

Guest Editors' Introduction— Social Studies Teacher Education: Dare We Teach for Democracy?

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Social studies education and the preparation of social studies teachers is a highly contested arena. A key issue social studies educators continually wrestle with is whether social studies education should promote a brand of citizenship that is adaptive to the status quo and interests of the socially powerful or whether it should promote citizenship aimed at transforming and reconstructing society (Hursh & Ross, 2000; Ross, 2006; Ross & Marker, 2005).

In our democratic society, all teachers and teacher educators—regardless of subject area—can learn from the ideas shared by social studies educators that deal with how to make education in an “era of accountability” more responsive to democratic ideals that form the foundation of social studies teaching and curriculum. We believe that the ongoing discussion of research, theory, and practice in social studies teacher education has the potential to benefit all teacher educators in critically examining and transforming their practices to better meet the needs of P-16 students.

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This themed issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* focuses on the status of social studies teacher education in an era where social studies education is suffering from declining curricular importance in elementary and secondary schools amidst issues such as accountability, standardization of the curriculum, the neo-conservative agenda, social justice, and teaching for a democratic society. The articles included here examine how both teachers and teacher educators respond to these issues in preservice and inservice teacher education experiences, assess the impact of these contexts on the preparation of social studies teachers in a democratic society, and present approaches to social studies teacher education that support democratic teaching in an era of accountability.

Phillip Kovacs sets the stage for this issue with his article “Education for Democracy: It Is Not an Issue of Dare, It Is an Issue of Can,” in which he examines how neoconservative and neoliberal educational reform efforts, including the *No Child Left Behind Act*, work to prevent social studies teachers from teaching towards democracy. In response, Kovacs argues that if social studies teachers and teacher educators are to have spaces where they can teach towards democracy, progressive scholars must amplify progressive ideals and develop and maintain a progressive infrastructure capable of supporting education in the public interest.

If anyone doubts that teaching for democracy in today’s schools is a dangerous proposition, Robert L. Dahlgren’s “*Fahrenheit 9/11* in the Classroom” illustrates remarkably easy it is to lose one’s job merely for attempting to teach social studies in a public school in the United States today. In this article, Dahlgren examines this disturbing picture of the teaching profession in the twenty-first century through the explosive reaction to the use of Michael Moore’s provocative documentary film *Fahrenheit 9/11* in American classrooms.

W(h)ither the social studies in high-stakes testing? is the question posed by Wayne Au in his article, which draws on the available body of empirical research, to argue that social studies teachers are feeling the pressures of high-stakes testing, and that these pressures are causing social studies teachers to alter their classroom practices and curriculum. Au posits that because of the consistent variability connected to social studies teaching in relation to high-stakes tests, social studies education, in many instances, is positioned to provide an education that challenges the hegemonic norms of high-stakes testing generally as part of a broader need to teach for social justice in today’s schools.

In “Social Studies and the Social Order: Telling Stories of Resistance,” Douglas McKnight and Prentice Chandler ask “what is the role of social studies education in a political atmosphere in which a technocratic discourses of testing and accountability threatens to undermine the very democratic institutions that social studies is supposed to uphold and criticize?” In response, they tell stories of a social studies teacher and a university professor that provide a counter narrative to current socio-political milieu, as well as offer some possible approaches to resisting the technocratic discourse that dominate social studies teaching and teacher education.

These are cautionary tales of the risks, complications and consequences of engaging in acts of resistance.

Following a related theme, Jennifer A. Tupper's "Unsafe Water, Stolen Sisters, and Social Studies: Troubling Democracy and the Meta-Narrative of Universal Citizenship," disrupts perhaps the core concept in the social studies curriculum—citizenship. Tupper questions what is democratic about the current state of "democracy" in North America in an attempt to dispel the veracity of citizenship as universal, an idea that permeates social studies curriculum documents, glossing over or rendering non-existent historical and contemporary realities of individuals who have not experienced citizenship in equitable and just ways. She then argues that if we hope to move toward a more genuinely democratic reality, we must consider the role that teacher education can play, the principles and practices that guide our teacher education programs, and how we might work with our students to interrogate their very understandings of citizenship and democracy, the cornerstones of what many believe education to be serving.

In "Democracy Denied: Learning to Teach History in Elementary School," Timothy D. Slekar documents how an elementary preservice teacher, Amy, learned to teach history from a "patriotic indoctrination approach" and how powerful and appealing this approach was, considering her limited knowledge of American history. Slekar demonstrates how this approach essentially denied Amy any opportunity to learn about the richness of social studies content and the possibilities it provides for genuine democratic discourse. The outcome is a narrative portrait of a preservice teacher and a cautious analysis of what the outcomes might mean for teacher education researchers concerned with the future of social studies and its commitment to citizenship education.

Like the field of social studies education itself, democracy is a contested concept and media play a significant role in shaping our notions of what exactly constitutes democracy. William Gaudelli's article "Interpreting Democratic Images: Secondary Students' Reading of Visual Texts" builds on previous research and theory in social studies curriculum to address how democracy is interpreted by secondary students through visual texts. Gaudelli begins with a brief exploration of hermeneutics and then presents and interprets data from focus groups of secondary students in three high schools who viewed democratic visual texts. He concludes by reweaving insights generated from focus group data around hermeneutic concepts that suggest implications for social studies curriculum. The main question of this research is: What insights about democracy do students construct in light of visual texts?

Laura Stein and Anita Prewett report the results of a survey of social studies teachers seeking to integrate media literacy education into their classrooms in their article "Media Literacy Education in the Social Studies: Teacher Perceptions and Curricular Challenges." This study aims to help teachers and teacher educators better understand the particular curriculum development and teacher training needs of social studies teachers engaged in media literacy education. The authors discuss

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factors that may place an additional drag on the ability to develop training and curricular resources, offer a discussion of how the aims of media literacy education have been understood and conceptualized in communication and education literature.

The next two articles examine the use of critical pedagogy approaches at in the public school classroom and in social studies teacher education. In “Adventures in Critical Pedagogy: A Lesson in U.S. History,” Deborah Seltzer-Kelly analyzes her struggle to incorporate liberatory practices in high school history classes and in the process offers insights into the circumstances new teachers may face when they are mentored by older colleagues and teacher educators who have, on some level, opted out of engaging the tensions between the mandate to prepare future educators to deliver standards-based school curricula and a fundamental commitment to democratizing education.

Ricky Lee Allen and César Augusto Rossatto ask “Does Critical Pedagogy Work With Privileged Students?” Based upon their experiences in teacher education answer they believe that the answer is “No.” Allen and Rossatto call for a sympathetic critique of critical pedagogy and in this article outline a refinement of critical pedagogy that deals more explicitly with students from oppressor groups and, to a lesser extent, those in oppressed groups who have internalized the discourse of the oppressor.

Although the call for teacher reflection has been well pronounced, many teacher education programs today are not designed to use thoughtful reflection as a means to empower teachers. The standards-based approaches to teaching and teacher education further erode an emphasis on preservice and inservice teachers critically examining their practices and the theories that underlie what they do in the classroom. In his article “Developing Involved and Active Citizens: The Role of Personal Practical Theories and Action Research in a Standards-based Social Studies Classroom,” Richard H. Chant describes his efforts to design a process using personal theorizing and action research within his social studies classroom, which allowed the teacher to experience how reflecting on his practice might lessen the negative impact of the teacher-as-conduit model promoted by bureaucratic accountability systems, while also emphasizing self-direction, personal, and professional knowledge, growth, and empowerment.

The contributors to this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* offer important critiques and perspectives of how education for democracy is compromised in contemporary P-12 social studies classrooms and within the current structures of teacher education. More importantly, however, these articles provide examples of resistance and hope for how social studies teaching and teacher education in general might reclaim and realize the democratic goals that have long been at the heart of the field.

References

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