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“I did not think it was an effective use of questioning”: Collective critical observation and reflection of social studies pedagogy



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ABSTRACT

This study examines how one student teaching seminar employed collective critical observation and reflection of an experienced high school social studies teacher's pedagogy using a multimedia representation of teaching. Pre-service teachers watched this teacher implement two full class lessons and reflections on teaching about freedom of speech. This study's pre-service social studies teachers exhibited a developing ability, through collective observation, to critically reflect on their individual methodological and philosophical goals, social studies teaching and learning, and professional and curricular visions in relation to their student teaching experiences and future practice. The study's findings offer implications for how pre-service social studies teachers critically reflect on their practice, while also developing knowledge of learners, subject matter, and teaching social studies.

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Introduction

As one of the primary purposes of social studies education is to prepare our students to be active and engaged citizens of U.S. democratic society (Thornton, 2008), how can we effectively prepare our pre-service teachers to be theorizers of their practice and actively reflect on how to implement this goal, what it might look like, and why? In offering recommendations for how to prepare “good teachers for every classroom,” the National Academy of Education (NAE) Committee on Teacher Education (2005) has suggested three areas of knowledge pre-service teachers must obtain including: knowledge of learners, understanding of subject matter and skills, and understanding of teaching. Our study attempts to offer a student

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teaching seminar environment, through using a multimedia representation of teaching and collective critical observation and reflection, to prepare pre-service social studies teachers for the complexities of practice (Segall & Gaudelli, 2007).

We examine how implementing collective observation and reflection of an experienced social studies teacher's pedagogy may afford pre-service teachers the space to grapple with their role as "curricular-instructional gatekeepers" (Thornton, 2005) and critically inquire about and gain knowledge toward developing their pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987; Grossman, 1990). Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) is defined as "that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding [...] of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction" (Shulman, 1987, p. 8). This study seeks to support pre-service teachers in their development of PCK through using collective critical observation and reflection in social studies teacher education coursework. Collective critical observation and reflection is defined as pre-service teachers coming together to discuss, analyze, and develop a collaborative community (Kahne & Westheimer, 2000; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Segall & Gaudelli, 2007), based on observing a multimedia representation of a veteran teacher's practice, and begin to inquire about what their observations of teaching means for their own practice (Zeichner, 1987) and for the practice of others. This study, therefore, encouraged pre-service teachers to develop the knowledge needed to become reflective, flexible, and critical social studies practitioners (Vinz, 1996; Zeichner, 1996; Segall & Gaudelli, 2007).

In doing so, we document how one student teaching seminar employed collective critical observation and reflection through watching two full class lessons and reflections on teaching freedom of speech using a multimedia representation of teaching. Drawing on a decomposition of practice (Hatch & Grossman, 2009) and critical social reflection and collective observation (Kahne & Westheimer, 2000; Segall & Gaudelli, 2007) theoretical framework, we asked: 1.) How do pre-service social studies teachers collectively observe and reflect on an experienced teacher's pedagogical practice and reflection through a multimedia representation of teaching in one student teaching seminar? 2.) What learning opportunities does collective observation and reflection afford pre-service teachers for current and future social studies teaching and learning practices?

Theoretical/conceptual framework

The design of the initial project and course was informed by a conceptual framework of decomposition of practice using multimedia representations of teaching controversial issues in the social studies classroom (Hatch & Grossman, 2009). However, while engaged in the class and during initial analysis of the data, we found that the opportunities for collective critical observation and reflection (Kahne & Westheimer, 2000; Segall & Gaudelli, 2007) emerged based on student interactions and engagement with the multimedia representation of teaching and the teacher educator's implementation of the project. We applied, therefore, a framework for collective critical observation and reflection to our re-analysis of the data, examined through the lens of two bodies of a literature on critical social reflection and collective observation.

Decomposition of practice and multimedia representations of teaching

One of the key elements of learning how to teach is examining and reflecting on other teacher's practices and enacting these practices in field placements and in teacher education coursework. Hatch and Grossman (2009) contend that the "decomposition" of practice or, "breaking down complex practice into its constituent parts for the purposes of teaching and learning" (p. 71) is one way of facilitating learning how to teach, what to teach, and why. While the decomposition of practice makes "practice more accessible," Hatch and Grossman (2009) also argue that multimedia representations of teaching help pre-service teachers "see" and experience enacting practice and offers an environment for "analysis while still capturing its [teaching] complexity" (p. 71).

Multimedia representations of teaching enable a "key means for facilitating collaborative examinations of practice from multiple perspectives," (p. 73); however they offer some challenges, including the ability to "see what is there and to see what is not" (p. 70) and "fail to capture the planning that went into those interactions [between teachers and students] or the teachers' thinking and reasoning during those interactions" (p. 74). Some elements that might be missing in these representations are pedagogical details and reflections, classroom contexts, purposes and histories of the course, and student/teacher interactions. In using a multimedia representation of teaching in this study, we challenge the issues of representation when using this medium (Hatch & Grossman, 2009) by incorporating a framework for critical social reflection and collective observation. We contend that by incorporating this framework we might further pre-service teacher's development of PCK. Learning to teach often changes due to reflection on what pre-service teachers (or others) are teaching and how (developing an understanding of pedagogy), and the action one takes when putting the content and pedagogy into practice (enacting pedagogy). As Shulman (1987) notes, this process of understanding, transformation, and action of pedagogy, is part of the development of a teacher as moving away from the "status of learner" to that "of teacher" (pp. 12–13); reflecting one of our primary goals as social studies teacher educators.

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