RESEARCH PROGRAM

Examining Culturally Relevant Social Studies Teachers

Social studies classrooms continue to be one of the primary spaces in schools where race can be discussed formally. Many, if not most, historical and current events involve issues of race and ethnicity. However, many social studies teachers do not make the examination of race a substantial component of their teaching, and their students may form misconceptions that issues of race only emerged during certain periods, or worse, that racism was solved some time ago. Yet, there are a growing number of social studies teachers who are making race a central component in their classrooms. As the U.S. student population becomes more racially and ethnically diverse, it is important that teachers not only teach about race, but also teach in ways that are aligned with their students’ cultures. Within this context, it is crucial to understand how teachers make sense of and use culturally relevant (and possibly sustaining) pedagogy.

This research program investigates secondary social studies teachers’ beliefs and practices related to the incorporation of race in the social studies curriculum. Over a school year, the researchers will examine 13 self-identifying culturally relevant social studies teachers from urban and suburban schools, of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and with a range of years teaching. Moreover, this study attempts to capture different models of culturally relevant teaching and examples of culturally sustaining pedagogy in social studies. There is a growing body of research that shows the positive impact of culturally relevant teaching for all students, and particularly for students of color, and this research attempts to add to that burgeoning work.

Biographical Sketch

Christopher C. Martell, Ed.D., is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Social Studies Education, where his research focuses on the development of social studies teachers’ beliefs and practices. Dr. Martell’s recent research projects have examined social studies teacher education through longitudinal studies and the role of race and ethnicity in the history classroom. He is also interested in teacher action research and practitioner inquiry. He currently teaches courses in elementary and secondary social studies methods, urban and multicultural education, and action research. For eleven years, he taught high school social studies in urban and suburban contexts. Dr. Martell’s research and scholarly work has been featured in *Theory and Research in Social Education*, *The Journal of Social Studies Research*, *Social Education*, *The Teacher Educator*, and the edited books, *Doing Race in Social Studies: Critical Perspectives* and *The New Politics of the Textbook: Critical Analysis in the Core Content Areas*. 