

# Are You Ready?

## Elementary Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions about Discussing Race in Social Studies

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### Introduction

As elementary pre-service teachers prepare to enter the classroom for the first time, there are a multitude of decisions to make. How will I manage the classroom? How do I help struggling students? How do I plan for each discipline that I teach? What themes could be addressed throughout the year? The topic of race in elementary social studies is not often among the common concerns of new teachers. I would argue that questions about race *should* be raised in elementary social studies teacher education in order to better prepare teachers to enter their classrooms.

In this study, I explore how elementary pre-service teachers situate race within the social studies curriculum and how prepared they feel about discussing race with their students in the context of a social studies lesson.

### The Purpose of Social Studies

Social studies' main purpose is to foster civic competence among students (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994). Developing a citizenry that will internalize and exhibit democratic ideals should be the goal for social studies teachers at all levels of public schools. Within social studies, students learn about the birth of our country's democracy, the gradual expansion of citizenship rights, and the progression of civil rights.

Before students can become competent citizens, they must feel they are true citizens whose voice is as important as anyone else's voice. Daniels (2011) stated that "citizenship is an important underlying theme [in social studies], and it raises questions about who is present in the

dialogue and who is being considered a citizen" (p. 211).

As students explore social studies themes, such as citizenship, the discussion of race must be a component in this conversation. Race has been a determining factor in whether one has been permitted to become a citizen throughout U.S. history (Zinn, 1999), and although, at this point, citizenship may be attained regardless of race, there remains a frustration that race still governs whether one can receive the full benefits of citizenship if one is a person of color (Brown, Crowley, & King, 2011; Howard, 2003).

Historically, the official social studies curriculum has not included explicit standards that refer to issues of structural racism and oppression in U.S. history (Brown, 2011; Fitchett, Starker, & Salyers, 2012). This exclusion of race studies within the standards has allowed a perpetuation of a Eurocentric master narrative of American history that is taught throughout K-12 public schools (Aldridge, 2006). In some cases, in-service and pre-service teachers have worked to disrupt the official curriculum to teach students to critically question the master narrative often found within textbooks (Brown & Brown, 2011; Flynn, 2012; Howard, 2004; Salinas & Castro, 2010).

Although examples of critical pedagogy exist within the literature, there is a lack of research highlighting the struggle within teacher education programs to effectively support students in reflection about issues of racism and privilege in our society and its influence on how one teaches (Crowley & Smith, 2015; Dlamini, 2002; Fitchett et al., 2012; Gershon, Bilinovich, & Peel, 2010; LaDuke, 2009).

Most research that focuses on pre-service social studies teachers' preparation includes a critical inquiry of history, including race, but has mainly been conducted with secondary pre-service teacher participants (Fitchett et al., 2012; Gershon et al., 2010; Segall & Garrett, 2013; Smith, 2000).

What is lacking is research that directly investigates elementary pre-service teachers' beliefs about discussing race within social studies instruction.

In addition, while research has examined the preparation of social studies teachers with regard to facilitating reflection about their beliefs and positionality, the research does not provide explicit discussion of the strategies used by social studies teacher educators to instruct pre-service teachers *how* to discuss race within the classroom and social studies curriculum.

Considering the existing literature gaps involving elementary pre-service teachers' beliefs about race and social studies instruction, the primary purpose of my study was to explore how elementary pre-service teachers situate the importance of race within the social studies curriculum. Secondly, I investigated my participants' perceptions of their preparedness to discuss race within social studies lessons. The following research questions were addressed in the study:

1. How do elementary pre-service teachers situate the importance of race within the social studies curriculum?
2. In what ways do elementary pre-service teachers feel prepared to discuss race in social studies lessons?

As described above, a need exists within the current research literature to explore these questions. In the following section, I offer further rationale for locating this study within the current social studies climate regarding issues of race and racism.

### Literature Review

Although the demographic make-up of the U.S. has never been monoethnic, the current population statistics portray growing racial and ethnic diversity in the country. In student population data from

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2012, approximately half of K-12 students were White while the other half were students of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Population projections predict that the number of students of color will continue to rise while the White student population decreases. As our nation's population becomes increasingly diverse, it is essential that the historical narrative of our country move away from a Eurocentric perspective to one that allows multiple voices to be heard.

In contrast to the diversity of the student population, an overwhelming majority of K-12 public school teachers are White females (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). This fact highlights the need for teacher education programs to prepare their pre-service teachers, who are mainly White, to teach in multi-racial classrooms.

Elementary school teachers usually teach several disciplines to one class, including social studies. Social studies is the primary discipline charged with preparing students to become active citizens who will uphold the principles of our democratic society (NCSS, 1994). Part of this effort must involve instruction about the multiplicity of cultures and races within the U.S.

Towards this end Balfour (2001) asked, "What could be more democratic than conversation among citizens about issues of national importance? What matter is in greater need of honest, thoughtful attention than the ongoing significance of race in American public life?" (p. 1). Although Balfour posed these questions 15 years ago, they remain pertinent today as seen in the inequitable policing practices in Ferguson, Missouri (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015) and Chicago (Police Accountability Task Force, 2016) and in activism, like the Black Lives Matter protests, which are a consistent part of daily life.

One question that arises is—*at what point should race be included in the curriculum?* There is often resistance discussing race with elementary school children because some teachers feel the children are too young to handle such conversations (Winkler, 2009). Other teachers maintain that young children are colorblind and the act of talking about race may actually encourage racist attitudes. Yet research has shown that children as young as 3-to-5 years old have already begun to create racial categories and that they act upon the stereotypes assigned to these categories (Hirschfeld, 2008). Elementary educators have the opportunity to facilitate discussions about race that could help form

students' views of race, leading to more equitable and democratic attitudes.

### **Challenges Faced by Teacher Educators**

In order for elementary teachers to teach race within their social studies lessons, they must understand the need to do so and receive effective training within their teacher education programs. Many teacher educators have experienced resistance from pre-service teachers when challenging them to reflect on their own biases and to recognize sociohistorical and institutional racism in society.

In one research study, a social studies teacher educator challenged his secondary social studies methods students to consider how race intersected with the social studies content and the student population in their practicum settings (Gershon et al., 2010). The students pushed back each time there was a question posed about race. Gershon et al. describe how students often complained that they had already "covered" race in previous classes, claimed they were uncomfortable to participate in race discussions, or even complained that they were "tired of being blamed for the race problems" (p. 34). This is an example of the common resistance social studies teacher educators face when addressing race within the social studies curriculum with mainly White pre-service teachers.

Segall and Garrett's (2013) study of secondary social studies pre-service teachers showed how resistance to the concept of institutional racism takes place through colorblind discourse. In their study, five White secondary social studies pre-service teachers viewed the film *When the Levies Broke* by Spike Lee. After viewing the film, the researchers conducted individual interviews with each participant. The researchers found that a pattern occurred where the pre-service teachers often avoided or acted ignorant of race as a main component of the Hurricane Katrina government response. Segall and Garrett concluded that the participants worked to maintain a colorblind perspective throughout watching and discussing the film.

The examples of teacher preparation research noted above are specific to social studies education courses with secondary social studies pre-service teachers. Another study conducted by LaDuke (2009) was set within a multicultural education course that included elementary pre-service teachers. Resistance by pre-service teachers taking secondary social studies methods courses was also experienced in this multicultural education course taught at a large public

university. LaDuke engaged in an ethnographic study of the course and found that the elementary pre-service teachers showed resistance through silence or by ignoring specific conversations. They also showed resistance through colorblind discourses and an unwillingness to view racism as institutional. Finally, the pre-service teachers often struggled to be self-reflective in recognizing their own biases and racism.

### **Examples of In-Service Teacher Success**

Overall, teacher educators struggle to prepare pre-service teachers to recognize the inherent racism within society and schools. This resistance affects the way that race is addressed in the curriculum and within K-12 classrooms. Yet, despite the too often discouraging research, there are a few examples of in-service teachers who have included race in their elementary social studies instruction. Bolgatz (2007) worked with a racially diverse fourth grade class in an urban setting. She collaborated with the classroom teacher to create activities that focused on race as part of the historical narrative of the U.S. In one instance she discussed how the use of roleplay helped the students understand various racial perspectives of an historical event.

Additionally, Yenika-Agbaw (1997), shared with teachers three different ways to read a picture book with students. Yenika-Agbaw used Patricia McKissack's book *Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters*, which is about the stark differences between what Christmas was like in a plantation house compared to slave quarters. The book was read three ways, through the lens of narrative, postcolonial, and critical multicultural storytelling. Through these readings, Yenika-Agbaw scaffolded the process for students to recognize the naturalized influence of racism in America's history.

Throughout current literature, it is apparent that pre-service teachers have struggled to recognize the importance of personally reflecting upon race and one's position of power as a teacher, as well as the necessity to include race as part of the social studies curriculum. Although there are practical examples of how in-service teachers incorporate race into elementary social studies lessons, it is unclear how social studies teacher educators prepare pre-service teachers to do so once they have affirmed the need for it. I used the current literature as a foundation for the development of my study while employing critical race theory to frame my research questions and study design.

## Theoretical Framework

My interest in this research study stems from my personal experience. I was once an elementary pre-service teacher who attended a traditional teacher education program in a rural, mainly White, private university. When I entered an urban, middle school social studies classroom, I had never asked questions about race and social studies, nor had I been encouraged to do so within my teacher education program.

At this point, I am working as an adjunct professor encouraging pre-service teachers to consider their personal biases and positionality before entering the education field. I encourage my students to think about the effects of race and racism in our society and how this should affect their instruction.

### Critical Race Theory

My experiences, which include the goal of becoming a teacher educator and researcher, mold my theoretical perspective. I designed this research study through a critical race lens. Critical race theory (CRT) takes an ontological perspective of "historical realism" stating that reality is shaped by power structures of race socio-historically constructed by the dominant class (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 195). The foundations of CRT arose in legal studies when scholars were frustrated with the slow progress of racial equality even after the Civil Rights Movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced CRT into the field of education as a way to center race when analyzing educational policies and schooling practices.

One of the foundational tenets of CRT is that racism is a common, permanent part of U.S. society (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This view encouraged me to focus this study on how pre-service teachers treat race within elementary social studies. Additionally, CRT scholars challenge the slow, often stunted, work of liberalism by calling for radical, structural action (Ladson-Billings, 1998). At the end of this article, I propose implications for social studies teacher education that require action and change at the structural level.

As one reflects upon the inclusion of race as an integral part of social studies education, it is important to realize that this inclusion is fundamentally an issue of power. Historically, social studies instruction, particularly history instruction, has been a metaphor of the White power and privilege existing in U.S. society (Urieta,

2004). As educators tell a master narrative based on White domination, it soon becomes received as a story of common sense where Whites are privileged in the actions and the telling of history. By using the lens of critical race theory, I challenge this narrative with the desire to disrupt this status quo and power imbalance.

### Methodology

In order to understand pre-service teachers' beliefs about race and social studies and their preparedness to discuss race with students, I conducted a qualitative interview study (Hatch, 2002). This qualitative method allowed me to "see [elementary pre-service teachers], and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings, and understandings, as the primary data sources" (Mason, 2002, p. 56).

As I interpreted my participants' representations of their beliefs and perceptions, I recognized that my own interpretation would be a second layer of representation. Merriam (1995) describes this ontological view of interpretation in the following way, "Thus, there are interpretations of reality; in a sense the researcher offers his or her interpretation of someone else's interpretation of reality" (p. 54). As a researcher, I sought to share the stories these participants had entrusted to me, yet the interpretation of their stories will always be affected by my own as well as my readers' subjectivity.

### Interview Method

In desiring to share the realities of my participants' beliefs about race in the elementary social studies curriculum, I conducted 30-60 minute semi-structured interviews. This interview format allowed for open-ended questions about the participants' backgrounds, their personal beliefs about the discipline of social studies, how race fits into this discipline, and their perceptions of how prepared they felt to discuss race with elementary students in the context of social studies lessons.

I created an interview guide with drafted open-ended questions that allowed me to be consistent with the questioning during interviews while also affording me the opportunity to ask specific follow-up questions in order to more fully understand each participant's story (see the interview guide in Appendix A).

### Participant Selection

The participants in the study were elementary pre-service teachers who were preparing to begin their internship year

the following semester. Through criterion-based sampling (deMarrias, 2004), an invitation was extended to students in two elementary social studies methods courses at a large Research-1-level state university in the Southeast.

I introduced the study to approximately 40 potential participants, and all students confidentially responded to the invitation. From the two classes, five students expressed interest in participation, and four of those pre-service teachers followed through to complete the interview. Each interview took place at the university where the participants were enrolled. Each interview was audio-recorded.

### Character Sketches of Participants

All four participants identified as White and female, demographics which represent the typical American public school teacher (National Council for Education Statistics, 2012). Each participant had a unique story, yet two themes arose from the data: participants who had diverse background experience and participants who had little diversity in their background. See Table 1 for a presentation of the differences and similarities in the participants.

As described in Table 1, Adrienne and Renee experienced little diversity in their childhood and adolescence. Both participants grew up in small Southeastern towns. Adrienne's school was in a suburban setting that she describes as having some racial diversity with African American and White students, and Renee's elementary public school experience was in a rural setting with a mainly White student population. For both middle school and high school, Renee attended a Christian private school with an all-White student body. Adrienne stated she had experienced some racial diversity within her extended family which lived in an urban area in the Midwest.

Part of Adrienne's story included the fact that she has extended family members who had been victims of violence in this urban setting, which contributed to why Adrienne views large cities as "scary." Last year, Renee sought out work experience in an inner-city after-school program that served mainly African American students. She described her first few weeks in this setting as a true "culture shock," explaining that she could not believe how different the culture was at this school, which is in the same district as the elementary school she attended as a child. Both Adrienne and Renee had relatively little experience with racial diversity in their home and school settings as children and adolescents.

In comparison, the other two participants, Isabelle and Carla, had opportunities to experience racial diversity throughout their childhood. Isabelle moved several times and lived in rural and urban areas on the West Coast, as well as in the Midwest and Southeast. She has always had many friends of other races. During the interview, Isabelle described her friendships in detail. In one example she remembered spending the night with a Nigerian friend in elementary school and learning how the friend used a tongue scraper. Although Carla always lived in one place, she grew up in a large urban city and attended a school that she described as “multicultural” with high racial diversity. Carla also shared that she always had many African American friends throughout childhood and that this was the norm at her school.

During both interviews, Isabelle and Carla discussed times when they had recognized systemic racism during their adolescence and how their awareness of these discriminatory practices continues to grow. Isabelle recalled a school she attended in Texas where the student population was mainly Latino and White with a small number of African American students. She believed that the African American students were consistently disciplined more harshly than the other students in the school.

During Carla’s interview, she described the current realignment of the school district which she attended. The city is restructuring school district lines with the intention of protecting national rankings of its high performing schools (mainly White, upper class) from the low-performing schools (mainly African American, lower class). Carla was angry about the restructuring and recognized it as a form of racism.

Further differences in background experience emerged as I began analyzing the data. These differences appeared to affect the participants’ beliefs about the importance of including race within the elementary social studies curriculum.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was a fluid, yet systematic process. After interviewing each participant, I wrote field notes recording my thoughts and impressions of the interview. Once the interview data collection was complete, I employed descriptive, values, and versus coding in the first cycle of coding analysis (Saldana, 2013). Descriptive coding allowed me to describe the participants’ comments as they pertained to the research questions. The values coding specifically helped me focus on the beliefs, attitudes, and values shared by participants in regard to their personal beliefs about race and social studies. After reviewing the interviews, it was apparent that each participant experienced some level of tension between her beliefs and how to translate those beliefs into action within the classroom. Therefore, I completed a final first cycle coding using versus coding. Versus coding allowed me to succinctly describe the tension participants felt as they shared their stories.

Throughout the first cycle coding process I engaged in memo writing. The purpose of memo writing is to “provide a space to become actively engaged in your materials, to develop your ideas, and to fine-tune your subsequent data-gathering, and to engage in critical reflexivity” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 162-163). The analytical memos provided me the opportunity to make links between participant responses and to stay abreast of whether my subjectivity was becoming a part of my sense-making process (Peshkin, 1998).

After the first cycle coding, I began a process of focused coding in order to make connections between my first cycle codes and to move toward categories (Charmaz, 2014). In the following section, I present findings that portray how the participants situated race within the social studies curriculum and how they perceived their level of preparedness to engage elementary students in discussions of race within social studies lessons.

**Findings**

The data analysis resulted in four main findings:

- (1) Participant background experience with family and schooling affected the degree to which they recognize the need to include race within the social studies curriculum and their comfort level in doing so.
- (2) Participants had a tension between wanting to teach about race in social studies while not knowing exactly how to respond to concerns or controversy that may arise from their instruction.
- (3) Participants provided a range of instructional strategies of varying quality which they plan to use to incorporate race into social studies lessons.
- (4) Participants were unable to provide specific ways in which they were directly taught how to discuss race in the K-5 classroom within their social studies methods courses.

In the following subsections, I provide evidence for each finding as well as connections to relevant literature.

**Finding 1:  
Effect of Background Experience**

Educational research portrays the generalization that pre-service teachers’ personal background experience with diversity greatly affects their awareness of racism in society and their willingness to address issues of race in the classroom (LaDuke, 2009; Skerrett, 2008; Sleeter, 1992; Smith, 2000; Whipp, 2013). As previously discussed, Adrienne and Renee had little experience with racial diversity in their background while Carla and Isabelle had greater exposure to racial diversity during their childhood and adolescence. Each of the study participants claimed that race should be a part of the

**Table 1**  
**Participant Background Experiences**

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Geographic Area of Childhood</i>	<i>School Experience</i>	<i>Desired Teaching Location</i>
Adrienne	White	Small Town, Southeast	Suburban; Public	Suburban, mainly White
Renee	White	Rural Community, Southeast	Rural; Public, Religious Private	Rural County
Isabelle	White	Rural, Urban; South, Midwest, West Coast	Rural, Suburban, Urban; Homeschool, Public, Private	Urban District
Carla	White	Urban, Midwest	Diverse Suburban; Public	Large City

Note: All names are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the study participants.

social studies curriculum, and they each expressed a willingness to include race in their future instruction.

Differences arose around the degree to which participants felt it was important to include race within social studies and the amount of comfort they felt in carrying out this type of instruction. For instance, Adrienne said that she thought “race needs to be touched on.” On the other hand, Carla was confident and determined that race was a topic that should be addressed within social studies.

In her response to a question about whether race should be in the social studies curriculum, Carla exuberantly said,

I definitely think so. I think that [race] is a huge part that makes up a lot of obviously the history that surrounds where we are, and also a lot of tension that can exist in communities.

The determination and feeling of responsibility to discuss race within the elementary social studies setting was what struck me as a stark difference between the two sets of participants. The participants who experienced racial diversity in their childhood and adolescence were much more insistent in including race within the curriculum than the two participants with little racial diversity in their backgrounds.

This finding is similar to what Whipp (2013) discovered with recent graduates from a social justice-oriented teacher education program. The first-year teachers in that study who demonstrated a focus on challenging the structural as well as individual social justice issues within their schools also shared the commonality of having many cross-cultural experiences in their lives before entering the teacher education program.

In my study, in relation to the participants’ perceived need to include race within the social studies curriculum, there was also a difference in the comfort level the participants felt with the inclusion of race. Isabelle was confident in her ability to manage race discussions with students. She claimed,

When students will ask me about [race], it doesn’t scare me. I don’t shy away from it. I try to be very deliberate about addressing it appropriately.

In contrast, Adrienne was fearful of the way discussions could unravel and feel out of control. She described this fear saying,

I don’t want there to be like a lot of conversation; I wouldn’t want little kids to ask bad questions that they don’t mean to be bad or anything, so it would be more like a direct teaching lesson.

Renee was even more tentative at times during the interview. When reflecting upon her perceived preparedness, she said, “I don’t know if I feel prepared at all.”

The level of confidence participants felt about including race within social studies lessons mirrored the participants’ experiences with racial discussions in their K-12 social studies classrooms. Carla, who was steadfast in her desire to include race in the classroom, recalled a specific experience in a diverse seventh grade class where her social studies teacher often challenged students to take different racial perspectives. Carla also experienced university classes where current topics of race, like the Trayvon Martin case, were debated in class. In contrast, when asked about any social studies experience where race was a focus, Adrienne responded, “I don’t really remember anything besides [a] college class which was about Appalachian history.”

The participants had different perceptions about the need to include race within the elementary social studies curriculum and their comfort level in doing so through lessons and class discussions. The participants’ background experiences seemed to impact their personal views about race and social studies, which further adds to the existing literature about how pre-service teachers’ backgrounds affect their willingness to address issues of racism and privilege within the K-12 classroom setting (LaDuke, 2009; Smith, 2000; Segall & Garrett, 2013; Sleeter, 1992; Whipp, 2013).

### **Finding 2: Want Versus How**

While the participants expressed some measure of willingness to include race within the social studies curriculum, they described tension over how to carry this out. There was a constant struggle between feeling the need to encourage their elementary students to be accepting of others and to understand how racism affects society historically and currently, while at the same time feeling that they were unable to state their personal opinions about race to their students. They did not want to indoctrinate their students or challenge their students’ families’ beliefs. This tension was apparent as Isabelle explained, “You want to teach [the students] like, life is better as a community, but you also don’t want to be like propaganda.” Adrienne echoed this sentiment saying, “You can’t state your opinions whatsoever or else [the students] may go home and tell their parents that, then the parents will get mad.”

Several participants made allusions to parental concerns over the inclusion of race within social studies. The participants assumed parents would disagree with these types of social studies lessons. Carla described the tension as a “delicate balance” between respecting the parents’ role and authority with their child and simultaneously remembering “it is still your job [as a teacher] to make your students aware of other people and things in the world.” As the participants described this tension in detail, they knew that discussing race within the elementary classroom would probably be viewed as controversial, but they were unprepared in knowing how to deal with concerns from parents with regard to the inclusion of race in the social studies curriculum.

The fear and uncertainty described by my study participants illustrates a broader tension shared among most social studies teachers as they consider including controversial topics in the classroom. In a 2007 position statement, the National Council for the Social Studies asserted the need for students to study controversial issues. The position stated that students should “study relevant social problems” and that they should recognize that “differing viewpoints are valuable and a normal part of social discourse” (para. 7).

Despite this call for a study of controversial topics, which include issues of race, there is a widespread fear among educators about including controversial topics within the curriculum and facilitating discussions about these topics (Byford, Lennon, & Russell, 2009; Misco & Patterson, 2007; Patterson, 2010). Byford et al. surveyed high school social studies teachers and discovered that the teachers believed the study of controversial topics was important in the development of civic competence among students, but they feared student disruption during discussion and possible consequences that could jeopardize their job security. Patterson (2010) reported that one main reason teachers avoided controversial topics was that they were not prepared to teach them in their teacher education program.

The pre-service elementary teachers in my study contemplated the need to discuss issues of race and racism in their future classrooms, but they were anxious about the response that students, parents, and school administrators would have to such instruction. In some ways, this finding may allude to the lack of specificity within social studies methods courses about how to responsibly include race within the K-5

classroom. Regardless of the reason, the participants' feelings are not surprising since previous studies have shown the same tension among pre-service teachers (Misco & Patterson, 2007) as well as teachers already in the field (Byford et al., 2009; Patterson, 2010).

**Finding 3:  
Range of Quality in Instructional Examples**

During the interviews, I asked participants to pretend they were already in their own elementary classroom and had the opportunity to include race within social studies lessons. I asked them to share examples of how they would do so. All the participants were able to provide examples, but some were quite vague while others were more detailed. As the participants answered the question, it was evident again that they were drawing from their personal experience in a K-12 setting as well as from a few teacher education courses where they could apply particular instructional strategies to the topic of race.

The examples of instructional strategy ranged in quality and level of development. In a less developed response, Renee discussed the importance of using multiple perspectives in the classroom. She planned on "taking events that are mostly told like in the curriculum from like a White man's perspective and like finding a different viewpoint from that." However, as Renee continued her explanation, she used an example of a White person's perspective from the time when Martin Luther King, Jr. led the fight for civil rights.

Although the use of multiple perspectives is ideal when discussing race in social studies (Berson, Bennett, & Dobson, 2009), Renee did not have the historical racial content knowledge to provide a specific example that would give voice to a person of color. The master narrative often told in social studies is that of the White voice, and Renee did not recognize that a main purpose of including multiple perspectives is to infuse marginalized voices into the curriculum.

Other participants were able to share a more developed plan for incorporating race in their social studies lessons. Isabelle focused her instructional strategies on the use of picture books. In a recent social studies methods course assignment, Isabelle had created a unit plan in which she chose to focus on the Civil Rights Movement. She chose the books *Martin's Big Words* and *The Other Side of the Fence* to use with students as a way to discuss issues of racism during this time period.

At the time of this interview, there was a reinvigorated debate about flying the Confederate flag as a response to a mass shooting at an historically Black church in Charleston, South Carolina. Isabelle indicated that she would address this debate with students by having them conduct research into the history and purpose of the Confederate flag. She would use questioning to encourage students to examine the historical meaning of the Confederate flag and its connotation and connections to different groups of U.S. citizens today.

The difference in the level of development of these lesson examples may relate to the comfort level the participants felt based upon their background experience as discussed under "Finding 1," but the range of depth may also refer to the participants' historical racial content knowledge and their varied experiences in elementary social studies methods courses.

Participants will struggle to think of a way to include race within social studies lessons if they personally have little understanding of how race has played out historically in the U.S. Additionally, the participants will have difficulty developing lesson activities that include race if they never experienced such issues within their own K-12 social studies educational settings or have never seen them modeled in social studies methods courses.

**Finding 4:  
Lack of Modeling**

The final theme, lack of modeling, has been alluded to throughout each of the previous findings. Participants were unable to describe ways in which they were explicitly instructed about how to teach race within elementary social studies. All of the participants were then in elementary social studies methods courses, which I believe should have provided them with an opportunity to see social studies teacher educators discuss how to include race within the curriculum.

They each shared examples of lessons in their methods courses that touched the periphery of race and racism or on topics that could subsume race, but no one provided a specific recollection of being taught how to focus directly on race in an elementary social studies lesson.

Isabelle and Adrienne shared that they had talked about the facilitation of controversial topics in their social studies methods course, but their descriptions of these lessons seemed to encompass many types of controversial topics that could be encountered in social studies but not race.

In addition to the social studies methods course, Carla was enrolled in a course about teaching social studies with film. She specifically discussed watching films that depicted "White teachers . . . as the White hats" in urban classrooms. This class discussion was helpful to Carla as she began to reflect on her desire to teach in an urban setting and to grapple with the thought that she "want[s] to go into a multi-urban classroom and change the world." Obviously, the discussion that took place in Carla's social studies film class is important, helping her reflect on her positionality with future students, but she never made the connection to using film as a specific strategy for discussing race with elementary students.

Exploring a topic outside the social studies teacher education courses, Isabelle discussed how to use picture books to address issues of race. She had taken a reading education course where much of the focus was on multicultural literature. Isabelle made the connection to using historical picture books to discuss racism in U.S. history.

Finally, Renee described talking about "diversity" in terms of socioeconomic status in some of her previous teacher preparation courses. When Renee discussed her ideas about teaching race in the classroom, she said, "I am really going off of my own experiences learning social studies." She did not provide any examples of learning about race in her social studies methods course.

Although the participants had varied experiences within their social studies methods courses, no one shared explicit ways in which they saw lessons about race modeled by social studies teacher educators. I found that the participants' background experiences affected the degree of importance they placed on including race in the social studies curriculum as well as their comfort level in doing so.

The participants felt tension between wanting to teach about race in the classroom and not knowing how to address any challenges they might experience from the inclusion of race in their lessons. As they described how they may try to include race in social studies lessons, there were stark differences in their ability to provide a well-developed explanation about how they would plan and conduct these lessons. In the end, none of the participants had experienced explicit modeling that showed them how to discuss race in elementary social studies within their social studies methods courses.

### Limitations of the Study

The findings in this research are the interpreted realities that my four study participants shared with me. Although the purpose of my study was not to provide a generalizable finding or theory for all elementary pre-service teachers, I still recognize that there were a relatively small number of participants in this study. Naturally, if other pre-service teachers in the social studies methods courses had chosen to participate, the findings could have been expanded further and perhaps modified.

When using an interview method, the researcher is representing the stories shared by the participants. As the researcher, I know that my subjectivity plays a role in how I analyzed the data (Hatch, 2002; Peshkin, 1998). For example, my personal background experience was similar to a couple of the participants, which made me feel like I understood their current positions more deeply but also caused me to be critical of their lack of recognition of racism within schools and the curriculum. I wanted to insert my professional and personal growth into their current understandings and positions. Throughout the analysis process, I tried to maintain an awareness of how my subjectivity might have skewed my perceptions of the data by using analytical memo writing, but ultimately, I know it is impossible to be truly objective in qualitative research.

A final limitation to consider is that I had one encounter with each of the participants. Although it is valid to conduct studies where participants are only interviewed once, I believe that this study could have been further developed by interviewing these participants again after they began their internship experience, possibly after they attempted to teach a social studies lesson where they incorporated race as a component of their instruction. Additional interviews could have afforded further snippets of the participants' experience, thus providing a better understanding of their beliefs and preparedness in discussing race within the social studies curriculum.

### Implications for Teacher Education

Despite the limitations described above, I believe this study offers implications that deserve to be discussed in teacher education, particularly in social studies teacher education. In the first finding, participants' background experience appeared to influence the way the participants viewed the inclusion of race in the elementary social studies curriculum. Although teacher edu-

cation programs cannot control the types of background experiences pre-service teachers bring with them to the program, they can require intentional field placement in racially diverse classrooms, which has also been mentioned as an implication in previous pre-service teacher studies (Whipp, 2013; Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007). Teacher education programs can walk alongside pre-service teachers as they have cross-racial experiences and provide structured reflection that helps support greater understanding and awareness among pre-service teachers.

When specifically considering social studies teacher education, I believe this study points to the importance of the kind of racial content knowledge students need to develop in social studies teacher education, to the lack of literature in the field about race and elementary social studies, and to the need for explicit modeling of race lessons within elementary social studies methods courses. Only one of the four participants in this study could recall a time in K-12 social studies classes where a teacher facilitated a lesson or discussion involving race.

In previous research, Brown (2011) explained that one main reason pre-service teachers push back from discussing race, racism, and privilege in teacher education courses is that they do not have historical content knowledge about the influence of race in our country's history. Chandler (2015) similarly called for Racial-Pedagogical-Content Knowledge (RPACK) to be a part of social studies teacher education. He insisted that pre-service teachers need to "have content knowledge (in the social science disciplines), pedagogical content knowledge, and a working *racial* knowledge of how race operates within social science" (Chandler, 2015, p. 5).

Current and future social studies teacher educators should consider what it would look like to develop RPACK with social studies pre-service teachers, including future elementary teachers. If pre-service teachers were involved in an ongoing development of RPACK they would not only better understand issues of race and racism throughout historical events, but they would have the skills to teach about race to K-12 students.

In order for Chandler (2015) and colleagues in the field to expand RPACK in general, especially with an elementary teacher focus, there will need to be a concerted effort to deepen this academic dialogue by developing literature about race and elementary social studies instruction.

I believe my study points to the need for further investigation into the specific strategies that social science teacher educators might use to encourage their pre-service teachers to discuss race within the social studies curriculum.

Many factors may play a role in explaining the lack of literature about how teacher educators prepare elementary pre-service teachers to incorporate race within social studies content. In the current assessment and standards climate, elementary social studies has been mitigated to an optional part of many elementary school curriculums (Center on Education Policy, 2007). Additionally, with the adoption of Common Core Standards, social studies teacher educators may now focus more on reading and writing than on the social studies content in their methods courses.

Even within the community of social studies teacher educators who focus their research on race, there is little attention given to the elementary classroom. Bolgatz (2007) discussed role-play as a useful technique to explore multiple racial perspectives, and a few authors have shared how to use critical literacy to highlight race in social studies lessons (Bolgatz, 2005; Wolk, 2003; Yenika-Agbaw, 1997).

In the recent work *Doing Race in Social Studies: Critical Perspectives* (Chandler, 2015), the authors introduced new, innovative ways to consider and teach about race through a critical race lens, but none of the chapters portrays an elementary classroom context. Thus a gap remains in the literature about preparing elementary pre-service teachers to infuse race into social studies instruction. Future study could involve interviewing social science teacher educators to explore if they provide explicit instruction regarding the inclusion of race within the elementary social studies curriculum, and if so, how they instruct their pre-service teachers to do this work.

### Conclusion

This research study investigated elementary pre-service teachers' beliefs about the importance of including race within the social studies curriculum and their perceptions of how prepared they felt to teach lessons about race to their elementary students within a social studies context. In order to investigate the research questions, I conducted an interview study (Hatch, 2002) with four elementary pre-service teachers enrolled in a social studies methods course.

The findings point to the influence that

participant background experience has on the degree to which the participants' desired and felt comfortable discussing race within their social studies lessons. In addition, the participants struggled with wanting to teach about race with their elementary students while having uncertainty about the challenges they might face as a result of this type of instruction. The participants varied in their ability to describe how they would actually incorporate race into their social studies lessons, and finally, the participants were unable to share an example of how they were taught to teach about race to elementary students during their social studies methods course.

In essence, the purpose of situating race in the social studies curriculum is to challenge the power differentials historically and currently in our society in order to give voice to the silenced voices in American schools and society. In this study, the participants all recognized a need for the inclusion of race in the social studies curriculum, yet they were at different levels in the importance they placed on racial inclusion and in their ability to carry out their stated desires.

Social science teacher educators should consider these findings as they assess their beliefs about race within the elementary social studies curriculum and design their social studies methods coursework for elementary pre-service teachers. As academic scholars, social studies teacher educators have the opportunity to build upon the limited research available involving race and elementary social studies. There remains a need for social studies teacher educators to share how they respond to the recognition that race should be a part of elementary social studies curriculum and how they model instruction about race for their elementary pre-service teachers.

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## Appendix A Interview Guide

*How do elementary pre-service teachers situate the importance of race within the social studies curriculum?*

*How well-prepared do elementary pre-service teachers feel about discussing race in social studies lessons?*

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself and how you came to the teaching program at this university. (prompt for where student is from, family structure, SES)
2. Why have you chosen elementary education as your career?
3. What do you think is the purpose of social studies instruction?
4. Why do you think social studies should be taught to elementary school students?
5. What are the main concepts that you feel should be taught in elementary social studies?
6. Do discussions of race have a place in the social studies curriculum? Why or why not?
7. How do you define "race"?
8. Tell me about your experience learning social studies when you were in a K-12 setting.
  - a. Do you recall a time when race was a part of a social studies lesson?
    - i. If yes, please tell me about this lesson. What did you think as a student? How did you feel?
    - ii. If no, why do you think race was not a part of discussion in your social studies classes?
9. As a student who will begin an internship in the fall, how prepared do you feel to discuss race within social studies lessons? Prompt reasoning.
10. Tell me about any teacher education course where professors have addressed discussing race with elementary students.
11. In thinking about the elementary social studies curriculum, what do you think it would look like to discuss race with your students in the coming year?
  - a. How does planning this type of activity make you feel? Why?
  - b. What types of questions come to mind when you consider discussing race in social studies lessons?
  - c. How do you think your student population will influence the inclusion of race into your social studies curriculum?
12. How do you identify your ethnicity? How do you identify your race?