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Who are we? The demographic and professional identity of social studies teacher educators



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ABSTRACT

Growth in racial and ethnic diversity among public school P-12 students stands in stark contrast to the teaching population who tend to be monolingual, White females. Secondary social studies teachers defy demographic teacher trends, as they tend to be male, albeit White males who still are not representative of the students they teach. What is missing from the discourse of student–teacher imbalance however is discussion surrounding diversity among social studies teacher educators. The purpose of this study was to examine racial, ethnic, and gender demographics for social studies teacher educators using a framework of critical teacher demography. Findings revealed that social studies teacher educators tend to reflect the population of social studies teachers with many being White males. Furthermore, social studies teacher educators tend to focus their research on concepts such as democratic citizenship with little focus dedicated to critical multicultural issues. The paucity of diversity in demographics and research is critical for social studies teacher educators to consider if we are to reflect multiculturalism in 21st century schools.

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Introduction

The demographic make-up of the United States represents a country that is continually growing in terms of racial and ethnic diversity ([United States Census Bureau, 2010](#)). This shift in demographics has subsequently resulted in the browning ([MacDonald, 2004](#)) of classrooms in the US. In fact, schools more than any other societal and professional institution in the United States have experienced the most dramatic shift as a result of multicultural population growth ([Ladson-Billings, 2011](#)). More recently, public school enrollment statistics for the 2014–2015 academic calendar year revealed that for the first time in United States history there are now more students of color enrolled in public schools than their White counterparts ([Maxwell, 2014](#)). Due to the changing racial and ethnic demographics within American schools more attention has been given in educational research to the disproportionate representation between a diverse student body and their teachers, who are mainly White female ([Bower-Phipps, Homa, Albaladejo, Johnson, & Cruz, 2013](#); [Collins, 2011](#); [Delano-Oriaran & Meidl, 2012](#); [Garcia, Arias, Harris Murri, & Serna, 2009](#); [Howard, 1999](#); [Ladson-Billings, 2001, 2011](#); [Sleeter, 2008b](#)).

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The foci of teacher education research pertaining to the demographic divide is centered upon two constructs: (1) White preservice teachers' conceptualization of race, privilege, and culturally responsive teaching in lieu of multicultural schools (Garmon, 2004; Laughter, 2011; Leavy, 2005; Valentín, 2006), and (2) how teacher educators and teacher education programs facilitate the development of multicultural teaching competencies and dispositions (Brown & Kraehe, 2010; Matias, 2013; Philip & Benin, 2014; Sleeter, 2008a). These are certainly constructs worthy of exploration, however, it is important to consider who are the teacher educators responsible for mediating learning about race, privilege, and multiculturalism as a result of the demographic chasm. Do teacher educator demographics mirror the divide between teachers and students? In this article the authors briefly discuss the impact of multicultural public school demographics on teacher education, but our goal is to refocus the discourse of imbalance specifically towards social studies teacher education using demographics from the field.

Teacher and preservice teacher demographics

The cultural, ethnic, and racial chasm that exists between public school students and teachers has consequences for all students, and more attention is needed for the recruitment and retention of a more diverse teacher workforce (Villegas & Davis, 2007). According to most recent reports from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2012d), about 82 percent of public school teachers in the US are White. Only a combined 15 percent of the teacher workforce are Black or Latino/a despite the fact that Black and Latino students together almost outnumber the enrollment of White students in public schools (Maxwell, 2014). Examining data from NCES there has been incremental yet small growth in the total percentage of teachers of color since 1988. Although when analyzing racial and ethnic groups individually the percentage of African American teachers has consistently declined since 1988 while the percentage of Latino/a teachers has a continual upward trend.

The chasm continues: preservice teacher education

The demographic makeup of preservice teacher education programs is parallel to the teaching force in the public P-12 classroom as both consist primarily of White middle class females. Racial and ethnic diversity as indicated by preservice teacher education demographics remains scant at best as only 8 percent of full-time undergraduate preservice students are Black, 6 percent are Latino/a, 2 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent are of Native American descent (Ludwig, Kirshstein, Sidana, Ardila-Rey, & Bae, 2010). These numbers combined stand in stark contrast to 78 percent of White students who are enrolled full-time in an undergraduate teacher education degree program. Numbers overwhelmingly indicate that the racial and ethnic imbalance between public school students and teachers will persist, as a majority of students graduating with teacher education degrees remain White female (NCES, 2012a). Furthermore, the gender imbalance in teaching is also likely to continue given the significant gap in the number of males graduating from education programs as opposed to females.

Social studies teacher demographics

Social studies unlike other core curricular fields deviates from the demographic norms of teaching as a homogenous, White-female dominated profession. Representing a more hegemonic structure social studies teachers tend to be White males (Fitchett, 2010; NCES, 2008, 2012c). More recent numbers from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2012c) *Schools and Staffing Survey* (SASS) indicate that about 63 percent of secondary social studies teachers are male and an overwhelming 87 percent of social studies teachers are White.

The dominance of White males in social studies teacher demography is not a trend, but rather a defining trait of the field that manifests itself in schools from decade to decade. Early social studies demographic research has pointed to this phenomenon (Ochoa, 1981; Risinger, 1981) and even then suggestions were made to stakeholders within the field for diversifying the social studies teacher workforce regarding Black and Latino/a representation. Fitchett's (2010) inferential study utilizing NCES statistics corroborated earlier studies as he concluded from his data analysis that secondary students are more likely to encounter a White male as a social studies teacher than any other race or ethnicity. Even when race is extracted as a factor in social studies demographic research there still remains a preponderance of male teachers (Farmer, 1984). The only research that indicates female teachers as a majority in reference to the social studies profession was Leming, Ellington, and Schug's (2006) survey of elementary and middle school teachers. A majority of the teachers in their study were White female, albeit, those numbers reflected elementary level teachers grades 2 and 5. It is important to consider that neither NCES statistics nor Fitchett's study provide concise data pertaining to the social studies teacher gender imbalance among various ethnic groups, which is an area in need of further explanation.

It is unclear why social studies teacher demographics tend to buck national trends although plausible explanations do allude to several reasons. One suggestion as to why social studies tends to be male dominated is rooted in perceptions regarding the curricular importance of social studies. Of the four core subjects social studies is perceived as expendable due to an increased emphasis on math, science, and English in lieu of standardized testing (Au, 2013; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; McGuire, 2007). A direct result of the low stakes attached to social studies is that male teachers who are hired with primary coaching responsibilities are often given social studies teaching assignments by principals (Brown, 2012a). Regardless of

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