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Classroom Culture in the Social Studies Classroom: The Abilities of Preservice Teachers

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Illinois Council of Social Studies

The environment that a teacher creates in the classroom can make or break their students' academic success, as it has been found to be one of the most important factors affecting student learning (Dorman, Aldridge, & Fraser, 2006; Young, 2014). That environment is directly related to the learning culture that the teacher has created in the classroom. The definition of "classroom culture" is wide and varied, as it is vague and somewhat ambiguous enough to cover all manners of things within the social studies teacher's control in the classroom. More often than not, it is described as a feeling of comfort (Jones, 2015) or a safe academic climate (Holley & Steiner, 2005); it is the classroom's "way of life" (Kafele, 2016). Ultimately, teachers strive to create a "positive" classroom culture (Gibson, 2016).

Classroom culture in a social studies classroom is vital to the success of the teacher. Given the nature of the social studies discipline, and the potential for discussing controversial and potentially sensitive topics, students must feel as if they are safe in their surroundings in order to truly voice their opinions and provide evidence to support them (Baloğlu Uğurlu & Doğan, 2016; Demir & Pisnek, 2018; Hess, 2004, 2008). As such, a positive classroom culture in the social studies classroom includes the creation of an environment where the students feel comfortable, safe, and free to engage; where students are able to share their thoughts and feelings without fear of retribution or judgment from the teacher or their peers; where mistakes are learning experiences; and trust and collaboration are valued. This classroom culture also embraces a variety of perspectives, and students are empowered to have their own opinions on issues being discussed in class and then express those opinions and provide evidence and justifications for them. Teaching Tolerance (2016) adds to this by sharing their critical practices for anti-bias education, which support a positive classroom culture. Anti-bias education is an attempt to work with children in early childhood education settings to teach them how to act as agents against bias and unfairness (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2009). Honoring students' lived experiences, having a thoughtful classroom setup and structure that is built on a foundation of shared inquiry and dialogue, ensuring students' social and emotional safety, and implementing a values-based behavior management system all play a role in supporting the classroom culture of today's social studies classrooms (Teaching Tolerance, 2016).

Classroom culture also includes whether or not the classroom is conducive to learning (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012) and the methods that a social studies teacher chooses to use based on his or her students' needs, interests, and readiness (Martens & Gainous, 2013). It is the sense of community that has been created, much of which is created through the teacher's classroom management philosophy and abilities (Djigic & Stojiljkovic, 2011). Given the nature of a social studies classroom and the content being taught within it, combined with the desire for a positive classroom culture as described, there is an

ever-increasing need to incorporate instruction surrounding the creation of a positive classroom culture into social studies teacher preparation programs.

The purpose of this study was to add to the very limited body of empirical knowledge regarding classroom culture and social studies student teacher preparation by answering the following research question: How do secondary students interpret the classroom culture that preservice social studies teachers create during their student teaching semester? This question was answered by examining results of a survey of secondary social studies students. The survey allowed the students to evaluate the classroom culture their preservice social studies teacher created. For the purpose of this study, classroom culture was measured by their thoughts on the presence of a student-centered and a well-managed classroom, cultivation of a classroom community, and a sense that they were learning. By answering this question, teacher preparation programs will be able to better determine the areas in which they need to improve instruction on the creation of a positive classroom culture for their social studies student teachers.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in this study was the Indicators of Classroom Culture Framework. This framework was created based on the pilot results of the Student Perception Survey used in this study; four main factors loaded from the confirmatory factor analysis as described in the Methods section below. Each of the factors were labeled and are considered indicators of classroom culture. Student-centered classroom, student learning, classroom management, and classroom community are the named indicators, as shown in Figure 1.

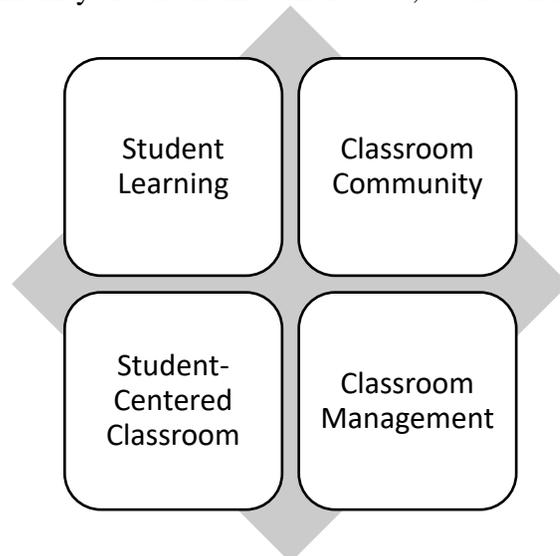


Figure 1. Indicators of Classroom Culture Framework.

Each of the indicators have been found to impact classroom culture. Preservice teachers affect classroom culture by positively impacting the learning, achievement, and disposition of their students (Hedrick, 1999; Mewborn, 2001; Reyes et. al, 2012; Schalock, Schalock, & Myton, 1998). Research has shown that students will engage more if a teacher cares about them (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010; Ferguson, 2012; Noddings, 1988, 2013), which speaks directly to a preservice teacher's need to create an engaging, inclusive classroom community (Emes & Cleveland-Innes, 2003; Jagger, 2013; Reyes et. al, 2012; Sandholtz, 2011; Smart, Witt, & Scott, 2012), as well as create a student-centered classroom (Campbell & Brummett, 2007; Felder & Brent, 1996; Land & Hannafin, 1996; Minor, Onwuegbuzie, & Witcher, 2000). The remaining element, classroom management, is vital to a preservice teacher's success when creating a positive classroom culture, as teachers tend to consider their classroom management skills as one of the biggest measures of effectiveness in their classroom (Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Sandholtz, 2011; Stoughton, 2007), which correlates directly with their ability to create a positive classroom culture.

Creation of a student-centered classroom comes through student engagement and the use of student-centered instruction (Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Çubukcu, 2012; Dole, Bloom, & Kowalske, 2016; Emes & Cleveland-Innes, 2003; Johnson et al., 2003; Land & Hannafin, 1996; Li & Guo, 2015; Overby, 2011; Smart et al., 2012). Due to the fact that the use of these methods has also been found to positively impact student achievement, many of which were utilized in different social studies classrooms, it may be determined that their use in the social studies classroom supports the development of a positive classroom culture.

Review of the Literature

Feedback for Student Teachers

Given that the data from this study are feedback from a student survey, it is important to have an understanding of the nature of feedback for student teachers. Student teaching is the time when preservice teachers should be open to critical feedback about their abilities effectiveness from those that surround them—their cooperating teacher, their university supervisor, other professionals, and from their students. Feedback from cooperating teachers comes in the form of daily advice and wisdom, both formal and informal (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014; Glenn, 2006; Tannehill & Zakrajsek, 1988); from university supervisors in the form of formal observation notes (Ballinger & Bishop, 2011; Johnson, 2011); from students in the form of surveys about their perceptions of their preservice teacher's abilities in the classroom (Lauroesch, Pereira, & Ryan, 1969; Wiggins, 2011); from other professionals in the form of a national performance assessment score such as edTPA (Nayfeld, Pecheone, Whittaker, Shear, & Klesch, 2015); and from their own personal growth reflections.

As Glenn (2006) noted in her study, “constructive feedback must be honest feedback” (p. 91). Honest feedback is going to be the most helpful for preservice teachers because that is the primary way they are going to find out what they are doing well and what needs to be improved upon in order to be a more successful teacher. However, preservice teachers had to be open to receiving feedback, even if it was not necessarily positive. If they were not open-minded, they perceived the cooperating teacher as being critical and harsh (Glenn, 2006). Wiggins (2011) found that student feedback was a vital part of the teaching process, especially for preservice teachers. He believed that many teachers were afraid to ask students their opinions on what was working and what was not. While not everything students say can be taken as accurate and answers are sometimes inconsistent, asking for student input can be the beginning of a conversation to improve teaching practice and meeting students’ needs.

Use of Student Surveys

The use of student surveys at the secondary level is not an uncommon or new way of collecting data regarding teacher effectiveness. In 1896 in Sioux City, Iowa, students in grades two through eight were asked to report out their thoughts on what made a teacher their favorite and what they perceived as characteristics of a helpful teacher (Kratz, 1896). However, it has been a sporadic practice until recently, when new K-12 educator effectiveness initiatives took off and created the need for multiple ways of measuring teacher effectiveness (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008). As a result, the use of student surveys has been on the rise for the past decade.

The most common way of getting feedback from students about their thoughts on their teacher is to survey them (Coats, Swierenga, & Wickert, 1972; Ferguson, 2012; White, 2009). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funded the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project. Their belief is that no one has a bigger stake in teaching effectiveness than students, and no one knows what they think better than they do (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). The MET Project asserted that student perception surveys could “provide balanced and reliable feedback to teachers about their performance in the classroom” (The Colorado Education Initiative, 2014, p. 1).

Follman conducted reviews of research on both secondary students’ (1992) and elementary students’ (1995) ratings of the effectiveness of their teachers. He found that “students can properly, objectively, reliably, and perhaps, validly report on such descriptive matters as events which occur in their class as well as their teacher interactions” (Follman, 1992, p. 169). According to Goe et al. (2008), student surveys are “used to gather student opinions or judgments about teaching practice as part of teacher evaluation and to provide information about teaching as it is perceived by students” (p. 18). They believe that there are three main strengths associated with teachers using student surveys: they allow students to provide

thoughts on the teacher since they are the ones that spend the most time with the teacher; depending on the timing of the survey, they can be used as a formative, informal assessment, allowing teachers to adjust instruction as needed to meet the needs of their students; and student surveys allow the students to feel as if they have a voice in their education (Goe et al., 2008).

One concern with the use of student surveys is deciding what students are truly able to provide feedback on and whether or not they provide valid and reliable data (Camburn, 2012; Georgia State Department of Education, 1979). While this is an important concern, studies have shown that student perception data can be both valid and reliable (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012; Camburn, 2012; Colorado Legacy Foundation, 2013; Ferguson, 2013; Peterson, Wahlquist, & Bone, 2001). In fact, children as young as four were found to rate their teachers reliably (Follman, 1995). In addition, one study found that the teachers themselves had a desire to use student survey ratings as one measure of their teaching effectiveness, which supports the face validity of student survey data (Peterson et al., 2001).

Moreover, Hanover Research (2013), found that teachers “found survey results extremely valuable, citing their ability to identify strengths and weaknesses and develop new, effective teaching strategies” (p. 4), which led to many of them supporting initiatives that allowed student survey results as a measure of their effectiveness. Denver Public Schools, Memphis Public Schools, and Pittsburgh Public Schools are all districts that have implemented or piloted student surveys for feedback to teachers, and the teachers have found them to be valuable in identifying areas of effectiveness (Hanover, 2013).

Student survey results have been predictive of academic achievement, test scores, and student learning gains (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012; Ferguson, 2012; Hanover Research, 2013; Polek, 2010). They also have produced more consistent results than formal and informal classroom observations (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). Ultimately, student surveys have given students a too-often unheard voice; they provided them with an outlet to share whether or not their needs are being met. Students have been motivated to participate in providing feedback through surveys because it will then help their teachers improve their teaching and become more effective, thus helping them make greater academic gains (Chen & Hoshower, 2003).

Methods

This study utilized 606 secondary social studies student survey results. The survey that was used in this study is the Colorado Legacy Foundation’s Student Perception Survey (SPS). The Colorado Legacy Foundation is now the Colorado Education Initiative (CEI). The SPS measures the following four main domains as described in the Indicators of Classroom Culture Conceptual Framework (Colorado Legacy Foundation, 2013):

1. Student Learning: How teachers use content and pedagogical knowledge to help students learn, understand, and improve.
2. Student-Centered Classroom: How teachers create an environment that responds to individual students' backgrounds, strengths, and interests.
3. Classroom Community: How teachers cultivate a classroom learning community where student differences are valued.
4. Classroom Management: How teachers foster a respectful and predictable learning environment.

A version of the SPS was created for students in grades 3 through 5, and another for grades 6 through 12. The SPS is a 35-question instrument that measured elements of student experience that have been demonstrated to correlate most closely to a teacher's ability to positively impact student growth (Colorado Legacy Foundation, 2013). Students were asked to indicate how frequently they experience each item with a response scale of always, most of the time, some of the time, and never. Only the grade 6-12 survey instrument was utilized in this study.

Reliability and Validity of the SPS

CEI's SPS was found to be valid and reliable after initial psychometric testing in 2012, and field testing as part of a pilot in fall 2012 and spring 2013 with approximately 80,000 students (Colorado Legacy Foundation, 2013). Those surveys were collected from 16 Colorado districts, representing a mix of rural, suburban, and mountain regions. In total, student responses described over 1,400 teachers in 86 schools. Each survey had 34 questions, and all were mapped to one of four domains that were developed over the course of the pilot through analyses of the underlying relationships between items.

Student-level reliability was calculated after the pilot, and a high Chronbach's alpha was found for the grades 6-12 ($\alpha=0.96$) instrument, as well as all four domains (Colorado Legacy Foundation, 2013). For student-centered environment, grades 6-12, $\alpha=0.90$; for student learning, grades 6-12, $\alpha=0.94$; for classroom community, grades 6-12 $\alpha=0.86$; and for classroom management, grades 6-12, $\alpha=0.80$.

Teacher-level reliability was also considered after the pilot. Chronbach's alpha was calculated by using teacher mean scores on each survey item. A high Chronbach's alpha was also found for the grades 6-12 ($\alpha=0.98$) instrument, as well as all four domains at the teacher-level (Colorado Legacy Foundation, 2013). For student-centered environment, grades 6-12, $\alpha=0.96$; for student learning, grades 6-12, $\alpha=0.97$; for classroom community, grades 6-12 $\alpha=0.94$; and for classroom management, grades 6-12, $\alpha=0.91$.

Participants

The participants in the study were students of a preservice teacher in one teacher preparation program from a western state in the United States, and were student teaching in grades 6-12 at the time of the survey. The preservice teachers

were student teaching at a variety of different secondary schools in one metropolitan area from varied contexts—some urban, suburban, and rural. The schools had students from a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, some drew from wealthy areas of the region while others were from more impoverished areas.

The survey was administered to all students whose parents gave permission by signing an approved release form over the course of two years; 606 responses were collected from students in a social studies classroom. Students did not identify themselves when completing the survey so all data were anonymous and de-identified. The only one identified on the survey was the preservice teacher, as the surveys were tied to them in order to aggregate data by preservice teacher and provide feedback on strengths and areas for improvement in the classroom. Demographic information gathered about the students included gender, school year surveyed, and current grade level. Table 1 shows the demographic compilation of the student sample.

Table 1
Student Demographics

	N (Total N=606)	Percent
Gender		
Male	277	45.7
Female	274	45.2
Prefer not to answer	55	8.9
Year Surveyed		
Year 1	223	36.8
Year 2	383	63.2
Grade		
6th	119	19.6
7th	54	8.9
8th	121	20
9th	110	18.2
10th	84	13.9
11th	89	14.7
12th	29	4.8

Data Analysis

As a result of field-testing performed by CEI, the four pre-existing domains of student learning, student-centered classroom, classroom community, and classroom management were used for this study. The survey questions were answered on a Likert Scale, with 0 as never, 1 as some of the time, 2 as most of the time, and 3 as always. Questions were mapped to one of the four predetermined

domains as found in CEI's factor analysis, and then descriptive statistics were analyzed using SPSS to determine the extent to which students experienced each of the domains.

Limitations

A variety of limitations existed within this study. First and foremost is the survey instrument that was utilized to measure the students' perceptions of their preservice teacher. This instrument has been field-tested and validated for use on classroom teachers, not necessarily on preservice teachers. However, since the survey was administered at the end of the student teaching semester, student teachers were less than two weeks away from completing student teaching and being eligible to obtain their teaching license and have their own classroom. Another limitation is that SPS was only administered to those students whose parents had provided permission for it.

In addition, the licensure program at the institution placed students in a classroom for an entire school year. As a result, the program itself may be a limitation since those candidates had more exposure than a program that only allowed for a one-semester student teaching field placement. The location of their student teaching experience may also be a limitation—while the candidates were intentionally placed in a diverse school setting, as defined by percentage of students that were eligible for free or reduced lunch, they were not placed in rural districts. They were placed in either urban or suburban districts, but all were not in the same district. In fact, the preparation program placed candidates in four different districts, all of which varied in terms of size, geography, and student demographic make-up.

Also, due to the fact that the survey respondents were de-identified, I was unable to draw conclusions regarding demographics and socioeconomic status. The social studies class that the students were in may also be a limitation, as they were in grades 6-12 social studies classes. The classes could have been middle school U.S. history, middle schools world history, high school U.S. history, high school world history, high school geography, high school civics/U. S. government, or high school Advanced Placement courses.

Results

Table 2 provides the individual question means of the SPS results for the 606 students in social studies classes in grades six through twelve. Secondary social studies students experienced a lack of knowledge about their life outside of school ($M = 0.89$, $SD = 0.96$), but believed their preservice teacher respected them as an individual ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 0.67$), and that they cared about them ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 0.82$). The secondary social studies students experienced the following most of the time when it came to how their preservice social studies teachers created a student-centered classroom: an organized classroom ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.78$), students were

comfortable sharing ideas ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 0.77$) and felt that their preservice teacher respected their opinions and suggestions ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.76$).

Table 2
SPS Grades 6-12 Question Means

	Mean	SD
Student learning domain		
My teacher makes learning enjoyable.	2.16	0.80
What I learn in this class is useful to me in my real life.	1.80	0.83
My teacher teaches things that are important to me.	1.94	0.84
My teacher knows the things that make me excited about learning.	1.68	0.96
In this class, we learn a lot every day.	2.33	0.73
In this class, it is more important to understand the lesson than to memorize the answers.	2.25	0.78
When the work is too hard, my teacher helps me keep trying.	2.35	0.84
My teacher accepts nothing less than my best effort.	2.41	0.73
My teacher knows when we understand the lesson and when we do not.	2.01	0.81
If I don't understand something, my teacher explains it a different way.	2.18	0.82
My teacher explains difficult things clearly.	2.14	0.79
In this class, we have a say in what we learn and do.	1.58	0.93
My teacher talks to me about my work to help me understand my mistakes.	2.03	0.89
My teacher writes notes on my work that help me improve.	1.83	1.01
When we study a topic, my teacher makes connections to other subjects or classes.	1.93	0.87
Student-centered classroom domain		
My classroom is organized and I know where to find what I need.	2.45	0.78
Students feel comfortable sharing their ideas in this class.	2.26	0.77
My teacher respects my opinions and suggestions.	2.48	0.76
My teacher cares about me.	2.41	0.82
My teacher pays attention to what all students are thinking and feeling.	2.15	0.84
My teacher respects my cultural background.	2.57	0.71
My teacher respects me as an individual.	2.65	0.67
Classroom management domain		
Our class stays busy and does not waste time.	1.90	0.76
Students in this class treat the teacher with respect.	2.14	0.79
The students behave the way my teacher wants them to.	1.82	0.74

Students in this class respect each other's differences.	2.09	0.81
Classroom community domain		
My teacher would notice if something was bothering me.	1.79	0.96
Our classroom materials (books, articles, videos, art, music, posters, etc.) reflect my cultural background.	1.61	0.92
In this class, I feel like I fit in.	2.11	0.92
I feel like an important part of this classroom community.	1.89	0.89
My teacher knows what my life is like outside of school.	0.89	0.96
My teacher knows what is important to me.	1.56	1.00
I ask for help when I need it.	2.21	0.89
I feel like I do a good job in this class.	2.29	0.76

Questions were then mapped to one of the four predetermined domains, and descriptive statistics were analyzed using SPSS to determine the extent to which secondary social studies students experienced each of the domains with their preservice teacher. Table 3 indicates secondary social studies students believed that most of the time, their social studies preservice teachers were most adept at creating an environment that responded to individual students' backgrounds, strengths, and interests ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 0.55$). Students believed that their preservice teachers used social studies content and pedagogical knowledge to help students learn, understand, and improve ($M = 2.05$, $SD = 0.54$), and that they fostered a respectful and predictable learning environment slightly less than most of the time ($M = 1.99$, $SD = 0.60$). Students believed that their preservice teachers were least successful at cultivating a classroom learning community where student differences are valued ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 0.63$).

Table 3
SPS Domain Descriptive Statistics Grades 6-12

	<i>N</i>	Minimu m	Maximu m	Mea n	<i>S</i> <i>D</i>
Student learning	544	.13	3.00	2.05	0.54
Student-centered classroom	533	.00	3.00	2.44	0.55
Classroom management	566	.00	3.00	1.99	0.60
Classroom community	538	.00	3.00	1.79	0.63

Discussion

This study yielded noteworthy results when considering the research question: How do secondary students interpret the classroom culture that preservice social studies teachers create during their student teaching semester? The indicators identified in the Classroom Culture Framework were found to resonate with the

students to varying degrees. Those indicators include student-centered classroom, student learning, classroom management, and classroom community

The students believed that their preservice teachers were strongest in creating a student-centered classroom, in that they created an environment that responded to individual students' backgrounds, strengths, and interests. They believed that their preservice teacher respected them as an individual and their cultural background. They also believed their preservice teacher respected their opinions and suggestions. All of these are important components of a positive classroom culture in the social studies classroom. Without those feelings of respect, social studies teachers would not be able to tackle the important issues in the classroom that secondary students face today. Controversial issues such as racism, xenophobia, and media literacy have a home in the social studies classroom, but if students don't believe their teacher respects them, they will not participate as openly as they would if they had a teacher that respects them (Byford, Lennon & Russell III, 2009). Since the teaching of controversial issues is a controversial issue in itself (Hess, 2008; Oulton, Day, Dillon, & Grace, 2004), teachers need to create a climate of acceptance and openness in their classroom, even as students disagree. This will allow students to feel comfortable enough to openly express their opinions on these issues. This should be done from day one of the school year when establishing their system of classroom management, which should include building rapport and trust with their students while laying out routines, policies, and procedures.

An additional indicator from the framework, the Student Learning indicator, found that students believed their preservice teachers were also adept at positively impacting classroom culture through the use of content and pedagogical knowledge that helped the students learn, understand, and improve. Students believed their preservice teachers helped them keep trying, even when the work was too hard, and that they had high expectations of their students. This is also an important finding, as the literature points us to the fact that teacher expectations can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies—if a teacher sets high expectations and believes a student can meet the expectations, the student is more likely to meet them (Jussim & Harbor, 2005; Rubie-Davies, 2006).

Students also believed that their preservice teachers thought it was more important that they understood the lesson than to simply memorize answers. In today's modern social studies classroom, this is the ultimate goal. Social studies is no longer about regurgitating facts, names, and dates, but about applying the knowledge learned from lessons in the social studies classroom. The National Council for the Social Studies' [NCSS] College, Career, and Civic Life Framework is built on the key belief that "students need the intellectual power to recognize societal problems; ask good questions and develop robust investigations into them; consider possible solutions and consequences; separate evidence-based claims from

parochial opinions; and communicate and act upon what they learn” (NCSS, 2013, p. 6). Knowing that the students believe their preservice teachers are living these values is important to be aware of, as it indicates a shift from the “old way” of doing social studies that consisted of lecturing, reading the textbook, and taking tests (Tindall, 1996).

The third indicator of the Classroom Culture Framework is Classroom Management. Students believed that their preservice teachers were somewhat successful in fostering a respectful and predictable learning environment, which is a key component of positive classroom culture (Djigic & Stojiljkovic, 2011). Students believed that their peers treated their preservice teacher with respect, but that the students did not behave the way their preservice teacher wanted them to. The latter is a concern, because Stoughton (2007) found that novice teachers tend to consider their ability to control disruptive students as one of the biggest measures of effectiveness in their classroom. Additionally, if the social studies preservice teacher wants to integrate more of the NCSS C3 framework in their classroom, they need to be able to maintain positive classroom behaviors. In order to cover an NCSS dimension indicator such as, “D4.3.9-12. Present adaptations of arguments and explanations that feature evocative ideas and perspectives on issues and topics to reach a range of audiences and venues outside the classroom using print and oral technologies...and digital technologies...” (NCSS, 2013, pg. 60), preservice teachers need to have a handle on student misbehavior. If they don’t have that foundation laid before they jump in to teaching an indicator such as the one above, they will not be able to truly delve in to those arguments and explanations as the misbehavior will hinder that process. Much like the creation of a respectful classroom as described above, behavior management needs to be established in the first days of school.

Finally, what is most eye-opening from these results are the findings on the last indicator of the Classroom Culture Framework—Classroom Community. Students believed that their preservice teacher needed to most improve on cultivating a classroom learning community where student differences are valued. Students did not believe that their preservice teacher knew what their life was like outside of school, and that their preservice teacher did not know what was important to them. What this indicates is that the preservice teachers did not take the time to get to know their students. While the other domains indicated that there was a respectful climate in the classroom, the preservice teachers had not taken the time to intentionally build rapport with their students by determining who they really were as more than just a student in their class. Respect and rapport are two very different things. When a teacher takes the time to build rapport with their students and get to know them on a personal level, students are more likely to engage in the class and participate in the lesson (Frisby & Martin, 2010). By taking the time to ask them about their day, or what their favorite song/movie/show/sports team is, or

what their interests are outside of school, the preservice teacher begins to build a trusting relationship with that student, and it shows the student that someone cares about them. Students will engage more if a teacher makes a concerted effort to prove that they care about their students (Noddings, 1988, 2013), which speaks directly to a preservice teacher's need to create a positive and engaging classroom culture. There are many ways that preservice teachers can get to know their students on a personal level, such as 'get to know you' type surveys, or Stroschein's (1991) video camera technique, standing in the hallway, or simply observing and listening to them; the bottom line is that preservice teachers need to make the time to get to know who their students really are.

Conclusion

Students provide an invaluable lens into the abilities of preservice teachers and what they perceive as their strengths and areas for improvement. The student's thoughts on their preservice teacher's ability to create a positive classroom culture is vital, since they are the ones that suffer if the classroom culture is one that is stifling and uncomfortable. With the lack of literature on classroom culture in the social studies classroom, this study is timely and assists in filling the void.

Teacher preparation programs should be cognizant of the results of this study as they are often the ones that initially influence a preservice teacher's ability to create a positive classroom culture. The students' perceptions should potentially drive curricular changes in methods courses to better prepare preservice teachers in: using content and pedagogical knowledge to help students learn, understand, and improve; creating an environment that responds to individual students' backgrounds, strengths, and interests; fostering a respectful and predictable learning environment; and cultivating a classroom learning community where student differences are valued. The findings on the latter were most surprising, and shine light on the need for additional preservice teacher preparation about the importance of establishing rapport and building trust with students, especially in a social studies classroom.

Social studies preservice teachers need to create an inclusive environment in their classroom, where all students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions on a variety of topics. Social studies classes are the ones that prepare students for civic life, a task that should not be undertaken lightly. In order to do that effectively, we must train our preservice teachers to create a positive classroom culture where all voices can be heard.

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