

PRESERVICE PORTRAYALS: PROSPECTIVE SOCIETY AND CULTURE
TEACHERS

HARRY THOMPSON AND
CHRISTINE E. DEER
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

ANNUAL CONFERENCE
ROUNDTABLE PRESENTATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR
RESEARCH IN
EDUCATION

Adelaide - 28 November to 1 December, 1989.

INTRODUCTION

Shulman (1985:1) refers to knowledge of subject matter as the

"missing paradigm in research on teaching". He maintains that it has been ignored as a central construct although it has frequently been included as a control variable. Such a view is supported by Dunkin and Biddle (1974) who completed a comprehensive review of research on teaching. Although teacher knowledge is included in their model of analysis as a presage variable, only one study (Bruce,1971) is reported as having investigated the link between academic knowledge and specific teacher actions. Bruce found no relationship between academic training in science and teacher use of higher categories of thought. The Third Handbook of Research on Teaching (Wittrock,1986) contains only a brief reference to research concerned with teacher knowledge and this is limited to pedagogy. Shulman (1986:25) finds it hard to account for this lack of interest by researcher considering that: The general public and those who set educational policy are in general agreement that teachers' competence in the subjects they teach is a central criterion of teacher quality.

In setting up the Knowledge Growth in a Profession Project at Stanford, Shulman (1985) stated that previous studies had concentrated upon the search for generic teaching skills which transcend the peculiarities of specific subjects and ignore the fundamental issue of how teachers communicate their own

knowledge of academic content to the students they teach.

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s part of the above project, case study research conducted by Gudmundsdotter, Carey and Wilson (1985) revealed close links between the academic background of teachers and their approach to classroom teaching. In this study four social science teacher education students in the final year internship phase of a five year teacher preparation program were interviewed and observed over a ten month period.

The interviews, of which there were seven, were aimed at producing detailed intellectual biographies of each student. Material collected included: academic background; factors influencing the career choice; individual orientations to the field of social science teaching; visions of purpose in teaching; general knowledge of subject matter in social science; general knowledge of subject matter in courses actually being taught; conceptions of good and bad teaching; and approaches to curriculum and lesson planning.

Once the researchers felt that they had a deep understanding of each teachers' subject matter training and orientation to teaching they began to observe specific lessons. This involved a cycle of planning, observation and debriefing. In the planning phase the teacher is asked to think aloud while planning the lesson with the observers taking notes and not interrupting. Once planning was completed the teacher was questioned on such matters as sources of ideas, reasons for omitting portions of a text or decisions to include certain activities. The lesson was then observed and followed by a debriefing session in which the teachers was asked to explain "in-flight " changes to the plan

and about various decisions and actions taken during the lesson.

As in Australia, the term social studies is used in the U.S.A. to describe a broad range of disciplines in the humanities area. In

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schools social studies could involve the study of such diverse subjects as history, geography, civics and economics. As a result teachers preparing to teach social studies may complete academic majors in a variety of disciplines.

This diversity was revealed in the data collected in the Stanford study:

Case (a) : An anthropology major with a chief specialisation in cultural anthropology and human evolution. Teaching a freshman social studies class.

Case (b) : An anthropology major with a specialisation in archaeological excavation. Teaching a freshman social studies class. Case (c): A history major with a specialisation in the history of the western hemisphere and Russian history over the last hundred years. Teaching a Russian history class.

Case (d): A political science major with a specialisation in international relations. Teaching two courses: U.S. history and European history.

In this study a close relationship was found between the academic background of the students and the way they structured the curriculum and the methodologies used. If one adopts Schwab's (1961) distinction between syntactic and substantive structuring of knowledge it was in the syntactic area that the main effects were found, that is in relation to methodology, to how knowledge grows and is revised in particular disciplines. There were also some differences in the substantive area relating to conceptual

structures.

Specifically, Case (a) was found to adopt the cultural anthropologist's ethnographic approach to social studies teaching. Interest was in the emic or insider's view of social

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situations with "man" at the centre of things. Simulation was a major method of teaching and was adopted in order to help students develop a "feel" for the real situations in each particular topic.

Case (b) adopted a geographic regional approach in designing the curriculum looking at the physical geography, climate and the specific human responses in each area studied. However, the methodology used in many cases was that of the archaeologist. For example when looking at the bushmen of the Kalahari the student stated:

We did a little archaeology kind of activity for a couple of days where we put out site maps with various artefacts found, and they, as anthropologists, had to find out who lived there. How many? --- (Gudmundsdottir et al. 1985: 6)

Case (c) teaching a history class taught the same course twice during the period of the study and showed interesting development over the period as a result of experience. The first time he adopted a chronological approach but became disenchanted as it "lacked organising ideas". The second time around he used political science themes as organisers and concentrated more on recent European history where he could bring out major political influences.

The researchers concluded that prior knowledge did influence the way in which student teachers organise and teach their classes in that they tend to draw on particular aspects of their disciplines which have been important to them in their own education.

Given the above tentative finding it was decided that the

introduction of a course at Macquarie University to train teachers for the new Society and Culture course for years 11 and 12 in New South Wales schools would provide an excellent opportunity to attempt to replicate the Stanford study. There were many similarities in the settings. For example, Society and

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Culture is a cross-disciplinary course and student teachers may enrol, drawing on a broad range of disciplines to meet the course prerequisites. The students were also in their final year of study, however, they were not completing an internship but rather a continuous form of school experience which involves one day a week in a school for 25 days plus 15 days of "block" teaching during University recess periods. During these visits the student works with and under the supervision of a "master teacher" selected and trained by the Teacher Education Program (TEP).

METHODOLOGY

Twenty students enrolled in the second semester course: Society and Culture in the Secondary School, agreed to participate in the study. All were also preparing to teach one other subject such as Geography, Economics or History.

The Society and Culture syllabus for years 11 and 12 was introduced into New South Wales high schools in 1985 (Board of Senior School Studies, 1983). It adopts a multidisciplinary approach and stresses the development of key concepts through a study of specific areas. Two of these areas, namely the Opening Section (Coming of Age in Today's World) and the Closing Section (Looking Ahead to Tomorrow's World) are compulsory. From the remaining seven areas, called depth studies (Adolescence; Intercultural Communication; Political Processes; Religion and

Belief; Rules, Rights and Laws; Social Inequality, Prejudice and Discrimination; and Work, Leisure and Sport) students must choose three. There is also a Personal Interest Project (PIP) worth 20 per cent of the external Higher School Certificate. A syllabus of 72 pages gives detailed guidelines in regard to content, methodology and assessment procedures.

The course "Society and Culture in the Secondary School",

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involves three hours of class time over a semester of thirteen weeks. This is achieved by having a two hour tutorial each week and a two hour workshop each fortnight. The pre-requisites for the course are that students have successfully completed the the third year TEP courses "Curriculum and Instruction in the Secondary School I and II and have accumulated 8 credit points at 200 level (the equivalent of an academic minor) in a discipline relevant to Society and Culture. A co- requisite is that all students are concurrently enrolled in the course TEP 312 "School Experience in the Secondary School". This involves 40 days of teaching in a high school under the supervision of a master teacher. As in all other TEP courses, no attempt is made to teach the academic content as this is assumed by nature of the pre requisites. In the tutorial, students study the syllabus and other related literature, such as guides, bibliographies and assessment guidelines. The two major assignments include a group project, which involves the development of a complete unit of work for one of the areas of study in the syllabus, and the completion of a PIP following all of the syllabus rules. Both assignments are presented by the students to the group as a whole. This procedure allows the input from the various background disciplines of the students to be shared and appreciated by all. In 1989, in order to assist the sharing

process, all students completed an introductory course in desk-top-publishing. Using this skill material produced by the students could be printed and distributed to all. In order to broaden the background knowledge of students and so assist them in teaching this multi-disciplinary course, the workshop time period is used to invite experts in a wide variety of fields to discuss recent developments in their disciplines with particular regard to the Society and Culture syllabus. Examples of invited guests

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included: the Head of School of the Graduate School of the Environment, the Head of School of Behavioural Sciences (whose research interest is in adolescence), experts in the fields of teaching the Religion and Belief and the Inter-cultural Communication depth studies and an expert in legal studies.

Early in the semester eighteen of the students were interviewed by a research assistant to obtain information to develop intellectual biographies. Owing to the much larger number of students compared with the Stanford study, it was not possible to conduct as many interviews. Also, considering the students were currently completing a full program of studies an effort was made to reduce demands on their time to a minimum. Since the Stanford findings were reported in fairly gross terms it was not thought that this reduction in data gathering time would cause major problems.

Details gathered in the interviews included:

- (a) Prior life experiences such as jobs, overseas travel, parenting.
- (b) Experiences as school students such as favourite subjects, views of good and poor teaching, and reasons for career choice.
- (c) University academic studies with details of academicmajors,

other specialisations, areas of Society and Culture in which they felt most and least competent, and what were their main sources of content in lesson and unit planning.

(d) Education or pedagogic studies with details of the subjects studies, qualities of good and poor teachers, role models , classroom climate preferred, three methodologies considered most successful, the proportions of time in teaching devoted to teacher talk, questioning, pupil to pupil talk and seat work and finally, comments on the most successful lesson. Tables I, 2, and 3 summarise some of the information gathered from the students in

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regard to their academic background, the areas of Society and Culture in which they felt most and least competent and the main sources from which they drew examples during their teaching.

TABLE 1 ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

Number of students (N = 18)

	ANTH	BHS	GEO	EDUC	HIST	POL	SOC	OTHER
Academic major/s (some double majors)	0	0	9	2	6	2	1	4
Disciplines considered most relevant to Soc.and Cult.	3	4	3	2	1	2	1	2

ANTH = Anthropology, BHS = Behavioural Science, GEO = Geography
 EDUC = Education, Hist = History, POL = Politics, SOC =Sociology.

TABLE 2

AREAS OF STUDY CONSIDERED MOST AND LEAST COMPETENT TO TEACH

Depth study most comp. to teach	Open.	Adol.	R.R.L.	I.C.C.	R.B.	P.P.	W.L.S.	S.I.	C.S.
	0	7	0	0	3	0	1	3	1

Depth study least comp. to teach	Open.	Adol.	R.R.L.	I.C.C.	R.B.	P.P.	W.L.S.	S.I.	C.S.
	2	0	1	1	3	6	3	0	0

Note: Some students named the PIP in response to the above two questions. It is not a depth study.

Open. = Opening Section, Adol. = Adolescence, R.R.L. = Rules, Rights and Laws, I.C.C. = Inter-cultural Communication, R.B. = Religion and Belief, P.P. = Political Processes, W.L.S. = Work, Leisure and Sport, S.I. = Social Inequality, Prejudice and Discrimination and C.S. = Closing Section.

TABLE 3

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MAIN SOURCES OF EXAMPLES

Main sources of examples	Academic Discipline						Media	Real life
	ANTH	BHS	GEO	HIST	POL	SOC		
(Others were not specific)	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	3

One of the assessment tasks of the course was to prepare a detailed unit of work suitable for one of the depth studies or compulsory sections. This unit had to include a rationale, specific objectives, teaching strategies, pupil activities, resources, evaluation and an annotated bibliography. As the unit was marked a checklist (Appendix A) was completed to locate possible links between the background knowledge of the students and the content of the unit plans.

Lessons taught by the students were also observed by the researchers using a checklist (Appendix B) designed to highlight links between background knowledge and teaching styles. For example, it looked for sources used to support facts or judge truth; sources of illustrations, examples or value judgements;

proportionate times spent in teacher talk, teacher-pupil interaction and pupil-pupil interaction; and instances of concentration on content as against processes at various key stages of the lesson.

RESULTS

Unlike the research of Shulman and his associates , this study found no links between the academic disciplines in which the students were majoring and the ways in which they planned and taught lessons. A possible reason for this finding lies in the clear instructions given in the syllabus concerning content, methodology and key concepts. In the Stanford study there was no central syllabus and teachers were able to differ greatly in their interpretations. In addition, the Stanford students were

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working as interns without the close scrutiny of supervising teachers (Called "Master Teachers" in the Macquarie context). In the case of the Macquarie research the student teachers were, at least in their teaching, following the programs of work designed by the Master Teachers.

Another reason for the result may be the nature of the course "Society and Culture in the Secondary School". It is designed to allow students from widely different disciplines to learn from each other and to broaden their horizons. Concentration on group work and the ways in which the disciplines could be used to contribute to the syllabus may also have produced a more common response to methodology than in the Stanford study.

There were however, some interesting findings. For example, when asked whether they placed more emphasis on children or subject matter, the four students who said subject matter were all from a History background. Questioned about the reasons for choosing

to take the Society and Culture course nine said because it was interesting and relevant however, five said it was to avoid either Economics or History. Most students considered that they were most competent in the Adolescence Depth Study and least competent in Political Processes. This finding supports recent Federal Government concern for the need for more political education in our schools. In terms of teaching, the most preferred classroom climate was one in which pupils were highly involved and interactive. Overall the biggest proportion of class time (42 per cent) was spent on teacher-pupil questions. The best indicator of a good lesson was considered to be pupil interest and participation.

CONCLUSION

In this study no relationship was found between the academic background of the students and the way they structured the

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curriculum, as evidenced by units of work, lesson plans and classroom teaching. That this result was different from that of Gudmundsdotter, Carey and Wilson may be explained in terms of variations in the context of teaching and the form of teacher education. The results suggest that where there is a centrally set syllabus with specific details concerning the concepts to be taught and the methodology to be used, any differences in orientation, due to background disciplines, tend to be masked. It is also highly likely that the teacher education unit of study, which involved co-operative group planning of tasks designed to help students adopt a multi-disciplinary approach, also contributed to the result. In general, this study supports the view that with proper training and with adequate support in terms of syllabus documents and associated resource materials, the tendency to major in only one of the traditional disciplines

should not act as a constraint on the ability of teachers to implement curricula adopting a multi-disciplinary approach.

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APPENDIX A

SOCIETY AND CULTURE STUDENT ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE STUDY

LESSON OBSERVATION Source used for Teacher

as source Pupils as source Other sources judging truth-

source of facts
etc.

Comment:

Class discussion	Teacher talk	Teacher/pupil	pupil/pupil
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Comment:

Sources of illustration, examples, value judgements	Sociology/ Anthropology	History	Geography	Economics	Other
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Comment:

Concentration on content/process	This is a follow-up to statements in the lesson plan. Look for evidence in : a.The introduction: We're going to b.Key concepts on the board. c.Key points in the evaluation/review.
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APPENDIX B

SOCIETY AND CULTURE ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE STUDY

UNIT PLAN EVALUATION

Name of student:

Depth study:

SA A U D SD

1. The unit is based on one major text.
2. The unit is flexible and adaptable to student interest and input.
3. The texts/references chosen come from one major discipline. If A or SA, name of discipline:
4. Case studies or examples are chosen from one major discipline. If A or SA, name of discipline:...
5. The key concepts selected for study show a bias towards one particular discipline. If A or SA, name of discipline:.....
6. The rationale for the choice of the depth study reveals a bias towards one particular discipline. If A or Sa, name of discipline:....
7. Objectives are clearly related to the syllabus and do not indicate a single discipline bias. If D or SD, name of discipline:.....
8. Assignments and other related tasks indicate a bias towards a particular discipline eg., historical evidence might be preferred to case study. If A or SA, name of discipline:.....
9. The unit plan stresses content or concepts rather than a range of skill-based student activities.