Survey on the Status of Social Studies: Development and Analysis

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In this paper, we outline the rationale for developing the Survey of the Status of Social Studies (S4). The instrument contains items for analyzing the organizational structure, instructional decision-making, professional attitudes, and demographics of social studies teachers. Nationally-inclusive data generated from this survey analysis were used to examine the technical and theoretical validity of the instrument. Incorporating factor analysis, findings suggest constructs embedded within S4 related to social studies pedagogy, content emphases, and technology-use that reflect extant theory. As such, the S4 and accompanying nationwide data set offer social educators a valuable resource for fostering professional development and policy.

Keywords: social studies, survey research, teacher characteristics, instructional strategies, Content-emphasis, technology-use

Introduction

In the changing 21st century curricular landscape, understanding the characteristics, instructional decision-making and pedagogical aims of social studies educators is a complex endeavor. The social studies have long been viewed as the curricular home of citizenship education; the field charged with preparation of the nation’s future citizens (Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Parker, 2003). Historically, this characterization of social studies education and those who teach it has been problematized by ideological conflicts, a shuffling of discipline dominance, and unfavorable educational policy positioning (Evans, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2011). Complications aside, examining who represents the field of social studies, how they teach, and why they do it is important for several reasons.

First, teachers’ beliefs and the context of their lived and work experience influence instructional decision-making (Costigan & Crocco, 2004; Ross, 2006). Social studies instruction, arguably more than other subjects, is shaped by a confluence of teachers’ and students’ beliefs and identity (Epstein, 2001, 2009). Examining these relationships has tremendous pedagogical implications for how social studies is taught in the classroom and how future teachers are prepared at the university. Second, while an aim of social studies traditionally has been citizenship education, this focus often differs across grade levels (Alleman & Brophy, 2001; Hanna, 1937; Leming, Ellington, & Schug, 2006). Exploring the differences in social studies instruction across grades offers an opportunity for critical examination of how and why teachers enact various curricula. Finally, data on the characteristics and practices of social studies teachers can have significant impact on related educational policy. Given the complexity of defining social studies purpose across state curricula (Au, 2007, 2009) and the increasing marginalization of social studies in the classroom (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; VanFossen, 2005), it is necessary that socials studies combats a perceived image problem. Such a problem stems
from partisans on the right who want to eliminate social studies in favor of historical transmission (Leming, Porter-Magee, & Ellington, 2003; Ravitch & Finn, 1987; Thornton & Barton, 2010) and from progressives on the left who question the veracity of social studies efforts to bring about societal change (Gay, 2003; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2003).

A large-scale endeavor, such as the current study, provides a public-policy foothold from which both future social studies related research and substantive advocacy campaigns can emerge. Previous large-scale efforts to characterize social studies teachers and their teaching are outdated and suffer from generalizability issues (Leming, 1991; Ochoa, 1981) or a lack of specificity to social studies instruction (Fitchett, 2010). The current study was planned and implemented by a team of social studies educators from colleges and universities across the U.S.A., the “State of Social Studies Research Team”, or SSSRT (see under list of Web-Based References). The team’s goal was to develop a large-scale national study to support research initiatives that might inform both practice and policy. In an effort to characterize Kindergarten-12 social studies teaching, this multi-state consortium of researchers collaborated on nation-wide data collection and survey development. In this paper, we provide the framework for how and why our research team developed the primary instrument for that data collection. Specifically, we offer justification for development of the survey, methodological considerations in the instrument’s construction, prospective uses for the instrument and the data it has generated, and limitations for its use. In the subsequent section, we present a review of previous analyses of social studies teacher characteristics both qualitative and quantitative.

A Review of Previous Analyses of Social Studies Teacher Characteristics

Qualitative research has traditionally dominated examination of social studies teacher work. S.G. Grant (1996, 2003) and Bruce VanSledright (2011), utilized case study methodologies to examine how teacher background, professional attitudes, and pedagogical aims influence social studies practitioners’ instructional decision-making. To explore the professional dispositions of teachers, Jill Gradwell (2006) and Stephanie van Hover (2006) used ethnographic methods. Other studies have examined how school level context and student demographics, coupled with teacher identity, influenced social studies teaching (Epstein, 2001, 2009; Pace, 2008, 2011; Wills, 2007). While these studies, and others like them, have substantially contributed to our understanding of practitioners’ attitudes toward social studies instruction, Wayne Au (2007) suggested that we remain cautious in how we interpret these findings due to the limited sampling frame, potential bias due to intimacy between researcher and subject, and interstate differences between curricular structures and purposes. Generalizing from such qualitative findings is, necessarily—due to the nature of such studies—problematic. This makes it difficult for such research to inform or influence large-scale policy reform in social studies. Survey analysis, on the other hand, affords researchers the opportunity to examine the collective landscape of social studies teachers, offering the potential to influence such policy.

The National Science Foundation

Few studies have substantially surveyed the field of social studies for teacher characteristics and professional habits (Leming, 1991). The National Science Foundation (NSF) conducted the most comprehensive and rigorous survey study of social studies teachers in 1976. The NSF provided an overview of the demographics, instructional decision-making, and content
emphases among math, science, and social studies pre-college teachers for policy-making purposes (Weiss, 1977). James Shaver, O.L. Davis, and Elizabeth Helburn (1978) reviewed the NSF study along with two other funded projects with cooperation of the the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). The review noted that textbooks, lecture, and question/answer recitation overwhelmingly drove social studies teaching. It was concluded that the social studies teachers’ who responded were more concerned with students’ essential content acquisition than with inquiry-oriented instruction. This finding seemed to contradict the citizenship education goals of social studies education. As a recommendation for improving social studies practice, Shaver, et al (1979) suggested that teacher educators develop more pragmatic instructional positions.

**The Ochoa Study**

In another early attempt to survey the social studies profession, Anna Ochoa (1981) examined 402 social studies teacher from six states. This analysis presented some of the earliest insight into who taught courses in social studies methods (e.g., demographics, credentials) and the professional attitudes of the teachers. The survey instrument employed for this study explored social studies teachers’ background characteristics, academic history, reading patterns, opinions on controversial attitudes, and dispositions toward work (Ochoa, 1981). Though the scope and purpose of the study were ambitious, the survey did not contain items related to instructional decision-making, content emphases, nor the use of technology. Furthermore, the instrument failed to include school and classroom level contextual factors such as school location, socioeconomic status of students, and urbanity. Researchers were unable to determine either the type of instruction most prevalent among social studies teachers or the context in which they taught.

**The National Council for the Social Studies Surveys**

In an effort to understand social studies teachers’ attitudes and practices, Mary Haas and Margaret Laughlin (2001) and Kevin Vinson (1998) sampled members of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). The use of NCSS membership for surveying the field was not a novel idea (Leming, 1991); yet, unlike previous social studies-specific research, the instruments used in these projects included items specific to research and practice. In the process of survey construction, Vinson (1998) also conducted rigorous tests of reliability and validity. These instruments, while demonstrating greater complexity in item development, were purposefully limited in their application. Hass and Laughlin (2001) targeted elementary practitioners and Vinson (1998) examined the instructional decision-making of high school social studies teachers. Thus, these previous studies could not sufficiently compare social studies instruction across grade levels or offer an accurate picture of teacher practice nationally. The use of NCSS membership rolls as a sampling frame may have brought about inherent selection bias in that membership is not representative of all social studies teachers nationwide.

**Secondary Data Analyses**

Further attempts to conduct large-scale analysis of social studies teachers’ professional characteristics have incorporated secondary data sets. Robert Rutter (1986) analyzed data from the High School and Beyond (HSB) supplemental teacher survey of 1984. Researchers more recently have employed data made available from the *Schools and Staffing Survey* (SASS) public school teacher survey (Fitchett, 2010; Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012). These surveys, developed by the National Center for Educational Statistics, produced the most
expansive and generalizable data on public school teachers in the United States. While informative and considerably more nationally representative than previous analyses, these instruments were not designed to collect specific data about social studies teachers. While the self-reported data can be disaggregated to various social studies teacher subsets, the SASS and HSB teacher surveys (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007; Spencer, Sebring, & Campbell, 1987) do not contain items specific to the social studies pedagogy and teacher decision-making associated with social studies instruction, thus limiting the level of analysis appropriate for social education. As with the Ochoa (1981) instrument, teaching practices, content emphases, and related social studies issues were not stressed. In terms of external reliability, the complex sampling frame of respondents for this data, while sensitive to various socioeconomic, geographic, and demographic indicators, did not consider subject area as a primary sampling unit (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007; Spencer et al., 1987). Disaggregating social studies teachers at various grade levels (i.e. elementary, middle, high), geographic location (i.e. state, urbanity), and building-type (charter, parochial, private, public) from these survey data can be problematic with respect to sample size and analytic power.

Special Interest Group Projects

In addition to research conducted by social studies academics, there have been concerted efforts by public-policy groups and think tanks to survey the field, most notably the Fordham Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI). These groups have taken what might be characterized as a conservative, essentialist stance regarding social studies teaching, content, and purpose. These self-proclaimed “contrarians” criticize many progressive educational ideas and student-centered practices. The Fordham Institute, for example, published a book titled, Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong, which included a chapter titled “The Training of Idiots” (Leming et al., 2003). The social and political agendas of these organizations may cast suspicion on the research conducted and endorsed by their membership (Farkas & Duffett, 2010; Leming et al., 2006; Ravitch & Finn, 1987).

Given the limited, and often times contradictory, findings of previous large-scale social studies research, we sought to develop a survey study of social studies teachers that used an instrument developed by and for social studies teacher educators, practitioners, and public-policy advocates. The purpose of the study was to better understand the current state of social studies in the Kindergarten-12 public school curriculum and of the teachers who teach it. Since the 1976 NSF studies, the profession has changed. Shaped by political, social, and cultural forces, the purposes and aims of social studies education have evolved. Given recent state and federal educational policy emphasizing science/mathematics education and English/language arts instruction seemingly at the expense of social studies instruction (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012), it is important for social studies professionals and advocates to inwardly examine the how and why of our practice. We were interested in documenting teachers’ characteristics, attitudes, and practices to “catch a glimpse” into the professional world of social studies education. The Survey of the Status of Social Studies (S4) designed by and for social studies educators, was developed to examine such contemporary social studies teaching and professional attitudes.
Method

Large-scale surveys provide generalizable findings that can be used to support a rationale for social studies teaching and offer insight into how we can better prepare future practitioners. The S4 was developed to meet this need. In the following sections, we summarize the development of survey items, content validity procedures, and construct validity analysis. We recommend referring to the instrument website (see under list of relevant webpages) while examining this section.

Development of Items

Respondent Organization

Grade level, classroom structure, and school type can have substantial influence over instructional decision-making, content emphasis, and workplace attitudes. Elementary social studies curriculum traditionally has followed an “expanding communities” model (Hanna, 1937). Social scientists and educational progressives rationalized that elementary school children could more readily conceptualize their direct community (e.g., family, neighborhood), with focus eventually enlarging to state, national, and world considerations. Such curricula are more often associated with subject matter integration (Alleman & Brophy, 1993; Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnnson, Sierrere, & Stewart, 2008) and a focus on cultural universals (Alleman & Brophy, 2001). Though little research supports this curricular sequence (Henke, Chen, & Goldman, 1999), it remains a staple of elementary content development. Given this structure, considerable variability lies in how much time practitioners spend on social studies teaching in elementary schools (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010) and how they utilize that time (Thornton & Houser, 1996; VanFossen, 2005). Conversely, high school (and to some degree middle grades) social studies has specialized in content area specifics, most often history but also separate civics, geography, economics and social science courses (Evans, 2004; Kliebard, 2004; Thornton & Barton, 2010). Instruction in later grades tends to focus on isolated content knowledge and occasionally the inquiry-based skills (e.g., historical thinking) associated with the content. Thus, the pedagogical content knowledge of social practitioners and execution of that knowledge (Shulman, 1986) varies according to the grade level taught.

Curricular development, emphasis, and utilization also vary among states. Political, social, economic, and other cultural forces influencing the social studies curriculum often account for these interstate differences. Consequently, state-by-state comparisons of social studies are a problematic endeavor (Au, 2007, 2009). Within state variance can be just as problematic across public schools, private schools, and charter schools with each mandating different curricular guidelines and advocating for different classroom practices. As of this writing, little research has examined the differences in social studies teaching among these different school types.

In developing the Survey of the Status of Social Studies (S4), we constructed initial items to indicate the state, school type, and grade level in which the respondent taught (items 1 to 4). These items allow researchers to disaggregate responses by state, school-type, and grade level. Response to these initial items also directs survey participants to one of three grade level-specific domains: elementary (items 5-26), middle (items 27-41), or high school (items 42-57). Elementary-specific items include class organization, teacher and student rank of core course (English/language arts, math, science, and social studies) importance, instructional time spent on subject area instruction, use of integration, and attitudes toward mandatory testing. These items
were influenced by previous research (Bolick, Adams, & Willox, 2010; Boyle-Baise et al., 2008; Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Heafner, Libscomb, & Rock, 2006; VanFossen, 2005; Holloway & Chiodo, 2009; Yon & Passe, 1990) that examined elementary teachers’ classroom prioritization of social studies and attitudes towards teaching it. Middle and high school domains include individual items on grade level description, class organization, and subject area taught (high school only). These organizational items were constructed to reflect the more subject matter-specific curriculum of middle and high school social studies with its focus on content and separate disciplines (Thornton, 2005; Thornton & Barton, 2010). Organizational structure and development of these items was influenced by, and/or replicated from, the SASS survey for public school teachers (Coopersmith & Gruber, 2009).

Professional Development Items

One area of growing interest among social educators is professional development. Previous research across varying subject areas has confirmed the impact of professional development to improve teachers’ content knowledge, encourage dynamic instructional strategies, and increase students’ outcomes on assessments (Borko, 2004; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). Within social studies, research has examined the influence of professional development on teachers’ instructional decision-making and content knowledge (Kenreich, 2002; van Hover, 2008). In a study of a Teaching American History Grant professional development, De La Paz and colleagues (2011) found that sustained commitment to the program via networking and follow-up workshops produced significant gains in students’ ability to conduct historical inquiry. As van Hover (2008) noted, the majority of these studies are particularistic and do not provide large-scale understanding of teachers’ involvement with professional development. We, therefore, constructed items relating to social studies teachers’ professional development (items 60-68). These items included teachers’ rank-order scales of possible professional development topics such as methods, classroom management, content, and special needs students. Teachers also reported the type and frequency of professional development in which they had participated over the last academic year. We posited that social studies education researchers could use participant responses to gauge teachers’ levels of interest in type and format of professional development. Responses to various items could be analyzed in conjunction with teachers’ reported instructional strategies and content emphases.

Classroom Accommodation Items

English language learners (ELLs) are a growing community in our social studies classrooms. Yet, as Cinthia Salinas (2006) has pointed out, the teaching of social studies often fails to resonate with recent immigrants within this population. Research indicated that teachers with a high percentage ELLs received less instructional support, obtained minimal training to work with limited English proficient students, and lacked the efficacy to sufficiently support students’ learning (O’Brien, 2011). Though frequently under-prepared to work with ELLs, social studies teachers viewed cultural connection as vital. Survey data collected by Seonhee Cho and Gabriel Reich (2008) indicated that social studies teachers rated cultural understanding of ELLs as an essential area of growth. In addition to ELL populations, social studies classrooms are charged with preparing students with special needs for engagement in a democratic society. Students classified as special needs, however, are leaving school less civically competent than their regular education peers (Hamot, Shokoohi-Yetka, & Sasso, 2000). Social studies’ low priority among teachers of special needs children might be partially
responsible for this phenomenon (Litner & Schweder, 2008; Mastropieri et al., 2005). Given this literature, four items were constructed for S4 to reflect specific issues facing special education (items 70-73) and five on ELL instruction in social studies (items 74-78). Items categorized the type of student, the mode of instruction (inclusion or pull-out), differentiation techniques, and obstacles to working with student populations. These items offer researchers the opportunity to examine teachers’ work with various classroom populations on a large scale and compare responses based upon various instructional criteria, dispositions, or other milieu and to make comparisons across various student populations.

**Institutional Strategies and Content Emphasis Items**

As noted earlier, the contentious aims and purposes of social studies education are well documented (Evans, 2004; Levstik, 2008; Thornton & Barton, 2010). The intersection of discipline area, ideology, and identity politics has contributed to an uncertain characterization of what social studies teaching is and should be. Tom Fallace (2010) recognized three orientations to social studies (the traditional, disciplinary, and progressive strands). Individually, these paradigms infer both purpose and practice of social studies education. For many teachers, the purpose of social studies remains a traditional transmission of canonical, historical knowledge. The increased emphasis on accountability and prescriptive curricula has intensified pressures on social studies teachers to narrow their content focus and pedagogy (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Gerwin & Visone, 2006; Hargreaves, 1994). Traditional orientations toward social studies teaching are associated with teacher-centered instruction, lecture, and textbook-focused reading (Fallace, 2010). Research of teaching practice suggests that this orientation is the most pervasive and observed form of instruction among practitioners (Leming et al., 2006; Levstik, 2008; Ravitch & Finn, 1987). However, students exposed to primary sources, historical writing, and other “active” forms of instruction score significantly higher on US History National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) tests (Smith & Niemi, 2001). These discipline-specific instructional strategies are characterized most frequently by historiography and methodology-focused pedagogy (Grant, 2003; VanSledright, 2011; Wineburg, 2001). While advocated among social educators as a preferred instructional approach, such pedagogy occupies a mostly ancillary position in classrooms due to teachers’ lack of skill-set and perceived curriculum constraints (Barton & Levstik, 2003; Wineburg, 2005). Such a ‘progressive’ orientation focuses on themes of citizenship, inquiry, and discipline integration (Borko, 2004). Progressive social studies teachers more often utilize authentic instructional strategies such as cooperative learning, inquiry, and discussion (Hess, 2009; Parker, 2003; Smith & Niemi, 2001; van Hover, 2008). Teachers who subscribe to this orientation are likely to foster tolerant classroom environments where students’ knowledge and perspectives are validated (Avery, 2002; Torney-Purta & Richardson, 2003). Yet, like discipline-specific instruction, progressive teaching is observed less frequently than traditional social studies practice.

Based on Fallace’s (2010) three instructional paradigms, we constructed two inventories to gauge teachers’ social studies teaching practices and purpose. The instructional strategies inventory (elementary = item 16, middle = item 31, and high school = item 47) is comprised of branch items that measured frequency of various instructional strategies (e.g., listen to a lecture, examine a primary source document, participate in a cooperative learning assignment). We also developed branch items to examine respondents’ content emphases (elementary=item 18, middle= item 33, and high school=item 49) such as political history, civic responsibility, and
issues of race and class. Additionally, two items asked teachers to indicate agreement with one of two statements about the goals of their social studies instruction: one with a traditional approach and one with a more progressive focus. These inventories, used separately or together, allow researchers to explore the multifaceted aims and approaches toward teaching social studies.

**Instructional Technology in Social Studies Items**

Social studies content (and the methods used to teach that content) lends itself to digital (and other) instructional technologies. Phil VanFossen (1999) suggested that social studies, by its very nature as a media rich field, was the content area most likely to benefit from such technologies. In their meta-analysis of previous studies, Kathy Swan and Mark Hofer (2008) concluded that social studies teachers are slow to adopt new technologies and less likely than other content area teachers to use technology overall (Cuban, Kirkpatrick, & Peck, 2001). Nowhere is this more evident than in the classroom use of the Internet. Adam Friedman and Phil VanFossen (2010) found that, for social studies teachers, classroom use of the Internet in their teaching has been both a lost opportunity and an unexplored frontier. In an effort to determine how social studies teachers were utilizing digital and computer technologies in their classrooms, we developed a series of items that asked teachers to indicate how often they engaged students in particular forms of instructional technology. Among these items were questions about: (1) Internet use, (2) computer-based instruction, (3) use of digital primary sources, (4) Web 2.0 use, (5) the use of Web Quests, (6) multi-media, and (7) virtual fieldtrips.

**Items Replicated from Schools and Staffing Surveys**

Little research has examined social studies teachers’ professional attitudes (Levstik, 2008). In developing the survey, we sought to construct valid items that would reliably measure social studies teachers’ perceptions of workplace climate. We chose to replicate items from the largest and most statistically scrutinized survey of teachers’ workplace attitudes, the NCES Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) for public school teachers (Coopersmith & Gruber, 2009). These scales are represented in item 59. We also incorporated SASS demographic measurements (gender, race/ethnicity, urbanity of school location). They are included in the survey as items 69 and 78-95.

**Content Validation**

As noted previously, the comprehensive instrument developed by VanFossen (2005) was a starting point for creating the S4. The authors created a beta version of the S4 in the commercial survey tool Surveyshare. A sub-group of the State of Social Studies Research Team was asked to review, submit comments, and/or submit additional items for inclusion in the instrument. The authors integrated these suggestions and created a second beta version. This second version also was reviewed by the sub-group and then discussed when the State of Social Studies Research Team (SSSRT) met at NCSS annual conference in 2010. This process of developing survey item collaborations with expert scholars in the field of social studies education established face validity. We further examined content validity through a two-step process. The first step used the research and theoretical expertise of professors of social studies education. The second step employed classroom teachers to examine functionality of items.

First, we shared these results with the SSSRT members from higher education institutions across the country who had not been directly involved in the instrument development. Individuals were assigned to various inventories in the S4 (e.g., instructional decision-making,
professional development, technology, etc.) based upon their area of teaching and research expertise. These reviewers provided feedback on item selection, wording, and placement within the survey. This formalized feedback helped us determine which items to keep, eliminate, and expand given the existing theory and research of social studies education. Second, the instrument (now in its third beta iteration) was piloted with teachers from Indiana (n = 88; mailed survey links) and North Carolina (n = 20; e-mailed survey links) in order to examine the instrument’s initial technical adequacy. Internal consistency reliability estimates using Cronbach’s alpha (α) coefficients were high across the three grade level-specific domains: elementary (α = 0.84), middle (α = 0.81), and high school levels (α = 0.93). Respondents to this pilot also provided feedback as to the relevance and wording of individual items. In addition, we examined survey completion times to determine whether the pilot participants were able to complete the survey in a reasonable amount of time (approximately 20 minutes). From the analysis of the pilot, we made final revisions to the instrument and disseminated it to SSSRT membership who would be responsible for data collection.

Between April 2010 and January 2011, we distributed the final version of the S4 through a web link to state representatives of the SSSRT. We received responses from Kindergarten-12 social studies teachers (n = 11295) from 44 states. The District of Columbia, Hawaii, Missouri, New Mexico, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming did not contribute to this study. Ideally, state representatives were tasked to incorporate stratified, random sampling of participants, but given the limited access of state teachers’ databases, SSSRT members in only five states (Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Ohio, and Wisconsin) were able to use the desired sampling frame. The remaining 39 states employed samples of convenience from various teacher and professional organization email listservs. Because of the difficulty in identifying state-level teacher-licensure databases, the response rate was relatively low: below 25% on average. In order to determine whether response rate variations would contribute significant error to a cross-state comparative analysis, we conducted a post hoc comparison of responses from states that used stratified, random sample responses from states that used samples of convenience. Results indicated statistically non-significant and negligible practical differences (η^2 < 0.02) between the groups. However, because there was also a wide range in proportion of responses across states—some states were overrepresented (e.g., FL, 18.90%) whereas other states of equal of greater population were underrepresented (e.g., NY, 1.90%)—we decided against detailed interstate comparisons.

**Construct Validation**

We posited that researchers of social studies pedagogy might want to investigate relationships among and between items. The use of single-item Likert-type scales, however, is fraught with issues of reliability and validity (Liu, 2004). For a single-item scale, participants are less likely to give consistent responses over time. Variability in responses can be affected by item interpretation, mood, and timing. Furthermore, many attitudes and constructs that social educators wish to examine (e.g., instructional strategies and content emphasis) are multi-dimensional (Levstik, 2008; VanSledright et al., 2006). A singular item does not always offer a valid interpretation of a complex pedagogy or attitude so, it is often more appropriate to aggregate single-items into multi-item constructs in order to measure abstract concepts (Liu, 2004). Therefore, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis of three social studies-specific inventories (instructional strategies, content emphases, and instructional technology).
Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is used to investigate possible commonalities among individual items within a survey inventory. These commonalities, which consist of shared variance among individual scales, are referred to as factors. Factors are multidimensional and are more representative of an abstract concept (i.e., teacher-centered or learning strategies) than the individual items from which the factors are drawn.

Researchers can use statistically valid factors that also align with substantiated social studies theory to investigate complex relationships between pedagogy, content, and teaching context. For example, factors embedded within the instructional strategies inventory (see Table 1) could be examined in association with credentials, demographics, and professional attitudes to answer questions regarding the nature of social studies teaching (i.e., Is instructional preference indicative of classroom demographics? Are grade level bands associated with discipline-specific instruction?) Thus, we conducted an EFA in the hopes that future researchers will use the factors uncovered in our analysis to investigate complex professional attitudes and beliefs associated with social studies instruction.

To examine the statistical validity and reliability of key item inventories embedded within the survey (e.g., instructional strategies, content emphases, and instructional technology), we disaggregated a randomized subgroup of approximately 20% of the complete sample ($n = 2818$). Examination of demographic variables indicated that this group was representative of the aggregated total, thus appropriate for exploratory analysis. We computed Cronbach’s $\alpha$ tests ($\alpha$) to examine internal consistency reliability of selected inventories. We also examined inter-item correlations within inventories to determine if constructs might account for variance among items.

Based upon $a$ priori findings, we conducted an EFA to establish the presence of latent variables within various item inventories. We employed principal axis factor analysis (PAF) to examine variable constructs because the items analyzed were Likert-type and assumptions of multivariate normality were not met (Costello & Osbourne, 2005). We used eigenvalues parameter values and scree plots to determine factor inclusion. Only eigenvalues greater than one were included in factor interpretation (Kaiser, 1960). To further substantiate the inclusion or exclusion of factors, we used scree plots to determine the break point among factors where eigenvalues were no longer substantially different (Costello & Osbourne, 2005). We employed rotation procedures to clearly establish latent constructs. Because previous studies suggest social studies teachers’ decision-making is inter-related and multifaceted (Grant, 2003; VanSledright et al., 2006), we chose to rotate data using an oblique procedure (oblimin), which allowed factors to correlate. In an attempt to reach simple solutions for the factors, we suppressed pattern matrix loadings (linear combinations of the variables) less than 0.30 of contributed variance for interpretation purposes. As noted in the subsequent results, simple solutions were not always attainable or conceptually applicable.

**Instructional Strategies Inventory**

To examine factor structure of the instructional strategies inventory (items 16, 31, and 47), we analyzed the three categories of respondents together. We intentionally excluded items pertaining to “whole class” instruction because it was not included in the high school category. Cronbach’s $\alpha$ test indicated reliability of the instructional inventory was an acceptable level ($\alpha = 0.71$). PAF distinguished three factors, which accounted for approximately 52% of the variance among items in the inventory (Table 1). We defined the three remaining factors as (1)
discipline-specific social studies instructional strategies, (2) teacher-centered learning strategies, and (3) student-centered social studies teaching strategies. These three factors reflect existing social studies literature on the direction and emphases of instructional decision-making (Fallace, 2010; Levstik, 2008). Two of the items, “working with maps or globes” and “watch films or videos,” minimally loaded on the discipline-specific factor, thereby suggesting a poor correlation with the factor. Examination of the communalities indicates a marginal proportion of these items’ variance is associated with the extracted factors (Table 1). Therefore, researchers should use caution when including these items for multivariate analysis. Interestingly, participation in role-play/simulation loaded upon two factors: discipline-specific and student-centered. We posit that the split loading item supports previous research on the use of perspective-taking and role-play discourse in making sense of social studies-related content (Hess, 2002, 2009). Furthermore, factor correlations indicate moderate association between student-centered and discipline-specific factors (Table 1). Conversely, correlations between teacher-centered*discipline-specific factors and teacher-centered*student-centered factors were low, indicating minimal association among these factors combinations.

Table 1

*Obliquely rotated principal axis factor loadings for the instructional strategies inventory (n=2642)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Discipline-specific Social Studies Instruction (26.8)</th>
<th>Teacher-centered Learning Strategies (15.6)</th>
<th>Student-Centered Social Studies Instruction (9.4)</th>
<th>Extracted Communalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examine photographs, artifacts, or primary source materials</td>
<td>.762</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing assignments such as essays or reflections</td>
<td>.521</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use computer-based social studies applications</td>
<td>.434</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in role play/simulations</td>
<td>.355</td>
<td>.325</td>
<td></td>
<td>.340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch videos or film</td>
<td>.305</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with maps or globes</td>
<td>.300</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Complete textbook-based worksheets | .716 | .481
Answer questions/define terms from textbook | .664 | .471
Listen to a lecture on social studies-related content | .371 | .252
Cooperative learning assignments | .688 | .458
Develop group projects | .629 | .515

**Direct Oblimin Factor Correlations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.254</td>
<td>.466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>.254</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>.466</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Content Emphases Inventory**

To explore factors within the content emphases inventory, we examined responses to items that asked teachers to report on the nature of the content coverage in their classrooms (items 18, 33 and 49). Each of these items required teachers to indicate how frequently they emphasized various content (see Table 2) such as learning about the US Constitution, learning basic economic concepts, learning foundations of state and local government, etc. We merged responses from each of the three grade level categories. Cronbach’s Alpha tests indicated very high inter-item reliability ($\alpha=0.90$). PAF specified two factors that accounted for approximately 64.0% of total variance among items in the inventory (see Table 2). Based upon strength of factor loadings, we defined two latent factors as civic content and historical content. These themes represent the most prevalent underlying content emphases in social studies education (Levstik, 2008). Teaching basic economic concepts loaded onto both factors (albeit the smallest loading), suggesting that economic content is taught across both domains and is embedded across social studies content (Ellington, 2011). Factor correlations indicated a moderate, inverse relationship between the civics content and history content factors (Table 2). This finding suggests that an increase in civic content domain is associated with a decrease in historical content (and vice versa).
Table 2

*Obliquely rotated principal axis factor loadings for the content emphases inventory (n=2635)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Extracted Communalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During social studies instruction how often do you emphasize the following:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic responsibility</td>
<td>.805</td>
<td>.516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamentals of state and/or federal government</td>
<td>.759</td>
<td>.611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about the US Constitution</td>
<td>.739</td>
<td>.581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing core democratic values</td>
<td>.659</td>
<td>.561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating current events into classroom activities</td>
<td>.509</td>
<td>.345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic economic concepts</td>
<td>.389</td>
<td>.406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social history of the US and/or World</td>
<td>.894</td>
<td>.711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political history of the US and/or World</td>
<td>.857</td>
<td>.763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of religious views</td>
<td>.675</td>
<td>.493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues of race and class</td>
<td>.653</td>
<td>.555</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Given the current emphasis of instructional technology in social studies education (Swan & Hofer, 2008; VanFossen & Waterson, 2008), we included items focused on technology use: (1) purpose of technology, (2) technology tools, and (3) Internet-use. We merged grade level responses to the technology items (21 = elementary, 36 = middle, and 51 = high school). There were three emphases within these items: (a) use technology to support learner-centered strategies, (b) apply technology to develop students’ higher order thinking skills, and (c) facilitate technology-enhanced experiences that address the content standards. Internal consistency reliability was very high ($\alpha = 0.91$). The limited item-to-factor ratio prohibited the conducting of a factor analysis (Velicer & Fava, 1998).

**Technology Tools Inventory**

The technology tools inventory combined grade level responses across four items (22 = elementary, 37 = middle, and 52 = high school). The items covered four themes: (1) interactive multimedia presentations, (2) instructional strategies that utilize digital images/primary sources, (3) digital media, and (4) course development software. Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = 0.73$) was moderate. As with the technology purpose inventory, we decided against conducting a factor analysis due to a low item-to-factor ratio.

Internet-use inventory. Responses to the Internet-use item were also merged items across grade levels (23 = elementary, 38 = middle schools, 54 = high school). Cronbach’s alpha reflected high internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = 0.85$). PAF indicated two factors accounting for approximately 64.7% variance among inventory items (Table 3). Based upon the strength of factor loadings, we defined the two factors as (a) Internet for research/investigation and (b) Internet for communication. Factor correlations indicate a moderate association between the two latent constructs.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Extracted Communalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you have students use the Internet:</td>
<td>Internet for Research/Investigation (49.9)</td>
<td>.887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internet for Communication (14.8)</td>
<td>.723</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings from these factor analyses suggest that the S4 instrument and attached data reflect theory of previous social studies research efforts, thus inferring validity and reliability. Using this instrument, social studies professionals and advocates can design policy and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Direct Oblimin Factor Correlations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To find and examine primary source materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During social studies instruction</td>
<td>.782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To collect information for reports or projects</td>
<td>.735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To complete a Webquest or other inquiry activity</td>
<td>.656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To take a virtual field trip to an online museum</td>
<td>.424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with students from another country</td>
<td>.872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with others (including historians)</td>
<td>.548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To develop Web 2.0 projects</td>
<td>.533</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research/Investigation</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Research/Investigation</th>
<th>Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings from these factor analyses suggest that the S4 instrument and attached data reflect theory of previous social studies research efforts, thus inferring validity and reliability. Using this instrument, social studies professionals and advocates can design policy and
professional development drawn from large-scale findings. Given these potentials, we hope that researchers will dig deeper and test hypotheses using this instrument, data, and constructs embedded within the various inventories.

Discussion

It has been over 30 years since Shaver et al. (1978) published their results on the state of social studies. Since that time, social studies has experienced various national and state policy changes, shifts in pedagogy and purpose, and an altering workforce. Over the last generation, several quantitative (Haas & Laughlin, 2001; Ochoa, 1981; Vinson, 1998) and qualitative (Au, 2007; Grant, 2003; VanSledright, 2011) studies have profiled, examined, and characterized social studies teachers and their practice. At the macro-level, limited research has examined the social studies landscape broadly, who teaches it and how they do it. In this paper, we have presented the rationale and development of a survey instrument designed to collect national data in an effort to explore the professional characteristics and pedagogical decision-making of social studies teachers.

The origins of the instrument and the accompanying nation-wide survey were based on the need for data-driven research that has implications for local, state, and national policy-making. This instrument was developed specifically for social studies instructional and professional emphases. The data generated permit social studies researchers to investigate large-scale research questions specific to our field and offer an opportunity to explore the intersections between instructional practice and the contexts of teaching: better understanding the when, why, and how of social studies teachers’ decision-making (Au, 2007; Grant, 1996; VanSledright et al., 2006).

In addition to describing the development of the survey, we provided an example of how data developed from this instrument can be used to examine existing social studies theory and research. In our example, we conducted a factor analysis to examine key inventories included within the instrument. The factors that emerged from this analysis aligned with previous social studies scholarship examining practitioners’ instructional attitudes and behaviors (Levstik, 2008; Littner & Schweder, 2008; van Hover, 2008), thereby offering evidence of the survey’s validity. The latent constructs within each inventory also provide useful variables for potential researchers. Moreover, the various factor correlations substantiated the complexity of previous qualitative studies that have examined social studies teachers’ workplace characteristics and perceptions (Au, 2007; Grant, 2003; VanSledright, 2011). We plan to use these components in future multivariate analyses.

As mentioned earlier, a limitation to this study is the sampling methods used to collect data. Because only five states incorporated stratified, random sampling procedures and several key states (namely California and Texas) are underrepresented, it is not appropriate to suggest the data are nationally representative. It is appropriate, however, to recognize these data as the single largest, nation-wide sample of social studies practitioners in over 30 years. Moreover, the reliability and validity analyses suggest that the instrument reflects current and past social studies teaching and learning. We contend that while sampling procedures were flawed, the S4 instrument represents areas of theory and practice of the highest importance to social studies educators and should be considered in future studies.
As the critique of previous research suggests (VanSledright et al., 2006), studies examining pedagogical practice have been limited in their sampling depth and scope. What constitutes successful teaching often is contingent upon the subjective context of when, where, and whom is taught. Survey research (when conducted judiciously) offers a more substantial normative position from which to make generalizable claims (Richardson, 2006). The Survey on the State of Social Studies is an appropriate instrument for such research.

The ability to offer greater generalizability of research findings extends beyond social studies teacher education and theory. Large-scale analysis can and should be incorporated in policy dialogue surrounding social studies teaching and learning. One example where such data can be useful is that of the Common Core Standards. Current iterations of the standards address social studies only in the context of English/language arts and only as a vehicle for reading comprehension (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). As social studies teachers, teacher educators, and researchers, we understand that while literacy is essential to social studies, it is not the singular focus. Our survey is a tool whereby researchers can inform policy on what social studies teachers “do” at the local, state, and national level. In addition, it can offer landscape (rather than portrait) illustrations of how professional characteristics, student context, and instructional emphases merge in social studies classrooms.

Conclusion

If social studies is to prosper as a viable discipline in Kindergarten-12 schools, it has to adequately define itself. Beyond mission statements, social studies educators need the resources to discuss openly the pedagogical aims and practices that define who we are and what we do in this profession. Though numerous studies have examined social studies teachers’ practices and offered rich findings (Au, 2007; Gradwell, 2006; Grant, 2003; van Hover, 2006; VanSledright, 2011), these studies are limited in the context and replication of their results. Survey research, as in the past (Ochoa, 1981; Shaver, Davis Jr., & Helburn, 1979), provides an opportunity for researchers to examine teaching across multiple contexts, establishing a collective professional identity. The S4 instrument, created by and for social studies teachers, enfranchises those who care about social studies-related educational policy by presenting a research tool unique to the field from which to advocate, inform legislation, and make curricular decisions. While understanding what goes on in social studies classrooms cannot (and should not) be essentialized, examining the trends, attitudes, and emphases of teachers counteracts misrepresentations of what social studies is not and provides directions for what it is and could be.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank all of the social studies teacher educators and researchers who helped collect data and provide insightful feedback on the development of individual items. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the important contributions of Dr. Jeff Passe (Towson University), Dr. Nancy Patterson (Bowling Green University), and Dr. Michael Berson (University of South Florida).
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Web-Based References


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