

Preservice Social Studies Teachers' Perspectives and Understandings of Teaching in the Twenty-First Century Classroom: A Meta-Ethnography

Rory P. Tannebaum¹

Abstract

This meta-ethnography explores the conceptions preservice social studies teachers have toward broad theories of democratic education. The author synthesizes and analyzes empirical research to find a consensus on preservice teachers' conceptions of the social studies. Findings suggest that social studies teacher candidates enter teacher education programs with limited understandings of the broad aims of education and often exit programs unable to make proper associations between the classroom and theories of social justice, democratic education, and equality and equity. The author calls for more research exploring the extent to which preservice teachers internalize theories advocated for within teacher education.

Keywords: Social studies education, Democratic education, Teacher education, Preservice teachers, Meta-ethnography

Introduction

The responsibility of fostering informed and participatory citizens is one that falls upon all educators. Parker (2003) describes teachers from all content-areas as “stewards of democracy” who prepare students to become rational, justice-oriented citizens in a pluralist society (p. xvii). However, scholars frequently describe the social studies as being at the core of an effective democratic education (e.g., Cuenca, 2010; Hahn, 1999; Hertzberg, 1981; Parker, 2010). This is due – at least in part - to social studies teachers' ability to use the social studies to integrate an array of perspectives into the classroom (Banks, 1993; Hahn, 1999), engage students in critical thinking on current issues and events (Hess, 2009; Parker, 2003), and, more broadly, provide ample opportunities for students to develop into citizens capable of entering into the public sphere (Barton, 2012; Bickmore, 2008; Dewey 1916; Habermas, 1989; Parker, 2005). The

¹ Assistant Professor, Merrimack College, TannebaumR@Merrimack.Edu

preparation of effective social studies teachers capable of attaining these lofty objectives, therefore, is essential to the 21st century social studies classroom where society is becoming more diverse, the world is becoming more interconnected, and new issues requiring an educated populace are developing on a consistent basis.

The purpose of this essay will be to analyze relevant literature describing how preservice social studies teachers conceptualize the teaching of social studies. The aim will be to generate a clearer picture of the “typical” preservice social studies teachers’ awareness of the potential and responsibility of the social studies in fostering democratic principles in students. In this sense, the essay will seek to better understand the extent to which preservice social studies teachers associate the practice of teaching social studies in the twenty-first century with the oft-referenced aims of a democratic education through a cross-case analysis (Patton, 2002) of various empirical studies. The essay, therefore, will be a meta-ethnography (Noblit & Hare, 1988) in which individual empirical studies viewed as separate cases are synthesized to “aggregate and substantiate knowledge” (Patton, 2002, p. 500).

The author situates the article within the broad aims of democratic education (citing Dewey, 1900/1915; Gutmann, 1999; Parker, 2003). Further, the author builds on the present literature exploring the positive impact of teacher education (Avery, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Vanhover, 2008). Beyond these two themes, critical and scholarly articles from the past three decades seeking to understand preservice social studies teacher’s thinking toward the social studies are presented and organized into several themes. The foundation of the study will be in Dinkelman’s (1999) claim that three elementary preservice teachers used in his own case study “viewed themselves as teachers, in a general sense, more than they viewed themselves as *social studies* teachers” (p. 3; emphasis in original). In other words, though the teacher education program the candidates completed advocated for principles of a democratic education (especially in the social studies methods course the participants were enrolled in, the participants left unable to make the associations expected of them. Such a claim is intriguing as it calls into question the extent to which preservice social studies teachers internalize the oft-referenced aims of the field.

Because there has not recently been a thorough analysis of the literature describing the perspectives of preservice social studies teachers, this essay will be critical to the field of social studies education and expand upon the field’s understanding of the extent to which teacher candidates understand the often-complex notions of democratic education. Such a study will

assist social studies teacher education programs in developing curricula tailored to the knowledge preservice teachers bring into the program and develop throughout their experiences. The essay, additionally, will assist teacher educators to better understand the ways in which teacher candidates reflect upon complex and abstract notions of social justice, equality and equity, multiculturalism, and broader theories of democratic and civic education.

Moreover, the research questions underlying and guiding the present empirical study were as follows:

1. To what extent do preservice social studies teachers associate broad themes of democratic education with social studies education?
2. What is the nature of the present literature in social studies education detailing the conceptions, beliefs, and perspectives of preservice social studies teachers toward democratic education?
3. To what extent do preservice social studies teachers feel prepared to incorporate instructional strategies predicated on theories of democratic education into their teaching?

The presented research questions were meticulously worded and selected in an attempt to “avoid making (or trying to make) gross generalisations across disparate fields” (Britten, Campbell, Pope, Donovan, Morgan, & Pill, 2002). In other words, the study’s parameters were explicitly defined and heavily restricted to ensure both valid and reliable results (Nolbit & Hare, 1988). Because the present study draws from such an array of sources, it hopes to obtain a high level of transferability (Guba, 1981).

Methods

Once the research questions were generated, the researcher considered a variety of means to most effectively answer the questions. After much consideration, the use of a qualitative meta-ethnography (Nolbit & Hare, 1988) was selected. Because the researcher sought to better understand how preservice social studies teachers conceptualized often complex and abstract notions of democratic education, a qualitative design was the most appropriate given its ability to produce a rich and clear picture of the phenomenon under examination. Using qualitative research additionally allowed for the incorporation of much of the “noise” included within the articles to be analyzed and synthesized and find qualitative themes that may not be measurable in the same manner within a quantitative design (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001; Yin, 2009). Such an approach allowed for the inclusion of a number of variables helping to describe the

preservice teachers being analyzed. Finally, when designing the study and analyzing an array of empirical articles, the use of a qualitative design allowed for the incorporation of participant quotes, author findings, and broad themes which could best be categorized and analyzed using a rigorous qualitative approach (Yin, 2009).

2.1. Meta-Ethnography

Adler (2008) published a chapter titled “The Education of Social Studies Teachers” in the most recent edition of the *Handbook of Social Studies Education Research*. Adler’s chapter details the state of social studies education programs within the United States and is critical to the field in that it explores an area to the field of social studies education having not received proper treatment in upwards of two decades. A guiding resource for the present study was Adler’s chapter and the methods she used to explore social studies education programs at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This present empirical study reflected Adler’s chapter in that the author conducted a meta-ethnography meant to generate new knowledge through a synthesis and analysis of existing qualitative research (Al-Janabi, Cost, & Flynn, 2008; Nolbit & Hare, 1988). Meta-ethnography, therefore, was used to develop “translations of qualitative studies into one another” (Nolbit & Hare, 1988, p. 25). And while Adler may not have explicitly associated her work as meta-ethnography, several themes arose from her work that presented a new understanding of the current state of social studies education.

In order to properly conduct an effective meta-ethnography, the author sought a validated protocol to follow throughout the research. Ultimately, direction was grounded in the works of Nolbit and Hare. Nolbit and Hare (1988) express seven steps to conducting a meta-ethnography: 1) Getting started, 2) Deciding what is relevant, 3) Reading the studies, 4) Determining how the studies are related, 5) Translating the studies into one another, 6) Synthesizing translations, and 7) Expressing the synthesis. The following sections on data collection and data analysis provide the current study’s means for steps three through six. The results of the study – step seven – will be thoroughly detailed in the findings section of the current essay.

2.2. Data collection

Data collection for the present meta-ethnography occurred in two distinct phases. The first phase included a keyword search through a variety of academic databases to find appropriate articles. The second phase involved the researcher using the references in the articles

found in the first phase to discover more relevant articles. The remainder of this section will detail the steps taken by the researcher throughout the data collection phase.

2.2.1 Keyword search. The author began this study by conducted a thorough literature review using multiple databases (e.g., Academic Search Premier, Google Scholar, and Full Text Dissertations and Thesis) to uncover empirical research detailing the conceptions preservice social studies teachers have of democratic education. Keywords and phrases within this search included (though were not limited to): preservice social studies teachers conceptions of democratic education, teacher candidates conceptions of democratic education, preservice teachers perspectives toward democratic education, and democratic education within teacher education. Often times, the researcher used a combination of these phrases to increase certainty that all relevant and applicable articles were discovered. Articles found throughout the keyword search were scanned for relevance and saved for inclusion if they were found to be useful to answering the aforementioned research questions.

2.2.2. Citation-tracking. Once having sifted through the aforementioned search results to surface studies relevant to the current conversation, the researcher then used the citation-tracking method to discover more qualitative studies which could offer a strong understanding of the associations preservice social studies teachers make between democratic education and pedagogical practices and teacher responsibilities. In other words, studies found in the first phase of the literature review were then used as conduits for finding similar pieces that may serve to inform the researcher. The two primary studies guiding this system were Adler's (2008) chapter in the most recent *Handbook of Social Studies Education* and Dinkelman's (2012) unpublished conference paper "Conceptions of Democratic Citizenship in Preservice Social Studies Teacher Education: A Case Study". Using the references from these two pieces led to the discovery of both newer and lesser-known articles which contributed to the argument of the present meta-ethnography.

Once these two phases were completed and the researcher felt confident about the inclusion of all relevant articles, a table was constructed to provide an overview of the sources to be included within the findings. In total, 19 articles were selected to be included in the present studies. Of those, most were located within the existing body of relevant literature stemming from the United States. These studies were selected based on their relevance to the research questions. The table constructed throughout the data collection phase can be seen in Table 1.

Article	Context	Type of Qualitative Study	Participants
Adler & Confer (1998)	Secondary Social Studies teacher education program	Case study (observations and interviews)	14
Alfano, M. (2001)	PSTs in various SS programs	Case study	11
Angell, A. (1998)	Preservice Elem. SS.	Qualitative Case Study	2
Author (2015)	Secondary Social Studies Teacher Education Program	Qualitative Multi-case Study	6
Crowe, Hawley, Brooks (2012)	PSTs in SS programs for grades 7-12	Standardized Open-ended interviews	19
Cutsforth, J. (2010)	3 SS methods courses	Qualitative case study	24
Dinkelman, T. (1999)	Elementary SS	Multi-Case Study	3
Doppen, F. (2007)	Graduate SS methods course	Case Study	19
Dumas, W. (1993)	Programmatic Analysis in Social Studies Education	Case Study	N/A
Fitchett, Starker, Salyers (2012)	Secondary Social Studies (6-12) Methods Course	Pre- and Post-test (experimental study)	20
Gulsvig (2009)	Secondary Social Studies Program	Action Research & Case Study	10
Kubow, P. (1997)	Fifth year students in a secondary SS program	Descriptive study interview and questionnaire	147
Marshall, J. (2004)	Elementary SS	Multi-Case Interviews	3
Mathews S. & Dilworth, P. (2008)	Preservice social studies teachers	Multi-Case Study	5
Miscow & Patterson (2007)	Undergraduate preservice teachers.	11-item online survey	40

O'Brien & Smith (2011)	Preservice elementary teachers	Questionnaire	309
Pryor, C. (2006).	Elementary Education Pre- & In-service teachers	Questionnaire	27
Ross, D. D.; & Yeager, E. (1999).	Elementary Preservice Social Studies Teachers	Teaching rationale analysis	N/A
Ross, E. W. (1988)	General Teacher Education	Interviews	21
Wilkins, C. (1999)	Elementary and secondary preservice teachers	Surveyed 418 and interviewed 16	418
Wilson, Konopak, Readence (1994)	Secondary Social Studies Methods Course	Survey (11 participants) to a case study (1 participant)	1

Table 1: Articles Included in Meta-ethnography

2.3 Data Analysis

Because this study involved an exhaustive exploration into a robust body of literature in social studies teacher education, an open-coding (Merriam, 1998) process was implemented to continuously find relevant themes and codes to present as findings. The author, in other words, took notes and marked themes in the literature as the articles were initially being analyzed. Such codes were continuously expanded upon as the literature was analyzed until the majority of empirical studies had validated consistent themes. After having conducted the thorough literature review in which the researcher felt as though he had exhausted all of his resources and collected all of the available literature relevant to the present study, the researcher coded the articles through careful readings and explorations into relevant themes. These codes were paired with the themes found while conducting the literature review (in a way that allowed for tailoring the themes). Such analysis allowed for the synthesis of a variety of articles and the generation of new knowledge on preservice social studies teachers' conceptions of democratic and citizenship education.

Though several findings emerged throughout the present study that will be detailed in the following section, it bears noting within the methods portion of this essay that that this appears to

have been the first time a meta-ethnography was used within social studies teacher education to explore preservice social studies teachers' conceptions of the underlying theories of democratic education. Moreover, limited research appears to have been conducted on the extent to which preservice service social studies teachers associate their practice with that of the broad theories of democratic education. A number of articles exist which detail how preservice social studies teachers describe citizenship education or the extent to which such individuals understand various critical theories. However, both the data analysis and data collection phases surfaced no articles specifically detailing how social studies teacher candidates associate democratic education with their own

Returning to Susan Adler's chapter regarding the state of social studies teacher education, this chapter seeks to focus specifically on the knowledge, dispositions, and conceptions of preservice social studies teachers. To that end, this chapter separates itself from Adler's work through its focus on the conceptions preservice social studies teachers have toward theories of democratic education and social studies education. In this sense, the author seeks to remove the research from the programmatic aspect to teacher education and, instead, focus on the teacher candidates who experience social studies teacher education.

Results

Both within the data collection phase as well as the data analysis phase, several prominent themes emerged from the data. These themes included: 1) preservice teachers having an unclear understanding of democratic and citizenship education, 2) preservice teachers making limited associations between pedagogy and democratic education, 3) preservice teachers entering into programs as malleable candidates, and 4) teacher educators advocating for theories of democratic education as advocated for by the leading organization of the social studies – National Council for the Social Studies – as well as the current works of political theorists and educational scholars alike. The following section will specifically detail each of these themes.

3.1. Unclear understandings of democratic education. Though the current body of literature in social studies education detailing how preservice social studies teachers define theories of democratic education is lacking in substantial and longitudinal research, that which does exist paints a picture of teacher candidates in the United States who graduate from the traditional teacher education program without a true understanding of what democratic education is and how it can be incorporated into the social studies classroom. In other words, the vast

majority of literature available describes the typical teacher candidate who is about to graduate from an accredited teacher education program as limited in their understanding of how the social studies can help students think autonomously, correct social injustices, teach tolerance, and participate in the public sphere as engaged and informed citizens.

For instance, Kubow (1997) explored the attitudes and conceptions of 147 preservice social studies teachers to discover their understandings how they viewed civic education in the twenty-first century social studies classroom. Kubow's findings present an interesting and telling story. Foundationally speaking, Kubow's results demonstrated that her preservice teachers maintained a limited understanding of what "true" citizenship entails and how it would be taught in the classroom. Kubow's participants' conceptions of citizenship (under the umbrella of democratic education) were vague and lacking in the breath and depth necessary to promote citizenship within the classroom. More specifically, Kubow notes, "For most of the students interviewed, the concept of citizenship education is quite vague and indistinct" (p. 20). And though citizenship is an often-vague term in a theoretical and philosophical sense, Kubow describes this vague understanding as stemming from a lack of understanding on democratic processes. O'Brien and Smith (2011), like Kubow, found through a questionnaire of 309 preservice elementary teachers enrolled in a social studies course that the participants' general understanding of a "good citizen" is grounded in helping others and following the laws, what they referred to as a "legalist perspective" (p. 33).

Wilkins (1999) similarly surveyed 418 preservice teachers in the United Kingdom and found preservice teachers have a limited understanding of what democratic and citizenship education entails and that "there was much confusion over what it means to be 'a good citizen'" (p. 217). Though it again bears repeating that the definition of a "good citizen" is one that is both up for debate and frequently evolving (Boyle-Baise, 2003), Wilkins' findings of preservice teachers developing vague constructions of "good" citizens reflects the aforementioned studies detailing the conceptions preservice social studies teachers have of democratic and citizenship education. Such views reflected that of Kubow's results in that the teacher candidates did develop some understanding of democratic and citizenship education, but not enough for them to have developed a definitive rationale or philosophy for teaching social studies education under the guise of democratic education. Wilkins further found that the model presented to students in their courses (that of democratic education) ran counter to the one presented to preservice

teachers in their field placements and as in-service educators. In this sense, they received mixed signals throughout their experiences that served to confused them about their responsibilities in the classroom in regards to the aims of education.

In his dissertation, Alfano (2001) explored the beliefs of 11 preservice social studies teachers through a multi-case study analysis. His intentions were to understand how preservice social studies teachers conceptualized the act of teaching in an urban setting. Foundationally speaking and relating to the present conversation, two themes emerged within Alfano's study regarding how his participants conceptualized democratic education. The first was that participants viewed democratic education as a term related to government or politics. Secondly, Alfano found that for a couple of his participations, the term transcended politics to include ideas ranging from equality, equity, fairness, individuality, freedom, and fairness. Though relatively uplifting to read the latter of the two notions, the former presents a picture of future educators who are unable to see beyond the foundational understanding of democracy within the field of education. Similarly, Doerre Ross and Yeager (1999) conducted a qualitative study in which they focused primarily on the reflections of preservice social studies teachers in an elementary education program. Like Kubow, Wilkins, and Alfano, the authors described their participants as having limited understandings of democratic and citizenship education (and democratic processes as a whole). Specifically, the authors claimed that they "rated 3 papers high, 8 moderate, and 18 low in terms of demonstrated knowledge and understanding of democratic processes and principles" (p. 259).

After reading and synthesizing the articles used for the present meta-ethnography, it became quite clear that preservice social studies teachers frequently lack definitive and clear understandings of the key tenets of democratic education (especially in regards to social justice). Each of the aforementioned studies provided the present study with a vision of preservice teachers grappling with sophisticated and abstract notions of education that they had previously not been exposed to and failed to develop a full understanding of how such broad theories should influence their pedagogy.

3.2. Limited associations between teaching and democratic education. In addition to having a limited understanding of the broad theories of democratic education, a prominent theme to surface from the present meta-ethnography was that of preservice social studies teachers failing to make the connections expected of them by teacher education regarding effective

pedagogy and democratic education. In other words, teacher candidates as described in the literature fell short of making the appropriate associations between their responsibility as “stewards of democracy” and their vision for the social studies classroom. Though there are a number of reasons why this may be, Gulsvig (2009) found that her teacher candidates “think of themselves as transmitters of content already determined by academics in their field.” (p. 93). Here, it is argued that preservice social studies teachers see themselves as purveyors of knowledge, as opposed to curricular gatekeepers who make critical decisions on what students are taught.

Two decades ago, Goodman & Adler (1985) explored preservice elementary teachers conceptions of the social studies and details how participants placed the social studies as a subject in the American school system in six categories: social studies as a “non-subject”, human relations, citizenship, school knowledge, the great connection, and social justice. Similarly, Alicia Crowe, Todd Hawley and, Elizabeth Brooks (2012) explored the perspectives of 19 preservice social studies teachers in a way that delved into how their experiences in schools as students affected their perceptions of the traditional social studies teachers. Crowe, Hawley, and Brooks found that the participants created five categories for the social typical social studies teacher: information giver, content knowledge expert, “character”, caring and committed, “powerful”. Much like Goodman & Adler, the authors found that the conceptions preservice social studies teachers had of in-service social studies teachers was disconnected from the ideals of democratic education as advocated for by scholars, teacher-educators and policymakers alike.

Similarly, Mathews and Dilworth (2008) found that their own preservice social studies teachers were reluctant to critically analyze their own understandings, experiences, and assumptions in regards to multicultural citizenship education. Further, they discovered how their participants made claims mirroring the broad aims of the National Council for the Social Studies, but were less likely to incorporate such pedagogical approaches leading to equity in their own classrooms on account of a limited amount of critical self-reflection. Mathews and Dilworth’s findings reflect the foundational justifications for the present study, as they – like Dinkelman – found that preservice social studies teachers rarely internalized the critical theories of democratic education or incorporate such theories into their own practice.

Pryor (2006) conducted a study amongst 27 preservice teachers as they transitioned through their first year of in-service teaching. Pryor discovered four themes among the

participants: 1) they remembered the broad aims and ideals of democratic education, 2) they recognized the value of democratic education in enhancing their teaching, 3) they recognized the value of democratic education in enhancing students' learning, and 4) they want strategies for democratic education to be modeled for them throughout their methods courses. Pryor's study is key in this sense in that it demonstrates how preservice teachers all value democratic principles of education in the classroom, but are often unsure or unclear on how to implement such strategies into their classroom practice.

As a final example, Author (2015) conducted a multi-case study on six preservice social studies teachers attempting to explore the associations the participants between democratic education and the use of discussion in the social studies classroom. The findings of the study suggested that though the preservice social studies teachers did associate the use of discussion with broad theories of democratic education, these ideas were primarily linked to citizenship education, as opposed to principles of social justice including inequities, social reform, and multiculturalism. Therefore, the available literature and present meta-ethnography describe how the theories of democratic education advocated for by teacher educators often do not resonate within preservice teachers' aims for the classroom.

3.3. Malleability of preservice teachers. An interesting finding to surface within the research was that of how malleable teacher candidates were upon entering into their teacher education program. Multiple articles noted how preservice social studies teachers began their program without even a foundational understanding of the broad theories of democratic education and, therefore, remained malleable to the ideas advocated for in their coursework (including lectures, readings, and class discussions). Providing anecdotal evidence, Barton (2012) eloquently reflects upon his own experiences with preservice teachers by claiming:

My own students, future social studies teachers from cities and towns speckled across the Midwest, have admirable reasons for wanting go teach – from developing children's potential, to making them feel valued, to providing role models. But there is one thing they never say, at least not at the beginning of their program: no one wants to be come a teacher to improve democracy. They are not alone. The reasons people have for becoming teachers are remarkably consistent, and while most of those reasons are commendable, they are not necessarily relevant to preparing students for democratic participation. (p. 167)

Barton's analysis is one that is reminiscent of many teacher educators. Preservice teachers do not typically become teachers to help foster citizenship in students. Rather, they become educators because they have family members who were teachers, enjoy working with the youth, or simply are drawn to the idea of working a 180-day school year. Therefore, one would be hard-pressed to find a single scholarly article describing a preservice teacher citing theories of democratic education as their primary justification for entering into the field of social studies education.

Despite such findings, however, the literature on preservice social studies teachers carefully described such individuals not as blank slates, but as unfamiliar with theories of democratic education. This is seen in Adler and Confer's (1998) research detailing the understandings of citizenship education prior to beginning their social studies methods course. What they found was similar to that of Barton; preservice social studies teachers rarely have a foundation toward democratic and citizenship education upon beginning their social studies education program. In this sense, "students did not enter the methods class with a clearly articulated rationale for social studies [or] with an explicit focus on a central idea of citizenship" (p. 18).

Moreover, the teacher candidates described by both Barton and Adler & Confer had preconceived notions of the social studies based on their own experiences as students ("apprenticeship of observation" as seen in Lortie's *The Schoolteacher*). However, such experiences did not provide them with an understanding toward the broad aims and objectives of democratic education as put forth by the field of social studies education. Therefore, the research seems to emphasize that teacher educators do not necessarily need to "undo" preservice social studies' teachers' conceptions of democratic education. Rather, they had to be constructed from the foundation.

Marshall (2004) took a similar approach though with an emphasis on preservice elementary teachers and, specifically, their views on teaching the social studies (a subject they were not majoring in, but were required to take a course in for their coursework). Marshall uses an interview case-study approach to investigate "initial and developing ideas of teaching elementary social studies overtime" (p. iv). Marshall ultimately finds that prior experiences in the social studies impact the ways in which preservice teachers view the subject and intend on teaching it. However, she also notes that these views – though relevant – are fluid and subject to

change. Marshall found her participant's conceptions toward the social studies changed throughout the course of her three-month study, but also found that the issues the preservice teachers faced throughout their student-teaching placement often prevented or limited the transfer of these newfound beliefs into practice. This was similarly seen in Wilson, Konopak and Readence's (1994) single case study in which they found that prior to taking more traditional approaches to teaching, their participant "espoused beliefs that generally reflected those of his methods instructor" (p. 376). In other words, Marshall and Wilson, Konopak, and Readence found that preservice social studies teachers *can* be influenced by their methods courses. What they found, however, was that these views often faded throughout student teaching.

Doppen (2007), likewise, found "that a teacher education program can make a difference [and] teacher educators can influence the beliefs preservice teachers hold about teaching and learning of social studies" (p. 62). Doppen, more specifically, conducted a qualitative case study with 19 graduate social studies educators in which he sought to explore the effects of a teacher education program on the perspectives of preservice social studies teachers. Broadly speaking, the results of his study found that the teacher candidates *did* have ideas toward education, but their notions and perspectives toward the social studies specifically could be crafted due to their lack of understanding of the field as a whole. Though his focus was not on democratic education specifically (albeit certainly theories which fit under that umbrella term), he found that the participants in her study were influenced by their experiences in the program including – thought not limited to – field experiences, coursework, and professors' ideals.

Fitchett, Starker, and Salyers (2012) similarly note that preservice social studies teachers can be taught to appreciate culturally responsive pedagogy and integrate it into their philosophies for teaching when they are thoroughly introduced to its meaning in their methods course. In other words, in their experimental study conducted with 20 secondary social studies education majors, they found a positive connection between their use of a model emphasizing culturally responsive teaching and their students' dispositions toward its use in the social studies. Again, such a finding confirms that teacher education does matter and can be used to create reform-oriented educators.

Ross (1988) found similar results to Lortie's text and Marshall's study regarding the apprenticeship of observation and teacher candidates' malleability, respectively. Ross found that his participants were reluctant to changing their personal beliefs and that "the influence of social

structural forces, such as teacher education course work and field experiences, was marginal and did not produce deep internal changes in the belief systems of the respondents” (p. 106). Ross, rather, noted how participants’ perspectives were shaped through personal backgrounds, social structural forces, and how they actively affected their own experiences within their teacher education program. In this sense, Ross notes that preservice teachers – though malleable – can change their perspectives toward education (including democratic education) on their own terms.

In a manner reflective of Ross, Angell (1998) found that preservice teachers did have views upon entering into the program that created friction between program goals and teacher candidates’ prior beliefs. However, Angell found that programs – when providing overlapping and consistent themes – had the potential to restructure preservice social studies teachers’ beliefs in a manner that could inform them on democratic education. Angell’s findings suggest that the conceptions preservice teachers hold have more of an influence than author authors, but that these can be overcome with planned overlap between professors, field instructors, and cooperating teachers. Angell, therefore, argues the same idea that teacher education does matter through its ability to restructure the beliefs of preservice social studies teachers through careful planning.

In her dissertation, Cutsforth (2010) conducted a qualitative multi-site case study exploring how preservice social studies teachers’ views in social studies developed over their methods course. Though the entirety of her study was intriguing, the finding relevant to the present conversation was her discovery on the connections her participants made between citizenship education and the social studies by the time they had completed their social studies methods course. Cutsforth, more specifically, followed her participants to discover how their views on citizenship education aligned more closely to the social studies as the semester progressed and their professors introduced them to such theories. These findings, therefore, reflected those of the rest of the literature detailing how preservice teachers could have their beliefs and understandings altered within their programs and provide another layer to the argument that teacher candidates’ views are adjustable and can be tailored to broad theories in democratic education.

Ultimately, the literature on the malleability of preservice social studies teachers reads rather positively. As Adler and Confer note, though the participants in their study had limited understanding of democratic and citizenship education, they took well to the theories and

“almost every student was comfortable with the idea and found it to be a useful concept for focusing their thinking about curriculum” (p. 18). Moreover, the literature suggests that teacher educators do have the potential to positively influence the views of preservice social studies in a manner aligning with broad theories of democratic education; they often just have to construct these notions from the foundation. Whereas theories of “washing out” and teacher socialization (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981) and “apprenticeship of observation” were often evident, they were not definitive in the sense that teacher education was seen as effective in a variety of ways – including the shaping of teacher candidates’ conceptions of democratic education. What was consistent may not have been the level of influence prior beliefs had on preservice social studies teachers, but, rather, the ability of teacher education programs to restructure these beliefs to align in many ways to broad theories of democratic education.

3.4. Teacher educators do advocate for democratic education. Despite a seemingly bleak outlook regarding the understandings preservice social studies teachers have toward the field of social studies and the broad theories of democratic education, there existed a plethora of literature demonstrating teacher education’s emphasis on incorporating theories of democratic education into their courses (e.g., Adler, 2008; Cutsforth, 2010; Dumas, 1993). Such findings extended into critical theories of multicultural education (grounded in race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ESOL students, and other diverse student characteristics), citizenship education (emphasizing political engagement and understanding), and autonomous thinking and acting predicated on rationality and evidence-based reasoning.

Dumas (1993) conducted the most recent and thorough analysis of what teacher educators at major universities teach in social studies education. Dumas noted that an overwhelming majority of programs use the National Council for the Social Studies as the foundation for both coursework and program themes. To that end, Dumas noted that the organization’s aim of promoting citizenship education “to equip a citizenry with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for active and engaged civic life” underlies the majority of social studies teacher education programs (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013, para. 1). And though he notes that preservice teachers often do not fully comprehend the NCSS strands (or their broader objectives), they are introduced to social studies teacher candidates both implicitly and explicitly.

Further – and perhaps a bit sophomoric of a statement – the present research study could not exist had the field of teacher education not advocated for prominent themes in democratic

education. In other words, this study's foundation was contingent on finding evidence that teacher education does support the aforementioned broad aims of a democratic education. Without such findings, seeking the extent to which preservice social studies teacher associate with and internalize principles of democratic education would seem arbitrary. To that end, the simply extensive review of the literature exploring the levels of democratic education infused into social studies teacher education curriculums proved the extent to which the field of social studies teacher education sees itself as responsible for preparing Parker's "stewards of democracy".

Discussion

The presented findings of this study paint both a positive and negative image of the field of social studies and teacher education. On the one hand, teacher education as a whole appears to be falling short of its goal of preparing preservice social studies teachers who are capable of incorporating the many theories of democratic education into their classrooms. In this sense, preservice social studies teachers are completing a multitude of courses where they are being exposed to ideas that they are not fully internalized or understood. The present research, therefore, demonstrates how the ideal social studies teacher is rarely developed within teacher education despite an enduring body of literature being produced on the necessity for such educators.

At the same time, however, the same candidates who are not fully recognizing their responsibilities as "stewards of democracy" do appear to be leaving their teacher education programs having developed *some* understanding of democratic education. In other words, having entered into their programs as "blank slates" in terms of democratic education, they are leaving their programs with a foundational understanding of their roles within the society as developers of educated and participatory citizens who demonstrate tolerance and advocate for change. And though they may not be grasping every tenet of democratic education called for by the field of education, they have shown growth in this area. For instance, Misco and Patterson (2007) found that over 80% of the participants in their study viewed the use of controversial issues as aligning with the mission of the school system. Though a microcosm of an example, this finding does illustrate how preservice teachers can hold a positive view of an essential component of a democratic education. This meta-ethnography, therefore, demonstrates that by the time the traditional preservice social studies teacher graduates from their teacher education program, they

do have a working understanding of their role of fostering individuals capable of entering into a pluralist society as informed and participatory citizens.

Consider both of these points, it is clear to see that the field of education – like any large ecosystem – remains a fluid entity that is consistently reflecting upon and adapting to its many elements. In this sense, the field is still working to define democratic education and prepare its future educators to achieve this abstract concept’s underlying objectives in their own classrooms. However, doing so successfully is not something that happens over night (or within the traditional two year teacher-education program). Rather, teacher educators must seek to generate the “lifelong learners” often called for within the K12 classroom to encourage in-service teachers to stay updated on current literature, consistently reflect both on their practice and the aims of education, and continue to adapt their practice to new ideas and understandings.

Teacher education, thus, must take into consideration the research on what preservice teachers know about democratic education and how they foresee themselves incorporating such ideas into their own practice. This information must subsequently be used within teacher education both on a macro- and micro-scale to assist teacher educators in preparing teacher candidates in novel ways to assist them in internalizing theories of democratic education. Additionally, such knowledge on preservice teachers must be used to assist preservice teachers to develop a sense of ownership and interest in their responsibilities as social studies teachers. In other words, only when teacher educators understand what preservice teachers know can they tailor curriculum and instruction to the generation of candidates who have an understanding and interest in the aims of education.

Conclusion

This meta-ethnography has the potential to influence those in the field of social studies education in a manner grounded in empirical evidence and reflective of the aims of social studies education. In this sense, the researcher used evidence not to advocate for what preservice social studies teacher *should* know but, rather, present a consensus of what they *do* know. Moreover, if the fields of teacher education and social studies education aim to prepare preservice teachers to foster the aims of both a democratic and civic education in the 21st century social studies classroom, an understanding of their knowledge bases must be developed.

At the current time of the present essay’s generation, limited research existed detailing the perspectives, conceptions, and views of preservice social studies teachers (especially in

regards to teaching the social studies). Therefore, more literature is needed on this critical area in teacher education. Future research must look into how preservice social studies teachers are prepared, the extent to which this preparation differs internationally, and the most effective means for preparing preservice teachers to understand the promise of the social studies. Ideally, this study will contribute to this aim and begin a dialogue amongst scholars on how to best prepare them to serve as effective “stewards of democracy”.

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