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Examining the Place of Geography in the American Social Studies Curriculum and the Efforts toward an Effective Teacher Education in K-12 Geography

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Abstract. This paper primarily focuses on locating geography education in the American secondary social studies curriculum, and then examines the American teacher education in geography. Therefore, the paper first defines the common ground between social studies and geography, followed by a discussion regarding how geography as a school subject fits in to the social studies curriculum. It next analyzes the American experience in preparing pre- and in-service geography and/or social studies teachers as there have been quite efforts to that end due to the widespread “geographic illiteracy” in the American schools. As a result, the current paper attempts to provide the interested audience with a general perspective concerning the place of geography education in the American schools, and suggests a comprehensive teacher education model based on the related literature investigated.

Key words: United States, Social Studies Curriculum, Geography Education, Teacher Education

Amerikan Sosyal Bilgiler Müfredatı İçinde Coğrafya'nın Yeri ve Etkili Bir K-12 Coğrafya Öğretmen Eğitimine Yönelik Çabaların İncelenmesi

Özet. Bu makale öncelikli olarak coğrafyanın Amerikan sosyal bilgiler müfredatındaki yerini tespit etmeye çalışarak, ortaokul ve lise coğrafya öğretmenlerinin yetiştirilmesine yönelik meseleleri inceler. Bu yüzden, bu çalışma ilk önce coğrafya ve sosyal bilgiler arasındaki ortak zemini tanımlayarak, coğrafyanın bir ders olarak sosyal bilgiler müfredatındaki yerini tartışır. Daha sonra da, Amerika'daki yaygın coğrafya eğitimi yetersizliğini aşmak için gösterilen yoğun çabaları göz önünde bulundurarak coğrafya ve/veya sosyal bilgiler öğretmenlerinin gerek hizmet öncesi gerekse hizmet içi eğitimiyle ilgili meseleleri analiz eder. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma ilgili kişilere Amerikan sosyal bilgiler müfredatında coğrafyanın yerine dair genel bir perspektif sağlar ve incelenen ilgili literatürü göz önünde bulundurarak coğrafya öğretmenlerinin yetiştirilmesine yönelik daha etkili ve kapsayıcı bir öğretmen eğitimi modeli sunar.

Anahtar kelimeler: Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Sosyal Bilgiler Müfredatı, Coğrafya Eğitimi, Öğretmen Eğitimi

“We are told we live in a
global village, yet we do
not know our neighbors.”

Anonymous

I. INTRODUCTION

There have been noticeable developments in education and knowledge which has created an amazing learning environment and impacted teaching and learning all over the world. As globalization and knowledge societies expand, reform on teacher education programs is becoming an important issue because teachers are always seen as moderators of the changing society. In this sense, as the opening quote puts it, in today's increasingly globalized world, there is an urgent need for a better teaching and learning geography in schools due to the inevitable emphasis on knowing and understanding today's increasingly interdependent world, its places, peoples, and environments. However, it is obvious that unfortunately we are far behind of what is expected from geography as a school subject, which is one of the best ways to achieve a high level of global understanding. As an integrative discipline, geography combines elements of the cultural landscape with the realities of the physical environment. Since most of the world's problems simultaneously involve both the social and physical environment, having geographic knowledge and skills prepares students to address those problems. In other words, “a good foundation in geographic understanding will prepare students to meet the challenge of solving the multi-faceted global problems we face today” (Dulli & Goodman, 1994:19). This obviously calls for a better and more effective teacher training given in the colleges of education.

With this in mind, when we closely look at the literature regarding geography education in a global context, it is apparent that many educators around the world complain about the low status of teaching geography either as a separate subject or integrated in the social studies. This related literature evidently confirms that geography as a school subject is generally struggling either to secure its place or increase the weight allocated in the school curricula. Likewise, the teacher education is also parallel to the status of school geography around the world. In other words, many countries have been reviewing their teacher training programs in order to improve the quality of teachers, and many of them challenge “pedagogical” problems in both teaching school geography and preparing geography/social studies teachers as seen in the case of the United States of America.

For the purposes of this paper, first of all, what social studies and geography have come to mean as a school subject in the United States is defined; then the current relationship between the field of social studies and the K-12 (Kindergarten through 12 Grade) teaching of geography is examined; and next the literature on teacher education in geography is discussed with a conclusion by proposing a comprehensive model for a better and more effective K-12 teacher training in geography.

Social Studies

Social Studies has been regarded as a major school subject and is taught in K-12 schools in the United States (NCSS, 1994). However, because social studies is multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, it is often difficult to define it. Therefore, the definition of social studies has tended to change as knowledge of subject matter increased and developed, and as more was learned about how children construct meaningful knowledge (Sunal & Haas, 2002). However, most educators agree that the social studies in essence is the study of humankind from a multitude of perspectives, and at the core of the field is citizenship education (Dyngneson, Gross, & Berson, 2003).

One of the most remarkable aspects of the history of social studies has been ongoing debates, among the social studies scholars, educators, as well as curriculum- and policy-makers along with the other interest groups, over its nature, scope, and definition of the field. Therefore, social studies has been giving a survival battle over its *purposes*, *content*, and *methods* in the school curricula since the early 1900's (Evans, 2004). There are thus different interpretations of the social studies or some researchers see different traditions (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1978); whereas, others recognize different camps, such as traditional historians, and social reconstructivists (Evans, 2004).

It seems that the account of Barr, Barth, & Shermis (1978) is more applicable to the philosophy of social studies as they distinguish three different traditions: (1) social studies taught as citizenship transmission; (2) social studies taught as social science; and (3) social studies taught as reflective inquiry (see Figure 1). However, Evans (2004) suggests that social studies and its differing purposes throughout its history must be understood in the context of the era in which some particular social events have influenced the historical and educational context including the social studies, such as the cold war and the great depression. Therefore, despite the fact that all these different camps or traditions have struggled over social studies and fought to influence its teaching in the schools for almost a century, social studies has apparently survived and made it through the 21st century.

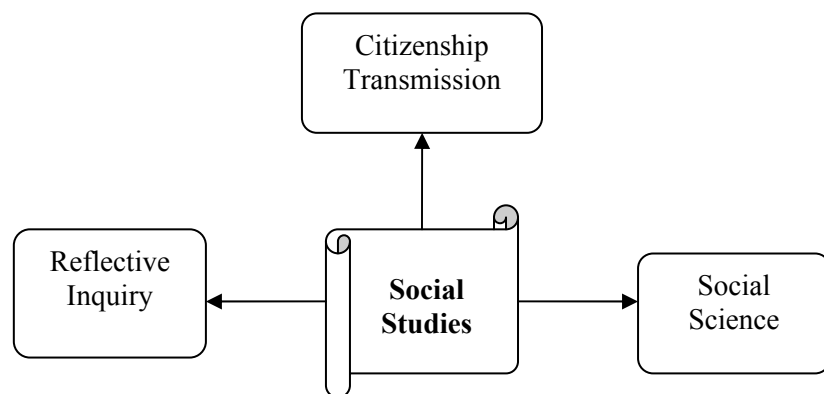


Figure 1. Interpretive Models of Social Studies or the Three Traditions (based on Barr, Barth & Shermis, 1978)

Although these differing as well as competing versions of the social studies have its own way of interpreting the ideals, visions, values, and beliefs, they all agreed upon the conception of "citizenship" as the *key* to the social studies education. Engle & Ochoa (1988) emphasize social studies as education for democratic citizenship. They define social studies at three levels: (1) social studies as the social sciences simplified for pedagogical purposes; (2) social studies as the critical study of the social sciences; and (3) social studies as the examination of social problems. Likewise, perhaps in broader terms, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), the leading national social studies organization in the U.S., has adopted the following formal definition for the social studies:

Social studies is 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 develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world (NCSS, 1994:3).

Additionally, the National Social Studies Standards (NSSS) include ten themes that serve as organizing strands for the social studies curriculum in order to foster student achievement at every school level (NCSS, 1994):

1. Culture
2. Time, Continuity, and Change
3. People, Places, and Environments
4. Individual Development and Identity
5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
6. Power, Authority, and Governance
7. Production, Distribution, and Consumption
8. Science, Technology, and Society
9. Global Connections
10. Civic Ideals and Practices

Each theme incorporates one or more of the disciplines contributing to social studies content, such as history, geography, government, economics, and sociology. In addition, NCSS has outlined five principles of powerful social studies teaching and learning. These five principles tell us that social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are *meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active* (NCSS, 1994).

As a result, given the definition of social studies by NCSS and the NSSS, the field of social studies is not only emphasized as “promoting knowledge of and involvement in civic affairs,” but is also defined as *multidisciplinary* and *interdisciplinary* in nature (NCSS, 1994:3). That is where geography as a discipline comes in.

Geography

Geography is one of the oldest disciplines. Over the past 100 years American geography has greatly changed through a lot of debates among geographers as to what constitutes the field of geography. Pattison (1964) identified *four traditions* of geography: (1) spatial tradition—maps and spatial analysis; (2) area studies tradition—areal differentiation or areal interrelationships; (3) man-land tradition—relationships between humans and the natural environment; and (4) earth-science tradition—referring to physical geography (see Figure 2).

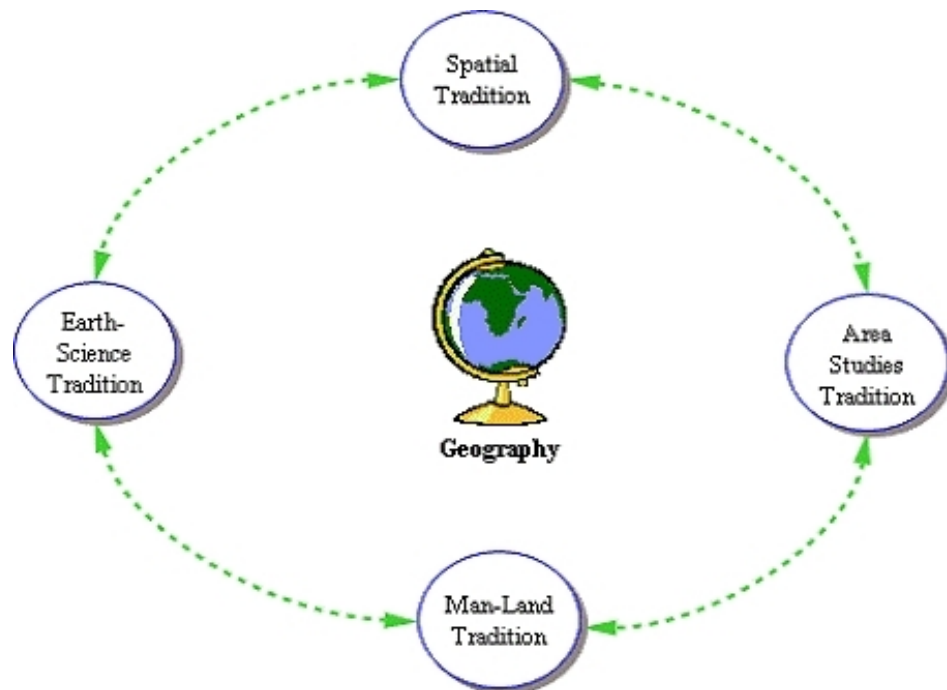


Figure 2. The Four Traditions of Geography (based on Pattison, 1964)

As an integrative discipline, geography brings the physical and human dimensions of the world in the study of people, places, and environments (Geography Education Standards Project, 1994). Therefore, geographers are concerned about understanding where things are located on the surface of the Earth, why they are located where they are, and how places differ from one another—the *spatial perspective*; and how people interact with the environment—the *ecological perspective* (Geography Education Standards Project, 1994).

As a school subject, geography has been part of American education since the 17th century as was then introduced as a map and globe study (Stoltman, 1990). In the United States, geography has been taught either as a stand-alone subject or as part of the social studies in the K-12 curriculum in American schools over decades. Therefore, many educators and researchers defined or redefined the significance of geography in American education, and pointed out that geography has historically played a vital role in “citizenship education” in the United States (Marran, 2003; Stoltman, 1990).

Intersection of Social Studies and K-12 Geography

As the official definition of social studies above implies, geography as a school subject has been part of social studies curriculum in American schools (Marran, 2003; Natoli, 1989). However, this resulted in the decline of geography courses in elementary and secondary schools and thus the subsequent rise in geographic ignorance among the nation’s population (Stoltman, 1990). In fact, when we closely examine social studies and geography, it is apparent that two important concepts determine the relationship between the two subject matters: (1) citizenship education and (2) integrative study (see Figure 3). Both subjects are aimed at preparing good citizens as integrative fields of study. In fact, geography historically plays an *integrating* and *synthesizing* role among both the natural and social sciences as it has roots in both and across disciplines (Taaffe, 1974). Thus, this provides geography a unique place in the social studies in terms of its dual nature. Geography also shares an interface with all other social sciences, such

as historical geography vs. history, economic geography vs. economics, cultural geography vs. anthropology, social geography vs. sociology, population geography vs. demography, and behavioral geography vs. psychology (Gritzner, 1990).

Therefore, in some respects, the educational goals of geography and social studies are strikingly similar as both fields connected in many ways (Sunal & Haas, 2002). For example, both geography and social studies attempt to impart a sense of time, place, and direction in order to help students acquire the skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes essential to individual fulfillment and productive citizenship (Gritzner, 1990). Hence, without a strong support of geography component in the curriculum, social studies lacks the foundation of space and place, a framework of humans relating to their environment, and the coverage of global perspective that are essential building blocks of social learning; whereas, without a strongly focused social studies curriculum, geography founders as a classroom subject (Gritzner, 1990).

The important mission of developing more productive citizens has been largely entrusted to the social studies curriculum. Although educators suggest a number of overall approaches for teaching social studies, all educators are agree that the ultimate goal of social studies is *citizenship* education (Barth, & Shermis, 1978; Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Evans, 2004; Natoli, 1989; NCSS, 1994). At this point, without a doubt, we begin to see how teaching and learning geography in K-12 schools fits into the large scheme of the social studies: citizenship education (Stoltman, 1990). In fact, for children to function effectively in society as good citizens, they must learn to become cognizant of their place in the space (Natoli, 1989). For example, children have places in the family, school, community, state, nation, and the world (expanding horizons curriculum), which are all functioning spatial or geographical systems (Natoli, 1989). These are where children learn to know and understand the meaning of places. It is clear that knowledge of geography helps us be better citizens (Natoli, 1989; Stoltman, 1990). For instance, through geography, we learn to locate important events; understand the relationship between geography and national or international policies; make informed decisions regarding the best use of the nation's resources; and ask important questions about policies that lead to changes in landscape and land use (Natoli, 1989). As a result, geographically informed students will be effective leaders for the country.

In addition, geography and history, in fact, are complementary subjects best taught together within the social studies curriculum (Bednarz, 1997). In other words, they are like *twins*: one cannot teach history without geography or geography without history (Bednarz, 1997). In the social studies, all historical, human, and economic events occur within a particular place and space. Thus, teaching and learning social studies often calls for geographic perspectives: (1) the *spatial* perspective, centering on location and an understanding of whereness; (2) the *ecological* perspective, considering how humans interact with their physical environment. Therefore, rationale for history as well as other social studies subjects by nature requires knowing geography. However, for geographers and/or geographic perspectives location is more than just *where*; it also *why* and *how* and *so what* (Bednarz, 1997). Hence, geography offers great implications for teaching and learning in the social studies. However, the geographic perspective is not strongly represented in the modern social studies curriculum, because most social studies teachers receive their training in history and have little or no background in geography (Bednarz, 1997).



Figure 3. The Overlapping Relationship between Social Studies and Geography

Moreover, due to increasing globalization, our world is getting smaller everyday. In addition to knowing about the global systems of land, water, and air to make wise choices regarding environmental issues, consequences, alternatives, today's citizens need to comprehend the mosaic of international relations, the aspirations of ethnic and national minorities, and the spatial dimension of change across our earth (Stoltman, 1990). Therefore, a global geography becomes necessary for all in order to strengthen geography education within the social studies.

On the other hand, traditionally, social studies teachers and texts have tend to define geography as location, pointing to, or marking places on a map, and place description, describe landmarks, general population characteristics, and natural resources at locations and within regions (Sunal & Haas, 2002). Such an approach thus reinforces the idea that geography is minimally important to the lives of citizens and that is unchanging in nature. Therefore, this resulted in geography's being relegated to the lower grades, where the only intellectual skill required was that of recalling specific facts (Sunal & Haas, 2002).

As a result, geography has long been a part of the school curriculum in the United States and one of the mainstays of the social studies program with history and government. Today, in K-12 schools, geography remains an integral part of the social studies curriculum to promote civic competence (NCSS, 1994). Marran (2003) outlines five reasons why geography is an essential school subject: (1) geography provides a spatial perspective for learning about the world; (2) geography describes the changing patterns of places in words, maps, and geographics; (3) geography is eminently useful; (4) geography provides an effective context for lifelong learning; and (5) geography provides every student with a special opportunity to develop a personal perspective about the world that is informed by both a humanistic and scientific viewpoint. Therefore, through its spatial and ecological perspectives geography has an important role in the social studies as an integrative study of places, people, and environments as well as great potential in producing geographically literate citizens. Stoltman (1990) stated that geographically literate citizens are aware of (1) what is happening in the world, (2) why it is happening, and (3) how it affects other people throughout the world as well as themselves; therefore, geography is good citizenship education with its unique perspectives.

Teacher Education in Geography

One of the most effective practices in terms of teacher preparation in geography, specifically in-service teacher training, found in the United States is the *Geographic Alliances*. The failure of social studies teachers in teaching school geography caused the establishment of these institutes across the United States. Since 1986, the National Geographic Society

established geographic alliances in all fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico to upgrade teachers' approaches to geographic instruction (Bednarz, 2002; Kenreich, 2004). The establishment of geographic alliances—a network of university geography professors, teacher educators, and K-12 teachers—have become one of the most effective practices in geography/social studies teacher education in the United States as they provide teachers with professional development in teaching and learning geographic concepts and skills (Kenreich, 2004). Thus, creating a communication link through geographic alliances between geographers and teacher educators, and K-12 teachers became an important step toward training qualified, knowledgeable geography teachers (Ludwig, 1995).

In the United States, teachers who hold social studies composite certificates are almost certain to be history-centric (Bednarz, 2002), which eventually causes geography to be overshadowed by other disciplines within the social studies, especially by history (Ludwig, 1995). In addition, many teachers who teach geography in the schools have had little or no coursework in the subject during their teacher training (Bednarz, 2002; Brophy et al., 2000), which undoubtedly contradicts with the notion that teachers often feel more comfortable when teaching subjects in which they have had better preparation (Boehm & Petersen, 1994). Thus, is it sufficient to teach geography without having had a single geography course? Of course not, because teachers cannot teach what they have not been taught (Boehm & Petersen, 1994; Gilsbach, 1997; Ludwig, 1995; Petry, 1995). On the other hand, many education professors who prepare geography teachers are not geographically well-educated as well (Boehm et al, 1994; Bednarz & Bednarz, 1995; Ludwig, 1995; and Morrill et al, 1995). In this sense, how can we increase the quality of geography taught in the schools when those who teach the subject majored in another discipline and/or prepared by non-geographers?

Consequently, improving geography pre-service education has a vital role in K-12 geography/social studies education (Bednarz & Bednarz, 1995); otherwise, it will threaten the future of geography as an essential school subject. Likewise, shortly after the national geography standards—*Geography for Life 1994*—were released, Boehm et al. (1994) pointed out that “geographic education faces serious shortcomings based on its failure to create and maintain strategies for effective pre-service teacher education” (p. 21). Keeping in mind that social studies teachers could get in-service training through professional development activities when they lack content knowledge necessary to teach the subject, Boehm et al. (1994) then continued by emphasizing the importance of effective teacher preparation: “it is axiomatic that if *all* we do is provide in-service training in geography for teachers then we institutionalize the continual need for further in-service teacher training in geography!” (p. 21).

However, Downs (1994) laments the almost total lack of research and empirical data that might be used to underpin pre-service teacher training programs, as he believes that only with such data rapid systematic change will take place. Downs (1994) argues for research on the status of geography in the American schools, classroom practice in geography instruction, assessment of the range and depth of geographic skills, the delivery system for geography in the classroom based on the relationship between the teaching and learning strategies, and the outputs from the teaching and learning processes. He then maintains that only when this is known and understood teaching geography in schools will change and improve.

In addition, Brophy et al. (2000) indicated that few teachers have sufficient knowledge about social education to contribute to the development and planning of curricular goals, relying on textbooks to guide their decisions. However, textbooks might offer unrelated facts and isolated skill exercises. Thus, unprepared teachers relying on textbooks tend to follow the dreary routine of having students read the chapter and answer the questions at the end (Brophy et al., 2000). Besides, according to Ediger (1998), a quality social studies teacher should capture learners' interest, demonstrate meaningful learning experiences, stimulate purposeful learning,

provide opportunities for student success, and encourage application of acquired learning. Likewise, Stoltman (1991) urged teachers to emphasize active learning by encouraging the use of hands-on investigations that apply geographic knowledge to solve realistic problems. As a result, the lack of diverse effective teaching models has created teacher-centered, lecture-driven educators who encourage students vote towards social studies as being the least favorite among major school subjects (Brophy et al., 2000).

In the United States, much of the staff development effort has been headed by the nationwide geography alliances and supported by the federal, state and local educational institutions. Moreover, the release of the *Guidelines for Geographic Education* (1984) and *Geography for Life: National Standards* (1994), the interests of National Geographic Society and other organizations produced intense efforts to improve geography instruction through professional development programs in order to provide teachers with the standard of knowledge and pedagogic expertise (Ludwig, 1995). Although in-service training is not the only method of improving K-12 geography instruction and learning, geography educators has agreed that staff development would produce more results quickly than the alternatives (Bednarz & Bednarz, 1995).

Moreover, Maier & Jones (1999) state that the enhancement of geography education involves collaboration between university geography faculties involved in teacher education and other government agencies. Although developing relationships between the university and outside entities can be challenging, these relationships also offer many benefits for pre-service and in-service teacher training in geography (Maier & Jones, 1999; Boehm et al, 1994; Petry, 1995). Besides, Welford & Fouberg (2000) argue that there is a perceived crisis in geography education. Brown (1999) contends that geography graduate students and faculty hesitate to conduct geography education research, discuss geography education theory, and publish in journals other than those specifically designed for geography education (as cited in Welford & Fouberg, 2000). Therefore, in order to address this perceived crisis, Welford & Fouberg (2000) emphasize a need to develop and maintain a very active dialogue between college geography faculty and graduate students and teacher educators and K-12 teachers. Similarly, in order to improve geography instruction practices of pre-service teachers before they enter the classroom, Gay (1995) suggests matching pre-service teachers with trained alliance teacher consultants to expose them to quality lessons and materials. Likewise, Orvis et al. (1999) developed inquiry-based projects that pair K-12 teachers with geographic researchers, which they found a resounding success providing a possible model for the teaching and learning of geographic research.

Furthermore, many states have also updated their pre-service geography education programs along with their licensure and requirements for certification in geography (Bednarz, 1995). Libbee (1995) states that teacher certification is the major problem and only when this is changed there will be an improvement in pre-service teacher education courses in geography. Thus, college and university geography programs are confronted with a challenge: how to influence teacher certification programs at their institutions to insure that future geography teachers have some geography to teach (Zeigler, 1996). Certainly, collegiate geography's role in training teachers is not a new one, but it is a role that needs to be reassessed in light of the standards presented in *Geography for Life*. Similarly, utilizing the national standards in pre-service teacher education programs will ensure that future teachers will incorporate the standards and improve geography teaching and learning (Morris et al., 1995). In 1991, the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) published a position paper outlining recommendations for the geography component of teacher education. NCGE (1991) suggested that all pre-service programs should include basic geography content, and that methods courses

should emphasize the use of geographic tools and techniques. In another publication—(NCGE, 1994), the National Council for Geographic Education suggested ways to improve geography instruction as follows:

- 1) implementing the national standards into the classroom,
- 2) encouraging student participation in nationwide geography contests, such as the (National Geography Standards) Geographic Bee,
- 3) hiring qualified, enthusiastic teachers,
- 4) encouraging teacher affiliation with state geography education alliances,
- 5) providing up-to-date equipment for geography classrooms, and
- 6) encouraging creative teaching methods to make geography interesting and exciting (p. 7).

Similarly, Boehm, Brierley & Sharma (1994) described an “environment of neglect” in which they identified the problems in the development of effective pre-service teacher training: the differing position of geography in school curricula among the states; lack of effective communication among groups responsible for curricula and teacher training; and poor interaction between universities and the schools. They revealed a schism that still existed between university geography and geography in public school curricula, which was reflected in the statement that “theory resides in universities and practice resides in schools” (p. 22). They also found division within geography departments at the post-secondary level between geographers and geography educators. The authors acknowledged that when equipped with skills, knowledge, and appropriate technologies, teachers had the capability to change American education and shape the future; thus, the authors placed the responsibility for development of necessary skills and knowledge upon pre-service teacher education programs.

In addition, Boehm, Brierley & Sharma (1994) made several recommendations to meet the enormous challenge of overcoming the inertia that hampers change in pre-service certification programs, which included:

- 1) a review of subject matter certification programs by departments of geography in order to determine if the programs on their home campuses served the needs to NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) assessment, national goals and standards, and the state course study in geography and social studies;
- 2) overtures on the part of geography departments to departments of history to establish the need for at least nine hours of geography for certification in history;
- 3) an attempt to overcome the prejudice against geographic educators in major university departments;
- 4) grants for summer institutes involving professors of history, geography and social studies in order to bring about changes in pre-service programs;
- 5) an interface between geographers and regional teacher-education accreditation;
- 6) departments of geography must take time to work with and understand the world of professional education;
- 7) a standardized minimum certification program for grades K-6 and 7-12 which is cognizant of the close relationship between geography and history in most social studies curricula; and
- 8) methods courses which include examples of how geography can be taught with science, math, art, literature and how these subjects can be taught in geography courses (p. 24).

The authors concluded that geography teachers held the key to success for geographic education as they were in positions to influence future geographers, write geography education curricula, and prepare students for content and performance standards. As a result, as the literature confirms the persistent problems and inadequacies in training teachers to teach geography,

Boehm, Brierley & Sharma (1994) have recommended increased course work in geography, greater cooperation between geography departments and schools of education, and training in methods of teaching geography.

As a result, based on the related literature examined, Figure 4 below proposes a comprehensive framework on how to improve teacher education in K-12 geography. Here, it is crucial to remind that it currently is *not* the responsibility of Departments of Geography to prepare geography teachers in the U.S. That is, the Colleges of Education, specifically the Department of Social Studies Education is principally responsible for preparing geography/social studies teachers. Therefore, this “teacher training” model clearly calls for a greater cooperation between the Colleges of Education and Departments of Geography in order to prepare high quality pre-service social studies and/or geography teachers. While the Departments of Geography offers more professional support, the Colleges of Education could emphasize renewed teacher licensure requirements on the part of more geography content for future geography and/or social studies teachers. In addition to increased collaboration between these two institutions, this model provides an extensive support from the Geographic Alliances through wide-ranging professional staff development activities for in-service teachers of geography, social studies and even earth-science.

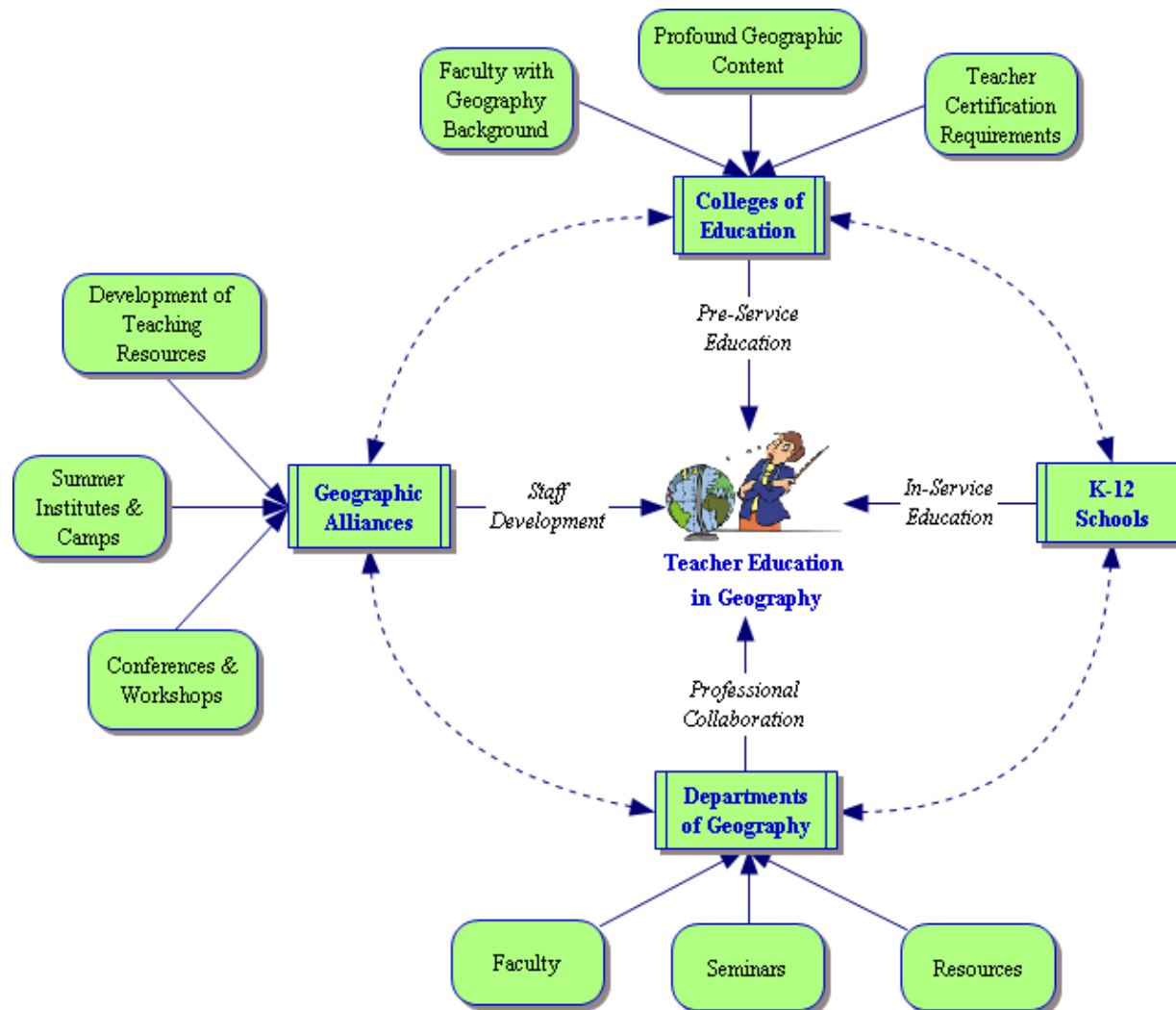


Figure 4. A Proposed Model for an Effective Teacher Education in Geography

CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, we briefly looked at the junction where geography and social studies meet in the American school curriculum; shortly analyzed the discussions held on how to improve the teacher training in geography from the American perspectives; and proposed a comprehensive teacher education model in geography, based on the literature examined.

The existing literature on geography education around world shows that not only in the United States but also in many countries geography has been struggling either to secure its place or to increase the weight allocated for teaching in the school curricula. That is, similar to most of the countries around the world, geography as a school subject in the United States is presently giving a survival battle into the twenty-first century. One of the primary reasons given in the literature for such a low status and decline of geography in schools is the subsequent rise of the social studies to integrate social sciences into the school curricula and thus teaching geography as an integral part of the social studies rather than a separate school subject. Therefore, it seems that geography has to convince others of its coherence and its intellectual depth, and that it is worthy of study for children. As indicated in the proposed model for teacher training in geography (see Figure 4), the current study also suggests that there should be more communication between professors of geography and geography educators including professors of education as well as school teachers. As a result, geography is subject to increasing pressure in the school curricula and struggles to make major impact with a relatively low profile in the United States.

Moreover, although there are plenty of resources on geography education in general and research on geography at the higher education level, this study surprisingly revealed a lack of research specifically on teaching and learning geography in elementary and secondary schools. Therefore, research is extremely needed to investigate how teachers are actually teaching geography and students are learning geographical knowledge and skills (Brophy et al., 2000; Downs, 1994; Welford & Foubert, 2000). This might also have essential implications on teaching geography in schools and on the future of geography at elementary and secondary levels in order to strengthen geography's place in the school curricula, including teacher training in geography. Consequently, the efforts to improve geography education in the United States, as well as around the world, will not be successful unless teacher education in geography is seriously taken into account to prepare high quality teachers to teach geography in the twenty-first century.

Acknowledgement: Although it would be helpful and useful for the American researchers and/or educators, this paper is in fact intended primarily for the non-American audience so that they could make more beneficial comparisons as they already know well the context in which their own curricula takes place and the issues raised in throughout this paper.

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