

**Social Studies in South Korea: Examining Teacher and Teacher Educator's Views**

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**Abstract:**

The Republic of South Korea is a nation that has seen dramatic changes in its economic and educational systems over the course of the last 50 years. These circumstances present unique views of citizenship and the roles that teachers and teacher educators play in this process. This study presents two case studies, one a classroom teacher and the other a teacher educator. It examines their views of social studies and geography education, the process of training new citizens, and offers insights into what the dynamic relationship between the two offers future educators and teacher educators.

**Key words:** social studies education; geography education; teacher education

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**Introduction**

The Republic of South Korea has seen a dramatic rise in both its educational and economic ranking in the last 30 years. These transformations have been connected to the rapid growth of the South Korean economy and the emphasis placed upon the necessity of having an educated and work-ready collection of human capital to staff its growing economy (Byun, Schofer, & Kim, 2012). Whatever the reason, South Korea has become one of the most highly competitive and respected educational systems in the world, as well as having one of the world's largest export economies (Byun et al., 2012). These and other factors have driven the success of the educational system in South Korea to its current position as one of the top five among all participating nations in recent rankings of the world's best educational systems by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2011; 2012; 2015). This presents a unique opportunity to examine two South Korean educators, one a K-12 educator and the other a teacher educator, to better understand this phenomenon and the implications on each participant's instruction and views of social studies education. The specific foci of this study are social studies and, more specifically, geography education. These two South Korean case studies may offer some insights for reflection and further questions facing social studies. South Korea was chosen due to unique

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opportunities presented to the researcher that allowed for travel to and direct interaction with the case study participants. The two research questions were:

- What are the differences between a social studies/geography teacher and a teacher educator of social studies and geography education?
- How do these differences impact each participant's understanding of citizenship education and the role of curriculum in this process?

It is the goal of this study to use the insights to inform the practice of teacher educators and K-12 educators. It is necessary to examine the history, purpose, methodology, and future goals of social studies and geography education in South Korea. A brief history of education in South Korea will showcase the dramatic changes in education across time. Data collected from two case study interviews, classroom observations, and field notes of South Korean educators, one a teacher-educator and one a secondary-level educator, will be examined. While the insights from these case studies are specific to the two participants and their schools, the researcher hopes to gain insights into the current status of social studies education and teacher preparation, in particular geography education. Lastly, it is the goal that these insights might inform teacher preparation and current classroom teachers.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is an exploratory study that utilized two case studies and an emergent design framework. The framework was chosen due to the limited size and scope of the researcher and participant interactions and the necessity for design flexibility and analysis (Creswell, 2003). An emergent design was most appropriate because, while the researcher had questions and a focus in mind, it was not clear what might emerge from the data collection. Furthermore, case studies were most appropriate due to the very nuanced and specific nature of the interviews and observations situated in classrooms in South Korea. In addition, the researcher analyzed the results as a social and cultural outsider. This framework lends itself to follow-up studies in which the researcher is able to complete further check-ins with the participants to determine change over time.

#### **Limitations**

This study examines two teachers and is, therefore, situated within their experiences and not the broader spectrum of educators throughout Korea. The data was collected over the course of a two-week visit to South Korea; the researcher had limited access to the participants due to

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administrative preferences of the school directors. There was also a substantial language barrier, overcome through long and purposeful conversations and allowing the participants access to written versions of the questions.

### **Problem Statement**

This study originated from the researcher's former colleagues and a familial connection to South Korea, visiting South Korea multiple times while teaching in a K-12 setting. During this time, the researcher had multiple informal interactions with South Korean educators and was impressed and intrigued with the commitment to quality social studies education. This generated an interest in determining the reasons, if any, why South Korean education—specifically geography and social studies—was so successful and, furthermore, examining how educators established their views. As a result of connections made while completing a graduate degree, the researcher met a highly awarded social studies teacher and a highly respected and well-published teacher educator. The researcher established direct connections in order to examine the two educators.

Once called an Asian tiger economy in the 1990s for its rapid growth, South Korea has made dramatic changes in its economy and educational systems in the last 20 years (Byun et al., 2012). These factors and the rapid ascent of the position of South Korea's educational system in the OECD rankings (2011; 2012; 2015) shows remarkable improvement from previous decades. In a 2013 study by the Economist Intelligence Unit, South Korea was ranked as the world's second best educational system out of 50 evaluated countries based on a number of factors including literacy rates, graduation rates, and spending per pupil (Gayathri, 2013). This is worth noting given that the OECD rankings have been criticized for being too limited and narrowly focused. It is also important to remind readers of the high-stakes nature of education in South Korea. These are all reasons to study South Korea and determine what is being done well and what gaps exist, with a focus on social studies and geography education.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to determine if the two case studies might offer insights into the current status of social studies and geography education in South Korea through their professional practice. In order to achieve this, a thorough evaluation of the history, purpose, and trajectory of general education, social studies, and geography education, and the detailed examination of the two case studies follows. Case study one is Byeoung (pseudonym), a social studies/geography teacher educator at a large university in South Korea whose insights and responses illuminate a deeper understanding of the structure of current teacher preparation

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programs in social studies/geography education in South Korea. Case study two is Dalnim (pseudonym), a secondary social studies/geography educator in South Korea whose responses and insights showcase the application of classroom methods and skills at the secondary level, relevant to student success. While these two participants offer a nuanced view of social studies and geography education and do not reflect all of South Korea, their experiences and insights provide valuable information for professional practice. After reviewing the respective histories and evaluating the case studies, this paper will attempt to glean insight into the methods, structure, and application of social studies education and teacher preparation in both social studies and geography education.

### **Methodology**

This was a mixed methods study that relied primarily upon qualitative analysis and the use of some descriptive statistics; it did not use advanced qualitative analysis as it was not appropriate given the nature of this study. This study had an n of two and used a case study framework. This study was orientational, examining data from a predetermined position of the researcher's perspective on the topic (Patton, 2002). Given that the researcher already has a preconceived idea about the topic, reflexivity was used through journaling and peer debriefing. This study focused on the participants' responses, and the researcher's thoughts and beliefs did not interfere with the work conducted. Grounded theory techniques were used to allow for and document potential theories (Patton, 2002).

The researcher for this study is currently an assistant professor at a small university in the midwestern United States. The data was collected while the researcher was still a high school social studies teacher and had not yet transitioned to higher education. The professional position of the researcher is important given the perspectives of a classroom teacher versus those of a teacher educator. This study utilized case study analysis and examined the unique experiences of two seasoned South Korean educators. The study employed interviews, classroom observations, and content analysis. All interactions were conducted in English. An interview protocol contained 15 demographic questions and 45 questions ranging from general education to more specific questions of social studies preparation and geography education (see appendix A). This protocol was lengthy in order to obtain a rich collection of data. Interviews and observations were conducted at the university and high school of each respective participant. Observations took place across a minimum of two classes for each participant.

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Data were analyzed using thematic analysis due to the diverse topics examined in the interviews, allowing for a broad collection of themes and topics to potentially arise (Patton, 2002). These themes included relationships between teachers and teacher educators, social studies education, social studies teacher education, social studies educator preparation, geography education, and geography education preparation. Insights into the multi-faceted nature of social studies education and geography education in South Korea were the primary focus. The researcher began by transcribing the interviews and reading them in their entirety to determine if any major themes emerged. Next, the researcher coded interviews and used descriptive statistics to determine the prevalence of various terms and ideas. Then, the interviews were compared to determine whether there were consistencies or divergences between the participants' responses. The researcher then examined the notes and observations collected during the field visits to determine if the responses of the participants were congruent with the events taking place in the classroom. A holistic approach to the data was the primary goal for the researcher in order to paint the most effective and descriptive picture of the participants and their responses. This was especially important for the researcher given the language and cultural barriers that existed between the participants and the researcher.

#### **A General History of Education in South Korea**

South Korea has changed much over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, beginning with the Joseon dynasty (rulers of Korea for over 700 years), Japanese colonization, the Korean War, and rapid economic growth with democratization to end the century (Choi, 2010; Sorenson, 1994). The Japanese occupation and forced subjugation of the Korean people during this period was evidenced in education (Jho, 2006; Sorenson, 1994). Education during Japanese occupation focused on a Japan-centric social and academic identity based upon the Japanese model of 14 to 15 years of schooling, severely limiting ethnic Koreans' access to a continuation of education (Jho, 2006). Half of the elementary-age population were ethnic Koreans, yet only five percent of those students continued to middle school (Jho, 2006; Sorenson, 1994). This system was further restricted in higher education, where the colonial Japanese government educated primarily native Japanese or persons of Japanese descent; this system lasted until the liberation of the Korean peninsula by allied forces in the later stages of World War II (Sorenson, 1994). After the end of WWII, the Korean education system was left in shambles as the country faced high illiteracy rates, and many of the educated elite were Japanese citizens who had been running the formal education system for the decades preceding liberation (Choi, 2010; Sorenson, 1994). In 1948, the contemporary version of the Republic of Korea was founded

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and was required to create an educational system almost from scratch with few highly trained and highly qualified persons to lead (Choi, 2010; Sorenson, 1994).

After only five years of peace, the outbreak of the Korean War caused even more damage and positioned South Korea to have to rebuild not only their educational system but much of the country's infrastructure as well (Choi, 2010; Sorenson, 1994). In the years immediately following the end of the Korean War, South Korea began to make changes and show improvements; the educational system encouraged loyalty, patriotism, self-reliance, and anti-communist beliefs while contributing to growing the economy (Sorenson, 1994). A large portion of the educational system, specifically the curriculum, was based upon that in the United States due to the influence of the United States military and the subsequent decision to import a US-based curriculum from the state of Colorado (Jho, 2006). Through a joint US and South Korean effort, a comprehensive review of the curriculum from Colorado was conducted and then used as the primary model for creating the new South Korean national curriculum (Sung, 2010). South Korea established its first national curriculum in 1955 after the passage of the Educational Law of 1954, creating a national curriculum that would be controlled by the government and that is today still heavily controlled by the South Korean government (Sung, 2010). To date, South Korea has had seven different versions of their national curriculum, with each being revised to reflect social and political changes in the country (Sung, 2010). The Colorado model remained the educational plan for South Korea until the 1970s when a shift occurred in education to begin building social capital towards modernization (Choi, 2010; Sorenson, 1994). During this period in South Korean history, the focus of the nation and its educational system shifted towards building the South Korean economy into a modern capitalist entity that would garner the same benefits obtained by the United States, Japan, and Great Britain (Choi, 2006; Jho, 2010; Sorenson, 1994).

The most dramatic change in South Korean education took place in the early 1990s, which saw the rapid ascent of the South Korean educational system in world rankings. Coincidentally, it was during this time that South Korea ended 40 years of military-based and semi-dictatorial leadership, electing the nation's first president without military experience (Jho, 2006). Since the early 1990s, South Korea has become a hallmark of educational success and has been applauded by many organizations. However, there are some who have argued that South Korea has become what Sorenson (1994) called a "testocracy," where the focus for primary and secondary students centers on various tests that act as institutional gatekeepers. Currently, the South Korean educational system focuses on what are called the Big Three: Korean language, English language,

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and math education. These three subjects dominate schools, national testing, and overall curricular focus.

The goals of the current South Korean education system are to prepare students for success after high school and college (Ahn, 2012). According to Byong-man Ahn, former minister of the Department of Education, Science, and Technology, the key to future success in South Korean schools is to become more student-centered and less about testing (Ahn, 2012). He has argued that the current state of education in South Korea has become too much about test scores and not enough about the individual child, which is contrary to the model of tests as points of entry and exit. However, some have argued that South Korea's collectivists' society with Confucian roots has allowed it to be successful because of the focus on the good of the collective and the role education plays in achieving those goals (Jho, 2006; Sorenson, 1994). The changes in education in South Korea will be something to follow, as it has transitioned from an ascending nation to one of prominence and status in the world's economic and educational rankings. One wonders how the nation and its education system will respond and adapt to achieve future goals.

#### **A History of Social Studies and Geography Education in South Korea**

Nested within these educational changes, social studies has been a part of the South Korean transition since the very early days of the republic in the early 1950s and the passage of the Educational Law of 1954 (Lee, 1992, as cited in Jho, 2006). This law established social studies as a primary subject of the South Korean curriculum. Again, much of this has been attributed to the influence of the United States military and its goal to foster an American-style system (Jho, 2006). The curriculum in general has been heavily controlled by the national government in South Korea—one finds clear evidence of this in the annual national review of social studies textbooks to ensure conformity of material (Sung, 2010).

In South Korea, social studies have been divided into divisions of history education, geography education, and general social studies education (Jho, 2006). In accordance with the time and the escalation of the Cold War, leadership in South Korea and a strong American influence caused social studies in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s to focus entirely on citizenship education, and for many South Korean social studies educators this became the unified goal of the profession (Jho, 2006). Furthermore, social studies in South Korea in the early 1960s and the decades that followed promoted a curriculum focused on a "reflective citizen who is able to make informed decisions about various social issues and make civic actions in our diverse and interconnected world" (Cha, 1996; Kyoyukbu, 1998; Lee, 1991, as cited in Jho, 2006).

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The current goals of social studies in South Korea are to cultivate democratic citizens who have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to live in a democratic society (Zhao et al., 2007). Much of the curricular changes in the seven national curriculums and specifically in social studies have changed to reflect progress towards democratization focused on capitalistic tendencies (Sung, 2010). Fostering these changes has led to a rise in tension among the three contending groups in social studies: history education, geography education, and general social studies (Jho, 2006; Sung, 2010). The contention exists over who will have prominence in a field that is seen by its professionals as marginalized as STEM education grows in prominence (Sung, 2010).

Changing views of social studies education have forced history, geography, and general social studies to become contentious and fractional while attempting to gain class time, seat time, and funding (Jho, 2006; Sung, 2010). As a result of these issues, many South Korean social studies teacher preparation programs have become sectioned off between history, geography, and general social studies with limited collaboration (Jho, 2006). The current national social studies standards reflect integration, but teacher preparation and primary and secondary school departments are still sectioned off by content (Sung, 2010). Much of the integration movement used the National Council for the Social Studies (1994, as cited in Sung, 2010) as a model for how to create a fully integrated curriculum. Pro-integration supporters argued that social studies should take an integrated approach to subject matter as a unified discipline instead of the individual subjects as currently exists in South Korea (Sung, 2010).

In response to pushback by university teacher preparation programs and primary and secondary social studies departments, the South Korean Ministry of Science, Education, and Technology mandated the creation of an interdepartmental program that fosters collaboration between departments responsible for preparing teachers for classroom life (Jho, 2006; Sung, 2010). Currently in grades K-8, social studies are officially presented in an integrated format with three sub-sections consisting of history, geography, and social sciences (Korean Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2007; Sung, 2010). In high school, the curriculum is still officially listed as social studies with separate subjects such as law and society, economics, politics, Korean modern history, world geography, and world history (Korean Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2007; Sung, 2010).

The future of social studies in South Korea appears to be heavily dependent upon how the discipline deals with the mounting social, economic, and political changes currently taking place, such as the push for an integrated approach and a shifting population that is becoming less homogeneous while demographically trending younger (Choi, 2010). At the heart of the

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integration debate is the national government's desire to transition to a fully integrated model in secondary education, similar to that in the United States, while dealing with groups such as history education, geography education, and general social studies and those in these groups who desire to remain independent and semi-autonomous (Sung, 2006). Choi (2010) notes the shift in the homogeneity of the population of South Korea: Since 2007, the number of non-native South Koreans living in the country has risen to almost two million residents, causing social studies to evaluate the goals of citizenship education (Choi, 2010). The future of social studies in South Korea will depend upon how educators and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology choose to respond to these changes. These choices will impact social studies, the nation, and its students for many years to come.

Geography education has played an integral role in the social studies curriculum since the first national curriculum was established in 1955 (Sung, 2010). Presently, geography education in South Korean social studies is separated into three distinct areas: Korean geography, world geography, and economic geography (Zhao et al., 2007). Currently, all South Korean high school students are required to study Korean geography in order to understand their place geographically and socially to inform their positions as citizens (Zhao et al., 2007). The Korean geography curriculum has six primary goals: (1) understand the relationship between natural geography and human geography; (2) understand the regional characteristics and change of Korea from diverse perspectives; (3) develop thinking skills while learning geographical knowledge; (4) participate in the society through collecting, synthesizing, and analyzing geographical information; (5) cooperate with people in different provinces of Korea; and (6) understand the importance of environments, love Korea, and be determined to unify North and South Korea (Korean Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2007; Zhao et al., 2007). World geography focuses on natural, human, and social environments of the world (South Korean Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 1998, as cited in Zhao, Hoge, Choi, & Lee, 2007). Economic geography focuses on the interplay of the economy, humans, and the environment. Presently, these three geography courses and others related to them are offered at the high school level and are structured as independent departments in both teacher education and secondary education; teacher education requires future teachers of geography education to focus their studies on geography coursework (Lee, 2012).

### **Case Study One**

Byeoung is a 39-year-old teacher-educator in geography education in the department of social studies education at a large university in Seoul, South Korea. Byeoung primarily teaches

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undergraduate course work in geography education, focusing on methods and theory. All of his students are women, ages 18-21, preparing to become either geography education teachers, history education teachers, or general social studies education teachers. Byeoung received his undergraduate and master's education in geography education at Seoul National University in Seoul, South Korea. Byeoung completed his Ph.D. in geography education at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, USA. Most of Byeoung's teaching experiences have been at the collegiate level in geography education, with a brief time as a high school geography education teacher, and the remaining experience at the college undergraduate or graduate level.

Byeoung's campus in Seoul honored Korean history, the history of the university and its founding, and the students. The campus, with its large green spaces, seemed to blend well into the natural environment while being located in one of the world's largest urban centers. Byeoung's classroom was in a space that was clean and had numerous maps and images in the rear of the classroom. Students were arranged in orderly rows and sat attentively during class. The conversations occurred in Korean, with some exchanges taking place in English to allow Byeoung to explain a concept to the researcher, followed by continued conversations in Korean. Conversations were orderly, and it was evident that respect for the instructor was paramount. It was clear that Byeoung led the classroom and students followed his lead throughout the discussion. The discussion for the day was the understanding of South Korea's place within the world and how South Korea's economic growth has influenced its geographic footprint. The researcher was limited by a lack of command of the Korean language and was subject to the assistance of Byeoung and the students to explain dialogue. Later, the researcher and Byeoung debriefed about exchanges that seemed noteworthy.

When asked to define geography education, Byeoung stated that it was "a discipline that might give some ideas for how to better understand the world, society, and individuals and geography can teach the value of nature and living with nature." According to Byeoung, geography education is not seen as an independent discipline and is not viewed seriously by the university. Byeoung further stated that he believed that because of the heavy influence of the United States, human geography dominated the curriculum in South Korea; physical geography was just as useful but underrepresented. Byeoung attributed much of this to the existence of physical science and its discussion of physical geography. When asked to describe the geographic awareness of his students on a scale of one to five with one being poor and five being excellent, Byeoung believed that his students were somewhere around three because they had not yet taken enough geography courses.

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When asked about geography's role at the K-12 level, Byeoung stated that South Korean primary and secondary students take national exams, but the major focus of administrators is on what he called the three majors: English, math, and Korean language; in consequence, geography education is marginalized. Byeoung suggested that this was further complicated by the current Korean government's plan to have schools, teachers, and districts compete with one another for salary and funding in order to foster excellence in all areas of education. These directives by government officials helped further shift the focus onto the Big Three while pushing the remaining content areas to the periphery. Byeoung explained that he was responsible for revising the national geography education curriculum at the middle school level and was satisfied with it, and although he was not satisfied with the elementary or high school level curriculum, he was still in favor of the national geography education curriculum. However, as Byeoung elaborated on his position, he stated that a major issue in many South Korean schools is that some teachers do not read the national curriculum and rely solely on the textbook when teaching their courses. This behavior is supported by the fact that whenever the national curriculum is revised, all textbook companies must revise their textbooks accordingly and must be screened and evaluated by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology before being used in the classroom. This allows teachers to rely solely on the textbook, as there is the appearance of a governmental guarantee of content and accuracy. KICE (Korean Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation) is the agency responsible for revising all curriculums in South Korea except for math and science education, which have their own agencies. KICE is responsible for creating a task force that proposes and makes amendments to the social studies curriculum.

Byeoung stated that there are no discussions about shifting away from a national curriculum and he does not see a time when there will not be a national curriculum, especially given the heavy reliance upon the curriculum and textbooks by teachers. However, according to Byeoung, the characteristics of a high-achieving curriculum are those that offer a deep understanding of all aspects of geography and its role in society. When asked if South Korea has a high-achieving curriculum, he stated that it depended upon the case, and if one were talking about knowledge, yes, but deep understanding, no. When asked to provide an example of another country with a high-achieving national geography education curriculum, Byeoung offered the United Kingdom as an example because of its emphasis on both content knowledge and deep understanding.

When asked to evaluate South Korean geography education, Byeoung noted the curriculum's identified faults, as the system encourages teachers to rely solely upon the curriculum and textbooks, and schools focus too much on math, English, Korean, and science. However, because

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the system is nationalized and unified, one can expect the same results across the nation. Byeoung rates the K-12 geography education as poor to fair and dependent upon socioeconomic factors that influence quality of life and teacher training. While South Korea has a national test that includes geography via social studies, students are encouraged to focus on math, English, and the Korean language.

Social studies/geography teacher education preparation was rated as very good and very rigorous with a high position of respect in Korean Society. Geography teacher education preparation in universities in South Korea focus on content, methods, and theory. Currently, South Korea's teacher preparation program in social studies is separated into history education, geography education, and general social studies education. According to Byeoung, the current focus of preparation is dependent upon the focus of the future teacher. If students have a concentration in history education, they are required to focus their content and major studies in history, and the same is true for geography education. However, if students are studying general social studies education, they are required to take a wide variety of courses in all areas of social studies. According to Byeoung, 30 percent of South Korean geography teachers have either a Master's degree or Ph.D. in geography. Teachers in the general social studies education track tend to teach at the elementary level where everything is integrated. Byeoung stated that he does not believe that an integrated model, such as that utilized for general social studies education, is an effective means of educating teachers because they lack content knowledge.

Currently, the framework for social studies education used as a description of the content areas is similar to that in the United States. However, in the social studies department within teacher education, each discipline has its own internal department: for example, history education, geography education, and general social studies education. There is not an integrated framework in place for the social studies in South Korea, and while this is being pushed by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, Byeoung believes that the integrated model would lead to a reduction in the quality of teachers and content because there would not be enough concentration in the respective areas of social studies. Byeoung is not in favor of framing social studies as a collective department, and he believes that one could not frame the individual subjects together into a comprehensive license. Byeoung is in favor of maintaining the separate disciplines and separate content specializations to maintain a high quality of education. According to Byeoung, integrating social studies programs might better inform the practice of teachers but would be detrimental to teachers and students in the various fields and would not allow for any in-depth study of the subject matter. In all, Byeoung suggested that the current

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separation of contents is best, but the fields of social studies and geography education need to focus more on the needs of the students and learning for learning's sake, not just content memorization.

### **Case Study Two**

Dalnim is a 45-year-old high school social studies/geography teacher in Seoul, South Korea. Dalnim received her B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in geography education from Seoul National University. All of Dalnim's educational experiences have been at the high school level, and she identifies her class as a combination of both male and female students with no percentages offered; Dalnim estimates that 20 percent of her students and their families receive some form of government subsidies. The ages of her students range from 15-16 years old, as she currently teaches the equivalent of 10<sup>th</sup> grade at her high school.

Dalnim's school was on the southern outskirts of Seoul. The school was a part of a larger complex of school buildings neatly arranged on a campus to provide a comprehensive K-12 education for its students. The building was adorned with the artwork of students and various announcements about school events. Dalnim's classroom was similar to one found in the United States, with desks neatly arranged in rows and student work on and near the announcement board, a collection of drill protocols, administration and teacher announcements, and procedural materials. Students wore uniforms and sat attentively during Dalnim's lecture, the primary means of instruction. During this class, students discussed historical empires of the world and their geographic locations in order to further their understanding of historical geography. Additionally, the class discussed the importance of recognizing knowledge and being informed as a hallmark of good citizenship.

When asked to define geography education, Dalnim had a difficult time at first and began discussing the nature of Seoul and its economic disparities. Dalnim defined geography education as a field that shows students how to understand people and how they live in certain areas and how they might get along. Dalnim stated that she rates the level of geographic awareness of her students as fair. The role of geography education in her classroom is to teach students to think critically and to open their eyes to the world through study. When stating that she teaches critically to teach her students to think critically, Dalnim referenced the social studies' goal of fostering critical thinking. The role of geography education in Dalnim's school is to prepare students for the university entry exam, while the national curriculum fosters diversity, an understanding of the environments impact on humans, and rational ways of thinking.

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When asked if she supported the national curriculum, Dalnim stated that she did not like how the curriculum was focused more on content memorization and neglected how students were feeling. Dalnim suggested that on a Likert scale, she was neutral in her rating of the national curriculum. Bureaucrats, professors at major universities, and the Korean Teachers Union—and not classroom teachers such as herself—were influential in deciding the national curriculum. When discussing the arguments for a national curriculum, Dalnim began discussing the recent push in South Korea to have an integrated model of social studies and the opposition that was raised by representatives of history, geography, and general social studies. Dalnim stated that some believe that no one has the expertise of all of those combined subjects to be able to teach them properly. Dalnim did not believe there were any arguments or groups in opposition to a national curriculum.

When asked to describe a high-achieving curriculum, she responded that in the eyes of the government it is one that allows students to do well on standardized tests. However, Dalnim believes that, although difficult to measure, high achievement can be found in what a student learns from the geography teacher. According to Dalnim, South Korea has a high-achieving geography curriculum based on scores, but she noted that she believes that geography and social studies are being minimized in order to account for math, Korean, and English. She indicated that South Korea's geography curriculum was rated fair because there are no separate rooms for the study of the subject. When asked about other countries, Dalnim cited the United Kingdom as a country with a high-achieving curriculum because it is very specific. Major weaknesses of the geography education curriculum in South Korea are a perceived disconnect between students' lives and the lack of critical studies of the subject matter, while the curriculum's strengths are how well it is organized to prepare students for national tests. If given the chance to improve the current curriculum, Dalnim suggested that she would require less lecturing and more student activities to foster active learning. (It is important to note that most of the class observed was lecture-based.)

When discussing teacher preparation, Dalnim rated geography education teachers as good to very good. She said that much of the preparation for geography education teaching positions is guided by the national curriculum requirements in the field, although universities decide the curriculum for preparing teachers and ensuring that it matches with the national curriculum requirements for K-12 education. Dalnim suggested that much of the teacher education preparation at the college level is content-focused with some courses on methodology and theory included. With respect to national tests for certification, Dalnim noted that upon

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successful completion of a program in geography education, in order to get a teaching position, one must pass a hiring test. Dalnim further stated that under these circumstances, persons applying for jobs are in a competition for the few geography education positions that are available. When asked if she believed that current teacher education preparation requirements in South Korea were adequate, Dalnim stated that at Seoul National University, where she was trained, five of the six professors in the geography education department had backgrounds specifically in geography and not geography education. While their content expertise is necessary, she believes more professors with education backgrounds are needed. Dalnim suggested that teachers are having these discussions while universities are not.

When Dalnim was asked about social studies in the United States, she indicated that she did not know much about the subject but assumed that social studies and geography education were framed and taught in the same way as in South Korea. Dalnim's defined social studies as the subject to explain society and humans. After reading the definition of social studies according to the NCSS (2011), Dalnim indicated that she believed they were very similar, with the exception of the inclusion of the humanities, mathematics, and science. Additionally, Dalnim indicated that although both focused on citizenship education and preparation, social studies in the US included cultural diversity while South Korea did not, instead focusing on the idea of being democratic. Dalnim noted that she believed that the US model would work in South Korea without the inclusion of interdisciplinary material from the humanities, mathematics, and science. She was in favor of an integrated curriculum and that, although it would be difficult for teachers to achieve mastery in so many areas, it would be more beneficial to students. Under the current teacher preparation programs in South Korea, this would work, but it might not work in the middle grades or high school because of the focus on content specific preparation for pre-service teachers. According to Dalnim, for this model to work in South Korea at all levels, system-wide changes would need to be implemented, from the structure of teacher preparation programs to the classrooms themselves.

### **Analysis**

The two research questions for this study were:

- What are the differences between a social studies/geography teacher and a teacher educator of social studies and geography education?
- How do these differences impact each participant's understanding of citizenship education and the role of curriculum in this process?

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The results of these case studies revealed some trends with respect to how each participant viewed geography education, geography teacher preparation, and social studies. Both Byeoung and Dalnim indicated that they believed that social studies are marginalized by the national curricular focus on the big three subjects and the subsequent focus on testing and funding. However, both note the contribution that social studies makes to the development of citizens. Geography education in South Korea was rated highly, but the geographic awareness of each participant's students ranged from fair to good. Byeoung teaches university level students while Dalnim teaches high school level students, and with this gap there was still a very similar rating, suggesting a disconnect that cuts across age and experience of students. Both case studies were chosen because of their respective teaching positions, but Byeoung has only taught at the university level while Dalnim has had all of her experience at the high school level. Given that a criticism of teacher education preparation by Byeoung was that geography education professors do not have enough K-12 educational experience and focus entirely too much on content, Byeoung's experience reinforces this position. Therefore, this suggests that Dalnim may view Byeoung's lack of K-12 teaching experience as detrimental to preparing students for success as classroom teachers. Furthermore, Dalnim's comments suggest that this lack of experience inhibits the ability of university professors to adequately prepare students due to a lack of substantive experience.

This leads to the general satisfaction with the national curriculum in geography education by both case study participants. Dalnim indicated that she believed it did not reflect students' needs enough, and Byeoung mentioned the need for students to learn for the sake of learning. Each would like to see changes, and both believe that there is something lacking, but neither offered a concrete solution. Both Byeoung and Dalnim discussed issues of economic disparities and their perceived impacts upon student learning, and Dalnim further indicated that socioeconomic issues heavily impacted the quality of teachers and student success. Each indicated being satisfied but followed up with requested improvements. The belief by both Byeoung and Dalnim that the current curriculum is too content-driven is interesting, as each indicated that content expertise is essential to making students successful. Notably, though, Dalnim appeared to focus more on the national testing. Her focus in this area appears to indicate a potential aversion to the high-stakes testing in South Korea.

Byeoung's belief that teacher preparation was good, while Dalnim believed that it was lacking, indicates a potential disconnect between teacher educators and classroom teachers. This disconnect appears to be connected to Dalnim's assertion that many professors in her university

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preparation programs had content-specific backgrounds in geography, in which one might infer a higher value being placed on content knowledge over theory and practice. Furthermore, one might assume that this leads to a culture of content-driven curriculum, which aligns with the issues raised by both participants on the role of content in the curriculum.

When discussing whether or not an integrated curriculum model might work in social studies, each offered unique views on this possibility. Responses suggest that a perceived lack of content focus at the lower grades is okay, but not for the upper grades. Dalnim indicated that she was in favor of an integrated model because she believed it would be more beneficial to students. It must be noted that early in her interview, Dalnim indicated views similar to those of Byeoung, including a belief that content mastery would be impossible, but at the end of her interview, she changed to an approval of the integrated structure. This divide in belief appears to focus on the issue of content mastery of classroom teachers. This further supports the researcher's belief that content mastery and memorization is prized as the most important facet of preparation for students, teachers, and teacher educators.

Each participant noted the importance of social studies as a means of fostering informed citizens through geographic awareness in order to facilitate an understanding of one's place in their own nation and within the framework of the larger region and global society. Neither made an explicit connection to social studies and geography's role in this process; rather, it was inferred through responses and observations that social studies, and geography education specifically, foster good citizenship through an awareness and sense of place. However, the researcher did not ask directly for either participant to define what good citizenship looks, sounds, and acts like. Therefore, assertions were gleaned from the interviews and observations through related questions and responses. Regardless, both indicate a level of importance but do not clearly articulate a definitive response.

Teacher educators and teachers agreement on some points and disagree on others. Dalnim indicated that she believed that the curriculum was decided by the government and university professors, and Byeoung indicated that it is decided by the government, university professors, and the teachers' union, which suggests the existence of potential friction with respect to who is able to influence the direction of education in South Korea. The two case studies, while unique, reflected some of the findings of the literature, notably the high value placed upon standardized testing. Interestingly, both Byeoung and Dalnim referred to testing not as a measurement of ability but as a contest between takers, thereby making testing a means of separation rather than an evaluation of mastery. Further research is needed to determine whether or not these are

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widespread beliefs. One must assume that the consistency of the literature and the responses indicates that others may hold the same feelings and beliefs.

### **Conclusions**

Upon reviewing the literature, case studies, and analysis, it appears that many of the same issues that are currently in play in the US are also in play in the classrooms of the two participants in this study. The heavy reliance upon content memorization and the ability to take a test successfully have shifted the focus of the government, teachers, and teacher educators to positions in which they must create test takers instead of focusing on deeper learning. This has produced students and citizens who are high-achieving, but the measurements of this success are tests. Are students mastering the content or are they merely great test takers? Additionally, the PISA test administered by the OECD for its rankings focuses on the subjects of math and science, which leads one to question how credible a metric it is for evaluating the entire system of education in a country. There appeared to be a disconnect between the teacher educator and the classroom teacher on a number of issues including content, structure of social studies, and educational focus on students' needs. These factors are relevant because of the broad power given to university faculty and the ability to influence the national curriculum in South Korea. How to remedy this gap is a larger question that will need to be addressed.

Social studies and geography education play pivotal roles in the development of good citizenship through an increased understanding of students' place in an ever-changing world. The two case studies showcase this importance, and while they disagree upon where and how the curriculum should be generated, both agree upon its place and position. The importance of autonomy for teachers and students in a US-based curriculum is stressed consistently in the public and academic spheres. The two case studies showcase that this debate is taking place in South Korea, although it is not clear how prevalent the discussion is outside public forums in South Korea. The open discussion of these events is incredibly important, and the perception of the public regarding the role of social studies and geography education is pertinent to the prominence or decline of the subject in schools and the general consciousness.

An important lesson from these case studies is the cultural focus on education and educational attainment. This raises the question of whether or not the United States should undergo a cultural shift with respect to the value of education. High-stakes testing that fosters competition for educational positions already occurs in the United States, but not at the level currently seen in South Korea, with the average high-achieving South Korean student spending upwards of 15

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hours a day on school work. In addition, while neither case study participant fully supports the focus on content specialization, an increase in content coursework may be beneficial to students and teachers in the United States. How to achieve a balance between the two is the prevailing question. The case studies revealed information and insight into the structure, content, and implementation of both geography education and social studies education teacher preparation and classroom applications. What seems to be most important are culturally embedded beliefs, strong influence over all parts of this study, and understanding how each component operates in connection with the others. This is crucial to understanding the nature of not only geography education but all of education in South Korea. How to replicate or influence each is a question for further study. Future studies should include larger sample sizes and broader economic cross sections of South Korean social studies educators. In addition, it would be much more rewarding if there were US-based participants from which a comparison might be created for further insights and analysis.

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**Appendix A**

**Demographic Information**

1. What is your name?
2. What is your current residence (both city, province, and nation)?
3. What is your age?
4. What is your gender?
5. What professional academic position do you currently hold?
6. What is your highest achieved level of education (Bachelor's, Master's, Ph.D.)?
7. What programs have you completed in preparation for your current position?
8. What is your academic/professional background in geography education?
9. At what academic level do you currently teach?
10. What are your personal experiences with geography education?
11. Have all of your geographic education experiences been in South Korea? If not, where else have you had experiences?
12. Can you think of an event that pushed you towards geography education?
13. Can you think of an event or moment that convinced you of the importance of geography education (your "aha" moment)? If so, can you explain and describe this event or moment?
14. Why was the event you described in question 12 so important?

**Remaining Questions**

1. What is your definition of geography?
2. How would you rate the geographic awareness of the students in the classes that you teach?
  - 1 – Poor
  - 2 – Fair
  - 3 – Good
  - 4 – Very good
  - 5 – Excellent
3. What is geography's academic role in K-12 education?
4. Please assess and explain the role of K-12 geography education in your classroom.
5. Please assess and explain the role of K-12 geography education in your school.
6. Please assess and explain the role of K-12 geography education at a national level in South Korea.
7. Are you satisfied with the K-12 geography curriculum in South Korea?
8. Are you in support of the national geography curriculum in South Korea?
  - 1 – Strongly oppose

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2 – Somewhat oppose

3 – Neutral

4 – Somewhat favor

5 – Strongly favor

9. What forces or organizations drive the K-12 geography education curriculum in South Korea?
10. Does South Korea have a national curriculum?
11. Is a national curriculum useful and desirable for geography education?
12. What are the primary arguments for a national curriculum?
13. What are the primary arguments against a national curriculum?
14. What do you believe are the characteristics of a high-achieving K-12 geography education curriculum?
15. Do you believe that South Korea has a high-achieving K-12 geography education curriculum?
16. Are you aware of any other countries that have high-achieving K-12 geography education curriculums?
17. How would you rate the quality of geography education in South Korean schools in grades K-12?
  - 1 – Poor
  - 2 – Fair
  - 3 – Good
  - 4 – Very good
  - 5 – Excellent
18. What are the identified weaknesses of the current K-12 geography education in SK?
19. What are the identified strengths of the current K-12 geography education in SK?
20. What improvements might you recommend to the current geography education curriculum in SK?
21. Is geography stressed more at one academic level than another in SK?
22. Are national tests those that geography students must take and pass? If so, please explain the components as you understand them.

#### **K-12 Teacher Preparation**

23. How would you rate the quality of K-12 geography education teachers in SK?
  - 1 – Poor
  - 2 – Fair
  - 3 – Good
  - 4 – Very good
  - 5 – Excellent

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24. Are there foci in geography education teacher preparation in SK (for example, regionally on the Pacific)?
25. Are there any national certification tests for preservice teachers to complete in order to become a certified K-12 geography teacher?
26. Are there similar teacher preparation tests for teachers of other social science-based classes such as history, economics, government, etc.?
27. What are the general preparation requirements for preservice K-12 geography teachers?
28. Are there specialization requirements for preservice K-12 geography teachers?
29. Do you believe current geography teacher preparation is adequate?
30. What improvements might you suggest for geography teacher preparation?

**Social Studies**

31. Please rate U.S. students' geographic awareness and explain your answer.
  - 1 – Poor
  - 2 – Fair
  - 3 – Good
  - 4 – Very good
  - 5 – Excellent
32. Do you know who defines geography education in the U.S.?
33. Do you know how geography education is framed in the U.S.?
34. Are you familiar with how geography education is taught in the U.S.? Please explain and evaluate its quality.
35. What is your understanding of the academic discipline of the social studies?
36. In the U.S. and according to the National Council for the Social Studies, social studies is defined as the following: (Present the NCSS definition). What is your opinion of this framework?

Please see bottom of sheet for this portion

37. Is there a framework similar to social studies in South Korea?
38. Under the social studies framework, geography education is framed with other subjects that are classified as social studies, as was just outlined. Could this work in SK? Why or why not? Please explain.
39. Do you see this as a potential alternative to the current format for not only geography education but all of the K-12 social sciences in SK? (by this I mean co-framing all of the subjects into a similar fashion, akin to social studies)
40. In your opinion, is it possible to frame social studies within history and not as a separate discipline?
41. In your opinion, is it possible to frame geography within economics and not as an independent discipline?

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42. Is it possible to frame geography within government and not as an independent discipline?
43. In your opinion, how might changing the curriculum to this model impact geographic awareness in SK?
44. Is an integrated social sciences curriculum effective? Why or why not? Please explain.
45. Do you think an integrated curriculum is beneficial or detrimental to students?

## **Appendix B**

### NCSS Definition of Social Studies

...the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is 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.

The aim of social studies is the promotion of civic competence—the knowledge, intellectual processes, and democratic dispositions required of students to be active and engaged participants in public life. By making civic competence a central aim, NCSS emphasizes the importance of educating students who are committed to the ideas and values of democracy. Civic competence rests on this commitment to democratic values, and requires that citizens have the ability to use their knowledge about their community, nation, and world; to apply inquiry processes; and to employ skills of data collection and analysis, collaboration, decision-making, and problem-solving. Young people who are knowledgeable, skillful, and committed to democracy are necessary to sustaining and improving our democratic way of life, and participating as members of a global community.

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