



Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

# The Journal of Social Studies Research

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jssr](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jssr)



## Elementary preservice teachers' navigation of racism and whiteness through inquiry with historical documentary film



Lisa Brown Buchanan\*

The University of North Carolina Wilmington, 601 S. College Road, Wilmington, NC 28403, United States

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Accepted 19 June 2015

Available online 9 July 2015

#### Keywords:

Elementary social studies education

Whiteness

Racism

Counter-narratives

Documentary film

### ABSTRACT

This descriptive case study explores how on cohort of 17 White elementary preservice teachers examined counter-narratives of racism and Whiteness in selected documentary films using a historical inquiry approach. Findings indicate that by joining documentary film and historical inquiry in elementary social studies education, teacher educators can foster preservice teachers' engagement with perspective recognition while developing historical content knowledge. This study also documents White preservice teachers' acceptance of racism and resistance towards unpacking their White privilege and racism as status quo. Implications for using this approach with preservice teachers and the dilemma of White avoidance in social studies education are discussed.

Copyright © 2015, The International Society for the Social Studies. Published by Elsevier, Inc.

### Introduction

Since the late twentieth century, changing demographics in American society have led to an increasing racial difference between teachers and students in the United States, raising concerns about the impact of teachers' Whiteness on classrooms (Kumar & Hamer, 2013; Picower, 2009). This trend is exemplified in U.S. teacher education programs, where most preservice teachers are White females while their students represent a variety of identities (Cooper, 2007; Galman, Pica-Smith, & Rosenberger, 2010). Equally concerning is the prevalence of Whites among teacher education faculty and inservice teachers, strengthening the case for deliberately examining racism and Whiteness in teacher education (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Sleeter, 2001; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). As "social studies educators encounter curricula rife with opportunities to discuss historical and contemporary racism, a task they cannot undertake without an awareness of the implications of their White racial identities" (Smith & Crowley, 2014, p. 2), historical investigations that are aimed at increasing preservice teacher thinking about racism and Whiteness are warranted.

Drawn from a larger study, this manuscript describes my efforts with one cohort of 17 White elementary preservice teachers to join documentary films, historical inquiry, and contentious issues in their social studies methods course. The four selected films, established as historical counter-narratives, were nested within a larger historical inquiry approach designed to foster perspective recognition and empathy while building historical content knowledge of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. The counter-narratives in each film were especially important as a record of absent or considerably marginalized

\* Tel.: +1 910 962 2890.

E-mail address: [buchananl@uncw.edu](mailto:buchananl@uncw.edu)

counter-narratives of race in the social studies curriculum has been well documented (Chandler, 2010; Howard, 2003; King, Davis, & Brown, 2012; Tyson, 2003).

Given the focus of this study, two terms require definition: racism and Whiteness. Racism is a power structure of opportunity, wealth, rights, and other affordances influenced by prejudiced beliefs specific to race or individuals based on race (Hoyt, 2012; Mills, 1997). In this study, racism is central to the counter-narratives illustrated in the four documentary films. Whiteness is a system whereby members of the dominant political, social, and/or cultural groups hold power and advantages (Haviland, 2008). Whiteness can be consciously or unconsciously employed, ignored, and denied by those holding its privileges, yet the privileges remain. Defining these two terms in relation to the study can help readers understand the utility of both throughout this analysis.

In the following section, I review the literature of race scholarship in the social studies, teaching controversial topics using documentary film, and the scholarship of perspective recognition and empathy. Combined, these three strands offer a pedagogical framework for students' understanding of the Civil Rights Unit that is described in the "Methodology" and "Findings". The research question used in this study was: *How can using documentary film within a historical inquiry approach help elementary preservice teachers examine racism and Whiteness?*

## Literature review

### *Race scholarship in the social studies*

Traditionally, the social studies curriculum has privileged some group perspectives while marginalizing others. Critical race theory scholarship has illuminated how the stories of marginalized individuals and groups have been consistently relegated to a myth of racial progress that sterilizes racist histories and privileges the dominant narrative (Brown & Brown, 2012; King et al., 2012; Rains, 2003). Dominant narratives are rooted in the retellings and reframing of historical perspectives of events, groups, or individuals through the majority perspective or lens. Often circulated through textbook summaries, media, and other prominent sources, dominant narratives are upheld by the interconnectedness of power (e.g., textbook and media writers) and conventional knowledge (e.g., whose story holds merit among the writers), two mainstays of White normativity (Mills, 1997). Dominant narratives perpetuate a pervasive, linear history void of alternative viewpoints and historical information. For example, the dominant narrative of Rosa Parks as a tired seamstress perpetuates a linear history of citizens' responses to Jim Crow South, and as a result, diminishes the narratives of organized groups of citizens taking nonviolent action during the U.S. Civil Rights Movement.

Though uncommon, some social studies scholars have attempted to expose and disrupt this history in their research. For example, Brown and Brown (2010) used a critical race theory framework to examine the treatment of race and racial violence in social studies textbooks. They analyzed elementary and middle grades textbooks for representations of race and racism in U.S. History and articulated two findings related to this study: textbook narratives largely ignore the institutionalized nature of racism (e.g., systematic disenfranchisement of civil or human rights in the past and today); when violence or discrimination was noted, the depictions suggested isolated individual perpetrators or pockets of violence rather than social and political structures that institutionalize racism. They concluded that the history of race and racism in the U.S. is overwhelmingly absent or glossed over in many textbooks in favor of narratives of racial progress, leaving social studies educators to determine if and how to supplement textbooks' narratives of race and racism. Their work suggested that if teaching materials are selected based on critical race theory principles such as counter-storytelling, the social studies curriculum has tremendous opportunity to position students for examining historical racism and critiquing the prevalence of racism today (Chandler, 2010).

In a similar vein, Hilburn and Fitchett (2012) examined state textbooks' representations of race (e.g., slavery, immigrant experiences) and also found sanitized narratives of marginalized groups. Like Brown and Brown (2010), Howard (2003) used a critical race theory framework to discuss the absence of research and scholarship about race and racism in social studies. Howard suggested that the lack of faculty of color among social studies membership (e.g., College and University Faculty, National Council for the Social Studies) and a collective failure to address race as a civic responsibility have each contributed to the absence of race discussions.

King (2014) examined the ways in which preservice teachers understood African American history, including experiences surrounding the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. Using a historical framework to investigate the lived experiences of African Americans, King positioned preservice teachers for historical analysis and content building while also facilitating reflection using interviews and written responses. He found that preservice teachers' content knowledge significantly increased, yet they failed to interrogate the social structures and conditions that facilitated racism both in the past and today (King, 2014). In the context of secondary social studies, Chandler (2009) used a critical race theory framework to examine how two U.S. History teachers taught race. He found that both teachers used a "pedagogy of racial progress," positioned race as a neutral concept, and admitted their fears about teaching race significantly impacted how and to what extent they taught race in U.S. History. Other social studies researchers have also used critical race theory to examine the teaching of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and documented the whitewashing of racism and privilege in the classroom teaching of the movement (Brown & Brown, 2010).

As social studies education provides a ripe context for critiquing dominant narratives of history, I concur with these scholars (Brown & Brown, 2012; Howard, 2003; King, 2014) that such work can be analyzed using a critical race theory

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/108319>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/108319>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)