



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

The Journal of Social Studies Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jssr



Teachers' curricular choices when teaching histories of oppressed people: Capturing the U.S. Civil Rights Movement[☆]



Katy Swalwell^{a,*}, Anthony M. Pellegrino^{b,1}, Jenice L. View^c

^a Iowa State University, 2015 Cessna Street, Ames, IA 50014, United States

^b George Mason University, 4400 University Drive, Mail Stop 4B3, Fairfax, VA 22030, United States

^c George Mason University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted 10 November 2014

Available online 17 December 2014

Keywords:

Curriculum development

Teacher education

Social studies education

History education

Civil Rights Movement

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates what choices teachers made and what rationales they offered related to the inclusion and exclusion of primary source photographs for a hypothetical unit about the U.S. Civil Rights Movement in order to better understand teachers' curricular decision-making as it relates to representing the histories of oppressed people. Elementary and secondary social studies/history teachers from three different in-service and pre-service cohorts ($n=62$) selected and discarded images from a bank of 25 famous and lesser-known photographs. Their decisions and explanations were coded for emergent themes. Findings reveal that these teachers tended to be guided by criteria both technical (how they might teach using a particular photograph) and philosophical (why they might teach about a particular photograph), with narrow definitions of what they deemed relevant and appropriate for their students. Their choices constructed a sanitized narrative of the Civil Rights Movement that largely avoided a discussion of racism.

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

Introduction

Whether they must use some form of scripted lessons or have total autonomy with what and how to teach, teachers make hundreds of decisions each day about what to highlight, what to downplay, and what to avoid – decisions whose path leaves behind a wake that we call the enacted curriculum. Inevitably, these decisions are mitigated by a series of influences like testing pressures, available resources, students' interests, and teachers' own content knowledge, values, and world-views. What choices do teachers make when creating units about the history of oppressed people? What do they include and exclude from the stories they tell? What explanations do they offer for their choices? And what do these reveal about the historical narratives they are presenting to their students?

To answer these questions, this study asked pre-service and practicing social studies teachers to select and discard five images from a bank of 25 famous and lesser-known photographs in order to design a hypothetical unit about the African

[☆] The authors have no financial interest or benefit arising from the direct applications of their research. This study was not funded by grants.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 608 852 3056.

E-mail addresses: katyswalwell@gmail.com (K. Swalwell), apelleg2@gmu.edu (A.M. Pellegrino).

¹ Tel.: +1 703 993 5253.

American Civil Rights Movement in the United States (CRM) (see [Appendix A](#) for images). The CRM is a useful topic for this study both because of its entrenched status as a prevalent topic in K-12 U.S. history classrooms and because of its emphasis on the history of racial oppression – a subject central to effective social studies ([Au, 2009](#); [McNeil, 2005](#)). Teachers selected images they believed best represented the CRM and discarded those they believed would not contribute to or even perhaps inhibit students' understanding of the CRM. Analysis of participants' choices as well as the explanations for their decisions reveal varied beliefs about how teachers should go about representing past oppression, and how they should make curricular choices about social studies content in general. As findings show, both in-service and pre-service teachers at the K-12 level tended to be guided by technical and philosophical criteria with the majority offering narrow definitions of *relevance* and *appropriateness* that ultimately constructed sanitized narratives of the Civil Rights Movement and avoided robust attention to racism and White supremacy.

Background

In the current U.S. educational climate, it is clear that teachers' curricular choices are constrained by standards and accountability pressures. Even with the advent of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which emphasizes students' research and analytical skills, teachers are largely left out of conversations about curricular development and the content they are tasked to provide to their students. Major curricular (and assessment) decisions are instead mostly made at the national and state level. Teachers are expected to teach for student success on end-of-course or other high stakes assessments, largely eschewing potent skill and knowledge development fostered by effective pedagogies. In social studies, this dynamic is perhaps exacerbated by the nature of disciplinary content, which includes topics of political and social controversy ([Cherryholmes, 2013](#); [Grant, 2008](#)) and the potential for students to develop sophisticated reasoning and research skills, which can be more challenging than other skills to teach and assess ([Barton, 2011](#); [Wineburg, 2001](#)).

Despite these pressures from outside the classroom, social studies teachers must still make practical decisions individually and in cooperative teams about what content to include/exclude, what to emphasize/deemphasize, and what means will best reach their curricular objectives ([Grant, 2008](#); [McCutcheon, 1995](#)). Standards, curriculum maps, and pacing guides certainly put pressure on teachers with regards to what content to cover and what relative levels of depth they can reach on certain topics, but teachers personally affect the curriculum at every turn ([Cornbleth, 2001](#)). While some teachers choose to simply teach the standards as presented, others opt to purposefully design their curriculum through their social and cultural interpretations of the content ([Bandura, 2001](#); [McNeil, 2005](#)). [Salinas and Castro \(2010\)](#), for example, described two Latino pre-service teachers who recognized the inability of the sanctioned curriculum to meet the needs of their students and 'openly disrupted the official social studies knowledge supported by the standard curriculum' (p. 448). And [Monte-Sano and Budano \(2013\)](#) revealed the conscious choices two novice teachers made when selecting emphasis and direction of the curriculum.

In light of the tensions that manifest between the formal and the enacted curriculum, a significant part of teacher development at various stages of teachers' careers must include attention to how they make curricular decisions and the cultural and social contexts in which they make them. Methods courses for pre-service teachers and in-service teacher professional development are two kinds of 'intentional learning opportunities (to) help teachers acquire and develop the vision, knowledge, practices, frameworks and dispositions they need to promote student learning' ([Feiman-Nemser, 2008](#), p. 697). Specifically in the study of U.S. history, these opportunities must involve representing, transforming, and attending to students' ideas about the past ([Monte-Sano & Budano, 2013](#)) while adhering to curricular guidelines and how these interact to function as relevant lessons and activities that culminate in meaningful student learning.

This project focuses on the modern Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. as the topic through which to explore how pre-service and practicing teachers make curricular choices and conceptualize the narratives they want to impart based on those choices. The opportunities for teaching about the CRM seem especially ripe at this time, given the series of 50th anniversary commemorations of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and recent Supreme Court decisions that are directly related to the CRM (for example, the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the 2013 decision in *Shelby County, AL v. Holder*). Despite the importance of this era in American history, textbook representations of the CRM range from limited to poor ([View, 2010](#)). In particular, civil rights teaching is typically offered through the lens of a handful of individuals and events, with little analysis of the historical context, the contemporary legacies of the movement, or the intersectionality and flow of social justice activism that preceded and followed the years typically associated with the period ([Aldridge, 2006](#); [Brown & Brown, 2010](#); [Menkart, Murray & View, 2004](#)). Nationally, the mandates to teach about the CRM lessen the farther away from the South and the smaller the African American population (Southern Poverty Law Center, p. 7). Given these circumstances, an examination of new approaches to teaching about the Civil Rights Movement seems to be a timely and complementary topic to better explore teachers' curricular decision-making with regards to the histories of oppressed people.

Theoretical frameworks

Curricular decision-making

This study was grounded in how social and cultural interpretations of content affect individual teachers' *curricular decision making* ([Feiman-Nemser, 2008](#)) with the assumption that:

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/108360>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/108360>

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