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Social Science Pre-service Teachers' Preparation to Teach About Asia: A Research Study

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Abstract

Asia is the world's largest continent, both in terms of land mass and human population; yet, many of the schools in the United States still embrace a Eurocentric curriculum, and resultantly, U.S. citizens remain largely ignorant about topics pertaining to Asian nations including their geography, histories, politics, economics, religions, and cultures. The ignorance is particularly troubling considering the ever-increasing prominence that Asian nations play in global affairs. A crucial first step in broadening students' knowledge about Asian topics would be to improve the preparation of pre-service teachers, due to the influence that teachers have in determining students' educational experiences. Therefore, this case study sought to inquire about the shared experiences that a group of Social Science Education (SSE) seniors had, at a large public university located in the southeastern region of the United States, with regards to how they felt their program prepared them to teach accurately and confidently about topics and issues related to Asia. It was discovered that although the pre-service teachers within the SSE program expressed great confidence in the pedagogical skills they acquired through their teacher education program, they felt their lack of subject knowledge made them ill prepared to teach about Asian related content.

Keywords: *global education, pre-service teachers, United States, Asia*

Introduction

Asia is the world's largest continent, both in terms of land mass and human population, consisting of approximately 30% of the world's total land and more than 60% of the world's total population (World Atlas, 2012). Over the last 30 years, several Asian countries have increased their rank in the global economic marketplace and have taken on a more prominent role in world affairs. In fact, four of the United States' top ten trading partners are located in Asia: China, Japan, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia (U.S. Census, 2012). Additionally, Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing and most affluent minorities in the United States. Yet, the rationale for including Asian history and content within the U.S. curriculum is not just about economic and political connections between the regions. Rather, the emphasis is on improving the notion of global education/citizenship, which is described in more detail below, and centralizing the humanitarian value of people of Asian decent.

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However, despite the many interactions with Asian people and nations many U.S. schools still embrace a Eurocentric curriculum. Resultantly, U.S. citizens remain largely ignorant about this important continent. The lack of knowledge and communicative efficacy about Asia will harm U.S. students' chances of future success in life (Hong & Halvorsen, 2010; Menton, 2007). Moreover, the standards-based education reform in the U.S. seems to discourage teachers from deviating from the Eurocentric path (Rapoport, 2009). Teachers, though, still maintain at least some autonomy over what they teach in the classroom, as they are the primary gatekeepers for content (Barton, 2012; Thornton, 1991). Thus, the level of content knowledge teachers possess about Asian related content is of vital importance as they would be more able and capable to substantiate any classroom materials. Still much of the content knowledge that teachers possess, including topics and issues related to Asia, come during their time studying at the collegiate level. It would seem most suitable, then, to provide pre-service teachers in a social science education (SSE) program with ample and appropriate experiences grappling with content knowledge concerning Asia, as it may increase the likelihood they teach their future students a more globally centered curriculum (Byker & Marquardt, 2016; Poole & Russell, 2015).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the shared experiences a group of Social Science Education (SSE) seniors had at a large public university located in the southeastern region of the United States. More specifically, the study focused on uncovering and exploring experiences that prepared pre-service teachers to teach accurately and confidently about topics and issues related to Asia. The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What experiences did the SSE program provide that teach pre-service teachers about Asia?
2. What experiences does a pre-service teacher in the SSE program participate in that prepares them to teach about Asia?
3. How confident do pre-service teachers feel teaching about Asia in their future classes as a result of their experiences in the SSE program?
4. What experiences should the SSE program provide to teach pre-service teachers about Asia?

Literature Review

This investigation is framed around the theory of global education or citizenship; naturally, the literature review begins by unpacking it. Next, the study reviews a common hurdle proponents of global education face within the United States, the Eurocentric focus of the curriculum (Merryfield & Subedi, 2003). While global educators desire to discuss world regions proportionally (e.g. Africa, Asia, Latin America, etcetera), given publication constraints, this study focused on one specific world region (i.e. Asia). Therefore, the study reviewed literature that describes additional hurdles for this particular population and region (i.e. Orientalism). The study also sought literature that might briefly explain the problems of miseducating students about Asia. Finally, given that the participants are bounded within a teacher education system, the study examined literature that stresses the importance of such a system.

Global Education

Global education is an educational movement that began in the late 1960s. While it is difficult to define (Günel & Pehlivan, 2015), global education is based on the belief that with increasing technology and the emergence of international organizations and businesses, "the relative importance of …national influences will gradually decline, and a worldwide, trans-national culture will come to play an increasingly large role in determining the life patterns of individuals everywhere" (Becker & Mehlinger, 1968, p. 10). While learning about other countries, languages, and cultures is a part of global education, it is not sufficient, as students must also gain an awareness of how separate countries interact in the world and create a sort of new transnational society. Anderson and Anderson (1977) define global education as "education for responsible citizen involvement and effective participation in global society" (p. 36). Therefore, global educators focus on helping students to "perceive the world as an interconnected system… [which] leads to the need to understand diverse cultures, cultural interactions, and human conflicts" (Merryfield, 2005, p. 59). In addition, global educators believe that students need to understand they are not only citizens of a political state but also citizens of the world and that their actions affect people internationally.

Social studies researchers recognize global education as a pedagogical imperative (Anderson & Anderson, 1977; Hong & Halvorsen, 2010; Merryfield, 2011; Ukpokodu, 2010). Ukpokodu (2010) states that, "In an increasingly diverse and interdependent world, individuals, regardless of their geographic location, must possess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes

necessary to negotiate different social, cultural, political, and economic discourses" (p. 121). Moreover, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), the leading professional organization for social studies educators in the U.S., also endorses the skills, understandings, and attitudes achieved by effective global education as essential for the future success of all students (NCSS, 2001). The NCSS's National Curriculum Standards [2010] state, "Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity… [and] the study of global connections and interdependence" (n.p.).

Teachers and students in today's classrooms, though, are not meeting the goals of global education, despite the fact that in recent years global education has become an important framework for social studies education in the United States (Harshman & Augustine, 2013) and other nations (Tarman, 2016). In fact, in 1990, Martin and Gronewold found that only one third of U.S. states required a course in world history, world geography, or world cultures at the high school level. Yet, nearly 20 years later, Rapoport (2009) found that only 15 states contain the term *globalization* in their social studies curriculum standards, and only two included the term *global citizen(ship).*

Students in the U.S. also lack basic knowledge about the world. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, only 27% of eighth grade students and 20% of twelfth grade students scored at or above the "proficient" level on the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress Geography exam (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). Additionally, the National Geographic-Roper Public Affairs Geographic Literacy Survey (National Geographic, 2006) found that young adults in the United States: greatly overestimated the size of the United States compared to other countries, were unable to locate many key locations on world maps, and incorrectly identified English as the most prevalent native language in the world. Just as worrisome, 38% of respondents stated that speaking a foreign language was "not too important", a mere 32% indicated that they could speak a non-native language, and only 50% thought it was important to know where countries on the news were located (National Geographic, 2006). The results not only indicate that global knowledge is lacking in recent graduates of U.S. educational systems, but also that U.S. students fail to see the importance of global knowledge.

Eurocentrism

When U.S. teachers present global education in the schools, they often skew their instruction in a Eurocentric direction. The West "pitches itself against the Non-West as a superior force [giving students the] view that dominant ideas tend to be Western in values and origin" (Cousin, 2011, pp. 585-587). The United States' Eurocentric stance is a byproduct of the vestiges of Europe's history of imperialism. "Imperial traditions of Eurocentric scholarship delineate an, 'us' (the white men who created the dominant power and represent its ideals) and a 'them' (the Others who are divided from 'us' by their inferior cultures, poverty, politics, language, or other differences)" (Merryfield & Subedi, 2003, p. 13). Furthermore, "school curricula in the U.S. tends to divide the world between 'them' & 'us', 'East' & 'West'" (Hong & Halvorsen, 2010, p. 372).

The reality of global interconnectedness and range of human experience is ignored then by schools in the U.S., and "…too often, 'Western' and 'Asian' values are characterized as discrete, homogenous, and unchanging" (Ryan & Louie, 2007, p. 405). Eurocentric bias can be seen in U.S. classrooms in various forms including the persistent use of Mercator projection maps (Raat, 2004), the organization of geography and world history textbooks (Asia Society, 1976), as well as teachers' treatment of other cultures (Crocco, 2010; Subedi, 2007; Ukpokodu, 2010). All of which support a "framework of opposition" (Merryfield & Subedi, 2003, p. 13), that positions the West as culturally superior to the rest of the world and as "the yardstick by which all other societies are judged" (Crocco, 2010, p. 22). The "historical legacy of colonialism is such that the direction of cultural flow is largely unidirectional, from the West to the rest" (Nguyen, Elliot, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2009, p. 110).

In order to embrace the global nature of education, teacher educators must give proportional time to all world areas. In fact, Merryfield and Subedi (2003) state:

> Global educators share a commitment to moving beyond Eurocentric perspectives to teach the voices, experiences, ideas, and worldviews of [people] in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East and of people of color in the United States. Some call this inclusion 'moving the center' from a curriculum centered on American and European worldviews to a curriculum that is inclusive of worldviews of the majority of the world's peoples (p. 10).

Additionally, Ukpokodu (2010) argues that U.S. school systems must transform the predominant imperialist Eurocentric bias inherent in the current curriculum through global perspectives pedagogy. Global perspectives pedagogy is a teaching approach that emphasizes the critical issues that globalization has caused including, but not limited to, economic disparities, human rights abuses, and ecological concerns. According to Ukpokodu (2010), teacher educators need to ask themselves whose knowledge or bias are they privileging when supposedly teaching from a global perspective. Case (1993) echoed the global perspective pedagogy and stated that the global educator's role involves "nurturing perspectives that are empathic, free of stereotypes, not predicated on naïve or simplistic assumptions, and not colored by prejudicial statements" (p. 319).

Orientalism

The specific type of Eurocentrism that marginalizes the accomplishments and experiences of Asian people has been termed 'Orientalism" by Edward Said (1978). Said (1979) argued that Orientalism, pioneered by the British and French before World War II and taken over by the United States since that time, is:

> A style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'…the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theses, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind', destiny, and so on (pp. 2-3).

Said (1979) believes that the imperialist views of Europeans, and later Americans, have caused them to create a body of "knowledge" of what constitutes Asia: its people, beliefs, political systems, religions, etc. that in many ways is more reflective of the West's need to be superior and to establish a pattern for normalcy and progress than any actual reality of Asian culture. The body of "knowledge" created by Western nations is an attempt to justify their imperialist behavior. While the rest of the world is undergoing rapid change, those in the West, including the Unites States, considers these "truths" about Asian countries and cultures as fixed in time. In fact, Ryan and Louie (2007) stated:

> It is not difficult for teachers to see that their own countries have changed dramatically in the last two or three decades. But many do not see (not having

> lived there) how even more dramatically East Asian countries have changed (p. 409).

The teaching of these perceived "truths" about Asian countries and cultures is indeed a reality in U.S. schools. A study conducted by The Asia Society (2001) found that social studies teachers spend approximately 5% of their class time teaching about Asia. Hong and Halvorsen (2010) found that schools in the U.S. reinforced the stereotypes and misunderstandings about Asia through their teaching. Thus students were unable to demonstrate significant knowledge about Asia. What's more, Martin and Gronewold (1990) discovered that even in the extremely diverse state of New York, teachers who were very interested in including information on Asia could not because there were no appropriate classes in the curriculum in which to do so.

The instructional materials used in U.S. classrooms further substantiate the idea that educators are teaching inadequate information about Asia. A study conducted by The Asia Society (1976) analyzed 270 Asia-related textbooks commonly used in U.S. schools. They found that 71% of the books praised Western-style change and criticized Asian countries' emphasis on tradition as an impediment to progress. While 76% of the texts use Western standards to judge Asian people. Furthermore, the study found common themes in the texts which include: (a) Asia is trying to catch-up with the West, (b) Asians should see the Western way of life as the standard of normalcy, and (c) Asian countries were described primarily in terms of their strategic importance to the United States. Unfortunately, this paper even succumbed to this ideology as it started with the description of Asia in relation to the United States. Notwithstanding the obvious concerns about textbook treatment of Asia, teachers in the U.S. still report the textbook is the most common resource they use when teaching about Asia (Asia Society, 2001).

Effects of Miseducation

The United States' young people are ultimately the recipients of this miseducation, concerning Asia, and this has led to many misunderstandings and incorrect impressions on their part. An analysis of U.S. middle school student's discourses on Japan conducted by Inokuchi and Nozaki (2010) found that, while few of the students described themselves as disliking Japan, many described the country as "weird" or "different than us", and only a small portion were willing to capitulate that "some of it is good."

Many students in the U.S. leave school with the false impression that Europe and the United States are geographically, culturally, historically, and linguistically related, while Asia is

a distant land populated by unusual people with incomprehensible languages and cultures, and an entirely separate history.

> In students' minds, the United States and Europe are recognized as belonging to the same world, the 'West', whereas Asia is constructed to be another part of the world, the 'East'…in this distinction, students feel more comfortable with Europe whereas they consider Asia a remote and even fearful world (Hong & Halvorsen, 2010, p. 380).

Importance of The Teacher and Teacher Education

Despite the growth of the standards based educational reform in the United States since the 1980s, teachers in the U.S. still exercise a considerable amount of autonomy in their classrooms (Barton, 2012; Merryfield, 1994; Thornton, 1991). As a result, what they specifically choose to teach, or not teach, about Asia is largely a personal decision. "Teachers' beliefs about Asia are likely to influence what and how teachers teach about Asia" (Hong & Halvorsen, 2010, p. 377). Learning how to think from an Asian point of view is critical to teaching about Asia (Johnson, 1972). The solution to this problem, therefore, lies in teacher education programs such as that found at SE University. Schools and colleges of education, however, are not doing enough to prepare future educators for the demands of non-Eurocentric global education (Kopish, 2016; Nganga & Kambutu, 2011).

In fact, an analysis of history courses offered at SE University (a pseudonym) revealed similar results (see Table 1 below). When comparing the total number of history courses taught about each continent with the percentage of world population living in that continent, the results are startling. While it makes sense that a U.S. university would offer a multitude of U.S. history courses, the large discrepancy in the number of European-related courses and its percentage of world population shows clear evidence of a Eurocentric bias.

Table 1. History Courses Compared to World Population

Continent	Percentage of World Population[a]	Number of History Courses[b]	Percentage of History Courses
Africa	14.95%	5	5%
Asia	60.31%	9	9%
Europe	11.88%	35	36%
North America	5.21%	39	40%
Oceania	.52%	0	0%
Latin America	8.52%	9	9%

[a]Percentage of World Population as of 2011

[b]Number of Courses at Southeastern University as of Spring 2012

The specific topics covered in classrooms and textbooks are also suspect of a hidden curriculum of "Othering" and "Orientalism". Masalski and Levy (2010) found that "when China appears in the curriculum in many U.S. schools, the focus tends to be on Cold War stereotypes, or on the political, economic, or military rivalry between our countries" (p.7). Similarly, The Asia Society (1976) found that American textbooks tended to underplay the exploitative role of European colonialism on Asia and to overemphasize the importance of the United States and its military and economic assistance to the well being of the region.

Similarly, according to a 1994 American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education report "only about 4% of the nation's K-12 teachers have had any academic preparation in global or international studies" (Merryfield, 1994, p. 4). Other researchers agree and state, "Many future teachers get little systematic grounding in global education as a regular and required aspect of their teacher preparation…" and when global education is included, "it is all too easy to slip into colonizing and stereotyped ways of doing global education" (Crocco, 2010, pp. 20-21). Ukpokodu (2010) states that, "…teacher education programs are doing very little to prepare teachers to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teach from a global perspective" (p. 124). The lack of preparation by teacher education programs is especially true when

considering Asia. The Asia Society (2001), for example, found that 95% of surveyed teachers believed that they had not received adequate preparation to teach about Asia in their teacher education program. Yet, no study sought to explore pre-service teachers' preparation to teach about Asia.

Methods

In order to capture the pre-service teachers' perceptions on how well their SSE program prepared them to teach about Asia, the study utilized a case study research design. Case study research has ethnographic roots, which emphasize shared and learned patterns of values and beliefs, "…but the intent of ethnography is to determine how the culture works rather than to understand an issue or problem using the case as a specific illustration" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). The study, then, explored an issue (i.e. pre-service teachers' preparedness to teach about Asia) within a bounded system (i.e. a SSE program).

A large public university that had a SSE program, located in the southeastern region of the United States (hereafter the pseudonym SE University) was utilized for this study. SE University is a large and diverse metropolitan university that serves well over 30,000 students of which 59% are white, 19% are Hispanic/Latino, 10% are Black/African American, 5% are Asian, 2% are multi-racial, 2% did not specify, 2% are non-resident aliens, and the last 1% are either Native American/Alaskan or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Additionally, the college of education at SE University serves over 5,000 students and is a top producer of K-12 educators in its state. There are approximately 400 social studies education majors. The majority of which are white males.

Twenty senior pre-service teachers participated in this research study, thirteen male and seven female. All but two participants were in-state residents. Sixteen participants were white, three were Hispanic and one was African-American. No students identified themselves as Asian or Asian-American. Seniors were chosen because they had the garnished the greatest amount of experience while attending SE University.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection consisted of two focus group interviews, examining the SSE program curricula and unit plans. A focus group interview approach was utilized because of the spawning effect; that is, as one participant describes their experience in the SSE it would resonate with the others and begin to spark memories of experiences had by all. The interview questions were

designed using a semi-structured approach and were intended to not lead the participants to any final conclusions. The questions were also written in such a way as to reduce the criticism the participants might have towards the SSE program. The focus group interviews were video taped and transcribed. During the interview, one researcher led the discussion and ensured that participants were providing pertinent information that could be used for data. Meanwhile, the other researcher managed the video recorder and took field notes. The researchers individually coded the transcribed data and unit plans before later combining their codebooks into one fluent document. "Structured Codes" were utilized based on the interview questions (Saldana, 2011). As the data was analyzed, the essence of the pre-service teachers' shared experiences was simplified into four themes. They were as follows: (a) importance of Asia in the world, (b) Asia in the curriculum, (b) preparation provided by the SSE program, and (d) suggestions to improve the SSE program.

Validity

In order to bolster the confidence of our findings several data verification strategies were used throughout the life of the study. First, there were multiple data points and investigators, which allowed for two sets of eyes to constantly examine and re-examine the data. Particularly, with multiple investigators it allowed for "investigator triangulation", where each investigator examined the data and then compared their findings to develop a broader and deeper understanding of the phenomenon in question (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2011). Second, the interview data was member checked with the pre-service teachers to verify the accuracy of the data analysis.

Limitations

As is the case with all research, certain limitations exist that may hinder or alter the findings. In this case, there were several identified limitations. First, this research was conducted at one university and may not be generalizable to U.S. universities as a whole, as SSE programs vary. In fact, it would better to replicate this study and use additional and multiple institutions across the U.S. As some institutions may have designed programs that better prepare their preservice teachers to teach about Asia than others. Second, this study only focused on Asia, and so the findings cannot be generalized to other underserved world areas, such as Africa and Latin America. Third, the size and number of focus groups could have allowed for greater control in guiding the sessions as well as providing participants a greater opportunity to share their

experiences. Fourth, interviewing students at various points throughout the SSE program, including recent graduates, could have resulted in a variation of the data. By utilizing recent graduates, and their real world experiences, there could have been a greater hindsight gained into how well the SSE program prepared its preservice teachers to teach about Asia. Additionally, since a focus group setting was utilized there are concerns the preservice teachers' responses were influenced by social desirability or presumed researcher expectations. Finally, the member checking process could have been improved. Rather than simply typing out the findings and asking the preservice teachers if they agree with the data analysis, there should of been a follow up focus group interview, in order to increase clarity and eliminate semantic issues.

Findings

Importance of Asia

The first theme uncovered during the analysis was the perceived importance of Asia in the modern world and in world history. Most pre-service teachers felt that knowledge about Asia was extremely important in understanding current world events, "It's important to understand about Asia or to be able to teach about Asia because so much of the world's current affairs are revolved around Asia and its economics". Many pre-service teachers also pointed out that Asian countries influence the history of other nations, "…if you're teaching about the U.S., Asian countries contribute to United State's history."

Additionally, pre-service teachers predicted that Asian nations would have an increasingly important role in future world affairs, "[Asian nations] are becoming more and more important and I think as time goes by we're going to be seeing more influence of Asia in the world's history." One pre-service teacher linked knowledge about Asia specifically to global education, stating that teachers should emphasize global knowledge and global interdependence, "everything is so connected now [and] it's important to create a kind of global citizen, I mean, that understands the world…so in that sense I think [studying Asia] is important."

The SSE program, on the other hand, only requires pre-service teachers to take one non-Western history course, which can be Asian, African, or Latin American history. Additionally, pre-service teachers are required to take two electives in either history or political science. So while the pre-service teachers could potentially have taken up to three courses dealing with

Asian history, none did. Finally, none of the students' unit plans focused on Asian related history or topics.

Asia in the Curriculum

Despite the participants' belief that Asia was important both in the modern world and in world history, they felt that the K-12 curriculum under-emphasized its role. "I think that a lot of the problem is that it's not that teaching about Asia is not important but it's not seen in the curriculum as important." While others spoke specifically of the Eurocentric bias in the K-12 curriculum, "I feel Asia has been ignored and it's just kind of sad because our curriculum has been very Eurocentric."

In considering this issue, some participants reflected on their own experience as former K-12 students or as teaching interns in secondary social studies classes. One participant asked the group members "…how many of you remember a high focus on Asia when we were in high school? It just wasn't there." Many concurred that their educational experience was similar. Other participants commented on their current teaching internship experiences in a similar way, saying, "right now in my internship I'm teaching world history and Asia is pretty small [in scope]".

Most participants also indicated that they felt they would not be able to emphasize Asia in their teaching due to the constraints of the mandatory content standards and pacing guides. Some, however, felt that it was up to the teacher to find a way to include the material anyway. "If you actually just take the time and gear the lessons to relate to Asian history or Asian economics, politics, whatever. Then yeah, it's going to start being important." Another participant felt that the supervising teacher for her internship was a good role model for how social studies teachers should teach about Asia, explaining, "the teacher I'm working with right now spent a really good amount of time talking to the students about China". Similarly, a another participant indicated his intent to include non-Western material in his future classes regardless of its paucity in the established curriculum, "this is information that; although [it's] not going to be present in a textbook that I use with students one day… I will teach that outside of the textbook because it's necessary".

Due to this perceived lack of Asian emphasis in the K-12 curriculum, some participants expressed that they were ignorant about knowledge related to Asia. One participant explained, "Do I feel that Asia is going to be useful and relevant in my professional career as a social

science 6-12 teacher? No. …because it is not [and was not]". Thus, many participants chose not to pursue knowledge of Asia while in their teacher preparation program. Instead the participants opted to take courses in college that would benefit them in the future as teacher educators. In fact, one participant stated, "[I want to take a course] that I'm actually going to use". In this way, anticipation of future curricular constraints may have limited some pre-service teachers' choices while in the SSE program.

Yet, some participants predicted that K-12 curriculum was going to become more inclusive and that they would likely be required to teach more Asian content in the future. "They keep updating the textbooks…I think we're just going to be seeing it more". Another participant agreed with this prediction, stating, "I've seen [the inclusion of Asian related topics] change from when I was in high school".

Asian Preparation Provided by the SSE Program

When participants were asked to rate their teacher preparation program on how well it had prepared them to teach specifically about Asia on a scale of one to ten, the average response was a three. The most frequent response was a two, but one student, who indicated that she was currently taking an Asia-related course, and therefore responded with a 10, pushed the average higher. Interestingly, she also noted that if it were not for this one class, she would also have rated her Asian preparation as a two. With the exception of two students, all of the participants indicated that they had learned very little specific content information about Asia while in the SSE program. One participant summed up the general trend by admitting; "If they ask me about Asian history…I'm not going to know anything…I feel so unprepared [to teach] about Asia". Another similar comment was, "I don't feel confident in any Asian subject areas". When discussing the requirements of the SSE program, all of the participants agreed that it was possible to graduate from the program, and earn a social studies teaching certificate, without having taken a single social science class about Asia.

When the participants were asked what specific Asian social science courses they had taken while in their teacher preparation program, only three participants were able to identify such a course. Two students indicated they took a course on modern Chinese history, one of those same students also stated that she took a class on Middle Eastern politics, and a third student indicated that he took a class on Russian history. It was discovered later, however, that SE University classified the Russian history course as a European history class. Other

participants felt that some of their social science courses touched briefly on Asia, though it was not the main focus of the course. Such courses included Western Civilization, Military Space Policy, World Political Geography, and Strategic and Nuclear Arms Control. Additionally, several students acknowledged that they had not had any classes that dealt with Asia, with one emphatically stating, "I just want to say…well, I'm going to graduate and I have not taken one class [that deals with Asia]", and several agreed.

Since the general consensus was that the SSE program had not provided specific content-area knowledge, many participants indicated that they believed that in order to successfully teach Asian content in the future, they would have to study the material on their own. "If you don't get a few classes by the time you graduate when you become a teacher you're going to have to relearn the material". A different participant concurred, stating; "if I become a world history teacher I'll have to teach myself about Asia". Yet another student concluded, "If…my students ask me about [Asia] I would have to do my own personal research".

While nearly all of the participants indicated that their experiences in the SSE program had not taught them much Asian content knowledge, they did specify that they felt confident in the general teaching abilities they had developed. When rating the teacher preparation program on the development of their pedagogical abilities (e.g. classroom management, lesson planning, presenting instructional content, assessment, etc.), the average score was 8.5 out of 10. Most participants indicated the teaching skills portion of the SSE program was very informative, and they felt they could teach almost any subject if they took time to learn the content first.

One participant explained their experience this way, "I feel…confident that I can teach and that I've learned how to teach…I know that once on my own or through some other way [I can get information about Asia] then, yeah, I know how to teach it because I know how to teach." Another participant expressed being an expert is not necessary thanks to the textbooks, "I mean, you read a lot of the teacher's editions of the textbooks that they give you. It's not like you have to be an expert on any of the material…you just read up on it". Several other students felt that their ability to find the proper information from which to build lessons was something they learned and refined by their experiences while in the SSE program, making such assertions as "I feel the program has taught me how to properly prepare" and "you know how to learn the stuff to be able to teach it." One respondent summarized the general consensus by explaining, "you are taught, as an educator, how to research and that's important…everybody has said and

we can all agree that you never stop learning. So, with that foundation I think that we can really teach any topic in history, including Asia". Thus, while most had experienced little Asian content in the SSE program, the general consensus was they felt that the increased teaching and research capabilities they developed through the program would enable them to teach any subject in the future.

One participant, however, voiced a concern about this idea, asking the group, "if we're paying for our classes should we have to go out and learn outside of school?" Most of the other participants stated that learning outside of their SSE program was not a problem for them. The participants gave the distinct impression that learning to teach was a far more important aspect of the SSE program than learning content material; as evidenced by the comment, "I think I can teach myself the material [I need to teach] but knowing how to be a good teacher, and how I've learned that in the last four or five social science instructional classes, I feel is more beneficial than actual knowledge of Asia." Many of the participants, however, rejected the researchers' interpretation of this and similar statements during the member-checking session.

Suggestions to Improve the SSE Program

While most participants indicated they enjoyed having a wide range of course choices, several felt that more specific course requirements would increase the breadth of their preparation. One student suggested that "maybe [the SSE program] can have a requirement of Latin American history, Asian history, South American history, and then have specific options within that category". One student stated, "I feel like you could condense the amount of education classes…I think they would be a little harder but they would be more to the point and you wouldn't overlap near as much… so you could have more [content] classes." Several students agreed that the SSE program could reduce the number of education classes in order to leave more room for social science content classes.

Another suggestion supported by many students was the creation of a 2000-level Eastern Civilization course sequence similar to the Western Civilization courses offered at universities across the United States. One participant proposed, "Why not have an Eastern Civilization one and two…you just have two classes that cover a period of time within that hemisphere of the world. …That way it covers everything and you feel knowledgeable about [Asia]". Another student stated "there needs to be a class that goes over the key events in Asian history". Most of the participants agreed with this idea. While other respondents suggested the university provide

a greater amount of social science courses that include a broader global focus, rather than being forced into taking very specific courses where the information may not be applicable to their future teaching.

Ultimately, students felt that "there's got to be a middle ground between not taking the subject at all and trying to become an expert at it" and that the college should "offer classes that are condensed [because] it allows us to be able to be well-rounded in the subjects." Another student agreed that a comprehensive base of knowledge would be most beneficial and stated, "it would be a lot easier for me to at least have a solid foundation about [Asia] and then be able to individually build upon that by reading". Some participants also thought that it might be advantageous to separate their classes from those of history majors who might need more in-depth coverage of specific topics.

Discussion

There are several implications that the SSE pre-service teachers expressed regarding their shared experience in the program and how that influences their teaching, particularly about Asia. First, the participants expressed feelings, based on their experiences in the SSE program at SE University, that learning about Asia is important in modern world affairs; yet, the current K-12 curriculum in the U.S. does not place an equal importance on the teaching of Asia and Asian related topics. Indeed, the literature supports the participants' feeling about the current representation of Asia in the United State's K-12 curriculum (Martin & Gronewold, 1990). Second, the participants expressed that their experience in the SSE program did not properly prepare them to teach about Asian related content. While the pre-service teachers cited a lack of available Asian history courses, they also explained that their criteria for selecting courses also included the reputations of professors, the modality of the courses (i.e. online versus face-to-face), and their personal interests. Participants were also concerned that this lack of preparation in Asian content may hinder them from acquiring a teaching job after graduation. In general, participants suggested that their university could offer a greater array of Asian related content courses, particularly broader courses intended for underclassmen, such as an Eastern Civilization course. The pre-service teachers also suggested that the university alter the SSE program requirements to include more non-Western history and social science courses. Interestingly, Thornton (2003) makes similar assertions. In fact, he suggests that taking traditional content courses may not necessarily enhance teachers' subject matter competence. He does present three

proposals for improving teacher subject matter competence: (a) facilitating a better alignment between the what courses preservice teachers take and what they will be expected to teach, (b) blurring of the lines between subject matter and professional education, and (c) blending work among courses including methods, educational foundations, and possibly even academic courses.

Regardless of the lack of content preparation the participants received, they did acknowledge that the SSE program taught them good pedagogical practices. Which entail bolstered their confidence in teaching about Asia and Asian related topics. Some participants, however, suggested that there were too many required education classes designed to teach them pedagogy. Currently, SE University requires that its SSE majors take eleven education courses for a total of 33-credit hours. Of course, others attributed the number of required education courses as the reason for their strong confidence in their ability to teach about Asia.

The final implication, and quite possibly the most important, is that the state of non-Western history, and particularly Asian history, in U.S. K-12 classrooms will still be taught from a Eurocentric point of view. The literature in the field has proven that textbooks are Eurocentric in nature (Marino, 2011; Stanton, 2015). Therefore, if an SSE program is not preparing it's pre-service teachers to teach about Asian related content then when and where will they go to obtain this information? Remember that the participants in this study expressed that had confidence in their abilities to teach about Asia due to the pedagogical and research skills they learned in the SSE program. Namely, they expressed that they would rely on textbooks as the epicenter for their content knowledge. Unfortunately, this is an all too common practice among social studies teachers (Sewall, 2000), and these are the same textbooks that have a Eurocentric bias and perpetuate the 'us' versus 'them' cycle too often seen in the United States.

Conclusion

Preparing pre-service social studies teachers to teach about Asia should be a necessary component for all SSE programs in the United States. While it is evident from the results of this study that SE University is teaching its pre-service social studies teachers an array of pedagogical practices, it appears that the pre-service teachers are inadequately prepared to teach about Asian related content. The shared experiences of the participants revealed that the small number of Asian related courses, the minimal course offerings for those courses they do have, and a lack of non-Western history requirements in the SSE program at SE University only

further perpetuates the problem. Unfortunately, this problem is not unique to SE University. Although, the degree or frequency for which this problem exists in other U.S. SSE programs must be confirmed in future studies. Additionally, there is ample evidence to suggest similar studies be completed with regards to pre-service teachers' preparation to teach about African and Latin American related content. Furthermore, a more comprehensive study could be conducted to compare our results with several other SSE programs from across the United States and other nations across the globe.

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