“He was the opposite of what we learned a teacher should be”: A Study of Preservice Social Studies Students’ Cooperating Teachers

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Curriculum consonance between social studies teacher education programs and field placements poses a perennial problem to social studies teacher educators and their students. This study explores the types of cooperating teacher placements experienced by preservice social studies teachers during their pre-student teaching field experiences (practicum) at two universities, one of which makes random placements and the other of which makes purposeful placements. Data collected from post-field experience surveys and preservice student interviews with cooperating teachers over a three-year period form the foundation for discerning the role of field placement processes in maintaining consonance between social studies teacher education programs and preservice field experiences. The findings suggest that roughly half of cooperating teachers in random placements subscribe to a citizenship transmission approach to social studies education, while approximately half of the purposive placement teachers subscribe to reflective inquiry. These findings indicate clearly the relation of field placement processes to achieving successful program goals.

Introduction

The impact of cooperating teachers on secondary preservice students during field experiences is of paramount concern to social studies teacher education (Evans, 1990). Great variance exists across such programs, including level of connectivity with program goals, degree of adherence to explicit program requirements during field experiences, choice of cooperating teacher, amount of teaching, placement opportunities, and kinds of practicum teaching accomplished (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008; Owens, 1997; Passe, 1994; Zeichner, 2010; Zeichner & Conklin, 2008). Nonetheless, the overall aim is somewhat universal: experimenting with the transition from theory to practice with an eye toward generative ideas, challenges, and solutions. Yet, we generally know little...
about field experiences (Adler, 2008), and most field-oriented research is directed toward student teaching rather than the pre-student teaching practicum experience, where the seeds for consonance or dissonance may be sown (Owens, 1997).

Each semester, social studies teacher educators who organize practicum courses face the issue of “curriculum consonance” (Thornton, 1988, p. 310) when they send students into the field. This study explores the types of cooperating teacher placements experienced by preservice secondary social studies teachers during their pre-student teaching field experiences (practicum) at two universities. Consonance in this study refers to the alignment between what is taught in the practicum courses and preservice teachers’ experiences in the field at these universities—one of which assigns cooperating teachers randomly to preservice social studies teachers and the other which purposefully selects cooperating teachers.

Relevant Literature

Although Adler’s recent revision of her comprehensive literature review on the education of social studies teachers reveals a somewhat renewed, but still insufficient, interest over the past 20 years in the role of field context in the student teaching experience and on the development of social studies teachers (2008), no research-based literature on the practicum experience, as defined by the two universities involved in this study, exists. Nevertheless, research on the cooperating teacher’s role in the formation of the preservice social studies teacher during student teaching reveals a modicum of findings appropriate to this study’s focus—the consonance between a university’s socials studies teacher education program and the pre-student teaching practicum experience. What we do know seems to either focus on caveats on what field placements should avoid doing, so as to minimize undermining teacher education and methods coursework, or a list of things to do that often appear chimerical given the constraints of institutionalized habit and external forces.

Cautious Expectations

Teacher educators hope and assume students will find an expanded universe of experience during their field experiences (Passe, 1994). They might also presume some transferability of theoretical models learned at the university to classroom practice. But this, too, is somewhat chimerical, as ultimately “teachers construct their own views” (Thornton, 1988, p. 309), and rarely during their field experiences will students be asked to put ideas from the academy into practice (O'Mahony, 2003). But perhaps we demand too much from field experiences and should instead think of practicum as a point of observation purely to gather material for reflection and conceive of education holistically within a school (Dewey, 1904). In this case, the philosophical orientation of the
cooperating teacher would not matter as long as the experience offers a platform for reflection. Emphasizing observational experiences in lieu of practice might also be a better approach than randomly placing students with cooperating teachers and expecting them to be positive role models. Even if the cooperating teachers exemplify “what not to do,” they could still provide material for reflection as non-examples.

Washout

A perennial problem of teacher education is the lack of connection between teacher education coursework and field experiences—a disconnect that still persists in spite of partner schools and professional development (Zeichner, 2010). When field experiences are of the impoverished sort, teacher education does not have the fully-intended impact and influence (Frykholm, 1996). Chief among the unmet goals is a shift in what preservice teachers believe to be “good instruction.” For example, field experiences often tend to reinforce the preservice teachers’ earlier pedagogical experiences, not those espoused in teacher education programs, primarily because cooperating teachers have such a powerful influence on preservice teachers’ perceptions (Frykholm, 1996; Pryor, 2006). When this happens, teacher education’s curricular effect becomes “washed out” (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981, p. 7), and this sort of experience often negates or seriously undermines the aims and goals of social education (Pryor, 2006).

In the main, cooperating teachers err toward “what works” and other practical and personal considerations that can lead to routinization of instruction, where decisions about content and strategies are not conscious or deliberate (Thornton, 1992). Preservice students, therefore, enter an “occupational socialization” (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981, p. 10) that includes a prevailing “inherited discourse” (James, 2008, p. 197) that can include discredited pedagogical practices and positions in opposition to that which was washed out. Given the undermining potential for washout, the purpose of this study was to determine if the social studies teachers with whom our preservice teachers were placed during their formative practicum experience matter, based on the extent to which these placements converge or diverge from program aims and goals.

Field Placement

Field experiences hold rich potential for student exposure to a variety of social studies teaching, to see the effect of a range of strategies, and to reflect upon the limitations of varied approaches (Carter, 1989). A clear improvement would be if each teacher education program built consensus regarding outcomes of field placements experienced by students and cooperating teachers. Ideally, the field experiences take place after students have learned enough about the field to engage in critical reflection on teaching processes (Cruickshank, 1984).
Similar to k-12 students’ “opportunity to learn,” one significant feature is the “opportunity to implement” (Pryor, 2006, p. 116), the lack of which can certainly undermine teacher education’s effect in practice. Numerous salubrious effects stem from integrating fieldwork and coursework, including the ultimate connection of theory and practice (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005). In addition to the opportunity to implement, the placement, context, shared conceptualization in both the university and field, carefully mentored experiences over 30 weeks in length, expert cooperating teachers, and attention to recruitment of cooperating teachers all help determine the quality of a field experience, as well as the extent to which the university has an impact on instruction (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2005).

In spite of the critical nature of field experiences for the maturation of teachers, the aforementioned variance of programmatic goals with placement activities allows for potentially underwhelming consequences. Cooperating teachers do not usually receive the kind of preparation and support needed to carry out their role (Zeichner, 2010), and teacher education does not have the expected impact and influence when countered by this sort of field experience (Frykholm, 1996; Vacc & Bright, 1994). Chief among the unmet goals is the general shift in what is thought to be good instruction. For example, field experiences often tend to reinforce the preservice teacher’s precollegiate education and not practices espoused in teacher education programs, primarily because the cooperating teacher has such a powerful influence on the preservice teacher’s perceptions (Frykholm, 1996; Pryor, 2006). When this happens, teacher education’s effect is “washed out” (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981, p. 7)—negating or seriously undermining the goals of a teacher education program (Odell & Huling, 2000; Pryor, 2006).

Analytical Framework

This study employed the Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977) typology of social studies education to discern the types of teachers with whom the two universities’ students were placed for their pre-student teaching practicum experiences. Commonly referred to as the “three traditions,” the Barr, Barth, and Shermis typology categorizes secondary social studies teaching as citizenship transmission (CT), social science (SS), or reflective inquiry (RI). The typology breaks down each tradition by its purpose, content, and method (see Table 1).
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Three Social Studies Traditions</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Method</th>
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| **Citizenship Transmission**        | Transmit positive affect, e.g., accepted values, information, and cultural patterns | 1. Authorized, institutionalized information  
2. Repeat for affective purposes | 1. Direct transmission and exposition by teacher  
2. Indirect transmission through student discovery of correct interpretations and proper values  
3. Unquestioned premises |
| **Social Scientist**                | Develop future citizens equipped to think in terms of social science | 1. Primary source material examined with disciplinary constructs  
2. Usually reflects problems studied by professional social scientists | 1. Analysis of real problems in the real world |
| **Reflective Inquiry**              | Ability to make rational, considered, well-thought-out decisions | 1. Social needs (personally sensed and socially shared problems)  
2. Based on student needs and interests | 1. Reflective process beginning with conflict, problem, or lack of information |

*Note: Distilled from Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977)*

The typology has created some defensible unity of the field, and the model has enjoyed “widespread and pervasive” (Stanley, 1985, p. 316) use primarily because it offers three clearly delineated epistemological positions, or traditions, as well as the philosophical and historical contexts of each (Hacker & Carter, 1987).

The three traditions have shown great resiliency. They have shown to be reliable and contain some measure of validity (White, 1982) and “despite years of negative critical reaction” they have had an enduring impact on the field (Stanley, 1985, p. 319). We selected this heuristic because both researchers employ the Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977) reading in their practicum classes in order to help students understand the most rudimentary epistemic differences in social studies teaching. We refer to the three traditions throughout our courses, both before and after our students’ practicum experiences. Given the students’ knowledge of the traditions, we thought it best to use it as a lens to direct their data collections as they observed and interviewed teachers. Also, because the aim of this study was not to understand variability of teacher beliefs, but rather to appraise the sense of convergence of what students were learning at the university in relation to what they experienced in the field, we felt the simplicity of the three traditions would provide some initial sense of the kinds of teachers with whom our students were placed.

**An Enduring Framework**

The three traditions have endured a number of criticisms, including claims of oversimplifying the field (Stanley, 1985), promoting vague definitions,
containing overlap (Shaver, 1977), and lack of discretion (Fair, 1977; Helburn, 1977; Shaver, 1977). As a result of these criticisms, the field now enjoys a variety of alternatives (Evans, 1990; Janzen, 1995; Martorella, 1996; Vinson & Ross, 2001). Some alternatives are remarkably similar to Barr, Barth, and Shermis’ typology, such as Eggleston’s informer, problem solver, and inquirer (Eggleston, 1983 in Hacker & Carter, 1987). Others expanded to five traditions, adding social criticism and personal development (Martorella, 1996), whereby social criticism is very much focused on challenging the status quo, and personal development attends to understanding the self, self efficacy, and increased student-directed curriculum design (Vinson & Ross, 2001). Another approach advances six traditions of cultural transmission, social action, life adjustment, discovery, inquiry, and multiculturalism (Janzen, 1995). Janzen admits that, similar to the three traditions, these six approaches are not mutually exclusive. When thinking primarily of history instruction, additional typologies have emerged, including the storyteller, scientific historian, relativist/reformer, cosmic philosopher, and eclectic (Evans, 1990), each of which corresponds to certain trajectories and traditions within the larger field of social studies education.

Vinson’s (1998) nationwide study of high school social studies teachers painted an encouraging prima facie picture, with most cooperating teachers in his sample identifying with reflective and critical approaches to teaching. However, and in spite of a generally purported preference for this tradition (Barth & Shermis, 1981), actual praxis can be elusive. This conflicting situation of words and deeds not only creates negative images of the field for preservice teachers (Carter, 1989), but also has the more nefarious capability of demonstrating that one can communicate in a university code (e.g., “inquiry,” “social justice,” “active citizenship”), but then deftly shift into expository methods of delivering content, including passive learning and transmission.

**Applying the Three Traditions**

When applied, the three traditions yield several permutations for approaching social studies teaching and learning. For example, a teacher might be (or claim to be) strictly reflective inquiry (RI), a mixture of social scientist and reflective inquiry (SSRI), or a mix of all three (CTSSRI). White (1982) claimed that there were in fact only two traditions given the findings in his study (SSRI and CTSSRI), and Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977) found the majority (81%) of teachers they studied were a mixture of all three (CTSSRI). Hacker and Carter’s (1987) study indicated that social studies teachers gravitating toward the social scientist traditions are typically more experienced, whereas the inexperienced tend toward citizenship transmission with reflective inquiry being quite rare (7%). Vinson (1998) claimed a majority identifying with reflective inquiry, but a majority actually used citizenship transmission approaches
In essence, this conflict between words and deeds, as well as the ability of some teachers to deftly mix the traditions, created a fourth category for data analysis in the study.

Methodology

Given an interest in understanding the extent of curriculum consonance with two similar field-based programs, the research questions that guided this study were:

1. What kinds of cooperating teachers are preservice social studies teachers encountering in their field experiences and does the nature of the placement process (random or purposive) make a difference?
2. To what extent are these placements consonant with the curriculum and instructional philosophies and practical approaches contained within their pre-student teaching social studies education coursework?

In order to answer these questions, we asked preservice secondary social studies teacher education students at two universities and over a three-year period to conduct observations and interviews of their cooperating teachers during their field experiences to gain a deeper understanding of a complex phenomenon. We provided all of the students, from both universities, with the same grand tour questions and encouraged their employment of emergent follow-up questions. For all interviews, students asked their cooperating teachers: 1) What is the value and function of schooling in our society? 2) What is your definition of social studies education? 3) Please define your role as a social studies teacher in relation to your students. In other words, why do you teach social studies?

Research Settings

These students were enrolled in secondary social studies practicum courses modeled after each other but taught at two different universities. The instructors in each setting team taught the practicum course for two years prior to conducting this three-year study at different universities. As a result, their syllabi, readings, activities, and assessment tools were virtual replicas of each other. This coordinated modeling served as a foundation for comparison of practicum experiences with regard to the two overarching research questions.

The universities are both public institutions with similarly-sized undergraduate populations (approximately 18,000) and located in semi-rural, Midwestern towns. Requirements for entry into each institution’s secondary social studies teacher education program are dissimilar, with University A
requiring a 2.5/4.00 grade point average in content and education related coursework and University B requiring grade point averages above 3.20/4.00 in previous university coursework. University A enrolled 128 students over the three-year study, while University B enrolled 77 students. University A assigns practicum students to field placements on a random basis, whereas University B assigns practicum students to field placements via purposeful recommendations of the university course instructor and based upon that instructor’s knowledge of possible cooperating teachers’ pedagogical philosophies and practices.

Both the timing of when and the process by which preservice students are placed in field experiences may have a serious influence on how they carry out their role as a teacher. The literature reviewed for this study indicated that a high level of influence on the practice of a preservice student comes from her or his mentor during field experiences. The observational and interview data in this study revealed that consonance between a field placement and a university or college teacher education program’s rationale is critically important to developing social studies teachers who reflect that rationale.

The two university programs under examination in this study followed a very similar syllabus for the three years of the study. In both courses the professors employed Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977), Hanvey (1982), NCSS (1994), and Dewey’s (1933) *How We Think*. Dewey’s (1933) rendering of reflective thinking served as a foundational epistemological tradition for teaching in both courses in terms of how other readings were interpreted, the ways in which curriculum was to be designed, which instructional strategies were highlighted, and how to determine the educative worth of content. The fact that the instructors in these two clinical courses had team taught the same syllabus for two years before teaching the course at two separate universities for three years insured as close a sense of trustworthiness as possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In each university’s course, students kept reflective journals that included entries with specific guidelines noted in the syllabi. As a result, and prior to their practicum experiences, the students read and discussed Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977) and wrote their second reflective journal entry on the following topic: “What is your vision of a good social studies teacher? Draw upon your experiences in both your precollegiate and university education. Who influenced your development of this vision? How did they influence your vision? In so doing, take a stand on Barr, Barth, and Shermis’ traditions. Which one(s) seem to ‘fit’ your ideal social studies teacher? Why? Why not? How? Which one(s) best represents powerful social studies teaching to you?” The journal responses from both universities over the three-year period of this study acted as a source of dependability in the students’ interpretation of the three traditions, as well as a sense of the philosophical beliefs of how best to approach the teaching of social studies. At University A, 92% (118/128) of the students chose reflective
inquiry as their best fit, whereas 95% (73/77) of the students at University B did likewise.

A significant difference between the two universities was the process by which preservice students were assigned for their field experiences. At University A, placements were made randomly, as the students were placed by a central office with no input from the university instructor. The placement process at University B involved the instructor in the placement process through recommendations based on past experience with cooperating teachers whose philosophy and practice resembled most closely the goals of the social studies practicum course. Under conditions when no such placement could be made (e.g., some requested teachers already had preservice students from other institutions working with them), recommendations made by field supervisors and teachers on site came into play.

**Process of Analysis**

Unlike previous studies that used multiple observers in multiple classrooms (Hacker & Carter, 1987), this study had students embed themselves within a singular classroom culture so they would be well-equipped to gauge, in reference to the three traditions, the sort of teaching that was taking place. We employed students’ interviews with and their observations of cooperating teachers in order to gather the most accurate and informative data on the teaching conducted in their field settings, and to benefit students with the reflective analysis on teaching that can actually respond to the university v. field experience schism (Passe, 1994). This approach is somewhat similar to that of Owens (1997) in the sense that students were the primary instrument for data collection (also see Rock et al., 2006). Students observe teachers more than anyone else, and this source of knowledge is too often neglected (Evans, 1990).

Given the possible disparity of words and deeds among cooperating teachers (Thornton, 1994), observations also served as a check on interview responses so that we could address any gap between what teachers say and do (Heritage, 1984; Silverman, 2005). At the end of the students’ field experiences, we collected interview responses, as well as the students’ analyses of these responses, and distributed a questionnaire asking them to categorize their cooperating teacher proportionally in the three traditions, as well as in light of their practicum experience. To wit, this questionnaire asked students to assign a percentage of each tradition toward which the cooperating teacher gravitated, as well as to make remarks on the extent to which words and deeds had congruence. For example, a student might rank a cooperating teacher as 10% Citizenship Transmission, 30% Social Science, and 60% Reflective Inquiry. These numerical data helped provide a composite picture of the placements in each setting to see if purposeful assignments (University B) differed from random assignments (University A) in how the students ranked their field
experiences, as well as to furnish groupings for the narrative data analysis (see Table 2).

Table 2
Cooperating Teacher Tendencies by University Placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Reflective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transmission</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University A (random)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B (purposeful)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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Regarding student interview and analysis data, we chose to use ‘within-case’ comparative content analysis (Patton, 1990), whereby themes emerged through recursive identification, codification, and categorization of data. Comparisons within the larger case of congruence adhered to the recommendations of Glaser and Strauss (1967), which suggest taking a “proportioned view of the evidence, since during comparison, biases of particular people and methods tend to reconcile themselves as the analyst discovers the underlying causes of variation” (p. 68). Rather than compare incident to incident among students’ interviews with and observations of cooperating teachers, we chose to compare the incidents to categories based on the Barr, Barth, and Shermis typology, which helped result in uniform and higher level interpretations of what occurred. In so doing, data analysis included 205 student interviews and accompanying analytical observations of cooperating teachers. Of the 205 interviews and observations, 23 teacher interview data and 43 student observation data comprised a representative sample of quotes taken from the entire body of data and that addressed most clearly the study’s two research questions.

Consequently, data are displayed in this study without specific reference to individual preservice students or cooperating teachers, but as depictions of the experiences garnered from the students’ field placements that reflect the overall dependability of findings across and within the data sets from both universities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Comparisons of incidents to the typology helped to “fill in gaps” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 50) and keep alive competing hypotheses given the possibility of some data failing to fit within the typology’s themes. Ultimately categorical analysis underwent constant revision as discrepant data, redundancies, and outliers suggested new sifting and comparison (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).
Findings

Data collected to address the two research questions for this study beg two forms of findings. First, preservice teacher interviews and observations are presented within categories based on the three traditions developed by Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977). Mixed and conflicting interpretations of the cooperating teacher follow the three categories, as some students indicated that at least two of the traditions were equally evident in their cooperating teachers’ philosophy and practice or the cooperating teacher’s words and deeds did not cohere. All four categories combine data from both research sites in order to indicate the depth of understanding the preservice teacher education students had of the typology, given that the course was virtually the same at both sites.

After verifying the students’ evaluative judgment of their cooperating teacher via the interviews and observations, the second level of findings—related to the research question on difference in placement processes—unfolded. This analysis is based on the overall cooperating teachers’ tendencies within the typology at each research site. These data, noted in the beginning of each category and aggregated in Table 2, give a clear indication as to whether or not the nature of the placement process has an influence on the consonance between the goals of these two secondary social studies practicum courses and the preservice students’ field experiences at both sites.

Citizenship Transmission

The majority of practicum students at University A (71, 55%) felt their cooperating teachers best fit within the citizenship transmission tradition, unlike University B (22, 28%). Teachers in this tradition promote specific values and attitudes through a highly controlled focus on content and methods. Similar to the other two tradition categories, most teachers designated as citizenship transmitters advanced citizenship as the primary purpose of history and social science classes. Citizenship transmitters, in the main, had a unity of words and deeds.

Purpose: One teacher’s response summed up the rationale for social studies in this tradition when he noted that he was pursuing the “model citizen” and that each citizen would know how to “fit into their world.” This recurring phrase, found with many citizenship transmitters, was explained by this cooperating teacher as a way to prepare students to “understand their place in society” or their “role as members of society.” Both of these phrases imply citizenship as defined outside the individual students’ considerations of the concept and as differentiated from citizenship based on the students’ perception of their political, social, and cultural environment.

Although one teacher kept students focused as much as possible on current events and the implications of these events on students’ lives, the articulated end goal was to “understand their place in society, in the world.” He further
elaborated on how his first goal was to “give kids a glimpse into the glory of God and how well He has blessed this nation.” The second goal, couched in organicist terminology, was to “give students ideas on what they need to do to keep this nation on track and ensure that the nation of the United States lives up to its past history.”

The transmission of positive affect concerning the values held by this teacher, whether ideologically left or right, came through clearly in these preservice student interviews. At both universities, however, only ideological values mostly associated with conservative viewpoints surfaced as the ontological foundation for the purpose of teaching social studies in these classrooms.

**Content:** Teachers in this category often justified the subject matter in terms of learning from the past so as not to repeat mistakes—an oft cited and uncomplicated rationale for teaching history within a larger rubric of social studies and civic education. One teacher hoped that students would ultimately understand the nature of repeating cycles in history so “when similar occurrences take place they can base their decisions off of events that have occurred in the past so they can try to achieve the most beneficial outcomes.” Similarly, another teacher, wanting students “to learn from the mistakes of history,” was so far removed from what the practicum student was learning at the university that the student found the responses “quite difficult to handle, and to record.”

Another element of content in this tradition, voiced clearly by one teacher, looks to social studies as “taking facts and perspectives and connecting them to creating a view of the world and understanding our place in it.” Upon further examination by the preservice student, however, this teacher was observed to use “facts and perspectives” that helped students find “their niche in society.” This sort of selective social efficiency approach to choice of content pervades the citizenship transmission tradition.

The preservice students from both universities who experienced placements with citizenship transmitters often found that, as one student noted, “most of the information was transmitted through the textbook.” She went on to observe that “not once did I see any use of a primary source.” The control of content in the citizenship transmission mode is made easier by mandated specifications. The statement of one teacher that “if it is not listed in the standards, I don’t bother teaching it” represented a common response to interview segments that explored the citizenship transmission teachers’ notion of social studies content.

**Method:** During the observations conducted by the preservice teachers assigned to citizenship transmitters, teaching strategies centered on direct, expository strategies. Although the control of content to convey a specific intention is an essential aspect of the citizenship transmitter’s teaching methodology, lecture and workbook exercises need not be the predominant
learning strategies used in such classrooms. However, typical of the citizenship transmission classrooms explored by these preservice teachers, focus on surface coverage of specific, controlled content prompted a student to observe that “a great deal of work from the textbook, use of little to no outside sources, and a great deal of memorization of facts. The focus of his classroom seems to be done in the form of history textbook worksheets.” This observation represented a common sentiment from a preservice student in a citizenship transmission classroom.

When addressing content outside the stated curriculum, teachers had more practical aims attached to citizenship transmission, including preparation for “life after school, whether that be in the military, workforce, or college.” Behavioral problems in these classrooms were often met with discussions, rather than lectures, about proper behavior in the “real world” and how “one could get fired from a factory job for showing up late.”

Again, words expressed by citizenship transmitters about preparing students for the “real world” and to “understand the past to avoid mistakes” very much matched up with teacher actions. One preservice student noticed that the teacher has “all general classes and she can barely make it through the bare bones basics of preparing for the high school exit exam.” In a sense, any hope of educating for active participation is perceived to have been lost—at this point she is trying to salvage what she can and “make sure they don’t lose any chance they had.”

This situation raises a very different methodological question that may explain the preponderance of transmission in these classrooms: Does the pressure to adhere to the demands of state testing dictate the tradition in which a teacher lands?

Social Scientist

The hallmark of the social science tradition is a focus on teaching students inquiry methods employed by one or more of the social science disciplines for the purpose of citizenship education. Use of primary sources, use of behavioral science instruments, and community-based field work highlighted these cooperating teachers’ attempts to imbue students with a sense of analytical thinking for democratic citizenship. Eight students (6%) at University A and seven students (9%) at University B indicated they had this category of cooperating teacher, by far the smallest of the traditions experienced during this study. These teachers exhibited very high levels of consonance between their interview responses and the preservice students’ observations.

Purpose. Teaching discipline-based intellectual skills transferable to situations in today’s world is a benchmark of this tradition’s purpose. A preservice student’s observation of a United States history teacher exemplified this role:
He sees himself as teaching his students skills they can use in their personal, occupational, education and social lives using American History as the medium. If students can understand what is happening around them, they are better suited to react and make decisions regarding their environment. This ability is vital to the student’s success whether they further their education, join the work force or start a family.

Social studies courses related to the social needs of a particular society serve the purpose of this tradition through the transferability of discipline-based intellectual skills to decision making in daily life.

Interview data indicated that social science teachers not only teach young people to become “good, productive citizens, but also the psychology and sociology of it all.” From psychology to government, these courses focus on the individual and how he or she forms a personal identity within a societal context. One preservice student’s analysis of her social science cooperating teacher led her to believe that “these courses are practical because they really make students think about themselves and how their actions affect others. Social studies courses give students the knowledge and tools to make good decisions in all areas of their lives.”

Content. One preservice student’s experience with a social science classroom observed a teacher who defined content as something that extends beyond the facts to the use of facts in examining questions related to the social world and the individual’s role in the world: “He stresses that students understanding the facts of history is secondary to understanding the concepts that surround them and that they can use these concepts in their own lives.”

Similarly, another cooperating teacher voiced the role of historical content in the social studies quite clearly during his interview, which other cooperating teachers in the social science tradition echoed in their interviews:

History has to be the main focus of social studies education in order to understand all other areas of this subject. History should be the focal point. It creates a basis for branching out into other content areas, such as government, economics, and sociology. In order to understand who people are, it is crucial to understand where they are coming from.

In essence, the facts, whether taken from surveys, interviews, or primary sources, are the secondary level of content in the social science tradition.

The primary level of content remains the processes by which the fields within the social and behavioral sciences and history discover new knowledge. These formalized processes, when taught to students, act as the cognitive mechanism through which students can view their personal and social contexts.
Method. Applying social science methods to analyze problems that confront both individual students and the larger society requires, as a cooperating teacher noted, one who “emphasizes the other social sciences in the study of human beings and their interactions, mentioning student engagement with both primary and secondary sources.” “Engagement” with data will help “prepare students for college courses.” In so doing, this teacher conveyed the typical social scientist belief that a “well-rounded education goes a long way in helping students sort out the world in which they live.” Teaching students social science methods of knowing creates the cognitive processes to unravel the world around them. As another teacher noted, “It also explains how we came to be the way we are, and what we can do to make changes in the future.”

A preservice student placed with a social scientist described that the teacher had students do “community service projects, shadow government officials, and research problems and how to solve those problems on a government perspective.” In addition to focusing on historical thinking as a platform for citizenship, the preservice student felt this teacher “focuses on real life events and scenarios so that students ‘get’ what he is saying. I agree that it is the job of a social studies teacher to produce active participants and to also enhance knowledge of the subject through engaging activities.” These “engaging activities,” whether taught formally as social science method or internalized by students through scientific practice, remain the heart of the social science tradition.

Reflective Inquiry

Of the 128 cooperating teachers at University A, students found 26 (20%) to exhibit the qualities of reflective inquiry as the dominant tradition, whereas students at University B deemed 36 of 77 (47%) cooperating teachers as such. In terms of words and deeds, these teachers often spoke of goals larger than disciplinary understanding and carried out these goals through practice related to teaching students how to make decisions.

Purpose. Preparing students for the “real world” constituted a recurring theme among these teachers, which speaks to the purpose of reflective inquiry, but also suggests life adjustment, career preparation, or some other practical outlet. This was certainly the case with one teacher who sought to focus on “students becoming good workers and citizens for America’s democracy.” Teachers in this group articulated a commitment to making “good decisions,” “functioning in today’s democratic society,” and “preparing for future careers as citizens,” all of which fall in line with the reflective inquiry tradition.

The central purpose of reflective teaching in the social studies is rational decision making. This theme emerged persistently throughout the observations and interviews conducted by the preservice students in classrooms they
evaluated as reflective. Representative of these teachers’ thoughts concerning teaching for rational decision making, one teacher noted:

the most important thing we can do is to get kids to learn how to develop their own educated opinions. This is the only way they will be able to affect change in our society. I leave a lot of decisions to the students, giving them ownership to choose things based on their interest; this will build their motivation to learn.

This consistent emphasis on decision making based on social problems, issues, and needs indicated that teachers who embrace reflective inquiry in their classroom practice resonated with the goals of the universities’ practicum courses with regard to the purpose of the social studies.

As words and deeds can sometimes confound preservice teachers during their interviews (e.g., a citizenship transmitter in practice espousing the philosophy of a reflective inquirer), the observations of social studies teachers self-professed as reflective left a solid sense of purpose with the preservice teachers. As analyzed by one preservice teacher, his cooperating teacher reflected “her beliefs and values on education fairly accurately. Jane’s attitudes toward social studies education very much suggest a ‘reflective inquiry’ view.” This student went on to note that

she stresses values clarification and critical thinking; she wants to facilitate her students to obtain the knowledge and information necessary to examine and reexamine their own values and belief systems and to challenge the status quo. She wants to help her students become good citizens, which she characterizes as individuals who care about others, their community, and their world, and who want to make the world a better place. In this sense, her ideas about citizenship are not strict and limiting, but rather broad and open-minded. It is less about content and more about teaching skills that can be applied to everyday life situations.

Content. Often the subject matter was mentioned as a means to some end other than itself, which represents a core idea of reflective inquiry. One teacher stated that he uses the disciplines to “teach kids an awareness of their place in the community,” while others pointed to using subject matter for developing, as one teacher noted, a “global awareness and being exposed to other ideologies.” These teachers added that social studies is, after all, “not just history and facts,” while pointing to “making connections to the past” in order to better understand the present.
However, the typology points to decision making as the heart of teaching social studies reflectively. In analyzing his teacher’s view of social studies content, a student recorded that

My cooperating teacher believed that students could develop as citizens through the social studies by examining the past, connecting it to the present, and determining the importance of the effect that the past has had on the present as it relates to them. She expressed that idea that part of being a good citizen is being retrospective as well as prospective in order to understand the mistakes and successes in the past. By doing so, students will gain the skills to be more able to make good individual and collective decisions in the present and the future.

Addressing socially shared concerns through rational decision making formed this student’s impressions of a reflective classroom through the teacher’s attention to the relation between content and purpose. In response to a question addressing the purpose of social studies, another teacher noted this connection as vital: “Only when kids realize the connection they have to the content will they begin to form opinions about it and want to take action for change.”

Method. The teaching methods used by teachers in this tradition exhibited direct consonance between the interviews and the observations. One student claimed that the “interview very much reflected in practice; he truly has a passion for preparing, challenging, and broadening horizons . . . he doesn’t require tedious homework, but instead has students write thoughtful reflections that require critical thinking.” Another student recalled a surfeit of engaging, challenging, and provocative simulations, discussions, and activities.

The role of teaching strategies aimed at community-building signals the importance of socialization in a reflective inquiry classroom. In analyzing her cooperating teacher’s “strategies,” one student noted that “the class has many activities where they are working with one another—group work, group research and presentations, even creative group skits.” This teacher’s extensive use of group work allowed students to get to know many, if not all, of their classmates and branch out of their comfortable friendship circles. Being exposed to considerable group work allowed them a number of different and sometimes stressful interactions that they will often face in the world outside of school. As a necessary building block for democratic citizenship, this student agreed with the cooperating teacher’s emphasis on socialization, and she believed that “it is an underutilized and not often mentioned function that schools should fulfill in our society.”
Mixed Traditions

Data gathered from observations and interviews done by 35 preservice students could not be categorized using the typology of the three traditions with regard to purpose, content, and method. Practicum students rated 23 of their cooperating teachers (18%) at University A and 12 cooperating teachers (16%) at University B as being of “mixed” traditions. This analytical category contained two distinct types of cooperating teachers. First, 23 of these 35 teachers expressed one tradition while practicing another—a disconnect between words and deeds that moved these preservice students to consider the tradition of the cooperating teacher as “mixed,” even though the classroom practice indicated a predominance of one specific tradition. Second, 12 of these 35 teachers managed to blend two or even three traditions successfully, including pluralities of reflective inquiry, social scientist, and citizenship transmission.

A conflict of words and deeds. Typical of the disconnect between words (interview data) and deeds (observational data), one mixed tradition teacher’s interview focused on social studies education as teaching a “worldview” as he “emphasized that since the world is globalizing and there will soon be a true global society—if people are not aware of the ‘outside the bedroom world’ they will fail in everything.” The practicum student found that while he idealized the “citizen of the world idea,” he “does not really make them think for themselves—instead he seems to be more in favor of transmission and has no qualms about admitting this.” This teacher had “clear ideas about who is able to be educated and who is not, and this binary between good and bad students that never changes.” [italics in original data]

Other mixed tradition teachers brought forth additional examples of dissonance between words and deeds. For example, one student found listening to his cooperating teacher during the interview to be “quite frustrating” because “he fails to implement any policies in his classroom that foster the goal of educating citizens to make decisions regarding societal change.” Although this teacher “feels discussions are fine,” the practicum student found that he often would revert to “just telling them what the facts are.” This particular teacher reportedly has a deep reservoir of content knowledge and wants students to become good citizens, but the student found that he ultimately:

betrayed his own ideals by neglecting to make his classroom conducive to learning. With his claim to believe in fostering critical thinking and cooperative learning that will be important for students later in life, I find it irresponsible that he does not employ these tactics in his classroom. Instead, he is preparing students to be told exactly what they need to know their entire lives and to never think outside of what is presented to them.
Others found “cliché answers” about social studies “informing and educating young people to help them solve problems and understand connections between past and present,” yet bringing forth “monotonous teaching methods” resulting in “students taking a lot of notes off of PowerPoint presentations and almost always completing in-class worksheets.”

In many mixed tradition field placements, the preservice students found classroom activities of the mixed tradition teachers to be the source of incompatibility with what these teachers reported in their interviews. One student noted that “I almost disbelieve a portion of what he was saying due to his teaching strategies—the focus of his classroom seems to be in the form of history textbook worksheets.” Even though this teacher spoke of the importance of engaging students, ultimately he presented facts in a linear fashion that did not fit with “my teacher’s definition of social studies education” or correspond to the reality of the classroom. One hallmark of the mixed tradition teacher in this study is a clear avoidance of social aims and a primary focus on history, often in its most banal form.

A delicate balance. Yet, students also reported cases where the cooperating teacher was able to qualify and carry out a mixture of two or more traditions. One teacher responded to the interview questions stating the importance of developing well-rounded citizens who understand multiple perspectives on issues and “see the importance of developing a global perspective.” The practicum student reporting these data found the teacher adhering to this aim with active participation, an organized classroom, and a close attention to nuanced global perspectives and epistemic concerns that wove together aspects of all three traditions.

A preservice student in another mixed tradition classroom described her cooperating teacher as someone whose “definition of social studies education is reflected in his teaching as he creates many situations in which students are forced to form their own opinion, enabling them to automatically form other opinions based on evidence and critical thinking.” Given this seeming mix of reflective inquiry and social science, the preservice student also noticed a tinge of citizenship transmission because “although he does teach controversial aspects of American History, he models a positive outlook on America and life as a whole.” A balancing act of this nature, with a positive impression left on the preservice teacher, indicated that a mixture can exist, but the attention to one’s actions and thoughts require an extremely high level of self-awareness as a teacher.

Limitations

Although we drew upon interview and observation data from scores of cooperating teachers in a variety of contexts, this study contains certain limitations. The chief limitation concerns the use of an a priori heuristic that in
some ways limited the range of student-generated data over a relatively short duration. Longer term observations with additional interviews and a broader range of typologies may very well reveal nuances that this study could not capture. In addition, we focused on only two universities and their respective placement communities. A more expansive study with a wider range of states, communities, and teacher education communities could add richness to variability and possibly reveal alternative trends and themes in terms of cooperating teachers and their approaches to social studies education. Finally, this study solely relied on preservice teachers for data collection. Having overlapping observers and interviewers with more training and experience in the field could enhance credibility.

Discussion
The first research question centered upon the kinds of cooperating teachers university preservice social studies students encounter in their field experiences and the extent to which differences in placement approaches mattered. Clearly, if the university instructor plays a significant role in the placement of preservice teachers at field sites (University B), then the goals of the teacher education program have a much better chance of achieving consonance with the social studies field. In the main, students at University A are most likely to be placed with a citizenship transmission teacher (55%) and students at University B are most likely to be placed with a reflective inquiry teacher (47%). Yet the purposive and random placement approaches did not matter with regard to the proportion of social scientist cooperating teachers (6% at University A and 9% at University B) or teachers of mixed tradition (18% at University A and 16% at University B).

Findings related to the second research question concerning curriculum consonance revealed that although dissonance exists between citizenship transmission practicum sites and university programs, those cooperating teachers are explicit about their philosophical orientation. Similarly, reflective inquiry and social scientist teachers demonstrated a congruence of their words and deeds. Students placed in these contexts are very much aware of the epistemological orientation of their teachers and are therefore better equipped to consciously view what is happening in classrooms as residing in a particular tradition, independent of its congruence to university coursework. This sort of disclosure, especially in citizenship transmission classrooms, can help students to remain aware of differences in tradition and avoid the potential for university effects becoming “washed out” (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981, p. 7).

Cooperating teachers subscribing to mixed traditions demonstrated a more problematic situation for preservice teachers. In these classrooms, students found a preponderance of teachers purporting to teach within a reflective inquiry tradition, but often reverting to citizenship transmission in practice. This
incongruity of words and deeds breeds an epistemic confusion for preservice teachers as they witness neglected ideals and observe pedagogical and content practices at odds with their training, but cloaked in the lexicon of their normative orientation. In short, we found the mixed tradition to be troubling from the standpoint of washout and “occupational socialization” (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981, p. 10).

Conclusion

If teacher education is a key fulcrum for a healthy democracy, it logically follows that teachers’ philosophical positions have a profound impact on the trajectory of that democracy (Pryor, 2006). These positions are often heavily influenced by cooperating teachers (Frykholm, 1996), which is why the importance of the kind of cooperating teachers paired with preservice teachers cannot be overstated (Owens, 1997). To be sure, numerous salubrious effects can stem from convergence of theory and practice and the unity of academia and schools (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005). Yet, many of these benefits are predicated on theoretical convergence, and in this study we found this only happens roughly half the time through purposive placement and 20% of the time through random placement. Not only do social studies programs need to work toward purposive placements, and have students critically engage the philosophical orientation of the teacher with whom they are placed, but they also need to position students to be on the qui vive for field experiences that purport to follow one tradition, but ultimately enact practices of another. Through purposive placement practices, field assignments that explore their cooperating teacher’s social studies tradition, and awareness of potential incongruity of words and deeds, preservice social studies teachers can be better positioned to avoid the perils of washout.

References


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