

Public Abstract

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Title:Along a Mobius strip: A journey into postcolonial theory, decolonization, and social studies with/in Indigenous contexts

This dissertation work sought the experiences of current and former social studies teachers in one American Southwest school district in order to begin a life-long learning journey to better understand and advocate for culturally relevant social studies curriculum for Indigenous students. Along the way, this dissertation unpacked the history of research with/in Indigenous contexts, engaged in critical reflection about the research process, teaching, and learning, and ultimately worked to breakdown qualitative and academic research traditions to open new spaces for dialogue about social studies curriculum and social studies teacher preparation with/in Indigenous contexts. The study associated with the dissertation utilized qualitative interviewing techniques and theories related to decolonization, postcolonial theory, critical pedagogy, and poststructuralism. As a result, the dissertation found social studies as a subject area to be marginalized in larger education conversations. On the other side of this, however, is the continued use of state-level social studies curriculum that neglects accurate and relevant content and contexts related to Indigenous histories and contexts. As both a silenced subject area (within education) and a curriculum that silences the voices and experiences of Indigenous peoples (historically and currently), this dissertation pointed to critical issues for social studies education that must be addressed. The first, that social studies is marginalized in the larger education conversation was found in the school district to lie in the district's focus on current high stakes testing demands. The impact of high stakes testing on social studies' in the day to day lives of educators was also a topic discussed more broadly in the dissertation. Second, the social studies curriculum used in the school district reflected the larger problem of inaccurate and Eurocentric representations of Indigenous histories and cultures. This dissertation work asked, in the end, for participants to share their thoughts on how social studies in the school district could change to make teaching and learning more fulfilling. The dissertation also ends with critical discourse on the need to continue relationships and dialogues between researchers and participants to make change possible.