicitly taught and then used in a simulated learning environment; (b) understand what PSTs identified as supporting or hindering them in teaching difficult history; and (c) identify what dispositions and experiences were related to PSTs' performance. Data were collected from documents, video reviews, and interviews to better understand and explore the fourth-year BSED students, a particular group anchored in a real-life context (Yin, 2014). Analysis of the data gathered in this study facilitated answering the following research questions:

- RQ 1: How does the social studies methods course instructor conceptualize difficult history, and what specific teaching strategies were taught in the course?
- RQ 2: After receiving explicit instruction about teaching difficult history, what teaching strategies do PSTs use to facilitate a small-group conversation about difficult history in a simulated learning environment?
- RQ 3: What factors (e.g., teaching practices and dispositions) do PSTs perceive as supporting or hindering the facilitation of a conversation about difficult history in a simulated learning environment?

First, I discuss the Social Studies Methods course instructor's conceptualization of difficult history and the explicit strategies and topics taught in the course, followed by his reasons for teaching difficult history. Next, I describe patterns across the preservice teachers, illustrated by three case studies. Then, I present the case studies, including PSTs' conceptualizations of difficult history, the strategies they used when facilitating a discussion about a difficult history topic, and what they identified as having hindered and supported them in facilitating the discussion. It is important to note that all study participants' accounts are included

as a means of triangulation. I end the chapter with assertions made, based on the findings and interpretations.

Finding 1: Learning to Teach Difficult History Topics is Supported Through the Use of Modeling and Practice.

Social Studies Methods Course Instructor

The elementary Social Studies Methods course has historically been taught by full-time faculty members, adjunct faculty, and doctoral candidates. The current course instructor identifies as a white male and is an adjunct faculty member who holds a Master of Teaching in Elementary and Bilingual Education. He has more than eight years of teaching experience in grades K-6 in addition to experience in a variety of teacher leadership roles, including team leadership, curriculum development, and coaching. He teaches an upper grade in a local elementary school and has taught the Social Studies Methods course for two semesters. He describes himself as being committed to issues of educational equity and social justice and believes in the importance of preparing preservice teachers to teach difficult history. When asked about the ways in which he plans to change future iterations of the course, the instructor indicated:

> This [teaching difficult history] is the most important thing we're doing. I am really refocusing the whole [Social Studies Methods] class on, "this is the most important learning that we're doing this semester." Whereas I think last semester, it was more of, "this is really important and we're doing some other things too." And so just refocusing … based on [student] feedback, saying "this is what we're needing more of," and thinking through what is going to be most helpful for a preservice teacher to have going

> into their first year in the classroom. And [difficult history's] the focus. And more opportunities to talk about it and practice it. (Interview, February 6, 2023)

This interview excerpt shows the Social Studies Course instructor's reflection on how he hopes to update the course, based on his personal reflections and those of his students. The instructor plans to reframe the course to center difficult history and support the preservice teachers in their understanding of and preparation to teach those topics. However, he did not discuss what he might cut from the current curriculum in order to make time to cover these topics in greater detail.

Conceptualization of Difficult History. It is important to note the instructor's understanding of difficult history, as it impacts the content and pedagogy in the course. In describing his conception of difficult history, the instructor said:

> Difficult history is any historical topic that could potentially create discomfort in the classroom, in terms of certain populations of students not understanding how to talk about it. And that can be anything from a topic that is considered taboo or a topic that is talking about something negative that's happened in the past. But it can also be something that is challenging for a particular group of students to talk about in your classroom. (Instructor interview, February 6, 2023)

When asked to expand upon this conceptualization, the instructor noted that difficult history is often "taught in a way that is not entirely truthful, or it is not taught in a way that trusts students to grapple with the true realities of what it was" (Instructor interview, February 6, 2023). These conceptualizations align with Gross and Terra's (2018) definition of difficult history, as teaching difficult history often involve violence that is whitewashed, with particular events being more difficult for certain groups of students to discuss than others. Similarly, Harris et al. (2022) note

the significance of discussing difficult history across all grade levels. The instructor did not, however, discuss how difficult history often contradicts broadly accepted narratives, nor the connection that difficult history often has to current societal issues (Gross & Terra, 2018; Harris et al., 2022). The course materials did not provide an explicit definition of difficult history (Document review, February 2023). However, it was noted in a course presentation that "a lot of this [difficult history] decision-making relies on teachers combining knowledge of their students, their communities, their own goals, and their professional judgment" (Teaching hard histories materials, slide three, November 2022).

The instructor specifically identified teaching about the following topics as difficult history: a) slavery in the United States; b) the treatment of historically marginalized groups (e.g., women, immigrants); c) any non-white people at any point within U.S. history; d) Native Americans and African Americans; Asian Americans during World War II with internment camps for Japanese Americans; and e) any populations that have been treated poorly by the dominant culture in the society. Examples such as these align with scholars who also identify similar topics (e.g., race, enslavement, human rights, disempowerment of women) as difficult history (Gross & Terra, 2018; Harris et al., 2022; Martell, 2017; Reisman et al., 2020).

Explicit Difficult History Content and Strategies. During the interview, the instructor outlined the specific content and strategies that he modeled and discussed in the course. The difficult history content taught in the course included three topics: slavery, African American history, and Indigenous People's history. The difficult history strategies taught in the course included the following: a) stick to the facts and provide examples; b) provide a nonfiction base of knowledge; c) use narratives to help make connections; d) center the narrative on the oppressed group; e) explicitly state when something is right or wrong; f) make sure you have enough

background knowledge; g) be open to questions and saying; I don't know; and h) know what is developmentally appropriate. As noted in the opening excerpt, the instructor mentioned that, in this iteration of the course, some difficult history topics were covered, but it was geared more towards how to talk about difficult history. Upon reflection, the instructor noted the following:

> I don't think I included enough of it [difficult history content and strategies] in my first go around with of course, and I'm excited that I had a group that was willing and able to give me feedback that they wanted more of it [difficult history]. (Instructor interview, February 6, 2023)

The instructor discussed the importance of modeling and how that positively benefitted the preservice teachers, stating the importance that the preservice teachers who "want to tackle these true histories with students [have] some time to explicitly practice it, talk about it, and have it modeled for them … that it's okay to say, 'that's a really hard question, let's look into that further'" (Instructor interview, February 6, 2023). The instructor shared that one of his strengths as an elementary teacher is his willingness to jump into difficult conversations and that having someone model these practices for preservice teachers is very important**.**

Reasons for Teaching Difficult History. Throughout the interview, the instructor noted that he was someone who personally feels comfortable having difficult history conversations in his elementary classroom. Several times, he noted how important it is for preservice teachers to know that there are educators doing this work and that it is possible. During class lectures, he regularly integrated examples from his own upper elementary classroom (Document review, February 2023). During the interview, the instructor shared how his upper elementary students are capable of having conversations about difficult history. He stated the following:

> I have seen an incredible impact that that [difficult history discussions] has on not only my Black and Brown students, but on the white students in my class who, we're building allies instead of, you know, there's often this, "those kids are going to feel [bad] and you can't make them feel guilty," and that's just never been my experience. (Instructor interview, February 6, 2023)

When asked why he felt it was important to explicitly teach preservice teachers about difficult history and how to teach it, the instructor noted three main reasons. They include the following: a) it's what they're asking for, b) they need time to practice, and c) elementary students are ready for these conversations.

It's What They're Asking For. The instructor noted that teaching difficult history has been the most challenging part of teaching social studies for himself and his colleagues. Specifically, he noted it is often challenging to facilitate a conversation about something that makes the teacher potentially feel uncomfortable. The instructor expanded on that, saying "there's an unwillingness within teachers still, veteran teachers too, to address topics that make them feel uncomfortable or make them feel like they don't have all the answers and all the information" (Instructor interview, February 6, 2023). This aligns with Gross and Terra (2018) who pointed out that some educators may be reluctant to engage in difficult history in their classroom, and "when they do, their instruction may be inadequate" (p. 52). At the end of the interview, this instructor discussed a time during class where he modeled not having an answer and the positive impact that had. He said the following:

> It wasn't a hard history, but it was a hard topic to talk about and the students got an opportunity to see me say, "I don't know … I don't know what I would have done in that moment." I got feedback from [a preservice teacher] who said "Oh, he actually means

> what he says. It was it was so meaningful for a lot of us to hear a professor come in and talk openly about this hard topic and give us a space to talk about it. But then also be willing to say I don't know." Modeling that was huge. (Instructor interview, February 6, 2023)

In other words, the instructor not only gave space for the preservice teachers to grapple with a difficult topic, but authentically modeled a difficult history strategy. This allowed the preservice teachers to see it in practice and helped develop trust in the instructor's knowledge and belief in the work of engaging with difficult topics. The instructor went on to identify that preservice teachers are asking for support in this area and that it is critical to have these conversations in teacher preparation programs.

They Need Time to Practice. The instructor identified how preservice teachers need time during their teacher preparation programs to practice these skills. He said the following:

> Preservice teachers need to lean into these conversations… and understand that just [their] willingness to talk about and have conversations about it [difficult history] allows [them] to validate those experiences, especially if [they] have students that come from that those backgrounds. (Instructor interview, February 6, 2023)

The instructor noted the positive impact of preservice teachers having time to explicitly practice teaching difficult history, talk about it, and have it modeled for them. Something that was shared by the instructor in his interview, was evident in the course slide decks (Document review, February 2023), and mentioned in the preservice teacher interviews, was the idea that it is okay to say, "I don't know" and how the preservice teachers need time to practice skills like these. The instructor stated the importance of "modeling and preparing them through this sense of practice.

Not just saying, ‘here's information about it,’ but actually showing them and giving them the opportunity [to practice]” (Instructor interview, February 6, 2023).

Students in the course completed a mixed-reality simulation scenario (see Appendix E) to practice facilitating a discussion on the topic of assimilation/Native American residential schools, using the children’s literature text “I Am Not a Number” by Jenny Kay Dupuis and Kathy Kacer (Document review, February 2023). In preparation for the small-group discussion, the preservice teachers completed a discussion preparation document (see Appendix B) with their peers, and upon completion of the simulation session, watched their session recording and responded to reflection questions (see Appendix C). During his interview, the instructor noted that the simulation had a positive impact on the preservice teachers because it provided an opportunity for them to practice having a difficult history conversation in a legitimate, meaningful way. In his interview, the instructor reported that the preservice teachers shared that the simulation experience was “by far the most meaningful simulation experience they'd had. That was across the board” and “because of the nature of the conversation, they were able to get into the conversation to a point where they kind of forgot that it was a simulation,” and the instructor went on to say, “I do think the simulation, while there is still a little bit of hesitation and doubt, showed them that, ‘Hey, I can jump in and do this’” (Instructor interview, February 6, 2023).

Elementary Students Are Ready for These Conversations. The instructor spent time talking about how assumptions are often made about what elementary students are capable of handling and how they are going to be made to feel if they talk about these hard histories. The instructor noted that many teachers assume that students cannot handle talking about difficult topics. He shared his personal experience, and those of other educators who have similarly

jumped in to teaching difficult history, saying that their experiences go "completely against any of those kinds of assumptions that are made. Students are, by and large, ready for those conversations, obviously at an age-appropriate level" (Instructor interview, February 6, 2023). During the course document analysis (February 2023), it was noted that the instructor shared a research-based graphic with the preservice teachers that outlined how children aren't too young to talk about race and that students are "ready and eager to talk about issues we might consider controversial" and "if students are asking questions about a topic, they're ready to talk about it" (Teaching hard histories materials, slide four, November 2022). Additionally, the instructor was explicit about not teaching untruths. He said the following:

> If you do decide that students might not be ready for the hard truth about a topic, do not teach a watered-down version in place of the truth. In some situations, it's better to not address the topic at all than to perpetuate harmful narratives. (Teaching hard histories materials, slide seven, November 2022)

Many people still believe that elementary students cannot handle difficult conversations and that difficult history should either be sanitized or whitewashed (Keenan, 2019), or not be taught altogether in classrooms (Darvin, 2008; Epstein, 2010; Executive Order No. 1, 2022). Elementary teachers, such as the course instructor, are seeing first-hand that elementary students can have these conversations in the classroom (Rodríguez, 2020a, 2020b; Stoddard, 2022) and, as a result, may become future advocates who can identify and actively work against the injustices they see and experience (Marks, 2017).

Summary

As evidenced through his interview, conversations with preservice teachers, and the document review, the course instructor believes in the importance of teaching difficult history

and preparing preservice teachers to do the same. During the course, he talked with the preservice teachers about how he does this in his own classroom and modeled similar practices in the course. He provided examples of difficult history content and plans to increase the amount of content taught, the focus on difficult history, and the amount of time spent practicing difficult history strategies.

Something the instructor alluded to during his interview was the importance of teachers knowing their students and how difficult history discussions may impact them, based on their personal and cultural experiences. He did not, however, talk about the importance of teacher educators knowing their preservice teachers in the same way. The instructor noted that it was important to give preservice teachers an opportunity to practice having difficult conversations and develop an understanding of the importance of the content. Bousalis (2022) discussed how preservice teacher participants felt it was important to teach social studies to young students, but most participants did not feel that social studies related to their own lives. Developing an understanding of what preservice teachers believe about social studies, and specifically difficult history, is critical to teacher preparation, as it may show misalignment and possible conflict between course curriculum/instruction and the preservice teachers, which should inform how we support and instruct them in these areas.

The instructor mentioned that many of the white students felt uncomfortable and hesitant, which shows a sense of awareness, but statements like these also seemed to describe the PSTs as a monolith. While it was evident that the instructor is passionate about teaching difficult history, it was unclear whether he had a sense of where the preservice teachers were personally coming from and how to meet them where they are in this work. There are possible challenges of doing relational work as an adjunct instructor, especially for someone who is teaching one BSED

course at the end of the PSTs' teacher preparation program (e.g., time constraints and inadequate compensation). The instructor did solicit feedback from the PSTs and considered how to implement that feedback. This shows that while he cares about the PSTs, there is minimal time and space for him to be able to engage in relational work. It is important to keep these findings in mind when determining ways to support both the PSTs and course instructor in this work.

Finding 2: Preservice Teachers Approach Facilitating a Discussion About Difficult History Topics in a Variety of Ways

Case Study Groups' Distinguishing Factors

As noted in the methods section of this study, after coding the preservice teacher participants' small-group discussion simulation videos and interviews, several themes began to emerge. Three patterns were identified across the preservice teachers: PSTs engaged with the simulated facilitation of a small group difficult history discussion in ways that were confident, hesitant, or avoidant. The three case study groups emerged as a result of analyzing the data, and connections to CRTSE scores were observed after the groups were formed. From there, one participant was selected from each group who represented the group's commonalities, including, but not limited to the following: a) the strategies employed during the discussion; b) their sense of responsibility in teaching difficult history; c) their sense of preparedness to teach difficult history topics before engaging with the Social Studies Methods course content; d) what hindered and supported their facilitation; e) self-reported demographic data, regarding the participants' high school experience and future teaching preferences; and f) overall scores on the culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy scale (CRTSE). It is important to note that higher scores on the CRTSE scale (i.e., > 80) indicate "a greater sense of efficacy for engaging in specific

instructional and non-instructional tasks associated with culturally responsive teaching" (Siwatu, 2007, p. 1092).

Table 2

Case Study Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Age	CRTSE (overall)	Personal High School Descriptors	Future Teaching Descriptors
Alex	Male	-	-	99.9	HMSES; MR; PHA	LSES; MR; PLA
Brett	Female	-	-	N/A	HMSES; MR; PMA	MSES; MR; PMA
Cameron	Female	-	-	94.5	HMSES; PWS; PMA	LSES; PSOC; PLA
Chris	Female	-	-	61.3	HMSES; PWS; PHA	MSES; MR; PMA
Finley	Female	-	-	97.0	HMSES; PWS; PMA	MSES; MR; PMA
Jesse	Male	-	-	74.4	HMSES; PWS; PHA	MSES; MR; PMA
Morgan	Female	-	-	82.0	HMSES; MR; PLA	MSES; MR; PMA
Parker	Female	-	-	92.1	HMSES; PWS; PMA	MSES; PWS; PMA
Quinn	Female	-	-	67.3	HMSES; MR; PMA	LSES; MR; PLA

Note. Descriptor Acronyms: HMSES = high/middle socioeconomic status; LSES = low socioeconomic status; MR = mixture of race (students); PWS = primarily white students; PSOC = primarily students of color; PLA = primarily low achieving; PMA = primarily middle achieving; PHA = primarily high achieving.

Note. Race/ethnicity and age were removed to help protect the participants' confidentiality.

When identifying delimiting factors of the participants for the groups (i.e., confident, hesitant, avoidant) the data showed that these different groups not only had similar within-group characteristics (e.g., adequate preparation), but also used similar strategies (e.g., centering the story of the oppressed group). Furthermore, each group had a within-group consistency with which the strategies were used (see Appendix K). For example, in the 15-minute simulation, the confident group stuck to facts, provided examples, and used precise language more, with 22 to 25 times. In comparison, the hesitant group did so less, with 11 to 13 times, and the avoidant group did so even less, with nine to 10 times. In the following sections, I begin with a brief overview of the commonalities within each of the groups (i.e., confident, hesitant, avoidant) and then move on to a more in-depth case of each.

Confident. The participants who seemed confident to employ the difficult history teaching strategies were intentional about bringing the conversation back to the experiences of the oppressed group and the impact that the trauma of assimilation had on them. They were explicit in describing what happened and why it occurred, and they did not shy away from talking about conflict, power dynamics, and harsh realities. On average, the confident participants stuck to facts, provided examples, and used precise language 24 times in the 15-minute simulation session (see Appendix K). These participants talked about having either personal background knowledge and experiences or the participants shared that they took the time to do extensive research in preparation for the discussion. They noted the importance of being prepared and understanding the information as the teacher. These participants discussed the importance of creating a safe space for students to talk about difficult topics and express their feelings and emotions. During the simulation, for example, they checked in on how the students were feeling, but focused more on the content. They were insistent on their role in making sure

accurate history is being taught, both because students can handle it and so they don't have to unlearn and relearn history.

As identified in the document review (February 2023), the confident participants completed high school in locations that were suburban and rural, middle socioeconomic status, and they identified the other students as being primarily white or other races, in addition to being both low and middle achieving (see Table 2). All confident participants (i.e., Morgan, Brett, and Finley) identified that they plan to teach students who are middle socioeconomic status, a mixture of races, and primarily middle achieving. They were the only group that identified identical future teaching plans upon graduation.

When asked about using their students' cultural background to help make learning meaningful they had scores of 100 and when asked about building a sense of trust with their students they had scores ranging from 80-100. Geneva Gay (2018) identifies using students' cultural background as critical when bridging the cultural experiences of students and the curriculum to facilitate higher levels of learning. She specifically notes that teacher must "consider critical and reciprocal dialogue and participatory engagement as central to the acquisition and demonstration of learning" (Gay, 2018, p. 53), which reflect necessary teaching practices when facilitating discussions about difficult history topics.

Hesitant. The participants who seemed hesitant to employ the difficult history teaching strategies also brought the conversation back to the oppressed group and what they endured, but they used more tempered language throughout the conversation. This may have been more comfortable for them and/or what they thought was appropriate for the students. These participants didn't use as direct or precise language about the difference in power and control between the oppressors and the oppressed. On average, the hesitant participants stuck to facts,

provided examples, and used precise language 12 times in the 15-minute simulation session (see Appendix K). They softened the language, which made the trauma of assimilation seem less abusive and purposeful than it was. These participants seemed to have prepared, but they acknowledged not having done extensive research in preparation for the lesson. These participants relied heavily on acknowledging that the conversation and topic would be hard to talk about, while specifically and continually checking how the students were feeling throughout the conversation.

As identified in the document review (February 2023), the hesitant participants completed high school in locations that were suburban and rural, middle socioeconomic status, and they identified the other students as being primarily white or other races, in addition to being both middle and high achieving (see Table 2). The hesitant participants identified that they each plan to teach different types of students. They plan to teach the following: a) Parker: students who are middle socioeconomic status, primarily white, and primarily middle achieving; b) Cameron: students who are low socioeconomic status, primarily students of color, and primarily low achieving; and c) Alex: students who are low socioeconomic status, a mixture of races, and primarily low achieving.

These participants' overall CRTSE scores (Document review, February 2023) were also high and when looking at specific questions, when asked about using their students' cultural background to help make learning meaningful they had scores ranging from 98-100 and when asked about building a sense of trust with their students they had scores ranging from 90-100. This aligns with the importance of caring for students' well-being and academic success (Gay, 2018). There were several instances of these participants asking the students how they would feel if they were the main character of the book and emphasizing to the students how good schooling

is now. They talked about the importance of students being taught accurate history, and some expressed still being nervous about having conversations like these.

Avoidant. The participants who seemed to avoid employing the difficult history teaching strategies used language that focused on sympathy and often asked the students to think about what they would have done in that circumstance, which may indicate that they were personally uncomfortable discussing the topic. While these participants did talk about the oppressor's power, two of the participants asked the students to determine if there were any benefits to the oppression, which is counter to what was taught in the methods course. On average, the avoidant participants stuck to facts, provided examples, and used precise language 9.3 times in the 15-minute simulation session (see Appendix K). These participants relied heavily on the planning document provided in the course, and only one acknowledged doing a lot of research on their own. However, that participant still asked the students to identify benefits of residential schools, which may come from a lack of confidence in being explicit about the topic. These participants acknowledged that the trauma endured by the Indigenous children was hard and sad, and that if anything like this happened to the students, that they would have someone to talk to.

As identified in the document review (February 2023), the avoidant participants completed high school in locations that were suburban, middle socioeconomic status, and they identified the other students as being primarily white or other races, in addition to being both middle and high achieving. The avoidant participants identified that they each plan to teach different types of students. They plan to teach the following: a) Jesse: students who are middle socioeconomic status, a mixture of races, and primarily middle achieving; b) Quinn: students who are low socioeconomic status, a mixture of races, and primarily low achieving; and c) Chris:

students who are middle socioeconomic status, a mixture of races, and primarily middle achieving.

These participants' overall CRTSE scores (Document review, February 2023) were low (i.e., <80) and looking at specific questions, when asked about using their students' cultural background to help make learning meaningful they had scores ranging from 54-86 and when asked about building a sense of trust with their students they had scores ranging from 60-80. As noted earlier, these particular skills are critical in discussing difficult history. The avoidant participants talked about the importance of teaching difficult history; however, several spent time talking about their hesitancies, nervousness about saying something political or wrong, and worry about the negative reaction of parents and guardians.

Sub-Finding 2.1: Some Preservice Teachers Seemed to Confidently Approach Discussing Difficult History Topics

Confident: Morgan. Morgan was selected to represent the case study group that seemed to confidently approach discussing difficult history topics, as she exemplified most characteristics that emerged from that group's aggregate data (i.e., simulation video review, document review, and interview). She identifies as a 22-year-old white female and her overall CRTSE score was above 80, which is considered a higher score (Siwatu, 2007), and reflects the confident group's overall scores. As identified in the document review (February 2023), Morgan completed high school in a location that was suburban, middle socioeconomic status, and she identified the students as being a mixture of race and primarily low achieving. She identified that she plans to teach students who are middle socioeconomic status, a mixture of races, and primarily middle achieving.

Morgan believes in the importance of teaching difficult history, felt a sense of strong responsibility, and stated that students should "know what actually happened" (Morgan interview, February 9, 2023). After engaging in the course content and instruction, she indicated that she felt more confident about teaching difficult history and recognized that, "in my future classroom, I won't have a chance to restart. Whatever I say to my students during hard history discussions will have an impact on their thoughts and emotions surrounding the topic at hand" (Document review, February 2023). Morgan was explicit and honest about the harsh realities of assimilation and did not shy away from discussing difficult history. For example, during the simulation, one of the students asked how it was legal for the schools to hurt the Indigenous children. Morgan said the following:

> The Native American people have very different cultures and traditions, different ways of life altogether than white people and the Catholic people, who were living in these areas of Canada where the book is based. The federal government formed these [residential] schools and had them run by Catholic churches and nuns, to basically force the Native American children to learn the white and Catholic ways of life. And while this isn't a good reason, or a fair reason at all, it was legal, because they were the majority. They were the people who made the rules, and the government said it was okay. . .They wanted to try to eliminate the Native American culture and make them more like themselves. That's why they took the children at such young ages (Morgan simulation recording, November 2022).

Morgan was able to employ difficult history strategies to answer the student's question by sticking to the facts and providing examples and centering the narrative of the oppressed people. Furthermore, she was developmentally appropriate in the precise and accurate language she used.

Conceptualization of Difficult History. Morgan defined difficult history as "anything that could make a certain group of people or any group of people feel either upset or uncomfortable, something that involves a bad thing happening" (Interview, February 9, 2023). Others in the confident group described difficult history as "things that need to be unpacked, without necessarily making kids feel responsible for the actions of their ancestors" (Brett interview, February 11, 2023) and "topics that may anger or frustrate parents [and] students" (Finley interview, February 9, 2023). In other words, the confident group understood difficult history to be something that may upset groups of people or make them feel defensive, which aligns with Gross and Terra's (2018) identification of difficult history having the potential to provoke controversy and division that cause teachers to avoid such conversations.

Morgan identified several difficult history topics, including race, Native American history, and where people are harmed or discriminated against. These were mentioned by others in the group, as well as the rights of marginalized groups. Several of these topics were explicitly discussed in the course, while others may have come from their personal experiences or exposure to difficult topics, and the topics were similar to the topics identified by the other two case study groups' participants.

Strategies Employed. The participants in this group employed many of the strategies taught in the course. For example, Morgan stuck to facts, provided examples, and used precise language 25 times in the 15-minute simulation session (see Appendix K). In her preparation document, Morgan noted that she wanted to "make sure the students grasp the seriousness of the story and how it's not just a book, but this actually happened to many, many children" (Simulation preparation document, November 2022). This was reflected in her conversation with

the students when talking openly about power and conflict. For example, Morgan replied to a student's question about the legality of these schools by saying:

> They wanted to eliminate the Native American culture and make them more like themselves.... which is why they took the children at such young ages … They believed the Native American ways of life were beneath them and they were trying to get them to rid themselves of all of that, and basically conform to the majority way of life (Simulation recording, November 2022).

Morgan shared the harsh realities in a way that used precise and honest language, similar to Brett who stated that the schools were "trying to alter these children's identity by giving them a number instead of a name, that's another part of that erasure" (Simulation recording, November 2022) and Finley who shared that the government's belief was that "everyone should be like white people and should be speaking like white people" (Simulation recording, November 2022). These examples show how the confident participants did not shy away from difficult conversations and topics, but instead leaned into them and provided accurate and honest information. For example, in a developmentally appropriate way, Morgan shared with the students that the Indigenous children's parents would go to jail or be severely punished if they did not comply with turning their children over to government officials. In her interview, Morgan expressed the importance of being honest with the students. She stated the following:

> I was worried the kids will think of this as just a story and not something that actually happened. I tried to keep reminding them that this is a real history story. And this actually happened to kids, because even though they're little, you don't want them to think that this is just made up and it's just something in a book that we read about. So, that's why I tried to use as much real language as I could (Morgan interview, February 9, 2023).

Brett and Finley also shared about the violence that occurred, including how many Indigenous children tragically died while they were at the residential schools. Finley made note of her awareness "to be very careful with my language with children, but also make sure what I'm saying is impactful" (Interview, February 9, 2023). These examples show the participants' confidence and sense of responsibility in relaying accurate information with the students.

Throughout the conversation, Morgan was open with the students when she was unsure of a certain fact or answer to a question. For example, Morgan stated that she was unsure of what would happen if an Indigenous child escaped from one of the schools and the types of schools that the Indigenous people had. Similarly, Brett said that she was not an expert on the Indigenous people's schools but would look into it and get back to the students with more information. This strategy was explicitly taught and modeled in the Social Studies Methods course and was directly translated to the participants' practice.

Supporting Factors. All confident participants referenced content and/or activities in their course as supporting factors. During her interview, Morgan noted how important the simulation preparation document was for her to confidently engage in this discussion. In her simulation reflection document, Morgan stated the following:

> This topic (and every hard history topic) is extremely heavy and can be difficult for adults to comprehend and digest, so it must be even more difficult for young children. In addition to making sure my students are okay throughout the lesson, I will also remember the preparation process I used for the simulation and use that to guide my preparation for future lessons in my classroom. (Simulation reflection document, November 2022)

Brett and Finley also mentioned how vital the simulation preparation document was in their preparation for the simulation. Finley expanded, and stated the following:

> I thought it was great to be able to see what parts of the curriculum this would apply to if you were teaching this in a classroom … and having that self-reflective piece is always great. I always really appreciate that, like, what could I have done better? … I really like that, thinking ahead of time, like, "ooh, kids may ask this question, how would I respond to this?" That was really honestly one of the big things for me. (Simulation reflection Document, November 2022)

Additionally, in her interview, Brett identified another course activity that supported her when thinking about difficult history. She referenced the "culture quilts" and explained that she made the quilt in the Social Studies Methods course and how it helped "unpack my culture and reckon with the fact that we did not talk about it [culture] in my house." (Brett Interview, February 11, 2023) During Morgan's interview, she noted a personal experience that supported her, sharing that "having been in such a diverse environment and learned history in the way that I believe is the right way, I would want everyone to have that same experience and not learn it in the totally whitewashed way" (Morgan Interview, February 9, 2023). This may have supported her comfort in preparing for the difficult history discussion. It was evident for this group that the time spent preparing for the simulation and thinking about difficult topics proved to be a beneficial process.

Hindering Factors. When asked about what hindered her when leading the discussion, Morgan noted that she thought that she could have done a bit more research beforehand, and how she didn't know the answer to one of the questions the students asked. Brett also noted how she didn't have the answers to all questions, but acknowledged how it is not possible to explore everything in preparation. Finley identified wishing that she had more open-ended questions. Overall, the confident group did not identify any major hindrances to their facilitation of the

difficult history conversation, which could be a reflection of their readiness to have difficult conversations with elementary students.

Summary. As evidenced through Morgan's simulation recording, interview, and course documents, and those of the other confident group members, three participants confidently facilitated a discussion about a difficult history topic. Confident participants like these emerged from the data by explicitly talking about power and conflict, while using precise language about the horrendous nature of assimilation and Native American residential schools. The participants checked to see how the students were feeling, but expressed the importance of teaching an accurate account of history and that elementary students can handle difficult discussions. Confident participants identified that the simulation preparation document supported their facilitation of the conversation, and while they either already had or gained significant background knowledge on the topic, they identified not having enough background knowledge as a hinderance. They scored high (>80) on the CRTSE scale (Siwatu, 2007) and confidently facilitated a discussion about a difficult history topic, and participants like these can help inform how we prepare and support preservice teachers who are confident in their culturally responsive teaching practices and ready to teach about difficult history.

Sub-Finding 2.2: Some Preservice Teachers Seemed to Hesitantly Approach Discussing Difficult History Topics

Hesitant: Parker. Parker was selected to represent the case study group that seemed to hesitantly approach discussing difficult history topics, as she exemplified most characteristics that emerged from that group's aggregate data (i.e., simulation video review, document review, and interview). She identifies as a 23-year-old white female and her overall CRTSE score was above 80, which is considered a higher score (Siwatu, 2007), and reflects the hesitant group's

overall scores. As identified in the document review (February 2023), Parker completed high school in a location that was suburban, middle socioeconomic status, and she identified the students as being primarily white and middle achieving. She identified that she plans to teach students who are middle socioeconomic status, primarily white, and primarily middle achieving.

Parker shared that she was very timid about discussing difficult history before the Social Studies Methods course, but she does feel a sense of responsibility toward addressing difficult topics and providing a safe, trusting environment for the students. She stated the following:

> Kids probably have ideas around those things [difficult history topics] already, but they just can't pinpoint it, especially at the younger elementary grades. But they [students] do have questions and I think it's important to talk about those questions and affirm their feelings revolving those hard history topics. And I just feel like it's so important to have kids be able to express those things and get those answers to questions in a safe space, and I feel like the classroom provides that. (Parker interview, February 9, 2023)

This focus on creating a safe space for students to talk about how they are feeling was reflected in the ways Parker facilitated a discussion with the students about assimilation, the difficult history topic. During the discussion, she referenced the power dynamic and conflict between the Indigenous people and government, as well as the intention of assimilation. However, she used less direct language when relaying depth of trauma related to the topic. For example, during the simulation, one of the students asked why the schools were like this [mean to and hurting the children]. Parker said the following:

> They [the government] didn't want them to have brown skin. They wanted them to speak English. They wanted them to follow a Christian religion. And they just didn't want them

> to be different. And it was just so, it's so horrible. (Simulation recording, November 2022)

This example reflects the type of conversations the hesitant group had during the difficult history discussion. The participants knew the topic was important and needed to be discussed in an accurate way. They may have, however, tempered their language to seem developmentally appropriate. For example, they used the term "want," instead of terms like "force" or "eliminate," and stated that "they didn't want them to have brown skin" instead of stating that the "government officials were racist." The participant used softened language instead of language that, although more accurate, has a harsher connotation.

Conceptualization of Difficult History. Parker defined difficult history as something that has happened before that is hard to talk about with elementary students, because they might have heard different things growing up or because it's more controversial or could be a sensitive subject. She described that "for some kids, it could be something that might relate to some of them, or if it doesn't relate to anything to them at all, it could still be hard because people were hurt, or people were treated unfairly" (Parker interview, February 9, 2023). Alex noted that difficult history make people uncomfortable, especially the teacher. Like Parker, Alex went on to say that it could be uncomfortable "based on the demographics of the class, if they can relate, or if they know any prior knowledge of the topic" (Alex interview, February 8, 2023). Cameron also brought up comfort when talking about difficult history, stating she was uncomfortable but "trying to get around that discomfort and really be effective while uncomfortable" (Cameron interview, February 9, 2023). In other words, the hesitant participants saw difficult history as topics that may make people uncomfortable to talk about. While this reflects part of makes difficult history difficult, their understanding does not reflect the controversy and division that

can come from discussion of such topics (Gross & Terra, 2018), which was present in the confident participants' conceptualization.

Parker identified Indigenous people, slavery, shootings, and terrorism as specific difficult history topics. While Cameron and Alex also identified slavery as a difficult history topic, and they mentioned oppression, colonization, and LGBTQ rights. Several of these topics were explicitly discussed in the course, while others may have come from their personal experiences or exposure to difficult topics, and the topics were similar to the topics identified by the other two case study groups' participants.

Strategies Employed. The participants in this group, like the confident group, employed many of the strategies taught in the course. For example, Parker stuck to facts, provided examples, and used precise language 12 times in the 15-minute simulation session (see Appendix K). However, what distinguishes this group is the language they used to describe the history. Much of their language was indirect or hedging. For example, when discussing the forceful removal of Indigenous students from their families, Parker said the following:

> They would take the kids to the residential schools, even if the kids didn't want to go, and the parents didn't really want them to go either. But they had to go or else they [the parents] would go to jail or get in big, big trouble. So, what they [government] did was they made them go to these camps to make them more like Americans, I guess. (Simulation recording, November 2022)

This can be seen as hesitant or hedging, because she uses terms like "take" and "want," instead of "force" or "eliminate," which seem to soften the severity and cruelty that occurred. Additionally, Parker ended the conversation by saying, "I guess," which shows hesitancy in the confidence of her response. Similarly, when asked about how the schools were legal, Alex told

the students, “It’s very surprising that this was allowed. And I agree with him, how was that legal? But at that time, that was the law. And some of these poor kids were taken and had this done to them” (Alex Simulation Recording, November 22) and Cameron said, “The government could kind of hide the things that were happening in them. In truth, they weren’t real schools, they are places where children, unfortunately, were treated very poorly” (Cameron Simulation Recording, November 22). Examples like these, which use terms like “poor kids,” “done to them,” and “treated very poorly” show how the participants shared accurate information, but the language was softened and less precise.

While not an explicit strategy taught in the course, an interesting feature of this group was that all three participants made sure that the students felt comfortable and frequently talked about their feelings during the conversation. Parker began the discussion with the students by saying the following:

> I’m going to go ahead and preface this conversation and let you guys know that talking about this is going to be kind of challenging for me and for you. And that’s totally okay. We’re going to talk about this and express our feelings and work through this together. Does that sound good?

Later in the discussion, Parker went on to say, “I’ve understood so far that you guys have felt sad for them [the Indigenous children]. You felt confused. You felt angry. Are there any more emotions that you guys felt while reading the story?” (Simulation recording, November 2022). Starting the conversation by sharing that it’s okay that the difficult history topic may bring up feelings that need to be worked though, and then restating and eliciting emotions throughout the conversation shows that Parker was trying to gauge the students’ feeling and how they may be

impacting engagement with the topic. Similarly, after letting each student state how they were feeling, Cameron communicated with the students about feelings. She said the following:

> I asked you guys how you were feeling. But I did want to say, stories like this, that deal with hard history, are really hard for us to take in and process. And I'm sure right after reading, you were feeling a lot of things. And maybe right now as we talk you are as well. And I just wanted to say that that's normal, and it's okay. And that's how I feel about it too. I think we all share a lot of the same feelings. So just remember that when we process these things, it's okay to feel what we're feeling. (Simulation recording, November 2022)

Alex relayed to the students that their feelings were valid and understood, and he told the students, "I like how you are making connections about how you feel and to the book" (Simulation recording, November 2022). These participants made an intentional decision to check in on the students feeling and support the students in that way.

During her interview, Parker spent a considerable amount of time talking about creating a safe space for the students. She said the following:

> I think being an educator, you need to create a safe space for these kids. And especially since I've been student teaching, some kids don't have a safe space, except for when they're at school. I just think building those relationships and being a safe adult that they can talk to, is super beneficial for them. And for me, and I just feel, especially at the elementary school level, that's when they're learning to name and define those emotions. And that's important in the longevity of their life. (Parker interview, February 9, 2023)

Cameron identified using a similar strategy, indicating that she would be "cognizant of how the students are feeling. The information in this story evokes discomfort and pain. For that reason, I

want to be mindful of the needs and feelings of the students, without watering down the truth" (Simulation preparation document, November 2022). Upon completing his simulation, Alex reflected that, "I will use what I learned from this simulation in my future classroom, by opening the space for students to share their thinking and listen whole heartedly during difficult conversations" (Simulation reflection, November 2022). As seen across interviews, preparation, and reflection, the hesitant group identified the importance of making sure the students had a space to acknowledge and talk about their feelings and put it into practice during the discussion. While all participants in the research study checked in with the students about how they were feeling, these three participants revisited the conversation several times throughout the discussion. The hesitant group checked in on the students' feelings more than any other study participants, which made it a unique characteristic. The decision to do this may have been because they weren't sure if or how the students could handle the difficult topic, or because they themselves may have felt uncomfortable, which aligns with their conceptualization of difficult history.

Unlike the confident group, none of the participants created a follow-up plan with the students when they did not know an answer. Parker was the only participant in this group who stated she was unsure about something, and this only occurred once. Parker stated that she was unsure if the government was afraid of the Indigenous people's culture, but did go on to tell the students that she thought the government thought it was different from their own culture and they wanted everyone act, look, dress, and speak just like they did. Although stating when unsure and making a follow-up plan was an explicit strategy taught and modeled in the course, it was rarely employed during the hesitant group's discussions.

Supporting Factors. Each of the hesitant participants referenced content and/or activities in their course as supporting factors. During their interview, Parker discussed how getting to practice having this conversation in a no-stress environment made her feel comfortable. In addition, she referenced the benefit of the course simulation planning document. She shared the following:

> The [teacher] education program has us write these in-depth lesson plans and I feel like that's not beneficial in all subjects. But for the hard history topics, it would be something I would like loop back to, to think of "okay, what direction could the students go with this?" and be thinking about all the different viewpoints or comments, and just really knowing the kids and what they would say. (Parker interview, February 9, 2023)

In other words, she saw the value in extensive preparation when facilitating a discussion about difficult history. Like Parker, Cameron said "the prep for this one just seems so much more intensive and helpful, and I definitely think this is the most helpful topic to use the simulation with" (Interview, February 9, 2023). While Alex did not mention the simulation planning document, he did identify that during the course session when they worked on the document, he asked the instructor a lot of questions. He shared that the instructor's specific comment about elementary students wanting and needing to know this history really stuck with him. It was evident for this group that the time spent preparing for the simulation proved to be a beneficial process.

Hindering Factors. All three participants in this group expressed a lack of feeling prepared as a hinderance to their facilitating the difficult history discussion. During the interview, Parker discussed not feeling prepared when one of the students asked how the Indian Agent felt about taking the Indigenous children. She stated the following:

> I personally would have liked to do more research before, because one of the kids asked me, "how did the Indian dude feel about doing this?" And I'm just like, he's a person, so he has emotions, but I don't know, because they were brainwashed … I can't answer that. But I would say doing more research and getting like all sides of the story from every viewpoint, whether it was that side, the good side, a bystander, whatever it may be, just really digging into it myself first. (Parker interview, February 9, 2023).

The way Parker described this interaction and lack of content may take the responsibility off the oppressor and could be perceived as an excuse for their behavior. Cameron had a similar sentiment in her interview. She stated the following:

> I think some people were so wrapped up into the ideals created by the government. Right? That was the norm. They thought that's what they were supposed to do. And that doesn't make it right. And I'm sure there's a lot of people that when they were involved with this later, I hope, regretted their actions, and really felt sorry for what they did. (Interview, February 9, 2023)

Similar to Parker, Cameron's statements take the focus off of the oppressed people, while also taking the blame off of the individuals involved. Gross and Terra (2018) discuss the need to challenge and undermine dominant societal narratives, which the hesitant group seemed to not consistently employ. These examples shows the participants' desire and need for more information, in addition to the indirect and somewhat oppressor-focused language employed when talking about the difficult topic.

Summary. As evidenced through Parker's simulation recording, interview, and course documents, and those of the other hesitant group members, three participants facilitated a discussion about a difficult history topic with some hesitation. Hesitant participants like these

emerged from the data by bringing the conversation back to the experiences of the Indigenous people but using indirect or softened language. They relied heavily on discussing how the students were feeling, and while they did express a need to teach difficult history, they did not use precise language when talking about the horrendous nature of the residential schools. This may have been because this language was more comfortable for them to use and/or what they thought the students could handle. Hesitant participants identified that the simulation preparation document supported their facilitation of the conversation and a lack of content knowledge as a hinderance. They scored high (>80) on the CRTSE scale (Siwatu, 2007) and somewhat hesitantly facilitated a discussion about a difficult history topic, and participants like these can help inform how we prepare and support preservice teachers who are confident in their culturally responsive teaching practices but hesitant in explicitly teaching about difficult history.

Sub-Finding 2.3: Some Preservice Teachers Seemed to Avoid or Deflect When Discussing Difficult History Topics

Avoidant: Jesse. Jesse was the case selected to represent the case study group that seemed to avoid or deflect when discussing difficult history topics, as he exemplified most characteristics that emerged from that group's aggregate data (i.e., simulation video review, document review, and interview). He identifies as a 22-year-old white male and his overall CRTSE score was below 80, which is considered low and reflects the avoidant group's overall scores. As identified in the document review (February 2023), Jesse completed high school in a location that was suburban, middle socioeconomic status, and he identified the students as being primarily white and high achieving. He identified that he plans to teach students who are middle socioeconomic status, a mixture of races, and primarily middle achieving.

During his interview, Jesse shared that he believes teachers need to be teaching and talking about difficult history because he believes teaching is a social engine for change. Jesse continued, discussing his hesitancies toward teaching difficult history:

> Personally, as a teacher, especially as a young teacher coming through student teaching and then [getting] ready to go out in the field, I do have concerns about teaching hard history topics. I'm worrying about how parents react and how that goes, because, you know, I don't want to put my job on the line. (Jesse interview, February 9, 2023)

While at least one participant from the three different case study groups mentioned that difficult history may be hard for parents in addition to teachers and students, only participants in the avoidant group discussed the possible pushback or negative impact of students' parents. This may be because they are not confident in their understanding of the content and/or their ability to teach difficult history with transparency and fidelity.

This avoidance was reflected in the ways Jesse facilitated a discussion with the students about assimilation, the difficult history topic for the simulated learning experience. During the discussion, he referenced the term assimilation, but did not directly address the depth of trauma with the topic. He often turned the conversations back to what the students were thinking and did not explicitly identify the devastating effects of assimilation and residential schools. For example, during his simulation session, the students were discussing how they were glad that the Indigenous children in the book didn't have to go back to the boarding school, and how the book was sad and like a nightmare. Jesse said the following:

> It definitely would be scary. How might you feel if you were in a situation like that? [Avatar Student reply: I would be really scared, because like they were really mean to the kids.] Part of why I think they did those things, made those kids go to those

> residential schools, they wanted them to assimilate them into their culture. Does anybody know what that word assimilate means? Do you have any guesses on what assimilate might mean? [Avatar Student reply: Like, you have to be like everybody else?] Yeah, that's really great. Assimilation means that they wanted these kids, these Indian children to be like the rest of them and normalized to the rest of society. Do you think that's a good thing? Or we think that maybe it's okay to be different, to follow one's own culture? (Simulation recording, November 2022).

This example shows that while Jesse does refer to the power dynamic between the government and Indigenous people, he is hesitant to clearly state the harshness and detrimental impact these schools had on the Indigenous children. While meaning-making (Kegan, 1982), the act of constructing one's own reality, is an important skill for students to develop, one difficult history strategy taught in the course was to explicitly state when something was right or wrong. Throughout the discussion, instead of doing so, Jesse turned the conversation back to the students, which could lead to the perpetuation of dominant and harmful narratives.

Conceptualization of Difficult History. Jesse defined difficult history as, "teaching and talking about subjects in history that may be uncomfortable for some people, may be uncomfortable for students, may be uncomfortable for their families, or may be uncomfortable for me as the teacher" (Interview, February 9, 2023). Similarly, Chris defined difficult history as "topics that are uncomfortable for people … things that have happened in history that now looking back, we're definitely not very ethical*"* (Interview, February 9, 2023) and Quinn defined it as "a fear of wording things incorrectly in a way that could offend people, and I think that makes a lot of teachers nervous because you don't want to say anything incorrect or hurtful" (Interview, February 9, 2023). In other words, the participants in this group see difficult history

as something that make people uncomfortable and may make the teacher nervous. Like the hesitant group, this understanding reflects part of makes difficult history difficult, but it does not reflect the potential controversy and division that often arises (Gross & Terra, 2018).

Jesse identified difficult history topics such as slavery, Japanese internment camps, Indian boarding schools, and the Holocaust. Other participants in this group identified several of the same topics, as well as segregation and court cases where the judgement was not sound. Several of these topics were explicitly discussed in the course, while others may have come from their personal experiences or exposure to difficult topics, and the topics were similar to the topics identified by the other two case study groups' participants.

Strategies Employed. The participants in this group attempted to employ some of the strategies taught in the course. For example, Jesse stuck to facts, provided examples, and used precise language 9 times in the 15-minute simulation session (see Appendix K). However, they sometimes used outdated terminology (e.g., Indians), gave inaccurate information, and/or avoided explicitly stating when something was right or wrong. For example, when discussing the horrendous nature and impact of the residential schools, Jesse asked the students,

> Were there any benefits maybe to having these students attend boarding schools? Do you think there could be any instance where it would be a benefit, or do you think it would be bad across the board, and there were no positives in the situation? (Jesse Simulation Session, November 2022).

This example is misaligned to what the instructor shared that he taught the students, explicitly state when something is right or wrong. When discussing a Learning for Justice (2022) teaching hard history framework, the instructor told the preservice teachers that there are parts of history, especially with difficult histories, where there is a right and a wrong side, and educators must be

explicit that, for example, enslavement, the civil war, or assimilation of Indigenous people was wrong and intentionally harmful. During Jesse's interview, when asked about giving the students space to talk about the potential benefits of residential schools, Jesse stated the following:

> I remember posing that question of like, "well, what do you think? Do you think there were any benefits to this?" You know, obviously, I don't personally really think there were any benefits to Indian boarding schools and all that. But I think letting the kids speak and kind of explore their own understanding about it is important, because again, as a teacher, I can't be forming their opinions, I can give them the facts. And I want to give them the facts, and then let them form their own opinion, because I'm not indoctrinating children, despite what some people might believe. And so, you know, kind of letting them say, "Well, do you think there was anything good? Do you think there was anything bad?" and letting them kind of justify it, owning their learning. (Interview, February 9, 2023)

While Jesse stated that he personally does not think there are benefits to assimilation and the residential schools, he wanted the students to come to that conclusion on their own. This, however, leaves room for students to agree with the actions of the oppressor and perpetuate dominant and whitewashed narratives. It is important that the teacher be as prepared as possible and ready to explicitly state when something is right or wrong. While discussing difficult history, as aligned with Gross and Terra (2018), not being explicit about what happened, and what is right and wrong, could perpetuate harmful, dominant narratives. Quinn had a similar interaction with the students. When replying to a student who wondered why the schools weren't helping the Indigenous children, she noted that she had been talking with other teachers about understanding

if "there were any benefits to these boarding schools (Quinn simulation session, November 2022). Quinn went on to say the following:

> Historians have brought up the point that these people were learning English, which could benefit them fitting into the American society and working, things like that. But with those benefits, there were a lot of problems with the schools. What do you guys think? Do you think that the benefits outweigh the costs, the negative things? Or do you think that because of all the negative things, the schools outweighed the benefits of learning English or other skills? (Simulation session, November 2022).

When asked about this conversation in her interview, Quinn responded similarly to Jesse. She stated the following:

> I think that I did that, because I wanted the kids to be able to expand on their perspective instead of immediately shutting them down and being like, "No, there's nothing good about the Indian boarding schools." Because I think that that's another thing about history, there's so many complexities and nuances that you can't just immediately cut off someone's perspective (Quinn Interview, February 9, 2023).

During her interview, Quinn did not state that she thought there were no benefits to assimilation and the residential schools. Based on the information shared with the students (e.g., learning English) and her rationale in the interview (e.g., complexities and nuances), it could be seen that this participant, while not pushing a particular viewpoint on the students, could be leaving space for the perpetuation of dominant and whitewashed narrative (e.g., Indigenous people may have benefitted from the horrendous circumstances and taking blame off the oppressor). Chris, although somewhat more direct in her discussion of the residential schools, did not use precise

language about what was happening and used the outdated term “Indians” with the students. She stated the following:

> The government disguises these schools and calls them residential schools. But in reality all these horrible things were happening. And it’s hard for outside people, who maybe weren’t Indians or weren’t part of the government, to know that these schools were actually more harmful than good. (Chris simulation session, November 2022)

During Chris’ interview, when asked about the terms used to describe the students in the residential schools, Chris did not acknowledge using the term “Indian,” but instead, she talked about the importance of having prior knowledge and “speaking with the students more specifically about certain events or terms” (Interview, February 9, 2023). From this statement, it was unclear if Chris understood that the term was outdated and understood as offensive. Examples like these show how the participants, at times, shared inaccurate information and could be leaving space for the perpetuation of dominant narratives. This may have been because they are still impacted by dominant narratives and/or uncomfortable talking about hard histories.

Similar to the two other case study groups, while not an explicit strategy taught in the course, all three participants in the avoidant group wanted to make sure the students felt comfortable. In addition, the avoidant participants discussed what the students could or would do if they felt uncomfortable at school. The participants led the students in making a connection between the trauma of the residential schools to feeling unsafe at their school. For example, Jesse asked the students, “What do you think you can do if you are treated like that today? How would you respond? Would you just go along with it, or would you tell a trusted adult?” (Simulation session, November 2022). Chris stated that, “Teachers definitely should not be allowed to treat students like that, and if that ever happened to you in any sort of way, you should definitely tell

another trusted adult (Simulation session, November 2022). Quinn provided more context for the students. She shared the following:

> Teachers shouldn't be allowed to do things like that. And I'm glad that you feel comfortable and safe to be able to tell your teachers today. Today at school, there's a lot of laws and regulations that make sure that teachers and schools treat all the students safely and fairly and that they can't harm students like what was happening in the book. If this happened to you, you definitely should tell your teachers. (Quinn simulation session, November 2022)

These examples align with the need to build a sense of trust with the students (Gay, 2018), but unlike the hesitant group, these participants focused on making connections to modern-day schools instead of the lived trauma of the Indigenous children. This may reflect a potential discomfort on the avoidant participants' part or that the students may not be able to handle the harsh realities in discussions like these.

Lastly, all participants in this group stated when they were unsure of an answer and for most, followed up by saying they would look up the information and get back to the students. Jesse used this particular strategy the most out of all ten participants, specifically stating that the students could take time to research the questions together. In his simulation preparation document, Jesse identified that, "if asked a question I do not have a confident answer for, I will be comfortable telling the students that I don't have an answer for them and that is something we could research as a class" (Simulation preparation document, November 2022). This aligns with his belief in using inquiry with students, as discussed in his interview. He stated the following:

> I'm big into inquiry and student research and students owning their learning and making it authentic. There's no point in me, as a teacher, trying to bullsh*t something and pretend

> like I know something when I don't. And again, that's part of my teaching philosophy, I think, is just being very honest with my students. Hey, you know, teachers aren't super computers, we don't know everything. There are things that we don't know. So, I don't know that but let's go research it or let's follow up later, or, you know, let me get back to you on that (Jesse interview, February 9, 2023).

While this example does reflect the difficult history strategy of stating when unsure, it also aligns with Jesse's discussion with the students about the potential benefits of the residential schools and wanting the students to develop their own opinions and beliefs. In her simulation, Quinn told the students that she was unsure of which governmental acts allowed the schools to be created, and let the students know that she would do some research on the topic and find that out for them. When asked about this in her interview, Quinn discussed how the instructor was clear about the importance of stating when you're unsure and "not teach a lie." As stated earlier, the strategy of stating when unsure was explicitly taught and modeled in the Social Studies Methods course and was implemented in the participants' practice.

Supporting Factors. All avoidant participants referenced content and/or activities in their course as supporting factors. During his interview, Jesse discussed the benefits of the simulation preparation document. He stated the following:

> As a teacher in my own classroom, next year, if I'm ever in a situation where I'm having a hard history conversation, it's going to be a little bit different, because I'm not going to be handed a document saying here's what you might want to talk about … I think that pre-planning really did save me, because I think if I had gone into that conversation without doing that document, and without thinking about it … it would have been a lot

> harder to be as successful as I felt like I was through that conversation. (Jesse Interview, February 9, 2023)

It is important to note how the participants used and benefitted from the simulation preparation document and how it may positively influence conversations in the preservice teachers' future classroom. Chris had a similar experience with the simulation preparation document, sharing, "I think doing the research was helpful, and having the guided questions to answer beforehand" (Chris Interview, February 9, 2023). Quinn also appreciated working on the simulation preparation document during a course session, specifically having an idea of hard questions that may be asked, since it was her first time having a conversation like this. The simulation preparation document proved to be beneficial for all research study participants, but it also shows that, just like elementary students, preservice teachers need different supports when unpacking and learning to teach difficult history topics.

Hindering Factors. The three participants in this group expressed a variety of factors that hindered their facilitation of the discussion with the students. It is important to note that they were the only participants who brought up parents as a possible hinderance.

When asked about hindering factors, Jesse talked about the complexities of the simulation experience. He stated the following:

> I think the fact that it was a simulation with those avatars, I think a lot of people in our program feel like the simulation is always awkward, because it's simulation. I think it's a great program. And it's a great way to have those practice conversations in a very low stakes, no-stakes environment. And so, I get the benefit of that. But it's always a little weird, sitting on zoom with all these robot children who talk funny, and how all these little quirks. And kids do have quirks like that, and kids do talk funny like that, but it's

> just different when it's through a computer screen. And so, I think that would have been the biggest hindrance, but I also think it could have been a strength because it was so low stakes. (Jesse Interview, February 9, 2023)

This response reflects the complex nature of simulated learning environments and how they can be beneficial, while simultaneously somewhat inauthentic (Howel & Mikesha, 2021).

Quinn discussed how a lack of knowledge about the topic was a hinderance and shared that it would have been beneficial to talk more about the history in the methods course. This reflected the instructor's response about needing to add more content to the next iteration of the course. Chris wrote that she felt "a little nervous about leading a small-group discussion about a hard history topic. Depending on the hard history topic, I feel unequipped to answer the questions that students might bring up" (Simulation preparation document, November 2022) and shared in her interview that "trying to come up with answers on the spot was a little hard, but I don't think it really hindered. I think it's just like it took more time to think about an answer" (Chris interview, February 9, 2023). These examples reflect the need for preservice teachers to have explicit instruction on difficult history content, modeled strategies, and time to practice engaging in difficult conversations.

As previously stated, avoidant participants were the only ones to bring up parent pushback. Quinn shared that interactions with parents could be a hinderance, but it has become less of one. In her simulation preparation document, Quinn stated that "another aspect of leading a hard-history topic that scared me was how parents would react to me teaching hard history" (Simulation preparation document, November 22). Quinn was asked to expand on that during her interview. She stated the following:

> I think that one thing that was very daunting coming into this program is parents, and not knowing how parents are going to respond to different topics that you're teaching in the classroom, because you always hear horror stories of what could happen. And so, this program has definitely made me feel a lot more confident in how to communicate with parents, and explain what we're doing in the classroom and why it's important (Interview, February 9, 2023).

This shows that while that there may be lingering hesitation with parents, having explicit instruction, modeling, and practice may create more confidence. Jesse also brought up parents in his interview, he but expressed a lingering concern rather than a growing confidence. He stated the following:

> I do have concerns about having hard history topics and worrying about how parents react how that goes because I don't want to put my job on the line. And I don't want it to become a "He Said, She Said" sort of situation. So personally, I'm all for it [teaching difficult history]. I think we need more of it. And then in the teacher mindset, I have to be very structured about how I have those conversations and how they go, because I want to protect myself and you know, kind of have my interests in mind, as well. (Jesse interview, February 9, 2023)

The avoidant group shared more hesitancies that the other two groups, possibly reflective of a potential lack of confidence in or understanding of difficult history content and teaching strategies.

Summary. As evidenced through Jesse's simulation recording, interview, and course documents, and those of the other avoidant group members, three participants avoided or hedged when they facilitated a discussion about a difficult history topic. Avoidant participants like these

emerged from the data because they used inaccurate terminology (e.g., Indians), were not explicit about the traumatic nature of the residential schools, and/or asked the students to determine if there were any benefits to the oppression. This may have been because they were not comfortable with the topic, thought the students weren't ready to discuss the harsh realities, or because they, as preservice teachers, may have benefitted from additional modeling and practice during the course. In addition, avoidant participants may benefit from additional reminders and instruction to discuss the content and strategies that were wrong during their simulation sessions, and it is okay to present them as such. Avoidant participants identified that the simulation preparation document supported their facilitation of the conversation and identified hindrances such as a lack of content knowledge or potential parent pushback. They scored lower (<80) on the CRTSE scale (Siwatu, 2007) and somewhat avoidantly facilitated a discussion about a difficult history topic, and participants like these can help inform how we prepare and support preservice teachers who are not confident in their culturally responsive teaching practices and avoidant when needing to explicitly teach about difficult history.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the case findings that enabled me to answer the study's research questions:

- RQ 1: How does the social studies methods course instructor conceptualize difficult history, and what specific teaching strategies were taught in the course?
- RQ 2: After receiving explicit instruction about teaching difficult history, what teaching strategies do PSTs use to facilitate a small-group conversation about difficult history in a simulated learning environment?

- RQ 3: What factors (e.g., teaching practices and dispositions) do PSTs perceive as supporting or hindering the facilitation of a conversation about difficult history in a simulated learning environment?

Analysis of the case study group participants that seemed confident, hesitant, and avoidant – both individually and collectively – enabled me to make the following assertions:

- The instructor in this study values teaching difficult history and preparing preservice teachers to do the same, which was particularly evident in the way he talked about its importance and how he modeled and discussed teaching strategies in the course.
- The instructor may have a lack of knowledge about individual preservice teachers' experiences and dispositions, which is important to preparing preservice teachers' in discussing difficult topics. This may have led to a missed opportunity in supporting all preservice teachers in their difficult history preparation.
- While the preservice teachers in this study approached discussing difficult history in different ways, they employed some similar strategies and shared some similar content knowledge. Exposure to and in-depth discussions about difficult history topics, as well as intentional modeling and approximated practice, may help improve preservice teachers' engagement and comfort with difficult history.
- Preservice teachers who identified as confident in their culturally responsive teaching pedagogy and seemed to confidently facilitate a discussion about difficult history topics seem to be ready to employ difficult history strategies and may confidently discussing difficult topics with future students.
- Preservice teachers who identified as confident in their culturally responsive teaching pedagogy but seemed to hesitantly facilitate a discussion about difficult history topics

may require additional support in identifying areas of growth. This support could be aligned to using direct and precise language, and they may benefit from explicit modeling and practice with targeted feedback.

- Preservice teachers who did not identify as confident in their culturally responsive teaching pedagogy and seemed to be avoidant or those who provided inaccurate information when they facilitate a discussion about difficult history topics may require scaffolded support in identifying areas of growth/misconception (e.g., using accurate language and explicitly stating what is right and wrong). They may benefit from additional instruction, modeling, and practice with targeted feedback.

In the fifth and final chapter, I connect my findings, interpretations, and assertions to contextual recommendations for the teacher preparation program and discuss implications for practice and potential limitations.

Chapter 5: Translation to Practice

This capstone research project was conducted with the intention of addressing a problem of practice in a Mid-Atlantic University's Education School's Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (BSED) degree program, which requires that preservice teachers (PST) enroll in one two-credit Social Studies Methods course in the first semester of year four. Engaging with social studies curriculum, including difficult history topics, can be particularly daunting work for preservice teachers (Bousalis, 2022; Haverback, 2017; Rich & An, 2022). Program faculty and leadership, who hope to make the program more explicitly social justice-oriented, discussed the missed potential of this course in preparing PSTs to engage with the content and pedagogy specifically aligned to difficult history (interview with Elementary Program Coordinator, August 2022). The Social Studies Methods course was recently revised and now dedicates three weeks to supporting PSTs in learning how to teach difficult history. Aware of both the minimization of social studies in TPPs and the importance of preparing PSTs in this area, program faculty and leadership are interested in understanding how PSTs respond to and use the curricular addition of teaching difficult history. Program leadership also recognizes that preservice teachers' experiences and backgrounds vary considerably, and the leadership is also concerned that a subset of students might leave the program unprepared. The following research questions guided my study:

- RQ 1: How does the social studies methods course instructor conceptualize difficult history, and what specific teaching strategies were taught in the course?
- RQ 2: After receiving explicit instruction about teaching difficult history, what teaching strategies do PSTs use to facilitate a small-group conversation about difficult history in a simulated learning environment?

- RQ 3: What factors (e.g., teaching practices and dispositions) do PSTs perceive as supporting or hindering the facilitation of a conversation about difficult history in a simulated learning environment?

I used qualitative analysis of documents, video reviews, and interviews, to answer the research questions. In this chapter, I first identify the intended audience and purpose of the recommendations. Next, I situate the assertions within three focus areas (i.e., course curriculum and pedagogy, course instructor, and teacher preparation program) and within each, I provide commendations, actionable recommendations, and intended benefits. I end the chapter with possible limitations and a brief conclusion.

Intended Audience and Purpose

The intended audience for the recommendations is the Education School's Teacher Preparation Program (TPP). While this study solely focused on the BSED preservice teachers, PSTs in the Education School's Master of Teaching (MT) degree program students also take a version of the Social Studies Methods course, and the study's findings and recommendations may support that course. Therefore, the recommendations should be presented to the Director of Teacher Education, Elementary Program Coordinator, and Undergraduate Degree Director. Once presented to that group of program leadership, recommendations will be shared with the elementary program faculty, so they can work to align and cohere their courses. Then, explicit content and pedagogical recommendations will be presented to the Social Studies Methods course instructor. Since the teacher preparation program is willing to evolve and meet the needs of its diverse student population, the intended purposes for the recommendations are to: a) support the desire to make the program more explicitly social justice-oriented; b) assist the meaningful integration of teaching difficult history into the methods course; c) create an opening

for program faculty to consider how the findings might transfer across courses; and d) support all preservice teachers in their preparation to facilitate such conversations with their future elementary students.

Three Focus Areas: Course Curriculum and Pedagogy, Course Instructor, and Teacher Preparation Program

Three areas of focus emerged from the study's findings and interpretations of those findings. While they each inform and impact one another, it is important to note that the three focus areas and subsequent recommendations are described in a suggested order.

Course Curriculum and Pedagogy

Aligned Assertion. The following assertion emerged from the study's findings:

> While the preservice teachers in this study approached discussing difficult history in different ways, they employed some similar strategies and shared some similar content knowledge. Exposure to and in-depth discussions about difficult history topics, as well as intentional modeling and approximated practice, may help improve preservice teachers' engagement and comfort with difficult history.

Commendations. The course curriculum included three difficult history topics: slavery, African American history, and Indigenous people's history. Each of these topics requires an understanding of the accurate history, unique contexts, and ways in which they have been whitewashed or described through a dominant narrative (Gross & Terra, 2018), and they were appropriate topics to cover. The course syllabus included a variety of resources for the preservice teachers to reference and draw from during the methods course. Preservice teachers were given time to prepare for facilitating a discussion in a simulated learning environment and then given time to reflect on the experience, which are both important practices in teacher preparation

(Grossman et al., 2009). The mixed-reality simulation was a useful tool in providing a low-risk and least-harm-done environment (Badiee & Kaufman, 2014; Cohen et al., 2020; Dalinger et al., 2020) for preservice teachers to engage in a difficult-history approximation.

Recommendations. My first recommendation is grounded in review of the data, which identified that difficult history was being discussed, modeled, and practiced in the methods course, but a codified definition of difficult history was not apparent. Therefore, I recommend providing a codified conceptualization/definition of difficult history that is readily accessible to all stakeholders, to support cohesion in both teaching and learning. Similar to the ways in which Gross & Terra (2018) outline specific criteria to guide thinking about how difficult history is taught and learned, common language should be present in the various pedagogical practices and multimodal activities of the course (e.g., slide decks, readings, course worksheets, and sim guide). One possible conceptualization/definition, drawn from the work of educators who are local to the context and seminal work in the field, could be the following: Difficult histories are most often associated with "issues of social justice and where America failed to live up to its stated values" (Weisend et al., 2022, p. 180) and are central to a nation's history, refute accepted versions of the past, connect with modern day problems and questions, are related to periods of violence that were usually collective or state sanctioned, and challenge existing historical understandings (Gross & Terra, 2018). This is important because a clear, shared definition allows the instructor and the students to be on the same page regarding the goals of the course. Additionally, I recommend that pre-service and in-service teachers be provided a support document when preparing to discuss difficult history with elementary students. The support document could include a codified definition of difficult history, reflective questions, and difficult history strategies (see Appendix L). As noted by Kavanagh et al. (2022), designing and

facilitating meaningful experiences for students is multifaceted and complex, and it is important that we support the implementation of teaching difficult history.

My second recommendation is grounded in a review of the course syllabus, which explicitly stated that preservice teachers are expected to seek out their own content knowledge. PSTs are asking for more content on difficult history (Instructor and Participant interviews, February 2023) and it is important to note that their beliefs/dispositions and experiences could impact what information they seek out or use (Nganga et al., 2020). For example, a PST who had never learned about Native American residential schools may not understand the purposeful nature of and trauma caused by the schools. In turn, they may not know to seek out sources and resources that accurately describe the sanctioned violence and assimilation, which could leave space for the perpetuation of dominant narratives during classroom discussions. Therefore, I recommend increasing the amount of difficult history *content* covered in the course. It could be difficult to make space for extensive content coverage in a two-credit course. If making it a three-credit course is not possible for or valued by the program, one suggestion to support content integration is to leverage a "unit fair" as the course's final project. Preservice teachers could work in pairs or triads to engaged with existing Inquiry Design Models™ (IDM) by researching the topic using course-approved resources, analyzing the IDM using a set rubric, and suggesting changes and additions that reflect difficult history content and practices. After completing this task, each group could present their findings and collectively create a shared database for future reference. This suggestion aligns with practices that were used in a prior iteration of the course (P. Grimes, personal communication, February 15, 2023).

My third recommendation is grounded in the research surrounding approximations as a practice-based teacher preparation practice (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Grossman et al., 2003). While

the mixed-reality software proved to be an effective tool, the preservice teachers may also benefit from different types of approximations. The integration of mixed-reality simulations is expensive, and if the program does not have access to these costly simulations, less costly alternatives are available and have demonstrated efficacy (Kavanagh et al., 2020). Therefore, I recommend the integration of rehearsals and/or role playing when engaging with difficult history in the methods course.

Benefits. These recommendations could contribute to the context's problem of practice and benefit the preservice teachers by creating a foundation of content and pedagogy to draw from when discussing difficult histories in their future classrooms. Additionally, exposure to more topics and increased practice may lead to PSTs' increased confidence in accurately discussing difficult history with their future elementary students (Reisman et al., 2020; Rodríguez, 2020a).

Course Instructor

Aligned Assertions. The following assertions emerged from the study's findings: 1) The instructor in this study values teaching difficult history and preparing preservice teachers to do the same, which was particularly evident in the way he talked about its importance and how he modeled and discussed teaching strategies in the course. 2) The instructor may have a lack of knowledge about individual preservice teachers' experiences and dispositions, which is important to preparing preservice teachers' in discussing difficult topics. This may have led to a missed opportunity in supporting all preservice teachers in their difficult history preparation.

Commendations. It was evident that the course instructor personally believed in the importance of discussing difficult history with elementary students as well as with preservice

teachers. He regularly elicited feedback from his preservice teachers and based on that feedback, he is reframing the next iteration of the course to focus more on the content and strategies aligned to difficult history (Learning for Justice, n.d.). Additionally, the instructor's use of modeling was effective at meeting the course objectives. Specifically, he modeled the difficult history strategy of stating when he was unsure of an answer to a question and creating a follow-up plan (Document review, Instructor interview, Participant interviews, February 2023). The discussion of this strategy and the instructor's modeling led to the preservice teachers regularly and easily employing the strategy in the simulated learning environment (Participant interviews, February 2023; Participant simulation recording, November 2022).

Recommendations. My recommendations are grounded in the research surrounding preservice teacher dispositions and the importance of relationships in teaching (Miller & Starker-Glass, 2018; Truscott & Stenhouse, 2022; Split et al., 2011) and the course instructor's interview, where he discussed eliciting feedback from the preservice teachers. Therefore, I first recommend that the instructor gets to know the individual preservice teachers in the course by evaluating program surveys and using surveys that specifically target difficult history content, practices, and beliefs. Knowing that it may not be possible for a two-credit adjunct professor to meet with each PST several times throughout the semester, the instructor could request course-aligned data from the program's existing surveys. Analysis of the data could also be requested if it is already available or able to be provided. In addition to program data, the course instructor could leverage short mixed-methods surveys throughout the semester. By capturing data on the PSTs' understandings, misunderstandings, misconceptions, and questions, the instructor could adjust course content and practices to meet the unique needs of the PSTs.

My second recommendation is that the instructor take anecdotal notes during and after each course session to identify and address PSTs' misconceptions and potentially harmful beliefs. Preservice teachers ideally are not treated as a monolith, and the supports they receive can be differentiated and reflective of their unique needs (CCSSO, 2013). Getting to know individual preservice teachers in this way may help identify the ways in which they are similar to or different from other members of their cohort. Given a reasonable amount of time, funding, and resources, supports could be created for groups of PSTs to support them in developing an understanding of and confidence in teaching difficult history. For example, it could be determined that one group of students would benefit from additional practice and targeted feedback when discussing a difficult history topic, while it may not be necessary for other students. Given available time and resources, the course instructor could offer differentiated experiences for the students during a class session.

Benefits. These recommendations could contribute to the context's problem of practice and benefit the preservice teachers by creating targeted instruction that ensures PSTs are effectively and thoroughly prepared with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to become effective teachers (Emerson et al., 2018), while keeping in mind that PSTs' identities, experiences, and dispositions can impact their readiness (Chelsey & Jordan, 2012; Zhukova, 2018).

Teacher Preparation Program

Aligned Assertions. The following assertions emerged from the study's findings: 1) Preservice teachers who identified as confident in their culturally responsive teaching pedagogy and seemed to confidently facilitate a discussion about difficult history topics seem to be ready to employ difficult history strategies and may confidently discussing difficult topics with future

students. 2) Preservice teachers who identified as confident in their culturally responsive teaching pedagogy but seemed to hesitantly facilitate a discussion about difficult history topics may require additional support in identifying areas of growth. This support could be aligned to using direct and precise language, and they may benefit from explicit modeling and practice with targeted feedback. 3) Preservice teachers who did not identify as confident in their culturally responsive teaching pedagogy and seemed to be avoidant or those who provided inaccurate information when they facilitate a discussion about difficult history topics may require scaffolded support in identifying areas of growth/misconception (e.g., using accurate language and explicitly stating what is right and wrong). They may benefit from additional instruction, modeling, and practice with targeted feedback.

Commendations. In general, the teacher preparation program tries to understand who the preservice teachers are and what they need. Data is collected on the students through surveys and conversations, and scaffolds are put into place to support them. Similarly, the preservice teachers regularly advocate for themselves and inform their instructors and the teacher preparation program about what they need. During the Social Studies Methods course, the preservice teachers informed the instructor about what supports they needed (Instructor and Preservice Teacher interviews, February 2023). The two main supports they identified, as aligned to difficult history, were more content information and more time to practice. While facilitating the discussion in the simulated learning environment, the preservice teachers employed a variety of practices, to varying degrees, but all participants noted either the same or an improvement in their own confidence (Simulation Lab Staff, personal communication, February 5, 2023). Additionally, the majority of preservice teachers were reflective after the experience (Grossman et al., 2009), identifying, for example, what supported and hindered their facilitation of the

conversation and how they could use what they learned from the simulation in a real elementary classroom.

Recommendation. My first recommendation is grounded in the understanding that preservice teachers approach teaching in different ways and require differentiated support (CCSSO, 2013). Therefore, my recommendation is that the teacher preparation program analyze relevant survey data (e.g., Culturally Responsive Teaching Self Efficacy Scale, Teacher Multicultural Attitude Survey, and Factors Influencing Teaching Choice Scale), in conjunction with course surveys and instructor notes. This can be done to learn more about the preservice teachers' background knowledge, prior experiences, beliefs, and dispositions and how those may impact the ways in which preservice teachers engage with difficult history.

My final recommendation is grounded in the research surrounding the impact of PSTs' dispositions and experiences (Ginsberg et al., 2021; Landa & Stephens, 2017; Miller & Starker-Glass, 2018; Oamek, 2019; Saultz et al., 2021; Truscott & Stenhouse, 2022). I recommend that different/additional data be collected about PSTs' dispositions/beliefs. These might include gathering data on PSTs' beliefs about what the roles and responsibilities of an elementary teacher are, particularly with regard to issues of equity and diversity, social justice, difficult conversations, and hard histories. As the program continues to articulate the dispositions it believes are necessary for effective teaching, it would benefit from finding or developing tools for measuring those dispositions. It is imperative that TPPs have an in-depth understanding of who their PSTs are and what their PSTs believe in order to support their development as future teachers. This data could be collected as a part of the larger program data collection and provide insight to support PSTs across the entire program.

Benefits. These recommendations could contribute to the context's problem of practice and benefit the preservice teachers by developing a deeper understanding of those in the programs and the ways in which they can be supported in their development as an effective educator.

Limitations

The course is a two-credit course, which means preservice teachers are only expected to engage with the course content and activities for a total of six hours per week, which includes attending the two-hour in-person, synchronous Social Studies Methods course. The limited number of engagement hours may make it difficult for the preservice teachers to develop a deep and flexible understanding of the content area (CCSSO, 2013) and transfer knowledge and skills into teaching practice (Elementary Education PreK-6, 2018; Richmond, 2019; von Hippel & Bellows, 2018). Additionally, the course instructor is adjunct, which means he is not expected make significant adjustments to the course, and without a full-time social studies faculty member, it may be difficult to evaluate the course, make changes, and maintain the changes with fidelity. Furthermore, teacher preparation needs to be holistic and coherent, so this course—one of the last the PSTs take—ought to be building on and aligned with what has come before.

Conclusion

Supporting preservice teachers is complex, and supporting preservice teachers in engaging with difficult history is remarkably nuanced. Preservice teachers, who have limited time and engagement with social studies content, may not have the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the content knowledge and skills needed to teach difficult history in a developmentally appropriate way. It is necessary to ensure that preservice teachers have access to rich content and opportunities to practice what they are learning, while receiving direct

feedback. As a result, teacher preparation programs have the responsibility to help preservice teachers gain the skills to teach difficult history, move past their hesitations and discomfort, and ultimately, support their future students in thinking critically about history. For a variety of reasons, preservice teachers may come to their teacher preparation programs unprepared for this work (e.g., personal experiences, inadequate education, and dispositions and assumptions based on dominant narratives), and with the current trend in educational policies (e.g., the censoring of culturally relevant, anti-bias, and anti-racist books and curriculum), it is imperative that teacher preparation programs equip preservice teachers to interrupt and dismantle such systems and provide all students a robust, equitable education.

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Appendix A

Document Selection and Collection

IRB-SBS #5580

Title: "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation"

Documents	Source	Format	Location	Audience	Date of Publication	Date Accessed
Current Course Syllabus	Provided by course instructor	Word Document or PDF	CANVAS	PSTs	Fall 2022	Spring 2023
Course Materials	Provided by course instructor	Word Documents, PDFs, PPTs, and Videos	CANVAS	PSTs	Fall 2022	Spring 2023
Course Assignments	Provided by course instructor	Word Document, PDF, or Surveys	CANVAS	PSTs	Fall 2022	Spring 2023
InTASC standards	CCSSO, 2013	PDF	ONLINE	TPPs	2013	Spring 2023

Appendix B

Simulation Preparation Document

EDIS 4345 Simulation Preparation Document
Book Talk about: "I Am Not A Number" by Jenny Kay Dupuis & Kathy Kacer

SIMULATION PREP

- Review:
  - This Preparation Document, including the Learner Guide for the simulation
  - Educating For Democracy Lesson Plan
  - Example of a Book Talk Preparation Document
- Read through the materials and email messages from the Simulation Lab so you understand how to schedule, access, experience, and review the simulation.
- Read the relevant course texts that relate to the simulation.

NOTES

- You will work in groups of three to plan, but will:
  - submit an individual plan
  - complete the simulation individually
  - submit an individual reflection
- This 15-minute small group simulation would be the initial conversation after reading the text, but not the only time you would discuss it.
- Immediately after completing the simulation, jot down some notes about the experience.

OVERVIEW

- In collaboration with the School of Education and Human Development's SimLab, you will have an opportunity to practice facilitating a small-group discussion about a hard history topic in a low-pressure, simulated environment.
- During the simulation, you will be presented with a scenario with animated characters, operated by live actors behind the scenes, with whom you interact and to whom you respond.
- You are asked to then watch your recorded simulation and write a reflection about your experience.
- You will be assessed not on your performance in the simulation itself, but on your reflection on your experience and an analysis of the course concepts that are relevant to the simulations.

INTENTION/PURPOSE

The objectives of participating in the simulation are for you to lead a small-group discussion about a hard history topic, and support the students in understanding:

- the text's content;
- the feelings, experiences and motivations of characters; and
- the fairness of assimilation and "American Indian Boarding Schools" in their historical context.

ASSIGNMENT

1. Read the story before class and again before your simulation session.
2. Submit your preparation document to CANVAS by Sunday, November 6 at 10:00pm EST.
    a. Save this document as "LastName,FirstName_SimPrep" and when you are finished, upload the individual, completed document for your submission.
    b. Individual students can make edits to their plan before submitting (i.e., it doesn't have to be the exact same as your group, but can be).
    c. You are not writing a formal paper, but make sure your writing is clear, organized, and professional. (If you are using bullet points, please use complete sentences.)
3. After completing your simulation appointment, you will write and submit a reflection essay to CANVAS (due by Wednesday, November 16 at 10:00pm EST).

GROUP MEMBERS

Self:

PART A: GROUP PREPARATION

Answer the questions in the space provided. Note: Your submission can be identical to your groupmates' submissions, or you can make changes before submitting your individual copy. You will complete the simulation and reflection independently.

1. **What 5th Grade [redacted] Standards align?** (Identify 2- one social studies & one reading)

Standard	How is it aligned?

2. **What do you want the students to know (facts) and understand (big ideas) from the book?**

Know	Understand

3. **What background knowledge do you need as the teacher?** (Do some research on residential/boarding schools, so you can be prepared to answer students' questions. You may need to come back to this section and add more information.)

Teacher Background Knowledge

4. **How would <u>you</u> define/explain the following terms to students?**

Term	My Definition
Assimilation	
Culture	
Identity	
Residential/Boarding Schools	

5. **How will you relay the reality and brutality of residential schools/assimilation to the students?**

Your Response/Thoughts

6. **What questions could you ask the students?**

Your Questions

7. **How would you respond to these statements/questions from students?**

Student Examples	Your Response
Why were the schools like that? Why did they hurt the kids?	
Teachers shouldn't be allowed to do that. If a teacher had done that to me, I would have told my parents.	
Why did the kids go? Why couldn't they just stay home... or run away?	
But at least the kids are getting a real education.	

8. **What additional questions might the students ask you? How will you respond? (Optional)**

Additional Examples	Your Response

9. **Loosely outline your plan for the small group discussion.** (e.g., How will you start your lesson? What information/facts will you share and what questions will you ask? How will you respond to difficult questions? Etc.)

Your Plan

PART B: INDIVIDUAL PRE-REFLECTION

Briefly answer the questions in the space provided. Note: Complete these questions independently from your groupmates, and be as honest/open as you feel comfortable.

1. **In general, how do you feel about leading a small-group discussion about a hard history topic? Why?**

Your Response/Thoughts

2. **What strategies do you plan to use when leading this small-group discussion about a hard history topic?**

Your Response/Thoughts

Appendix C

Simulation Reflection Document

EDIS 4345 Simulation Reflection
Book Talk about: "I Am Not A Number" by Jenny Kay Dupuis & Kathy Kacer

DIRECTIONS

1. **Watch your simulation recording** before you complete your reflection.
    a. **Write down at least three timestamps** that you will use as examples in your reflection.
2. Submit your **reflection document to CANVAS** by Wednesday, Nov 16 at 10:00pm.
    a. Save this document as *"LastName,FirstName_SimReflection"* and when you are finished, upload the document for your submission.
    b. This assignment must be completed independently.

OVERVIEW

- In collaboration with the [redacted] SimLab, you will have an opportunity to practice facilitating a small-group discussion about a hard history topic in a low-pressure, simulated environment.
- During the simulation, you will be presented with a scenario with animated characters, operated by live actors behind the scenes, with whom you interact and to whom you respond.
- You are asked to then watch your recorded simulation and write a reflection about your experience.
- You will be assessed not on your performance in the simulation itself, but on your reflection on your experience and an analysis of the course concepts that are relevant to the simulations.

INTENTION/PURPOSE

- The objectives of participating in the simulation are for you to lead a small-group discussion about a hard history topic, and support the students in understanding:
    - the text's content;
    - the feelings, experiences and motivations of characters; and
    - the fairness of assimilation and "American Indian Boarding Schools" in their historical context.

TASKS

- Immediately after completing the simulation, jot down some notes about the experience.
- Then, watch the video of your simulation, which will be shared with you through your Mursion Portal within 24 hours.
- Take note of the strategies you used to engage the students in the conversation and at least 3 timestamps that you'll include as examples.
- Take notes and reflect on your simulation experience.

ASSIGNMENT

First watch your video recording and write down at least three timestamps that you will use as examples in your reflection.

Then answer the following questions in the space provided, writing about 100-200 words per question, and including at least 3 total timestamped examples. (e.g., description… *(min. 04:27)*) *The goal of this assignment is to help you reflect on the simulation and make connections between your coursework, preparation, and your experience.*

1. What teaching hard history strategies did you use when discussing the text? How did the students respond? Be sure to note specific examples (at least 1 timestamp).

2. What did you feel went well during the simulation? What supported you? Be sure to note specific examples (at least 1 timestamp).

3. If you could go back and repeat the simulation, what would you change? What may have hindered you? Be sure to note specific examples (at least 1 timestamp).

4. How will/could you use what you learned from the simulation and your reflection in a similar situation in a real classroom?

Appendix D

Video Review Protocol

IRB-SBS #5580

Title: "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation"

Research Question: After receiving explicit instruction about teaching difficult history, what teaching strategies do PSTs use to facilitate a small-group conversation about difficult history in a simulated learning environment?

Environment: Mursion mixed-reality simulation platform

Prior to Observation:

- Review contextual information PSTs on lesson preparation document, simulation reflection document, and course materials.

During the Observation:

- Note PST's behaviors and dialogue
- Note interactions between PST and avatar students
- Note instances and timestamps where the PST used "teaching difficult history" strategies

Center The Oppressed Group	Anchor in Shared Humanity	Talk About Power and Conflict	Use Precise Language	State When Unsure	Create a Follow-Up Plan

Appendix E

Simulation Scenario

Scenario Guideline:
UPPER ELEMENTARY – Book Talk "I Am Not A Number"

Location: Simulated Upper Elementary Classroom
Intensity: Low-Medium *(intended to provide the Learner a low-risk practice to facilitate a small-group conversation about a hard history topic, but the conversation topics may be hard)*
SIM Participants/Learners: Individual sessions for BSED Elementary Education Course
Length: Approx. 25 minutes: Avatar Greets (4 min), Simulation (15 min), Avatar Closes (4 min)

Simulation Challenge
During today's simulation, you will lead a small group conversation about the book "I Am Not A Number" (by Jenny Kay Dupuis & Kathy Kacer) and engage the avatar students in a dialogue about the hard history topic of "Native American Residential/Boarding Schools" and assimilation.

Learner Objective(s)
The learner will be able to lead a small group discussion and support the students in understanding: a) the text's content; b) the feelings, experiences and motivations of characters; and c) the fairness of assimilation and "American Indian Boarding Schools" in their historical context.

Context
You are the teacher in a 5th grade self-contained classroom, and just finished a whole group read aloud of "I Am Not A Number" by Jenny Kay Dupuis & Kathy Kacer. While the rest of your class works at two other stations (written self-reflection and primary source analysis), you meet with a group of 5 avatar students to discuss the text. (*Use the preparation document from your course to prepare for the conversation.*)

Synopsis
This book is based on the life of co-author Jenny Kay Dupuis's grandmother, who was removed from her First Nations family at the age of eight. While this book is based on a Canadian residential school, it aligns with the experiences of children in "American Indian Boarding Schools." When eight-year-old Irene is removed from her First Nations family to live in a residential school, she is confused, frightened, and terribly homesick. She tries to remember who she is and where she came from, despite the efforts of the nuns who are in charge at the school and who tell her that she is not to use her own name, but instead use the number they have assigned to her. When she goes home for summer holidays, Irene's parents decide never to send her and her brothers away again. But where will they hide? And what will happen when her parents disobey the law?

Strategies
1. Anchor your conversation in a shared/equal humanity
2. Listen to the students with an open mind, and navigate their ideas/opinions
3. Be willing to dive into the content wherever the students are and support their understanding
4. Be open to saying, "I don't know"
5. Pivot/Guide the conversation (if needed) to keep the conversation on task

Appendix F

Interview Protocol: Pre-Service Teachers

IRB-SBS #5580

Title: "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation"

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Date and time:

Location: Zoom

Consent

- Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview and research project. The goal of the interview is to learn more about how you facilitated a conversation about a difficult history topic and what you felt supported and hindered you. Your participation has no effect upon your standing in the program. I will ask you a few questions about your background, and then we'll discuss the simulation you engaged in, by watching a brief portion of it together and talking about the experience.
- Before we begin, I wanted to let you know you are free to not answer any question or to stop the interview at any point. Please let me know if you would like to end the interview now. [End here if participant indicates so.] If not, remember that you may ask to stop the interview at any point during our conversation.
- I will be recording this interview to ensure accuracy in my write up of the interview. If you would like me to stop recording at any point or have any concerns about being recorded, please let me know. All recordings and transcriptions from the interview will be de-identified and stored in a secure location to protect your privacy. As a reminder, the

information I collect from you is for use in my Capstone project. After transcribing the interview, I will delete the recording.

- This interview will be about 30 minutes long. If you need me to stop or pause it at any point before then, just let me know.

Questions

1) Tell me a little about why you want to be a teacher.
2) When thinking about teaching, how would you define the concept of "hard/difficult history"?
3) What topics do you consider to be "hard/difficult history"?
4) What are your beliefs about addressing topics like racism/oppression/social justice with children?
5) What in your personal background has influenced those beliefs?
6) Have your thoughts or beliefs about that changed over the course of your program?
    a. If yes, how? If not, why?
7) Shifting to the simulation experience, did you take time to review your recording?
    a. If not, that's okay, but take a moment to think back to that simulation.
8) What are your general takeaways from the simulation experience?
9) What supported you when leading the difficult history discussion with the avatar students?
    a. Follow-up: Other Sources: Course, Learner Guide, Outside of Class/EHD
10) What hindered you when leading the discussion with the avatar students?
    a. Are there any supports you wish you had? (Course/Learner Guide)

11) What difficult history strategies do you plan to use in your current student teaching placement or future classroom?
    a. Why?
12) How likely do you think it is that you will discuss difficult history topics with your students?
13) Do you have any final thoughts you'd like to share?

Closing

- Thank you for participating in this interview. As I said at the start, all recordings and transcriptions from the interview will be de-identified and stored in a secure location to protect your privacy. After transcribing the interview, I will delete this recording.
- A few of the themes that emerged from your responses were _____. (Member-Checking) Do you agree and did others emerge for you in this process?
- Do you have any questions or additional thoughts before we end the interview?

Appendix G

Interview Protocol: Course Instructor

IRB-SBS #5580

Title: "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation"

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Date and time:

Location: Zoom

Consent

- Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview and this research project. The goal of the interview is to learn more about how the Social Studies Methods course helps prepare elementary BSED preservice teachers in facilitating conversations about hard or difficult history topics.
- Before we begin, I wanted to let you know you are free to not answer any question or to stop the interview at any point. Please let me know if you would like to end the interview now. [End here if participant indicates so.] If not, remember that you may ask to stop the interview at any point during our conversation.
- I will be recording this interview to ensure accuracy in my write up of the interview. If you would like me to stop recording at any point or have any concerns about being recorded, please let me know. [Wait for participant indication.] All recordings and transcriptions from the interview will be de-identified and stored in a secure location to protect your privacy. As a reminder, the information I collect from you is for use in my Capstone project. After transcribing the interview, I will delete the recording.

- This interview will be about 45 minutes long. If you need me to stop or pause it at any point before then, just let me know.

Questions

1) How would you define the concept of "hard/difficult history"?
2) What topics do you consider to be "hard/difficult history"?
3) Why do you feel it's important to explicitly teach preservice teachers about difficult history and how to teach it?
4) What difficult history topics did you teach in the Social Studies Methods course?
5) Based on the topics that you taught, what difficult history strategies did you teach?
    a. Most salient/important
    b. What questions/misconceptions did the students have?
6) What training and/or resources did you use to support the teaching of difficult history in the course? (State? National? Professional organizations?)
7) Shifting to thinking about the difficult history simulation in the course. What feedback did you get from the students about the experience of getting to practice these skills?
8) What do you think supported your students in leading the difficult history discussion with the avatar students?
    a. If need more Strategies or experiences from the course or their personal life
9) What do you think hindered your students in leading the difficult history discussion with the avatar students?
10) What do you plan to change or add for future iterations of the course, regarding teaching difficult histories?
11) Do you have any final thoughts you'd like to share?

Closing

- Thank you for participating in this interview. As I said at the start, all recordings and transcriptions from the interview will be de-identified and stored in a secure location to protect your privacy. After transcribing the interview, I will delete this recording.
- A few of the themes that emerged from your responses were _____. (Member-Checking) Do you agree and did others emerge for you in this process?
- Do you have any questions or additional thoughts before we end the interview?

Appendix H

Study Email Correspondence: PSTs & Course Instructor

IRB-SBS #5580
PST - INITIAL EMAIL (STUDY INTEREST)

To: [EHD BSED ELEM 4th YEAR COHORT]
From: Katherine Leigh
Subject: BSED Research Study Opportunity

Dear 4th Year BSED Cohort,

For my EdD Capstone Project, I am interested in how the [redacted] prepares pre-service teachers to facilitate conversations about hard history topics.

Last semester, your social studies methods class completed a mixed-reality simulation (small-group discussion about a difficult history topic with Avatar students) through the [redacted] Simulation Lab. I am reaching out to students from the course to invite them to participate in a research study, "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation." I am conducting this study because I would like to learn more about the student experience.

Participation in this study includes one interview conducted over Zoom which will be video recorded. You will be asked to briefly review your simulation recording and subsequent reflection before the 20-minute interview. Additionally, I will review and analyze your simulation recording and relevant course documents.

Your participation in the study is voluntary, and your decision to participate or not will have no effect on your grades. Results from this study may help us better understand and improve the teacher education program at [redacted] and contribute to the field more generally.

Participants of the study will receive payment.

If you are interested in participating, please <u>reply to this email</u>. I will reach back out, letting you know if you have been selected for the study.

Thank you,
Katie Leigh

PST – REMINDER - Initial Email (Study Interest) (5 Days Later)

To: [Participant Name]
From: Katherine Leigh
Subject: Research Study Opportunity REMINDER

Dear [Participant Name],

This is a reminder about the invitation to participate in the study, "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation."

Your participation in the study is voluntary. Results from the study may help us better understand and improve the teacher education program at [redacted] and contribute to the field more generally.

Participants of the study will receive payment.

If you are interested in participating, please reply to this email. I will reach back out, letting you know if you have been selected for the study.

Thank you,
Katie Leigh

PST – Met Eligibility Requirements – Consent Email

To: [Participant's Name]
From: Katherine Leigh
Subject: Research Study Participation

Dear [Participant Name],

You have been selected as a participant for the research study, "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation."

Participation in this study includes one interview conducted over Zoom which will be video recorded. You will be asked to briefly review your simulation recording and subsequent reflection before the 20-minute interview. Additionally, I will review and analyze your simulation recording and relevant course documents.

Your participation in the study is voluntary, and your decision to participate or not will have no effect on your grades. Results from this study may help us better understand and improve the teacher education program at [redacted] and contribute to the field more generally.

Participants of the study will receive payment.

If you are still interested in participating, please sign the DocuSign Consent Form emailed to you. There is an option to agree to participate at the end of the consent form. If you no longer want to participate, please reply to this email.

Thank you,
Katie Leigh

PST – Met Eligibility Requirements – REMINDER Consent Email (3 days later)

To: [Participant's Name]
From: Katherine Leigh
Subject: Research Study Participation

Dear [Participant Name],

This is a reminder about your selection to be a participant in the study, "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation."

Your participation in the study is voluntary. Results from the study may help us better understand and improve the teacher education program at [redacted] and contribute to the field more generally..

Participants of the study will receive payment.

If you are still interested in participating, please sign the DocuSign Consent Form emailed to you. There is an option to agree to participate at the end of the consent form. If you no longer want to participate, please reply to this email.

Thank you,
Katie Leigh

PST – DID NOT Met Eligibility Requirements – FIRST EMAIL

To: [Participant's Name]
From: Katherine Leigh
Subject: Research Study Participation

Dear [Participant Name],

You were not selected as a participant for the research study, "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation." However, please reply to this email letting me know if you would like to be re-contacted for the study, should the opportunity arise this semester.

Thank you,
Katie Leigh

PST – DID NOT Met Eligibility Requirements, but is now needed and wanted to be re-contacted-CONSENT EMAIL

To: [Participant's Name]
From: Katherine Leigh
Subject: Research Study Participation

Dear [Participant Name],

You indicated that you would like to be re-contacted for the study, should the opportunity arise. You have been selected as a participant for the research study, "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation."

Participation in this study includes one interview conducted over Zoom which will be video recorded. You will be asked to briefly review your simulation recording and subsequent reflection before the 20-minute interview. Additionally, I will review and analyze your simulation recording and relevant course documents.

Your participation in the study is voluntary, and your decision to participate or not will have no effect on your grades. Results from this study may help us better understand and improve the teacher education program at [redacted] and contribute to the field more generally.

Participants of the study will receive payment.

If you are still interested in participating, please sign the DocuSign Consent Form emailed to you. There is an option to agree to participate at the end of the consent form. If you no longer want to participate, please reply to this email.

Thank you,
Katie Leigh

PST – DID NOT Met Eligibility Requirements, but is now needed and wanted to be re-contacted- REMINDER CONSENT EMAIL (3 days later)

To: [Participant's Name]
From: Katherine Leigh
Subject: Research Study Participation

Dear [Participant Name],

This is a reminder about your selection to be a participant in the study, "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation."

Your participation in the study is voluntary. Results from the study may help us better understand and improve the teacher education program at [redacted] and contribute to the field more generally.

Participants of the study will receive payment.

If you are still interested in participating, please sign the DocuSign Consent Form emailed to you. There is an option to agree to participate at the end of the consent form. If you no longer want to participate, please reply to this email.

Thank you,
Katie Leigh

IRB-SBS #5580
INSTRUCTOR - INITIAL EMAIL (STUDY INTEREST)

To: [Participant's Name]
From: Katherine Leigh
Subject: Research Study Opportunity

Dear [Participant Name],

For my EdD Capstone Project, I am interested in how the [redacted] prepares pre-service teachers to facilitate conversations about hard history topics.

Last semester, students in your social studies methods course were explicitly taught content and strategies regarding teaching difficult history and completed a mixed-reality simulation (small-group discussion with Avatar students) through the [redacted] Simulation Lab. I am reaching out to students from the course, inviting them to participate in the research, "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation." I am conducting this study because I would also like to learn more about the experience from an instructor's point of view.

Participation in this study includes one interview conducted over Zoom, which will be video recorded and transcribed. You will be asked to briefly look through relevant course materials before the 30-minute interview. Additionally, I will review and analyze relevant course documents. The consent form has more detailed information about this study and can be accessed through the link below.

Your participation in the study is voluntary, your decision to participate or not will have no effect on your employment. Results from the study may help us better understand and improve the teacher education program at [redacted] and contribute to the field more generally.

Participants of the study will receive payment.

If you are interested in participating, please reply to this email and I will send you a consent form through DocuSign. There is an option to agree to participate at the end of the consent form. If you do not want to participate, please let me know.

Thank you,
Katie Leigh

Instructor – REMINDER - Initial Email (Study Interest) (5 Days Later)

To: [Participant's Name]
From: Katherine Leigh
Subject: Research Study Opportunity

Dear [Participant Name],

This is a reminder about the invitation to participate in the study, "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation."

Your participation in the study is voluntary, and your decision to participate or not will have no effect on your employment. Results from the study may help us better understand and improve the teacher education program at [redacted] and contribute to the field more generally.

Participants of the study will receive payment.

If you are interested in participating, please reply to this email and I will send you a consent form through DocuSign. There is an option to agree to participate at the end of the consent form. If you do not wish to participate, please let me know.

Thank you,
Katie Leigh

Appendix I

Codebook: Documents, Observations, & Interviews

Code Name	Definition	Inclusionary Criteria	Exclusionary Criteria	Example
DIFFICULT HISTORY Primary Codes (Learning for Justice, n.d.; Shuster et al., 2018)				
Centering the story of the oppressed group	The narrative is from the perspective and experience of historically marginalized people	Framing the narrative based on the perspective and experience of the oppressed group	Framing the narrative based on the perspective and experience of the dominant group	The indigenous children were "almost feared because of their difference, instead of being appreciated" (Brett Simulation Recording, November 2022)
Sub: Anchoring conversation in a shared/equal humanity	*Every human needs to be seen, heard, recognized for who they are, taken into account, valued, and given the chance to live a life of hope, freedom, and fairness*	*Acknowledging the injustice and unfairness of the residential schools and assimilation*	*Focusing on the oppressors' ignorance*	*"Do you remember that her parents could not come for her or that she couldn't write letters, and she also couldn't receive letters. So as much as she wanted to tell her parents was happening…" (Finley Simulation Recording, November 2022)*
Talking about power and conflict	Identifying when, how, and why power was used to control a situation or narrative	Discuss the role of the US government and religious leaders and their motives and actions	Does not refer to power	"The federal government formed these schools and had them run by Catholic churches and nuns, to basically force the Native American children to learn the white and Catholic ways of life" (Morgan Simulation Recording, November 2022)
Sub: Using precise language	*Language that is reflective of the people group and what is most*	*Indigenous, Native, Boarding or Residential Schools*	*Indian*	The government "wanted to try to eliminate the Native American culture and

	broadly accepted by that group			make them more like themselves" (Morgan Simulation, November 2022)
Stating when unsure and creating a plan to follow up	Being willing to admit that they don't have all the answers	Admitting not knowing an answer or how to handle something and stating that they will follow up in a specific way	Making up information or ignoring a question or statement	"I'm sure that there were normal schools that weren't residential type schools that hurt these kids. But that's something that we can research as a class later to understand better" (Jesse Simulation Recording, November 2022)
Code Name	**Definition**	**Inclusionary Criteria**	**Exclusionary Criteria**	**Example**
IDENTITY, EXPERIENCE, DISPOSITION Primary Codes (Nganga et al., 2020)				
Supports				
Descriptor: Motivation	**The reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way**	**Identifies the reason they did or said something**	**Blames others**	**N/A**
Sense of Responsibility	An awareness of obligations	Identifies an obligation to teach about difficult history topics	Does not feel obliged to teach about difficult history topics	"I definitely think that it should be addressed… I don't think it should be something hidden from students, like the United States especially has a very rough history and violent things happen and really bad things happen. And I just don't think that should be glazed over in any way. I think kids should know what actually happened" (Morgan Interview, February 9, 2023)

Personal Experiences	The direct experience of an individual	Identifies relatable or relevant examples of experiences that impact their motivation	Tangential or off-topic examples of experiences	"I just feel like having been in such a diverse environment and learned history in the way that I believe is the right way. I would want everyone to have that same experience and not learn it in the like totally whitewashed way" (Morgan Interview, February 9, 2023)
Awareness & Knowledge	Knowledge or perception of a situation or fact	Identifies components of the topic(s) and their importance/impact	Does not have knowledge of the topic(s) or importance	The Native American residential schools were "trying to alter these children's identity by giving them a number instead of a name, that's another part of that erasure" (Morgan Simulation recording, November 2022)
Descriptor: University, Program, Course	**Events or experiences had at the university**	**Guest lectures, clubs, webinars, speaker series, etc.**	**Those which occurred outside of the university (could be identified as personal experiences)**	**N/A**
Content	Topics or themes covered in other courses, events, or experiences	DEI Learning Series Topics (e.g., anti-racism, whiteness, social justice)	Topics that do not align to DEI	"I think the Curriculum and Instruction course change my outlook. Seeing how my white peers reacted to the information that was given to them" & "Last semester, we read a book about, and we did a whole unit about the Indian boarding schools" (Alex Interview, February 8, 2023)

Constraints				
Lack of Content Knowledge	Does not know or understand the facts, concepts, theories, and principles that are needed	Does not know/understand hard histories, racism, whiteness, dominant narratives, etc.	Does have a knowledge/ understanding: hard histories, racism, whiteness, dominant narratives, etc.	"So, what they [the government] did was they made them go to these camps to make them more like Americans, I guess. (Parker Simulation Recording, November 2022)
Lack of Critical Consciousness	Does not have the ability to recognize and analyze systems of inequality and the commitment to take action against these systems	Does not recognize or analyze systems of power, privilege, dominance, etc. and/or does not feel comfortable taking action	Does recognize or analyze systems of power, privilege, dominance, etc. and feels comfortable taking action	"Historians have brought up the point that these people were learning English, which could benefit them fitting into the American society and like working things like that. But with those benefits, there were a lot of problems with the schools. So, what do you guys think? Do you think that the benefits outweigh the costs, the negative things? Or do you think that because of all the negative things, the schools outweighed the benefits of learning English or other skills?" (Quinn Simulation Recording, November 2022)
Caregiver/ Community Backlash	Angry and/or strong adverse and opposing reaction	Caregivers and community members condemn or discourage content/skills	Caregivers and community members support or encourage content/skills	"I'm worrying about how parents react and how that goes, because, you know, I don't want to put my job on the line" (Jesse Interview, February 9, 2023)

Appendix J

Data Management Plan

IRB-SBS #5580

Title: "Discussing Difficult History in Elementary Schools: Preservice Teacher Preparation"

This plan describes how I will manage, organize, and securely store the data that I will gather during this study.

1. Data Types and Storage

The types of data generated will be documents, video reviews, and interviews.

1. Course documents and materials will be collected upon IRB-SBS approval.
2. Video recordings of individual simulation sessions will be obtained upon IRB-SBS approval. All audio files were transcribed into text format using Otter.ai transcription software.
3. Interviews will either be conducted within a one-week timeframe and reflective memos will be written after completing each interview. All audio files were transcribed into text format using Otter.ai transcription software.

All data files will be uploaded to the secure file hosting system Box, as it saves each iteration of a file and data loss or corruption is unlikely.

2. Data Organization and Documentation

The plan for organizing and documenting data includes the following:

The file naming system will include the following:

- Documents: DocumentName_Course.pdf
- Video Review: PST Code ID #_Year.Month_SimRecodring.pdf
- Interview: PST Code ID #_Year.Month.Day_Interviewer Initials_Interview.pdf

Data will be organized using a nested file system in the secure file hosting platform, Box. The system will be structured according to the following:

- Data
    - Data Files
        - Documents
            - Document Protocol Document
            - Course Syllabus
            - Course Texts and Materials
            - Course Lecture Slides
        - Video Recordings
            - Video Review Protocol Document
            - Simulation Session Recording Transcription Documents
        - Interviews (PSTs & Course Instructor)
            - Interview Protocol Document
            - Interview Video and Audio Files
            - Interview Transcription Documents
    - Data Analysis
        - Coded Documents
        - Coded Video Recordings
        - Coded Interviews
        - Project Codebook

3. Data Access

All data files and analysis will be uploaded to the secure file hosting system, Box. All participants will be assigned pseudonyms and unique code numbers, to protect privacy, set by IRB-SBS. Code numbers and participant identifiers (e.g., name, age, demographics, etc.) will be recorded in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet document separate from the data files. This document will be uploaded to the secure file hosting system, Box.

As the Principal Investigator, I will have complete access to and use of the data described for the study. The data used can be shared with other researchers via Box; however, I must grant permission to allow access the data. No high-security data will be collected.

4. Data Preserving and Archiving

I will store the data for 3-5 years using Box, following standard IRS-SBS protocol. The Microsoft Word files will be saved in the .docx file format, Microsoft Excel files will be saved in the .xlsx file format, and Adobe PDF files will be saved in the .pdf format. I will be responsible for maintaining the data until it is destroyed.

Appendix K

Employment of Difficult History Strategies

Pseudonym, Group	Center Oppressed Group/Shared Humanity	Stick to Facts/Provide Examples/Precise Language	State When Unsure/Create Follow-Up Plan
Morgan, Confident	9	25	3
Brett, Confident	18	22	5
Finley, Confident	8	25	3
Parker, Hesitant	6	11	1
Cameron, Hesitant	8	13	2
Alex, Hesitant	4	12	1
Jesse, Avoidant	5	9	6
Quinn, Avoidant	4	9	4
Chris, Avoidant	8	10	1

Note. The number of times each strategy was employed was based on analysis of participants' small-group discussion simulation video recordings.

Appendix L

Teaching Difficult History: Support Document

Before You Teach a Difficult History Topic...

Difficult histories are most often associated with "issues of social justice and where America failed to live up to its stated values" (Weisend et al., 2022, p. 180) and are central to a nation's history, refute accepted versions of the past, connect with modern day problems and questions, are related to periods of violence that were usually collective or state sanctioned, and challenge existing historical understandings (Gross & Terra, 2018).

Ask Yourself...

- What do I believe about this topic?
- What do I know about the role of power and conflict?
- What is the dominant narrative?
- Whose voice and lived experiences have historically been removed/silenced?
- What have been determined as open and closed questions regarding the topic?
- What do my students already know about this topic?

Explore...

- Learning for Justice
  - Teaching Hard History
- Educating for Democracy
  - Lesson Plans
  - Profiles of Resistance
  - Transactive Discussions
- National Council for the Social Studies

DIFFICULT HISTORY STRATEGIES

- **stick** to the facts and **provide** examples
- **use** precise/accurate language
- **provide** a nonfiction base of knowledge
- **use** narratives to help make connections
- **center** the narrative on the oppressed group
- **explicitly state** when something is right or wrong
- **have** enough background knowledge to support pedagogy
- **be open** to questions and saying "I don't know"
- **know** what is developmentally appropriate

Created by: Katherine Leigh, Ed.D.
Univeristy of Virginia, 2023