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Preservice Social Studies Teachers' Conceptions of and Experiences with Discussion as a Pedagogical Approach: A Case Study

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Abstract

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Keywords

Discussion, Teacher Education, Social Studies Education, Debate

Preservice Social Studies Teachers' Conceptions of and Experiences with Discussion as a Pedagogical Approach: A Case Study

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An extensive body of empirical data emphasizes the numerous benefits of incorporating discussion into the social studies classroom. Therefore, it is necessary to better understand how educators view discussion and what experiences they have with in throughout their college courses. The authors conducted a single-case study at a large southeastern university that sought to explore how 12 preservice social studies teachers experience discussion in their college-level coursework. The study also sought to discover the extent to which the participants valued discussion within their coursework and whether they considered discussion as a practical approach for their own classroom. Findings suggest that the participants mostly experience lecture in their lower-level core curriculum courses as well as their teacher preparation coursework. Additionally, the study demonstrates that the participants valued discussion as a pedagogical approach, but they viewed it as a less practical strategy than more traditional forms of pedagogy such as lecturing.

INTRODUCTION

Discussion in the classroom

Extensive research shows the benefits of students participating in discussion in the classroom (Avery, 2003; Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Hess, 2004; Larson, 1997; Parker, 2003). Hahn (1998) noted that students who participate in classroom discussion are more likely to vote in national, state, and local elections, engage in productive discourse with other citizens, support basic democratic values, and have confidence in their ability to influence the democratic process. Additionally, contemporary scholars of education consistently allude to the belief that discussion encourages students to interact with those who have varying perspectives from their own and educate them on how to socialize in an increasingly pluralist society and interconnected world by developing tolerance, understanding, and an appreciation for differences (Banks, 1993; Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Gutmann, 1999; Hess, 2004; Hess & Posselt, 2001).

But what is an effective discussion? Though the concept of discussion is certainly abstract and complex, for the purposes of the current study the following broad definition will suffice: Discussion occurs when multiple individuals seek to construct new knowledge through a collaborative, inquiry-based effort in which ideas are exchanged and views evolve. When teachers model and integrate this form of discussion into the classroom, students are more likely to learn how to construct an argument, listen to their peers, synthesize copious amounts of information, and find value both in their voice and the voices of their peers (Avery, 2003; Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Hess, 2004). Carol Hahn (2010) claims "when [students] perceive that several sides of issues are presented and discussed, and when they feel comfortable expressing their views, they are more likely to develop attitudes that foster later civic participation" (p. 198). Such aims are essential to various notions of citizenship education in which the primary objective of the school system is "to prepare youth for their role as citizens in a democracy" (Hahn, 1999, p. 235). In other words, the use of discussion in the classroom can assist educators in achieving the oft-referenced aims of developing students into rational, autonomous, and open-minded citizens capable of entering into a pluralist society (Barton, 2012; Hahn, 1999).

Discussion for Democratic Citizenship

Scholars in other academic realms have supported discussion as a tool to be used both in and out of the classroom. Political philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas (1989) contends that democracy and discussion are inextricably intertwined and the latter contains the potential to repair the former. Habermas describes the development of a "public sphere" through discussion among public citizens, which can then be used to improve and progress society in a democratic manner. Habermas, in this sense, defines the public sphere as "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed [and] access is guaranteed to all citizens." (p. 49). Habermas notes, "A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body" (p. 49). The public sphere, in this sense, is an abstract concept in which participants collaborate in a variety of means (e.g., discussion, debate) to achieve rational and justifiable consensuses on matters pertaining to the public good. The public sphere, therefore, is critical for sustaining and evolution of a democratic society.

Similarly, Dewey (1916) intertwines discussion's role in democracy by describing the latter as "[a] more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (p. 101). Dewey, further, asserts that the foundation of a good democracy "is in free gatherings of neighbors on the street corner to discuss back and forth what is read in uncensored news of the day, and in gatherings of friends in the living rooms of houses and apartments to converse freely with one another" (p. 312). In this sense, Dewey sees an effective society as one in which all citizens communicate openly to better understand one another and, like Habermas, he views the development and overall growth of society as being contingent on an educated populace who hold the ability to participate in discursive practices where knowledge is fluid, ideas are evolving, and conversation is continuing.

Rorty (1989), in a manner similar to Dewey and Habermas, describes discussions' role in a democracy as a way to improve inclusivity in society (further developing the public sphere described by Habermas). More specifically, Rorty emphasizes the importance of having citizens see individuals once seen as "they" as members

of a collective “we”. Such an ideal advocates for a democracy where collective action is put before individualized aims and objectives. Rorty’s ideal of developing this “we” through discussion is further seen in German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer’s magus opus, *Truth and Method* (1960) in which he states that “to reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were” (p. 379). Gadamer sees the use of group talk (in this case, dialogue) as a means for individuals to continuously evolve.

This emphasis on using collaboration and discourse to improve people at the individual and societal levels is seen and heavily discussed in John Dewey’s frequent emphasis on a school’s responsibility to promote growth. To that end, Dewey acknowledges the benefits of disagreements leading to discourse and discussion and sees potential for growth at multiple levels (Preskill, 1997). This is seen as Dewey (1940) claims “expression of difference is not only a right of the other persons, but is also a means of enriching one’s own life-experience”, which he claims as being “inherent in the democratic personal way of life” (p. 4). Further, Preskill (1997) says that disagreements can be productive “if some explanation for those differences can be found. In this sense, an airing of differences can stimulate additional discussion and offer an opportunity to clarify one’s own view in relation to another’s” (p. 320). Disagreement through discussion, therefore, can be beneficial for all parties in a discussion if ideas are fluid and participants are open-minded toward alternative beliefs. And such benefits multiply in a setting comprised of a range of diverse views.

Likewise, Gutmann (1999) emphasizes the diversity embodied in a classroom, noting “[classrooms] contain more diversity than one would expect to find in a family, church, synagogue, mosque or club. This diversity of views ... makes classrooms powerful places to promote ‘rational deliberations of competing conceptions of the good life and the good society’” (p. 14). Gutmann sees the school as a rare setting in which individuals from various backgrounds come together and have the potential to learn about and gain a mutual respect for one another’s differences through collaboration and discussion. Given such potential, the classroom becomes an environment ideal for what Oakshott (1962), a British philosopher, refers to as “unrehearsed intellectual adventure” in which diverse opinions are exchanged and discounted voices are heard through various forms of group-talk (p. 198).

In sum, the use of discussion in the classroom is essential to the development of autonomous and educated citizens capable of working toward a more democratic and collaborative society. Effective discussion provides students with a way to learn about one another, develop their own beliefs, and participate in the democratic process with those who have opposing views from their own (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Hess, 2009). Additionally, discussion allows for citizens (and students alike) to voice their opinions in a manner that promotes social justice and equality (and, often times, equity) and allows for those traditionally marginalized or devalued to contribute to a collaborative effort reflecting an ideal democracy. If schools seek to achieve the aims of growth in both students and society as a whole, integrating discussion into student learning is pivotal.

PURPOSE

Given the vast benefits at both the individual and social level, it is essential that the field of education develop a strong understanding of discussion as a pedagogical tool. Scholars must develop a conversation of their own on the best means for preparing in-service teachers to foster discussion in their classes. To that end, there exists limited empirical research exploring discussion’s place in higher education and the ways in which preservice teachers experience discursive practices throughout their undergraduate careers. Further, because teacher education programs have such a critical impact on preservice teachers’ implementation of pedagogical tools like discussion, such programs must be studied to discover in what ways they incorporate, encourage, and model discussion (Darling-Hammond, 2006). For that reason, this research sought to analyze how 12 preservice social studies teachers enrolled in a junior level social studies methods course in the fall of 2013 conceptualized discussion as a pedagogical tool, experienced it as students in their own coursework, and envisioned using discussion in their own social studies classrooms. Therefore, the sub-questions driving this study included:

1. To what extent do preservice teachers experience discussion in their university level courses? How is discussion used as a pedagogical tool in teacher education programs relative to how it is used in participants’ non-education based courses?
2. To what extent do preservice social studies teachers at a large southeastern university envision themselves incorporating discussion into their secondary social studies classroom?
3. To what extent do preservice social studies teachers incorporate discursive practices into their aims of education?

METHODS

Because this study seeks to better understand how preservice social studies teachers grapple with sophisticated notions of pedagogy and educational theory, the most logical approach to ensure valid findings was through the use of a qualitative design (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Qualitative research, to that end, allowed for the study to take into consideration the lived realities of the participants and include many components of their experiences which otherwise may have been difficult to account for if strictly quantitative research had been conducted (Glesne, 2006). The remainder of this section will detail the specific design used to answer the study’s underlying research questions.

Design

This study took a qualitative approach and used a single case study method as a way to provide rich, empirical data that could otherwise not have been collected and analyzed in such a thorough manner (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). The case studied involved a large southeastern university’s social studies teacher education program that bound the participants by a common experience in much of their coursework as well as a shared interest in working within social studies as future educators. The participants, in other words, were studied individually as a way to better understand their experiences within a shared environment.

Case study allowed for the researcher to collect a range of data and analyze multiple participants over an extended period of time (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). The researcher used a case study approach in an attempt to gain a strong understanding of the par-

ticipants' conceptions of and experiences with discussion by allowing participants to "tell their own stories" through interviews and other forms of data collection. Such data, further, provided a context reflecting the real-world experiences of participants in a manner in which quantitative research – or one of the various other methodologies in qualitative research – perhaps would not have been able to do (Yin, 2003).

Because this research seeks to provide findings applicable to teacher education, at large, multiple participants were studied in an attempt to develop conclusions that are more valid and reliable (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Additionally, using multiple participants to study a single context allowed for the researcher to identify key themes in the data through a combination of individualized reports for participants as well as a cross-case analysis to find consistent themes within the larger study. Such data analysis consisted of open coding, which allowed for the researcher to begin data analysis with an interpretative stage grounded in an exploration of noticeable themes and consistencies throughout the data. Case study further enabled the researcher to incorporate contextual factors and develop a rich, empirically-sound picture for each of the participants and their experiences in a large southeastern teacher education program (Yin, 2003).

Setting

This study occurred in the fall of 2013 and took place in a junior-level social studies methods course at a large southeastern university. The course is the first of two social studies methods courses taken by preservice social studies teachers in the secondary social studies program, which prides itself on notions of democratic and multicultural education, reflective practice, and progressive pedagogy. Students enrolled in the course will have been accepted into the Secondary Social Studies Education program prior to their junior year, concurrently enrolling in courses in the history of U.S. public education, adolescent growth and development, and multiple content-area courses. Additionally, participants will have previously taken other education courses including: orientation to education, educational psychology, technology skills for learning, and, occasionally, principles of American education (which looks at the current issues in American education through a sociological lens) and aligns itself with theories of social justice and equity.

The methods course used as the context for this study met once a week for seventy-five minutes. In addition to attending class meetings, students enrolled in the course were expected to spend three hours a week participating in a field experience in a secondary social studies classroom assigned to them by the teacher education program. For their field experience, students were expected to teach three lessons with the assistance of their assigned cooperating teacher (CT) (i.e. in-service teacher that allowed students to use his/her rooms as their field experience placement) as well as observe their CT and provide support for their CT. The participants in this study were placed in six different schools located in three districts and with twelve different teachers. See Table I for information regarding the schools and school districts (all identified by pseudonyms) used for participants' field experience placements.

Limitations and Research Subjectivities

As the instructor-of-record for this particular methods course, the researcher was required to select applicable readings (in this case,

TABLE I. Participant demographics.

Participant (Pseudonym)	Demographics (Gender, Age, Home State)	High School	School District
1. Adriana	Female, 20, Pennsylvania	Carroll	Paige
2. Carrie	Female, 20, Tennessee	Carroll	Paige
3. Corey	Male, 22, South Carolina	Carroll	Paige
4. Elizabeth	Female, 20, Virginia	Andrews	Williams
5. Erin	Female, 20, South Carolina	Marietta	Paige
7. Jessie	Female, 20, South Carolina	Apple	Paige
8. Kathleen	Female, 20, New Hampshire	Apple	Paige
9. Michael	Male, 20, South Carolina	Marietta	Paige
10. Rita	Female, 20, Virginia	Atlantis	Williams
11. Sydney	Female, 20, South Carolina	Andrews	Williams
12. Trisha	Female, 25, South Carolina	Pluma	Joseph

students were required to read Parker's edited anthology *Social Studies Today: Research & Practice*), develop proper assessments, foster and incorporate themes of the course, and assess students based on their performance on a variety of assessments. The primary limitation to this study involved the researcher's biases in what the aims of education are for the social studies classroom. In this sense, the researcher taught the course based on the ten thematic strands put forth by NCSS and their underlying aim of developing citizens capable of making informed decisions, understanding one another's backgrounds and beliefs, and participating in the public sphere. Further, nine of the twelve participants had already taken a course with the instructor/researcher earlier in the college career (either Orientation to Education or Principles of American Education), thus making that researcher's own biases and understanding of the field of education more impactful on participants' thinking toward the social studies. With this said, these biases and understandings may have been stated by participants during classroom discourse in order to appease the instructor or reflect the readings assigned both in EDSC 3280 and previous courses in which the researcher was the instructor-of-record.

Limitations also existed in the form of the methods used to collect data. The study could have benefitted from a more thorough analysis of the participants' cooperating teachers within their field experiences as well as their former professors. Because there was no formal data collected on these individuals, it was difficult to see how they impacted the participants' comments. Future research exploring how preservice teachers experience discussion in the college classroom should look into how instructors at the college level teach their courses.

Finally, the study could have benefitted if data collected had

extended beyond a single methods course. Participants in future research could be followed for additional college-level courses so that the researcher can compare what the participants say with what their instructors actually do. Such data would have either supported the current findings or provided additional results.

Participant Selection

Twelve students were enrolled in the junior level social studies methods course. Convenience and purposeful sampling were used to select participants from that course. Convenience sampling was used since the researcher served as the instructor for the participants and had direct access to the data (Marshall, 1996). Convenience sampling allowed the researcher to collect informal data through discussions with participants both in and out of the classroom and allowed for the gathering of a rich and robust amount of data meant to support any findings that may have resulted from the study. Purposeful sampling was used since the study required data to be collected from preservice social studies teachers having been accepted into a formal teacher education program with the intention of becoming social studies teachers. To recruit participants, the researcher provided a foundational explanation of his research and asked students if they would be willing to participate in the study during the first class session of the semester. All of the 12 students enrolled in the course agreed to participate and signed consent forms allowing for the researcher to analyze both assignments submitted for the course in addition to formal and informal discussion occurring inside and outside of the classroom.

As seen in Table 1, 11 of the participants at the time of the study were “traditional” students who were in their third year of college and ranged in age from 20-22. The final student, also a third-year in college, was 25 and had recently returned to school to attain her certification in social studies education. Of the participants, ten were female and two were male. Further, 10 noted in initial interviews that they intended on teaching either United States or World history after having graduated from the program, while the other two stated that they were interested in teaching sociology or political science.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study were collected throughout the fall semester of 2013 and included an array of sources. This included interviews conducted individually with each participant, and field observations taken during class sessions, and, for the course requirements: teaching philosophies, lesson plans, reflections on teaching experiences (of which students completed three). Throughout the course of the semester, various informal assessments were assigned that became part of the data collected. Additionally, participants agreed to allow the research to include any formal or informal conversations relevant to the study in the data.

As data were collected, the researcher used open coding to analyze and triangulate the data in an attempt to find themes within the individual participants and collectively throughout the 12 participants. The first step in data analysis was the line-by-line reading of themes to identify salient pieces of data related to the research questions. Then, the data were coded by the surfacing of broad themes relevant to social studies and teacher education (e.g., critical thinking, citizenship, student engagement). The codes were then situated within notions of democratic education and, more

specifically, using discursive practices of pedagogy to achieve the oft-referenced aims of education. Next, the researcher checked for internal and external homogeneity within the categories used to organize the data. To that end, the researcher conducted individual case reports on each participant to discover both patterns and contradictions in the data collected on each participant. These individual reports were then cross-checked with other participants in an attempt to surface themes consistent amongst participants and data sources. Categories were then merged into themes that were used to develop the case for each participant by providing a clearer picture of the dispositions and experiences of each participant. Cross-case analysis led to the convergence key themes and findings across cases. This convergence of data allowed for the researcher to use the rich, empirical data collected to draw conclusions detailing the experiences with and conceptions of discussion the participants had developed throughout their experiences as students and preservice teachers.

RESULTS

Through cross-case analysis, four prominent themes emerged. First, participants continuously viewed the aims of education as being larger than simply having students remember information for summative assessments. Instead, participants frequently spoke and wrote about the need for the social studies (and the larger educational system) to prepare students to become citizens who participate in society, are open to new ideas, and are capable of voicing their opinion through a variety of mediums. Secondly, participants stated that they did intend to use discussion in their own practice and that they understood the academic and social benefits to doing so, but they could not seem to remove the element of lecture from the lessons they developed for the course. Third, participants all stressed that the vast majority of their coursework had consisted of lecture (both in and out of education). Finally, participants seemed to struggle with the notion of incorporating discussion into their practice due to their experience observing and implementing lessons with their CT, their views toward state and national social studies standards, or developing the idea that discussion is an impractical pedagogical tool for the K-12 classroom. The remainder of this section will provide more detail into these themes and, ultimately, justify how these findings are relevant to the field of social studies education and critical to consider in future lines of research.

Citizenship Education as a Rationale for the Social Studies

Throughout the course of the semester, participants were expected to reflect upon their experiences in the course and on the aims and objectives of social studies education. Though the students differed greatly in a number of ways relating to their philosophical dispositions and experiences, their aims of education consistently ran parallel to the aforementioned aims of education. From their initial interviews conducted at the beginning of the semester to their final teaching rationales, students in the course maintained that the purpose of social studies education is to foster the development of capable citizens in a democracy.

When asked what the aims of education are at the beginning of the semester, for instance, Elizabeth quickly stated “to make productive members of society, I feel like [it] is our first and foremost

goal. If people are not educated then it's hard for them to function in society and for society to continue on" (Interview, September 16, 2013). Jessie also claimed the first and foremost aim of the American public school system is "To create citizens who know about the past and where they come from and to take pride in the democratic system we have and to know how to participate in it" (Interview, September 17, 2013). Similar themes during these initial interviews consisted of teaching students about how "the world works" (Corey, Interview, September 10, 2013; Trisha, Interview, September 17, 2013), keep up with other countries (Erin, Interview, September 25, 2013), maintain an educated population (Adriana, Interview; September 17, 2013; Fran, Interview; September 18, 2013), and teach students to develop relationships with other people (Rita, Interview, September 24, 2013).

As the semester progressed, these ideals stayed consistent, but students developed them based on class readings, discussions, and their experiences in a way in which their philosophies became more detailed and critical throughout the study. In fact, all 12 participants alluded to the development of educated citizens capable of participating in a democracy as being a key theme to their philosophy of education. Michael in his final rationale, for instance, noted that his aim for the social studies classroom was "creating more informed and active citizens of the democratic society." Erin, similarly, stated that she wanted to develop critical thinking skills in students and "provide students with the skills they will need to perform future roles within America's pluralist society."

That said, regardless of either the time in the semester or the data being analyzed, there existed a strong emphasis on the "big picture" of K-12 students' education. Rather than focusing on learning names, dates, and theories, participants consistently maintained that the general aim of education – and the social studies, more specifically – is to prepare students for what they would experience after completing their K-12 education. To that end, the participants mirrored Dewey's (1900/1915) notion of creating a "miniature community" in the classroom.

Discussion Seen as Being Beneficial to Students

Frequently seen throughout data collection were references to why discussion is a beneficial strategy to bring into the classroom. Participants constantly alluded to discussion as a means for having students construct their own opinion and learn both from and about one another, in a manner reflecting their understandings of literature read by Banks (1993) and Au (2009). To that end, participants emphasized the need for capitalizing on the diversity of the classroom through collaboration among students. Adriana, for instance, stated that:

There are immense benefits to having open discussions and listening to multiple perspectives on controversial topics in social studies classrooms. Even in the most homogenous settings, students will still have varying opinions on topics due to personal experiences and prior knowledge.

Similarly, Kathleen cited Parker (2003) in her final rationale and noted "discussion is another classroom strategy that not only strengthens students' understanding of the material, but also promotes the skills of communication and acceptance of diverse opinions." Trisha, in the same assignment mirrored the previously mentioned comments on school diversity by citing Gutmann (1999), stating, "Schools typically contain more diversity than stu-

dents would find in other factors of their life, such as church, family, friends or clubs" and that "Discussion in the classroom is . . . a method of understanding biases because of the diversity within schools." Jessie, too, emphasized that "Discussion will help with communication and also allow the students to hear multiple perspectives." Further, Carrie stated that good social studies teachers "foster in depth discussion about various perspectives that should emerge when using multiple viewpoints."

As the semester concluded, it became apparent that participants understood (at least on a surface-level) the oft-referenced aims and benefits of having students collaborate and discuss issues with diverse partners (as seen in the Common CORE standards). Participants frequently referenced the use of discussion as a pedagogical tool and emphasized the value in using it to have students learn about and from one another and – though often not explicitly stated – the connection between such practices and the principle components of democratic education.

A Lack of Discussion in Coursework

Nunn (1996) describes the typical learning that occurs in the college classroom as a "spectator sport". Though an alarming description of a such a critical educational experience in a novice educator's life, a key underlining theme to be found in the data was the fact that discussion is rarely integrated into college students' general education courses. Rather, when asked what methods or strategies are most often used in their coursework, participants did not hesitate to emphasize how much lecture they experience. More specifically, when the researcher inquired about the participants' general experiences in college and the types of instructional strategies their professors used, all 12 participants used the word "lecture" in the first sentence of their oral response. Responses ranged from one student estimating as much as 85% of their courses being lecture to foundational and broad statements such as "most of them are lecture" (Trisha, Interview, September 17, 2013), "A lot of my teachers still do the lecture and PowerPoint spiel" (Adriana, Interview, September 17, 2013) and, "I feel like most of my classes are very lecture based with few opportunities for discussion (Fran, Interview, September 18, 2013).

Further, participants often acknowledged their social studies content-area courses that were taken outside of the education department (e.g., history, geography, political science, economics) as being largely grounded in lecture and other traditional methods of instruction. Elizabeth, for instance, described her experiences in the social studies by saying "I feel like depending on the course like I feel like a lot of social studies professors lecture a lot" (Interview, September 16, 2013). Carrie, in describing her history courses stated "Like, to me, all of my history classes even at the college it's just been lecture, lecture, lecture that's it" (Interview, September 26, 2013). Similarly, Sydney even described her most effective history instruction by saying, "I think my most effective history course, he would put up PowerPoint's but not necessarily read off them. There were a few visual points along with music, and he would just lecture but go through the time periods." (Interview, September 23, 2013).

For the most part, participants' education courses were often better about integrating discussion for a number of reasons including smaller classes, students more prepared to participate in discussions, and professors who had formal training in effective pedagogy and student learning. Rita, for instance, stated "the education class-

es are more discussion-based and less lecture and they are more focused on the kids in the class, which is just different than lecture” (Interview, September 24, 2013).

Despite this, however, the majority of participants also noted that many of their education courses (of which they had all taken at least three courses) had some element of lecture and limited discussion. Fran, interestingly enough, noted that:

I'd say education classes are definitely a lot better and a lot more engaging. But I always tell people that education classes are nice because education professors are like schooled in how to be good professors and they are teaching you how to be good professors so they structure their lectures; like, they lecture, but their lectures are structured in a way that's not just spouting information and all of the tests and quizzes are way more (Interview, September 18, 2013).

This sentiment was mirrored in Elizabeth's response in which – when asked specifically about discussion in her education courses – noted “Education courses... um... I feel like they are lecture based, a lot of them” (Interview, September 16, 2013). Similarly, Adriana described her experiences in her education courses as “some of my education classes I guess are a little bit different, but most of them are just lecture style... like sit there and take notes and ask questions if you have any” (Interview, September 17, 2013). Moreover, participants at this particular university did experience a more engaging and discussionbased experience, but they still noted a strong emphasis on the traditional form of lecture in many of their early education courses.

Plans For Lecture

Students in the course were expected to develop two lesson plans that they could receive feedback on from the instructor and their peers and potentially use in the classroom when they begin teaching. The first lesson, which was assigned two months into the semester, had limited instructions aside from filling out a traditional lesson plan template and developing a lesson that was standards-based and promoted higher-order thinking in the students. All 12 students submitted a lesson plan, of which 11 of the students (91.6%) either began with a lecture or with an icebreaker leading directly into a lecture. Combined, these 11 students expected to lecture for 211 minutes, or almost 19 minutes in each class individually.

While there is certainly nothing wrong with the use of lecture in the social studies classroom and some would argue that there exists a false dichotomy between lecture and discussion (see: Brookfield & Preskill, 1999, pp. 35-36), an array of literature would be hesitant to consider lecture (in the traditional, teacher-centered sense) as a “best practice” for promoting democratic and citizenship education, let alone engaging students in the content in a meaningful way. To that end, the researcher requested that, for the second lesson plan, students submit a lesson promoting more of a constructivist approach in an attempt to have them develop a lesson containing more of a student-centered environment. After placing this requirement on students, the lesson plans became far more engaging; dealing with primary sources, controversial topics, and discussions amongst students and their peers.

This, however, did not completely remove the use of lecture from the lesson plans submitted. Of the 12 lesson plans submitted, six of them directly noted the use of lecture. Two of the 12 were less open about their use of lecture as a form of communicating

content, but appeared to imply the use of lecture by stating they would “Describe” or “introduce” content to students.

Discussion as an Unwanted or Impractical Form of Pedagogy

A final key theme to participants' conceptions of discussion in the secondary social studies classroom was the numerous variables they would have to combat to successfully integrate discussion into their lessons. Participants, for instance, frequently alluded to their cooperating teachers' request for them to lecture a set of content for part of their teaching experiences. Adriana, as an example, reflected on how she “read from the PowerPoint lecture notes that [her teacher] prepared” (Teaching Reflection #3) while Jessie similarly noted that for her final lesson “[her] CT wanted [her] to lecture on the causes of World War I and have the students fill out a graphic organizer during the lecture” (Teaching Reflection #3). Running parallel to this socialization, Fran noted that while her objective was to use discussion and pedagogy meant to promote critical thinking, she was fearful of deviating from the primary mode of teaching used by her cooperating teacher, lecture (Teaching Reflection #1).

Additionally, the participants continuously alluded to both the importance, but also their fears of integrating controversy through discussion into the classroom. Sydney, for instance, when asked about the strategies used by the best social studies teachers she has experienced, responded “Discussion, even though that's not exactly practical for k-12 classes.” (Interview, September 17, 2013). Sydney later added onto this noting that for students below a certain age, she could not see herself trying “to push deep discussions about things like that where they have no idea what they are doing.” Similarly, Carrie struggled with how her students may respond, stating that “I would not feel very comfortable bringing them in cause I would be afraid I would say something that would either hurt someone or bite me in the back” (Interview, September 26, 2013). Adriana, in a similar manner, responded by saying “I don't like upsetting people [as a student], but at the same if I were at the head of my classroom, I wouldn't want other people to feel uncomfortable” (Interview, September 17, 2013).

DISCUSSION

Many of the findings of this study are troubling for a variety of reasons. For one, preservice teachers often do not feel prepared to foster discussion amongst their students despite an implicit knowledge that having students discuss content and participate in discourse is beneficial both to the growth of students and the classroom climate, in addition to being essential for citizenship education (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999). This was seen in multiple comments during preliminary interviews with participants who stressed their interest in using discussion as a pedagogical tool but considered themselves inept at doing so appropriately. This theme continued throughout the course of the semester and was seen as strongly – if not more – in participants' final teaching rationales which were submitted in the final week of the semester. Participants, however, questioned their ability and feared the potential issues that may arise including having limited time to cover standards, fear of offending students, the maturity level of students, or simply a lack of understanding on how to properly foster and maintain a discussion. Additionally, many of the lesson plans submitted by the participants

were in direct contrast to the teaching rationales developed, which emphasized a student-centered climate and emphasized the need for discussion and limited lecture.

A second cause for concern involved the experiences of participants and their comments regarding their experiences in the university-level classroom. There is an array of research demonstrating that preservice teachers are influenced more by how they are taught than the theories and methods they are taught in their teacher education programs (Powell, 1992). Though not the sole reason for the often teacher-centered instruction that occurs in the social studies classroom, the strategies that preservice teachers both experience and witness will play a key role in the pedagogical methods they will use once they enter the classroom. And if – as the 12 participants described – the vast majority of their social studies courses (history, geography, political science, economics) are lecture, is it to be assumed that preservice teachers are learning to teach through lecture in their content-area courses? It is for that reason that teacher educators must be cognizant of how the methods and strategies that they use will directly impact their preservice teachers' pedagogy. Further, what teacher educators promote is often overshadowed by how they teach this material.

But, there do exist signs of hope and reasons for optimism in teacher education and the development of effective and reform-oriented social studies teachers. As demonstrated in the findings section of this essay, preservice teachers are being exposed to many essential theories in education and reflecting upon how to apply them into their own pedagogy. Students consistently reference social justice, multiculturalism, participatory citizenship, and the development of critical thinking. And this is both reason for optimism and essential to this study because, as noted by Barton (2012), there is rarely a preservice teacher who enters into the field with the intention of teaching for democracy. Rather, Barton notes that most preservice teachers justify their decision to enter into education because they want to work with a younger generation, seek to be a role model, or simply enjoy watching students develop into mature adults. In this sense, the research indicates that by the third year of their college career, preservice teachers began to internalize critical dispositions toward the purposes of education. Further, the participants in this study clearly grappled with many of the difficult questions in education and did so in a manner that suggested they would seek to integrate various forms of pedagogy (including discussion) into their teaching as they progress in their careers.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates the need for university educators within all content-areas – especially those in teacher education – to better prepare their students to foster discussion in their own courses once they graduate and have classes and students of their own. If those at the university level are expected to prepare future teachers to achieve the social and political aims of the classroom, they must do so through modeling of discussion methods and opportunities to reflect and discuss on these methods. As eloquently noted by Patricia Avery (2003): As teacher educators, we know that our student teachers will “listen” more to what we do than what we say. If we want the social studies teachers of the 21st century to be able to integrate technology into their instruction, as student teachers they must see us integrating (not demonstrating)

technology into our courses. If we want future teachers to be more likely to conduct meaningful classroom discussions about controversial social and political issues than their predecessors, then our student teachers need to see us welcoming such discussions. And if we want teachers to be able to help their students take different perspectives, then we must model that skill when talking about current events as well as when reflecting on student teaching issues. (pp. 26-27)

Further, this research has demonstrated preservice teachers do have a working understanding of the aims of education as described by prominent scholars in the fields of education, political science, and various areas of philosophy, but their experiences in the classroom (both as college students and working in their field experiences) often lead them to be fearful of how to integrate discussion into their coursework or to be socialized into a style of pedagogy which often fails to lead to democratic forms of education. That said, if teacher education programs seek to promote discussion and discourse in secondary classrooms, they must integrate discussion into their conceptual frameworks and introduce preservice teachers to practical strategies that encourage the use of discussion and increase confidence.

Teacher preparation as a whole would benefit from future lines of research looking into how preservice teachers' pedagogical intentions are affected by their university professors and the methods they use when purveying content. Additionally, future lines of research should seek to better understand the associations preservice teachers make between the use of discussion and the underlying principles of democratic education. This form of research should take an interdisciplinary approach where scholars from various content-areas collaborate and share the most effective forms of discussion-based pedagogy within teacher education. In this sense, scholars must ask to what extent preservice teachers value discussion as a means for democratic education and the impact their own instructors have on these beliefs and conceptions.

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