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Voices of Cooperating Teachers and Preservice Teachers: Implications for Elementary Social Studies Education

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While elementary teachers and administrators are feeling No Child Left Behind pressure to devote more time to literacy, mathematics, and science education, the need for well-informed democratic citizens has never declined. National social studies standards state that “The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (National Council for Social Studies, 1994, p. 3). Social Studies teacher educators continue to promote viable and effective citizenship instruction, however, reports from the field suggest that social studies education in elementary classrooms has been marginalized (Passe, 1999; Rock, Heafner, Oldendorf, Good, & O’Connor, 2004; VanFossen, 2005). In order to promote teaching social studies more effectively at both the elementary level and teacher education level, it is important to examine the current status of elementary social studies education and social studies teacher education.

The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) position statement of powerful teaching and learning in the social studies (1993) provides a theoretical framework for viewing practice in the field of elementary social studies education. This position statement asserts that social studies must prepare children to assume citizenship responsibilities in a “culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (p. 213). Social studies should be meaningful (useful inside and outside of school), integrative, value-based, challenging, and active. Is this sort of powerful teaching and learning occurring in contemporary Illinois elementary classrooms? What can teacher educators (in universities and K-12 schools) do in conjunction with preservice teachers to promote more powerful teaching of social studies?

Social studies teacher education at the university level usually centers in social studies methods courses, which typically coordinate with field experiences. Examining the intersection between cooperating teachers who work with universities and preservice teachers in elementary education provides insights to improve social studies education. Grounded in teacher education literature, this research examines preservice teachers’ beliefs and cooperating teachers’ beliefs about social studies education.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What beliefs do cooperating teachers in school-university partnership districts have about elementary social studies?
2. What beliefs do preservice teachers have about elementary social studies?
3. How do their beliefs compliment or conflict with each other?
4. What are better ways to connect social studies methods classes with current practices in elementary classrooms?



Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

As teacher education programs across the country are being held increasingly accountable for the development of prospective teachers' content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge, these same programs are being encouraged to collaborate with K-12 teachers to develop and implement contextually rich field experiences that integrate methods course instruction with public school practices (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Goodlad, 1990; Holmes Group, 1986, 1990). The importance of the integration between methods course instruction and classroom practice has been discussed for over four decades, since John Goodlad (1965) stated,

If there is any place in the teacher education program where theory and practice must be brought together, it is in that phase called methods... The continued teaching of methods courses divorced from the classroom or its simulated likeness is a malpractice which we can ill afford to perpetuate. (p. 265-266)

Much previous research has called for teacher preparation programs to connect university classes and field experiences more closely (Fullan, Galluzzo, Morris, & Watson, 1998; Holmes Group, 1986; Howey & Zimpher, 1989). Although Meuwissen (2005) has emphasized the importance of addressing the disconnections between the social studies methods course and classroom practice, extensive research on the teaching of social studies methods has been limited (Adler, 1991; Slekar, 2005).

Literature suggests that there are many beliefs about the purpose and state of social studies (Barth & Shermis, 1970; Gross & Dynneson, 1983). Recently, the Fordham Foundation published a diatribe against social studies education entitled, "Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong?" calling the field "moribund" and blaming "ed school professors, textbook authors, state and local social studies supervisors, and their ilk" (Leming, Ellington, & Porter, 2003, p. iv). While these polemical essays from the Fordham Foundation garnered some media attention, none of them was based on any new data or systematic analysis of the field. Our research examines qualitative and quantitative data to improve social studies education at both the collegiate and elementary levels.

Historically teachers have been seen by policy makers and school district officers as people who carry out the curriculum decisions made by others (Griffin, 1994). The implicit belief was that curriculum planning required specialized knowledge and skill and could be accomplished at a location removed from the students who were to be taught. Teachers and teacher preparation programs were meant to focus on "methods" of instruction and lesson planning, with modest attention to curriculum. But, in the last two decades, more focus in teacher education has shifted to acknowledge that teachers wield great power in determining what curriculum and instruction is offered to their students (Griffin, 1994; Thornton, 1991, 1995). Therefore, it is helpful to investigate teachers' and future teachers' beliefs about social studies, since their beliefs influence curriculum and instructional decision making in social studies.

Beliefs are powerful in preservice education because they can support professional development or undermine teacher education programs (Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & James,



2002). According to Goodlad (1990), preservice teachers' values and beliefs about teaching and teacher education do not change much over the course of their university programs. So, having a clear snapshot of those beliefs can inform teacher educators working with preservice teachers throughout their teacher preparation program.

Methodology

This study uses mixed-methods (Cresswell, 1994) with both quantitative and qualitative data collected over a period of two years. Quantitative data relies on structured interviews of cooperating teachers and surveys of preservice teachers. Qualitative data includes focus group meetings with cooperating teachers and open-ended responses in the structured interviews and surveys.

Setting and Participants

In this study, 172 cooperating teachers in nine districts within Northern Illinois and 89 preservice teachers at one Illinois university participated. The university's undergraduate elementary education program usually competitively admits 120 to 150 students each fall semester and 70 to 90 students each spring. The elementary education program includes four semesters focusing on teaching and learning different academic subjects, such as science, social studies, literacy, math, and other classes that are taught through a variety of departments across the university. One of those semesters includes student teaching, while two other semesters incorporate a field experience.

While the preservice teachers are in the field, elementary education faculty occasionally visit schools, and a university clinical coordinator "checks on" teacher candidates a couple of times per semester. In addition, university faculty meet with the partnership district liaisons twice per semester to discuss their expectations and reflections on the preservice teachers' field experience.

The preservice teacher participants were in their second semester in an elementary education program, which includes their third clinical experience before student teaching. Like most teacher education programs nationally, the teacher candidates in this program are predominantly Caucasian (89.9%), although there are 1.6% African-American, 4.2% Asian and 3.2% with Hispanic ancestry. The demographics of the preservice teachers included 11.6% male and 88.4% female. Also, 11.5% of the preservice teachers are non-traditional (older than 22 years) in age.

The university has some level of partnership with the school districts housing teachers in this study; however, the levels of commitment to the partnership vary. Cooperating teachers in these partnership districts agree to mentor preservice teachers, as a minimum. In the most developed partnerships, cooperating teachers support social studies curriculum development and research through collaboration with university faculty and preservice teachers. The cooperating teachers who participated in this study vary in their partnership commitment, years of teaching experience, as well as their grade level placements. For example, the cooperating teachers' years of experience ranged from 0 years to 35 years, and their grade level assignments ranged from 1st to 5th grade.



Structured Interviews

The initial structured interview protocol for cooperating teachers was developed and used by social studies university faculty in North Carolina, and it was shared at the 2004 College and University Faculty Assembly (CUFA) meeting of NCSS. The initial structured interview protocol was modified to accommodate the purpose of this study; however, the modifications were minor. Appendix A includes the instrument used for this study.

Structured interviews of cooperating teachers were conducted by preservice teachers at the beginning of their social studies methods course. Training for preservice teachers was provided during their social studies method classes. For example, preservice teachers learned how and why to obtain informed consent, how to create an open atmosphere, and how to use the established protocol.

The structured interview protocol for the cooperating teachers consisted of a series of questions focused on 1) time devoted to social studies instruction, 2) satisfaction with social studies instructional time, 3) familiarity with social studies standards, 4) preferred teaching methods for social studies, 5) barriers to teaching social studies, 6) rationale for pedagogical and curricula decision-making, and 7) expectations for the university social studies methods course.

In addition to the closed questions, qualitative data was collected through open-ended questions from the structured interview with cooperating teachers. The open-ended questions for the structured interview protocol inquired about the cooperating teachers' motivation for teaching social studies and particular themes or topics that are taught by the interviewee.

Survey

The survey taken by preservice teachers (see Appendix B) was administered at the end of their social studies methods courses. The survey instrument for preservice teachers mirrored the structured interview protocol developed for cooperating teachers, focusing on the seven items listed above. However, some modifications were made, since the preservice teachers did not have year-long teaching experiences. For example, the questions asking about cooperating teachers' experiences were either removed or changed to ask about the preservice teachers' future plans. The instrument was just used as a survey with the preservice teachers, not as a structured interview, due to time constraints.

In addition, qualitative data was collected through open-ended questions from the preservice teacher surveys. The open-ended questions on the preservice teacher survey queried about reasons for teaching social studies and how the social studies methods class could better assist them.

Focus Groups

For more in-depth examination of social studies education in practice, focus group meetings were held with cooperating teachers in four school-university partnership districts. These focus groups were held at the partnership schools and conducted by the researchers who teach social studies methods courses and work with preservice teachers placed in those districts. All cooperating teachers currently mentoring the preservice teachers in a given district were invited to the focus group meetings after school. Three teachers attended three of the focus groups and 11 teachers attended the fourth focus group. The focus group meetings lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, and the conversations were audio taped and transcribed.



The focus group protocol for cooperating teachers examined 1) cooperating teachers' current and preferred methods of instruction, 2) curriculum, 3) goals for preservice teacher education, 4) perceptions of preservice teacher preparation, and 5) how professors of social studies education might better collaborate with cooperating teachers.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the quantitative data, first, descriptive statistics were calculated from the structured interview and survey data to see what cooperating teachers' and preservice teachers' beliefs are about teaching social studies in elementary classrooms. To examine any differences in the characteristics of cooperating teachers, they were divided into two groups: Grade 1-3 and Grade 4 and 5. Since there was no statistically significant difference in the groups' responses, they were analyzed as one group: cooperating teachers.

In addition, the structured interview results from the cooperating teachers were compared to the survey results from the preservice teachers. Chi-square and Kruskal-Wallis H tests were used to compare the responses from cooperating teachers and preservice teachers. Chi-square was used to compare the responses that included nominal values (e.g., different categories, etc.), and Kruskal-Wallis H, non-parametric tests were used to compare the responses that included ordinal values (e.g., ranking, continuous distribution, etc.).

The transcripts from focus group meetings and open-ended responses from the interviews and surveys were analyzed using a constant-comparative method to develop codes and themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Verbatim transcripts and written responses were carefully examined through repeated readings to find patterns. Responses were coded, similar codes were collapsed into categories, and then findings were determined by strong themes which were repeated in at least three out of the four focus groups. Similar responses were categorized from open-ended questions in order to create frequency counts of suggestions offered for better ways of preparing social studies teachers in the university social studies methods course.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations require caution in interpreting the findings from this study. First, the survey of the preservice teachers was given at the end of the semester in which they were taking their social studies methods class. Thus, their responses may have been more representative of their university professors' ideas than the beliefs that the preservice teachers would espouse in the long-term as teachers. It is also possible that the preservice teachers' views would be influenced by their conversations with their cooperating teachers during the semester. (Although it is interesting to note that the preservice teachers' views and cooperating teachers' views are often different). Secondly, the qualitative and quantitative data collected from the cooperating teachers relied on self-reporting rather than direct observation. Hence, the cooperating teachers may have been describing favored teaching techniques and curriculum decisions that reflect what they "wish" to do, rather than what they really are doing. Finally, all the data was collected in one geographic region in which there is no state social studies test required, so the data may not apply to states where high-stakes testing in social studies abounds.

Findings



Findings from this study provide insight about cooperating teachers' and preservice teachers' beliefs about social studies education and the similarities and differences between them. While the findings must be interpreted with caution because of the limitations described earlier, they document current challenges relevant to social studies education.

Commitment to Teaching Social Studies

When the cooperating teachers were asked to rank their commitment to teach social studies compared to language arts, mathematics, and science, three percent of the cooperating teachers ranked social studies first, three percent ranked social studies second, 59% ranked social studies third, and 35% ranked social studies fourth (see Table 1). When the same question was asked to the preservice teachers, six percent of the preservice teachers ranked social studies first, 16% ranked social studies second, 48% ranked it third, and 30% ranked social studies as the fourth most important commitment.

Table 1. Cooperating teachers' and preservice teachers' commitment to teach social studies

	Cooperating Teachers	Preservice Teachers
1 st	3%	6%
2 nd	3%	16%
3 rd	59%	48%
4 th	35%	30%

In fact, ranks attributed to 'commitment to social studies' were found to be statistically significantly ($p=.016$) higher for pre-service teachers ($MR=115.22$, $n=88$) when compared to the cooperating teachers ($MR=136.17$, $n=169$). Although both cooperating teachers and pre-service teachers reported a median rank of 3.0, pre-service teachers deemed social studies significantly higher in their rank overall (see Table 2)

Interestingly, ranks attributed to 'commitment to mathematics' were found to be statistically significantly ($p=.000$) higher for cooperating teachers ($MR=118.07$, $n=168$) when compared to the preservice teachers ($MR=149.62$, $n=89$). Although both cooperating teachers and pre-service teachers reported a median rank of 2.0, cooperating teachers were deemed significantly higher in their rank overall.

Table 2. Comparison of commitment to teach different subject areas

	CTs (Mean Rank)	PTs (Mean Rank)	Chi-Square	Significant
Language Arts	128.16	133.52	1.1	.294
Mathematics	118.07	149.62	21.9	.000*
Social Studies	136.17	115.22	5.8	.016*
Science	132.08	120.25	1.8	.171

Note. CTs represents cooperating teachers, and PTs represents preservice teachers



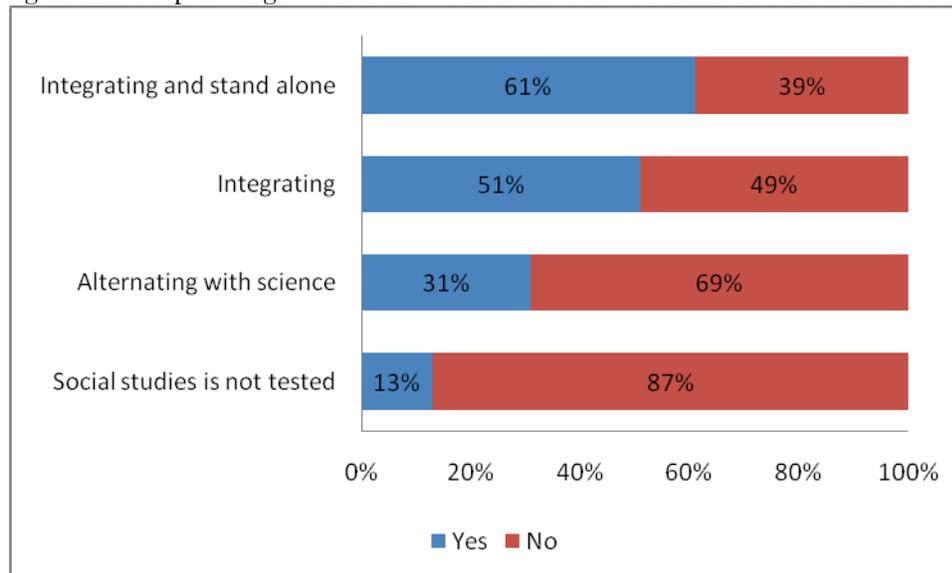
* indicates statistical significance

Instructional Time for Social Studies Education

In responding to the question asking about the amount of time spent (or should be spent) on social studies standards, the preservice teachers reported a preference for spending more time on social studies standards than the cooperating teachers. But, when compared statistically, there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups' mean rankings.

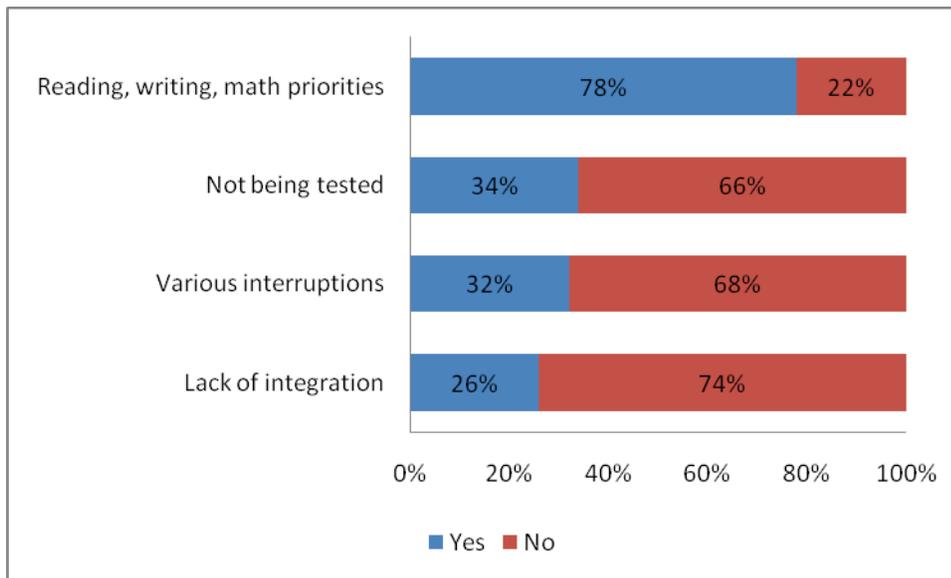
When reasons for their contentment with current social studies instructional time were asked, 51% of the cooperating teachers said that being able to integrate social studies across the curriculum, and 61% cited integrating social studies with other subject areas and the ability to teach social studies as a separate subject (as one response item) as reasons for their satisfaction with the amount of time devoted to social studies. Also, 31% answered that they were satisfied because they can alternate social studies instructional time with science. Meanwhile, 13% said that they were satisfied with the amount of time devoted to social studies since social studies is not tested by the state (see Figure 1). There was no significant difference between the cooperating teachers' and preservice teachers' responses.

Figure 1. Cooperating teachers' reasons for satisfaction with current instructional time



In contrast, cooperating teachers who were not satisfied with the amount of time devoted to social studies instruction believed that insufficient time was due to reading, writing and mathematics priorities (78%), not being tested (34%), various interruptions, such as pull-outs (32%), and lack of integration (26%) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Cooperating teachers' reasons for dissatisfaction with current social studies instructional time



When asked how they thought decisions should be made regarding instructional time in social studies, there was a significant difference between the preservice teachers' desires and the cooperating teachers' report of how decisions are actually made. In responding to the question asking how social studies instructional time is determined, ten percent of the cooperating teachers answered that administrators determine how instructional time is used in their classroom, 36% of the cooperating teachers said teachers determine how instructional time is used in their classroom, and 46% said that the decision is made by a set policy in the school with some flexibility.

In responding to the question asking how decisions should be made regarding instructional time in social studies, one percent of preservice teachers answered that administrators should determine how instructional time is used in their classroom, 36% of the preservice teachers said that teachers should determine the social studies instructional time, and 60% of the preservice teachers answered that instructional time in social studies should be determined by a set policy for the school, allowing teachers some flexibility.

When the responses from the cooperating teachers and the preservice teachers were compared, there was a statistically significant difference between preservice teachers' preference and the cooperating teachers' practice (chi square = 11.78. df = 3, $p < 0.01$). Cooperating teachers were more likely to perceive administrators as decision makers regarding the allocation of instructional time to social studies, when compared to pre-service teachers who prefer to follow a school or district policy. Neither of these findings bodes well for Thornton's (1991) theory of instructional gatekeeping. Thornton has argued that teachers' role as gatekeepers (deciding what curriculum will actually be taught in their own classrooms) is crucial. But, if inservice teachers and preservice teachers both accept that administrators and school policy will dictate their instructional decisions, teachers are abdicating even their gatekeeping power.

Confidence in Implementing the State Standards

In responding to the question asking how carefully they read the Illinois Learning Standards for Social Science, 35 % of the cooperating teachers said that they read them carefully,



39% said that they read the standards moderately, 24 % said that they read them briefly and one percent said that they had never examined them (see Table 3). In responding to the same question, seven percent of the preservice teachers indicated they read the standards carefully, 36% said that they read them moderately, 55% said that they read them briefly, and two percent said that they had never read the standards.

Table 3. Level of reading social studies standards

	Cooperating Teachers	Preservice Teachers
Carefully	35 %	7 %
Moderately	39 %	36 %
Briefly	24 %	55 %
Never	1 %	2 %

Note. Total may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Similarly, when the cooperating teachers were asked how confident they are in addressing the state standards, 24% said that they can fully address the standards, 68 % said that they can adequately address the standards, eight percent said that they had given insufficient attention to the standards, and no cooperating teachers said that they did not pay attention to the standards (See Table 4). In responding to the same question, fourteen percent of the preservice teachers answered that they can fully address the standards, 78% said that they can adequately address the standards, nine percent said that they have given insufficient attention to the standards. No preservice teachers said that they did not pay attention to the standards.

Table 4. Level of confidence in addressing social studies standards

	Cooperating Teachers	Preservice Teachers
Fully	24 %	14 %
Adequately	68 %	78 %
Insufficiently	8 %	9 %
No attention	0 %	0 %

Note. Total may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Using chi square to compare these two groups' responses, a statistically significant difference was found (See Table 5). Cooperating teachers perceived their familiarity with social studies standards to be significantly ($p=.000$) greater ($MR=146.09$, $n=169$) when compared to pre-service teacher perceptions ($MR=96.18$, $n=88$). While a plurality of cooperating teachers described their reading of social studies standards as being moderate, most pre-service teachers reported reading the standards only 'briefly'.

Table 5. Comparison of reading and addressing social studies standards between cooperating teachers and preservice teachers



	CTs (Mean Rank)	PTs (Mean Rank)	Chi-Square	Significance
Familiarity with SS Standards	146.09	96.18	29.5	.000*
Confidence in Addressing Standards	135.15	116.02	6.2	.013*

Note. CTs represents cooperating teachers, and PTs represents preservice teachers

* indicates statistical significance

Cooperating teachers perceived their ability to address social studies standards to be significantly ($p=.013$) greater (MR=135.15, $n=167$) than pre-service teachers' perceptions (MR=116.02, $n=89$). Although both cooperating teachers and pre-service teachers reported a median response of 3.0 ('adequately') in addressing social studies standards during instruction, cooperating teachers were deemed significantly higher in rank overall.

Considering that 25% of the cooperating teachers had briefly or never examined the social studies standards and 57% of the preservice teachers had only briefly or never examined the standards, it is surprising that there was so much confidence in addressing the standards. It is particularly surprising that so many of the preservice teachers reported only briefly examining the standards, since they were completing the survey at the end of their university social studies methods course. If they had not carefully read them at this point, when would they read them? Although the preservice teachers are less confident in implementing the social studies standards than the cooperating teachers, both groups' responses indicated that they are more confident in implementing the standards than they might be when considering their lack of personal knowledge of the standards. It may be that teachers are assuming that the textbooks they use for social studies cover the state standards. It may also be that teachers perceive these state standards as less important to read than those content area standards that are tested with high-stakes.

Methods Preferred in Contemporary Elementary Social Studies Classrooms

Both preservice and cooperating teachers value the integration of social studies instruction with other subject areas. In responding to the question asking about their preferred teaching methods in elementary classrooms, both groups selected integration of social studies with other content areas and teaching social studies as a stand alone subject (as one response item) as their preferred way of teaching social studies.

In surveys, 83% of the preservice teachers selected integration of social studies with other content areas and teaching social studies as a stand alone subject as their preferred way of teaching, while 68% of the cooperating teachers had that preference. The second most frequently chosen response from both groups was integrating social studies with another subject area. When the preservice and cooperating teachers' responses to this question were compared using the chi-square test, there existed no significant association between the approach to social studies' instruction and the type of the teacher group (cooperating teachers vs. preservice teachers).



In focus groups, many cooperating teachers described “switching” between science and social studies teaching, but they strongly supported integration of social studies. A teacher in one district explained that although she usually rotated between a science unit for two weeks, then a social studies unit for two weeks, in one month she integrated science and social studies with a unit on the Earth. The Earth unit incorporated interdisciplinary concepts such as erosion, recycling, and landforms. In a similar vein, two third grade teachers described integrating social studies into units on insects or bears as “the only way that we can see to ever fit it [social studies] in.” Integration of social studies into an insect unit was explained as, “talk[ing] about the insect community, the ants, and human communities, people, and correlat[ing] their differences and likenesses.” Another teacher explained her practice of integration as doing “Roman numerals along with Italy, and we have the children do math problems in Spanish.”

Teachers in all four focus groups discussed at length the importance of integrating social studies and literacy instruction. One teacher said, “Social Studies really has to be a time [when] you are teaching strategies for how you...read that kind of text.” Understanding non-fiction and tackling textbooks were identified as key social studies skills. Teachers described using their social studies time to teach reading strategies, note taking, study skills, and “power writing.”

In addition to the integration of social studies with other subjects, cooperating teachers discussed their preferred social studies teaching strategies. They most frequently identified cooperative learning, simulations, and other activities in a “real life context” as their “best methods” for teaching elementary social studies. Capturing students’ attention, fostering enthusiasm, and working in small groups were key values expressed by cooperating teachers when they were asked to describe the methods that they preferred in their social studies instruction. For example, teachers in several districts identified “jig-sawing” (a popular cooperative learning structure) as a favorite way to teach social studies. Also, one teacher described cutting up straws and attaching feathers to them so that students could “write with a quill pen and dip it in ink, and they realize how hard it would have been to write the Constitution” to make social studies come alive.

In order to make social studies relevant to children’s lives, several teachers discussed ways of “making connections between different historical time periods.” For example, one teacher explained how he wanted his students to explore the role of government intelligence in Pearl Harbor and 9/11. Another teacher described helping children make connections to parents and grandparents to understand different time periods and the connections between them.

Recommendations for University Social Studies Methods Classes

In focus group discussions, cooperating teachers indicated that they rely heavily on reading to teach social studies, and preservice teachers should learn how to teach reading skills from their social studies methods course. As a result, they believe that teaching a “big word” and how to “read non-fiction books” is important in social studies education. One cooperating teacher said, “I think the most important strategies [preservice teachers] need to know is how to teach kids to read non-fiction text. We’re learning the content, but even more, we’re learning...what do I do if I don’t know what that word means? Why are there captions under pictures? I think [preservice teachers] really need strategies.”



Because both cooperating teachers and preservice teachers highly value hands-on activities and motivating students, they wish social studies methods classes would model high-interest activities. For example, one cooperating teacher described her goals for preservice social studies teachers by saying, “I hope they learn ways to interest the students. If the teacher can’t interest the students, it’s the teacher’s fault. One of the things that I try to impress with them right away is your job is to interest the kids.” Fifty-one percent of the preservice teachers also indicated in their open-ended survey responses that they wanted their social studies professor to provide more ideas and strategies for teaching social studies.

Cooperating teachers, as well as preservice teachers, expressed a desire for university instructors to reinforce the current social studies practices of cooperating teachers. One preservice teacher said that social studies education professors needed to, “teach how to incorporate the new methods of teaching (concept discovery, etc.) into a curriculum that the cooperating teacher or principal already had.”

Cooperating teachers as well as preservice teachers called for more collaboration and communication with university-based social studies educators. In focus groups, cooperating teachers were unanimous in suggesting that social studies methods instructors meet with them face to face. They wanted more communication about clinical assignments and what was being taught in methods classes. Some teachers wanted social studies professors to observe in their elementary classrooms, while others went so far as to challenge social studies professors to actually demonstrate their social studies teaching ability at multiple grade levels in their elementary school.

Motivation to Teach Social Studies

In responding to the open-ended question asking the reason for teaching social studies, the most frequent motivation cited by cooperating teachers for teaching social studies was a belief in the importance of the discipline (history for history’s sake, for example), followed closely by state/curricular requirements, or personal interest in the subject. Meanwhile, preservice teachers’ open-ended responses indicated that they also believed in the primary importance of discipline-specific content knowledge, but their second most frequent reason for teaching social studies was to promote citizenship.

Discussion and Implications of This Study

For those interested in exploring the intersection between methods classes and field experiences, this study suggests that cooperating and preservice teachers are generally satisfied with teaching social studies just two to three days per week for 15 - 45 minutes. Although the preservice teachers would like to teach more than that, we cannot predict that the preservice teachers will actually be teaching any more social studies than veteran teachers. In fact, our data shows that preservice teachers are more likely to prefer being told by their district how much time to teach social studies, compared to cooperating teachers who prefer to make that decision themselves. This finding relates to Meusissen’s (2005) observation that preservice teachers grapple with policy and organizational issues in implementing curriculum.

Cooperating teachers’ and preservice teachers’ perceptions regarding the examination of the Illinois Learning Standards for Social Science and their confidence in addressing those



standards raises another concern. Many of the participants in this study read the standards briefly or not at all and still feel that they could adequately address the standards. Without reviewing the standards themselves, cooperating teachers may be relying on administrators to ensure that district curriculum meets state standards. Teacher educators may need to work harder to help preservice teachers examine social studies standards more carefully.

Preservice and cooperating teachers are in agreement in expressing their desire to teach social studies as both a stand alone subject and an integrated subject. Qualitative data buttressed the survey data as cooperating teachers described “switching” between science and social studies or integrating social studies with one of the other content areas. But examining the qualitative descriptions of what integration meant to the cooperating teachers participating in this study was disheartening.

Studying insects or bears does not sound like the powerful teaching of social studies described by the NCSS Task Force on Standards for Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies (1993). Social studies seemed to become ornamental rather than fundamental to these teachers’ practice. Spending one day comparing insect communities to human communities suggests a lack of depth in exploring social studies concepts. Doing math in Spanish or learning how to read the caption of a textbook seems like a superficial incorporation of social studies, at best. Brophy and Alleman (1991) have warned against counterproductive or pointless activities done in the name of integration. The data collected for this study lends credence to that warning.

While we know that reading skills are essential to learning social studies (VanSledright, 2002), labeling time spent teaching reading skills as social studies instructional time seems potentially misleading. There is more to learning social studies than taking notes from a textbook. Results of this research suggest that professors of social studies education may need to collaborate more closely with literacy instructors and others to model how to make connections meaningfully between social studies and other content areas.

Both cooperating teachers and preservice teachers expressed strong commitments to using a variety of instructional strategies. Cooperating teachers and preservice teachers were united in calling for university-based social studies educators to teach more hands-on, relevant, and motivational strategies in social studies. While those methods are valuable to social studies education, more explanation and emphasis may be needed in pedagogical content knowledge within the social studies methods course. How much did children really learn about the Constitution from making their own quill pens and trying to write with them? Fun activities without a citizenship purpose may not be the best use of limited social studies instructional time.

In considering the results of this study, professors of social studies education may look for ways to change the beliefs of preservice and cooperating teachers to make them more compatible with established purposes for social studies education. Few cooperating teachers emphasized NCSS’s (1994) stated goal of citizenship in describing their social studies instructional rationales. As social studies as a content area struggles to find new rationales (beyond testing) in the No Child Left Behind era, examining the beliefs about social studies of today’s cooperating and preservice teachers is informative. Longitudinal studies could shed light on whether the citizenship rationale for social studies “washes out” after preservice teachers are employed as teachers for several years.

Finally, the call from cooperating teachers and preservice teachers for social studies professors to be in elementary classrooms more visibly has numerous implications. Meeting with



cooperating teachers, observing in their classrooms, and even teaching model lessons has great potential for building partnerships. But, all of those activities take time away from university service requirements, university teaching requirements, and some research agendas. One way of interpreting these suggestions from cooperating teachers is that they want to develop closer relationships with university-based teacher educators. Another way of interpreting these calls from cooperating teachers is that they want the university faculty to “prove” their credentials “in the real world.” Either way requires university-based social studies educators to personally negotiate expectations in both higher education and elementary schools.

Reflecting on the beliefs, decisions, and suggestions offered by cooperating teachers and preservice teachers about social studies suggests that teacher educators have more work to do. Although teacher education programs are the place to start changing and improving practices (DeWitt & Freie, 2005), this study suggests that social studies professors have an uphill battle if they wish to use their university courses as a means of changing practice in elementary social studies education. Helping preservice teachers and cooperating teachers make their beliefs more public invites deeper dialogue about the purposes and needs for social studies education.



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Appendix A

Elementary School Social Studies Structured Teacher Interview

(Survey adapted with permission from Rock, T., Heafner, T., Oldendorf, S., Good, A., & O'Connor, K. (2004, November).

Interview Conducted by _____

School System _____

Semester (circle one) Spring 2005 Fall 2005

Grade/Subject (circle all that apply) Kindergarten 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th 7th 8th

Total teaching experience in years? (circle one)

0-4 year 5-9 years 10-14 year 15-19 year 20-24 year 25-29 years 30-34 year 35+ years

Directions: Please respond to the following questions by selecting the most appropriate response. Feel free to expand on any answers that you provide.

1. Rank-order your school's commitment to the following subject areas in order from (1) Most Important to (4) Least Important

- _____ Reading/Language Arts
- _____ Mathematics
- _____ Social Studies
- _____ Science

2. Rank-order your commitment to the following subject areas in order from (1) Most Important to (4) Least Important

- _____ Reading/Language Arts
- _____ Mathematics
- _____ Social Studies
- _____ Science

3. How are decisions made regarding how instructional time is used for social studies?

- _____ Administrators determine how instructional time will be used
- _____ Teachers determine how instructional time will be used in their classroom
- _____ A set policy exists for the school, but teachers have some flexibility
- _____ other (please explain) _____

4. Is social studies instructional time used as a pullout for other activities and/or student remediation work?

_____ Yes. How often? _____



_____ No.

5. How often do your students receive social studies instruction?

- _____ daily all year
- _____ daily for one semester
- _____ 2-3 days per week all year
- _____ 2-3 days per week for one semester
- _____ one day a week
- _____ rarely/never
- _____ other (please explain) _____

6. When you teach social studies, approximately how many minutes of instruction out of the school day are focused on the Illinois Learning Standards for social studies?

- _____ 0-15
- _____ 15-30
- _____ 30-45
- _____ 45 or more
- _____ other (please explain) _____.

7. I have read the Illinois Learning Standards for Social Studies

- _____ carefully
- _____ moderately
- _____ briefly
- _____ have never examined it

8. How well do you feel you address the Illinois Learning Standards for Social Studies?

- _____ fully address the standards
- _____ adequately address the standards
- _____ insufficient attention to the standards
- _____ no attention to the standards

9. As compared to five years ago, the time allocated to teaching of social studies has

- _____ increased significantly
- _____ increased slightly
- _____ remained the same
- _____ decreased slightly
- _____ decreased significantly
- _____ I have not been teaching for 5 years

10. How do you teach social studies?

- _____ integrated with other content areas
- _____ as a stand alone subject
- _____ combination of both integrated and as a stand alone subject



_____ rarely/never teach social studies
_____ other (please explain) _____

11. How prepared do you perceive your students are for the next grade level in social studies.

_____ well prepared
_____ adequately prepared
_____ poorly prepared
_____ unprepared

12. How many hours of undergraduate/graduate training have you had in the social sciences, e.g., history, anthropology, sociology, political science, geography, etc.?

_____ less than ten
_____ ten to fifteen
_____ fifteen to twenty
_____ twenty to thirty
_____ more than thirty

13. Are you satisfied with the amount of time that you currently allot for social studies instruction?

_____ Yes (please answer #14) _____ No (please answer #15)

14. If you responded yes in question #13, please indicate your reason(s) for your contentment with the time allocated for social studies instruction. (Check all that apply).

_____ I am able to integrate social studies across the curriculum.
_____ I integrate social studies in reading, writing, math, and science and I teach it as a stand alone subject.
_____ I alternate instructional time with science.
_____ An adequate amount of time is developed to social studies because it is not tested.
_____ Other tested content areas are more important and need more time.
_____ Other (please explain) _____

15. If you responded no in question #13, please indicate your reason(s) for your discontentment with the time allocated for social studies instruction. (Check all that apply).

_____ There is insufficient time to teach social studies because instructional time is spent teaching reading, writing, and mathematics.
_____ Social studies is pushed aside to prepare for End of Grade Tests.
_____ Interruptions, pull-outs, mandatory, and special programs interfere with social studies instruction.
_____ Increased integration of social studies with other content areas would lead to more satisfaction with the limited instructional time given to social studies.
_____ Other (please explain) _____



16. Which of the following are barriers that might inhibit you from teaching social studies?

- Lack of instructional time devoted to social studies.
- End of Grade tests in other content areas.
- Reading, writing, and mathematics need more instructional time.
- There are few resources available to teach social studies.
- Social studies is an overloaded curriculum and there is too much content to teach.
- I do not have the training necessary to effectively integrate social studies.
- I do not feel prepared to teach social studies because of lack of content knowledge.
- There are not barriers that keep me from teaching social studies.

Open-ended Questions

17. Why do you teach social studies? Please explain your response.

18. How would you describe your curriculum in social studies this year? What are the major topics or themes that you teach?

19. Could you please identify a few social studies concepts that you would like your students to learn during the time I will be here for my three week clinical experience.

Appendix B: Preservice Teacher Survey (next page)



1. Rank-order **your commitment** to the following subject areas in order from (1) Most Important to (4) Least Important to teach elementary/middle school students:
 - _____ Reading/Language Arts
 - _____ Mathematics
 - _____ Social Studies
 - _____ Science

2. How do you think decisions **should be** made regarding how instructional time is used for social studies? **(Choose one)**
 - _____ Administrators determine how instructional time will be used
 - _____ Teachers determine how instructional time will be used in their classroom
 - _____ A set policy exists for the school, but teachers have some flexibility
 - _____ other (please explain) _____

3. When you teach social studies, approximately how many minutes of instruction out of the school day do you think **should be** focused on the Illinois Learning Standards for Social Sciences? **(Choose one)**
 - _____ 0-15
 - _____ 15-30
 - _____ 30-45
 - _____ 45 or more
 - _____ other (please explain) _____

4. Have you read the Illinois Learning Standards for Social Studies **(Choose one)**
 - _____ carefully
 - _____ moderately
 - _____ briefly
 - _____ never examined them

5. How well do you feel you are prepared to address the Illinois Learning Standards for Social Sciences? **(Choose one)**
 - _____ I can fully address the standards
 - _____ I can adequately address the standards
 - _____ I could give insufficient attention to the standards
 - _____ I could give no attention to the standards

6. How many hours of college classes have you had in the social sciences, e.g., history, anthropology, sociology, political science, geography, etc.? **(Choose one)**
 - _____ less than ten
 - _____ ten to fifteen
 - _____ fifteen to twenty
 - _____ twenty to thirty
 - _____ more than thirty

7. How do you want to teach social studies?
 - _____ integrated with other content areas
 - _____ as a stand alone subject
 - _____ combination of both integrated and as a stand alone subject
 - _____ rarely/never teach social studies
 - _____ other (please explain) _____

8. How ready and prepared to be a social studies teacher do you feel right **now?** **(Choose one)**
 - _____ Very well prepared
 - _____ Generally ready to be a teacher right now
 - _____ I still have a fair amount to learn
 - _____ I still have a lot to learn

9. Overall, my social studies methods class has provided content and strategies that will be **(Choose one)**
 - _____ Very applicable to my future teaching
 - _____ Generally applicable to my future teaching
 - _____ Somewhat applicable to my future teaching
 - _____ Not at all applicable to my future teaching

10. My ability to implement different teaching methods and use different educational materials in social studies has improved this semester: **(Choose one)**
 - _____ A lot
 - _____ A fair amount
 - _____ Somewhat
 - _____ Very little

11. Rank how important it will be to you in the future to do each of the following things to improve your skills and knowledge for teaching social studies? **(1 is most important and 7 is least important)**
 - _____ Take more classes in social studies education
 - _____ Read more books about social studies education
 - _____ Talk to my co-teachers
 - _____ Learn from my principal
 - _____ Learn from my own experience in the classroom
 - _____ Read more books about social studies content
 - _____ Take more classes in history, geography, etc.



12. Why will you teach social studies?

13. How could your professor of social studies education help you to be more effective in your future social studies teaching?

