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PREPARING PRESERVICE TEACHERS TO FACILITATE COURAGEOUS
CONVERSATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER
EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

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Date Submitted March 4, 2021

Date Approved May 19, 2021

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ABSTRACT

PREPARING PRESERVICE TEACHERS TO FACILITATE COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES

Ariel N. Henry

Scholars and associations committed to powerful social studies education have long advocated that students explore controversial issues so they grow into informed, ethical, and participating citizens. Yet, teachers avoid undertaking this work due to a lack of training, confidence, or experience in facilitating courageous conversations about tough issues. Teachers may fear retribution and complaints. Teachers may also worry about how to defuse classroom tensions and manage strong emotions. While scholarship on teaching controversy has primarily focused on preservice and in-service teachers' views and experiences, research examining teacher educators' perceptions and practices remains sparse. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how 12 secondary social studies teacher educators understood and taught controversial issues within their methods courses. The study examined how they prepared preservice teachers for the challenges of teaching controversy. Three research questions framed the focus for this study: What are secondary social studies teacher educators' attitudes toward teaching controversial issues? How do secondary social studies teacher educators approach the teaching of controversial issues in their courses? How do secondary social studies teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to handle the challenges associated with teaching controversial issues? Using case study methodology, I conducted semi-structured video

conferencing interviews with participants and collected teacher-provided artifacts.

Several key findings emerged. The teacher educators agreed teaching controversial issues prepares young people to become active citizens and is most effective when taught using an interdisciplinary approach. In their methods courses, the teacher educators modeled how to build a classroom community and handle disclosure. They guided preservice in defining and identifying examples of controversial issues along with locating and examining reliable sources. They modeled practical strategies for steering a civil discourse that welcomes multiple perspectives. The teacher educators discussed personal and external obstacles that might discourage teachers from broaching contested issues. To overcome these challenges, they advised preservice teachers to build positive relationships with stakeholders, cultivate an emotionally safe classroom space, and seek ways to grow. The study has implications for leaders and teachers in teacher education and secondary education settings. Recommendations for future research related to the findings reached are presented.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mom, Nadira, and brother, Justin. I am forever grateful for your unwavering support and enduring love during this academic journey. You have been my daily source of inspiration and strength throughout this program and in life. Thank you for always encouraging me to learn, grow, and challenge myself. You empower me to be the best person I can be. Because of you both, I achieved this dream.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The journey toward completing my Ed.D. would not have been possible without the guidance and support of many people who have each made a valuable contribution in helping me throughout this experience.

I would first like to express my deepest gratitude to my incredible team of mentors, Dr. Elizabeth Gil, Dr. Randall F. Clemens, and Dr. Rene S. Parmar. Each of you gave a generous amount of time, expertise, and encouragement during the different stages of this journey. Your expertise and support helped me to formulate a sound research methodology. You guided me in planning how I can present my findings comprehensively and systematically. Thank you as well for your constructive feedback on my drafts and careful attention to detail. You deepened my thinking and helped me to grow into a stronger, more confident writer. I also appreciate your patience in answering all of my questions and steering me in the right direction when I faced any roadblocks. Finally, thank you for helping to map out my dissertation timeline and making sure I meet each deadline. Without your tremendous mentorship, I would not have been able to complete this research.

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Barbara Cozza and Dr. Catherine DiMartino. Thank you for your time, for sharing your knowledge, and for your encouragement. You each brought a unique and important perspective to my work, which helped me to see how I could strengthen my research design and narrative.

Many thanks to the twelve teacher educators for being so generous with their time, resources, and stories. You shared your perspectives and experiences with such candor, which made this research possible and so much richer. Thank for you deepening

my understanding of how teachers can effectively teach controversial issues and how we can empower future educators to take on this courageous work. You have shared a wealth of practical tools and strategies with me that I am eager to put into practice and share with teacher colleagues.

Special thanks to my supervisors for creating a flexible work schedule so that I could attend evening classes and progress with my writing.

Thank you to my circle of colleagues for your friendship and check-ins. Your invaluable advice and words of encouragement eased the challenges of writing this dissertation. You motivated and inspired me to make it to the finish line.

I am deeply grateful to my mom and brother who provided the mental and emotional support I need to actualize this dream and recognize my potential. You celebrated both my small and large wins throughout this experience. From you both, I learned the importance of enjoying the journey of learning and discovery as much as the destination. I learned to be patient when working towards huge goals and remain steadfast in achieving them no matter what obstacles that come my way. I am blessed to you have you both in my life. Thank you for your infinite love, trust, and patience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
CHAPTER 1	1
Purpose of the Study	2
Overview of Theoretical Framework	3
Significance of the Study	4
Connection with Social Justice Education	7
Research Questions	8
Definition of Terms	8
College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History	9
Controversial Issues	9
Critical Consciousness	10
Dialogue	10
Preservice Teachers	10
Problem-Posing	11
Social Studies	11
Teacher Educators	12
Conclusion	12

CHAPTER 2	14
Theoretical Framework.....	14
Review of the Relevant Literature	19
Definition of Controversial Issues	20
Open, Closed, and Tipping Issues.....	21
Methods for Teaching Controversial Issues	22
Preservice and In-Service Teachers' Views	25
Teacher Educators' Approaches and Challenges.....	29
Connection Between Extant Literature and Present Study.....	35
Conclusion	36
CHAPTER 3	38
Introduction.....	38
Research Design	39
Participants.....	42
Sampling Technique	42
Recruitment.....	43
University-Level Gatekeepers	44
Social Media	45
Recruitment Screener.....	46
Description of the Sample.....	47
Population	50
Data Collection Methods	50
Video Conferencing Interviews	50

Document Analyses	53
Data Analysis Methods	54
Managing and Organizing the Data	55
Reading the Data and Memoing	55
Coding.....	56
Categorization and Re-Coding.....	57
Thematizing	58
Representing the Data	58
Data Collection and Analysis Procedures.....	59
Video Conferencing Interviews and Document Collection	59
Transcription	60
First Reading and Memoing.....	61
Cycles of Coding and Codebook Development.....	61
Categorizing Data	64
Theme Identification.....	65
Document Analyses	67
Trustworthiness Definition and Strategies.....	67
Credibility	69
Transferability.....	70
Dependability	71
Confirmability.....	71
Research Ethics.....	72
Researcher Role and Positionality	74

Conclusion	77
CHAPTER 4	78
Theme 1: Undertaking a Difficult but Necessary Responsibility	79
Subtheme 1a: Preparing Young People for Active Citizenship	81
Subtheme 1b: Dealing with Personal and External Factors	83
Lack of Knowledge and Confidence	83
Fear of Offending Students	84
Concerns from Administrators and Parents	86
Standards and Time	88
Subtheme 1c: Embracing an Interdisciplinary Approach	89
Summary of Theme 1 Findings	92
Theme 2: Preparing for and Steering the Controversial Issues Discussion	92
Subtheme 2a: Laying the Groundwork for Discussion	94
With Each Other	95
On Our Own	98
Subtheme 2b: Understanding Controversial Issues and Examining Resources	102
Defining a Controversial Issue	103
Exploring Examples of Controversial Issues	105
Searching for Resources	109
Evaluating Media Sources	111
Subtheme 2c: Facilitating an Open Student-Centered Discussion	112
Promoting Discussion Not Debate	113
Using Discussion Frameworks and Strategies	117

Including Multiple Perspectives	120
Handling Teacher Disclosure.....	125
Summary of Theme 2 Findings.....	134
Theme 3: Cultivating a Positive Relationship with Community Members and Yourself	135
Subtheme 3a: Communicating Proactively with Parents and Administrators	136
Promoting Parent Communication.....	137
Gaining Support From Supervisors	141
Subtheme 3b: Maintaining an Emotionally Safe Classroom Space for Students ...	142
Allowing Students to Resolve Disagreements Themselves.....	143
Drawing the Line	146
Acknowledging Students' Emotions.....	150
Subtheme 3c: Eschewing Your Role as the Expert	152
Building Background Knowledge.....	153
Learning Alongside Students	156
Resisting the Tendency to Compare Yourself With Others.....	157
Forming a Support System.....	158
Summary of Theme 3 Findings.....	159
Conclusion	160
CHAPTER 5	162
Introduction.....	162
Summary of the Study	162
Restatement of Need for and Significance of the Study	162

Reiteration of Theoretical Framework	164
Discussion of the Findings.....	165
Discussion of Research Question 1.....	165
Discussion of Research Question 2.....	168
Discussion of Research Question 3.....	173
Relationship to Theoretical Framework	176
Relationship Between Findings and Problem-Posing Education.....	177
Relationship Between Findings and Dialogue	178
Relationship Between Findings and Teachers as Co-Constructors of Knowledge.	178
Relationship Between Findings and Critical Consciousness	180
Relationship Between Findings and Praxis.....	180
Relationship to Related Research	182
Relationship Between Research Question 1 and Related Research.....	182
Relationship Between Research Question 2 and Related Research.....	183
Relationship Between Research Question 3 and Related Research.....	186
Limitations of the Study	188
Recommendations for Future Practice.....	189
Recommendations for Higher Education Teacher Educators and Administrators .	190
Recommendations for Secondary Education Teachers and Leaders	192
Recommendations for Policy in Social Studies Education.....	196
Recommendations for Future Research	198
Conclusion	200
APPENDIX A.....	202

APPENDIX B	203
APPENDIX C	204
APPENDIX D	205
APPENDIX E	206
APPENDIX F	207
APPENDIX G	209
APPENDIX H	210
APPENDIX I	218
APPENDIX J	220
APPENDIX K	221
APPENDIX L	225
REFERENCES	226

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Participant Demographics	47
Table 2	Participant Responses to Screener Questions	49
Table 3	Alignment Between Interview Questions and Research Questions.....	52
Table 4	Techniques to Establish Trustworthiness During Data Analysis Spiral	68
Table 5	Relationship Between Themes and Research Questions	78

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	A Critical Pedagogical Approach to Preparing Preservice Teachers to Teach Controversial Issues	19
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CHAPTER 1

Controversial issues are at the center of our democratic society and in many ways, part of our everyday realities. Issues relating to race relations, immigration, religious freedom, structural and instructional discrimination against diverse groups, and gender inequality in the United States are discussed on social media, news outlets, and most likely trickle into our daily conversations (Zimmerman & Robertson, 2017). In recent years, our nation's climate has been affected by altercations over police brutality, climate change, gun control, among many others (Hess & McAvoy, 2014; Pace, 2019). Controversial issues pervade the school curriculum as well, particularly within the social studies curriculum. For example, historians are still divided over the question of whether or not it was justified for President Truman to drop the atomic bomb on Japan to end World War II sooner.

Controversy and conflict permeate social studies education. When social and historical issues enter classrooms, teachers face teachable moments and tensions. Many teachers avoid the ambitious endeavor of discussing sensitive issues due to unpreparedness (Oulton, Dillon, & Grace, 2004; Pace 2019). Beginning teachers, in particular, feel nervous about losing classroom control. The idea of navigating through this uncharted territory might disturb the safety of an academic environment (Pace, 2017). Teaching controversial issues also increases teachers' risk of not knowing how to manage emotionally charged discussions or revealing their lack of knowledge (Pace, 2019). Yet avoiding contested issues altogether sends the message to students that we should ignore the issues they are likely to encounter in their own lives and communities as well as the national and global issues they are exposed to through the media. These

circumstances call for the need to understand how teacher educators prepare preservice teachers with the challenge of taking up an issues-based approach to social studies education with their students and fostering learning environments that promote civil discourse.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how 12 secondary social studies teacher educators felt about and taught controversial issues in their courses. The study also examined how these teacher educators prepare secondary preservice teachers for the challenges associated with teaching controversial issues. Research on teacher education at large shows a disconnect between theoretical university courses and K-12 classrooms, which inhibits the transference of coursework to practice (Pace, 2019). Teacher educators can prepare teachers for the ambitious practice of teaching controversial issues in several ways. This includes addressing risks that make teachers avoid certain issues, providing and modeling practical tools, and engaging in reflective conversations about them, creating opportunities to rehearse enactment, and grounding conversations in preservice teachers' field experiences (Lampert, 2010; Lunenberg, Korthagen, & Swennen, 2007; Pace, 2017; Parker & Hess, 2001; Ritter, 2012).

The study relates to the discourse of critical pedagogy and thoughts of theorist, Paulo Freire. The goal of Freire's pedagogy is for "men and women develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves...they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in the process of transformation" (Micheletti, 2010). Freire conceptualizes that the purpose of education is to promote social reform. Therefore, schools should help students recognize

make connections between their individual experiences and the social contexts in which they are embedded. Students are challenged to analyze the various political and social issues injustices deeply entrenched in society (Applebaum, 2009; Freire, 1986/2000). They might ask critical and reflective questions such as “What made the situation as it is? Who made the situation as it is, and whose interests are served by the status quo?” (Applebaum, 2009, p. 397). In thinking critically about social injustices, students develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to create a more just society (Freire, 1986/2000; Micheletti, 2020).

Overview of Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in the tenets of critical pedagogy. In Paulo Freire’s book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968/2000), the critical theorist argued that the current education system reflects the interests of middle- and upper-class society, which hinders liberation of the oppressed. In traditional classrooms, teachers take on an authoritarian role. They deposit content into students’ minds that “is detached from reality” and “disconnected from the totality” (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 71). Freire claims this traditional banking model of education presents many problems (1968/2000). Students are restricted and oppressed into “passive robots, who do not have feelings and autonomy” (Shim, 2008, p. 527). Their role is to passively “receive, memorize, and repeat” (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 72) information that has been transmitted to them from an authoritative figure (the teacher). As a result, there is little room for critical thinking and intellectual growth (Shor & Freire, 1987). As citizens in an ever-changing world, Freire argues students should be allowed to think for themselves, as well as to critique, act, and reflect “upon their world to transform it” (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 79).

Freire (1968/2000) calls on educators to reject the banking model of education and instead work toward an emancipatory form of education. Critical pedagogy promotes “social interaction, collaboration, authentic democracy, and self-actualization” (Nouri & Sajjadi, 2014, p. 76). In this approach, students and teachers are invited to engage in dialogue. Together, they analyze social and political issues and oppressive practices (Nouri & Sajjadi, 2014; Wardekker & Miedema, 1997). Education that involves questioning anti-democratic power structures that cause injustices and inequalities is essential. It prevents exploitation and the reproduction of inequality (Freire, 1968/2000).

Significance of the Study

True democracy is achieved when educated citizens are aware of and discuss controversial issues impacting their lives (Misco, 2014; NCSS, 2012; Parker, 1996). In the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Position Statement, *A Vision of Powerful Teaching and Learning in Social Studies (2016)*, the organization advocates for teaching controversial issues in the classroom. Examining current and historical controversial issues encourages students to consider multiple and opposing viewpoints (NCSS, 2016). Students learn to respect differences and resolve conflict. Studying current and historical controversial issues also strengthens students’ critical thinking and problem-solving so they can make informed decisions (NCSS, 2012; NCSS, 2016).

The later published NCSS position statement, *A Vision of Powerful Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies (2016)*, builds on its earlier position. In this document, NCSS (2016) states social studies classrooms should engage students in discussions about “pervasive and enduring social issues” (p. 180) connected to their lives. Learning about current issues is fundamental for growing students into educated citizens who will

lead a purposeful life in a democracy (NCSS, 2016). Students develop a concern for the common good. They also deepen their understanding of policies and democratic values.

Despite the benefits of teaching controversial issues for students, challenges exist. Firstly, federal policy initiatives have given little attention to social studies. When the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was in effect between 2002 and 2015, standards and assessment narrowed the curriculum and increased content coverage. When the Common Core State Standards Initiative launched in 2009 to standardize the curriculum on a national scale, Social Studies and History standards were incorporated within the English Language Arts standards (Chara, 2017). As a result, social studies has been largely deemphasized in the K-12 school curriculum when compared to English Language Arts and Mathematics. These changes in national-level policy could have potentially impacted the teaching of controversial issues in social studies classrooms.

Secondly, teachers decide what is taught and how they teach it in their classrooms (Thornton, 2005). Since controversy suggests working against the status quo, social studies teachers face instructional difficulties (MacDonald, 2013). Across the reviewed studies, preservice and in-service found teaching controversial challenging. Many teachers cited a lack of preparation and confidence for handling sensitive topics (Abu-Hamdan & Khader, 2014; Byford, Lennon, & Russell, 2009; Demoiny, 2017; Ersoy, 2012; Journell, 2011). Inadequate training can impact how teachers approach controversial issues in the classrooms and the extent to which students experience the benefits. This calls for a need to examine how social studies teacher educators view and engage their preservice teachers in exploring controversial issues. The findings would reveal how teacher educators equip their students with the practical tools, resources, and

confidence to handle the wide range of challenges that can arise with controversy.

Additionally, the research would provide insight into the techniques teacher educators use for modeling respectful and civil discourse.

The study might assist higher education leaders to determine if teacher educators are favorably or unfavorably disposed to teaching controversial issues. Then leaders can pinpoint if this may be due to confidence, knowledge, or educational philosophy.

Learning about their attitudes helps leaders to discern how teacher educators approach controversial issues in preservice social studies methods courses. Higher education teacher educators and leaders can also use this study to evaluate and rethink how their social studies programs equip teachers with the skills and knowledge to engage in issues-based discussions. Their responses would reveal how they are supporting teachers in managing teacher disclosure and establishing a safe classroom space. Teacher educators can use findings from the study to bridge ideological disconnects between educators serving students on the ground and those serving at universities.

An examination into teacher educators' attitudes and practices when teaching controversial issues is important for looking closely at how teacher education programs at large equip preservice with the content knowledge, intellectual skills, and civic values to guide and empower young citizens in developing productive and active citizenship. Efforts to increase student participation in their democracy, not just through the school curriculum, but also at the teacher education level, is both relevant and necessary. In the United States, young people have the lowest voter turnout compared to adults 65 and older (Misra, 2019). This suggests they might be disillusioned by politics. To counter low civic engagement, teachers need to help students realize they can affect change in their

world. Otherwise, their interests and concerns could be sidelined. To develop students' capacity to be informed and active citizens in a democracy, teachers must involve students in deliberating about a wide range of complex controversial issues from various standpoints, weighing evidence, and making reasoned arguments (Cowan & Maitles, 2012). A healthy democracy depends on citizens being involved in their community.

That means teachers need to be well-informed about a wide range of social, economic, political, and cultural events to present controversial issues effectively to students. However, as noted by Cowan and Maitles (2012), teaching controversial issues is particularly challenging at present, due to an increase in unreliable sources of information. Teacher education programs are faced with an important task.

Comprehensive training that includes opportunities for preservice to deepen their knowledge about a range of issues, learn the art of compromise, and discern multiple points of view might help them feel more confident in facilitating civil discourses. They can experience an exemplary model of how to promote citizenship education (Cowan & Maitles, 2012). In turn, students will develop the competencies to become contributing and responsible citizens.

Connection with Social Justice Education

The present research achieves the equity and inclusion aspect of the St. John's University Mission. The research examined teacher education social studies methods courses through a social justice lens. Teacher educators are responsible for preparing future teachers to succeed in today's diverse classrooms. The study examined how teacher educators developed pedagogy for discussion of controversial issues, which is a core component of a social justice-oriented curriculum (Um, 2019). The study provides

insight into the ways teacher educators help preservice teachers recognize and address their biases and vulnerabilities. It illustrates how teacher educators model powerful social studies practices that open opportunities for students to engage in critical conversations and develop critical thinking.

The findings highlight how teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to create classroom spaces that take into consideration students' unique identities and promote an understanding across these differences. They provide advice and strategies for interrupting biased language and educating students about why their comments are offensive. Overall, the research presents how teachers can act as social justice advocates. Preparing teachers to handle controversial issues prepares them to create a space where students consider social justice issues and formulate informed opinions about those critical issues (Busey & Mooney, 2014).

Research Questions

The research questions guiding the proposed dissertation are:

1. What are secondary social studies teacher educators' attitudes toward teaching controversial issues?
2. How do secondary social studies teacher educators approach the teaching of controversial issues in their courses?
3. How do secondary social studies teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to handle the challenges associated with teaching controversial issues?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, I defined the following terms from the Council of Chief State School Officers (2013), Burns, Jacobs, and Yendol-Hoppey (2016);

Chambers and Lavery (2012); Darling-Hammond and Rothman (2014); Ducharme (1986); Freire (1968/2000), Freire and Macedo (1987); Korth, Erickson, and Lynnette (2009); Lunenberg, Dengerink, and Korthagen (2014); The National Council for the Social Studies (2012, 2013, 2016); Stradling, Baines, & Noctor (1984); and Zimmerman and Robertson (2017).

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History

This framework, also known as the C3 Framework for the Social Standards or simply the C3 Framework, was developed by the *Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)* to help states, teachers, and curriculum writers strengthen their social studies programs and prepare students for college, career, and civic life (CCSSO, 2013). The C3 Framework includes indicators for student learning in four distinct dimensions: developing questions and planning inquiries, applying disciplinary concepts and tools, evaluating sources and using evidence, and communicating conclusions and taking informed action (CCSSO, 2013). Together, the four dimensions form the Inquiry Arc, the heart of the C3 Framework. The Inquiry Arc provides the organizing structure and rationale for the framework’s four dimensions (CCSSO, 2013).

Controversial Issues

Controversial issues (also referred to as “hot-button” issues) are topics, events, questions, or issues that elicit strong emotional reactions. The public is almost equally divided on the explanations and best solutions on the issues (Zimmerman & Robertson, 2017). Issues of controversy are unsettled and cause disagreement due to competing

values, opinions, perspectives, backgrounds, or philosophies of those involved (Hess, 2009; NCSS, 2012; Stradling, Baines, & Noctor, 1984).

Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness, a term constructed by Freire (1968/2000), represents an individual's developing awareness and understanding of issues of social, economic, and political injustices. Two key dimensions of critical consciousness are reflection and transformation or taking action. Through reflection, an individual examines the relationship between themselves and their social and political environment in which they are situated so that they can better understand oppression and injustice (Freire, 1968/2000). Transformation or taking action, the second dimension of critical consciousness, has a cyclical and dynamic relationship with reflection. Oppressed people feel empowered to change their social conditions through continuous reflection and a growing critical awareness of inequities in those conditions (Freire, 1968/2000).

Dialogue

Dialogue is the critical investigation of knowledge or thinking. Through dialogue, students “recognize various tensions and enable them to deal effectively with them” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 49). Students have the opportunity to challenge their reality and explore new alternatives for transforming it. To, achieve a more just society, people from diverse backgrounds must engage in critical dialogue together.

Preservice Teachers

Preservice teachers are undergraduate or graduate students training to become certified practicing teachers within a teacher education program at a higher education institution. Students complete coursework in educational theory, research, practice,

psychology, and curriculum and instruction (Chambers & Lavery, 2012). Preservice teachers engage in field-based observation and activities throughout their training period. The program culminates with the student teaching experience, which is required to earn the education degree and state certification. During this semester-long course, preservice teachers put into practice the principles and strategies learned in their teacher education program (Chambers & Lavery, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2014). They are supervised by their university supervisor and a cooperating teacher mentor.

Problem-Posing

Problem-posing, a term coined by Freire (1968/2000), is the opposite of the banking model of education. In this teaching method, students are transformed into “critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher” (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 81). The teacher-student relationship is collaborative and respectful. The teacher and students engage in a process of co-constructing knowledge about issues by actively dialoguing and listening to one another (Freire, 1968/2000). First, the teacher starts by listening to students’ issues. Then the teacher directs students to define the problem, understand how it applies to their lives, determine the causes of the problem, and finally suggest alternatives or solutions to the problem. Throughout the process, students develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Rather than passively absorbing information, they are partnering with their teacher to discover and examine new information about issues. This gives them a sense of ownership over their learning and enacting change.

Social Studies

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2016) defines social studies as “the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic

competence” (p. 1) with the primary purpose to “help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (p. 1).

Teacher Educators

Teacher educators are instructors in higher education institutions responsible for preparing preservice and/or in-service teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, and competencies required for their future professional role as teachers. Teacher educators can include professionals who make contributions to initial teacher education, who provide continuing professional development for teachers, or who act as university supervisors for student teachers during their student teaching experiences (Ducharme, 1986; Korth, Erickson, & Lynnette, 2009; Lunenberg, Dengerink, & Korthagen, 2014).

Conclusion

This first chapter sets the foundation for the study. I present the context, purpose, importance, and research questions for this study as well as the theoretical framework that under grids the research. Controversial issues, whether they be historical or current, arise in the curriculum, in some aspect of our daily life, or in connection with a worldwide event. With the rise of social media and instant electronic communication, students are regularly exposed to controversies that cannot be entirely shut out by schools. The NCSS (2012) promotes the use of controversial issues in the classroom as they help students learn to listen to diverse viewpoints, learn how to compromise, and make informed decisions. Paulo Freire’s theory of critical pedagogy endorses a critical examination of social and political issues so that students develop into active democratic citizens. However, dealing with controversy in the classroom is risky and challenging,

especially for teachers who have not received adequate preparation from their teacher education program in competently teaching controversial issues.

This study intended on addressing this problem by examining how secondary social studies teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to teach controversial issues. Also, the study aimed to examine how teacher educators prepare preservice teachers for the challenges in the reality of schools when teaching controversial issues. The following chapter synthesizes research related to the topic of controversial issues with particular focus placed on the wide-ranging meanings of controversial issues, perceived challenges by preservice and in-service teachers, and the instructional higher education teacher educators use to prepare their students in this undertaking.

CHAPTER 2

This literature review lays the foundation for this study. The chapter is organized into two major sections. In the first section, I discuss Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy the theoretical framework that guides this study (1968/2000). In the second section, I place this study in the context of previous research that has informed this study. First, I explore preservice and in-service teachers' views about teaching controversial issues, which not only provides a logical progression into the subsequent subsection but gives a stronger base into the nature of this research. Second, I expand on the teaching of controversial issues to the higher education context. The reviewed research in this section focuses on the instructional strategies and roles teacher educators assume for engaging preservice teachers in examining controversial issues. Third, I examine the risks and challenges involved in teaching controversial issues. I close each summary of the reviewed research articles with a synthesis that focuses on implications for this study. Finally, I conclude the chapter with an interpretive summary that illustrates how the study addresses shortcomings in the extant literature, how it contributes to research in the area of study, and how it fits within the previous scholarship.

Theoretical Framework

This study drew upon Freire's critical theory and critical pedagogy framework to understand teacher educators' perceptions and strategies for supporting preservice teachers in taking up the challenging work of teaching controversial issues. In the 1960s, Freire suggested that learning becomes immediately relevant and engaging through a problem-posing process. Problem-posing, according to Freire (1968/2000) steers away from the "vertical patterns characteristic of banking education," (Freire, 1968/2000, p.

80). Learning experiences are based on the realities of students. Teachers present students with a relevant issue that needs to be solved. The problem cannot be answered through status quo considerations because it requires thinking about the “why” aspect of the problem. Both students and teachers are equal participants in this process (1968/2000). They bring in relevant and meaningful problems to the classroom. Teachers pose inductive questions to stimulate discussion of the situation and listens to students (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). In return, students act as active agents in their learning. They along with their teachers engage in mutual listening, dialogue, and action to investigate and ask questions about the problematic issue (Shor & Freire, 1987).

So, while the banking model of education presents reality as static, the problem-posing model interprets reality as “a process, undergoing constant transformation” (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 75). Problem-posing shows students that they have the right to ask questions and critique their world. Additionally, while the banking model “attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness,” the problem-posing model “strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality” (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 81). Through questioning the problematic issues in their lives, students gain the opportunity to reflect on the way they exist in the world. This encourages them to consider how they can improve their living conditions and build a more just society.

At the center of critical pedagogy and the problem-posing process is dialogue among students and between teachers and students. In Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968/2000), dialogue is described as “the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized” (p. 89). True education, education for freedom and from

alienation, requires dialogue between teachers and students. Through dialogue, the voices of teachers and students are valued equally so that students are actively involved in their own education (Freire & Ara, 1998). This creates an atmosphere of respect, openness, and trust. Students' role shifts from "docile listeners" to empowered and active "critical co-investigators" (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 81). They are encouraged to think critically so that they can figure out solutions to problems (Freire & Macedo, 1987). The basic assumptions are that people cannot learn alone to achieve liberation and transformation. Working together and engaging in dialogue allows people to liberate themselves from societal structures that have oppressed them (Freire, 1968/2000).

The teaching of controversial issues is embedded in the constructs of Freire's critical pedagogy. Problem-posing and dialogue, two fundamentally democratic practices centers on examining current contested issues. (Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Parker, 2001). It can provide teachers with an instructional framework for effectively navigating the study of controversial issues in classrooms. Students or teachers identify "problems that pose meaningful quandaries, dilemmas, perplexities" (Shaver, 1992, p. 95) to them. Along with teachers, they generate and extend on each other's ideas. Students ask relevant questions to gain a deeper understanding of different perspectives. They examine instances of unfairness and explore possible solutions to those problems. By the end of the problem-posing process, students grow into more self-aware, understanding, and resilient individuals. Equipped with these competencies, students feel empowered to take informed action to make their world a better place.

Focusing on the injustices of an often-oppressive world "helps students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to

power” (Giroux, 2010, p. 335). Students are empowered to transform their societies and liberate oppressed people (Luke, 2012). Freire (1968/2000) would argue that controversial issues and social injustice issues related to sexism, racism, ethnicity, and classicism need to be analyzed through a critical pedagogy lens (Waliaula, 2011). When teachers incorporate contested issues in their curriculum, they are preparing their students to be active participants in their communities (Nyambe & Shipena, 1998). The emergence of this consciousness transforms students from obedient individuals to autonomous and “transformative intellectuals” (Giroux, Freire, & McLaren, 1988, p. 127). They are aware that through dialogue, reflection, and action, they play a vital role in eradicating the reproduction of inequality (Freire, 1968/2000).

Figure 1 illustrates the process of teaching controversial issues and shows how key constructs of critical pedagogy fit into each step. This model provides a logical structure and focus for the research. It highlights how the constructs of critical pedagogy (i.e., critical consciousness, dialoguing, and problem-posing) connect with my research and align with the teaching of controversial issues.

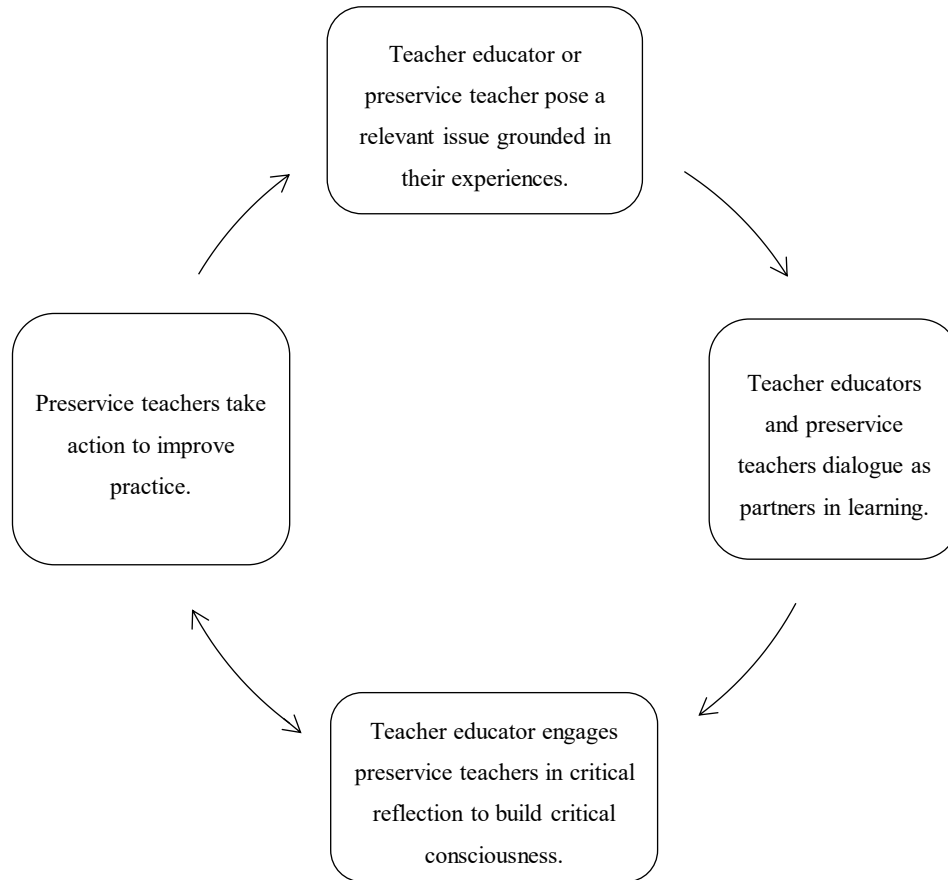
The model also supported my efforts in making sure my data collection and analyses connected to the theoretical framework. In this study, problem-posing focused on types of controversial issues teacher educators brought into their classrooms and their reasons for selecting those particular issues. This allowed me to identify what or who influences teacher educators’ decision-making when selecting issues. Dialogue focused on the opportunities teacher educators design to help preservice teachers understand the nature of controversy and controversial issues. This also included how teacher educators develop preservice teachers’ skills for exploring and reflecting on controversy and

learning strategies for teaching these skills and issues of controversy with their own class (Schukar, 1993, p. 53). During dialogue, the teacher educators and students build trust, deepen understanding, work towards a solution. The construct, critical consciousness centered on how teacher educators helped preservice teachers critically reflect on their own practice and challenges related to teaching controversial issues.

For the construct, praxis, I drew on Freire's definition that praxis is an ongoing cycle of reflection and action directed at achieving transformation (1968/2000). I examined instances of this transitive relationship in the types of instructional strategies, tools, and resources teacher educators introduced to preservice teachers as well as their course goals. I focused on the ways they built preservice teachers' self-efficacy to act as change agents who transform traditional social studies education. I also looked for examples of student-centered pedagogy that pushes back against the banking model of education. These consisted of, but were not limited to, instructional techniques that promote higher-order student thinking, amplify diverse voices, and empower students to consider how they can change social conditions.

Figure 1

*A Critical Pedagogical Approach to Preparing Preservice Teachers to Teach
Controversial Issues*



Review of the Relevant Literature

The Review of Relevant Literature is divided into three sub-sections. The first subsection examines the varied definitions of controversial issues and Diana Hess’s (2009) descriptions of open, closed, and tipping issues. The second describes a few techniques and strategies for introducing and incorporating controversial issues into the classroom. The third subsection focuses on research exploring social studies teachers’

attitudes related to the teaching of controversial issues and the factors that either enhance or constrain their capacity to do so.

Definition of Controversial Issues

Studying controversial issues is challenging because the nature of the term is rarely examined or easily defined (Ho, McAvoy, Hess, & Gibbs, 2017). The meaning of controversial issues is also complex and multifaceted. Bailey (1975) considers an issue controversial “if numbers of people are observed to disagree about statements as assertions made in connection with the issue” (as cited in Oulton, Day, Dillon, & Grace, 2004, p. 490). For Stradling (1984), controversial issues are “issues on which our society is clearly divided and significant groups within society advocate conflicting explanations or solutions based on alternative values” (as cited in Oulton et al., 2004, p. 490). These definitions suggest controversial issues can be understood as matters that stir disagreement due to diverging and conflicting values, perspectives, and backgrounds.

The study of controversial issues can be interpreted in two ways (Ho et al., 2017). First, it could refer to introducing topics into the curriculum “that could be seen as inappropriate or objectionable by parents, administrators, or the larger public” (Ho et al., 2017, p. 322) such as the history of systemic racism in a U.S. History class. Research about controversial issues has focused on controversies related to specific topics. For instance, Zimmerman (2017) looked at the history of how topics associated with the “culture wars” (i.e., race, ethnicity, immigration, religion, patriotism) have played out in public school debates. Topics typically become controversial when they touch upon a sensitive political or religious aspect, bring about emotional responses, and raise disagreement over competing values and interests.

The second understanding of controversial issues refers to “a variety of pedagogical strategies designed to help students investigate, evaluate, or deliberate issues that have multiple and competing views” (Ho et al., 2017, p. 333). The teacher or students identify the issue, learn about the issue from competing and multiple perspectives, then make judgments on what should be done. Within social studies, issues can take many forms, including historical, constitutional, political, and/or personal/moral. This review of the literature and proposed study will follow these two understandings of controversial issues.

Open, Closed, and Tipping Issues. In her book, *Controversy in the Classroom* (2009), Diana Hess distinguishes between open issues and closed issues. Open issues are ones “for which we want students to engage in deliberating multiple and competing answers.” Closed issues are ones “for which we want students to build and believe a particular answer” (Hess, 2009, p. 113). While the former involves matters still is considered controversial, the latter includes questions where there is broad-based agreement about a decision (Hess and McAvoy, 2015)

Issues not considered open or closed can be categorized as “tipping issues” (Hess, 2009, p. 113). Tipping issues move from open to closed or closed to open over time. This depends on the historical circumstances and the context in which we live. For example, same-sex marriage has tipped from closed to open. For many decades, teachers presented marriage as a union between a man and woman. With the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 2015 granting same-sex couples the constitutional right to marry, teachers began discussing this topic more in their classrooms. Another example relates to Americans’ changing interpretations of Japanese American internment during World War II

(Camicia, 2008). After the war, there was an overwhelming consensus that internment was necessary. At the time, this issue was closed, but decades later, opinions shifted. People generally agreed internment was a violation of human rights. Hess (2009) encourages teachers to bring in open and closed issues into the classroom. Settled issues should be taught as settled and open issues should involve evaluating evidence and competing values (Hess, 2009).

Methods for Teaching Controversial Issues

Hand and Levinson (2012) identify four factors needed to engage in a proper discussion: “effective preparation, accessible topics, strong and diverse views among discussants, and appropriate facilitation” (p. 620). That said, when planning a controversial issues lesson, teachers should consider the following planning questions: Is the issue developmentally appropriate, important, and interesting to the students? How comfortable do I feel with handling the issue? Do I have enough materials to use? Are they credible and do they present multiple perspectives on the issue? How much time can I devote to exploring the issue? Will the issue clash with the school community’s values and beliefs? Approaching discussions of controversial issues assuming that students have the background knowledge or communication skills necessary to engage in a civic discussion will likely result in spontaneous discussions with minimal participation (Hess, 2009). To ensure that students have sufficient and necessary background information on the topic, teachers should allow students to choose the controversial issues to discuss or they should address topics directly related to the social studies curricula (Ochoa-Becker, 2007). To effectively facilitate the discussion, teachers should teach students how to

analyze information, consider varying positions, asking probing questions, and communicate respectfully with peers.

Teachers should help students unearthing their values. Guiding students in identifying their values will “serve as criteria for the decisions made by student-citizens on the issue being discussed” (Apter, 2016, p. 14). The use of open-ended questions helps to create a dynamic yet focused discussion. Additional essential aspects that teachers should consider in facilitating the discussion include identifying alternatives, predicting consequences, and reaching and justifying a decision. If discussions teachers facilitate discussion methodically, students develop an understanding of different viewpoints and greater empathy. Furthermore, students will gain greater civic knowledge, confidence to participate in political discussion, and increased political engagement (Apter, 2016; Hess, 2009, Ochoa-Becker, 2007).

Controversial issues can be taught using a variety of discussion strategies, such as town meeting, Structured Academic Controversy, and advocate decision making. Each method requires the teacher to carefully plan the discussion experience and set behavioral expectations for students. The town meeting model is a whole class discussion. Students represent someone holding a particular perspective on an issue (Hess, 2002). The roles can be fictionalized or represent real people who hold these views (Apter, 2016). Students individually research the viewpoint of their selected or assigned role. Then they gather together in the “town meeting” to present their viewpoints and debate on various aspects of the controversial issue. Afterward, the teacher leads a short debriefing session where students step outside of their roles and share their own views.

Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) is a type of cooperative learning approach that engages students in controversy and then guides them to seek consensus (Parker, 2001; Parker & Hess, 2001). Unlike debates, SAC encourages students to contemplate the complexities of controversial issues and equally consider all sides of an issue before forming their opinion. Students are grouped into teams of four. Within each group, there are two pairs—one advocating for one position in the controversy and the other advocating for the opposite position. Each pair researches one position and then presents to the other pair. Then they reverse perspectives and highlight the points made by others. Afterward, students reach a decision about the controversial issue. SAC avoids potential areas of classroom conflict (Bruen et al., 2016). The goal is to sustain a positive and civil discourse. Throughout the process, students learn how to conduct research about an issue and synthesize that information to develop a position. Students are exposed to different perspectives and have the chance to reconceptualize their initial position. The class works together to reach a consensus.

Advocate decision making resembles a debate structure (Apter, 2016). Students are divided into three groups: one that advocates for the issue, one that advocates against, and one decision-making group. Members in the first two groups research their assigned position. The decision-makers develop questions. The debate begins with each side presenting its position and responding to questions from the decision-making group. Advocates respond to each other while the decision-makers record the discussion. As with the other models, a debrief and assessment follows.

The methods for teaching controversial issues in the social studies classroom require careful planning and teaching. Each of the models and methods requires that

students engage in an open, purposeful, goal-oriented, and interactive dialogue and that they come to the discussion with an open mind and knowledge of the issue at hand. Gathering background information and examining strong examples of arguments that support various positions on the issue is key for helping students to learn how to state their ideas with more precision and to develop stronger rationales for their positions. Through classroom discussion, students and teachers can safely talk about contemporary and controversial issues related to local and national politics, society and culture can be a powerful tool to promote learning, problem solving, decision-making, and critical thinking of student-citizens (Justice and Stanley, 2016). Discussion allows students to make a serious effort to understand and accommodate how others view an issue and how those views reflect their values.

Preservice and In-Service Teachers' Views

Preservice and high school social studies teachers generally believe that teaching controversial issues is valuable and students should be exposed to such issues (Abu-Hamdan & Khader, 2014; Byford et al., 2009). Teaching controversial issues supports citizenship education (Philpott, Clabough, McConkey, and Turner, 2011). Students learn to think critically, recognize different viewpoints, and build empathy (Ersoy, 2010). However, major challenges persist. Teachers cited inadequate preparation, uncertainty about how they should reveal their personal opinion on issues, student behavior, and repercussions as reasons for steering away from teaching controversial issues (Abu-Hamdan & Khader, 2014; Byford et al., 2009). Additional obstacles expressed included creating a space that welcomes multiple views of controversial historical topics, pressures to raise standardized test scores, and learning about students' backgrounds and the school

context (Woolley, 2017). These findings suggest an apparent tension between wanting to teach issues of controversy and not knowing the best strategies for handling associated difficulties. Cited challenges surrounding the reality of schools and classrooms might lead to unintentional avoidance of such topics.

Research examining high school social studies' perceptions and experiences with teaching controversial issues found that inadequate training to be a major obstacle. Teachers reported never receiving any formal preservice or in-service training in teaching controversial issues (Abu-Hamdan and Khader, 2014; Oulton, Day, Dillon, & Grace, 2004). Some added they had minimal direction from their teacher education programs and schools (Philpott et al., 2011). This left them feeling overwhelmed with teaching controversial issues. In Oulton et al.'s (2004) research, a mere twelve percent of teachers reported feeling well-prepared to teach controversy while fifty-two percent of teachers reported feeling somewhat well-prepared. Sixty-nine percent felt the national curriculum did not provide clear guidance on how to effectively handle controversial issues. Seventy-one percent said their school offered unclear direction. As Byford et al. (2009) explains, issues of unpreparedness could adversely affect teachers' self-confidence.

Preservice teachers, like high school in-service social studies teachers, also feel that controversial issues are not adequately covered in the social studies teacher education courses. The majority of preservice teachers in Ersoy's (2010) research controversial issues were mostly incorporated into civics courses, but not addressed in some other social studies courses. Without sufficient pedagogical knowledge, preservice teachers shared they struggled to think of ways to include race within social studies lessons. When preservice teachers were asked to develop lessons about race, they recalled their teacher

educators not modelling instruction about recognizing race beforehand (Demoiny, 2017). Although preservice teachers had difficulty in discussing critical issues, they agreed teachers should include controversial issues related to the curriculum in the social studies classroom.

Teachers have expressed challenges related disclosing their views. Journell (2011) researched how high school teachers and their students responded to racial, gender, and religious diversity in the presidential candidates. Some acknowledged the openness of the issue without disclosing personal opinions. One teacher shared his feelings on race and who he voted for in the 2004 election, which initially angered his angered. Some teachers presented students with all the facts and helped them see that everyone has viewpoints. Other teachers worried if by sharing their view, they would unintentionally sway students' opinions or stifle diversity. Teachers in Philpott et al.'s (2011) also found sharing their perspectives a "dangerous" (p. 33) and "tricky" (p. 38) situation. They felt once students know their opinions, they will become disengaged, especially if the issue is religion related. Students might also feel challenged or threatened. That said, most of the teachers refrain from disclosing their stances. Instead, the teachers preferred to present students with a balanced range of perspectives and encourage them to think freely. These findings show that teacher disclosure adds another layer of complexity for teachers when teaching controversial issues (Journell, 2011).

Research has been conducted on preservice and in-service teachers' attitudes about teaching controversial issues along with the factors that either supported or hindered their efforts. The issues of under-preparedness, teaching strategies, and principles that emerged from the participants calls for attention to be directed toward

examining the existing practices and opinions of teacher educators in preservice teacher preparation programs concerning teaching controversial issues. The present study fits within the previous scholarship. It extends on and responding to the researchers' recommendations. Ersoy (2010) and Woolley (2017) recommend that further research be conducted on the support teacher preparation programs provide for preservice teachers in taking an informed approach to teaching controversial issues. Ersoy (2010) deems this necessary due to limited studies about this phenomenon. With that in mind, the present study examined the methods and techniques teacher educators use to teach controversial issues in preservice teacher education programs including how they model instruction for discussing controversial issues. This research also investigated how teacher educators guide preservice teachers in tackling controversial issues and the extent to which these practices demonstrate sensitivity toward diverse values and backgrounds.

Incorporating controversial issues into preservice teacher education improves teacher candidates' class participation, analytical thinking on social and political issues, and respect for different views (Abu-Hamdan and Khader, 2014; Demoiny, 2017; and Ersoy, 2010). The study built on the researchers' findings by investigating teacher educators' beliefs and rationales for teaching about controversial issues. I inquired about teacher educators' reasons for including some controversial issues in their coursework while excluding others. Extending on Journell (2011) and Philpott et al.'s (2011) exploration on teacher disclosure, I asked teacher educators to share the roles they take on when facilitating controversial issues discussions and to describe how they assist preservice teachers in knowing when and how to reveal their positions. This would shed

light on the ways teacher educators help preservice teachers to create a classroom climate where the views of both teachers and students weighed equally and explored.

As expressed by preservice teachers in Demoiny's (2017) study and in-service teachers in Byford et al.'s (2009) study, teaching controversial issues is associated with a number of personal discomforts and external challenges that make them anxious. Oulton et al. (2004) and Philpott (2011) conclude that preservice and in-service teachers need to develop greater self-confidence and strategies for addressing challenges. The teachers' vulnerabilities and fears will be used as a basis for examining the extent to which teacher educators are aware of teachers' feelings of unpreparedness and the difficulties they face. The present study focused on how teacher educators equipped teacher candidates with the knowledge and skills to handle potential problems. Insight into teacher educators' perspectives on the potential challenges teachers might face in the school setting would reveal if teacher education programs are adequately narrowing the gap between aspiring to teach controversial issues and preparing teachers to overcome barriers. Their opinions for overcoming these difficulties would also convey a message to teacher candidates that they should not merely give up when faced with difficulties.

Teacher Educators' Approaches and Challenges

Research has examined the teaching of controversial issues in the higher education context, with particular attention placed on the instructional strategies teacher educators used with their preservice teachers and challenges they have experienced. The following reviewed studies in this section describe the methods teacher educators use to teach controversial issues and provide examples of obstacles they have experienced.

When selecting the types of controversial issues to study in their courses, researchers observed that teacher educators consider the students' backgrounds and their communities (Liggett & Finley, 2019; Pace 2019). Their courses centered around local issues and aimed to help preservice teachers reflect on how their personal identity influences pedagogy (Liggett and Finley, 2009). Some teacher educators gradually increased the complexity of issues of poverty, race, and culture by framing them as public issues or historical questions (Pace, 2019). Teacher educators also allocated time for guiding preservice teachers in dealing with challenges involved with tackling controversial issues and incorporated strategies to alleviate preservice teachers' anxieties and protect them from retribution.

Teacher educators strive to create a space that welcomes multiple perspectives and fosters civil discourse. Pace (2009) observed that educators strived to maintain an open and safe classroom climate to confront preconceptions and biases and prevent student alienation. The teacher educators used dialogic methods, guided students in understanding different viewpoints, and balanced emotional with intellectual engagement in the classroom. Student-centered discourse, reflective conversations, and small group activities were more prominent in the U.S. teacher educator's classroom.

The teacher educators in Liggett and Finley's (2019) research integrated relationship-building activities through an ongoing online discussion board. It encouraged students to share their personal and emotional stories about the issues, thereby raising critical consciousness. It also served as a "pedagogical space" (Liggett & Finley, 2009, p. 34) where students could dialogue about how they can promote change in schools. The use of language helped to facilitate better understandings of how to address aspects of

diversity and controversy. Four potential in-class strategies regarding language use include using inclusive language, using phrases that do not over-generalize, using both indirect and direct language, and asking clarifying questions. These strategies helped to increase students' comfort level and willingness to openly discuss controversial issues. It also conveyed to students that this was a safe space where a range of opinions and beliefs can be shared. These findings and recommendations suggest that through modeling explicit actions, teachers can implement in their own classrooms could help foster a sense of agency for new teachers. This might help them feel empowered and compelled to take on controversial topics in their classrooms.

Like in-service teachers and preservice teachers, higher education faculty members face personal and external challenges when teaching controversial issues. Constraints include time, cultural and sociopolitical environments, and entrenched norms of politeness, protection, and avoidance (Pace, 2019). For example, teacher educators in Pasque, Chesler, Charbeneau, and Carlson's (2013) research generally agreed controversial issues regarding race should be addressed. However, when racial conflict trickled into their classrooms, most of the teacher educators stated they would acknowledge racial conflicts but not address them. They acknowledged that in doing so, they lost the opportunity to model effective pedagogy deepen learning about racial conflicts. To manage classroom tensions and regain control of the situation, teacher educators used authoritative approaches: changing the topic, ceasing the conversation, or delivering a lecture. In fact, only a few faculty members responded to racial conflict in ways that helped students gain a deeper understanding of the issue. These teacher educators guided students in exploring the issue or structured course activities around the

conflict. Others planned activities that involved conflict so the learning was “useful and transformative” (Pasque et al., 2013, p. 10) for students.

Pasque et al. (2013) recommend that teacher educators employ instructional approaches that deepen student learning about diversity in our democracy and racial conflict. To effectively incorporate racial conflict in the classroom, the researchers recommend the following strategies: evaluate the issue, check personal emotional reactions and biases, anticipate how to address responses, validate students’ feelings, normalize the reality of racial conflict, initiate a productive exchange of ideas and solutions, and balance control of potentially disruptive situations.

Another notable obstacle cited in the research was the disconnect between what is taught in current secondary social studies classrooms and what is emphasized in teacher education programs. A South Africa educator in Chikoko, Gilmour, Harber, and Serf’s (2011) research described schools as a “factory-like climate” (p. 13). Teachers prefer teaching facts and avoiding certain topics for fear of lawsuits and challenging widespread beliefs. Unfortunately, this approach limits student knowledge construction, critical thinking, questioning, dialogue, and opinion-formation. This observation was also noted by Ritter (2014) who studied the experience and challenges of a novice social studies teacher educator who returned to the classroom as a high school teacher. The participant experienced challenges living out his values in the classroom. He felt social studies should engage students in deliberation around pressing social issues so students gain the essential competencies to become moral citizens. At the beginning of the year, the researcher used student-centered, inquiry-based methods to get students to talk about controversial issues. The learning experiences were met with varying degrees of success.

As demonstrated in these two studies, a gap still exists between theory and practice. The rushed curriculum pacing along with administrative pressures to increase content coverage and make sure students passed high-stakes standardized tests leaves teachers with no other choice than to use traditional approaches that rely exclusively on rote memorization of historical facts (Ritter, 2014). This type of teaching prevents teachers from implementing the powerful social studies practices they learned in their teacher education programs—facilitating open discussions about substantive issues. That said, teacher educators have an additional responsibility. In addition to teaching preservice teachers how to teach their content well, they must guide teachers in navigating the challenges of the school context so meaningful learning and room for critical thinking can still occur.

Research has examined the teaching of controversial issues in the higher education context, with particular attention placed on the instructional strategies and roles teacher educators use with their preservice teachers. Findings from the reviewed research raise critical questions about teaching controversial issues and teacher education. The research substantiates the need to further investigate how teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to teach controversial issues. In my present study, I intend on addressing the limitations of Pace's (2019) study and acting on Liggett and Finley's (2009) recommendations. Pace's (2019) research was limited in sample size and demographic diversity. Participants in my research included 11 teacher educator participants from the United States and one teacher educator in Canada. Six of the participants were male and six were female. I hoped the diversity in my sample would shed light on a wide range of teacher educator practices within the United States and

between the United States and Canada so I could see how contextual factors influence a teacher educator's practice. Liggett and Finley (2009) suggest that explicitly identifying and modeling effective practices and language for teaching controversial issues is needed so that preservice teachers are better equipped to apply knowledge to practice in their future classrooms. Extending on these findings, I sought to examine how teacher educators empower preservice teachers with a sense of agency to teach controversial issues.

The research also set out to understand how these different teacher educators across the United States perceive risks associated with entering the risk-laden territory of teaching controversial issues and how they prepare teachers for teaching with sensitivity, pragmatism, and confidence. Expanding on the purpose of Pasque et al.'s (2013) study, I attempted to understand what factors teacher educators consider when planning a controversial issues lesson (i.e., the makeup of the class, community values, nature of the conflict, personal beliefs, etc.). Additionally, I drew on Pasque et al.'s (2013) descriptions of teacher stances to explore the roles teacher educators take on.

Findings from the reviewed research provided insight into the experiences of teacher educators committed to teaching for educational equity and social justice. The studies revealed challenges and obstacles teacher educators face in handling controversy and in preparing teacher education students to teach about controversial issues. Similar to in-service teachers, teacher educators experience pressures and constraints. South African and English teacher educators in Chikoko et al. (2011) and Dunn's (2016) research expressed the need for training to tackle such issues effectively in their classrooms. This

indicates educators also have to develop self-confidence in their abilities to engage preservice teachers in difficult discussions of controversial issues.

In my research, I also sought to build on Chikoko et al.'s (2011) research. While the researchers examined South African and England teacher educators' perceptions, I expanded the sample population to teacher educators in North America. This allowed me to uncover any similarities and differences in challenges teacher educators recognize. Similar to the goals of Chikoko et al.'s (2011) research, the proposed study aimed to examine teacher educators' instructional strategies to help preservice teachers confidently take on controversial issues teaching in their classrooms. In doing so, the findings could be used to determine if teacher educators possess the necessary skills and expertise to adeptly carry out this endeavor. This study also extended on Ritter's (2014) research. In my study, I hoped to capture teacher educators' perceptions on the systemic, administrative, and personal obstacles in-service teachers might experience when teaching controversial issues. I also hoped to explore how teacher educators develop preservice teachers' resilience for dealing with such challenges. The findings would bring to light any gaps between the theory of effective social studies teaching and practice.

Connection Between Extant Literature and Present Study

In relation to prior research, this present study examined the intersections of teacher educators' views with their classroom practices to provide deeper insight as to the reasoning behind their curricular and instructional decisions with regards to the teaching of controversial issues. The study explored teacher educators' attitudes, pedagogical approaches, and methods for helping preservice teachers to enact controversial issues instruction in their classrooms. This investigation provided a greater understanding of the

challenges who themselves face in preparing future teachers for working towards critical and emancipatory practices. Extending the literature, the current study examined the various ways current teacher educators allow students to explore controversial issues pedagogy, whether it be through course readings, case study analyses, or modeling. Along with investigating engaging methods for controversial issues discussion, the study inquired about how teacher educators create opportunities for preservice teachers to discuss and reconcile their fears. A number of in-service teachers in previous studies who engaged in controversial issues teaching were left still feeling anxious about teaching certain issues, managing control over the classroom climate, and addressing criticism from parents and administrators. These lingering struggles and fears suggest the absence of reflective conversations and experiences for addressing concerns.

Conclusion

The review of the literature brings together the voices and experiences of preservice and in-service teachers as well as teacher educators with regard to controversial issues instruction. In studies where preservice and in-service teachers were engaged in discussions of race and activities aimed at promoting diversity, equity, and social justice, they experienced personal and structural tensions. Comments reveal high levels of apprehensions, vulnerabilities, and feelings of unpreparedness (Al Badri, 2015). This shows that pressing issues persist in teacher education programs in relation to equipping preservice teachers with practical strategies, tools, and competencies for facilitating effective teaching controversial issues in their future classrooms.

Of the research that exists on preservice teacher preparation for teaching controversial issues very few are conducted by outside researchers (Pace, 2019). Yet, as

seen in several studies (Chikoko et al., 2011; Dunn, 2016; Ritter, 2014), teacher educators, like preservice and in-service teachers, face similar constraints and tensions when attempting to teach controversial issues. Similar to their students and in-service teachers, teacher educators have expressed a need for training in attaining the specialized knowledge and skills to undertake the responsibility of preparing teachers for today's diverse classrooms. This chapter raises the need to investigate further related teacher educators' attitudes and approaches for teaching controversial issues in their classroom. The next chapter presents the research methodology used for this qualitative research.

CHAPTER 3

The purpose of this case study was to understand secondary social studies teacher educators' practices and attitudes toward teaching controversial issues. The study examined how these educators prepared preservice teachers for the challenges in the reality of schools when teaching controversial issues. Three research questions framed the focus of this study.

1. What are secondary social studies teacher educators' attitudes toward teaching controversial issues?
2. How do secondary social studies teacher educators approach the teaching of controversial issues in their courses?
3. How do secondary social studies teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to handle the challenges associated with teaching controversial issues?

Introduction

In this chapter, I present a discussion of the research methodology and specific procedures used for this study. While each section focuses on one key component of the methodology (i.e., methodology, sample discussion, data collection, and analysis methods, etc.), all sections follow an identical structure in presenting information: identifying and defining the strategy with support from pertinent methodologists, connecting the usefulness and appropriateness of this approach to the study and illustrating the steps I took. Documenting this information in sufficient detail would allow readers to adequately judge the soundness of this study. The following paragraph provides a brief roadmap of Chapter 3.

The first section describes the case study methodology used, the major characteristics, and why this design was appropriate for the purpose of this study. The study incorporates elements from core case study texts (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). The second section focuses on the sampling technique and description of the participants. A rationale for the technique employed and participant selection is provided. The third section presents an overview of the data collection methods including why they are important and how these protocols connect to the research questions. The fourth section describes my data analysis methods, which are grounded in the work of pertinent methodologists (Creswell and Poth, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Saldaña, 2009). The fifth section discusses the strategies employed to ensure and enhance trustworthiness. The sixth section outlines the safeguards taken to ensure the protection and rights of participants were maintained. In the seventh section, I discuss my role as a researcher and how this might influence the research process. Strategies for recognizing and addressing bias are described. Culminating the chapter is a concluding summary tying together and highlighting the important elements presented in this chapter.

Research Design

I used a case study methodology for this research. A case study is first and foremost, an in-depth investigation containing two or three research questions about a complex issue within a discipline or field of knowledge. To gain a deep understanding of the case being studied, I collected data from multiple sources such as interviews and documents to give “attention to ordinary experiences” (Stake, 1995, p. 142). With different forms of data, I could capture a more complete and accurate picture of how intricate the case is (Stake, 1995). A case study is also marked by boundaries. The scope

and focus of the research are clearly stated, so readers know where the research begins and ends (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2009; Yin 2009). The major characteristics of a case study make this approach most appropriate for the present study. My aim was to a deeper understanding of a complex social phenomenon through informal semi-structured interviews with participants and document reviews of course materials (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Patton, 2002). With this research methodology, I could gather rich detailed descriptions and analyze in-depth how teacher educators perceived and taught controversial issues.

A case study involves the researcher conducting an in-depth “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 1994, p. 13). An examination into teacher educators’ perceptions towards teaching controversial issues and how they prepare preservice teachers to take on this task is both relevant and contemporary. As illustrated in the review of the literature, preservice and in-service teachers generally agree that teaching issues of controversy benefit students (Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Philpott et al., 2011; Ross, 2017; Wilson, 2010; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012). Yet, personal, classroom-level, and school-wide problems prove to be major obstacles. Teachers agree more guidance should be provided on developing their knowledge base of current and historical controversial issues (Philpott et al., 2011). Both preservice and in-service training offer limited training with regard to building teachers’ pedagogy and knowledge of controversial issues pedagogy (Demoiny, 2017; Oulton et al., 2004; Philpott et al., 2011). For this study, I focused on examining teacher educators’ teaching of controversial issues, which is embedded within the natural context of their

classrooms in their respective higher education settings. In examining their past and present approaches, I would have no control or influence over the events.

A case study can take one of three forms: exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory (Yin, 1994). The type of case study a researcher chooses to follow is based on the type of research questions. The present study is an explanatory case because the investigation deals with *how* and *why* questions. Firstly, the research questions focus on understanding *how* teacher educators select issues, incorporate controversial issues in their classroom, model civil classroom discourse, and prepare preservice teachers for this endeavor. The research questions also focus on *why* particular approaches were used and *why* teaching controversial issues is challenging. With deeper-level investigative questions, I could gain a broad understanding of controversial issues pedagogy in teacher education programs that could not be gathered through surveys.

Case study relies on the study of bounded systems, meaning the researcher sets boundaries and clearly states what the focus and extent of the research (Stake, 1995). Merriam (2009) describes a bounded system as “a single entity” of focus (p. 40). Stake (2003) further notes that “boundedness and activity patterns...are useful concepts for specifying the case” (p. 121). Stake (1995) and Merriam’s (2009) definitions guided the research questions and participant selection for the study. In the present case study, the phenomenon of teaching controversial issues as represented by secondary social studies teacher educators served as the primary unit of analysis. Bounding the case within teacher educators defined the focus of the study and delineated where the case ended, and the environment began (Stake, 1995). The case study was bounded by several other factors, such as time (between June 2020 and August 2020), place (within each teacher educator’s

higher education setting and in their social studies methods courses), and issue (teaching controversial issues with preservice teachers). Contextual factors that may influence teacher educators were taken into consideration (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). A holistic approach is pertinent for understanding the phenomenon within each teacher educator's contextual conditions while also considering the interrelationship between the phenomenon and its context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

Participants

This section begins with a description of the sampling technique I utilized to identify participants for this study. Then I explain the strategy I followed for recruiting teacher educators and the criteria that would determine eligibility. Finally, I provide a description of the twelve participants and explain how the findings from this population can be applied to other teacher educators.

Sampling Technique

For the research study, I used stratified purposeful sampling to select participants. Patton (2002) describes stratified purposeful sampling as samples within samples. Purposeful samples can be stratified or nested by selecting particular units or cases that vary according to a key dimension. Stratified purposeful sampling ensured that I recruit participants who fit the purpose of the study and possess both interrelated and distinct characteristics. I divided the broad group of teacher educators into smaller subgroups, or strata, based on members' shared attributes or characteristics. By doing so, I could discover variations in characteristics among the subgroups of the larger group of teacher educators and come to see relationships between subgroups (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 2002). The following subgroups were a) professors who often incorporate

controversial issues into their courses, b) professors who sometimes incorporate controversial issues into their courses, or c) professors who rarely incorporate controversial issues into their courses. To group participants into one of the three subgroups, I referred to respondents' answer to the screener question, "How frequently do you integrate controversial issues in your courses?" To ensure a good representation of appropriate participants, I sought to have a sample size of 12 teacher educators with a minimum of 4 teacher educators in each subgroup. However, I was not able to achieve the goal of having three subgroups. The majority of the individuals who expressed interest in participating in the study indicated they often incorporate controversial issues in their courses, while only one person indicated he sometimes incorporated controversial issues in his courses. In the section, "Description of the Sample," I explain in further detail how I addressed this issue.

Recruitment

The main objective of this qualitative study was to examine teacher educators' perceptions of and practices for teaching controversial issues. Therefore, I aimed to recruit a sample that would best inform the research questions and yield the most information about the phenomenon under study. Eligible participants included teacher educators who met the following requirements:

1. Teacher educators who have taught social studies methods courses for secondary education preservice teachers.
2. Teacher educators who have had experience incorporating controversial issues into their coursework or teaching topics that broach controversial issues.

3. Teacher educators who have had experience guiding preservice teachers in teaching controversial issues and addressing potential challenges.
4. Teacher educators who are willing to share curricular/instructional documents such as syllabi, lesson plans, handouts, and assignments.
5. Teacher educators whose course schedules are conducive to participating in this study and conducting 2-3 semi-structured video conferencing interviews, each lasting for approximately 45 minutes (audio and video recorded and transcribed).

University-Level Gatekeepers. I began the recruitment process by contacting two university-level gatekeepers, defined as individuals who may or may not provide access to an institution or individuals (see Appendix A). The two gatekeepers I contacted hold leadership roles within the colleges of education at their higher education institutions and are prominent researchers in social studies education research. They are well-respected and trusted among members of their community (McFadyen & Rankin, 2016; Joseph, Keller & Ainsworth, 2016). The first gatekeeper is the dean of The School of Education at a public research university in the Midwest region of the United States and has written numerous studies on engaging students in the deliberation of controversial issues in the classroom. The second gatekeeper is an associate professor of social studies at a public research university in the midwestern region of the United States. The associate professor specializes in critical race theory and social studies teacher education. In addition, the professor's teaching philosophy advocates for social studies experiences that promote critical inquiry, and an intensive study of significant issues.

Given their social connections and influence over their community, making this connection helped me to gain a sense of direction as to where I can recruit participants who fit the criteria for my study. I contacted the gatekeepers via email and provided them with a brief description of the study, participant criteria, and data collection methods. I requested references of teacher educators who meet the criteria for participation in the study and who teach secondary methods courses where preservice teachers are involved in studying historical and/or contemporary controversial issues.

Afterward, I emailed the six referred individuals (see Appendix B). In this email, I introduced myself and explained that I was searching for participants for my study on preparing preservice teachers to teach controversial issues. I explained to the potential participant how he or she was referred and provided a general description of the purpose of the research. I provided details on the primary criteria that I would use to determine eligibility, time commitments for participation, the study procedures, and possible benefits to participants. I also asked individuals to respond to my email if they are interested in volunteering to participate in the study.

Social Media. In addition to recruiting participants through university gatekeepers, I posted a recruitment flyer (see Appendix C) on the official College and University Faculty Assembly (CUFA) Graduate Forum Facebook group webpage. CUFA is an affiliate group of the National Council of Social Studies (NCSS) and is an advocacy organization for social studies education. Members of the group include higher education faculty members, graduate students, K-12 teachers, and others interested in a diversity of ideas and issues associated with social studies education. The group provides social

studies, social sciences, and history graduate students with mentoring and fellowship opportunities as well as opportunities to present their work at conferences.

Recruiting participants through this Facebook group, allowed me to engage diverse populations of teacher educators while targeting audiences who might be ideal participants for this study. To mitigate the risk of violating the privacy of potential participants, I disabled likes and comments for this post. If these features were enabled, the public could see how responded to the post. Disabling the likes and comments also protected the potential participants' privacy, thereby encouraging more people to join the study. I also disabled messaging to prevent the public from sending me Facebook messages and emails.

Recruitment Screener. individuals willing and interested to participate in the study were asked to complete a Qualtrics screener survey (see Appendix D). With the use of a Qualtrics survey screener, I could determine which respondents fit the specific criteria to participate in the study based on the series of questions. The screener articulated the purpose of the study and provided a general description of the nature of the research. Potential participants provided their full name, current role and affiliation, phone number, and email address. Additionally, they responded to three questions. Qualified respondents consisted of those individuals who answered “yes” to the last two questions. This criteria for determining qualified participants ensured the sample consisted of teacher educators who viewed controversial issues as an integral part of their teaching, and who have the requisite background knowledge and experience in this area. Ideal participants included individuals who would provide insight into the phenomenon and inform the research. I contacted qualified participants within two to three days after

responding to the questionnaire (see Appendix E). Participants who willingly gave their consent to participate in the study and returned their signed informed consent forms were invited for interviews. I also asked participants to nominate other teacher educators who they felt met the criteria of this study.

Description of the Sample

A total of twelve individuals expressed interest in participating in the research study. Of the six referenced individuals, two prospective participants responded to the recruitment email. I sent a follow-up email to the other four individuals one week after sending the introductory email. However, I did not receive any further responses. The remaining ten prospective participants included individuals who responded to the recruitment flyer on the CUFA Graduate Forum Facebook group. All respondents were eligible to participate in the study based on their answers to the screener questions. Table 1 displays the demographic information of each participant.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Current Title	Years in Current Role	University Type and Location
Abigail	F	Assistant professor	4	Public research university in Western Canada
Bianca	F	Doctoral student	3	Public research university in Southeast and Mid-Atlantic United States
Dominic	M	Graduate Teaching and Research Assistant	4	Public land-grant, research university in Midwestern United

Geoffrey	M	Doctoral Candidate/Graduate Assistant	5	States Public, land-grant research university in Northeastern United States
Hannah	F	Doctoral Student / Instructor of Social Studies Methods	3	Public research university Midwestern United States
Kristen	F	Assistant Professor	3	Public university in Southeastern United States
Morgan	F	Assistant Professor of Social Studies and Multicultural Education	6	Public university in Pacific Northwest United States
Nathan	M	Professor	11	Public research university in Southeastern United States
Stephen	M	Assistant Professor of Teacher Education	2	Public university in Northeastern United States
Tyler	M	Assistant Professor	1	Public research and land-grant-university in Southeastern United States
Victoria	F	Adjunct Professor	5	Private Jesuit research university in North-Central United States
Xavier	M	Professor	30	Private university in Northeastern United States

Table 2 presents each participant's response to the two screener questions asking how important they feel it is to address controversial issues in teacher education

programs and how often they integrate issues of controversy in their course. As previously mentioned, I did not achieve the goal of having three subgroups. Eleven participants indicated they often incorporate controversial issues in their courses. One participant stated he sometimes incorporated controversial issues in his courses. Zero participants indicated they rarely incorporate controversial issues in their courses. I describe how I addressed this sampling limitation in Chapter 5.

Table 2

Participant Responses to Screener Questions

Pseudonym	Importance of Teaching Controversial Issues in Teacher Education Programs	Frequency of integrating controversial issues course
Abigail	Very important	Often
Bianca	Very important	Often
Dominic	Very important	Often
Geoffrey	Very important	Often
Hannah	Very important	Often
Kristen	Very important	Often
Morgan	Very important	Often
Nathan	Very important	Often
Stephen	Very important	Often
Tyler	Very important	Sometimes
Victoria	Very important	Often
Xavier	Very important	Often

Population

In qualitative research, transferability of the population and settings allows readers to judge the degree to which perspectives and processes can be transferred to other contexts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The results of this study can be applied to other higher education teacher education settings with social justice-oriented programs that prepare preservice teachers to tackle issues of controversy in their diverse classrooms. The population can be applied to teacher educators who incorporate issues of controversy in their courses as well as discipline-specific professors (from humanities to science) who teach hot-button issues, or teacher educators who are interested in engaging students on often fraught topics.

Data Collection Methods

Case studies use more than one data collection method to present various examples of a phenomenon (Swanson & Holton, 2005). Using multiple methods of data collection strategies allows the researcher to triangulate the data, providing greater rigor and breadth to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). To obtain an in-depth understanding of teacher educators using controversial issues, I used multiple methods of data collection throughout this study. I collected data primarily from video conferencing interviews and document analysis of various materials.

Video Conferencing Interviews

In qualitative research, interviews allow the researcher to build rapport with participants and elicit rich, thick descriptions for the study (Merriam, 2009). Interviewing is a powerful way of understanding another human being and their experiences (Fontana & Frey, 2003). For this study, I scheduled 2-3 video conferencing interviews with each

participant. The in-depth interviews helped me to establish a trusting relationship with the participants. It also allowed participants to delve deeper into stories about their teaching experiences and reflect on the meaning of those experiences (Seidman, 2019).

I conducted the interviews through a video conferencing platform. There are several advantages in using video conferencing interviews for this case study. Firstly, video conferencing interviews overcome the barrier of geography and allow the researcher to interview teacher educators located from different locations. Secondly, participants have the flexibility to engage in the research from the comfort of their respective locations. Nehls, Smith, and Schneider (2015) explain when online interviews or interviews are conducted at a location that participants select, this helps to put them more at ease as opposed to an in-person interview in an unfamiliar setting. Thirdly, video conferencing interviews, as opposed to phone interviews, offer the researcher the advantage of reading non-verbal cues and emotional reactions similar to face-to-face interviews (Nehls, Smith, & Schneider, 2015).

The open-ended interview questions in this study (see Appendix F) comprise *how* and *why* questions that would result in a thick, detailed, and comprehensive narrative of the interviewee's perspectives and experiences about teaching controversial issues (Yin, 2009). The first set of questions set out to understand participants' life history, their current roles, and their experiences with controversial issues. The second group of questions focuses on teacher educators' attitudes toward and understanding of controversial issues. I asked teacher educators to share which issues they believe are the most critical to address, to evaluate their comfort level when broaching controversial issues in their classrooms, and to reflect on the benefits of teaching about issues of

controversy. The third set of questions inquiries about teacher educators’ instructional planning and practices, including how they prepare preservice teachers to teach controversial issues. The last group of questions asks participants to combine their past events with the details of their present experiences. They contemplated the obstacles and risks preservice teachers might face when discussing controversial issues in the secondary education setting and proposed ways they could help preservice teachers handle such dilemmas. Furthermore, I asked teacher educators to reflect on their own strengths and concerns in teaching controversial issues. Table 3 displays how the interview questions align with each research question.

Table 3

Alignment Between Interview Questions and Research Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1. What are secondary social studies teacher educators’ attitudes toward teaching controversial issues?	This question will be answered by responses to Questions 1-6.
2. How do secondary social studies teacher educators approach the teaching of controversial issues in their courses?	This question will be answered by responses to Questions 7-13.
3. How do secondary social studies teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to handle the challenges they might face when teaching controversial issues?	This question will be answered by responses to Questions 14-16.

Document Analyses

Hatch (2002) describes documents as “unobtrusive” data. Collecting these various types of data contributes to a fuller description of the research context without interfering with the natural setting. This, in turn, was helpful for better contextualizing the research study. Artifacts can provide concrete examples of the types of learning, instruction, and assessment occurring in a classroom (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Concerning this study, I asked teacher educators to share their course syllabi, lesson plans, readings, and/or any assignments that related to the teaching and learning of controversial issues within the context of their courses. I collected curricular and instructional resources to understand how they designed their courses to prepare preservice teachers with the key skills and competencies required for confidently teaching controversial issues.

More specifically, I was interested in understanding how teacher educators structure and scaffold the course learning experience so that preservice teachers leave equipped and confident enough to take on the challenge of teaching controversial issues. The course syllabi, in particular, could present important information on the sort of experiences teacher educators plan to help preservice teachers acquire teaching skills and competencies related to the teaching of controversial issues. This can range from creating opportunities that involve preservice teachers in understanding the rationale for teaching controversial issues to identifying controversial issues that may permeate throughout the secondary social studies curriculum. Course readings and assignment outlines could provide evidence of the ways teacher educators guide preservice teachers in facilitating an open-ended discussion and debate, creating a bias-free climate, and managing students’ emotional or insensitive remarks. Taken together, the set of documents could

reveal if teacher educators build in learning experiences relating to parental engagement and creating a school culture that encourages discussion of controversial issues, as this is key for allaying any fears, showing sensitivity, and managing risks.

Data Analysis Methods

I used the constant comparative method to analyze data recursively and inductively (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Stake (1995) recommends that data collection occur simultaneously because there is no exact point in the research process to start either activity. That said, I engaged in the iterative process of collecting and analyzing data. This joint act of collecting and analyzing data helped me to process the large volume of material in a more manageable way (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The data analysis thus became more focused and I was better able to discover patterns and themes, look for connections to the research questions, and uncover how teacher educators' attitudes interacted with their implementation of controversial issues instruction.

With the understanding that data collection and analysis are interrelated and not distinct steps in the research process, I engaged in “the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach” (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 185). The spiral begins with managing and organizing the data, followed by reading and memoing emergent ideas, and then describing and classifying codes into themes. It ends with developing interpretations and finally, representing and visualizing the data. Following Creswell and Poth's (2017) data analysis spiral would ensure I was continually reviewing the data in a systematic and manageable way.

Managing and Organizing the Data

Creswell and Poth (2017) believe it is important that researchers first organize the data as skipping this critical step could affect later analyses. I created digital password protected folders in a secure computer to organize and easily locate each participant's interview transcripts and artifacts. I named each participant's digital folder with their pseudonym. I imported all raw data to MAXQDA, a computer software program, and placed them in folders, organized by data types (e.g., individual interviews and document analyses). MAXQDA not only assisted with storing the qualitative data for easy retrieval, but also provided the means for assigning and sorting codes, documenting memos, and reconfiguring codes into categories. The computer program supported my efforts in retrieving data segments associated with multiple codes and analyzing relationships among codes. This was especially important when developing categories and themes.

Reading the Data and Memoing

Following Creswell and Poth's (2017) data analysis spiral, the next phase involves reading through the data set several times and writing memos and reflections. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019) define memos as "not just descriptive summaries of data but attempts to synthesize them into higher-level analytic meanings" (p. 88). I read and reread the transcripts to develop a good understanding of the entire data set. I wanted to become fully immersed in each participant's stories before diving into coding and breaking apart the texts. I jotted down any short phrases or ideas that came to mind as memos. In MAXQDA, I kept track of my thinking by writing memos that were directly assigned to segments or document groups or by writing free memos that were not attached to any particular piece of data. The process of memoing helped me to reflect on

my own thinking, construct meaning of the text, and make sense of any nuances and contradictions. In terms of credibility, memoing created an audit trail of my thinking processes, questions, and connections.

Coding

The following step involves identifying and applying codes and creating a codebook. Creswell and Poth (2017) describe coding as the “heart of qualitative data analysis” (p. 190) because the researcher is beginning to describe the data. Coding is an essential component in the data analysis process for streamlining the data and foundational developing categories and discovering themes. In this study, I used an open coding system to develop a manageable classification or scheme. Open coding is the process of organizing and assigning short and meaningful labels or codes to pieces of data that capture the main idea of the specific text segment (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). In later stages of the data analysis, I could easily search and return to these segments for further inspection (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For the first cycle of coding, I used descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2009). With this strategy, I assigned a short one-to-three-word label to an excerpt summarizing the main topic. I only used data related to the research questions. My goal was to produce a final code list of no more than 25-30 codes, reduce and combine them into 7-8 categories, and then develop 2 to 3 three themes that would be used to write the narrative (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I aligned codes to the research questions and based them on information from the framework and the literature review.

I developed a codebook to keep track of emerging codes and make sense of the data. A codebook is a record of emerging codes, code definitions, and brief data

examples for reference (Patton, 2002; Saldaña, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Code definitions for this study were derived from the literature review or by how participants refer to the topic. The codebook helped me to organize and reorganize codes into categories and themes (Patton, 2002; Saldaña, 2009).

Categorization and Re-Coding

Categories, as defined by Creswell and Poth (2017), are “broad units for information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (p. 194). To facilitate the development of categories from codes, I followed the strategies of Saldaña (2009) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), who suggest that researchers engage in a second cycle of recoding and then use reasoning and intuition to determine which codes can be clustered according to similarities and patterns. Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012) explain that “recoding is not a sign you have done things wrong; it is simply part of doing things well” (p. 76). During the second and third cycles of coding, I was able to reduce redundancy while filtering, focusing, and highlighting important features of the data. Some codes were integrated into other codes, relabeled, or dropped entirely.

I used pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2009) to reorganize and condense the codes. Coded data that contained similar characteristics were grouped into categories of families and then rearranged and reclassified as needed into different and/or new categories (Saldaña, 2009). Categories that contained a large number of coded data and warranted further refinement were divided into subcategories. I gave careful thought to developing categories that were tied to the research question. To be comprehensive, I made sure at least one category related to each research question (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). I created descriptors for each category based on findings from the review of the

literature and refined the continually revised the wording as I collected new data. The main categories were compared to each other and reconfigured in a variety of ways to progress toward developing themes.

Thematizing

Saldaña (2013) defines a theme as “a phrase or sentence that identifies what the unit of data is about and/or what it means” (p. 139). To move from categories to a small and manageable number of themes, I engaged in “themeing the data” or conducting a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying themes in research findings. While there is no set number of themes to achieve, Saldaña (2015) recommends that major themes should be held to a minimum, so the analysis remains coherent. The 2-3 themes that emerged as a result of refining and collapsing the categories became the major headings in the findings section (Creswell and Poth, 2017). I used the following recommended strategies to identify themes: continuing to write memos about the codes, highlighting important quotes, and searching for words or phrases that appear in the data multiple times (Creswell and Poth, 2017). Repetition is a common theme recognition technique and is based on the premise that if an idea reoccurs across transcripts, it is likely a noteworthy theme (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I compared recurring patterns within each subgroup and then across subgroups to identify similarities and differences. Once the themes were created, I interpreted the data with the help my mentor and by soliciting the participants’ views on the credibility of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Representing the Data

The final phase of the spiral involves creating a visual representation of the data in a tabular form. Visual displays represent how the researcher organized, summarized,

simplified, and transformed data (Verdinelli & Scagnoli, 2013). A matrix, for example, can show the progression from the raw data to the themes. (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The Data Analysis and Summary Table (See Appendix G) I built contains three sections, one for each of the three research questions. Under the row with the research questions are four columns with the following titles: examples, codes, categories and subcategories, and themes. The table illustrates the route from analysis to themes as well as the alignment between themes and research questions. That being said, the table serves to promote transparency of the process of analysis for myself, my mentor, and readers.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Within this section, I outline the steps I took to collect and analyze data. First, I describe my approach for conducting the video conferencing interviews with the twelve participants and gathering documents. Second, I present the step-by-step data analysis process I followed to systematically proceed through the process of transcribing, coding, categorizing, and themeing the data. I also provide a summary of my strategy for interpreting the artifacts provided by the teacher educators.

Video Conferencing Interviews and Document Collection

Data collection began in mid-July 2020 and concluded in mid-August 2020. The interview process consisted of 2-3 video conferencing interviews with each participant, each lasting approximately 30-45 minutes in length. The interviews were conducted using the video conferencing software, Zoom. Interviews were scheduled one week apart for each of the twelve participants. When scheduling and conducting interviews, I took into consideration participants' schedules and preferences. If the interview was interrupted or cut short, participants were contacted, I arranged another date and time that was

convenient for the participants to continue the interviews. Before each interview, I explained the structure and purpose of the interviews and assured them that any identifying information would be changed such as their names and names of where they live and work. Additionally, I would store all transcripts in a password-protected computer that only I can access to. To protect participants' identities and maintain their confidentiality, I invited them to assign themselves with a pseudonym.

Because I did not conduct observations, document collection allowed more information to be collected about how the teacher educators prepare preservice teachers for including controversial issues in their future classrooms (Mertens, 2005). Teacher educators were asked to provide evidence of their practices through course syllabi, lesson plans, readings, and/or assignments illustrating how they equip preservice teachers with the competencies to teach controversial issues. I collected curricular-instructional documents at the beginning of the study because as noted by Glesne (2011), documents can raise questions about hunches and thereby shape new directions for interviews (Glesne, 2011). I used the course syllabi to frame semi-structured interview questions and in cross-checking and verifying the accuracy of teacher educator-reported practices. I also examined the documents to uncover if more emphasis is placed on building preservice teachers' theoretical knowledge, providing them with conceptual and practical tools, or a combination of both.

Transcription

Once I completed all the interviews, I began the data analysis process by transcribing individual interviews for each participant. I emailed participants a copy of their transcripts from the interview sessions and asked them to review the narratives to

ensure they accurately reflect their thoughts and experiences. If I needed more elaboration or clarification on specific segments of the transcripts, I highlighted the specific section in yellow and asked the participant probing or clarification questions such as “Why do you think...happened?” or “Can you give me an example of...or explain more about...?” The process of transcribing interview transcripts and conducting member checks took about two weeks to complete.

First Reading and Memoing

Next, I read each participant’s entire interview transcript carefully at least three times to gain a sense of his or her storyline, lived experiences in teaching controversial issues, and to make sense of what he or she was saying. Then, I performed a line-by-line analysis of each participant’s interview transcript. While reading the transcripts, I highlighted salient sentences, phrases, and words that were relevant to research questions as well as repeated phrases. Ideas, thoughts, and comments that came to mind were jotted down in the margins so I could maintain an ongoing record of my thinking (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

Cycles of Coding and Codebook Development

The initial round of coding began by locating phrases and sentences that seemed to fit together to describe one idea and drawing a bracket around them. Then I assigned a descriptive code label to each text segment and recorded the codes on the left side of the transcript. I only used two or three words for each code label such as “parent communication” and “learning alongside students.” In this first cycle of coding, I generated 89 codes. I recorded reflections and potential big ideas on the right side of the

paper as memos. After labeling segments with codes, I took a holistic look at all of the codes and began to develop initial categories.

To refine and reduce the large number of initial codes, I engaged in subsequent cycles of coding. I made sure the codes represented the most important ideas about the central phenomenon: how teacher educators perceive teaching controversial issues, what strategies and tools teacher educators use to prepare preservice teachers for this undertaking, and how they support preservice teachers in addressing challenges. Next to each code, I wrote RQ 1, RQ 2, and/or RQ 3 to make sure the ideas would help me form answers to the research questions later on. I eliminated or combined them into a single code that had fewer than 10 text segments. For example, in the first round of coding each example of a controversial issue that was mentioned by a participant was assigned a different code: gun control, Truman drops the atomic bomb, climate change, etc. In the second round of coding, I reevaluated these codes and decided to group them into a new code, open issues. Each example of a controversial issue appeared sporadically across the 25 interview transcripts and was mentioned by no more than two participants. Gun control, for instance, consisted of one text segment. The new code, open issues, encapsulated the characteristics of these text segments and highlighted that these issues have multiple and competing answers (Hess, 2009).

A similar process was followed when reorganizing the initial codes, traumatic historical experiences, marriage equality, and fundamental rights into settled issues during the second cycle of coding. This renamed code summarizes that all text segments under this label deal with issues that are settled, have widespread agreement, and are not controversial (Hess, 2009). I returned to the codes “open issues” and “settled issues” in a

third cycle of recoding to determine if they could be further refined or reworked. Open issues had a frequency count of 16 and closed issues had a frequency count of 9. Given the low-frequency counts, I merged the two codes under the name, Diana Hess who developed the terms “open issues” and “settled issues” to make the distinction between issues that are currently in debate and issues that are resolved. I followed this inductive process to narrow down the number of codes from 89 to 38 and then to 30.

I built a codebook in MAXQDA to maintain a record of the emergent codes and the frequency counts. The compilation of codes included a description for each code and a short verbatim quotation from the data for reference. The description of a code provided me with guidance on its application. For example, I defined the code *resources* as any text where the participant speaks about various resources (i.e., human, physical, financial, intellectual, etc.) that preservice teachers need. For the code example, I cited a text segment where a participant suggested that teachers develop a strong support system or community of people. I revisited the codebook later on in the data analysis cycle to support my efforts in organizing and reorganizing the codes into major categories and subcategories.

For the final cycle of coding, I returned to the data and eliminated disconfirming data that were irrelevant or vague. I placed pieces of information that did not fit any of the existing categories but were important in a table titled “Miscellaneous.” Each quote had a note stating what the main idea was and how it was important to the study. Once I finished sorting all of the relevant quotes, I revisited quotes in the “Miscellaneous” table to see if they fit in one of the existing categories or should be placed in a new emergent category. The final codebook can be found in Appendix H.

Categorizing Data

After several rounds of coding, I proceeded to develop categories. First, in MAXQDA, I used the Code Relations Browser tool to gain insight into the relationships between codes and how many document segments any two codes are attached to. In the matrix, the code, *committed impartiality*, for example, was connected with *discussion v. debate*, *multiple perspectives*, *civil discourse*, and *more than two sides*. The number of co-occurrences between committed impartiality and the other four codes ranged between 15-20 coded segments. This first step in the categorization step helped me to gain an initial sense of how any two codes are related to each other. Next, I proceeded to organize and sort the codes in the MAXQDA MAXMaps tool, as it provided a large workspace to represent the codes graphically. The tool helped with forming meaningful categories because I could freely arrange and rearrange codes in relation to one another. In the Creative Coding Mode, I dragged all 29 codes onto the workspace. I sorted codes together based on similarities and assigned a title that represented one idea or broad parent category. If a parent category became too large (i.e., it contained clusters of coded data that merit further refinement into subcategories), I separated the group into smaller units or subcategories. To demonstrate, for the one parent category named “Planning and Preparation” I divided this group into five subcategories: Support System, Physical Resources, Repertoire of Teaching Strategies, Knowledge about Issues, and Range of Credible Sources. The subcategories highlight the various professional resources, tools, and expertise teachers need to effectively prepare for a lesson, as cited by the teacher educators.

In the last stage of the categorization process, I turned to the Data Analysis and Summary Table (See Appendix G) and wrote down the refined categories and subcategories under the corresponding research question heading. I electronically copied and pasted quotes from interview transcripts that connected to this category into appropriate cells, which were organized by participant name and subgroup. Then I wrote descriptors for each parent category. The descriptors reflected findings from the review of the literature and were refined as new data was collected.

Theme Identification

The final stage of the data analysis involved generating themes. I first generated initial themes by examining the list of codes and categories within my codebook and formulating how they could be combined to form over-arching themes connected to the research questions (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). For example, I recognized that the categories, *course activities and structure*, *discussion facilitation*, and *safe classroom environment* all related to the various processes involved with studying controversial issues in the classroom, from the planning to the implementation stages. Next, I returned to the coded segments of the interview transcripts and searched for repeated words and phrases where participants referred to ideas associated with lesson planning, ground rules, discussion strategies, and classroom safety. The repetitions indicated to me that these recurring ideas were important and could be combined to form an over-arching theme: Designing the discussion of controversial issues from start to finish.

Then, I further divided this broad theme into three specific subthemes that illustrate the unique and different ways teacher educators guide preservice teachers in preparing a controversial issues discussion: a) laying the groundwork in the classroom

and on their own through self-reflection, b) selecting appropriate issues, credible resources, and a discussion framework, and c) facilitating a student-centered and open dialogue. The first two subthemes take a close look at how the teacher educators help preservice teachers set the stage for discussion. The third subtheme explores how teacher educators model and engage their preservice teachers in steering the conversation. Afterward, I read and re-read to the entire dataset to consider how the theme and subthemes I generated connected to the data as a whole. Returning back to the data to make sure the themes and data reciprocally support each other ensures that the themes have been authentically built from participants' experiences and perspectives. I also had the opportunity to identify meaningful items that were overlooked in the earlier stages.

Lastly, I refined the themes so that they tell a coherent and accurate story about the data while answering one or more of the research questions. If the list subthemes under a particular overarching theme became too large, then I would either discard one subtheme or collapse subthemes into each other. I emailed my list of themes and subthemes to my mentor who provided detailed feedback on improving the overall clarity and minimizing open interpretations. The suggestions helped me to consider the themes in relation to each other rather than just autonomously and specify vague words so that readers know exactly what it is that I am referring to. To improve the readability of the themes and subthemes, I rewrote them to ensure they all follow the same parallel structure and verb tense. Appendix I contains a table that illustrates the progression from codes to categories to themes.

Document Analyses

A critical analysis of the teacher-provided artifacts linked to participants' lives leads to a deeper and broader understanding of a phenomenon (Glesne, 2011). The set of curricular-instructional documents provided by each teacher educator were analyzed and interpreted following a systematic procedure. This process provided a more complete picture of the instructional practices in teacher educators classrooms. Following Waliaula's (2011) method for analyzing documents, I read through the documents with the following questions in mind: Why do I need to use this document? What is this document telling me about the study? What is the document not telling me? Is there any missing link in the document? What are the existing and repetitive themes? What is the significance of the document?

The first phase involved reading through the documents at least two times to gain an overall sense of the big ideas. In the second phase, I delved deeper by re-reading each document and highlighting keywords or phrases that repeated and were related to the research questions. I noted comments and reflections about those highlighted sections in the margins. In the third phase, a document summary form based on the work of Miles and Huberman (1994) was used to help organize the data collected from documents. The document summary form contained the name of the document, the participant associated with the document, its significance, and a summary of its contents (see Appendix J).

Trustworthiness Definition and Strategies

To ensure rigor, I employed trustworthiness strategies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) affirm that establishing trustworthiness is a way for researchers to persuade both themselves and readers that their research findings are worthy of attention.

Trustworthiness involves establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Table 4 highlights how I addressed Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria for trustworthiness during each cycle of the data analysis spiral. The following paragraphs provide a more detailed discussion of how I addressed each of the four aspects of trustworthiness during the study.

Table 4

Techniques to Establish Trustworthiness During Data Analysis Spiral

Data Analysis Spiral Activity	Techniques for Establishing Trustworthiness
Step 1: Managing and Organizing the Data	Organizing and storing raw data in secure computer and computer-assisted software program
Step 2: Familiarizing Oneself with Data and Memoing Emergent Ideas	Data triangulation Document thoughts about potential codes Document reflective thoughts and questions Member checking
Step 3: Cycles of Coding and Categorizing	Reflexive journaling Audit trail of code generation Peer debriefing
Step 4: Themeing the Data	Diagramming to make sense of progression from codes to categories to themes Member checking Peer debriefing
Step 5: Developing and Assessing Interpretations	Member checking Peer debriefing Reflexive journaling
Step 6: Representing the Data	Describing process of coding and analysis in sufficient details Thick descriptions of context Description of the audit trail Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study

Credibility

Credibility establishes confidence in whether or not the research findings reflect the participants' reality and their views. To address credibility in this study, I used a number of techniques such as data collection triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking. Triangulation is described as the "comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means" (Patton, 1999, p. 1195). With data triangulation, multiple methods of data collection strategies provided rigor and breadth to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In this study, I compared and contrasted themes from both the teacher-provided artifacts and interview transcripts. Cross-examining the collection of rich, in-depth data from interviews and document analysis established credibility and accuracy of the participants' perspectives. This helped to produce a richer and more complete picture of the type of controversial issues instruction occurring in teacher educators' courses.

To ensure that the data and findings represent the reality of participants from their point of view, this study utilized member checking and participant validation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Bringing in more than one perspective to the data analysis process helps to clarify meaning and offer different ways of seeing the phenomenon under study (Stake, 2003). I used member checks throughout the data collection process and precisely one to two weeks following the interviews. All participants were sent copies of their transcripts via email. I asked them to share if the transcripts accurately depict what was said during the interview. During the data analysis process, I regularly shared emerging categories with the participants so they could verify the accuracy of their thoughts and experiences with controversial issues instruction. I asked participants to share their thinking about the

emerging categories and to explain more about any vague comments they made. I also asked participants to read excerpts from the interview transcripts to confirm if data were represented accurately and elaborate on or clarify any parts.

I communicated with her mentor periodically throughout the data coding, categorization, and theming process through video conferencing meetings or email exchanges. Through these conversations, I was able to examine how my thoughts and ideas were evolving as I engaged more deeply with the data. I shared the codebook with my mentor, explained how I developed the codebook, answered any questions my mentor had. The mentor shared personal insights and provided suggestions on effectively moving through the data analysis phase. With my mentor's guidance, I realized that I needed to reduce and refine the number of codes in my codebook and adapt a cyclical rather than linear approach to analyzing the data. I gained greater clarification and direction in synthesizing the findings to identify cross-cutting themes and patterns.

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the results can be transferred to other settings with different participants. In this study, I established transferability between one context to another by providing sufficient detail or "thick descriptions" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the participants, their setting, and the research process. I gave a detailed and robust account of the sample, sample size, sample strategy, demographic information of the participants. In addition, I made explicit connections to participants' social and cultural contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their daily lives that surrounds the research study. In doing so, readers could situate themselves in the context of the study. They would be better able to judge the extent to which findings hold

relevance and usefulness to their own contexts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Leonard, Napp, and Adeleke, 2009).

Dependability

Dependability involves showing that the findings are consistent and logical. I achieved dependability with the use of audit trails and a reflexive journal. To provide a transparent description of the research steps that I took from the start of the research study to the implementation and reporting of findings, I maintained an electronic log of all the tasks I completed throughout the investigation. After each cycle of coding, I had to reorganize my codebook to reflect the changes in my coding decisions. When I needed to update the codebook, I duplicated the file of the previous version and made updates to the new version. With this method, each file acted as a separate record demonstrating how the codes were being consolidated and refined over time. My reflexive journal contained process notes about the daily logistics of my research, methodological decisions, and personal reflections (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

Confirmability

As explained by LeCompte and Schensul (1999), it is important for researchers to take steps to minimize bias in their study. For example, my prior knowledge of teacher educator participants could impact how interviews are conducted. I used the following to minimize bias: open-ended questions during semi-structured interviews and use of a reflective journal (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Interviewer bias can present itself when interviewers ask leading questions or pose questions that include or suggest the desired response. In the current research study, I posed open-ended questions and follow-up

questions that would elicit responses from participants and not guide them in a particular direction. To ensure low inference descriptors, I incorporated direct quotes from interview transcripts into the narrative. Throughout the data analysis, I engaged in an ongoing process of self-reflection with the use of a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this journal, I wrote notes about my own biases, values, and preconceptions in relation to the research. This was essential for monitoring how my own views and feelings came into play during the research process.

Research Ethics

In any research study, the researcher is responsible for informing and protecting participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Merriam, 1998). I anticipated no serious ethical threats to any of the participants or their well-being during this study. Nevertheless, I followed various safeguards to ensure participants were protected. First, I made informed consent a main priority throughout the study. All participants who volunteered to participate in the study were asked to carefully read and then sign a consent form before the data collection process began (see Appendix K). They also received a countersigned copy for their records. The consent form contained the following information: research purpose, description of the study procedures, all foreseeable risks/discomforts of being in this study, benefits of being in this study, confidentiality, payments, a statement regarding rights to refuse or withdraw, a statement regarding the right to ask questions or report concerns, and the person to contact for answers to questions. It was important to me that all participants had sufficient and adequate information about the study so they could make an informed decision about whether or not to participate before and/or during data collection. I made sure the form was written in language that would be easily understood

by all participants, as doing so minimized the possibility of coercion or undue influence. Participants were given two weeks to consider participation.

Second, I took into consideration participants' rights and interests when making choices regarding reporting of data. I audio-recorded all interviews with participants' consent. Before each interview, I informed participants that their participation was completely voluntary. If at any time they did not feel comfortable answering any questions or believed the questions did not hold relevance to them, I proceeded to the following question. Additionally, I told participants to inform me at any point during the interview process if they wished to stop. There were a few interview questions asking participants to provide certain identifiable descriptors such as their teaching experience and social studies educational experience. To prevent the risk of losing confidentiality, I removed the participants' names, affiliations, and other significant identifiable characteristics when coding, analyzing, and reporting pertinent data. I replaced participants' names and the names of their institutions with pseudonyms. In cases where they described a course that is specific to their institution, I gave the course a generic name.

I took cautionary measures to secure the storage of research-related records and data. Once interviews were conducted and transcribed, I saved the audio and video recordings as well as the Microsoft Word transcription documents as password-protected files to maintain confidentiality. I retained all files in the password-protected computer for one year until I obtained the information I needed for my research. No one other I had access to the material. In taking these necessary measures, I ensured that the study would

be conducted in a manner that protects participants, ensures ethical treatment, and minimizes potential harm.

Researcher Role and Positionality

Presenting “an honest and rigorous appraisal of personal assumptions and ethnocentrism” (Campbell & Lassiter, 2015, p. 5) throughout the research process is essential for minimizing researcher bias and demonstrating how the researcher’s stance and views affect her research decisions. Therefore, I made it my priority to be aware of how my own values, experiences, biases along with my teaching practices and philosophy have led to conducting this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I engaged in the process of reflexivity by providing written descriptions of my perspectives and explaining how my past and current experiences brought me to this study within my research journey. Engaging in this process ensured my perspective did not overwhelm the perspectives of the participants, thereby enhancing the credibility of the study’s findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015).

My interest in this study stems from my personal experience as a student in a social studies teacher education program at a public research university and efforts to help beginning teachers incorporate controversial issues in their classrooms. Within my teacher education program, particularly the elementary and secondary social studies methods courses, my teacher educators weaved in historical and contemporary controversial issues throughout the semester. Throughout this ongoing exploration, I observed my teacher educators modeling powerful teaching practices for facilitating structured discussions on sensitive issues. My classmates and I were encouraged to

question, interrogate, challenge, and affirm each other in a safe and supportive environment so that we can learn and grow together. These experiences helped me to see the importance of developing nuance in our thinking and an ability to talk across the differences we may have. My professors encouraged preservice teachers to consider the positionality when deciding what should be taught and why. In these methods classes, I learned how to select age-appropriate primary and secondary sources that present multiple perspectives on a situation and weigh evidence from different sources. I developed the ability to critically analyze news sources and determine their biases through class conversations.

Upon completing the teacher education program and entering the school setting, I felt confident in addressing difficult topics that would enter my classroom and the curriculum. Disagreements and uncomfortable moments will arise, but these should be viewed as opportunities to work through conflicts and learn about differences. This is necessary for a social justice education and guiding students toward developing a sense of civic agency and participation. Over time, I began informally mentoring social studies student teachers and first-year teachers with a commitment to reshaping the traditional social studies curriculum, enacting critical pedagogy, and promoting societal transformation and justice. I drew on the effective practices from my teacher education program in this process. In small groups, we searched for ways to introduce controversial issues into their curriculum, developed strategies for fostering civil discourse, and identified how we can minimize risks associated with teaching tough topics.

From this rewarding experience, I was inspired to deepen my understanding of controversial issues. I began reading the works of scholars in the field such as Diana

Hess, Paula MacAvoy, Walter Parker and communicating with previous methods professors about my work with social studies student teachers and first-year teachers. The conversations were mutually beneficial. Hearing about the teachers' initial experiences and challenges in the field about teaching contested issues provided insight for the teacher educators on areas they needed to place greater emphasis on in their course. In turn, I learned how to guide student teachers in applying those effective practices from preservice training to their classroom so that they do not lose sight of their commitment toward justice-oriented social studies education.

My experience and position as a researcher created some potential influence on the research process. I use several strategies in my data collection and analysis to recognize and address bias. During the data collection process, I refrained from revealing practices and viewpoints to participants. For example, I did not share my understanding of a controversial issue or strategies for facilitating a discussion with participants. This might have led participants to omit their own ideas, reflections, practices, or documents because they did not match my thoughts and pedagogy. Also, I did not mention specific teaching approaches (i.e., Structured Academic Controversy) so that participants did not feel compelled to describe their knowledge or experience with a strategy they might not be familiar with. I accepted all materials the participants sent to me, regardless of if it aligned with my views of controversial issues.

Throughout the data analysis process, I wrote memo reflections. Maintaining this audit trail of "how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (Merriam, 2009, p. 222) helped to validate the study and create thick descriptions of participants and situations (Strauss, 1987). I kept an open

mind while reading and reading the vast amounts of data. I wrote notes about certain occurrences or sentences that were of vital interest. In so doing, the notes served to inform my coding scheme, make sense of the categories that emerged, and determine which categories should be combined or eliminated. I also noted my reactions to the data, any preconceived notions, biases, or beliefs. Taking these steps to ensure accountability and transparency was critical for preventing misrepresentation of interpretations.

Conclusion

This chapter presents the research design and specific procedures that will be used in conducting this study. Use a case study methodology, I examined the teaching of controversial issues in secondary social studies methods courses. I utilized stratified purposeful sampling to select the 12 secondary social studies teacher educators who teach secondary social studies methods courses at the higher education level. For the data collection, two methods were employed: in-depth semi-structured online video conferencing interviews and document analysis of course syllabi, lesson plans, readings, and/or assignments. I closely followed Creswell and Poth's (2017) data analysis spiral to ensure the data was analyzed and interpreted systematically and comprehensively. For the first and subsequent cycles of coding I used descriptive and pattern coding (Saldaña, 2009). I created a data analysis summary table to represent the progression from coding to categorizing the theming the data. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking and participant validation, memoing, data triangulation, and engaging in reflexivity. The next chapter presents the major findings of the research organized around the research questions and themes.

CHAPTER 4

In the previous chapter, I described the roadmap for my case study. This chapter contains the product of my data collection and analysis procedures. I present key findings obtained from the video conferencing interviews with the 12 teacher educators and the document reviews of artifacts they provided. The following research questions guide the findings:

1. What are secondary social studies teacher educators' attitudes toward teaching controversial issues?
2. How do secondary social studies teacher educators approach the teaching of controversial issues in their courses?
3. How do secondary social studies teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to handle the challenges associated with teaching controversial issues?

I organized this chapter into three themes and three subthemes. I describe each overarching theme in relation to one of the research questions. I made this decision to ensure the findings directly respond to the questions I set out to answer. In Table 5, I outline the themes and subthemes within this chapter and define which research question they address.

Table 5

Relationship Between Themes and Research Questions

Themes and Subthemes	Connection to Research Questions
Theme 1: Undertaking A Difficult but Necessary Responsibility	1. What are secondary social studies teacher educators' attitudes toward teaching controversial issues?
Subtheme 1a: Preparing Young People for Active Citizenship	

Subtheme 1b: Dealing with Personal and External Factors

Subtheme 1c: Embracing an Interdisciplinary Approach

Theme 2: Preparing for and Steering the Controversial Issues Discussion

Subtheme 2a: Laying the Groundwork for Discussion

Subtheme 2b: Understanding Controversial Issues and Examining Resources

Subtheme 2c: Facilitating an Open Student-Centered Discussion

2. How do secondary social studies teacher educators approach the teaching of controversial issues in their courses?

Theme 3: Cultivating a Positive Relationship with Community Members and Yourself

Subtheme 3a: Communicating Proactively with Parents and Administrators

Subtheme 3b: Maintaining an Emotionally Safe Classroom Space for Students

Subtheme 3c: Eschewing Your Role as the Expert

3. How do secondary social studies teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to handle the challenges associated with teaching controversial issues?

Within each of the three sections, I integrated illustrative quotations from the interview transcripts to elevate the teacher educators' voices and accurately portray their perspectives. I wove data from course syllabi, course assignments, and additional teacher provided artifacts throughout the narrative to augment and verify responses from the teacher educators. In the subsequent chapter, I provide my interpretation of the findings to answer the research questions and link the findings to the theoretical framework and related research.

Theme 1: Undertaking a Difficult but Necessary Responsibility

The theme, "Undertaking a Difficult but Necessary Responsibility," addresses Research Question 1: What are secondary social studies teacher educators' attitudes

toward teaching controversial issues? The twelve teacher educators shared the belief that teachers have a responsibility to address controversial issues. Teaching controversial issues prepares secondary-age students or young people to become active and responsible citizens in a democratic society. Geoffrey explicitly expressed this view:

I think it's just necessary—you have to do it. It's not like we should weigh the pros and cons—no, it's just that we need to talk about controversial issues, what's controversial, how do we define it, how do we respond to it. That is how we have a democratic society. That's such a central part of it.

Choosing to ignore and stay silent about issues affecting young people's lives “ignores their realities” and conveys to students that “you don't care or feel this [controversial issue] isn't important,” Geoffrey explained.

This section is divided into three subthemes: Subtheme 1a: “Preparing Young People for Active Citizenship,” Subtheme 1b: “Dealing with Personal and External Factors,” and Subtheme 1c: “Embracing an Interdisciplinary Approach Within Subtheme.” Within Subtheme 1a: “Preparing Young People for Active Citizenship,” I present the teacher educators' reasoning for teaching issues of controversy and how contested issues benefit students. Within Subtheme, 1b: “Dealing with Personal and External Factors,” I share the findings showing the challenges associated with handling contested issues. Within the final subtheme, 1c: “Embracing and Interdisciplinary Approach,” I describe the teacher educators' call for an interdisciplinary approach to teaching controversial issues.

Subtheme 1a: Preparing Young People for Active Citizenship

The teacher educators unanimously agreed engaging secondary-age students or young people in controversial issues helps them grow into “well-rounded and proactive citizens.” Hannah and Victoria listed many behaviors they believe secondary students develop through discussing issues of controversy, all of which they feel prepare students for citizenship. These include the ability to “detect discrimination when it happens,” to speak up and take action, focus on equity and making the world a better place, “higher critical thinking skills, higher levels of empathy, higher conflict resolution skills, better tolerance for people, lower biases for people who are different from them.”

A few participants described how broaching “real and authentic” issues helps secondary students achieve the above civic competencies. As Tyler and Xavier pointed out, young people regularly encounter issues of controversy in their everyday lives, whether or not teachers bring them up in the classroom. Gun control is a widely debated issue in our national context. “It’s what everybody cares about because that’s what’s happening now and affects them [students],” Tyler stated. It spills into the social studies curriculum and secondary-age students’ lives. Xavier, who also spoke about the relevance of this issue, explained gun control directly affects the lives of young people “because of mass shootings in schools but also because of the availability of guns in their communities.” Young people whose lives are at risk and affected by gun violence are often the most concerned and inclined to learn about limits on gun ownership and to identify the “ethical, definitional, and factual issues” undergirding the issue. He affirmed when teachers facilitate conversations with their young students about important and complex topics such as gun control, students learn to resolve conflicts cooperatively and

develop respect for human rights. They will become ready to deal with this issue “knowledgeably, sensibly, tolerantly, and morally” in their adult lives.

Three other participants expressed a similar perspective. Geoffrey said “relevant” issues leave secondary students with a “greater understanding of society.” In agreement, Morgan believes “preparing students for any contested topic is preparing them for teaching about life and knowing how to respond to threats: flight, fight, or freeze.” This empowers young people to actually function and eventually change their society.

For several teacher educators, beginning the study of controversial issues in the secondary classroom provides a safe space for secondary students to participate in a “civil and informed conversation about issues that might be otherwise difficult to achieve in other settings.” Kristen and Dominic viewed the presidential debates as a “terrible example” for young people to learn what it means to civilly discuss a matter of controversy. Dominic described the debates as a “nightmare to watch” because they are often filled with “vitriolic personal attacks that treat individuals as if they are subhuman” just because the other person disagrees on some point. “We don’t want to contribute to the problem by just dehumanizing somebody who thinks differently from us,” he contended. Both he and Kristen believed introducing secondary-age students to issues of controversy and teaching them how to talk about them respectfully enables them to handle disagreements appropriately. “Introspectively, you have to ask yourself what opportunities do you want to provide to your students that are going to help them be the democratic citizens we want to be when they’re out in the world,” stated Kristen. Overall, the participants generally agreed teaching controversial issues to young people is vitally

important for helping them become better informed and prepared to make positive contributions to society.

Subtheme 1b: Dealing with Personal and External Factors

The participants recognized teaching controversial issues is a challenging responsibility for secondary social studies teachers, whether they have been teaching for just a few months or well over a decade. A variety of factors ranging from the personal to the external levels highly influence teachers' decision to engage their young students in examining issues of controversy.

Lack of Knowledge and Confidence. Several participants shared that preservice teachers are discouraged by their own lack of familiarity with current issues and how to respond to spontaneous questions. Kristen shared, "My students [preservice teachers] will tell me they don't know how to do this. They're afraid of not knowing enough or being asked a question they don't know." Bianca stated preservice teachers in her course expressed a similar concern. Her students felt social studies methods coursework should focus more on developing preservice teachers' content knowledge. "They [Preservice teachers] come into the social studies methods course thinking we're going to learn about all these important events, people, and issues," she explained. Her preservice teachers "feel because they don't have enough of a background in these topics [controversial issues], it's going to be challenging to teach them." Stephen corroborated these sentiments when he questioned: "How can you teach about something or even facilitate a discussion about something when you don't know what's going on?" Two participants conveyed a connection between gaining knowledge about controversial issues and teachers' confidence. Victoria explained not having a sufficient grasp of current contested

issues will decrease preservice teachers' motivation. This was conveyed in her statement: "They [Preservice teachers] don't know what's going on because they don't watch the news. If they don't know what the issues are right now, they probably wouldn't feel capable of bringing them up in the classroom." Morgan also felt "knowing the content well" is key for teaching the lesson confidently. She tells her preservice teachers if they are going to teach a lesson about a particular issue, then they need to "go out and learn about it in order to teach it." The participants' comments indicate that teacher knowledge about issues, or lack of, affects their attitude toward teaching controversial issues.

Fear of Offending Students. Half of the teacher educators mentioned preservice teachers are personally fearful about unintentionally offending one or more students in the class. As Dominic explained, when talking about many current issues of controversy "you're going to be talking about some of the people who experience going through some of the problems that these issues are centered on." Hannah said this is one of the "biggest fears that preservice teachers share each semester." Abigail received similar feedback from her preservice teachers. She stated not only do they [preservice teachers] find the thought of "saying the wrong thing scary," they are worried about not saying anything at all. Her preservice teachers found both scenarios equally problematic. As a result, they tend to "shy away" from the issue altogether. Stephen reasoned this is particularly the case when an issue directly affects a student or their families:

The immigration issue, the ban on Muslims and Hispanics, the wall being built, the discussion about it on the news little young children who were from immigrant families we're afraid of that. It's well-documented. They [Preservice teachers] were afraid President Trump was going to come and take their parents

away. So, these issues have created a lot of fear in teachers and students and they shy away from that and they don't want to do it.

Similar to Stephen, Nathan added that if one or more young person in a class is representative of the group being discussed, "everybody is looking at that kid and teachers just don't want to put themselves or their students in that discomfoting position." He described a scenario in which teachers prefer to dodge the issue rather than address it in order to avoid placing their students in an uncomfortable situation:

So, let's just say you're vehemently against the wall. You hate Trump's wall and teachers don't even want to talk about the wall because if they bring in a perspective that validates the wall that explains why the wall would be a good idea they just don't even want to go there because maybe they have students in their classroom whose families are immigrant families. Then they just don't talk about it.

Dominic and Morgan believed ignoring such issues entirely is not an option. Controversial issues will constantly come up in the classroom, either through the curriculum or during informal conversations. Dominic suggested that preservice can "overcome this individual barrier" by protecting students' identities. "You have to make them feel safe when you are indirectly talking about them in front of the class," he said. Morgan proposed having a one-on-one conversation with secondary students before the conversation. She recalled a time when she pulled aside one of her African American high school students before beginning a unit on slavery:

I don't expect you to and if anybody tries to position you as being the spokesperson for the black experience in the United States, you are under no

obligation to do that, but at the same time, if there is something that you want to share, I want you to feel free to share.

Morgan said the parents contacted her to express their appreciation for protecting their child. In line with Dominic and Morgan's thinking, Abigail also shared preservice teachers have to be careful to not neglect other people's feelings and experiences. She said, "I find there are people who have great intentions and yet still they make their students feel really uncomfortable." Therefore, Abigail advises her teachers to "assume that at least one student in that room has an intimate personal connection." She described an instance where she guided a preservice teacher who was teaching about genocide in Rwanda to assume that a student's parent or grandparent was involved. Abigail explained with this strategy, "you're really careful not to make a glib lesson plan out of someone else's pain." The teacher educators' responses show that opening the curriculum to issues of controversy raises difficult questions for preservice teachers about how to protect the sensitivities of students.

Concerns from Administrators and Parents. Many teacher educators spoke about preservice teachers' hesitation to teach controversial issues because they are worried about the consequences that might arise from administrators and parents. Xavier attributed this to the polarization of our society, which "pushes teachers away" from teaching contested issues: "It is very difficult because they of course kids in American culture know that you are not supposed to talk about certain issues, like controversial political issues overall." Bianca recalled that "a large portion of my [her] preservice teachers are nervous about what parents will say." When asked why they believe

preservice teachers are concerned about stakeholders, Bianca remembered her preservice teachers telling her “they’ll most likely be fired if they say something controversial.”

Hannah and Morgan received similar feedback from their preservice teachers. Preservice teachers in Hannah’s class also felt they would have to “constantly navigate parents.” Morgan shared that parents are the “number one” fear for her students as well. Her students felt teaching controversial issues would lead to complaints and them getting into trouble with parents and their administrators. She also shared her perspective based on her years as a high school social studies teacher:

So, I got in trouble a lot for teaching what I did and for making a lot of what I did student-centered...People were having the conversation about student-centered pedagogy but not really having the conversation about what that really means. So, I got in trouble a lot for bringing controversial issues into my classroom...That was hard. It was hard to sit in the principal’s office and get yelled at.

Tyler, however, described the fears preservice teachers have about community stakeholders as “pre-loaded trauma.” Both he and Stephen contend this fear about consequences does not actually occur. Stephen said his students have “this fantasy of the angry parent...like, you allowed my student to talk about some taboo information, you’ve eroded the line between school and home.” Tyler mentioned that his preservice teachers also hold a certain preconceived image of parents. He said, “They seem to think that imagined parent is right-wing conservative and that says more about us as teachers.” Tyler believed this view provides much insight into what their qualms are than perhaps what the real situation is. Tyler clarified “liberal parents more so than conservative parents” might raise concerns and for different reasons: “They are going to be like, hey,

you are not teaching this stuff?” Most often, they believed parents question why teachers ignore issues coming up in society than how they are teaching them. For the most part, however, the majority of the teacher educators agreed preservice teachers shy away from controversy in order to avoid facing repercussions from administrators and parents.

Standards and Time. Curricular and structural constraints pose another barrier. Kristen and Bianca could not find any standards within their state standards focused on studying controversial issues or current events. Kristen stated, “They’re all history, geography, economic, civics to a degree. Civics more in the context of knowing the branches of government, knowing how a bill becomes a law, that kind of thing.” When looking for connections to standards, Bianca drew her students’ attention to the *Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards* because “there was not one state standard” that centered on studying issues of controversy. The teacher educators explained if the local and state standards do not prioritize this work explicitly, teachers will refrain from talking about controversial issues in-depth or at all. Geoffrey explained:

Controversial issues, to teach them well, you need time to dig in and really become well versed in the different perspectives and arguments from every single angle. What’s the historical account? How was it changed across the years? How are people looking at it now? Realistically, there’s not that much time.

Nathan, like Geoffrey, expressed that a challenge to teaching controversial issues is the lack of time “to talk about topics that are super detailed and meaty.” He felt at both the secondary and teacher education levels, social studies educators are expected to “teach an absurd amount of content” as well as the skills and dispositions in a few months or a year. The demand to cover large amounts of content within a short amount of time at the

secondary level might be another reason why teachers steer away from controversial issues.

Subtheme 1c: Embracing an Interdisciplinary Approach

More than half of the teacher educators advocated for an interdisciplinary approach to teaching controversial issues at the secondary and higher education levels. Dominic understood why controversial issues lend themselves well to social studies education. However, he felt the departmentalized model in higher education perpetuates “what we see in secondary schools.” Dominic contended teachers take on this mindset: “Now you’re in social studies, so we’re going to talk about teaching public issues or teaching children how to discuss issues of controversy.” This compartmentalized structure does not help preservice teachers to see that issues of controversy permeate across content areas. He explained, “if we [teachers] teach controversial issues cross-curricularly, we could accomplish so much more.”

Two teacher educators shared Dominic’s perspective. Kristen said it is hard to teach English Language Arts apart from Social Studies, Science, and Math. She described utilizing a few digital literacy standards about examining a variety of web-based sources and standards from the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History. “So, I tell them, you can hardly separate social studies from literacy. You use literacy skills to make sense of social studies content.” Geoffrey also believed that controversial issues permeate the curriculum in each content area and “should be a part of every discipline,” as reflected in this statement: “I don’t understand

how that is not part of English, how is that not part of science.” Tyler agreed with Kristen and Geoffrey’s perspectives, as reflected in his comment:

I’m trying to think - so in our biology classes, I have friends who are biologists and they care about the debate as to whether birds are dinosaurs and whether birds are not dinosaurs. Like that’s not – even though that’s not a controversy within social studies, it’s controversial.

Stephen, as well, spoke about the connections between social studies and science in terms of looking at controversial issues: “Like what we societally do to address climate change is a controversial issue, not just in the social studies classroom.” He said he enjoys looking for connections across the disciplines and considers this an important piece for deepening students’ understanding of an issue.

Many of the teacher educators elaborated on the importance of teaching controversial issues following an interdisciplinary approach and described how this could be achieved. Nathan compared studying controversial issues across the curriculum to teaching reading and writing across the content areas:

You know there has been a really big shift...especially my time in the classroom where there are really different sentiments about English teachers are not the only teachers teaching writing. Like we are all teaching writing, we’re all teaching reading and I think that, and this is really a tactic that I take with my secondary education teachers who are predominantly in placements where there is no social studies instruction. Which is that just because something is not there on the surface, we’re all doing this work.

For Morgan, an interdisciplinary approach to teaching controversial issues provides teachers with a greater sense of what the role of education should be: a broad commitment to helping students develop a sense of responsibility “for themselves, each other, the planet.” Geoffrey agreed, stating controversial issues are “a part of citizenship and prioritizing being a democratic citizen is not just a social studies effort.”

Nathan and Victoria noted embracing an interdisciplinary approach to teaching controversial issues “can’t be fixed by social studies teachers alone.” It would require a programmatic overhaul. A viable solution, they contend, is not adding a second social studies course, but designing a program with a “culturally responsive or sustaining vision” and incorporating that across all courses. The teacher educators felt this approach would help preservice teachers have a firm understanding of their own biases and explore questions of identity that need to be unpacked before delving into a discussion of controversial issues. In addition, they envisioned an interdisciplinary approach as one where students have “authentic practice facilitating discussions” in any discipline and methods class.

Abigail pointed out that many universities in Canada offer interdisciplinary study programs in their schools of education that “transcend traditional academic departments.” The school of education at her current university, for example, views current events as integral to any program of studies in education “because these topics just come up anywhere and anytime in the classroom.” That said, the coursework within a program engages students in examining complex issues that cross academic departments and disciplines. For these teacher educators, striving for an interdisciplinary approach allows preservice teachers to explore new ways of looking at current and historical issues.

Summary of Theme 1 Findings

In this section, I described the teacher educators' thoughts and beliefs regarding the teaching of controversial issues. The participants noted young people are eager to learn more about their world and figure out their role in making it a better place. Learning about controversial issues develops secondary-age students' critical thinking skills. A safe space that promotes civil discourse helps students process difficult issues. Personal and contextual barriers make teaching controversial issues a challenging undertaking. The participants identified factors that might deter preservice teachers from broaching issues of controversy: lack of confidence and expert knowledge about the issues, fear of offending students and receiving complaints from parents and administrators, limited time, and the absence of controversial issues in standards. The participants believe all content area teachers play a role in preparing students to become empathetic and contributing citizens. In the following section, I present findings showing how teacher educators guide preservice teachers through planning and implementing learning experiences centered around controversial issues.

Theme 2: Preparing for and Steering the Controversial Issues Discussion

The theme, "Preparing for and Steering the Discussion of Controversial Issues," addresses Question 2: How do secondary social studies teacher educators approach the teaching of controversial issues in their courses? The teacher educators described strategies and assignments that aim to help preservice teachers develop and carry out their own controversial issues discussion. This section is broken down into three subthemes: Subtheme 2a: "Laying the Groundwork for Discussion," Subtheme 2b: "Understanding Controversial Issues and Examining Resources" and Subtheme 2c:

“Facilitating an Open Student-Centered Discussion.” Within Subtheme 2a, “Laying the Groundwork for Discussion,” I describe collaborative and personal strategies teacher educators use to prepare their preservice teachers to teach controversial issues. Many of the participants provide guidance on the foundational steps that need to be taken in the classroom and on their own before facilitating discussion. To guide preservice teachers in steering the discussion of controversial issues, the teacher educators explicitly modeled strategies and civil discourse statements to communicate to preservice teachers what they were doing and why.

Within Subtheme 2b, “Understanding Controversial Issues and Examining Resources,” I share how teacher educators create a classroom where critical conversations about issues of controversy can thrive. A few teacher educators focused on building a classroom culture in their classrooms through norm-building. They also designed identity exploration activities where preservice had the opportunity to reflect on their biases and awareness of the controversial issue. The teacher educators believed these learning experiences show preservice teachers how they can lay the groundwork for productive and civil conversations. Both community-building and individual exercises establish a trusting classroom culture and honor secondary students’ identities, which are foundational when discussing issues of controversy. As part of the discussion preparation stage, the teacher educators defined controversial issues for or with their preservice teachers. They also taught preservice teachers how to select appropriate issues. The teacher educators explored appropriate and unsuitable examples of controversial issues. They designed activities where preservice teachers searched for sources of information

that present multiple perspectives and suggested strategies for helping young students detect media bias.

In Subtheme 2c, “Facilitating an Open Student-Centered Discussion,” I describe findings from the majority of the teacher educators who emphasized the importance of fostering discussions in the classroom rather than debates. Several teacher educators provided their preservice teachers with discussion frameworks they could use in their future classrooms, such as the LET’S ACT (Listen and Love, Educate, Talk, Search, Analyze, Conclude through Deliberation, Take Action) Framework, Structured Academic Controversy, Fishbowl, Deliberation, and Socratic Seminar. A few teacher educators presented preservice teachers with various approaches for exploring multiple perspectives and supporting their secondary students in developing a nuanced understanding of an issue. Finally, the teacher educators explicitly modeled for preservice teachers how they can disclose their views while making sure to keep the discussion student-centered and open.

Subtheme 2a: Laying the Groundwork for Discussion

The majority of the teacher educators spoke about the foundational work that must be established in the classroom before launching into any discussion centered on controversial issues. The recommendations participants shared can be divided into two areas: *With Each Other* and *On Our Own*. *With Each Other* tasks consist of establishing ground rules for discussion and building a classroom community. *On Our Own* activities involve preservice teachers exploring their own identity, reflecting on their background knowledge and experience with an issue, or evaluating their own comfort level with the

issue. Six teacher educators said having these elements in place creates a “safe classroom environment” and is conducive to having open discussion about issues of controversy.

With Each Other. Half of the teacher educators described how they establish and reinforce parameters for discussion. Victoria indicated that discussion norms create the “zone for safe discussion” and must be in place before any controversy can be presented. Bianca and Kristen said they set discussion guidelines collaboratively with their preservice teachers. Kristen explained modeling norm-building “provides them [her preservice teachers] with a concrete model of what this might look and sound like” in their future classrooms. Before discussing anything that is controversial or something where students might not all hold the same opinion, Kristen would guide her preservice teachers in defining “what is and is not acceptable behaviors.” She recalled some rules that usually appear on the list: no put-downs, no personal or offensive remarks, and no interrupting. Her goal was to create a space where multiple perspectives are encouraged and valued.

Bianca followed a similar process. She shared by the time her preservice teachers enter her class, most of them know what norm-building means but few of them have actually participated in the process. During the first class meeting of the semester, she sets time aside time to brainstorm norms:

So, we do it and it’s a good 45 minutes to 1 hour time to have them [preservice teachers] in groups and talk about the most important things. Then groups all share out their top items or they share individually or in small groups. Small groups share out their biggest items. We add them to a whiteboard and live, I tried to consolidate and organize them based on what they have said. I have them

feedback on what we have drafted. “Are there any norms up here that that you don’t agree with or you what add or adjust?” In our first session with preservice teachers, someone called out one that was “assume the best intent.” So, at the end of the first session of the course, we had a draft, and I went through and organized what they had said in a way that I couldn’t do live. I presented that to them for feedback and we made a few adjustments in the next session. We put that up every class and midway through the semester, they reflected on how well they were doing that in the discussions that we were having in class. We gave ourselves something we were doing well, something we were going to keep working on.

Bianca considered the process of having her preservice teachers actively engage in “collective and collaborative” norm-building as “one of the most really powerful activities” in her course. She stated not only was norm-building important in the context of her course, which centers on current events and controversial issues throughout the semester, but for motivating students to do the same with their future secondary students. Bianca’s preservice teachers also felt going through the process of creating ground rules to be useful. “A lot of them [her preservice teachers] in their feedback to me or reflections on how the class was going, they talked about how those norms as being important for the space to feel productive.”

Four participants did not speak explicitly about establishing ground rules with their preservice teachers but shared their own approaches for the groundwork for productive critical conversations. Victoria, like Kristen, prioritized on cultivating a classroom culture that “emphasizes personal viewpoints.” To create a collaborative space

where those viewpoints are safely shared, she first develops preservice teachers' listening skills and respect for others' viewpoints:

So, we never really get to the controversies for at least a month and I work on listening skills. I work on empathy. We share personal stories. We journal. We write. I teach students how to listen to each other. We do a lot of face-to-face sharing, partnering.

During the first few class meetings, Xavier also focuses on training preservice teachers to listen and respect other people's viewpoints: "In order to deal effectively with emotive issues, students need to learn how to cooperate with each other, to communicate with each other or else you're not going to have an effective dialogue." Underpinning his discussions are two predefined rules: support your opinion with evidence and make sure your statements are respectful of other people in the class. Dominic also stressed a similar message of maintaining a respectful and safe environment to his preservice teachers: "I write this mantra on the board of what we go by, which is I care about you more and my ideas or can we try to care about the people in the classroom today, your peers, more than we care about the ideas that we have."

Stephen's strategy for building a strong classroom community involved the students "making connections" and "just getting to know one another." In the first class, the preservice teachers interviewed each other using 15 questions that he generates:

They can be like goofy ones like – if you could live in any fictional world, what world would you live in? What do you think is one of the biggest challenges of teaching social studies today?...So I give everybody [preservice teachers in his class] a question including myself and we spend a lot of time...just going around

and talking to each other one on one of interviewing each other using our single questions. To me, that's the foundation of everything that I'm able to do after that point because people know each other, people know each other's names, they know goofy and or serious ways that they might think the same.

Stephen understands “not all of the groundwork for critical conversations is laid in that moment” but by just investing time to make connections the activity provides an opportunity for preservice teachers to get to know themselves and their classmates in an authentic way. “The focus on the class is on the class as a community that's going to do work together.” The various strategies the teacher educators used to establish discussion guidelines demonstrate that creating a safe, collaborative, and respectful space is foundational for engaging in an open and productive dialogue about controversial issues.

On Our Own. A little more than half of the teacher educators designed learning experiences where preservice teachers explored their identities and reflected on their background knowledge or experience with a controversial issue. For these teacher educators, identity exploration and self-reflection were embedded into their course objectives. In Abigail's “Teaching for Secondary Social Studies” course, one of her objectives is for preservice to give serious consideration to the “various forces that shape and influence teachers' identifications and commitments” as well as to contemplate on “how they might find themselves in the “stuff” they are teaching.” She explained starting “with the person in front of the room” helps preservice teachers think carefully about their own identity and uncover unconscious biases and assumptions before engaging with critical topics in their classrooms.

Xavier's "Secondary Social Studies Education Methods" also centers on identity exploration so that preservice teachers understand how their beliefs and values influence the way in which we address and interact with young people. The course description in his syllabus states preservice teachers will answer these questions: How might attention to my values, assumptions, and understandings about how we might live in the world impact the discourse in my classroom? Whose past(s), present(s), and future(s), as well as whose stories are welcome in my social studies classroom? How might I invite an 'other' in? Xavier, like Abigail, felt teachers should continuously reflect on the relationship between their own beliefs and values as teachers and how these might relate to their handling of controversial issues. Engaging in reflection encourages preservice teachers to consider the implications for how they handle controversial issues in the classroom and school.

Three participants discussed specific identity exploration activities from their course. Preservice teachers in Geoffrey's "Social Studies in the Secondary Grades," create their own identity webs. First, the class brainstorms common identity categories such as ability, age, ethnicity, gender type, race, religion, sexual orientation, immigration status, etc. Each preservice teacher writes their name in the middle and "and then they put all the different ways they see themselves and all the different things that they do that creates their identity." Afterward, the class participates in an identity share. Preservice teachers take turns identifying two commonalities and differences from another classmate's web. "We want to celebrate the differences, not just the similarities," he explained. Geoffrey then asks preservice teachers to share identities that appear across many webs and identities that did not appear frequently or at all. The purpose of this

exercise is to model for preservice teachers how they can become aware of similarities and differences between people, improve their listening skills, and gain a sense of identity and self-worth.

In Hannah's "Methods for Teaching and Planning Secondary Social Studies Instruction," preservice teachers are asked to write an autobiographical paper. She provided a brief description of the assignment:

They reflect on how they have been influenced by their group affiliations, specific incidents that may have contributed to this awareness, and those aspects of their awareness that came from personal experiences, media, experts, peer group experiences, family interactions, and/or other sources.

The autobiography assignment offers preservice teachers the opportunity to explore and gain a better understanding of the intersection of their multiple identities.

In Nathan's "Secondary Social Studies Curriculum" course, preservice teachers create a "Culture Quilt" and write a reflection piece. For this visual art and writing assignment, preservice teachers "explore their personal histories and cultures, share with classmates, and brainstorm ideas to adapt this activity for secondary classroom use." The brief reflection summarizes follows a "What, So What, and Now What format."

Preservice teachers reflect on what they learned about themselves, explain why this is important to their teaching and learning, and consider how they can use their personal history and culture to inform their future teaching and learning.

Before beginning any discussion of a controversial issue, several teacher educators have preservice teachers reflect on how much they know about the issue and if they or anyone else they know has been affected by the issue. "Our classrooms are so

diverse today and students all bring a range of experiences and knowledge to a conversation,” stated Hannah. She believed part of creating a safe environment is getting to know students’ understanding of an issue. Hannah models for preservice teachers how to “grasp students’ [secondary-age students’] distinctive knowledge and questions around an issue” through individual questionnaires, a KWL (Know, Want to Know, Learned) chart, or a writing prompt. If the controversial issue is race-related, her preservice teachers write a short essay about their experiences with race throughout their entire life: “There are problems like, ‘What were your first experiences? What was your first time remembering that people have different skin colors?’ It gets people thinking about their own perceptions of race or whatever the issue is.” Hannah explained collecting as much knowledge as possible about what preservice teachers know or are personally connected to an issue “helps them see effective strategies for their future practice.”

Tyler enacts a comparable technique in his class. Prior to the conversation around the question, “Do you think Confederate monuments should come down?” he asked preservice teachers to write down their opinions and “emotional reactions” on a piece of paper with or without their name. He tells his class that they can use this information to anticipate if an issue might be problematic for young people due to their backgrounds, personal and cultural experiences, or emotional development. Tyler explained, “The last thing that you want is students feeling singled out without warning or put in an uncomfortable place.” Abigail has her preservice teachers identify their own perspective and point of view on a specific controversial issue through formal writing assignment. In approximately 250 words, they respond to this question: What is your opinion on the topic, and what informs that decision? Would you be upset if someone disagreed with

you? Why? She stated this activity helps preservice teachers discover how their personal experiences influence their position about an issue.

Victoria, in contrast to Hannah, Tyler, and Abigail encourage preservice teachers to collection information on secondary-age students' comfort level sharing their experiences. She introduces preservice teachers a variety of survey instruments, such as rating scales or questionnaires where preservice teachers share their degree of comfort about different topics. Victoria felt assessing young people's comfort level is "foundational before asking them to share their ideas and opinions" because teachers need to know how comfortable and familiar students [secondary-age students] are with complex issues. Morgan also agreed that taking the time to understand "what is actually going on for students [secondary-age students] and learn about their identities" is the "best way to talk about controversial issues." She maintained that taking into account the backgrounds of young people and their personal and cultural experience allows preservice teachers to grow into critical and conscientious educators. The identity exploration described in this section provide preservice teachers with an opportunity to self-reflect on their knowledge, experiences, and comfort level with a contested issue.

Subtheme 2b: Understanding Controversial Issues and Examining Resources

The teacher educators spoke about establishing a shared understanding of controversial issues and gathering a variety reliable resources before facilitating a controversial issues lesson with secondary-age students. I broke down the techniques and suggestions into four subsections: "Defining a Controversial Issue," "Exploring Examples of Controversial Issues," "Searching for Resources," and "Evaluating Media Sources." The first two areas present findings on how teacher educators help preservice

teachers understand what a controversial issue is and recognizing appropriate and inappropriate examples of issues. The third area describes teacher educators' strategies and assignments that engage preservice teachers in searching for different resources. The fourth area shows how two teacher educators guide their preservice teachers in evaluating the reliability of media sources.

Defining a Controversial Issue. The 12 participants described in-depth how they guide preservice teachers in distinguishing between good and poor examples of a controversial issue and eventually selecting an issue to frame their lesson around. The teacher educators start this conversation by either defining what a controversial issue is for preservice teachers or working with their secondary students to create a shared definition. Eleven participants used the former strategy. Hannah, Victoria, Stephen, and Xavier inform their preservice teachers that a controversial issue is centered on a policy. Xavier, for example, would tell his preservice teachers that controversy is “the government’s response to an issue, like climate change,” He stated providing an explicit definition of what a controversial issue is prevents both preservice teachers and young people from “making the mistake that broad topics, such as racism or climate change” are contested issues.

Victoria also preferred narrowing in on policies as her preservice teachers inaccurately list questions and topics dealing with human rights violations, hate, and extremism as controversial issues. “I need to get it out there right away and if I don’t, we’re opening the viewpoint that it’s okay and I don’t want to mislead them.” She pointed to the example of the United States detaining migrant children. “You have to teach that policy, that practice as a hateful practice.” Stephen as well defines in his

syllabus that controversial issues are “robust policy debates without a single answer.” Hannah felt it is important to clarify this from the beginning “or else you sort of get lost in the I don’t know; I feel this way. She, like Victoria, agreed that by focusing on policies, preservice teachers can minimize the likelihood of someone getting defensive.

Tyler, Kristen, and Dominic defined controversial issues for their preservice teachers as those which lend themselves to “multiple competing viewpoints” with no single solution. Tyler shared the definition he presents to his preservice teachers:

Controversial issues have inherent disagreement in the middle of it. They do not necessarily have to be salient as far as being in current events at the time or something that is in the news, but they have people coming from different viewpoints. It’s not yet resolved in policy. It’s not yet resolved historically.

Nathan and Bianca use Diana Hess’s definition of a controversial issue as being *open*, *settled*, or *tipping*. Bianca stated, “I lean on and encourage students to utilize Hess’s framework. This shows them [preservice teachers] some things that used to be controversial are no longer controversial.” Nathan said he likes drawing on Hess’s definition because preservice teachers recognize that controversial issues are “contingent in society and in time and place.” Bianca expressed a similar line of thought in explaining why she encourages preservice teachers to use Hess’s definition. “I want students [preservice teachers] to know that issues can be context-dependent, right? It depends on where you are. It depends on the population that you’re serving. Some things might be controversial to some institutions and it might not be in others. I think it’s really place dependent.” In contrast to the other participants, Abigail and Morgan focus their preservice teachers on understanding controversial issues from an emotional standpoint.

In her syllabus, Abigail states controversial issues “have a highly emotional component and evokes strong emotions.” Morgan presents a similar definition. She said controversial issues “make people irrationally angry and activates a backfire effect where it refuses to hear the other perspective because it doesn’t fit into the worldview.”

Only one participant co-constructed a definition with their preservice teachers. Geoffrey asks his preservice teachers to write down their definition for how they think they would define the word controversial and provide five controversial issues. Next, the preservice teachers have five to seven minutes to jot down as many controversial issues as they can. Then, he posts their initial ideas on the board and begins a discussion on what makes something controversial. “These are things of different ranges up there like climate change to abortion – across the spectrum.” Afterward, the class starts to create a definition of controversial issues and interrogating whether they think some of these issues should be categorized as controversial if they think that is appropriate. Geoffrey explains this process helps him to gain background information on preservice teachers’ thinking and develop a shared and refined understanding of the term, controversial issues. Whether the teacher educators chose to supply preservice teachers with a definition or co-construct a collective definition, foundational for a controversial issues discussion to take place is establishing an agreed-upon explanation of this term.

Exploring Examples of Controversial Issues. Four teacher educators described assignments or classroom activities where preservice teachers select controversial issues as part of a larger project. One of Nathan’s assignments in his “Secondary Social Studies Methods” is for preservice teachers to create a controversial issues primer that teachers can use to teach about a particular controversial issue. The first portion tasks preservice

teachers with selecting a controversial issue. He said he recently decided to include a few examples of suitable and unsuitable questions on the assignment outline to guide their selection process. In previous semesters, preservice teachers would choose issues that did not open a variety of ways people can think about addressing the issue:

I had a student [a preservice teacher] who chose healthcare, but healthcare is not a controversial issue, but it's whether or not we should have universal healthcare. That's not controversial to me, but to some people that's controversial [laugh] so this idea that this is not necessarily settled. Another one was "Whose historical experience was worse: Native Americans or African Americans?" This wasn't good because trauma is not comparable. This question also doesn't achieve anything by being answered.

Nathan stated he understands that different people have different conceptions of what they consider to be controversial but felt it was necessary to clarify "what is and is not controversial." When a preservice teacher crafted the question, "Is climate change happening," Nathan guided her in reworking it so that it lends itself to multiple perspectives and solutions. "I asked her: Do we have the answer to this? Yes, scientific research demonstrates that we know that it is happening. What are we concerned about?" Nathan shared these questions helped the preservice teachers recognize that the controversy lies with how our federal government should respond to the threat of climate change.

Abigail designed a similar activity. For Stage 1 of her "Teaching Controversial Topics Assignment," preservice teachers pick a current issue or event from Canada or the United States. Like Nathan's assignment, she stipulated that the issue must be specific

and contain multiple perspectives. Abigail said she gives preservice teachers the example of marijuana legalization:

Marijuana legalization has been an issue in both Canada and the United States.

Legal marijuana became available for recreational consumers in the state of Colorado in 2014, and this has likely influenced 2016 decisions in California, as well as federal politics in Canada as seen in the 2015 election.

Kristen, Stephen, and Tyler mentioned they encourage preservice teachers to select and explore local issues when planning their lessons because secondary-age students are especially concerned about changing current prevailing problems in their communities. “Most students [secondary-age students] don’t know about local issues and they very much need to read the local papers.” One of Tyler’s preservice teachers expressed an interest in teaching a lesson about “the most controversial thing about Civil Rights or modern-day political controversies.” in his student-teaching placement classroom. Tyler advised him to instead dissect local election results with the secondary-age students as would be “much more relevant” for them. During the next class, the preservice teacher told Tyler the secondary students in his field placement classroom found it fascinating that wards in certain cities which have “the highest voter turnouts also get the most money for road repairs.” They realized how voting can help fix roads in their community.

Stephen described how he drew his preservice teachers attention to local problem happening in Maine:

They have this power grid that they want to connect hydroelectric power in Québec to the main power lines that go down to Maine and that’s been like a huge

controversial issue because on one hand it's reducing greenhouse gasses in Maine and its creating jobs but are those jobs that are being created going to be longer than two years or however long it's going to take to build it. Is this power going to be benefitting Maine or is it just creating an eye sore through the forest? It's a hot button issue in Maine right now.

He shared that in doing so, his preservice teachers began exploring the lobster industry and white whales. One of this preservice teachers created the question, "Do we need to save white whales, or do we need to save the livelihood of lobsters?" for a ninth grade lesson plan that he was going to teach during his fieldwork placement. Stephen's recalled his preservice teacher sharing that the ninth graders were "highly engaged" in the inquiry. In Kristen's course, there is a two-week unit where the class explores a variety of issues in their local community. During one semester, preservice teachers examined issues surrounding homelessness in their community. This was a current event at the time and she wanted her preservice teachers to take a closer look at the more controversial aspects surrounding the particular issue:

We [Kristen and her preservice teachers] visited, it's not a shelter, but it's a space for people experiencing homelessness but also to help them find access to resources. We went and visited there. We sat with a panel of people who shared the space and they just shared their wife stories with us.

Kristen said the experience helped the preservice teachers discover that their mayor was pushing for a policy that would prevent homeless individuals from congregating in the parks and community. This sparked questions among the preservice teachers: "Should he be allowed to tell people that they are not allowed to sit in a public space? How can we

look at this from different stakeholders' perspectives?" When the preservice teachers had to develop a controversial issues lesson plan later in the semester, Kristen noticed lessons framed around examining how the local government can better address the magnitude of the situation and assessing the benefits and problems with current policies. Overall, when teaching preservice teachers how to select appropriate issues, they emphasized on choosing issues that are relevant, involve multiple perspectives, and stimulate deep thinking about the best solutions.

Searching for Resources. Approximately half of the teacher educators discussed learning experiences where their preservice teachers searched for and examined a variety of sources. Kristen and Abigail first model for the preservice teachers how they can select resources. Kristen's "number one resource" that she uses in her class is NewsELA, a learning platform that provides news articles and assessment for students in grades 2-12. She shows her preservice teachers how to navigate through the website and then provides opportunities in class for them to practice looking for articles in small groups. Kristen said, "When we get to planning the controversial issues lesson, they'll know how to locate good articles independently."

Abigail brings in guest speakers, videos, poetry, and articles that present different perspectives and then send preservice teachers off to gather appropriate resources in Stage 3 of the Controversial Topics Assignment. She explained this type of guidance "helps them figure out how to collect resources before they send off their own future students to collect them." Abigail recommends to preservice teachers that they differentiate their strategies based on their secondary students' levels of experience with the issue at hand. With less experienced secondary students who have not been watching

the news before or reading through social media, she suggested providing them with a source, whether that is projecting it on the whiteboard or giving them a handout.

Experienced secondary students could have the opportunity to find and sift through reliable sources of information for themselves.

After modeling how to incorporate a variety of sources when studying a controversial issue, Abigail has her preservice teachers begin Stage 3 of the Controversial Topics Assignment, where they find three articles from news sources. Two of the sources must be from sources that tend to disagree on some level with each other (e.g., one from Fox News and the other from MSNBC). The third must be from a source outside of the United States and Canada (e.g., Al Jazeera, the Guardian, etc.), but can fall into any ideological (or other) category:

You also want to find something that's also going to take a little bit more of a bird's eye and tie some threads together and kind of complicate it. I think it's counterproductive to have radically one side and radically another side. You have to pepper it with some things in between. We practice searching for those sources which I think will help give advice to their future students.

Similar to Abigail's assignment, Nathan also asks preservice teachers to locate resources that present a variety of viewpoints about the controversial issue they choose for their Controversial Issues Primer. His assignment, in contrast, asked preservice teachers to collect three teacher sources that will help them build their own background knowledge and three sources for secondary students to build their own background knowledge. In addition to teaching preservice teachers how to locate resources that present various

perspectives, there are a few teacher educators who model for preservice teacher how they can use these sources to develop students' media literacy skills.

Evaluating Media Sources. Hannah and Morgan spoke in depth about how they train preservice teachers to evaluate the reliability of media content so that they can in turn teach secondary students how to engage critically with the media. Hannah facilitates an activity over a few class meetings where her preservice teachers critically analyze the media and explore issues around fake news. Preservice teachers are organized into groups of three and given different news articles around one event. In their groups they discuss questions, some of which include: What is the source of the article? What are the views/biases of this organization? What does the author say? Does he/she present facts or opinions? Was anything important left out? Did the author use biased, emotive, or inflammatory language? Is the author trustworthy? Afterward, each group presents the news article and discusses whether there are differences between the sources presenting the same story.

The lesson, Hannah explained, is targeted toward middle and secondary students, but “models concretely for preservice teachers what this looks like in practice.” She said, every time she teaches this lesson, her preservice teachers' opinions and judgements about the topical issue or news story changes as a result of thinking more critically. She stated she hopes her preservice teachers receive this takeaway as a result of the experience:

Media spaces spend a lot of time telling you what to think about certain issues.

So, I try to gauge students on sort of opening up the hood and becoming media

experts. If I do that, then they'll go into their classrooms and know how to help their students tell facts apart from untruths.

With her preservice teachers, Morgan emphasizes that in this time of fake news, it is important for teachers and young people to be “diagnostic about the information they consume.” That said, she devotes “a large portion” of her course toward evaluating media content with this question in mind: “Where is the bias here?” She would bring in transcripts from *The Blaze* and *The Raw Story* to present examples of sources that are not conducive to a productive and meaningful discussion because they do not present a nuanced understanding of an issue. “If you really think about the adjectives that they’re using and the adverbs and so on you can sort of determine their position.” She also has preservice teachers work in small groups to select sources that provide background information about a particular controversial issue and then assess whether or not or why each of the sources would provide a generative discussion. Preservice teachers are asked to consider the following questions: Who might feel uncomfortable by the article, and why? If it might cause discomfort, do they need to feel uncomfortable to learn something important? What care can you provide to support them through that discomfort? If you anticipate the article to be non-threatening, why do you assume that? Hannah and Morgan’s activities concretely show preservice teachers how they can help young people critically analyze, question, and evaluate news sources.

Subtheme 2c: Facilitating an Open Student-Centered Discussion

When speaking about the most effective ways to structure the learning experience of a controversial issue, the teacher educators underscored the importance of fostering an open dialogue centered on helping preservice teachers gain new understandings of issues

and formulating evidence-based opinions. The approaches the teacher educators shared for facilitating an open student-centered discussion can be divided into three subsections: “Promoting Discussion Not Debate,” “Using Discussion Frameworks and Strategies,” “Including Multiple Perspectives,” and “Handling Teacher Disclosure.” In the first two subsections, the teacher educators explain why discussion as opposed to debate is a more suitable learning approach when handling contested issues. The subsequent subsection builds on the previous section by describing various effective discussion strategies teacher educators use in their classrooms. In the third subsection, I present findings where the teacher educators discussed how they guide their preservice teachers in examining multiple perspectives of an issue and developing a nuanced understanding of individuals and groups. The fourth and last subsection describes the teachers’ suggestions and techniques for disclosing their opinions. Most of the participants preferred to be transparent about their stance with students. However, they should encourage their preservice teachers to first consider the implications of disclosure on maintaining an open conversation and promoting student voice.

Promoting Discussion Not Debate. The majority of the teacher educators emphasized the importance of fostering discussions about controversial issues instead of debates, as each format has a different end goal, conversational flow, and level of openness. Morgan provided an example to show why she believes debates about issues of controversy are unsuitable:

There are these things that we might discuss with ground rules, for example, about what are the affordances and constraints of having a high minimum wage. You can have a discussion with ground rules, for example, about what are the

affordances and constraints of having a high minimum wage, but you can't debate it. That could get really disrespectful really quickly and make the environment not very welcoming.

She stated there are many different points of view, and you can make arguments for or against but does not feel we can make arguments about something that "is so fundamentally important to someone's existence." Kristen, in making distinction between the two structures, also illustrates why debates do not lead to an open conversation:

My students [preservice teachers] often conflate these terms [debate and discussion] and we talk about that. With debate, there is a goal. Somebody's argument is going to win. With discussion, the end goal is not that somebody wins. The end goal is that we take the time to understand how other people, how other individuals and other groups perceive this issue differently and ultimately, we're able to work across those different perspectives in order to come up with alternative solutions. This is really the essence of all democracy of a democratic republic. The goal is not to change their mind.

Kristen brings in video clips of presidential debates and discussions for her preservice teachers to view. She asks them to identify the differences between the two formats and conclude which is more appropriate and conducive to a fruitful examination of controversial issues. When she asked her preservice teachers to justify their decision, Kristen recalled some of them expressing thoughts along these lines: "The goal is to have an informed discussion and to listen and learn from others. There shouldn't be any winners or losers."

Nathan strives to steer his preservice teachers away from using debates when studying controversial issues as well. “When—throughout K-12—whenever something like a controversial issue comes up, the teacher would usually say, let’s debate this. Well, no, you don’t want to debate this. In a debate, you are trying to win.” Similar to Kristen, he references the presidential debates:

Like when Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton were debating in 2016, they were trying to change each other’s minds. They were not trying to get a better understanding of the issue at hand. They were trying to win the point. That’s not the goal with controversial issues.

Nathan believes discussions, unlike debates, push individuals to branch out from their own perspective and beliefs. Individuals have the opportunity to obtain a more nuanced understanding of any given issue, to better understand the whole picture of the issue and see where other people are coming from. Xavier is also “a big fan of discussion.” Like Kristen and Nathan, he informs his preservice teachers when addressing controversial issues in their future classrooms, they should bear in mind that the end goal is not to persuade people that one view is correct. Rather, the goal should be a “continuous effort to understand what each other’s viewpoints are” and developing a better understanding of why we hold the beliefs that we do.

Abigail and Geoffrey shared similar views as the previous teacher educators but acknowledged that some individuals have difficulty showing an openness to ideas that are different from our own. Abigail explained:

When we encounter someone with a different perspective, with a different worldview from ours, it has the same effect because our worldviews protect us

from the fact that we are conscious of our own death if left to our own devices. Whether you're encountering or reading something that you really disagree with at your core which is at the heart of contested issues, you will self-segregate, like you will stay with your worldview groups and farther away from other people who disagree with you.

Geoffrey agreed, stating people have a general reluctance to change their worldview. They find it threatening and feel it is "safest to stay in it." Abigail and Geoffrey felt when a person is reluctant to alter or even consider another person's point of view, they are more prone to insult the other side, be heavily invested in converting them to their side, or might seek to actually eliminate those people.

Geoffrey along with Kristen and Dominic described the strategies they model to help preservice teachers demonstrate a willingness to listen to opposing voices and learn about different beliefs and values. Kristen reinforces to her preservice teachers that "discomfort leads to learning." It is often uncomfortable to be in spaces where everyone is not just like us or does not think exactly like the way we do. However, through that discomfort that we grow as human beings. "I tell them to put themselves in spaces where you're not the majority, where you're your voice is not 100 percent validated. It's okay being in those spaces."

Dominic focuses his preservice teachers' attention on recognizing "how disagreement and multiple perspectives can instead be a source of strength to build relationships rather than a source of divisiveness." Dominic instills the goal of "moving towards each other" with his preservice teachers. He tells his preservice teachers "we may never come in complete alignment, but I think our goal is to reach understanding of

each other.” Dominic models this by weaving discussion phrases such as “What are your thoughts on this? What are your thoughts on that? I disagree with that statement, but thanks for sharing” which develops his preservice teachers’ mindset that everyone’s perspective is welcomed and disagreement is okay. He explains, “Because my goodness, we’re 20 people with 20-year history 25-year histories. We’re not going to see everything the same and neither are students [secondary-age students].” Overall, the teacher educators underscore to their preservice teachers that in order for democracy to work, individuals have to place more emphasis on thoughtfully listening to one another’s opinion and reaching a compromise than attempting to persuade others that their view is correct.

Using Discussion Frameworks and Strategies. In their syllabus and during the interviews, several teacher educators described the various discussion structures they model in their classroom and encourage preservice teachers to use in their lesson plans around a controversial issue. Victoria and Nathan both considered the learning strategy, Structured Academic Controversy (SAC), a viable approach for moving young people beyond debates and toward understanding several points of view. Nathan explained “it is designed to force students [secondary-age students] outside of their own personal bubble and personal worldview to at least expose them to the other side of the argument.” Victoria considered SAC “one of the most amazing and wonderful things you’ll ever see in a classroom. She modeled SAC in her classroom during one session of her “Black Lives Matter” unit. The question she posed was: How should we treat the Black Lives Matter protestors? Victoria said, “everyone was eye-to-eye” and equal participants in the discussion regardless of age, race, ability, or gender. The preservice teachers were all

equal participants in the discussion regardless if they were “a parent, a black student, a student in a wheelchair.” Both Victoria and Nathan agreed SAC is effective for showing preservice teachers and young people that the goal in discussion is not to change each other’s minds but at least expose them to other perspectives, which will bolster their own thinking. Victoria also introduces preservice teachers to other discussion strategies such as seminars, town halls, large/small groups, and inquiry throughout the semester.

As part of her class’ exploration on the question: What are Citizens’ Responsibilities in Ending Hunger, Kristen engages preservice teachers in various types of structured classroom discussions that could be utilized in secondary education. Her preservice teachers are assigned to one of four types of discussion (Fishbowl, Deliberation, Socratic Seminar, or Structured Academic Controversy). Each group is given a guiding question such as “Should food pantries reject donations of unhealthy/non-nutritious foods? What are the best things we can do as university students to assist our local food bank? How can food pantries provide more nutritious food to their clients? What are Citizens’ Responsibilities in Ending Hunger?”

Kristen explained preservice teachers are asked to come to the session having already reviewed the assigned reading that address their guiding question and an understanding of their assigned discussion strategy. During the class session, each group has approximately 5-7 minutes to engage in their discussion. For the Fishbowl Discussion, a student takes on one of the four perspectives: nutritionist, food bank operator, person who uses a foodbank, and person who donates to a foodbank. The goal of the Deliberation group is to agree on a feasible action plan/make a decision regarding the guiding question. Preservice teachers in the Socratic Seminar and SAC groups

support and refute both the pro and con related to the guiding question. Kristen shared this activity exposes preservice teachers to different types of effective discussion strategies that “develop active listening skills, focuses on understanding, and provides everyone with a chance to contribute.” She said after the experience, preservice teachers leave with a deeper and more complex grasp of the complex situation, which would not have been achieved through a debate.

Hannah uses the LET’S ACT (Listen and Love, Educate, Talk, Search, Analyze, Conclude through Deliberation, Take Action) Framework in her course to guide preservice teachers in their efforts when exploring controversial issues in their classrooms. She explained the *Talk, Search and Analyze*, and *Conclude through Deliberation* components focus on facilitating a “structured discussion-oriented activity” where students speak in small groups about the issue without having to declare their own position right away. Hannah described how she demonstrates the three stages of the LET’S ACT Framework in her classroom for her preservice teachers:

If we’re [Hannah and the preservice teachers in her class] exploring the controversy with Colin Kaepernick taking the knee, I look up perspectives on this. I print out each perspective on a separate paper. My students work together to sort the perspectives on a spectrum: pro-Kaepernick vs. anti-Kaepernick perspectives; legal vs. moral vs. emotional perspectives, etc. They evaluate evidence in each perspective and sort each position along the spectrum according to the strength or validity of evidence.

She compares the Talk phase to Socratic Seminars. It is not intended to spark debate on the issue, but rather to give preservice teachers and young people a better sense of the issue itself and the range of perspectives on the topic.

Reflecting on her preservice teachers' reactions to the activity, Hannah shared that every time "they're like, "Oh my gosh, I never thought about this perspective is that why they are so against this or for that? I literally didn't know that was the reason." For the *Conclude through Deliberation*, Hannah gives her preservice teachers the opportunity to draw conclusions around what they believe should be done about the problem through deliberation—a discussion that aims at deciding on a plan of action that will address a problem:

I present a specific question that addresses the issue. For example, "Should Kaepernick and other players who kneel during the national anthem be penalized for kneeling? I give them time to prepare pro or con statements with evidence.

Then I use a fishbowl or some other structured strategy to facilitate the discussion.

Hannah said she received positive feedback from her students with regard to this exercise. One of her past preservice teachers said it helped him see how he could scaffold his students toward taking a stance on an issue, weigh evidence from multiple sources, and develop their citizenship skills. The discussion frameworks described promote cooperation over competition and understanding over disagreement.

Including Multiple Perspectives. A few teacher educators mentioned that presenting and unpacking a variety of viewpoints is a key component of fostering an open discussion about a controversial issue. The representation of a range of perspectives from different groups deepens young students' understanding of the complex issue while

reducing unconscious or unconscious prejudice against an individual or a group. During the unit titled, “Diversity and Difficult Histories in Social Studies Education,” Tyler said he does “a lot with representation in social studies and how do we critically analyze sources to understand whose experiences are valued and whose are left out.” The preservice teachers read the works of Ladson-Billings (2003), Stanton (2019), and Cruz and Bailey (2017) to guide their efforts in identifying whose narrative is being told in social studies and which voices are silenced. He said his goal is to “help students [preservice teachers] uncover and hear traditional and marginalized oppressed voices so that they can integrate that into the actual work that we [teachers] do.”

Morgan follows a similar approach in her course. A major goal of her course, as stated in her syllabus, is to empower preservice teachers to upend oppression embedded in social studies education. Morgan recalled feeling frustrated during her high school teaching years when she realized neither the Mashantucket Pequot Nation nor the Mohican indigenous Nations were presented in the social studies curriculum. She believed this was problematic as where she lived and taught was between the geographic location of the two nations:

There was this invisibility and an erasure of the indigeneity of our place and space. That really frustrated me and students [Morgan’s secondary social studies students]. Those tribal nations in our schools and in our classrooms were not getting to see their own cultures represented. When we were talking about the American Revolution or first contact, there were students from Mashantucket Pequot nation in the room in there like, “Um, hello? Like we were actually here.”

That was never in the curriculum and people did not want to talk about it in staff meetings. I was like, “What’s happening?”

As a teacher educator, she decided to focus on the representations of indigenous peoples and nations in social studies curriculum and supporting future teachers on how to make decisions about and for indigenous issues and indigenous students in communities.

During a unit of study about a local issue, she invited her preservice teachers to list various groups and individuals who might be impacted by the situation. “I wasn’t surprised that they immediately thought of the big companies and environmentalists, but I used this as an opportunity to think about the varying Indigenous perspectives.” Morgan stated in so doing, her preservice teachers gained awareness of how their reservations are negatively affected. She said she also brought in companies that do seem to care about the environment to prevent students from taking on a generalized view of one group.

Similar to Morgan, Xavier and Victoria guide their preservice teachers in considering a wide range of perspectives around a controversial issue, not just two points of view. During a study on the United States invasion of Afghanistan, his preservice teachers read George Bush’s speech explaining to the nation why we should not invade Afghanistan and a letter in Howard Zinn’s book, titled “Not in Our Son’s Name.” The letter is written by a family whose son had died on 9/11 and explain their opposition to the invasion of Afghanistan. They did not want a war fought in their son’s name. Xavier would then ask his students to think about other stakeholders who might have been linked to the issue and search for statements or documents from these individuals. For instance, he would ask, “How does Colin Powell justify this?” Over the course of the discussion if students are dismissing what Robert Byrd said, he says, “You know how long have these

wars been going on? Who might disagree? In retrospect, were they right or were they wrong? What evidence do we have that will help us answer that question?” Xavier explained the process of continuously inspecting multiple perspective documents ensures these positions are introduced and deepens students’ understanding of the controversial issues.

Victoria described how she guides her preservice teachers in researching the multiple and competing viewpoints as well as the nuances of the issues they were examining. In Victoria’s class, she assumes the role of the opposing perspective or one of the nuanced perspectives if she notices consensus among students or when students are mostly considering the views of the school, community, or officials. “Bringing in multiple and competing viewpoints brings out the nuances of issues and where people might have disagreements on” she explains. Without disagreement a discussion cannot ensue.

Several participants also said they strive for their preservice teachers to develop a nuanced understanding of individuals and groups. Geoffrey explained: “None of us can be boiled down to a single factor or ourselves.” Abigail establishes a rule in her class where they replace the phrase “the blank perspective” with words like “some.” She also models this way of speaking: “Some but not all think this and some but not all say that. So, some but not all liberals will argue this and others that and some but not all conservatives will see this and that.” Another rule that she has is adding an “s” especially when talking about a broad group, such as Indigenous people. “Where I am, there are countless communities and they don’t necessarily agree on the same things we do.” That said, she reinforces to preservice teachers that they should try not to flatten it into “the

Indigenous perspective” and instead talk about multiple Indigenous perspectives. Abigail understands that it sounds cumbersome to say at first but after a while it “kind of rolls off the tongue” and changes the flow of the conversation. To support her efforts, she assigns the TED Talk, *The Danger of a Single Story* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie for students to watch and uses this video as an anchor for the talk about perspectives.

Afterward, she asks preservice teachers to write a “thoughtbook” entry on how they can welcome a variety of voices into their classrooms in humble and respectful ways. In this assignment, preservice teachers should include techniques to help themselves and their secondary students engage more thoughtfully with developing a nuanced understanding of different groups. Kristen agreed that emphasizing the idea of “nuanced understandings” to preservice teachers raises their awareness about multiple truths in current events and history. In her syllabus, she expressed the view that social studies is not black and white and not a memorization and regurgitation of facts. Social studies is gray and how each group or individual experienced that is different.

Two participants specified, however, that asking young people to explore multiple perspectives must be handled carefully when studying traumatic events and not employed altogether when addressing subjects that deal with issues of power, discrimination or where cultures are trivialized and simplified. Xavier illustrated this point by reflecting on a moment where he was helping a preservice teacher revise her lesson on slavery and incorporated multiple perspectives into the discussion activity. He explained to her that “you cannot tell your students [secondary-age students] to look at the multiple perspectives on slavery. There are no multiple perspectives on slavery. Slavery is horrific.” He mentioned this applies to the European Holocaust as well: “Multiple

perspectives is not on how the Holocaust happened. It happened. It's not whether it was good or bad. It was bad." Instead, he directs his preservice teachers to focus on the multiple perspectives of "why do things like this happen." With this approach, he establishes the indisputable fact that slavery and the Holocaust were horrific events and focuses the preservice teachers' attention on understanding why they happened and looking at different possible explanations, as these questions lend themselves to multiple viewpoints.

Bianca expressed a similar perspective. "There are times when it's appropriate to have students take on perspectives and there are times when it isn't." She informs her preservice teachers that it is inappropriate to take on racist or discriminatory ideas, acting in the role of an oppressor, when an exercise suggests ignorance or passivity on the subject of oppressed people or on the part of oppressed people, when an act reflects victimization or romanticizes conflict. Additionally, she cautions them against having young people take on perspectives that trivialize a culture or involves practices and beliefs that others consider sacred. For the teacher educators, bringing in multiple perspectives and multiple ways of looking at situations help to broaden preservice teachers' worldviews.

Handling Teacher Disclosure. All of the 12 teacher educators unanimously agreed that preservice teachers must give careful consideration to their own role in teaching controversial issues. Young people will find out eventually their teacher's position through the curricular and instructional decisions they make. The majority of the participants said preservice teachers should be open and honest about their opinion but model how they reached their position. Several teacher educators felt opinion sharing is

contextual and preservice teachers should consider certain factors before disclosing their stance. Part of keeping the discussion student-centered is knowing when it is and is not appropriate for teachers to share their positions. Xavier was the only teacher educator who indicated that he does not add his point of view: “It’s not necessary because there are primary source documents that students [preservice teachers and secondary students] can read and analyze and compare which introduces them to multiple perspectives.” His point of view is reflected in one or more of the documents that he brings on but does not introduce them to students as his point of view.

Three participants said their preservice teachers generally felt they have to remain neutral on all issues. In response, the teacher educators state it is “virtually impossible” for teachers to remain neutral on a particular issue. Dominic said, “I very much have this idea about neutrality that I tell my preservice teachers. It’s impossible. I say that out-front.” Abigail elaborated on Dominic’s thinking when she stated, “if you think you are being unbiased then you are being biased. We talk about situated knowledges or strong objectivity.” She clarifies to her preservice teachers that each person has biases and if we think otherwise that is actually more dangerous than if acknowledging it and keeping it in check. Our perspective, values, and beliefs are revealed through the tone we use, the language we use, body language. She illustrates this in the following example:

So, say if a student [secondary-age student] asks who you are going to vote for in the next election and you’re just like “Oh well...” You just skirt the question or whatever. The verbs that you choose when talking about the different candidates or political parties, the sources that you’re bringing in when you talk to me about current events, and so on will implicitly tell them who you are voting for.

Abigail mentioned her preservice teachers saying they need to be neutral in the classroom. In response, she asks, “Well can you do that? I think it’s really hard to strip your identity when you walk into the classroom.” From here, she would springboard into a conversation with her preservice teachers on identity, specifically discussing “who we are, what shapes our perspectives, what shapes the way we understand the world, the way we understand people, the way people understand us.” She also speaks with her preservice teachers about unconscious bias and how that shapes how we understand things and how we understand people, the world, and the material we grapple. She recalled that by the end of the course, her preservice teachers view on neutrality shifts.

Abigail along with a few other teacher educators believed secondary-age students will eventually discern their teacher’s positions because our personal views are revealed in a variety of ways to students, whether we choose to remain neutral or conceal our stance. Abigail said, “I mean, kids aren’t stupid. They’re going to know what you think.” Geoffrey agrees, stating that young people, regardless of the age, are incredibly intelligent. “Based on the way – all the buzzwords that we use, all our language is so loaded, and it leans towards a certain perspective. So, it’s really impossible to be absolutely objective.” Similarly, Kristen pointed out how her preservice teachers and secondary-age students would know what her opinion was before “even beginning the conversation” because of the content she incorporated in her classes:

My students [preservice teachers] have a pretty good idea of what I value just based on the content that I teach. Your students [secondary-age students] get an idea of who you are even just with what you choose to teach in your classroom and how you choose to teach it. My class [social studies methods course] is very

heavy on examining Civil Rights across time...So they know that social justice and civil rights is really at the core of who I am. For my undergrads, they know...We've done a concept lesson on refugees where they've really examined the experiences of refugees from different parts of the world and it's really relevant in the news, right?...I guarantee they know my opinion, they know that I've protested should refugees be able to enter our country. When Trump had initially put in the ban for people to come in from Iran—I don't remember the countries that were put under that ban, but I'm open with them about who I am so I told them, I went down to O'Hare Airport and I protested with thousands of people when that happened. You're essentially telling people that they're not welcomed here when they have done nothing wrong.

Because her course content is tied to her personal values and beliefs, she felt “it was totally impossible to dwell in that neutral space.”

Morgan also recognized that it is unrealistic for teachers to be neutral about issues of controversy. Like the previous teacher educators, she felt secondary-age will figure out a teacher's opinion or one way or another “so they might as well share it.” Similar to Geoffrey's comment about students' perceptivity, she said “they're [secondary-age students] really really good at reading a teacher” will figure it out in a matter of time. Morgan, like Abigail and Kristen, felt a teacher's beliefs and opinions about an issue will be “revealed in one way or another” through every piece of curriculum and resource that is used as well as how the teacher plans the learning experience.

Five teacher educators advise their preservice teachers to be open and honest about their opinions. When Tyler's preservice teachers ask how they should handle

disclosure, he provides the same response: “be transparent.” He stated he is an “open book to his students [secondary-age students] about how he feels about most controversies.” He felt teachers gain more of their students’ trust in them when they are upfront with their opinions. “You buy in more so than if you were closed off.” Additionally, if teachers do not share their viewpoints with students and choose not to explain why, teachers widen the distance between themselves and their students. “You are acting like you are separating your own humanity and your own engagement with these political issues which are pervasive from them, so you are like living in a different world from the students.”

Stephen said he does not mind his preservice teachers or secondary-age students asking him about any topic as well. When one of his high school students asked him how he felt about drone use in the military, he openly shared his views and what shaped them. Stephen explained he would rather be honest about his opinion on an issue because “it offers new understandings and perspectives on an issue.” Nathan reasoned just as we ask young people to share their opinion, we should be open in sharing ours too. He remembered hearing teachers say, “Oh I can’t tell you” but then they will ask the student [a secondary-age student] “What do you think?” Nathan considered this a problematic power imbalance because the first thing that secondary-age students typically inquire about when talking about a controversial issue is what teachers think. In order to have an authentic conversation about a particular issue with students he, like the previous teacher educators affirm that teachers should be transparent with their perspective.

Several teachers discussed how they modeled “using disclosure as a teaching tool,” as Victoria puts it, if choosing to disclose their position on a controversial issue.

When teaching an election, for example, Victoria informs her preservice teachers that telling secondary-age students her true feelings about the 45th president of the United States, Donald Trump, which is, “he is a hateful, awful man” and she hopes “that he gets prosecuted for his hate crime” is not an appropriate viewpoint in the classroom context. She makes her preservice teachers aware that there will be young people who support President Trump and “we have to honor this even though we might feel differently.” Victoria advises preservice teachers to instead “to connect with those students whose families support Donald Trump” and “strive to understand why.” With this approach, teachers bring out secondary-age students who might be reluctant discussers and those students trust her to speak out. She also explained including the opposing views in the classroom cultivates discussion about a controversy. Students on both sides trusted her to protect their view and make sure it’s safe for them to talk.

Half of the teacher educators stated they model for preservice teachers how they can share their stances with their secondary-age while still maintaining a discussion space where multiple perspectives are welcomed. During a discussion on the Trump wall, Hannah modeled how she would share her stance with students:

I tend to think the wall is probably not a good idea because people will still get over anyway well whatever but I’m really open to hearing what you guys think because my mind is always I’m always able to change my mind.

In Stephen and Nathan’s classes, the two teacher educators modeled for preservice teachers how they can share their viewpoint in a respectful way. When discussing a controversial issue, Stephen would state his position followed by this statement: “This is how I think and feel about it. It might not be the same as yours. It may be different.” He

believed using this language shows preservice teachers how they can effectively share their opinion with young people while making it clear to them that they are open to hearing their views as well. This was also one of Stephen's goals in his course. In his syllabus, he states that he hopes his preservice teachers become comfortable enough with one another to challenge and interrogate each other's ideas so that they, in turn, will be encouraged to do the same in their future classrooms.

Nathan shares his position with preservice teachers followed by a statement showing his openness to hearing different opinions:

This is what I believe but it doesn't necessarily mean that it's right. When you are dealing with a controversial open issue, there is more than one rational viewpoint here and I want to hear what you have to say about it as well. I am not going to penalize you if you believe something different from me.

Nathan said this message "develops nuance in thinking and an ability to talk across the differences." Stephen and Nathan's approaches clarify to preservice teachers that everyone's viewpoint will not always align due to different values, beliefs and experiences. The purpose in sharing their positions is to demonstrate to preservice teachers how they can effectively disclose their opinion in a way that does not impede upon an open conversation.

Geoffrey structures each unit in his course around a central investigative question. When answering the overarching question, such as "Are humans a cancer on the planet?" he models what it means to have an opinion that is grounded evidence and makes sure to convey a willingness to change his position. "I think yes for these reasons. Well, I want to see what you can come up with and then let's talk about it." Then, he asks that others

contribute to the discussion: “So yeah, I’ll give you my opinion and I think that because these, these, these, what do you got?” Morgan suggests to her preservice teachers that if young people ask them who they voted for, they can respond, “I tend to vote for this party for these reasons but you know there’s lots of considerations and people have to make these choices based on x y and z.” She said this approach shares “who we are with students” by providing insight into how “our [teachers’] own journey led to formulate a way of thinking about an issue.” The teacher educators indicated handling disclosure through these techniques will prevent accusations of indoctrination to a particular worldview because teachers are encouraging students to think critically about the issue, not what to think.

Morgan and Nathan felt teacher educators do a disservice to preservice teachers if they do not model for them how to share their opinions in a respectful way. Unless teacher educators make this visible for preservice teachers, Morgan believed they would not be in a comfortable position when moments arise in the classroom where they are compelled to disclose their opinions. “It’s almost sort of like a confession in a way, but you always need to be respectful and open. They’ll know how to do it if they see good examples of how it’s done.” In agreement, Nathan states teacher educators should model effective ways to disclose. “They aren’t seeing it on social media, on cable news, and chances are, they’re not seeing it at their family’s dinner table, right? So, they need to have examples of someone saying, “This is what I believe, but I want to hear your side of the thing.” This allows preservice teachers to see and eventually lead tolerant civil discourses.

Bianca and Hannah expressed that teachers play a critical role in maintaining an open discussion about a controversial issue and supporting students in developing a deeper understanding of the issue. Therefore, they need to be cognizant about when and how they are disclosing their views. The teacher educators reinforced to their preservice teachers that before disclosing their point of view, they should first consider how interjecting their personal opinion might affect the discussion flow. Bianca asks her preservice teachers to answer this question: “What is the pedagogical purpose of sharing my opinion? How am I going to share my opinion? Will this disrupt a healthy discussion?” She explained, “If adding your view opens up discussion, then it’s appropriate. If adding your point of view closes down discussion, then it’s inappropriate. It was a mistake.” Bianca advises her preservice teachers to share their positions as long as it does not interfere with developing “an open atmosphere of inquiry and prevent them learning to think for themselves.” A hateful or extremist view, for example, should be “kept under wraps” because if revealed, young people would feel unprotected by their teachers.

Hannah warns her preservice teachers to refrain from sharing their opinion beforehand, especially when addressing certain controversial issues that have a personal resonance with young people, their families, and their communities. To illustrate her point, Hannah provided an example where one of her preservice teachers wanted to teach a lesson about the Chief Illiniwek controversy. The student decided to share her opinion despite Hannah advising her against it:

She said, “I’m going to share my opinion this time” and I said well, “I’d think about that when you do it because you want to think about the impact it will have

on the kids and their ability to focus on the task” and she said, “Oh I think I’m just going to go ahead and do it.” She did and a kid asked right away, and she was like “Well I’m an anti-chief” and the kids turned against her.

The preservice teacher learned the secondary-age students all grew up in this community and had warm and fuzzy feelings about chief Illiniwek from going to sporting events as small kids. Only three students felt the mascot should be retired. As a result, the children turned against her and the discussion focus quickly turned from whether Chief Illiniwek should remain the mascot of the University of Illinois to the student teacher’s comments. Afterward, Hannah reflected on the lesson with the preservice teacher. Hannah said the conversation helped her realize that she needed to first understand the young people’s connection and background experiences to the issue of controversy before interjecting her opinion. The teacher educators’ handling of disclosure varied. Some of the participants believed teachers should be open about their views because it is difficult to remain neutral when discussing issues that evoke strong feelings. Other participants, however, felt teachers should first determine their purpose for sharing their opinions and understand where their class generally stands on the issue.

Summary of Theme 2 Findings

In this section, I present findings showing how teacher educators support their preservice teachers design the entire controversial issues discussion. First, teacher educators guide their preservice teachers in laying the groundwork for a controversial issues lesson by developing discussion norms. Second, teacher educators help preservice teachers understand the characteristics of a controversial issue. They model or assign activities where preservice teachers search for reliable resources and evaluate bias in

media sources. Lastly, the teacher educators identify key components of an open student-centered discussion: fostering an open dialogue, using effective discussion frameworks, bringing in multiple perspectives, and disclosing not only your stance but how it was reached. In the following section, I present the teacher educators' recommendations and strategies for addressing potential challenges associated with teaching controversial issues.

Theme 3: Cultivating a Positive Relationship with Community Members and Yourself

The theme, "Cultivating a Positive Relationship with Community Members and Yourself," addresses Research Question 3: How do secondary social studies teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to handle the challenges associated with teaching controversial issues? The twelve teacher educators discussed the various challenges and risks their preservice teachers raised that make them nervous about teaching controversial issues: parent complaints, negative reactions and consequences from supervisors, rising tensions in the classroom, managing strong emotions, and a lack of subject knowledge or teaching skills. Their recommendations for reducing the likelihood of these challenges from occurring and reducing the impact of the obstacles should they occur were grounded in building strong relationships with parents, administrators, students, and finally yourself. That said, I have divided this theme into three subthemes, each addressing one of the three areas: Subtheme 3a: "Communicating Proactively with Parents and Administrators," Subtheme 3b: "Maintaining an Emotionally Safe Classroom Space for Students," and Subtheme 3c: "Eschewing Your Role as the Expert."

Subtheme 3a: “Communicating Proactively with Parents and Administrators” contains two subsections: “Promoting Parent Communication” and “Gaining Support from Supervisors.” To build positive relationships with parents, the teacher educators advise preservice teachers to make their students’ parents aware of their goals and approaches for discussing controversial issues at the beginning of the school year. To build positive relationships with supervisors, the majority of the teacher educators strongly suggest that preservice teachers involve their immediate supervisor in all aspects of the planning and implementation process of the controversial issues lesson. Subtheme 3b: “Maintaining an Emotionally Safe Classroom Space for Students” is comprised of three subsections: “Allowing Students to Resolve Disagreements Themselves” and “Drawing the Line.” To build strong relationships with their future secondary-age students, the teacher educators spoke in-depth about creating an emotionally safe classroom space. Subtheme 3c: “Eschewing Your Role as the Expert” is divided into two subsections: “Building Background Knowledge,” “Learning Alongside Students,” “Resisting the Tendency to Compare Yourself with Others,” and “Forming a Support System.” These three subthemes reflect the teacher educators’ overall view that teachers should develop a strong relationship with themselves.

Subtheme 3a: Communicating Proactively with Parents and Administrators

In a majority of the teacher educators’ syllabi was a course objective relating to forging open lines of communication with key stakeholders, such as parents and administrators. For example, Victoria wrote in her course overview that she hopes her preservice teachers leave the course knowing how to “form partnerships with parents and members of the community” through collaboration and teamwork. Geoffrey aims for his

preservice teachers to gain greater awareness of how they can “develop open relationships with parents about the importance of discussing controversial issues.” Hannah hopes her preservice teachers leave her course at the end of the semester knowing how to foster “an open dialogue with parents and administrators of discussing controversial issues.” Tyler strives for his preservice teachers to see “the supporting roles of parents and administration” when broaching issues of controversy. These teacher educators along with several others emphasized the importance of involving parents and administrators over the introduction and teaching of controversial issues, rather taking on this responsibility alone. Each of the teacher educators described their unique approaches they use in their courses to ensure their preservice teachers meet these objectives and feel confident enough in knowing how to address the anxieties of parents and others in the community.

Promoting Parent Communication. Four teacher educators designed an assignment where preservice teachers are asked to create a sample letter, email, newsletter, or PowerPoint presentation for parents informing them their child’s class will be starting a study that might touch upon potentially controversial matters. In Hannah’s course, the assignment requires preservice teachers to include a promise reassuring parents that issues would be taught in a balanced way from a variety of viewpoints. She shared that one of her preservice teachers developed the following promise in her parent letter:

I promise to create a respectful learning environment where every voice is heard, and disrespect is not tolerated. I promise to look at all and many multiple perspectives on the issue. I promise to tie the issues to some standard or

curriculum. I promise to make sure the content and their resources I use are age appropriate. Those are the things I promise to do. If your child says anything at home that seems strange or outrageous, please contact me. I will do the same for you.

Hannah said this preservice teacher used her promise in an actual communication to her class parents when she began teaching and “had gotten a good response” from the groups of parents. Later in the year, when she was ready to discuss a contested current issue with her class, she sent out another letter to parents with the same promise. Hannah said this preservice teachers received “no pushback” because “she made her goals clear from the beginning” and showed parents how she would promote a safe and secure environment. Additionally, as pointed out by Hannah, the preservice teacher gained parents’ trust by promoting two-way communication and including them as partners in their children’s learning.

For Victoria’s assignment, preservice teachers are asked to include a short paragraph “showing there’s a lot of research backing up teaching contested issues, your strategies, and highlighting what benefits it has for children.” Victoria provides her preservice teachers with a list of sources and standards they can use for his section of their communication. Some include the National Council of Social Studies (NCSS) standards, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the works of Diana Hess, Noddings, and Brooks (2017), Bicmore (1999), and Bronson and Merryman (2009). She said she tells her preservice teachers “parents love seeing that you’re [teachers] using a proven research-based methodology that people know, and your goals are grounded in research. They’ll respect you more for that.” Victoria stated she also encourages her

preservice teachers to “step in the parents’ shoes,” think about what their main concerns would be, and address what they will do to reduce them. Some of her preservice teachers, she shared, would often cite indoctrination as a common parental concern. To that point, she advises them to emphasize that their goals as a teacher in teaching a particular issue is for students to understand multiple sides of an issue. Victoria believes this will leave parents feeling more comfortable with the plans because parents want their children to learn how to view situations through more than one lens.

Dominic and Morgan’s assignment asks preservice teachers to outline a learning plan for handling a particular controversial issue that would be sent to parents. Preservice teachers in Dominic’s class create a parent information sheet for a particular issue they intend on teaching. The document must address what the overarching goals are for teaching the particular issue, how those goals achieve the curricular and state standards, what resources the secondary-age students will use, and how they as the teacher will facilitate the discussion. Dominic recognizes developing this learning plan “might take a lot of time and energy from teachers.” However, in laying out a broad yet thorough overview of the learning progression, teachers demonstrate to parents they have prepared a well-thought-out learning experience. Doing so, he believes, will reduce chances of receiving complaints from parents. He explained, “Like, if you show this is the pedagogical reason that I’m doing this thing and here’s how I’m going to bring it in, here are the range of resources to use. That’s the thing that covers your behind.”

Preservice teachers in Morgan’s class complete a similar assignment where they write an email or create a presentation for parents about how they will handle a controversial issue in their class. Like Dominic, her goal with this assignment is to help

preservice teachers understand that communicating with parents is integral for preventing criticism and misunderstanding. Morgan states that first and foremost, parents will question what place the topic has in the curriculum and what the discussion is going to look like. That said, if teachers present a letter showing they are “armed with the standards, the resources, all beautifully lined up and planned,” then parents will feel more comfortable and confident in the teacher’s plan.

Geoffrey and Abigail have discussions with their preservice teachers framed around relationship-building with parents. Both teacher educators emphasize teachers must make it clear to their parents “you all [teachers and parents] are on the same side” and “at the end of the day, you care about their children and success.” Sending a letter at the beginning of the school year articulating the goals for discussion and studying certain issues of controversy is just the first step, they contend. As noted by Geoffrey, “you have to keep them in the loop throughout the year and have a relationship with them.” He advises preservice teachers to provide multiple methods for promoting two-way communication and for parents to express their questions or concerns. In doing so, he explains, “you’ll know which families might have some concerns about a topic. You know to let that family know we’re going to talk about this. They can go ahead and talk about it with their child if they want.”

Abigail reminds her preservice teachers not to view parents as the enemy. Drawing on her own experience and feedback from previous students who are not teachers, she tells them:

Every parent wants their kids to think. They want their kids to come home from school and say, “Oh I talked about this issue and it made me think and it made me ask questions.” This is typically what parents want from their child’s education. Unfortunately, when lines of communication with families are not clear or parents feel disconnected from what is happening in the classroom, confrontations might rise. Therefore, Abigail recommends to her preservice teachers that they not only contact parents when an issue arises. Rather, they should check-in with parents frequently and invite parents to share important information about their family and child. Maintaining positive and ongoing communication with parents, as the teacher educators believe, helps teachers gain their trust when teaching controversial issues.

Gaining Support From Supervisors. Three teacher educators felt prior to speaking with parents, teachers must communicate with their supervisors. Nathan reasons, “If the administration has your back, then you don’t have to worry about the parents as much.” That being said, he encourages his preservice teachers to be as transparent with the administrators as possible. If teachers talk to administration first and explain how they are teaching the issue of controversy and why, the principal will be more on the teacher’s side if a parent makes a complaint. Kristen provides the same suggestion to her preservice teachers. She advises them to schedule a meeting with their administrators before launching the discussion in their classroom but after planning the lesson and gathering the resources they will use. She explains, “You’re more likely to gain their support by sharing your ideas.” Xavier provides an example and models for his preservice teachers how they can approach their administrator:

You can say, I'm working on them with this skill or knowledge. I'm pretty sure my students are going to mention this thing that Trump said yesterday or whatever and I'm planning on talking about it. I'm going to approach it in this way to make sure that I'm caring for my students [secondary-age students] and that that conversation doesn't get out of hand in all sorts of ways. What do you think?

He also has his preservice teachers role-play the meeting where one person acts as the teacher and the other is the principal. He recognizes that administrators have “a tremendous amount of power and influence.” However, for young teachers, especially novice teachers, they might feel at odds with “trying to establish themselves in the school and not get fired at one end and pursuing their commitment to enacting critical pedagogy at the other end.” The teacher educators' recommendations and strategies emphasize to preservice teachers the importance of involving administrators throughout the planning and implementation phases of the controversial issues lesson.

Subtheme 3b: Maintaining an Emotionally Safe Classroom Space for Students

The majority of the teacher educators said their preservice teachers often seek strategies to help defuse confrontation in the classroom and assistance on how they can best respond to situations where students take an extreme or hateful position on an issue. In response, the teacher educators present a variety of techniques that teachers can use to maintain an emotionally safe classroom space for their students. In an emotionally safe classroom, as described by the participants, teachers have a plan for handling situations when the line has been crossed. Teachers name and address hateful views. Students trust their teachers to protect them against feeling embarrassed, victimized, or alienated. At the

same time, students feel empowered to resolve disagreements on their own and voice their opinions. Teachers pay attention to the emotional dimension of controversial issues by seeking to understand students' emotions and anticipating the kinds of emotions that are likely to arise.

Allowing Students to Resolve Disagreements Themselves. When strong emotions arise during the discussion and students, three teacher educators felt students—preservice teachers and young people—should have the opportunity to resolve the disagreement themselves rather than intervene immediately. However, if the conflict escalates, causing hostility between students, the teacher educators would step in and take control of the discussion.

Victoria encourages her preservice teachers to follow this approach in their classrooms, as it “provides students with the chance to keep each other in check.” In one of her previous methods classes, one of her preservice teachers expressed an extremist view. She turned the situation into a learning experience for the class so they could see her recommendation for de-escalating tension in practice.

We [Victoria and the preservice teachers in her social studies methods class] did an exercise where we talked about, we were defining race, that's what we were doing. What is race? He wrote and I put up papers around the room and we had students just kind of writing in what their idea of what race was, and he wrote race is what Social Justice Warriors used to keep white people down. Now we've got a problem. So, the way I handled that, I believed that I had to walk a really fine line because everybody deserves a voice, but this is a hateful voice.

Instead of labeling his voice as hateful and “shut him down,” Victoria asked probing questions, which allowed him to share his thoughts, and opened the space for the rest of the class to respond:

So, I asked him to explain and I did give him a platform in class to explain what he meant by social justice warrior, to explain what his thinking was. It turns out he spent a couple of minutes that he thought everything in the class was complete BS. Everything I was teaching was wrong and went against his worldview of what he thought a teacher should know and be able to do. I gave him that platform and then what happened was that the rest of the students attacked him, and they basically said you’re wrong this is not how this works. I stepped back and let them have it.

Victoria explained the preservice teacher needed an authentic response to his ideas. He learned more from his fellow classmates than she could have told him by just shutting him down and telling him that he is wrong. She reasoned, “It was better than me saying no you’re wrong. Social justice is the right way to teach and you’re just going to have to deal with it and you can’t be a teacher because you hold those views.” Victoria felt this approach demonstrated to the class how students can support each other in preventing someone from using the discussion as a platform to espouse extreme views. Victoria clarified that the preservice teacher did not use hateful speech and did not personally attack anyone. He was attacking the idea of teaching social justice and felt social justice teaching was misguided. Victoria said if he said something like “I think all black people should be killed or something like that,” she would have referred him to the university authorities and he would have been dealt with by the administration.

Geoffrey reflected on repeated situations in the past two semesters where he “had to combat micro-aggressions” from the white preservice teachers against his preservice teachers of color. His response for addressing the white students’ “general lack of empathy and racist comments” was to have the preservice teachers of color share how they were impacted and hurt by the white students’ behavior:

We [Geoffrey and the preservice teachers in his social studies methods class] were reading an article on Tamir Rice and talking about how – obviously not presumed innocence – like how black and brown kids are viewed as so much bolder, more dangerous. One of my – some of my white students [preservice teacher] were not taking things seriously at all. They were kind of not engaged in this conversation, like it was heavy giggling. So, some of my students of color [preservice teachers of color] said, like, “Could we talk about this? I’d like to talk about this.” The students spoke their piece and we had a difficult conversation about some of the microaggressions that they were having in this class.

Geoffrey explained giving his preservice teachers of color the “floor completely” instead of “just calling the white students out” himself was more meaningful. The preservice teachers had the chance to see how the different identity groups within a context interact. In hearing directly from the preservice teachers of color, the individuals they hurt, the white preservice teachers realized how their comments and actions insulted their identities. Afterwards, these preservice teachers of color asked their white classmates to talk about the problems that occurred and what they can do going forward. Geoffrey shared: “Honestly, I really liked that. I loved the idea and we went with it. So, they shared their piece, it was really profound.” By the end of the class, he recalled a range of

feelings from his white preservice teachers. Some said, “I get it, like I understand that their perspectives make sense and I kind of feel bad about it.” Others asked, “Why were we doing this? This isn’t school.” Then there were a few who felt attacked. However, he said his preservice teachers of color felt very supported in being able to share how the white preservice teachers’ microaggressions and racist comments impacted them personally.

Stephen agreed with the approach of allowing students to handle their disagreements instead of the teacher stepping in and making an evaluative statement. He believed it is more meaningful when students hold their peers accountable and make sure they are not using hateful or extremist language. He explained, “if a teacher acts as the mediator all the time, there is not actual interaction going on between students.” However, when students hold each other accountable, they are actually practicing the kinds of interactions that we want students to actually do as citizens.

Drawing the Line. More than half of the teacher educators emphasize to preservice teachers that their chief responsibility in teaching controversial issues is to maintain a safe classroom space. When the preservice teacher in Victoria’s class voiced extremist views about social justice education, Victoria understood she had a responsibility to teach him because he was still one of her students, “and can’t just reject him.” After the students’ classmates expressed their concerns about his extremist comments, Victoria told her preservice teachers that if this was to happen in their own classrooms, the next step would be for them to the class discussion norms, which she models how to do with preservice teachers. She said, “When you return back to those guidelines on discussions, you make it clear this is how we’re going to operate.” Victoria

explained in this way, her preservice teachers trust her to maintain a civil and respectful classroom climate.

When a student—preservice teacher or secondary age-student—takes an antagonistic position on an issue or makes an offensive comment, several teacher educators confront the situation by asking them to clarify, revise, or expand on what they said. In problematic situations where a young person makes an offensive remark or slur, Tyler advises his preservice teachers to pause the discussion and say the following: “Okay, here’s what I’m hearing. Is that what you meant to say, like are there any edits that you’d like to make to that?” He reminds his preservice teachers to remember the goal in calling out the violation is not to “publicly shame the student,” but to help them understand the impact of their words and how such remarks can divide the classroom community. Teachers have a responsibility to call out violations in a way that is not “personally attacking, that doesn’t embarrass students but that treats the classroom space as a collaborative safe space where everyone is learning at the same time.” That said, he reminds these students that they agreed to follow the classroom expectations of how to engage in respectful dialogue.

Abigail guides her preservice teachers in trying to understand how and why a young person came to have such a strong reaction. During one of her class meetings, she presents her preservice teachers with four scenarios of a classroom discussion. In the scenarios, a secondary-age student has expressed a hateful view or made an insulting comment that left others feeling excluded and hurt. Working in small groups, the preservice teachers discuss how the teacher in the scenario should best respond to the difficult situation while still making sure everyone is treated with dignity and classroom

community remains intact. She advises preservice teachers to stay clear of saying “you’re an X, you’re a racist, you’re a transphobe.” Labelling words and actions as those things rather than people will avoid someone becoming too defensive. Some of the responses Abigail’s preservice teachers came up with include: “You said this, where does that come from? Why would you say that? Why do they believe it? Why do you feel the need to articulate this in this place or time or in that way?” The exercise enabled her preservice teachers to think about what prompted the young person in the scenario to make a particular comment in that moment. Morgan described the act of pausing the discussion and helping students reflect on offensive remarks as the “lesson within the lesson, the unforeseen lesson.” Engaging students in reflecting on the root of the reactions, she believed, helps students become more self-aware of their beliefs and understand that prejudicial remarks may offend or embarrass others in the class. Students come to realize what is and is not acceptable in a way where they do not feel singled out and still feel a sense of self-worth.

Two teacher educators felt preservice teachers need to develop the capability to respond flexibly and think on their feet when figuring out how to prevent discussions from becoming too heated. Bianca said, “I think one of the things we need to help preservice teachers learn is that you don’t have to do a lesson start to finish in one day. If they see something going off the rails, they can stop it and then come back to it.” She considered this “part of our power, to be the boss of the room.” Trying to get the discussion “back on track,” she explained might be a futile effort because secondary-age students need time to reflect on their own, process all the information that was examined, and take a short break. Otherwise, it is likely the class may become too polarized and the

teacher would have difficulties maintaining a civil discourse. In her class, Bianca models for her preservice teachers how they can pause the discussion for a few seconds if they feel overwhelmed or anxious about the direction of the lesson. She asks her preservice teachers to “take a moment and just put everything down. She tells them: “Okay, we’re going to take 30 seconds and we’re going to stretch or breathe or just pause and then come back to it because the reactions are what we need to be mindful of.”

Xavier also advises his preservice teachers to pause the discussion if they notice tension and conflict arising between individuals or groups in the classroom. He tells his preservice teachers they could say:

“Excuse me everybody, I think it’s getting a little heated. Remember we are here as historians and social scientists and we’re trying to resolve this together.” So, I think that we have to de-escalate the tension for a few minutes. I think it makes sense to hold it until tomorrow. Just doing that de-escalates the tension.

He recalled one example as a high school teacher when he was leading a discussion in his global history class about the Oslo Accord debate. The dialogue become very heated between a Jewish and a Palestinian school-age student. He reminds his class, “We’re not going to resolve these problems here for the world, but we need to think about them for ourselves and as a community. Let’s put a pause on this for now.” Xavier explained this strategy emphasized to preservice teachers that they are “a community of learners” and that even though they hold conflicting or opposing viewpoints, it is imperative they show tolerance and respect for each other. For both Xavier and Bianca, pausing the discussion gave preservice teachers time to think and calm down.

As revealed in the teacher educators' responses, when conflicts between young people get out of hand and students make insensitive comments that might hurt or offend others, teachers are expected to speak up and take control of the discussion. They must also explicitly name the view as hateful or extremist and use the situation as a learning opportunity to educate students on why those views impede a healthy discussion. This will ensure the classroom climate is not threatened and future student-teacher relations are not negatively impacted.

Acknowledging Students' Emotions. Four teacher educators remember their preservice teachers feeling concerned about not being able to address their secondary-age students' emotions when discussing issues of controversy. The topics often "hit close to home" and "can provoke a range of responses," Hannah explained. She tells her preservice teachers to anticipate the conversations getting deep and personal and believes they should because the issues surrounding the discussion "should be related to something that is relevant and meaningful" to young people's lives. Tyler agreed, stating:

I just don't want them [preservice teachers] to think that emotionality is the enemy. I think it is often how it comes across in the classroom, which is why we don't want controversy. This is the opposite of what we want to do. We are actually teaching students [secondary-age students] that we don't want their emotions in the classroom.

Xavier shared a similar sentiment to that of Hannah's. He stated, "it's okay to be emotional." He spoke about a secondary-age student's emotional response during a lesson that one of his preservice teachers taught in their field placement:

One of the seniors was stopped and frisked because he was African American. No one in that room has been stopped and frisked. No one in the room has experienced this offensive thing. I respect him for getting emotional about this. We heard his pain, his anger. He didn't express himself in a way that created heated conversation. His contribution really helped the class understand how he was affected and how he felt.

Xavier noted, however, that learning how to express and manage emotions in appropriate ways, just as the aforementioned secondary-age student did, is a learned skill. Teachers must think ahead to how they can create emotional safety in their classrooms so that tension and conflict does not arise in the classroom. He encourages his preservice teachers to accept that "it's okay for students [secondary-age students] to be emotional about controversial issues" and to remember they are working toward the same goal: to resolve the issues as a community.

Similar to Xavier's approach, Tyler emphasizes to his preservice teachers the need to overcome their fear of emotions when discussing controversial issues:

One thing that I tell them is, first off like, "let's get over this fear of emotionality and engagement." Because when we don't want students [secondary-age students] to get heated or like passionate about something or something that we don't want them to engage, something I'd say is like, "let's you know find ways to take steps back, what we don't want is to like, push away the controversy."

When strong emotions do arise, he models for his preservice teachers how they can pause the discussion and engage secondary-age students in a reflective writing or journaling exercise. He explained offering time for reflection is also helpful for young people "at the

other end of the spectrum” who are often hesitant to share certain emotions and thoughts in a public space and do not want to expose their vulnerabilities about heavy issues. For all young people, journaling helps them process emotions in a private space.

Abigail devotes a class session where preservice teachers identify their emotional response to a particular issue of controversy. She begins the session by telling her preservice teachers “we’re going to sit in this muck and just talk and talk about how these things make us feel and talk about how controversial issues come to bear on our identity and how it comes to bear on others.” Abigail then asks her preservice teachers, “How is your body going to react? Will you feel adrenaline? Is your heart going to pound? Will you get red in the face? Might you get very defensive?” She also guides her preservice teachers in becoming aware of obvious and less obvious ways we convey our emotions during difficult conversations. Like Tyler, she carves out time during class for preservice teachers to “sit their yucky feelings” and process their emotions, whether that be through personal writing activities or a small group sharing exercise. Abigail felt helping students of all ages express their emotions about a controversial issue is “just as important as researching information to gain new knowledge.” Students learn to understand their emotions, clarify their values, and identify where people are coming from in their reactions. The teacher educators agreed attending to young people’s emotions is an integral component of teaching controversial issues.

Subtheme 3c: Eschewing Your Role as the Expert

The teacher educators agreed preservice teachers should let go of the mentality that teachers are expected to be all-knowing experts in content and pedagogy. They described how they preservice teachers can improve their confidence and effectiveness in

teaching controversial issues. The teacher educators suggested a variety of print and online resources that preservice teachers can use to build their background knowledge about a topic and learn effective approaches for teaching controversial issues. They told their preservice teachers it is okay to not have all the answers to students' questions. Teachers and young people can work together and research their questions in real-time using various reliable websites or print sources.

A few teacher educators described how they boosted their preservice teachers' confidence in their teaching abilities. They encourage them to learn from their mistakes and advise them against making comparisons between themselves and veteran teachers. Instead, they encourage preservice teachers to measure their own progress with where they have been previously. Measuring their success in this way would help preservice teachers recognize their own professional growth and strengths. Finally, the teacher educators strongly recommend that preservice teachers join a professional network of educators who they can lean on for support and ideas.

Building Background Knowledge. The majority of the teacher educators said their preservice teachers worry about a lack of adequate knowledge in relation to a particular issue or not knowing how to respond to spontaneous student questions. The teacher educators reassured preservice teachers they should not strive to become an expert on a controversial issue or compare themselves to veteran teachers who have been facilitating discussions on controversial issues for many years. In terms of building background knowledge, several teacher educators cited a variety of resources that preservice teachers can use to educate themselves on the issues they plan to teach. Kristen's approach for helping her preservice teachers build background knowledge

about an issue involves them designing an inquiry-based WebQuest around a current hot-button issue. For the inquiry projects, the preservice teachers are also asked to gather research and then they bring them back to class to share what they have learned. She tells the preservice teachers:

If you want to teach a really powerful lesson, then you have to know the content well. So, I tell them [preservice teachers] you've got to be lifelong learners. If you want to teach a lesson about a particular issue, you've got to go out and learn about it in order to teach it.

The goal of designing and participating in the WebQuest was to help the preservice teachers gain more knowledge about a particular issue so that they can confidently create a similar activity for their future students. She felt if teachers know the content well, they will feel more confident teaching their lesson.

Victoria provides a few reliable online resources for her preservice teachers in her syllabus. She said, "There are so many resources online they can look at, but I narrow down on a few that provide multiple and competing views on issues." Victoria suggested that preservice teachers visit allsides.com when teaching about media bias and procon.org to gather research on various arguments about different issues of controversy.

Bianca shares her list of resources for learning about controversial issues with her preservice teachers. The Google Doc contains "several different sources from several different Smithsonian archives from a variety of different dot orgs [websites] that exist to help students [secondary-age students] and teachers build those backgrounds." Even after the semester ends, her preservice teachers still have access to the document "so that they can continue making use of the articles to deepen their own knowledge or with their

students.” She tells her preservice teachers that it is “perfectly okay” to start with a Wikipedia article before “diving into a variety of reading resources” as this would give them a general sense of whether or not they are prepared to teach about the particular topic. She along with Geoffrey recommend several books to their preservice teachers such as *A Different Mirror* and Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*. Geoffrey used the book, *Between the World and Me* with his preservice teachers to help them gain a different perspective of America or American history.

When preservice teachers in Tyler’s class share their anxieties about not knowing enough about current contested issues, he provides two pieces of advice. First, he encourages his preservice teachers to purchase a subscription to *The Atlantic* and *The Economist*.

I tell my students [preservice teachers] – like, I’d flat out say, “if you really feel like you are behind the 8-ball and you are not getting smart enough, buy a subscription to *The Atlantic*, *The Economist*, like those two magazines have great analysis. Like, they will walk you through political science, social studies thinking. You know, and I’m pointing out the fact that you know, *The Atlantic* skews left and *The Economist* skews right, so if you do both of those, then you are generally getting a good coverage – like 80% of the thought in there or 70% of the thought – you’ll get them all in those two magazines.

Second, Tyler advises his preservice teachers to research lesson plans and teaching strategies online that relate to teaching controversial issues. “Good writers borrow, great writers steal. Go steal a lesson on this topic,” he stated. Tyler directs his preservice

teachers to visit *Rethinking Schools* or the *Zinn Education Project* for high quality and engaging teaching and learning materials centered on tough topics.

Similar to Tyler, Dominic supports his preservice teachers in using teaching strategies from various educational websites when planning their controversial issues lesson. “We spend time looking through the classroom resources section on TeachingTolerance.org, like the student tasks and teaching strategies because they include connections to anti-bias education,” he explained. He also mentioned that he and his preservice teachers explore the collection of classroom resources on FacingHistoryandOurselves.org and asks them to identify one teaching strategy along with a primary source or video they could use for their own controversial issues lesson plan. Taken together, the activities and resources ensure preservice teachers leave the semester knowing how they can expand their understanding of controversial issues and how to teach them.

Learning Alongside Students. At the same time, two teacher educators reassure their preservice teachers that they do not have to have all the answers about the topic or students’ questions. Morgan said she “can relate to this fear during her first few years” but then “came to realize you just have to roll with the punches sometimes.” She tells her preservice teachers, “if you don’t know something, you don’t know something” and reminds them teachers are not prepared to be the “knowers of all things.” They are prepared to facilitate powerful learning experiences, to teach young people how to think, and not necessarily to “tell students all that content there ever was about anything.” When her students ask, “What do you do if someone asks a question you don’t know?” Morgan says, “You Google it when we have a question.” She shared that her high school students

“loved it” when they had to go to Google to answer a question. “They’re okay with it. You don’t have to know everything. I promise, it’s okay.”

Abigail also gives the same reminder to her preservice teachers. She tells them “it’s okay to not have all the answers.” Similar to Morgan’s thinking, she believes preservice teachers do not have to have a deep knowledge of everything. That said, she hopes by the end of the course her students feel competent not that they know everything” but feel “competent knowing what reliable sources they can use to find out more information.” For these teacher educators, they believe meaningful learning experiences occur when teachers investigate answers together with their students.

Resisting the Tendency to Compare Yourself With Others. Two teacher educators said they encourage their preservice teachers to avoid comparing themselves to the veteran teachers in their field placements and to welcome mistakes as part of their professional growth. After observing his preservice teachers’ lessons in their field placements, Xavier would ask them “How do you think the lesson went?” He said his preservice teachers are much more critical of themselves than they should be because they are reaching for perfection and the same level of proficiency as their cooperating teachers. Throughout the semester, Xavier tries to help his students understand that it will take “three to five years” to become an effective teacher. He reminds them making mistakes is part of the learning process for growing into an outstanding teacher. Tyler emphasizes to his preservice teachers that when looking at the teacher who does “the controversial issues, the guided inquiry almost every day,” remember “you’re seeing the Sistine Chapel, you’re not seeing Michelangelo’s sketching. The preservice teachers are seeing this teacher now and ten years into his or her profession, not on day one.

Forming a Support System. A few teacher educators suggested that preservice teachers connect with other educators who share a commitment to broaching issues of controversy in the classroom. Hannah and Morgan advise their preservice teachers to find a few other educators in their school or district with who they feel comfortable speaking openly about problems of practice. Hannah spoke about her own “mini support group” of social studies teachers who communicate through a group text. The teachers exchange ideas for support materials and offer suggestions to effectively deal with challenges. She stated, “I would be like, hey guys I found this book and it’s a really great book to use when might you use it? Have you seen this article about teaching Colin Kaepernick?” Morgan encourages her preservice teachers to join online communities where people around the country and the world are united in creating “engaging and critical social studies learning experiences.” She said “building coalitions” of educators provides a source of emotional strength for teachers. “It can feel isolating and it can feel very lonely to do this work and so finding the people who are in the fight with you and you can lean on when you’re like, ‘Ugh, this happened today.’”

Geoffrey encourages his preservice teachers to connect with other educators for similar purposes. He explains to them that having a strong support system helps to overcome many of the anxieties they expressed about teaching controversial issues (i.e., insufficient background knowledge about a topic or repertoire of effective discussion strategies). Geoffrey tells his preservice teachers being part of a professional network of teachers shows “you don’t have to do this alone and you’re not expected to know everything.” The purpose of the group is to provide each other with personal guidance and support in the handling of controversial issues. The teacher educators believe

building a support system with teachers within and outside of their buildings will help them gain confidence and feel supported in their efforts.

Summary of Theme 3 Findings

This section reported the teacher educators' suggestions and approaches for helping preservice teachers develop a positive relationship with parents, administrators, students, and themselves. Many of the teacher educators indicated parents will feel reassured knowing that their child's teachers will present issues in a sensitive and balanced way where multiple viewpoints are welcomed. Several teacher educators advised maintaining open lines of communication with parents throughout the school year. They contend the more parents feel included and involved in their children's education, the more understanding and supportive they would likely be. Working closely with supervisors will help preservice teachers foresee any potential concerns from the community, define their rationale for broaching the issue, and clarify how it relates to the curriculum and standards. The supervisor can support teachers in planning the discussion and anticipating where strong emotions might come up. Additionally, involving supervisors throughout the planning and implementation stages ensures preservice teachers gain their support should a parent express complaints.

In an emotionally safe classroom space, students have the opportunity to work through conflicts on their own. They have a forum to voice their concerns and express disagreement in respectful ways. At the same time, as pointed out by several participants, teachers are entrusted to maintain a classroom space that protects students against hate, extremism, embarrassment, or any kind of emotional harm. The teacher educators proposed various strategies for defusing tension and addressing hateful and harmful

conduct. A few of the teacher educators recognized the potential of controversial issues to arouse strong emotions, which would pose a great obstacle to teaching. That said, these participants underscored the importance of acknowledging young people's emotions and teaching strategies for helping them remain calm.

The teacher educators encourage teachers to develop positive relationships with themselves. This begins with learning to reconcile with the fact that they will not have all the answers to every question. The teacher educators stress that teachers are not expected to know every piece of information a particular controversial issue or know how to effectively scaffold a discussion as soon as they enter the classroom. Teaching is a craft. It requires years of experience, continual learning, and a strong support system before reaching mastery. The teacher educators described their suggestions and strategies to build preservice teachers' self-confidence, knowledge base of controversial issues, and repertoire of effective teaching methods. In the Conclusion, I summarize the key overarching findings from this case study.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the finds of this study by organizing data from various sources into three major themes, with each theme answering one of the research questions. The following major findings emerged from this study. All 12 participants agree that teaching controversial issues is crucial for preparing students to be active citizens in a diverse democracy and all teachers, not just social studies educators, share this responsibility to engage students in issues of controversy. Yet, as the majority of the participants pointed out, preservice teachers lack confidence and knowledge about issues, fear of offending someone, receiving negative feedback from community stakeholders,

and worry about not being able to control the classroom. These personal and external setbacks present serious challenges for teachers and discourage them from broaching issues of controversy.

The majority of the teacher educators design learning experiences where preservice teachers learn core components of an effective controversial issues discussion, from creating an open classroom environment to facilitating the lesson. More than half of these participants engage their students in community-building and identity exploration activities. They guide preservice teachers in selecting appropriate issues, examining sources, and handling multi-perspectivity. The majority of the teacher educators encourage preservice teachers to use discussion strategies and frameworks rather than debates when discussing controversial issues. Many of the teacher educators agreed teachers can disclose their opinions on issues. However, the general beliefs of the school community and students' personal connections to the issue should be taken into consideration before disclosing to avoid upsetting anyone. Teachers should also be clear about how their stance was shaped by evidence and show a willingness to hear different views. Most of the teacher educators believe cultivating positive relationships with community stakeholders, students in the classroom, and oneself can minimize fears associated with teaching issues of controversy. In the following chapter, I will present interpretive insights into the findings from this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I organized the data into major themes and subthemes. In this chapter, I provide analytical and interpretive insights into the findings to present a more holistic understanding of the data. The discussion begins with a summary of the significance of the study, the theoretical framework, methodology, and major findings. Then, I discuss the findings to interpret the research questions. Next, I position my findings to the theoretical framework and bodies of literature related to teacher education and teaching controversial issues. Afterward, I delineate limitations pertaining to my study. The chapter concludes with recommendations for higher education administrators, teachers, and school leaders as well as for researchers interested in furthering the research on teaching controversial issues.

Summary of the Study

This section summarizes my case study in four subsections. In the first subsection, I restate the need for and significance of the study. In the second subsection, I reiterate the theoretical framework and methodology. This includes the methods and procedures I used to recruit participants and collect and analyze the data. In the last section, I summarize the major findings.

Restatement of Need for and Significance of the Study

An examination into how secondary social studies teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to teach controversial issues is significant. Previous research shows preservice and in-service teachers generally agree teaching controversial issues in a safe space fosters empathy and develops students' multi-perspective thinking (Abu-Hamdan

& Khader, 2014; Byford et al., 2009; Journell, 2011). Throughout the process, they learn to appreciate human diversity and realize the complexity of human relations (Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Philpott et al., 2011; Ross, 2017; Wilson, 2010; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012). Yet, there is widespread agreement among teachers that they need more training to develop their competencies in handling contested issues (Demoigny, 2017; Oulton et al., 2004). Training in preservice and in-service settings is also limited (Philpott et al., 2011). Researchers have recommended future studies examine the teaching of controversial issues in teacher education settings and collect data that captures teacher educators' perspectives and pedagogy (Ersoy, 2010; Journell, 2011; Liggett & Finley, 2009). The present case study serves to address this need.

The study is also timely and relevant to the nationwide social unrest in the United States that began on May 26, 2020. It was ignited by a Minneapolis police officer's gruesome killing of George Floyd, an African American man. The officer knelt on Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes, suffocating him as Floyd repeatedly cried out that he could not breathe. Meanwhile, three other officers looked on and prevented passers-by from intervening. Protests erupted across our country and then internationally in response to the death of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and the long list of black men, women, and children who have died as a result of police violence.

In the following weeks and months, vast crowds of people took to the streets and stood in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement to march against police brutality, even amid the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic. People were outraged, frustrated, and grief-stricken. Curfews were imposed and then violated. Reports and footage from news cycles made viewers aware of the aggressive and militarized use

of force. Protesters along with bystanders and journalists were shot with rubber bullets, tear-gassed, pepper-sprayed (Dewan & Baker, 2020). The incidents provoked even more widespread concern about law enforcement tactics. In each time period there are critical social issues, the analysis of which can lead to better understanding and a stronger society, thus realizing the ultimate goal of social studies education.

Students need to talk about the waves of unrest that have sparked across our nation in schools. It is not enough for teachers to remain silent during this time. The practices presented in the findings can support teachers looking for ways to open the door to conversations about justice, truth, and reconciliation but require practical guidance in undertaking this hard work. Findings from this study can help both pre- and in-service teachers learn promising practices for structuring tough conversations with their students about systemic and racial violence. The teacher educators' thoughts can help other educators grow into anti-racist educators who speak up about injustice and make schools more affirming spaces for Black students. Their suggestions demonstrate how educators can amplify the Black community's voices and feelings about the killing of Floyd or the police's use of extreme force. This reinforces to students that their feelings of pain and frustration are heard and validated.

Reiteration of Theoretical Framework

I grounded this case study in Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (1968/2000) theoretical framework. The theory advocates for a problem-posing, transformative education that encourages students to challenge dominant beliefs and practices. Through collaborative dialogue, teachers and students critique and question prevalent issues causing oppression of marginalized individuals and groups. Students gain a developing

awareness of societal injustices, which increases their critical thinking and sense of agency to make change in society. The teaching of controversial issues in social studies methods courses equips beginning teachers with the intellectual, practical, and civic competencies to create meaningful learning experiences in their classrooms. Teachers leave feeling empowered to help their students grow into active citizens who work toward building a more equitable society.

Discussion of the Findings

The following section presents my interpretation of the findings answer the three research questions: 1) What are secondary social studies teacher educators' attitudes toward teaching controversial issues? 2) How do secondary social studies teacher educators approach the teaching of controversial issues in their classrooms? 3) How do secondary social studies teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to handle the challenges they might face when teaching controversial issues?

Discussion of Research Question 1

Findings within Theme 1 indicate an overall agreement that teaching controversial issues is integral for preparing young people for participatory citizenship. Holding discussions about contested issues relevant to students' lives bridges classroom learning with social, political, and economic issues occurring on the local, national, and international levels. As Xavier and Tyler highlighted, choosing to ignore widely debated issues, even when they enter the classrooms, is also choosing to ignore how such issues personally affect secondary-age students. When teachers embed issues of controversy into the social studies curriculum, they respond to young people's interests to learn more about their world. Teaching controversial issues also heightens students' awareness of

current issues and charges them with the responsibility to figure out how they can make the world a better place. Morgan best conveyed this thinking when she said, “Preparing students [secondary-age students] for any contested topic is preparing them for teaching about life and knowing how to respond to threats: flight, fight, or freeze.” Through discussing controversial issues young people recognize their responsibility as citizens to make informed decisions and promote social justice.

The teacher educators’ responses highlighted that learning about controversial issues develops inclusive behaviors in young people. Hannah and Victoria, for example, noted secondary-age students gain a “better tolerance for people” and “lower biases for people who are different from them.” When complex issues are explored with a diverse group of people and perspectives, young people have the chance to see the situation from different lenses. The experience helps to shape positive citizenship attitudes such as showing empathy for others and resolving conflicts respectfully. As future citizens, these competencies are essential to contributing to social change.

A few teacher educators (Kristen and Dominic) also believed teaching controversial issues provides secondary-age students with the space to learn and practice respectful discourse. Their views of the presidential debates suggest learning about controversial issues through this platform creates more polarization than unity and understanding. Dominic noted: “We don’t want to contribute to the problem by just dehumanizing somebody who thinks differently from us.” Discussing issues of controversy within the safe and structured classroom space ensures young people know how to engage in respectful and open dialogue. This is central for strengthening democracy and promoting human rights.

Each of the teacher educators indicated that despite the merits of teaching controversial issues, obstacles ranging from personal, to classroom, and to school-wide areas can discourage preservice teachers from broaching tough conversations. Starting from the personal level, preservice teachers have to grapple with their own discomfort of not knowing enough about the topic or how to facilitate a fruitful conversation. Preservice teachers might be left feeling unmotivated and nervous about tensions that could arise in the classroom. If conflicts ensue and students become upset, it can be unsettling, especially if administrators and parents hear about the situation and they express concerns. Preservice teachers might also face school-wide constraints. When the standards and time do not encourage deep investigative studies, they might be more likely to shy away from this critical work. While most of the teacher educators recognized the reality of these challenges, two teacher educators perceived the fears to be speculative and invented. Tyler and Dominic believed preservice teachers have preconceived and inaccurate depictions of parents. This raises questions about what shapes preservice teachers' fears and what can teacher educators do to address such misconceptions.

While there is no one simple solution for addressing the aforementioned challenges, the teacher educators suggest preservice teachers start with defining a strong rationale for teaching a controversial issue. Next, they should have an awareness of the class make-up and anticipate how the issue might affect students. Stephen's example regarding the immigration ban on Hispanics on Muslims shows how some issues could be sensitive for some students, especially if the issue directly affects their family. Teachers can make visible efforts to show their care and protection for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. One of the most simple, yet powerful, strategies is making

it clear to these young people that they are not expected to be the spokesperson, as Morgan did for one of her African American high school students.

As the teacher educators noted, the long-term goal in teaching controversial issues and addressing associated challenges is adopting a whole-school approach. Teaching issues of controversy does not take place in a vacuum, but most effective when part of the whole school curriculum. How it is implemented can make a significant difference to the way issues are addressed. An interdisciplinary approach shows English Language Arts, Math, Science, Art, Music, and other content area teachers the important part they play in preparing students to become active citizens. An interdisciplinary structure encourages staff to make connections between societal issues and the subjects they teach. Colleagues collaborate to share different teaching techniques and discuss problems of practice. As a result, an open and supportive learning climate develops where controversy is seen as an integral part of democratic life rather than something to be feared.

Discussion of Research Question 2

Conversations with the teacher educators along with my analysis of their course syllabi revealed the teacher educators used modeling, assigned individual or small group activities, and held classroom discussions, as reported in Theme 2. Many of the teacher educators do not introduce controversial issues until later in the semester. At the beginning of the course, they focus on building a classroom community. Some teacher educators, such as Kristen and Bianca, model for preservice teachers how they can develop norms collaboratively with their students. Other teacher educators, such as Victoria, Xavier, and Dominic promote behaviors for respectful dialogue. Having these guidelines in place is foundational before entering emotional conversations that relate to

students' identities and values and could potentially spark disagreement. Students understand their shared ownership in maintaining a respectful classroom culture.

The teacher educators' identity exploration activities invite preservice teachers to reflect on their identities while simultaneously allowing the teacher educators to learn about their backgrounds. Geoffrey's identity webs task, Hannah's autoethnography assignment, and Nathan's culture quilt engage preservice teachers in unpacking factors that have shaped their identities. The activities also illustrate how identities can influence their social studies teaching. A few teacher educators model how preservice teachers can use questionnaires, writing tasks, and rating scales to gather information on their students' knowledge and experiences related to the topic. Preservice teachers complete the task and then the teacher educators demonstrate—while verbalizing their thoughts—how teachers can use the data to inform their instructional decisions. Engaging in the exercises from a secondary-age student's standpoint could offer preservice teachers a valuable opportunity to foresee where issues might arise and plan how they can adapt the activities for varying age groups.

Just as the teacher educators develop a shared agreement of classroom discussion norms, they also aim for their preservice teachers to have a common understanding of what a controversial issue is. Most of the teacher educators explicitly define a controversial issue with their preservice teachers. The decision to give preservice teachers a teacher-provided definition hints at the teacher educators' understanding of the complexity in defining a controversial issue. Only teacher educator, Geoffrey, co-constructs a definition with his preservice teachers. Regardless of the approach used, it is important for the teacher educators that their class have a collective understanding of

what constitutes a controversial issue. It provides an opportunity for them to clarify examples and non-examples of a contested issue. Later on in the semester, when preservice teachers have to choose a controversial issue for their lesson plan, they could refer back to this definition for assistance. The teacher educators' definitions of controversial issues are also generally similar. They agree controversial issues center on policy, involve multiple perspectives, have competing values and interests, and arouse strong emotions.

With a shared understanding of a controversial issue, the teacher educators move preservice teachers into the next phase: exploring good and poor examples of contested issues. If preservice teachers propose topics relating to traumatic events, Stephen guides his preservice teachers in seeing how the question “doesn't achieve anything by being answered.” Similarly, in Nathan's class, if a preservice teacher suggests a broad topic such as climate change, he poses questions to help them see that disagreement lies in how climate change can be best addressed. Many of the teacher educators encourage their preservice teachers to research local issues and explore them with secondary-age students in their field placements. In doing so, the teacher educators model for preservice teachers how they can utilize young people's community context to make the learning experiences meaningful and relevant.

The teacher educators engage preservice teachers in searching for reliable resources and evaluating media sources. Several teacher educators take this one step further and trained their preservice teachers in evaluating what they are hearing, seeing, or thinking from the news content. These findings demonstrate that teachers need to experience how to critically analyze news sources for themselves before teaching their

secondary-age students how to do so. Kristen and Abigail spend a sizable amount of time in their course modeling for preservice teachers how they can locate sources that present various perspectives. Then preservice teachers have time to work independently or in small groups to search for their own articles. Kristen and Abigail's approach demonstrates the importance of supporting preservice teachers in finding resources that represent a range of opinions and stakeholders.

When addressing controversial issues in the classroom, the majority of the teacher educators advocate for preservice teachers to promote discussion rather than debate. The reason for using the former format was effectively summed up in Kristen's comment: "With debate, there is a goal. Somebody's argument is going to win. With discussion, the end goal is not that somebody wins. The end goal is that we take the time and learn the different perspectives." With that said, the teacher educators introduce preservice teachers to a range of discussion techniques. Some strategies cited include the LET'S ACT (Listen and Love, Educate, Talk, Search, Analyze, Conclude through Deliberation, Take Action) Framework and Structured Academic Controversy. Preservice teachers plan for and participate in one of the discussion strategies as opposed to just reading about the discussion methods. Through this immersive experience, preservice teachers see first-hand what an effective discussion looks, sounds, and feels like as well as how discussion benefits students. During well-structured discussions, students question, contribute knowledge and perspectives, listen to one another, and build on each other's contributions (Hess, 2012). Students also do not just analyze two diverging perspectives surrounding an issue. They examine a broad range of viewpoints to gain a greater understanding of the complexity of a situation and an individual's unique experiences.

This also prevents students from prematurely committing to one view and making sweeping generalizations of a particular group.

Concerning teacher disclosure, the teacher educators generally agree teachers should be transparent with their secondary-age students about their position. They contend that it is almost impossible to take on a neutral stance when discussing controversial issues. Firstly, contested issues closely touch on our identities and beliefs. Secondly, young people will figure out their teacher's view based on the language they use, their facial expressions, and their curriculum choices. Being an "open book," as Tyler puts it, about how we feel develops stronger and trusting relationships with students.

Several teachers model for their preservice teachers how they can purposefully and carefully disclose their views without giving young people the impression their viewpoint should be adopted. First, they express their opinion with support from reliable sources. Second, the teacher educators state clearly this is their personal view and not everyone will agree with it. Third, the teacher educators invite preservice teachers to share their thoughts and feelings about the issue. This three-step approach closely aligns with what Kelly (1986) describes as *committed impartiality*. When teachers take on this role, they remain loyal to their particular perspective but impartial in the sense that the goal of disclosure is to model how citizens take and defend a stance. Modeling disclosure shows preservice teachers that the purpose in sharing their viewpoint is to model for students how to think, not what to think.

There are times, however, where the weight of the teacher's voice might shut down inquiry. This might be the case if a teacher expresses a hateful or extremist view

and if their opinion conflicts with the values of the school community. To support preservice teachers in figuring out “where” and “how” they should disclose, the teacher educators convey the following pieces of advice: gain as much knowledge as possible about young people’s feelings toward the issue and as well as that of the school community. Preservice teachers can ask their secondary-age students to first share their opinions to gain valuable insight into their beliefs and values. This could help them determine if adding their own stance would impede upon an open exchange of thoughts. Also, preservice teachers should think critically about when and how to share their stance. Effectively navigating teacher disclosure is contextual and requires that teachers carefully consider the purpose for sharing their views, the impact on an open discussion, and the relationship with young people.

Discussion of Research Question 3

In this section, I discuss the teacher educators’ strategies and recommendations for handling the aforementioned challenges, connected with findings within Theme 3. The teacher educators agree preservice teachers should maintain open lines of communication with parents and administrators throughout the school year. In their courses, their preservice teachers create a sample letter, parent presentation, or parent-friendly learning plan explaining these points. The learning plan assignment, in particular, help parents understand what the discussion of a controversial issue looks and sounds like in the classroom. Parents will also see that the teacher has planned a carefully thought-out learning experience.

For preservice teachers, the activities provide practice with effectively communicating with parents and learning how to gain their support. When the time

approaches in their teaching profession to share their goals and instructional techniques, teachers might find the task less daunting. Like Hannah's preservice teacher, they can draw upon the sample letter or presentation they made during their courses. Yet, the teacher educators pointed out that sending out a single communication at the beginning year is just the first step in building a positive and trusting relationship with parents. Throughout the year, teachers should share positive news about their child and invite the parent to share their child's accomplishments and family news with them. Ongoing two-way communication with parents strengthens the school-parent partnership and increases parental involvement in their child's learning.

The teacher educators emphasize to preservice teachers that gaining their supervisor's support is foundational. They should meet with their supervisors frequently and consistently throughout the planning and implementation phases. Administrators can provide teachers with guidance on addressing potential challenges that they might not have otherwise considered. Xavier has his preservice teachers role-play the conversation. Acting out the situation offers preservice teachers invaluable practice in talking about their pedagogy in a strong way with their supervisors and learning how to best prepare for the conversation.

The teacher educators model various strategies preservice teachers can utilize for de-escalating heated moments in the classroom and building their emotional development. In situations where disputes arose in their classrooms, a few teacher educators stepped aside and allowed preservice teachers to try and reconcile the conflict among themselves first. Giving students a forum to voice their reactions to a comment without teacher mediation encourages students to play an active part in their own

learning. They engage in self-reflection, listen more attentively to each other, and ask clarifying questions. This strategy also enables to hold their classmates accountable for upholding the discussion norms and maintaining a safe classroom environment.

Teachers have a responsibility to re-establish a safe space. They need to intervene in the discussion when a student makes an offensive comment about someone else's identity. The teacher educators implicitly model for preservice teachers how they can constructively address the problem. Their strategies demonstrate to preservice teachers that hateful statements have no place in the classroom while reinforcing the teacher's responsibility in turning that moment into a learning opportunity. Teachers should help young people understand why their statement was harmful and guide them in distinguishing between intent and impact. It opens a chance for them to elaborate on their comments and rectify their mistakes. The teacher educators also remind preservice teachers that it is acceptable to pause the lesson if it is becoming heated and return back to it later. Doing so prevents teachers from losing control of the classroom climate and having their authority undermined. Teachers, therefore, need to be able to think flexibly and take notice of signs where hostility between students could threaten the classroom atmosphere.

The teacher educators help preservice teachers explore the emotive dimension of controversial issues. Tyler stated preservice teachers should help young people express and manage their emotions rather than make them feel that "emotionality is the enemy." Some issues related to young people's lives and their identity could trigger a range of emotions from sadness to anger. If teachers ignore those feelings, young people could possibly grow detached from the discussion. The teacher educators engaged preservice

teachers in reflective journaling. They facilitated conversations focused on identifying where emotions might likely arise, what causes them, and how they can be expressed appropriately. These practical activities give them a chance to actually experience what it feels like to express one's emotions while discussing controversial issues. Preservice teachers develop a sense of how they can create emotional safety in their classrooms and support students in appropriately verbalizing their emotions.

Finally, the teacher educators support preservice teachers in handling personal-level challenges. Their recommendations for building content knowledge and teaching practices help shift preservice teachers' thinking from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset. The teacher educators all agree teaching controversial issues is complex. It requires years of expanding one's own content knowledge and sharpening teaching practices. There will be moments that might cause teachers to question their self-efficacy as professionals and leave them feeling deflated. Joining a coalition of social studies educators offers teachers a source of professional and emotional support. They can learn new teaching techniques and receive advice on how to handle particular challenges. This dialogue and sharing of experiences can keep preservice teachers motivated and committed to teaching controversial issues despite the difficulties that may arise.

Relationship to Theoretical Framework

Problem-posing education, as opposed to the banking model of education, cultivates students' critical thinking skills and promotes active citizenship behaviors (Ochoa-Becker, 2007; Parker, 2001). Teachers and students dialogue, question, and critique their realities (Wardekker & Miedema, 1997). Through dialogue, students' critical consciousness grows. They recognize systems of inequality and develop a

commitment to take action and transform systems that oppress marginalized people (Freire, 1968/2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Nouri & Sajjadi, 2014). The teacher educators' practices and course goals present strong connections to Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy and problem-posing education (Freire, 1968/2000). In the following paragraphs, I describe the places in the findings where I noticed parallels between their practices and aspects of Freire's problem-posing model of education. The section is divided into five subsections, each focusing on the links between one critical pedagogy construct where I found evidence of this in the findings. Within each subsection, I reference themes and subthemes, where appropriate to support connections.

Relationship Between Findings and Problem-Posing Education

In problem-posing education, the teacher or student presented an issue of relevancy and meaning to their lives (Freire, 1968/2000; Shaver, 1992). Teacher educators, such as Kristen, Stephen, and Tyler in this study suggested to their preservice teachers that they discuss local or state issues with their field placement students. As the findings within Theme 1 reveal, young people find examining contested issues within their own communities highly motivating. They can speak with stakeholders to gain perspectives on how the situation has impacted them and then reach out to local representatives to propose change. Young people have the chance to experience the process of changing conditions in their own communities (Nyambe & Shipena, 1998). In time, they might be driven to address justice-related problems on larger national and even international levels.

Relationship Between Findings and Dialogue

Freire (1968/2000) states dialogue is grounded in “love, humility, and faith” (p. 91). These elements are foundational in the problem-posing education model and when discussing a controversial issue. The teacher educators aimed to create an environment grounded in “love, humility, and faith” (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 91) by laying the groundwork for discussion (Subtheme 2a) and maintaining an emotionally safe classroom space for students (Subtheme 3b). Although the teacher educators generally agreed preservice teachers should be open with young people about their views, they advised preservice teachers to first consider the consequences of disclosure. Expressing a view that contradicts a “climate of mutual trust” (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 91), can hinder an open and critical investigation of an issue. To prevent this from happening, the teacher educators made it clear this is their personal view and then they welcome students to share their own. This approach models for preservice teachers how they can build an open and democratic learning environment. From a secondary-age student’s perspective, it demonstrates a teacher’s willingness to alter personal their views in light of new information (Freire, 1968/2000).

Relationship Between Findings and Teachers as Co-Constructors of Knowledge

Problem-posing education rejects the idea of teachers depositing information in students’ minds. Instead, teachers are encouraged to co-construct knowledge and figure out solutions to problems with students (Freire, 1968/2000). Findings presented within Subtheme 2c and Subtheme 3c demonstrate teacher educators’ willingness to step away from the authoritarian teacher role and discover new knowledge alongside preservice teachers. In doing so, they showed preservice teachers how they can help their own

secondary students to form their own evidence-based opinions, ask questions, and communicate their thoughts, all of which develop their critical thinking skills (Freire, 1968/2000).

Firstly, the teacher educators used instructional strategies where they and their preservice teachers co-examined the different perspectives surrounding a controversial issue. Hannah, Victoria, Nathan, and Kristen engaged their preservice teachers in a variety of discussion structures (e.g., Structured Academic Controversy, Fishbowl, Deliberation, Socratic Seminar, or LET'S ACT Framework). This gave them a chance to exercise agency in the classroom. During the discussion, teacher educators asked probing questions and made sure the conversation remained civil and productive (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011; Shor & Freire, 1987). They also provided preservice teachers with resources that presented multiple perspectives and guided them in researching answers to their own questions.

Secondly, the teacher educators moved away from being seen as the all-knowing expert. A goal in Stephen's class was for preservice teachers to challenge and interrogate each other's ideas and his ideas so that they can develop nuance in their thinking and an ability to talk across the differences. With this goal, Stephen strives to do away with the "vertical patterns characteristic of banking education" (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 80). Students are no longer passive individuals with "who do not have feelings and autonomy" (Shim, 2008, p. 527). They are expected to be critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher, working together and learning from each other. As seen in Subthemes 2c and 3c, teacher educators led preservice teachers in learning experiences

that allowed them to see how answers unfold through the problem-solving process. This allowed preservice teachers to see that teachers are not expected to know all the answers.

Relationship Between Findings and Critical Consciousness

Critical pedagogy aims to amplify “the voices of those who have had to struggle to be heard” (Kincheloe, 2011, p. 24) to raise their critical consciousness. Core objectives in many of the teacher educators’ courses included exploring multiple perspectives of a controversial issue and gaining a nuanced understanding of diverse individuals and groups. Subtheme 2b demonstrates how several teacher educators took a departure from dominant perspectives. They assigned readings from Ronald Takaki and Howard Zinn who highlight perspectives from marginalized groups. Using these texts, the teacher educators facilitated discussions where preservice teachers critically explored the world and questioned why things are the way they are. Preservice teachers contemplated on how power structures privilege certain people while oppressing others (Giroux, 2010).

The exercises in perspective-taking help to develop preservice teachers’ critical consciousness of the diversity that exists in the world. People from diverse perspectives and frames of reference interpret issues differently. The consciousness-raising experiences also prompt preservice teachers to recognize their role in making a more just world. As future social studies educators, they have an important responsibility to help their students uncover hidden voices, challenge stereotypes, and examine the unequal power relationships at the root of injustice (Luke, 2012).

Relationship Between Findings and Praxis

Freire defines praxis as “reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed” (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 126). Engaging in a continuous cycle of action and

critical reflection teaches students that reality is a “process, undergoing constant transformation” (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 75). Findings across the three major themes indicate how teacher educators guide preservice teachers through the cycle of praxis so that they grow into more critical and reflective practitioners. Within Subtheme 1b and Subtheme 3a, for example, the teacher educators describe how they develop preservice teachers’ habit of frequently self-assessing their instructional decisions and considering new ways of teaching to improve the quality of learning. In the process, this helps preservice teachers gain greater self-awareness of their strengths and areas of growth. Following Bianca’s collaborative norm-building exercise, which was described in Subtheme 2a, the class reflected on the benefits of creating a collective agreement and how they can be enforced. Within Subtheme 2b, Tyler and Xavier encouraged preservice teachers to use a newly taught technique in their fieldwork placements. During the next class meeting, they reflected with preservice teachers on what went well and could be improved. Similarly, after Morgan and Abigail modeled how a lesson on evaluating the reliability of news information, the class debriefed on areas that secondary students might find difficult.

In each of these examples, the teacher educators supported preservice teachers in seeking ways to improve the teaching and learning of controversial issues. This demonstrates to teachers that teaching contested issues is not a straightforward and simple practice. It requires teachers engaging in an ongoing cycle of trying out new strategies, evaluating what went well and could be reworked, and then carrying out the revised plan. Based on teacher educators’ responses, praxis, in the context of controversial issues, could include educators considering some of the following

questions: How can I get my secondary-age students to have more open-ended discussions? How can I support secondary-age students to develop a deeper understanding of the issue? Which strategies can I use to defuse heated moments? How will I deal with offensive comments? How do my own personal values, views, and feelings could influence their thinking and teaching of an issue? Reflecting on responses to these questions and thinking and subsequently putting them into practice can further strengthen preservice teachers' capacity to teach controversial issues.

Relationship to Related Research

In the following section, I present connections between the related research I reviewed in Chapter 2 on controversial issues and the findings from my case study. The sections are organized into three subsections. Each subsection discusses the relationship between one or more of the critical pedagogy constructs and one of the three research questions. Within each subsection, I indicate places where my findings support, extend, and refute prior research examining preservice, in-service, and teacher educators' perceptions or engagement with controversial issues in their classrooms. I also reference themes and subthemes, where appropriate to support connections between the findings and the literature.

Relationship Between Research Question 1 and Related Research

In my discussion of Research Question 1, I found that all of the secondary social studies teacher educators in this study agreed teaching controversial issues in secondary classrooms is important and beneficial for preparing students to become contributing citizens. In Subtheme 1a, the teacher educators noted that discussing tough topics helps secondary-age students grow into empathetic, knowledgeable, and responsible citizens.

Preservice teachers (Abu-Hamdan & Khader, 2014; Ersoy, 2010; Philpott et al., 2011) and in-service teachers (Byford et al., 2009) from previous research held similar views. Preservice teacher participants in Abu-Hamdan and Khader (2014) and Philpott et al.'s (2011) generally felt learning about controversial issues widens students' awareness of current issues happening around them. Controversial issues permeate throughout the social studies curriculum and can arise unexpectedly. Therefore, they cannot be avoided entirely.

Secondary social studies teachers in Byford et al.'s (2009) research and the teacher educators in my case study listed various competencies secondary-age students develop when studying controversial issues. Within Subtheme 1a and 2c, the teacher educators said secondary-age students learn how to think critically and craft informed opinion. Additionally, when discussions are structured with clear goals and guidelines, students learn to listen and respond to others who hold different beliefs from them. This enables young people to problem solve in a civil manner and gain a deeper understanding of different perspectives.

Relationship Between Research Question 2 and Related Research

In my discussion of Research Question 2, I described the teacher educators' instructional strategies for teaching controversial issues. As illustrated in Subthemes 2a, 2b, and 2c, teacher educators taught their preservice teachers effective principles for handling controversial issues, such as introducing students to local and relevant issues. They encouraged preservice teachers to explore and experiment with practical techniques that could use in their own classrooms. Similarly, the teacher educator participants in Pace's (2019) study guided preservice teachers in broaching issues that were personal to

their secondary students' lives. They engage preservice teachers in planning for and participating in a variety of age-appropriate discussion strategies. Additionally, both the teacher educators in my case study and in Pace's (2019) research model for preservice teachers how they search for rich resources, as seen in Subtheme 2c. However, other studies examining teacher educators' perspectives and experiences with teaching controversial issues indicate minimal evidence of modeling and use of practical strategies in methods courses (Chikoko et al., 2011). In Chikoko et al.'s (2011) research, the researchers found that training mainly comprised of teacher educators exposing preservice teachers to a few common issues and delivering a brief discussion about those topics.

Preservice teachers, like the teacher educators in Chikoko et al.'s (2011) study, felt controversial issues training did not include opportunities to learn about or participate in effective discussion strategies (Demoiny, 2017; Ersoy, 2010). These findings contrast with the findings reached from my case study. Within Theme 2, the teacher educators described, in detail, how they prepare preservice teachers to lead powerful discussions around tough topics in their own classroom. As shown in Subtheme 2a, the teacher educators modeled for preservice teachers how they can establish a respectful and trusting classroom community with secondary students. Subthemes 2b and 2c show how the teacher educators engaged preservice teachers in a variety of age-appropriate discussion models for secondary students. Overall, the teacher educators prioritized on making sure their preservice teachers left the semester with the tools, strategies, and confidence to conduct a productive discussion.

There are several differences between this case study and earlier research examining how teachers should effectively handle disclosure. The teacher educators in this study recommended that preservice teachers be transparent about their stance and then welcome students to share their own views, as described in Theme 2c. The teacher educators also felt preservice teachers cannot remain neutral. Their stance on issues will surface unconsciously through their curricular choices, instructional decisions, or non-verbal expressions. The teacher educators' strategy illustrates how preservice teachers can be open with secondary-age students and give them the courage to express their own opinions without feeling closed off. In doing so, secondary-age students feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and teachers and build a more trusting relationship between themselves and their students.

However, a majority of preservice teachers in prior research (Ersoy, 2010; Philpott et al., 2011), as well as in-service teachers (Oulton et al., 2011), felt otherwise. Preservice teachers in Ersoy (2010) and Philpott et al. (2011) studies said that a teacher's opinion can influence students and possibly cause the discussion to shut down. Therefore, teachers should present the facts about an issue without supporting any particular position. In-service teachers in Oulton et al.'s (2011) study felt maintaining a balanced role allows students to access a range of opinions. Neutrality encourages students to make up their own minds about a contested issue. When comparing these previous research findings to those reached in my study, it appears that the answer to whether or not teachers should disclose is complex. It requires considering the makeup of the class and community values (Journell, 2011).

Context also plays an important role in how teachers choose to disclose their personal opinions (Hess, 2012; Journell, 2011). With this in mind, a few teacher educators advised preservice teachers to first gather as much information as they can about the students' backgrounds and what they know about the issue. This was described in Subtheme 2c. A few of the teacher educators noted that sometimes when a teacher shares their ideas at the beginning of class, young people might not be so willing to share their opinions, especially if they think their ideas contradict with the teacher's views. This could affect students' self-confidence and self-worth (Journell, 2011). Showing sensitivity toward the wider community values could also alleviate anxieties of parents and administrators. Teachers could use this knowledge to determine if disclosing their opinion will either promote or hinder an open and safe discussion space.

Relationship Between Research Question 3 and Related Research

In my discussion of Research Question 3, I describe the teacher educators' recommendations and strategies to help preservice teachers manage challenges associated with teaching issues of controversy, such as how to deescalate classroom tensions. The findings in Subtheme 3b build on Liggett and Finley's (2009) observations of the strategies teacher educators use to build a classroom community. In Liggett and Finley's (2009) study, the professors used qualifying language and an online discussion board in their course to maintain a sense of camaraderie. While no teacher educators in my case study spoke of an online discussion board in my research, they did speak about communication techniques to promote a strong classroom community. As described in Subthemes 2c and 3b, a few teacher educators encourage their preservice teachers to use phrases that avoided overgeneralization of individuals and groups. When a student made

an offensive remark, teacher educators modeled how to seek clarification without embarrassing the student. The teacher educators in Liggett and Finley's (2009) study and my case study demonstrate how qualifying language and questioning are integral elements of a controversial issues discussion. Qualifying language helps secondary-age students recognize the nuances and complexities of an individual's experiences. Clarifying and probing questions guide students in unpacking their thinking and identity bias statements. Together, the two strategies contribute toward building a safe and trusting community of learners.

Concerning classroom management strategies, the teacher educators in this study and Pasque, Chesler, Charbeneau, and Carlson's (2013) study used similar approaches to control the classroom environment. As described in Subtheme 3b, when teacher educators noticed hateful language or rising tension, they used authoritative approaches and turned the incident into a learning experience. Pasque et al. (2013) explain this solidifies a teacher's responsibility to promote a safe learning environment. The teacher educator participants in their study agreed teachers must actively intervene when someone says or does something threatening and instruct the class to take a break. It equally important they address the situation afterward. Both the teacher educators in my case study and in Pasque et al.'s (2013) expressed classroom conflicts should use this as an opportunity to model for preservice teachers how to effectively handle disagreement. Tension will most likely arise in their future classrooms, especially when broaching tough topics.

Limitations of the Study

The study included four major limitations. The first limitation was the absence of observational data. Findings relied solely on semi-structured interviews and the teacher educators' artifacts. While participants provided in-depth, nuanced data during interviews, observations of teacher educators would provide complementary data. Relying on participants to share what they do in the classroom could be contrary to what is actually occurring during classroom instruction. To address this issue, I cross-checked the participants' interview responses with their course syllabi. This allowed me to evaluate the extent to which all evidence corroborated and converged. (Suter, 2011).

The second limitation was the study setting. All of the teacher educators strongly agreed teaching controversial issues in teacher education programs is important. However, contextual factors can impact their curricular and instructional decisions, in particular, how they approach the teaching of contested issues. If the beliefs and values of their colleges do not align with their own opinions, teacher educators might avoid broaching certain issues that could arouse anger or concern among students and school officials. They might also use different disclosure strategies in response to the makeup of the class and school environment. For example, a liberal left-leaning teacher educator teaching at a conservative right-leaning college might refrain from sharing their opinion about certain contested social policies if they know their beliefs about those policies conflict with the values of the larger community. Essentially, the techniques a teacher educator used in one setting with a specific group of students would not necessarily work within all social studies methods courses. A teacher educator's unique values and makeup of their environment shapes their decisions and methods.

The third limitation was concerned with the sample of the study. I focused primarily on the voices of 12 teacher educators who taught secondary social studies methods courses. Eleven of the teacher educators taught in universities across the United States. One teacher educator taught at a university in Canada. Each teacher educator's particular understandings, challenges, beliefs, and attitudes regarding controversial issues enactment in the classroom may not be a true representation of all teacher educators from his/her respective university.

The fourth limitation was the uneven distribution of participants in each of the three subgroups. The "often incorporates controversial issues into their courses" subgroup was composed of the majority of the participants, specifically 11 of the 12 participants. In contrast, the "sometimes incorporates controversial issues into their courses" and "rarely incorporates controversial issues into their courses" contained the lowest number of individuals, 1 and 0 respectively. This raises several issues. Firstly, the views and practices of the single teacher in the "sometimes" group did not necessarily encompass all teacher educators who occasionally teach controversial issues. His reasons for broaching issues of controversy intermittently may be due to a wide variety of external or personal factors that are unique to his own experiences. Secondly, the unequal sample sizes across the three subgroups make it difficult to make reach sound and reasonable between-group comparisons.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The findings of this study have practical implications for higher education teacher educators and administrators, secondary education teachers and leaders, and policymakers in the field of social studies education. The first section,

“Recommendations for Higher Education Teacher Educators and Administrators,” addresses an important change that should be made in teacher education programs, based on teacher educators’ suggestions. I describe the idea of making a programmatic change to secondary methods where all discipline area teacher educators (e.g., English Language Arts, Math, Science, the Arts, etc.) engage preservice teachers in examining issues of controversy within that specific field.

The second section, “Recommendations for Secondary Education Teachers and Leaders,” builds the teacher educators’ suggestions for teachers to improve their content knowledge and practice. I propose teachers participate in discussions of controversial issues. Professional development opportunities should focus on building teachers’ background knowledge of controversial issues and effective teaching strategies. Mentorship and professional learning communities (PLCs) give teachers time to work with colleagues in meaningful ways. Together, they can concretely address specific problems of practice and devise how to integrate new knowledge into their practice. I also describe school-wide efforts school leaders can make to support teachers in teaching controversial issues. In the third section, “Recommendations for Policy in Social Studies Education,” I suggest curriculum decision-makers and policymakers increase the visibility of controversial issues within the social studies standards and curriculum.

Recommendations for Higher Education Teacher Educators and Administrators

As reported in Subtheme 2c, the majority of the teacher educators advocate for an interdisciplinary approach to teaching controversial issues in teacher education programs. The findings within this theme demonstrate ways English Language Arts, Science, Math, and other content area methods professors can incorporate controversial issues that arise

in their particular discipline. Science professors could facilitate discussions with students about climate change policy. ELA methods professors could present preservice teachers with young adult books that tackle complex issues and model how to use literature to teach about contested issues. They could also design a unit where preservice teachers explore censored, challenged, and banned books. Afterward, preservice teachers could develop a secondary-level lesson plan where students use one of the texts as a tool to examine why schools might choose to remove certain books, identify features in the books that might have made it controversial, and have a structured discussion about the pros and cons of such a decision (Subtheme 1a).

This interdisciplinary approach can help preservice teachers recognize the unpredictability and ubiquity of controversy across the school curriculum. They can arise at any time when teaching almost every subject area in school. Additionally, each methods professor can address difficult pedagogical questions with preservice teachers (in connection with Subtheme 2a). From each professor, preservice teachers can learn a variety of techniques for protecting the sensitivities of students from diverse backgrounds, preventing classroom conflict, teaching contentious material in a balanced way, and avoiding criticisms of bias (in relation to Subtheme 2c). In turn, preservice teachers will develop the ability to help their future students think across different subject area lines and consider alternative viewpoints. These are necessary competencies students need as contributing citizens in a democratic society.

Reprogramming the teacher education curriculum to follow an interdisciplinary approach, as proposed by the teacher educators in Subtheme 1c, requires collaboration among discipline-area methods professors. Higher education administrators and

department chairs can facilitate this initiative by supporting discipline-area teacher educators in developing a learning environment that promotes the handling of controversial issues. They can help methods professors search for areas in their content area where conflicting opinions and multiple perspectives come into play. Teacher educators can also use real-life issues that preservice teachers would encounter in schools. In addition, deans can organize training for instructors on learning research-based strategies for teaching controversial issues. The training could focus on how to create an inviting climate for discussion, apply a variety of discussion strategies such as Structured Academic Controversy and The Last Word, and select appropriate resources.

Recommendations for Secondary Education Teachers and Leaders

In Subtheme 1b, the teacher educators pointed out that the fear of upsetting community stakeholders and not knowing enough can leave teachers discouraged from teaching controversial issues. Within Theme 3, the teacher educators present a variety of strategies for navigating these difficult obstacles. The teacher educators suggest that preservice teachers seek out opportunities to engage in conversations with other educators about issues of controversy outside the classroom (Subtheme 3c). Doing so will build their confidence, knowledge of the issue, and teaching expertise. Preservice teachers interested in teaching controversial issues can also consider joining public venues, such as community meetings or issue forums as another avenue for experiencing controversy. Additionally, they can discuss issues with family members, close friends, and other colleagues with who they feel safe expressing their opinions and asking questions. In these settings, they will gain firsthand experience in listening to multiple perspectives and seeing how people work toward a mutual consensus.

As reported in Subtheme 3c, preservice teachers need resources and ongoing training to strengthen their teaching and comfort levels with handling controversy. Findings within Subthemes 2a and 3b illustrate the teacher educators' for creating a safe and trusting learning environment that is conducive to discussions of tough topics. Based on these findings, professional development should center on teachers learning practical strategies for establishing ground rules for discussion, recognizing bias, managing disagreement, and addressing hate (Subthemes 2a and 3b). Training should also focus on helping teachers understand the "why" behind teaching controversial issues and what makes an issue controversial (Subtheme 2a). Additionally, preservice teachers would benefit from engaging in professional development activities aimed at developing their understanding of specific issues and teaching competencies. In this study, the teacher educators introduced their preservice teachers to various online and print resources to build background knowledge and repertoire of effective teaching strategies (Subthemes 2b and 3c). Building on these practices, I recommend preservice teachers visit websites of credible organizations such as FacingHistoryandOurselves.org, GilderLehram.org, LibraryofCongress.org, ProCon.org, TeachingTolerance.org, TheNationalEndowmentfortheHumanities.gov, and ZinnEdProject.org. Provided on the websites are a wide range of teaching resources and background information on various issues that can support teachers in effectively facilitating a civil and productive discussion.

Within Subtheme 3a, the teacher educators described how preservice teachers can involve key community stakeholders in their teaching of controversy to allay any anxieties they may have and to clarify misunderstandings. These findings show that

controversial issues instruction is a whole-school concern. What occurs in the classroom connects to the school-wide context and beyond—in positive and negative ways. It concerns other teachers in the community, administrators, and parents. Therefore, in addition to teachers proactively communicating with their supervisors and parents about their plans, it is also important for school leaders and Board of Education (BOE) members to develop a school-wide or district-wide approach to support teachers in facilitating these courageous conversations. This will help to mitigate risks associated with teaching controversial issues (such as parent complaints, losing control of the classroom climate, and failing to protect student sensitivities) while promoting consistency in teaching and learning. School leaders can organize ongoing professional development through mentorship and professional learning communities (PLCs). These two forms of embedded professional development provide teachers with the time and space to work together, plan lessons, and developing strategies collaboratively. This works toward a more consistent approach across classrooms in the teaching of controversial issues. It also ensures learning becomes part of teachers' work and their teaching of contested issues continually improves over time (Roberts & Pruitt, 2009). School leaders can use findings from Subtheme 1b, which describe preservice teachers' personal and external fears, to determine mentorship and PLC priority areas.

In Subtheme 2c, the teacher educators said preservice teachers typically shy away from controversial issues because they worry about unintentionally upsetting students and parents or not being able to facilitate effective discussions. Through one-on-one mentorship from an experienced colleague, inexperienced teachers can gain professional expertise on effective classroom management strategies and practical teaching

approaches (Matthews & Crow, 2010). Mentors can schedule opportunities for mentees to observe how they teach a controversial issues lesson and guide them in carefully planning their own lessons. Afterward, they should make sure ample time is created for critical reflection, feedback, and planning for improvement. Given the mentor's experience, they can also guide mentees in establishing and sustaining trusting relationships with parents. Mentors can show mentees examples of effective parent guidelines they have shared with parents, which mentees can use as a model for developing their own. At the beginning of the year, mentors can help mentees develop a parent information sheet that outlines what types of controversial issues they will teach, the rationale for those issues, the benefits to their children, their instructional strategies, and how they will ensure issues are taught in a balanced way from a variety of viewpoints (Subtheme 3a). Throughout the year, mentors can provide mentees with strategies for making feel parents feel included and connected to classroom learning, such as opening opportunities for them to meet and discuss questions around certain issues being taught.

In Subtheme 3c, the teacher educators advised preservice teachers to join professional networks of educators committed to teaching issues of controversy. Within these networks, learn with and from others, exchange ideas, and gain emotional support. To act on this suggestion, school leaders can organize a PLC focused on improving the teaching and learning of controversial issues. A controversial issues-centered PLC encourages novice and expert teachers across disciplines to dialogue about problems of practice and effective techniques. In this collaborative space, teachers work together to develop a joint controversial lesson as well. First, teachers can map out the curriculum to make direct connections between the controversial issues and the concepts being taught

in class (Lindahl, 2008). Then, they can search for reliable sources and effective teaching strategies. Afterward, pairs of teachers can conduct peer observations and then regroup to reflect on the lesson and work through issues. A controversial issues-focused PLC develops consistency in teaching and learning across classrooms. It also provides teachers with the source of support, motivation, and courage needed to continue facilitating tough discussions on controversial issues despite the challenges that may arise.

Recommendations for Policy in Social Studies Education

Opening the school curriculum to controversial issues raises questions of policy on social studies education. The teacher educators felt teaching controversial issues promotes active learning, student engagement with real-life issues, and a greater understanding of multiple perspectives, as reported in Subtheme 1a. These findings suggest contested issues have an important place in the social studies curriculum. That said, it might be beneficial for educational learners to recognize the value of developing school policies and clear guidelines for teaching controversial issues.

Leaders can look to culturally responsive frameworks, such as The New York State Education Department's (NYSED) Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Framework (CR-S Framework) to guide their planning of school-wide policies and practices. The CR-S Framework, for instance, aims to help leaders create learning environments that affirm students' cultures, develops their ability to connect across differences, amplify historically marginalized voices, empower students to become change agents, and develop their critical thinking (New York State Education Department Office of P-12 Education and Higher Education, 2019). One of the four principles in the document is creating a "welcoming and affirming environment" (New York State Education

Department Office of P-12 Education and Higher Education, 2019, p. 14) and provides strategies for achieving this principle. One of the recommendations includes encouraging teachers and students to lean into discomfort and engage in critical conversations.

Leaders can draw on the suggestions within the “Welcoming and Affirming Environment” section of the culturally responsive framework to craft a school-wide vision statement on the role of controversy in the school environment. Together, they can also construct a shared definition of a controversial issue and list examples and non-examples, similar to what a few of the teacher educators did in this study. Additionally, like the teacher educators, the leaders and teachers can develop a brief statement outlining the basic discussion principles. In doing so, school learners create a supportive democratic school culture that supports the study of real-life problems. This will also help to address any anxieties community stakeholders may have about the appropriateness of teaching such issues in school or how they are taught.

The NCSS calls for controversial issues to be studied in the classroom so students are aware of local, state, national, international issues, and cultural and religious conflicts (NCSS, 20016). Several teacher educators in Subtheme 1b mentioned their state social studies standards do not include controversial issues. In this case, teachers might refrain from including them in their classrooms (Journell, 2010). To prepare students to grow into participatory citizens, state social studies standards should deepen students’ understanding of important issues and help them become critical, empathetic citizens. Policymakers should consider revising standards that better reflect the NCSS support for studying controversial issues. Revised standards could place greater emphasis on uncovering bias, drawing conclusions based on evidence, and considering the

perspectives of marginalized groups. Curriculum decision-makers can then develop social studies curricula where students regularly discourse about a common issue and learn how to strategize solutions to addressing the problem. Such learning experiences opens opportunities for students to gain deeper insight into the cares and concerns of others (Knowles, 2017). They develop a greater appreciation for human diversity and learn how to deliberate cooperatively with others.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for further research that can add to the overall understanding of how social studies teacher educators incorporate controversial issues in their classrooms. Future research can focus on the influence of teacher educators' philosophy of social studies education influences on their handling of controversial issues. The research question could be: To what extent does a teacher educator's beliefs and values about social studies education influence how they incorporate controversial issues in their coursework? Examining the intersections of teacher educators' philosophy of social studies education with their teaching practices could provide deeper insight into their curricular and instructional decisions.

Another recommendation for future research is to use the same methodological framework but collect data that capture the preservice teachers' views and experiences in their social studies methods courses. This study would help widen the perspective of what is happening in the teacher educators' course with regard to teaching controversial issues. Data can be collected from course assignments that connect to controversial issues, questionnaires, interviews, and document reviews of submitted assignments. A future study that includes the preservice teachers' points of view can reveal how effective the

learning experiences are in helping them feel confident about teaching issues of controversy.

Researchers could also conduct an ethnographic study in the teacher educators' classrooms over the period of a semester to observe their teaching of controversial issues instruction and interactions with preservice teachers. With this research design, researchers can become "intimately involved with members of the community or participants in the natural settings" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 9). The ethnographic study would be a deep observation-based investigation with researchers sitting in the classrooms during each class session. During classroom observations, researchers can listen and look for ways the teacher educators established a safe and trusting classroom community, helped their preservice teachers understand what a controversial issue is, and guided them in selecting issues and planning lessons. Additionally, they could search for instances where the teacher educators address preservice teachers' concerns and model effective teaching strategies. Observational data can be triangulated with samples of student work and interviews with the teacher educators and students. An ethnographic study also opens an opportunity for researchers to track changes in preservice teachers' attitudes and behaviors toward teaching issues of controversy. This could be measured using interviews or questionnaires. If findings indicate little to no change in preservice teachers' outlook and behaviors, researchers could examine the relationship between the course activities and their feelings of preparedness.

A final recommendation is to conduct a comparative study with secondary teacher educators and elementary teacher educators, as minimal research has been conducted in this area (Chilcoat & Ligon, 2004). This study can examine the similarities and

differences in their attitudes and approaches for teaching controversy. Specific research questions could include: How does teaching controversial issues differ in elementary social studies teacher education than in secondary social studies teacher education? How do the challenges in teaching controversial issues differ in elementary social studies teacher education than in secondary social studies teacher education? Similar to this study, data can be collected from in-depth interviews and teacher-provided artifacts. Focus group interviews can be conducted to compare opinions and experiences within the elementary teacher educator subgroup and within the secondary teacher educators subgroup. As participants share thoughts in this group setting, another person could connect to or share a diverging perspective, leading to a deeper examination of the topic.

Conclusion

In James Baldwin's speech, "A Talk to Teachers," he stated children "have the right and necessity to examine everything" (Baldwin, 1963). Students should "examine society and try to change it and to fight it—at no matter what risk." Decades later, Baldwin's words still remain relevant. Today's young people live in a contentious time. They are exposed to contested issues through social media and the news. Teachers should create learning experiences early on where students have the opportunity to discuss controversial issues. Within the safe and structured classroom space, students can engage in respectful dialogue about challenging issues, deepen understandings of different perspectives, and take informed action to create change. Through these experiences, students develop a commitment towards social justice and equity in their communities. To guide their efforts in helping young people discuss complex issues, training must begin in teacher education programs. This study offered possibilities for strengthening

preservice teachers' capacity and determination to explore controversial issues with their future students. I hope this study inspires teacher education and secondary-level leaders to think about the types practical supports they can offer teachers so they develop the confidence and competencies to facilitate courageous conversations on tough issues.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE EMAIL TO UNIVERSITY GATEKEEPERS

Dear [Name of university gatekeeper]:

My name is Ariel Henry and I am a doctoral candidate at St. John's University. I am pursuing a Doctor of Education degree in Instructional Leadership. My research interest focuses on the teaching of controversial issues. I am conducting a case study on how higher education professors, specifically secondary social studies methods professors, prepare preservice teachers to teach controversial issues. I am also interested in understanding their perceptions toward teaching controversial issues.

There are three research questions that will guide the focus of my study:

1. What are secondary social studies teacher educators' attitudes toward teaching controversial issues?
2. How do secondary social studies teacher educators approach the teaching of controversial issues in their courses?
3. How do secondary social studies teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to handle the challenges associated with teaching controversial issues?

I am seeking to recruit secondary social studies teacher educators who:

- have incorporated controversial issues into their coursework or teach topics that broach controversial issues
- have had experience guiding preservice teachers in teaching controversial issues and addressing potential challenges

Participation would involve 2-3 video conferencing interviews, each lasting approximately 45 minutes and scheduled at their convenience as well as sharing of course syllabi and any lesson plans, handouts, assignments, and digital resources that address controversial issues. Participants will not receive payment for participating in this study. That said, I am reaching out to you to inquire if you could provide references of any higher education professors who incorporate controversial issues in their classes and who might be interested in taking part in my study.

Thank you for your time and support. I look forward to hearing from you!

Best regards,
Ariel

Ariel N. Henry
Doctoral Candidate
St. John's University
8000 Utopia Parkway
Queens, NY 11439
Email: ariel.henry10@stjohns.edu
Cell: [REDACTED]

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE EMAIL TO REFERENCED PARTICIPANTS

Dear [Participant's name]:

My name is Ariel Henry and I am a doctoral candidate at St. John's University. I am pursuing a Doctor of Education degree in Instructional Leadership. My research interest focuses on the teaching of controversial issues.

I am conducting a case study on how higher education professors, specifically secondary social studies methods professors, prepare preservice teachers to teach controversial issues. I am also looking to understand their perceptions toward teaching controversial issues.

[Name of gatekeeper who provided reference] recommended that I reach out to you because you would be an ideal participant for my study. I was told that you have and/or currently teach a secondary social studies methods course at the higher education level. Within the coursework, you integrate topics and experiences that involve preservice teachers learning how to teach issues of controversy in their classroom.

Participation for this study will involve 2-3 video conferencing interviews, each lasting approximately 45 minutes and scheduled at their convenience as well as sharing of course syllabi and any lesson plans, handouts, assignments, and digital resources that address controversial issues. Participants will not receive payment for participating in this study.

If you are interested and willing to participate, I am asking for all participants to complete a short survey on your opinion and experiences with teaching controversial issues. This will ensure you match the desired criteria for this study. It is estimated that this survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. If you meet the criteria for this study and you are interested in participating, will be contacted within 3-5 days. Please click this link to respond to the survey:

https://stjohnssoe.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9A16DHdzDxWY101

Thank you for your time and support. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,
Ariel

Ariel N. Henry
Doctoral Candidate
St. John's University
8000 Utopia Parkway
Queens, NY 11439
Email: ariel.henry10@stjohns.edu
Cell: [REDACTED]

APPENDIX C

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS FLYER



Participants Needed for Research Study on Preparing Preservice Teachers to Teach Controversial Issues

Have you taught an elementary or secondary social studies methods course that integrates controversial issues with pre-service teachers?

Have you guided teachers in teaching controversial issues and addressing potential challenges?

If so, please consider participating in this dissertation research study.

Consider Participation if You

- are a higher education professional who teaches an elementary or secondary social studies methods course
- incorporate controversial issues into your coursework or teach topics that broach controversial issues
- have had experience guiding preservice teachers in teaching controversial issues and addressing potential challenges

Participation Involves:

- 2-3 video conferencing interviews, each lasting approximately 30-45 minutes and scheduled at your convenience
- sharing course syllabi and any lesson plans, handouts, and assignments that address controversial issues

If you meet the criteria and are interested in participating, please complete this survey by Friday, July 31, 2020. https://stjohnssoe.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9A16DHdzDxWY101

Questions: Please contact Ariel N. Henry at [REDACTED] or send an email to ariel.henry10@stjohns.edu

No reasonable foreseeable or unknown risks as well as discomforts beyond any faced in daily activity to you as the participant are involved in this study. Participating in this study may not directly have benefits, but the findings are intended to inform teacher education programs. You will not receive payment for participating in this study.

Findings from this research can be of use to higher education administrators to explore how they help faculty learn strategies for tackling hot-button issues and to evaluate if their programs adequately equip pre-service teachers with the skills and knowledge to engage in issues-based discussions.

St. John's University, The School of Education, Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership
8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens, NY 11439

APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT SCREENER

Thank you for accepting to participate in my dissertation research study examining teacher educators' perceptions of and practices for teaching controversial issues for my dissertation. For this survey, I am asking if you could respond to the following question items about teaching controversial issues in your classroom. This will ensure you match the desired criteria for this study. This survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. If you meet the criteria for this study and you are interested in participating, you will be contacted within 1-2 days.

1. First and Last Name
2. Position and Affiliation
3. Phone Number
4. Email Address
5. In your opinion, how important is it to address controversial issues in teacher education programs?
 1. Not important at all
 2. Low importance
 3. Neutral
 4. Important
 5. Very important
6. How frequently do you integrate controversial issues in your courses?
 1. Rarely (1-25 percent of course hours)
 2. Sometimes (26-50 percent of course hours)
 3. Often (51-100 percent of course hours)
7. Are you open to sharing your course syllabus with the researcher?
 1. Yes
 2. No
8. Will you be interested in participating in 2-3 video conferencing interviews, each lasting approximately 45 minutes in length?
 1. Yes
 2. No

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE EMAIL TO ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS

Dear [Participant's name]:

Thank you for your interest in participating in my study. Based on your responses from the questionnaire, you are eligible to participate! Your knowledge and experience about the topic of preparing preservice teachers to teach controversial issues will greatly inform this study.

Here is just some background information about myself and my research study: My name is Ariel Henry and I am a doctoral candidate at St. John's University. I am pursuing a Doctor of Education degree in Instructional Leadership.

My research interest focuses on the teaching of controversial issues. I am conducting a case study on how higher education professors, specifically secondary social studies methods professors, prepare preservice teachers to teach controversial issues. Additionally, I am interested in understanding their perceptions of teaching controversial issues.

Participation will involve 2-3 video conferencing interviews, each lasting approximately 45 minutes and scheduled at their convenience as well as sharing of course syllabi and any lesson plans, handouts, assignments, and digital resources that address controversial issues. You will not receive remuneration for participating in the study. However, participating in this study may not have direct benefits to you, but the findings are intended to inform teacher education programs. No reasonably foreseeable or unknown risks as well as discomforts beyond any faced in daily activity to you as the participant are involved in this study

I would like to schedule the interviews between (time frame). Could you please provide a few dates and times that would for you?

Again, thank you for your contribution and time! I look forward to hearing your thoughts and experiences about this topic.

Best regards,
Ariel

Ariel N. Henry
Doctoral Candidate
St. John's University
8000 Utopia Parkway
Queens, NY 11439
Email: ariel.henry10@stjohns.edu
Cell: [REDACTED]

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The interview questions focus on your perceptions and attitudes for teaching controversial issues. Your interview will be audio and video recorded to assist with accurately documenting and transcribing your responses. If at any time you do not feel comfortable answering any of the following questions or believe they do not hold relevance to you, you may proceed to the following question. Responses will not be evaluated. Neither your name nor any information that would compromise the anonymity of your participation will be included in this study.

Interview 1

Employment and Educational Experience

1. What led you to become a teacher educator?
2. Tell me about your previous social studies educational experiences as a student. Did they involve learning about controversial issues?

Perspectives on Controversial Issues

3. How do you define controversial issues?
4. What influenced you to include controversial issues in your coursework?
5. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of engaging preservice teachers in discussing controversial issues?
6. How comfortable do you feel teaching controversial issues? Why?

Interview 2

Problem-Posing and Mutual Dialogue - Instructional Approaches for Developing Preservice Teachers' Controversial Issues Pedagogy

7. How do you begin the study of controversial issues with your preservice teachers?
 - a. Optional probing question: How do help preservice teachers select controversial issues to use in their classrooms?
8. What does the discussion of a controversial issue look like and sound like in your classroom?
 - a. Optional probing question: How do you model effective strategies for facilitating civil discussions?
9. What role do you play during the discussion?
10. How do you facilitate disagreements across students' opinions on issues?
11. How do you debrief on the discussion with your preservice teachers?

12. What do you hope for you preservice teachers to take away personally and in their teaching practice from learning about controversial issues with you?
13. Can you tell me a little more about (assignments/lesson/topic in course syllabi related to controversial issues instruction) and how your students responded to those experiences?
 - a. Optional probing questions: Why did you include this? What were the goals?

Raising Critical Consciousness and Engaging in Reflection for Transformation –
Challenges in High School Settings and Opportunities for Change

14. How do you think preservice teachers feel about discussing controversial issues in the high school setting?
 - a. Optional probing questions: How did you come to this conclusion? Can you think of a time or tell me a story about...?
15. What challenges do you foresee secondary preservice teachers facing when attempting to teach controversial issues in a standards-based high stakes testing classroom?
 - a. Optional probing question: How do factors such as testing/the school culture/school leadership/community affect teaching of controversial issues?
16. Reflecting on our conversation, what can be done going forward in teacher education programs to help preservice teachers gain the confidence and skills to teach controversial issues?

A few days following the interview, I will send you the interview transcripts. Please tell me if there anything that you would like to comment on, expand, or clarify.

APPENDIX G

DATA ANALYSIS AND SUMMARY TABLE

Research Question 1: What are secondary social studies teacher educators' attitudes toward teaching controversial issues?			
Examples	Codes	Categories and Subcategories	Themes

Research Question 2: How do secondary social studies teacher educators approach the teaching of controversial issues in their courses?			
Examples	Codes	Categories and Subcategories	Themes

Research Question 3: How do secondary social studies teacher educators prepare preservice teachers to handle the challenges associated with teaching controversial issues?			
Examples	Codes	Categories and Subcategories	Themes

Miscellaneous			
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APPENDIX H

CODEBOOK

Codes	Definition	Example	Frequency
Administration	Participant recounts own experience with administration and how preservice teachers can gain support from their administrators when including controversial issues in their curriculum.	If the administration has your back, then you don't have to worry about the parents as much and so I always encourage my students to be as transparent with the administrators as possible because it's kind of like when you are a parent and you get a call from the school and your immediate thought is what did they do.	24
Anticipate Potential Conflicts	Participant explains what he/she does to prevent conflicts from happening or alludes to instances where this cannot be planned for in advance.	We can plan as much as we can for reactions but sometimes you just don't know what they're going to say if a student throws something out there just to be contrary and to stir the pot.	14
Avoidance / Neutrality	Participant shares the belief that teachers should not avoid addressing controversial issues or questions if it is possible for teachers to remain objective. Participants provides various reasons supporting this position.	So just ignoring it and staying silent about an issue because you're so passionate about the issue that you couldn't even imagine teaching one of the perspectives doesn't make sense because you're not going to help the situation by just staying silent.	18

Ground Rules	Participant describes how he/she creates a learning environment that encourages active engagement in learning, positive social interaction and self-motivation. Participant might also speak about discussion guidelines, norms, ground rules, classroom contracts, etc. as an important part of building a safe and respectful classroom community and before engaging in discussion of sensitive issues.	One thing that I try to do before we discuss anything that is controversial is to set guidelines for discussion.	25
Frameworks	Participant describes teaching techniques and frameworks used to facilitate discussions (e.g., Structured Academic Controversy, Let's Act Framework)	four different effective teaching strategies: big paper, barometer, save the last word, four corners debate...Then I also introduce some others: traverse talk, and respond, reflect, and review.	18
Committed Impartiality	One of Thomas Kelly's (1986) four perspectives on the teacher's role when discussing controversial issues; teachers disclose their point of view explicitly and purposefully during the discussion while ensuring not to sway student opinion by introducing students to competing perspectives; teacher models thinking process for reaching and defending his/her stance.	You're basically saying that this is what I believe but it doesn't necessarily mean that it's right. When you are dealing with a controversial open issue, there is more than one rational viewpoint here and I want to hear what you have to say about it as well.	24

Scope and Sequence	Participant provides an overview of how his/her course is organized	I try to structure my classes around is like a central question – kind of ethical, philosophical ones like – I mean, some of them can be extreme, I’m giving extreme ones. Are humans a cancer on the planet? Like an investigative through different forms of history, all those different things.	28
Diana Hess	Participant refers to Diana Hess’s (2009) definition of a controversial issue or refers to an issue as either open or settled. An open issue is a current matter of controversy and debate for which we want students to engage in deliberating multiple and competing answers (Hess, 2009). A settled issue is a question or topic for which we want students to build and believe a particular answer. It is resolved, no longer controversial, and is met with widespread agreement (Hess, 2009).	The law says that it's legal. Now you can ask questions about if my religious views disagree with that. There are a lot of questions about that policy but the broader question of whether or not gay marriage should be legal, that's not a controversy anymore.	30

Discussion v. Debate	Participant points out the different elements and goals of discussion and debate.	Take the time to understand how other people, how other individuals or other groups perceive this issue differently...This is really the essence of all democracy of a democratic republic. The goal is not to change their mind.	32
Emotionality During Discussions	Participant speaks about the role of feelings and emotions when engaging in a discussion about a difficult and sensitive issue. Participant directly or indirectly states that controversial issues evoke an emotional response from people.	We do have an emotional response to things. I hope that helps to make the conversations much more evidence based more so than this is my emotional response to what it is that's happening.	16
Field Experience	Participant describes fieldwork activities in his/her coursework such as classroom observations, student teaching, visiting historical landmarks, etc.	It's our partner school so it's kind of a nice school to take them to teach their very first lesson, which this usually is. So, when I call them and say I want to set up my clinicals for social studies, they just give me the grade levels that have time so we have to be ready.	10
Not Taught Enough in Schools	Participant shares belief or recounts own experience that show difference between what is emphasized in teacher education programs regarding teaching controversial issues and what is actually happening in secondary classrooms.	What I notice in the classrooms and the teachers I work with is that when it comes to controversial issues, they don't do them...I noticed that shift...They were so afraid to even ask the questions they just stopped doing it.	11

Interdisciplinary Study	Participant mentions there are controversial issues in content areas besides social studies in both higher education and high schools. Participant directly/indirectly recommends they should be addressed in all disciplines.	I think teacher ed programs need to think about it's not just the social studies professor who talks about how to teach controversial issues, but the other subject area faculty need to do it too.	18
Learn Alongside Students	Participant expresses and models how teachers and students can collaboratively find answers to questions.	I don't know the answer to this question but maybe we can figure it out together.	27
Lesson Planning & Teaching	Participant describes how he/she guides preservice teachers in developing, teaching, and reflecting on a lesson or inquiry.	Then we go through and we take time - these are our goals, here's how we are going to assess them, and now we have to think about what that controversial issue is going to be and what resources we are going to use to engage them looking at different ways of thinking about this.	30
Resources	Participant speaks about various resources (i.e., human, physical, financial, intellectual, etc.) that preservice teachers need. Participant suggests or states effective teaching happens over time with practice and right resources.	It can feel isolating and it can feel very lonely to do this work and so finding the people who are in the fight with you.	35
More than Two Sides	Participant directly or indirectly states that controversial issues include more than two perspectives.	There are not just two sides to an issue, but there are two strong sides of an issue that are going on public discourse.	26

Multiple Perspectives	Participant mentions there are more than two sides to a story and shares strategies or resources he/she uses to guide students in examining an event or questions from different viewpoints.	I think it's counterproductive to have radically one side and radically another side. You have to pepper it with some things in between.	22
Openness and Honesty	Participant advocates for and explains why teachers should be straightforward honest with students about their viewpoints.	Like my biggest advice is to always be upfront with your decision making process because that allows students to buy in more so than if you were closed off.	39
Parent Communication	Participant speaks about various ways and importance of communicating with parents before initiating discussing controversial issues with class or teaching a unit of study that deals with issues of controversy	Send home a note to some parents beforehand just to say that we are going to be talking about this topic. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me.	28
Parents #1 Fear	Participant cites parent reactions as one reason preservice teachers' shy away from teaching issues of controversy	One of the most common things that come up is what about their parents?	18
Students Work it Out	Participant recalls instance where he/she allowed preservice teachers to resolve disagreements, clarify each other's misunderstandings, or challenge speech that was discriminatory, hateful, or extremist.	I gave him that platform and then what happened was that the rest of the students attacked him, and they basically said you're wrong this is not how this works. I stepped back and let them have it.	28

Central to Democratic Citizenship	Participant explains why he/she includes study of controversial issues in his/her coursework and why high school social studies should include controversial issues in their curriculum.	If we don't start to teach young people how to talk about issues, how to handle controversy and the ways they think about the world at a very young age, what do we expect them to do when they're 18?	27
Reflection / Debriefing	Participant describes debriefing approaches or ways he/she engages preservice teachers in thinking about how they would adapt learning to their context.	So, what is applicable and how far and what can we change to bring the ideas in without doing exactly what we did here?	18
Select Issues and Sources	Participant describes having preservice teachers identify controversial issues and/or gathering articles on their own.	We look at potential topics. I give them a handful of questions, like grab those questions and those become the foundation of their lesson or they can come up with one.	21
Start with Self	Participant shares how he/she begins conversation of controversial issue by engaging preservice teachers in an activity where they reflect their backgrounds, their identities, their experiences in relation to the issue.	We spend the first couple of weeks discussing who we are, what shapes our perspectives, what shapes the way we understand the world, the way we understand people, the way people understand us.	28

Taking Control of Discussion	Participant recalls instance where he/she had to use authority over students to stop discussion because students were not following discussion guidelines, the class was becoming polarized causing hostility between students, or there was use of hate speech and extremist views.	If someone says something to that effect, I say there's no place for white supremacist points of view here and then explain the reason.	36
Personal Connection to Students	Participant discusses the importance of taking into consideration the audience, their backgrounds, and identity when discussing sensitive issues.	When you are talking about them, you're going to be talking about some of the people who experience going through some of the problems that these issues are centered on.	25
Well-Planned Lesson and Discussion Structure	Participant discusses necessary preparation involved in implementing an effective discussion and lesson.	What you need to have is a very well formulated lesson plan with your resources so you can show this is what I'm doing, how I'm doing it, and why.	32
			710

APPENDIX I

FROM CODES TO CATEGORIES TO THEMES TABLE

Codes	Categories and Subcategories	Themes and Subthemes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central to Democratic Citizenship • Diana Hess • More Than Two Sides • Not Taught Enough in Schools 	<p>Understanding of Controversial Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open v. Settled Issues • Policy • Real-Life 	<p>Theme 1: Undertaking a Difficult but Necessary Responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subtheme 1a: Preparing Young People for Active Citizenship • Subtheme 1b: Dealing with Personal and External Factors • Subtheme 1c: Embracing an Interdisciplinary Approach <p>Theme 2: Preparing For and Steering the Controversial Issues Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subtheme 2a: Laying the Groundwork for Discussion • Subtheme 2b: Understanding Controversial Issues and Examining Resources • Subtheme 2c: Facilitating an Open Student-Centered Discussion <p>Theme 3: Cultivating a Positive Relationship with Community Members and Yourself</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field Experience • Interdisciplinary Study • Lesson Planning • Scope and Sequence 	<p>Course Activities and Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Voice • Inquiry • Driving Questions 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion v. Debate • Frameworks • Learn Alongside Students • Multiple Perspectives • Reflection/Debriefing 	<p>Discussion Facilitation</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipate Potential Conflicts • Emotionality During Conversations • Ground Rules • Personal Connections to Students • Students Work it Out • Taking Control of Discussions 	<p>Safe Classroom Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Guidelines • Sensitivity • Defuse Heated Moments 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidance/Neutrality • Committed Impartiality • Openness and Honesty • Start with Self 	<p>Teacher Role and Identity</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration • Parent Communication • Parents #1 Fear 	<p>Stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear Goals and Plan • Strong Relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subtheme 3a: Communicating Proactively with Parents and Administrators • Subtheme 3b: Maintaining an Emotionally Safe Classroom Space for Students • Subtheme 3c: Eschewing Your Role as the Expert
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources • Well-Planned Lesson & Discussion • Select Issues and Resources 	<p>Planning and Preparation Support System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical Resources • Repertoire of Teaching Strategies • Knowledge about Issues • Range of Credible Sources 	

APPENDIX J

DOCUMENT SUMMARY FORM

(Adapted from Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 54-55)

Name of Participant:

Name or Type of Document:

Date Received:

Date of Document:

Event or Contact which Document is Associated:

Page #	Keywords/Ideas	Comments: Relationship to Research Questions

Brief Summary of Contents:

Significance or Purpose of Document:

Is There Anything Contradictory About this Document?

Salient Questions/Issues to Consider:

Additional Comments/Reflections/Issues:

APPENDIX K

RESEARCH PARTICIPATION INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM



**Consent to Participate in Research Study
St. John's University**

Title of the Study: Preparing Preservice Teachers to Facilitate Courageous Conversations: A Case Study of Social Studies Teacher Educators' Perceptions and Practices

Investigator Name: Ariel N. Henry

Department: School of Education, Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership

Phone: [REDACTED]

Co-Principal Investigator/ Faculty Mentor Name: Dr. Elizabeth Gil / Dr. Randall Clemens

Department: School of Education, Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership

Phone: 718-990-1557

Introduction

You have been invited to participate in a research study that explores the perceptions and practices of teacher educators when teaching controversial issues. You were selected as a possible participant because you self-identified or were recommended by a social studies researcher for incorporating controversial issues in your coursework and instruction.

This study will be conducted by the Ariel N. Henry, the co-principal investigator and a doctoral candidate in The Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership in the School of Education at St. John's University. The research is part of the investigator's doctoral dissertation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand secondary social studies teacher educators' practices and attitudes toward teaching controversial issues. Additionally, the study aims to explore how teacher educators prepare preservice teachers for the challenges in the reality of schools when teaching controversial issues.

Description of the Study Procedures

If you are interested in participating in this study, you will be asked questions related to your social studies educational experiences and perspectives on social studies and controversial issues. Additionally, you will be asked to share how you incorporate and/or approach controversial issues in your classroom and how you prepare preservice teachers to address the possible dilemmas they may encounter when teaching controversial issues.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

No reasonably foreseeable or unknown risks as well as discomforts beyond any faced in daily activity to you as the participant are involved in this study. This study does not involve any face-to-face interaction.

Payments and Benefits of Being in this Study

You will not receive payment for participating in this study. Participating in this study may not directly have benefits, but the findings from this research can be of use to higher education administrators to bridge ideological disconnects between educators serving students on the ground and those serving at universities. Higher education administrators can use findings to explore how they help faculty learn strategies for tackling hot-button issues and evaluate if their programs adequately equip preservice teachers with the skills and knowledge to engage in issues-based discussions.

Confidentiality

The investigator will follow important measures to ensure that individual privacy, confidentiality, and security is protected in the process of collecting and storing data.

Notes and transcripts will be accessible only to the investigator and her mentor. All records of participation will be kept strictly confidential. They will be stored in a locked file while all electronic data will be saved in a secured password protected file. Your name along with any personally identifying information that may make it possible to identify you will not be included in any report and replaced with pseudonyms.

Rights to Refuse or Withdraw

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If at any time, you wish to refuse or withdraw from the study, you are free to do so for any reason without explanation or penalty. Withdrawing from the study will not result in any consequences. During the interviews, you have the right to not answer any question for any reason. Additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview information. If you are not comfortable answering any of the questions or they do not hold relevance to you, the interviewer will proceed to the following question.

Right to Ask Questions or Report Concerns

You have the right to ask questions pertaining to this research study and these questions can be answered at any point before, during, or after the research process. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [REDACTED] or ariel.henry10@stjohns.edu. A summary of the study results can be sent to you, if requested. If any problems or concerns arise as a result of your participation, you can report them to the IRB Chair, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe at 718-990-1440. Concerns can also be reported by completing a Participant Complaint Form, which can be found on the IRB website at <https://www.stjohns.edu/academics/provost/grants-and-sponsored-research/human-participants-irb-animal-use-research>

Consent

There is no in-person contact involved in this study. This study involves audio and video recording of the video conferencing interviews to assist the researcher with accurately documenting and transcribing responses.

Once the researcher transcribes the audio, they will be checked for accuracy. The audio and video files will be treated with confidentiality. They will be stored on a password protected computer and will be destroyed one year following the making of the recording. Your name and any other identifying information (such as your voice and name of institution) will be edited out and omitted from the study.

Only the investigator and her mentor will have access to the recordings. Please read the following statements and select “Yes” or “No.” You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

Yes _____ No _____

I consent to participating in the video conferencing interviews and being audio and video recorded using a digital recording device.

Yes _____ No _____

I consent to having the audio recordings transcribed.

Yes _____ No _____

I consent to the researcher retaining the audio and video recording in a password protected computer for one year, so the researcher obtains information needed for her research.

Your signature below indicated that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study and that you have carefully read and understood the information provided above including the study purpose and procedures. You understand that your information will be handled with confidentiality and confidence. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form for your records along with any printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigator.

Participant's Name (print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Investigator's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX L
IRB CERTIFICATION



Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Jun 22, 2020 10:57 AM EDT

PI: Ariel Henry
CO-PI: Elizabeth Gil
Ed Admin & Instruc Leadership

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - **IRB-FY2020-454** *Preparing Pre-Service Teachers to Teach Controversial Issues: Teacher Educators' Perceptions and Practices*

Dear Ariel Henry:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Preparing Pre-Service Teachers to Teach Controversial Issues: Teacher Educators' Perceptions and Practices*. The approval is effective from June 22, 2020 through June 21, 2021

Decision: Approved

PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data must be discarded.

Selected Category: 5. Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology

Marie Nitopi, Ed.D.
IRB Coordinator



Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Aug 3, 2020 2:59 PM EDT

PI: Ariel Henry
Dept: Ed Admin & Instruc Leadership

Re: Modification - IRB-FY2020-454 *Preparing Pre-Service Teachers to Teach Controversial Issues: Teacher Educators' Perceptions and Practices*

Dear Ariel Henry:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Preparing Pre-Service Teachers to Teach Controversial Issues: Teacher Educators' Perceptions and Practices*.

Decision: Approved

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology

Marie Nitopi, Ed.D.
IRB Coordinator

REFERENCES

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