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The Complexity of Learning to Teach News Media in Social Studies Education

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The Complexity of Learning to Teach News Media in Social Studies Education

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Abstract

This research reports on data generated through an initial teacher certification program for secondary social studies teachers that introduced a specific and program-spanning focus on news media literacy. Growing out of the urgent need for pedagogies that address and promote critical engagement with the kinds of news media sources upon which civic decisions are made, our project follows teacher candidates from their initial certification coursework through the culminating student teaching semester. Our work with teacher candidates over this time was explicitly intended to intervene in and develop teacher candidates' understandings of news media literacy, its place in social studies education, and related pedagogies. However, what resulted, and what we present throughout this paper, was also an intervention in our own understandings of the significant constraints and complexities of addressing these issues in teacher education.

Keywords: social studies education, teacher education, complexity, news media literacy

This research reports on data generated through an initial teacher certification program for secondary social studies teachers that introduced a specific and program-spanning focus on news media literacy. Growing out of the urgent need for pedagogies that address and promote critical engagement with the kinds of news media sources upon which civic decisions are made, our project follows teacher candidates from their initial certification coursework through the culminating student teaching semester. Our work with teacher

candidates over this time was explicitly intended to intervene in and develop teacher candidates' understandings of news media literacy, its place in social studies education, and related pedagogies. However, what resulted, and what we present throughout this paper, was also an intervention in our own understandings of the significant constraints and complexities of addressing these issues in teacher education. Our interventions unfolded and changed as understandings and misunderstandings emerged during the course of our program.

The research questions that frame this paper are: (1) What are the capacities of teacher candidates to interact critically with the news media? and (2) How did teacher candidates understand and describe their incorporation of news media literacy into their emerging social studies pedagogy? In what follows, we describe the context of our inquiry and the design-based methods with which we enacted our curricular design and through which we conceptualize this research. Drawing on complexity theory to interpret the emergent, often contradictory elicitations prompted through assignments in varied contexts, we explain our efforts to teach them about news media literacy and analyze their efforts to make sense of it. This article highlights the limits and complexities of teaching and learning about media that emerged as we interpreted teacher candidates' engagement with the news. Our purpose in foregrounding what was challenging, and in exploring these complex limitations, is to illustrate the difficult and tangled terrain these novice teachers encountered as they attempted ambitious pedagogical practices using news resources in times of political and social turmoil.

Context

The context of this inquiry is a secondary social studies teacher preparation program in a large research university in the southern United States. A significant proportion of the certification program occurs onsite at secondary schools and links teacher candidates' practicum experiences (6 weeks in a middle school social studies classroom, 6 weeks in a high school social studies classroom) directly to coursework. The program concludes with a 13-week student teaching experience. Much of the coursework integrates undergraduate and graduate teacher candidates seeking certification in secondary social studies: approximately 75% of the teacher candidates are undergraduates.

In response to the 2016 election, several of our faculty decided to integrate current events and news media literacy more directly and systematically into their coursework. Over the course of the election season, we came to see that not paying significant attention to news and news media literacy in social studies teacher education was an oversight. As topics like "fake news," Russian involvement in the election, and the idea of post-truth became consistent components of the national discourse, we realized that attention to the concepts and tools needed to make sense of these phenomena was woefully lacking in our program. In particular, we recognized that we had not created the space for teacher candidates to think about these phenomena in a way that would directly connect them with social studies education and, in particular, the relationship of these phenomena with the maintenance of democracy. In recognition of this hole in our curriculum, we set out to provide teacher candidates with both a rationale and effective strategies for including

news media literacy in the social studies curriculum, focusing on skills related to evaluating and analyzing news media products and their role in democracy.

News Media Literacy Education in the Post-Truth Era

We approached our news media literacy curriculum with concerns about “truth decay” (Kavanagh & Rich, 2018), and the understanding that the blurring of opinion and facts have weakened institutions important to democracy and contributed to the erosion of public discourse. The framework we adopted was also shaped by media studies scholars (e.g., Buckingham, 2017; Mihailidis, 2018; boyd, 2017) who have warned that media education is not a panacea to the enormous social, cultural, and political challenges that have created the “new media and sociopolitical realities of our time” (Mihailidis, 2018, p. 2). The assignments were situated in a context that took into account the ways in which the credibility of news sources have been questioned and undermined by elected officials and other media figures. Specifically, we were oriented toward helping teacher candidates explore the complexities of bringing news into classrooms in an environment in which the credibility of news media outlets and their role in democracy are under attack. We focused on developing and supporting media literacy pedagogy and practices—and social studies education—that must be reimagined for a digital era “where partisanship, polarization and distrust are increasingly present in daily life” (Mihailidis, 2018, p. 2).

News Media, Evidence, and Democracy in Social Studies Education

These foci are legitimized by research in social studies and civics education in which scholars have addressed the current context of media, the evaluation of evidence, and teachers’ inclination to address these topics in their classrooms from a variety of perspectives. This work, much of which is emerging in response to the expansion of digital media as well as the 2016 election in the US, highlights difficulties present in efforts to address media, political polarization, democratic life, representation, evidence, and argumentation. These pressing issues have always been present in social studies education but now carry a new urgency.

For example, Stoddard’s (2014) exploration of the relationship between proliferating digital media and democracy identified several critical obstacles that impede engagement with the media in ways that could lead toward democratic ends. He argued that people accessing online sources are not likely to “reflect on the expertise or viewpoints of people contributing to the information they are accessing. Nor do they consider how the design of the applications, databases, search algorithms, and the pages they engage with influence their understanding of the world” (pp. 1–2). Stoddard asserted that the absence of a “critical view point on information and technologies” (p. 6), has contributed to the narrowing of perspective, which inhibits exposure to any variety in viewpoints and perspectives, contributes to a less democratic society, and may contribute to the “extreme political partisanship” (p. 3) that shapes the political landscape today. Stoddard’s prescient arguments have held true over the last several years. While Stoddard focused conceptually on the relationship between media literacy and democracy, McGrew et al. (2018) provided a close empirical look at young people’s interaction with the media, a practice they identified as a key component of civic participation. This report on the Stanford History Education Group’s

analysis of students' capacity to evaluate digital media indicated that "students are not prepared to navigate the maelstrom of information online" (p. 21). To ameliorate this problematic lack of understanding, McGrew et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of teachers providing explicit instruction and opportunities to practice identifying the sources of content, evaluating evidence, and considering multiple sources. Thus, the role of scholars and leaders in social studies education is "to develop assessments and curricular tools" (p. 23) to facilitate better and more explicit instruction surrounding engagement with and evaluation of, online media.

However, other studies have shown that even explicit instruction yields little in terms of students' use of evidence in their arguments. Jacobsen et al. (2018) investigated students' interactions with media by asking students to rank sources of evidence on the basis of trustworthiness. Their analysis found that there was "limited convergence in what is persuasive or trustworthy" and that emotional and personal connections to the content, as well as, sociocultural identities, were significant in understanding students' sense of media trustworthiness (p. 18). Thus Jacobsen et al. (2018) "suggest that teacher educators and K-12 teachers should be mindful that students' reasons for trusting or not trusting evidence are complex" (p. 30). Taken as a whole, these recent studies indicate that interpretations of media accounts represent some of the most critical political realities of our time. Further, they suggest that the problem of teaching news media and developing understandings of its relation to democracy and civic actions are exceedingly difficult to address.

These conclusions are supported by scholars who assert that enacting media education when media credibility is in question presents a myriad of challenges. For example, while concerns about credibility are not new to media literacy education, Buckingham (2017) asserted that credibility concerns have, "tak[en] on a new form. Social media has made it much easier for lies and misinformation to be circulated from person to person, bypassing the gatekeepers and regulators who controlled old media" (para. 8). Some media scholars have argued that responding to the new media landscape requires understanding that its challenges will not be solved through easy fixes (e.g., boyd, 2017; Buckingham, 2017, Mihailidis & Viotty, 2018).

Complexity Theory in Teacher Education

The findings described above indicate an overlapping set of entrenched and persistent problems that exist in and beyond teacher education programs. Because of this overlap, our research team turned to complexity theory to frame this study. Cochran-Smith, Ell, Ludlow, Grudnoff, and Aitken (2014) argue for the use of complexity theory in teacher education in order to produce new sets of questions and research projects within the field: questions that focus on emergent rather than predictive phenomena. While prediction makes for reasonable actions, in situations where there are simply too many phenomena and variables to control, looking at relationship and context becomes generative. The rich potential afforded by the acknowledgement of unpredictability and emergence points toward "more complex and contingent notions of agency and responsibility that depend on deep understanding of the local linked to larger understanding of processes and outcomes at various systems levels that are widely variable but not inexplicable" (Cochran-Smith, et. al. 2014, p. 21). This means that the overlapping context between classroom, culture, politics,

representation, knowledge, power, identity, teacher and student must be acknowledged in any interpretation of classroom life. It also means giving up control of predetermined outcomes. In contrast to outcomes-based research, “complexity offers us a way to think about relationships between inputs and outcomes that does not impel us to seek evidence of causal relationships between them” (Gough, 2012, p. 47).

Because complexity theory recognizes variability, it offers a framework capable of reflecting our deep commitments to robust and focused programs of teacher education, while simultaneously acknowledging the impossibility of a grand solution to many challenges found in the development of teachers. In the context of this study, using complexity theory to understand teacher education practices creates the space to take into account the pervasive discourses about ideology, politics, and conflict that were impossible to ignore in teacher candidates’ perceptions, responses, and orientations toward news media and teaching.

Methods

To complement the use of complexity as a theoretical framework, the research design and methodologies for this study were drawn from design-based research (DBR). As Anderson & Shattuck explain, “DBR is a methodology designed by and for educators that seeks to increase the impact, transfer, and translation of education research into improved practice” (2012, p. 16). This orientation, as well as the propensity of DBR studies to foreground “both what researchers learned to further their knowledge about a phenomenon and what effect the intervention had on students’ learning and motivation” (p. 24), were well aligned with the interventionist approach of our pedagogy and research as well as our use of complexity theory.

DBR and complexity theory are complementary. DBR’s holistic approach to considering interventions can “provide insights into the complexity involved in developing knowledge and skills, and [can] help us understand the role that teachers play in capitalizing on the affordances of learning materials” that might have “gone unnoticed” in research that focuses solely on summative outcomes (DBR Collective, 2003, p.6). In particular, DBR creates the space necessary to consider emergent knowledge and understanding and allows researchers to use the evidence of emergent knowledge to refine interventions and theories of what is happening. Finally, the epistemological relationship between complexity and DBR enables the examination of data based on complex theories of learning that attend “explicitly to the dynamic reciprocal interactions between individuals and knowledge systems” (Castro, 2012, p. 156). In other words, pairing complexity and DBR allows us to make sense of how the teacher candidates made sense of our interventions in the context of the other knowledge systems that were shaping their sense of if, when, and how to teach news media literacy in social studies.

The teacher educators/researchers involved in this project began brainstorming ways that we could include tasks and experiences exploring news and news literacy for the teacher candidate cohort that began their studies in January 2017. We continued introducing media-related activities for the second and third semesters of the teacher education program through spring 2018.

All teacher candidates were invited to participate in the research project at the beginning of their program. In total, 39 of the 41 candidates consented to have their assignments used as data. In the third semester, which is the student teaching semester, 11 teacher candidates consented to continue participating in the study. These candidates were selected for the third semester of the project because they were the field instructees of three faculty/researchers involved in this study. This group of teacher candidates received additional instruction in news media literacy and was asked to implement media literacy tasks in their student teaching placement. Additionally, nine of these students participated in individual interviews conducted during week six of their student teaching placement to discuss their experience of learning to teach news media literacy and their orientations toward including it in their present and future teaching practice.

News media education in the first semester focused on introducing the teacher candidates to components of news media literacy. The topics, drawn in part from pedagogical resources created by the Center for News Literacy (<http://www.centerfornewsliteracy.org/>) included the consideration of media credibility in relation to the creation of media texts; truth, fairness, and bias in media; and ethics in journalism. Additionally, the consideration of credibility was highlighted in an assignment that tasked teacher candidates with tracking a current news issue in several legacy newspapers. Further, the teacher candidates were tasked with multiple assignments that asked them to consider the intersection of news media literacy and social studies. Overall, these tasks were intended to provide teacher candidates with a foundational knowledge of news literacy concepts and ensure that they experienced significant engagement with traditional news sources. Further, we sought to provide clear connections between social studies content and topics in news media literacy.

In the second semester activities, teacher candidates were asked to draw on (some of) what they had learned to integrate tasks addressing news credibility into inquiry lessons designed and taught during both the middle school and high school practicum. In the third semester, the teacher candidates were asked to integrate eight different news media literacy tasks into lessons during their 13-week student teaching semester.

The research presented in this article focuses on the data produced by the 11 focal teacher candidates (nine undergraduate and two graduate students) over three semesters. Specifically, we draw from 21 assignments (described in the Appendix) and transcripts from nine interviews to trace these teacher candidates' thinking about integrating news media literacy into social studies pedagogy as they moved from abstract and theoretical discussions of news literacy integration and pedagogy into field-based implementation. In particular, we drew heavily from assignments (e.g., Media Review Assignments 1&2, Media Log) in which teacher candidates described their efforts to plan and implement tasks that required students to evaluate the credibility of news resources. Similarly, the data from the interviews were derived from participants' responses to questions regarding their orientation toward teaching these lessons media and the challenges they experienced.

The process of analyzing this data occurred in multiple stages (LeCompte, 2000). In terms of the data drawn from class assignments, the research team analyzed each data source first at the assignment level and then at the participant level. As such, data were considered both in terms of what the assignment produced and made possible (or not)

overall and by tracing each participants' work over the course of the program. Through this process, we worked to establish a common "interpretive zone" (Wasser & Bresler, 1996) in which to identify themes and patterns present in the data. Through these discussions, and the reconciliation of differing interpretations, we came to consensus on a codebook, which was used to focus analysis and increase the possibility of interrater consistency. Using the codebook as a guide, members of the research team used qualitative research software to reanalyze the assignment data and examine the interview data to code excerpts of text that exemplified one or more code. Excerpts were then analyzed by code by at least two research team members to resolve discrepancies and document the presence of the theme and to identify subthemes.

Findings

In our discussions of the findings, we provide evidence of the limited impact of a concerted, planned intervention to introduce news media literacy in our social studies education program and assert that the problem we are describing is institutional, cultural, curricular, pedagogical, and nested in the complex web that connects all of those. In the following section, we begin with a description of a specific aspect of the nested limits of learning to teach media literacy in social studies.

Anxieties in Learning to Teach/Learning to Teach Media

Teacher candidates in our study articulated their experiences with learning to teach news media by invoking narratives familiar to teacher education research (e.g., Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Specifically, while learning to teach, many of the teacher candidates locate the problem of teaching media in the recognition of their own deficits as pedagogues. Through the data presented in the following section, we consider the explanations of their attempts to implement media lessons where the factors they identify as challenges to their media pedagogy demonstrate the dual and overlapping complexities of learning to teach (generally) and learning to teach news media literacy (specifically). We then explore the complex, overlapping anxieties and conflicts in what teacher candidates reported in their experiences.

Anxieties in learning to teach

The anxieties of learning to teach and learning to teach media manifest in the teacher candidates' reflection on their attempts to integrate media into their lessons. For many of the teacher candidates, learning to teach news media in a social studies context was intricately and explicitly intertwined with learning to teach more broadly. Consider four different participants' responses to one of several assignments asking them to identify the challenges they experienced in teaching news media literacy skills:

"I need to stop assuming that students understand what I am saying simply because they are quiet when I give instructions and they nod their heads. In the future I should provide examples of what I want students to do and understand."

“This time [teaching media] the biggest challenge was my nerves and worrying about some of the students’ abilities.”

“The fact that all students completed the [media literacy task] was great, however, our follow-up discussion fell flat and students were unwilling to contribute to the conversation about why they would or would not choose a source.”

“I’m always on the spot and so I don’t have time to think about more questions to ask them, and the easiest most comfortable thing for me to do is to tell them the answer. That’s probably the biggest challenge I have with teaching media.”

These teacher candidates were responding to prompts asking them to remark on what challenges they face in teaching news media. The data quoted above, which is representative of a significant proportion of the responses to the “what was challenging?” prompts, highlight the complex tensions inherent in teacher educators’ efforts to integrate news media literacy into programs for novice teachers. By this, we mean that we can identify in their responses a “coming to terms” with fundamental problems of *pedagogy in general*. In being assigned tasks that require them to engage with complex issues specific to news media, they have been confronted with crucial and irresolvable conundrums of teaching: How much do I tell my students? How do I know what they are thinking? When do I answer for my students? How do I develop better questions?

While one student quoted above specifically identified these types of issues as “the biggest challenge I have in teaching media,” we see the issues they described as challenges in learning to teach rather than challenges specific to news media education. What they have chosen to recognize or what they are capable of recognizing in these instances is not about media in particular but about the general existential situation of teaching, brought about in this case through their assigned relationship with media pedagogy.

The recognition of the overlapping difficulties of simultaneously learning to teach/learning to teach media highlights a key problem for teacher educators, which is that both are amazingly complex endeavors on their own. While teacher education researchers have a rich language for the ways that pedagogical and disciplinary processes are entwined (e.g., pedagogical content knowledge), we so far lack a way to layer on the complications inherent when thinking about preparing teacher candidates to learn to teach while simultaneously preparing them to learn to teach a topic as slippery, dynamic, and unpredictable as news media. This simultaneity represents a problem likely to recur as our politically unsettled times continue.

Anxieties in learning to teach media

There were, however, some instances in which participants demonstrated the capacity to articulate teaching issues specific to developing media pedagogy. In these instances, the candidates highlighted the complexity of learning to teach news media literacy, and in particular, to engage students in the consideration of source credibility, in ways that specifically explore the complex nature of media. The data excerpts from five different teacher candidates below represent the kinds of media-specific analyses found across the data:

“It was somewhat difficult to get them [students] to understand the fact that although particular sources are biased, that does not necessarily mean that they are not providing true or factual information. Ah! The information is just skewed towards a particular focus. Some of the students equated bias with bad or false. They did not have a complete understanding of what bias means.”

“[Media analysis] can be hard because it can be controversial.”

“[Thinking] about how I’m trying to explain it to them helped me realize how complicated and important it is, and it’s such a complex thing and difficult to teach.”

“They’re very young and they just don’t understand that this is so much more than what I can tell [them] right now . . . sometimes the conceptualization of everything together doesn’t happen and there’s just like—there’s that disconnect.”

“There’s so much false information out there. And just stuff that is just not true. . . . But the closest thing you can get to the truth is what you should be teaching in your social studies classroom, and that [has] everything to do with media . . . you have to teach what actually happened and not things [that] are made up and fiction.”

While not all students articulated media-specific challenges to implementing lessons, there were some students, like those quoted here, who were able to see past the anxieties of learning to teach in general in order to voice anxieties specific to news media education. We agree with these teacher candidates’ assessments of what makes teaching media difficult. The loaded nature of addressing “controversial” current events using news sources which are themselves “controversial” raises the stakes for all educators. These are the very real and extraordinarily important issues that social studies education must concern itself with if our field is to have any kind of intervening role in civic participation. The challenges some participants described point to the ability of these teacher candidates to identify and even explicitly articulate the difficulties they face in addressing media credibility. As such, we see that our efforts contributed, in at least a limited way, to some of the teacher candidates’ emerging articulations of the complexity of media and news media literacy and the challenges of teaching them. Even though the teacher candidates expressed difficulties, we see their articulations as a limited success. Still, we have to contend critically with their expressed lack of confidence, which we explore in the following section.

Vote of no confidence

Throughout the course of the program, teacher candidates encountered various news media texts, engaged in multiple discussions about source credibility, and completed assignments in which they were tasked with both assessing credibility and reflecting on their process for assigning credibility. Further, with the assistance of their instructors, they designed and taught lessons that focused on news media literacy and credibility and were

given multiple opportunities to self-assess their efforts to teach these lessons. In their assignments, as well as in the interviews, many teacher candidates expressed a lack of confidence. This lack of confidence manifested in at least three different ways. First, some teacher candidates explicitly addressed the slipperiness of mastering media literacy broadly. Specifically, they expressed concerns about teaching media literacy concepts, like credibility, that they themselves did not fully understand:

“I’ve grappled with my own ability to identify bias, my own ability to identify a credibility and those things and there are places where I still have questions and it’s like, well, how am I supposed to teach this if I’m confused myself right here?”

“Ever since we began this program, we have been learning about the importance of using the media in our lessons. We had to train ourselves to be media literate, and now we are encouraged to do the same with our students. This has been a personal struggle for me during my practicum.”

“For me honestly, it’s just more of a self-conscious thing of that I don’t feel totally comfortable with it yet. So sometimes I get worried about my limitations and being able to really teach it, especially since they really do use [media] all the time.”

Second, some self-evaluations frame media literacy as something they shouldn’t be expected to know, as in this comment from a teacher candidate who stated, “I’m 23 and like, don’t even know media literacy all that well, like it’s hard to teach somebody else confidently.” Another teacher candidate attributed his challenges to a general unknowability of media literacy, noting, “Scholars who specialize in this topic do not fully understand the best way to improve [this situation]. Therefore, my work will be cut out for me to teach the information in a way [students] can understand and conceptualize.”

Finally, a third group of teacher candidates described their lack of confidence specifically in terms of not being able to answer questions students might have, as found in the comment from one participant who indicated her challenge in implementing media education was “being unable to answer student questions confidently—in a way that gives them confidence in me as a teacher.”

There are several ways to think about these participants’ concerns about their capacity to enact news media education in their lessons. We have to consider the efficacy of our efforts to introduce and deploy media and news media literacy concepts across three semesters of instruction. We see these comments as evidence of the weak intervention we achieved in our efforts to impact the teacher candidates’ understandings and practice. Despite the many assignments and lessons which explicitly explored news media and literacy concepts and modeled specific practices, many of the teacher candidates indicated that they did not feel they had a firm understanding of these ideas.

However, we also recognize the complex structures in place that functioned to limit our efforts. While students seeking certification in social studies have at least a modicum of disciplinary coursework in several different domains of the social sciences, prior to

beginning our certification program, most of these teacher candidates had not encountered even the most rudimentary introduction to media studies. Some had experience with the analysis of evidence through their history coursework but had never applied these skills specifically to the study of news media. As such, they were formally introduced to the vocabulary and concepts for the first time in their teacher education program.

As we think more about these limitations through complexity theory, we recognize that we were not introducing them to the media for the first time. Despite the lack of formal instruction on media, each of them had distinct understandings about the media, its attributes, deficits, and its role in society before they enrolled in our certification program. These understandings are an inevitable result of participating in society and culture and living and interacting in the modern world. In one class activity, conducted during the first class meeting of the program, each teacher candidate expressed a high degree of confidence in response to the following prompt: "I am able to accurately detect bias and inaccurate information in the news in my regular, daily encounters with news media resources."

Through another early assignment, we found that these teacher candidates had distinct—and diverse—views about, for example, the role of media in the 2016 campaign, the news media's coverage of Trump, and his attacks on news media. These observations recognize the null curriculum in which teacher candidates have been educated (Eisner, 1985). Acknowledging the understandings and beliefs teacher candidates bring with them forces teacher educators to consider how the complex context in which news media operates in society—an ecology that has always been complex but is even more so now—shapes these participants' perceptions of their lack of knowledge about media.

We draw attention to their previous understandings of the media, and the understandings that any teacher candidates will have, to acknowledge the complex interplay of forces shaping our attempts to teach news media literacy. As Hetherington (2013, p. 72) notes, complexity theories challenge linear "views of causality, suggest that phenomena need to be viewed holistically and cannot be broken down, require a focus on interactions." So while, on one hand, we interpret these comments as highlighting a deficit in our efforts to teach media effectively or coherently, a focus on interactions requires us to acknowledge that in our attempts to teach media, teacher candidates were experiencing a conflict between what they were learning and what they already knew and believed about media. While we can see weaknesses in our efforts to provide a sufficiently foundational knowledge of media and news media literacy, we can also identify the results of our efforts to make them less sure of what they knew to be true about the media.

Finally, these comments can be interpreted as emerging out of our pedagogies and their relationship with the inherent tensions and affective pushes and pulls that are present when teachers venture to undertake intellectually ambitious pedagogies. We note a significant vulnerability in these teacher candidates' comments, as they describe themselves as overwhelmed, worried, struggling, and confused. We assert that the acknowledgment of an identifiable and ephemeral "lack" of knowledge, confidence, and ability is a productive pedagogical space for these teacher candidates and indeed all teachers. In articulating their anxieties and worries, teachers acknowledge, rather than disavow, the ways in which teaching is never quite within the realm of control.

The difficulty that arises in the acknowledgment of the tension in these circumstances, of course, is in encouraging teachers to lay a claim to particular “truths” that are, in light of current events, controversial. Social studies education ought to teach evidence and argumentation. However, when what circulates from elected officials defies evidentiary and argumentative norms, many teachers are right to worry that pointing out falsehoods exposes them to the possibility of being labeled ideologically partial to a particular partisan position. Such is the reality of teaching social studies in current times.

Conflict of Commitments: Media Literacy as “Extra” to Social Studies

The complexity revealed here is that teachers did see, at times, news media literacy as being centrally important to social studies and democracy education but simultaneously difficult to implement. We began asking students about whether or not news media literacy was relevant to social studies education early in the first semester of the program. Without fail and on each occasion, the teacher candidates articulated their recognition of the value of news media literacy to social studies education and their students’ capacity to function as democratic citizens, as demonstrated in this comment from a student who said:

“In my classroom, I want media literacy to be an ongoing lesson for my students. I won’t be able to control everything that my students come in contact with in regards to the media, but I can prepare them to focus on credible sources, analyze articles and media they are reading, and investigate the authors and creators of their media choices.”

Statements about the importance of news media literacy in social studies and vows to become a teacher who addresses these topics were so similar across the teacher candidates’ responses that they almost seem rehearsed.

These responses must be interpreted, at least in part, as being shaped by their roles in a student/teacher relationship informed by expectations that doing well requires telling instructors “what they want to hear.” Nonetheless, we were surprised by the unanimity of their support for the need for news media literacy and the lack of resistance we encountered in the first semester when we asked them to consider, in the abstract, how news media literacy could be integrated into social studies. However, the teacher candidates’ experiences in implementing media literacy lessons in their practicum and student teaching placements surfaced conflicts with their commitment to teaching media literacy. In the following section, we describe the articulated sources of these tensions.

“Required” Content and News Media Literacy: Finding a Fit

Teacher candidates expressed anxiety about the challenge of finding ways to align news media literacy tasks with the particular content they were expected to teach at any given time. As one student explained, the media literacy assignments “always seem to fall . . . during a time period where it’s like hard to incorporate—like China—it’s hard to do media literacy involving that . . . you feel like you’re just getting too far away from what you’re supposed to be talking about.” In describing a different attempt to integrate a required media literacy task, the same teacher candidate noted: “Every day I was teaching way too

much stuff already in one day so it's like I don't have time to cut anything or else I'm cutting the Atlantic Slave Trade out. So I can't cut out the Atlantic Slave Trade to do media literacy."

In other instances, teacher candidates expressed the challenge of aligning news media tasks with the specific content standards they were assigned to teach. As one student stated, "I think it's difficult if your content and what's expected from the standards doesn't really align with what's going on right now." In part, these types of comments reflect the challenge of integrating media education requirements into practicum requirements when teacher candidates have disparate subject and grade level placements. In our case, the 11 focal teacher candidates in this study were placed in 15 different classrooms in grades 6th through 12th. We assigned the integration of news media literacy tasks to all teacher candidates, regardless of placements. Specifically, we tasked teacher candidates with incorporating news media resources in a lesson, along with tasks that frequently asked students to consider examine the function and framing of those texts to determine their credibility. As such, planning and facilitating news media literacy assignments required each teacher candidate to (1) adapt the media literacy task to whatever content they were implementing at the time and (2) adapt it for the grade level they were teaching. This created tensions for the teacher candidates who struggled to identify ways that news media literacy tasks could be made relevant to the prescribed curriculum, which in our study seemed to be particularly difficult for those teaching in US and World history classrooms.

Additionally, some of the teacher candidates in middle school placements found the idea of addressing these topics with middle-grade students to be daunting, exemplified in the comment of one student who said "With sixth grade, it's just so much harder I think because . . . [they]aren't familiar with news at all. It is a whole different world. . . . It's like you have to take a whole lesson to do it. It has to be a whole day of just doing media literacy in order for them to understand." Another teacher candidate working with 6th graders expressed a similar sentiment: "It will probably be a challenge to teach the perspective and credibility piece to the students as it relates to the article and the video because we do not think they have any understanding of the terms."

In some sense, these concerns are to be expected among novice teachers who (1) often see social studies content as static, self-sealed nuggets of info with little relevance to the world outside the classroom (e.g., Saye et al., 2013) and (2) have little experience in anticipating and responding to knowledge and capacities students bring to the classroom. However, we assert that these tensions also reflect the dominant discourses of the standardized and tested curriculum that teacher candidates were subjected to throughout their teacher education program.

Time

Students expressed anxiety about teaching news media literacy in the context of being expected to "get through" through the required/tested/"real" content in three specific ways: time constraints, standards alignment, and colleague buy-in. The following data excerpts illustrate the kinds of comments indicating that teacher candidates felt they did not have enough time to address media literacy.

“If you just had free time to talk about media stuff all the time then it would be easier . . . trying to do it like in an opener, or like the one day in which somebody’s ahead of the other class [because of] snow or something like that.”

“I felt like bringing in media literacy was for another lesson for a different day because it requires so much scaffolding for students to understand. I would rather teach an entire lesson on media literacy rather than just throwing it into an inquiry lesson about an economics topic.”

“I am especially worried about time, but since we have main understandings we want them to achieve as well as these additional media understandings, the worst case would be that we are unable to address and teach a part of the lesson.”

“I don’t think that we explained the need for credible sources well enough to our students. We were so focused on explaining the project to the students and getting them prepared for their presentations that we rushed through the explanation of the importance of credibility.”

Many of the teacher candidates framed time as limiting factor in teaching news media, but we saw it used in at least two ways to place news media literacy outside of the social studies curriculum: as a topic that can address when there was “extra” time and as a topic too complicated to address in the time available. This was perhaps best demonstrated in one teacher candidate’s description of his plans to incorporate media literacy into his future teaching. Noting that he plans to do so in some capacity, he stated, “But not like, too often, you know, because you just don’t have time to do it like all the time.”

We highlight the uses of time in teacher candidates imagined future practices because it points to the real—and perceived—tensions that were used in different ways to account for and justify dispositions that are likely outside of the domain of our program. Of course, it is true that time is an important part of teaching. We felt the same kinds of time constraints in our own efforts to integrate news media literacy into our already overpacked teacher education curriculum. However, we found these teacher candidates’ invocation of time relevant because of the consistent deferral of the possible ways that news media would be incorporated. We note here our worry that such deferral indicates at least the possibility that it is a strategy of avoidance of the difficulties of implementing such practices.

Standards

The other significant obstacle to integrating news media literacy the teacher candidates identified were standards. The following set of data excerpts reflects this tension:

“A challenge that I will have is making sure that I am able to incorporate it into the lesson, while still being able to teach the information that I need to from the standards.”

“I think those tensions are very strong to stick with the standard . . . the administration plays a huge part, seeing as they have someone who comes in to your planning meetings.”

“[The students] have to learn . . . ‘This, then this, then this, then this, and this, and this.’ And so it’s like, ‘They need to know the standards, standards, standards, standards.’ . . . that can get in the way of them learning and taking time out to do [news media literacy].”

The conceptualization of standards as roadblocks is another space in which we locate our teacher education efforts within the complex web of competing discourses, histories, professional expectations, and others. We see these as emerging out of their embedded history in schooling cultures that are saturated by standards discourses. The conflict between news media literacy and standards is evidence of the teacher candidates’ intellectual and lived context and is, therefore, something additional that is part of the complex and difficult topography of media literacy pedagogy in social studies education.

Colleagues

Finally, the teacher candidates identified resistance from colleagues and collaborators as an obstacle to adhering to their commitment to including news media literacy. Several participants expressed the challenge of including media literacy specifically in the context of getting fellow social studies teachers on board: “I feel that especially with the collaborative planning that we do sometimes not the whole team is on board with [integrating media literacy] . . . that resistance . . . diminishes that desire a bit sometimes.” Another student who experienced collaborative planning in their placement described the tension in this way:

“I already know it’s hard to [integrate media literacy] here and I’ve only done it four times, I think, while I’ve been here. And, that’s with me being, ‘Well I have to do it this day because my teacher said I have to.’ And . . . my collaborating team is like, ‘Okay, since you have to do it, [laughs], you can do it.’ But it’s already hard.”

The data presented in this section provide just three of the challenges teacher candidates articulated as obstacles to teaching news media literacy. The possible paths of resistance to media literacy integration are compounded by the reality most states do not address media literacy in their standards (Stoddard, 2014). It is critical that we consider the consequences of these teacher candidates’ orientation toward seeing media literacy as extra. Put the most strongly, we see the integration of media studies and news media literacy as one of the most critical issues for social studies educators in the current era. How can current social studies education be relevant to the world in which we live without the exploration and consideration of media analysis and consumption, citizenship, and democracy? We do not see a way to make an argument for a responsible social studies curriculum/pedagogy that does not include a focus on news media literacy. The most pressing issues of our time are

represented to audiences through sophisticated networks that are worthy of study on their own terms. While these topics are certainly relevant to other disciplines, operational knowledge of such systems and the ways they impact the roles and responsibilities of citizens in democratic spaces *is* the work of social studies education.

Acknowledging that news media literacy is critical to social studies but unmandated reflects the kind of significant mismatch we found between the commitments to media literacy the teacher candidates professed and the multiple excuses they were able to find for not doing it—even before being fully inducted into the profession. However, all teachers are in a stuck place on this issue: between a responsibility to promoting democracy and the constraining forces that seek to shape what, when, and how they implement curricula in their classrooms.

It is important to consider the consequences of teacher candidates' perceptions that news media literacy is "extra," particularly right now. The prospect of implementing media literacy that could contribute to democratic citizenship is subject to multiple discourses that provide significant obstacles to actual implementation. Teacher educators need to think carefully about the ways these tensions are introduced, framed, and explored in their curriculum.

Discussion

Complexity, Castro (2012) writes, allows us to frame our teacher education efforts in terms of "an inefficient, nonlinear kind of causality" (p. 155). In our current times, the demand for such outcomes and our professional obligations to provide evidence that we affected them are, indeed, part of the complex system of teacher education. We live within this complexity, of course, and when we carried a focus on news media literacy and pedagogy in our initial certification program, this complexity persisted. In our study, learning experiences in relation to our intentional efforts were, indeed, inefficient and nonlinear. As we have discussed, teacher candidates' understandings and articulations shift and bend in relation to the complexity they can acknowledge and articulate. What emerges through teacher candidates' encounters with our own pedagogies, their school contexts, their histories of learning, and our current sociopolitical realities indicate a complexity that is overwhelming, alarming, and hopeful at the same time.

We can see in the teacher candidates' assignments the articulation of many well-known and well-trodden challenges in social studies education, from the challenge of learning to teach (at all) (e.g., Britzman, 1986) to the struggle to find a way to include meaningful lessons relevant to anything happening in the world (Saye & SSIRC, 2013). Additionally, we see persistent tensions and tropes that exist in relation to the accountability regime and its attendant need for teachers to sacrifice the stuff of meaningful social studies to make room for standards and what will be tested (Au, 2009; Schmidt, 2008; Segall, 2003; Sondell, 2013). But we assert that integrating media literacy in social studies education in meaningful ways presents new challenges that transcend the old, familiar ones. The complexity of learning to teach media, as well as the real tensions present in finding a place for media education within an already packed social studies curriculum, are significant obstacles to any effort to promote social studies as a place to embed these topics. Our analysis of the

teacher candidates' experience of implementing news media education demonstrates clearly that engaging with news media is shot through with contested issues that enliven social and political anxieties and cannot be resolved through simple, linear input/output strategies.

In our study, we feel confident in our assessment that we were successful in introducing the idea that news media literacy is important to social studies and gaining buy-in on this from most of the teacher candidates. Taken as a whole, their assignments indicate that we were able to raise their understanding of news media literacy in some form. At different points, we were able to support their limited efforts to integrate these topics into social studies. The results of these efforts contributed to the implementation of news media lessons in secondary social studies classrooms that would likely not have been exposed to these topics otherwise.

However, despite the 18-month concerted, collaborative, directed, comprehensive, purposeful efforts of multiple instructors to promote a rich understanding of media and how news media literacy can be integrated into social studies, at this point we have only limited evidence of success in terms of promoting the productive and effective incorporation of media literacy skills in novice teachers' teaching. Drawing on complexity, we can identify the process of learning to teach news media literacy and think about the efficacy of our curriculum and pedagogy in ways that acknowledge both the limits and the potentials. We can consider our efforts and our teacher candidates' actions and articulations as products of, or relations to, the cultural/political/social milieu in which we are all embedded. What this means is that while we can (indeed we did) make every intentional effort possible to implement a rich pedagogical invitation for teacher candidates to learn about media and social studies education, there are significant, influential components of learning to teach entirely outside of our control.

However, we do not feel as though this acknowledgment of complexity and challenge leaves us in a state of hopelessness in which there is nothing we can do as a result of the innumerable influences that impede our efforts. Rather, we find the opposite to be true. Acknowledging these complexities forces us to be more intentional in our work as teacher educators. Because of the focus on the emergence of action and meaning in the contexts of the work we do in the here-and-now with teacher candidates, we feel we have more agency rather than less in our efforts to attend to integrating news media literacy education for democracy.

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Appendix

Course Assignments Used as Data

Spring 2017

1. Lead Paragraph Practice

Teacher candidates looked at three separate articles and worked to identify the key points in the lead paragraph of the article.

2. News Summary Project

In a running log completed over three months, teacher candidates tracked a current event in two different legacy news sources. In the log, they recorded the date and author(s) of each article, summarized the article, and evaluated the article for bias.

3. Current Events Check In

Teacher candidates shared what they had learned so far in their tracking of their current event topic, what had surprised them, and what had been interesting about tracking their current event in their selected legacy news sources.

4. Critical Response 1: The Importance/Value of Media Education

After observing a model news media literacy lesson taught by a faculty in residence in a professional development school partnership, teacher candidates reflected on the lesson, their own conversations about the lesson with a small group of students, and evaluated the importance of teaching media literacy skills in social studies.

5. Critical Response 2: The Challenges of Media Education

After observing a second model news media lesson in the professional development school, teacher candidates discussed what they noticed as well as the challenges they anticipate in teaching media lessons in their future pedagogy.

6. Bias in the News

Teacher candidates were asked to discuss their conclusions about the presence of bias in news reports related to the current event they tracked.

7. News Tracking Reflection

Teacher candidates culminated their tracking of their selected current event in legacy news sources by sharing their findings and experiences in this process.

8. Anticipatory Guide

Teacher candidates discussed how they envision engaging future students in developing an understanding of the current event they tracked, its importance, and the challenges they anticipate.

9. Narrated Lesson Plan

Teacher candidates designed lesson plans to teach students about the current event they tracked, narrating the elements of the lesson as well as why each media resource would work to enhance student understanding.

10. Video Analysis Assignment (1)

Teacher candidates reviewed a video recording of a lesson they taught about their current event, transcribed a particular moment of interest, and analyzed what they noticed and what they would like to improve.

11. Final Reflection

Teacher candidates discussed what it was like to track their selected current event as well as what it was like to teach students about that current event.

12. Flipgrid Tasks (1–4)

Using the video application Flipgrid, teacher candidates discussed topics in four separate video recordings: the connection between media and social studies, what media literacy skill is important for students at different grade levels, the importance of news media literacy in social studies, and their views on Trump's statements about the media and fake news.

Fall 2017

1. Student Media Use Reflection

Teacher candidates were prompted to consider how the students in their fall placements encounter news media, what issues they anticipate arising in their effort to teach news media literacy, and how they will address those issues.

2. Video Analysis Assignment (2)

Teacher candidates reviewed a video recording of a news media lesson they taught, transcribed a particular moment, and analyzed what they noticed and what they would like to improve.

3. Media Analysis Lesson Preview (1 & 2)

Prior to teaching lessons focusing on news media literacy skills, teacher candidates described what they were planning and what they anticipated would happen as a result of their lesson.

4. Media Analysis Lesson Review (1 & 2)

Teacher candidates reflected on what challenges arose in their news media lesson and what things they would change in their news media literacy instruction based on their experiences.

5. Preparing for a Media Mini-Inquiry

In groups of two or three, teacher candidates completed a reflection before engaging their own students in an initial mini-inquiry unit, which required an explicit news media element.

6. Culminating Project

At the end of the semester, teacher candidates assessed their initial teaching experiences, specifically discussing their students' understandings of news media literacy concepts.

7. Culminating Project Reflection

Reflecting on their peer's presentations, teacher candidates discussed what they noticed about the news media literacy pedagogies discussed in the culminating projects of their classmates.

Spring 2018

1. The Influence of Personal Ideologies

Teacher candidates reflected on how they perceive their own ideologies influence their perceptions of media credibility and their news media literacy pedagogies.

2. Media Lesson Log

Teacher candidates were tasked with discussing their plans for eight media literacy focused lessons during student teaching, and then assessed their implementation of the lessons and described students' responses.