**Educational Autobiography**

From preschool on to graduate school, I have been in the Virginian and American educational system for twenty years. Since an early age I have had an interest in social science disciplines like history, government, political science and geography. Over the years my interest in these social science disciplines has developed into an interest for teaching social studies. I did not decide overnight that I wanted to teach this discipline. I have over the years and still today think about other career opportunities that I could pursue. However, there are several factors that have led me to work becoming a social studies teacher as a primary goal during my post-secondary education career. Culture, Learning, Individual Development and Identity, and Time, Continuity, and Change are themes in my life that have influenced my decision of working toward becoming a social studies teacher. I believe it is a journey worth taking as I believe I can enjoy teaching social studies, but more importantly I have the opportunity to make a difference in students’ lives.

Before I discuss why I wanted to become a social studies teacher, I think it is important to discuss how I became interested in social science disciplines like history, political science, and geography. If I had no interest in these social science disciplines then I would have no interest in becoming a social studies teacher. I began my educational career in 1993, as I had to go preschool or special education because I had a mild case of Autism. Fortunately, this early intervention helped a great deal as I was able to be in a normal class setting from kindergarten to the present day. However, my interest in geography can probably be traced back to Autism. I have always had a great interest in maps, mountains, rivers, and where places are in general from back in the mid 1990’s. On trips I would usually be responsible for the directions; as I can still name certain places, cities, countries, rivers, and mountains extremely well. Over the years I have developed more interest in cultural and human geography as well. I cannot specifically trace when I became interested in these types of geography; however, different cultures have always fascinated me.

My interest in history can be traced back to growing up in Virginia. Virginia is a state full of history, including many plantations and Civil War sites. I grew up less than an hour away from many of these sites like Petersburg. I also had descendants that fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War. Over time I have found interesting other historical events across the world. Tracing my interest in political science and government may be a little more difficult. I have always found interest in political debates, political organization, and elections. In the past five years I have become more interested in economics due in part to the recession, national deficit, and the fact I have had to take more responsibility in my finances as a young adult. However, economics still does not interest me as much as history, political science, or geography. This interest in the social sciences is a part of my Individual Development and Identity, as well as and Culture as it has influenced my decision toward becoming a social studies teacher.

Even though someone may have an interest in the social sciences does not mean that they want to become a social studies teacher. It is important to discuss how I developed my interest in becoming a social studies teacher over my school career. One, I have learned especially from my days in preschool that teachers no matter what subject they teach can make a difference and transform a student’s life. In elementary school the history and geography sections of our class always interested me. The field trips we took to places like Jamestown and the Smithsonian in Washington DC were extremely fun for me. While I enjoyed many of our other field trips in elementary school these are the two that probably stand out for me and many of my former classmates. While I had certainly not decided to become a social studies teacher as this point in my life, these events in elementary school certainly influenced my decision later on in my educational career.

My interest in teaching social studies began to really develop during my middle school years. I still enjoyed my social studies classes even though one teacher did not necessarily stand out, other than the fact that my eight grade geography teacher got fired for stealing money from a school sport fundraiser. I did however have an agriculture teacher stand out for good reasons during my middle school years. This teacher was able to effectively tie agriculture to history, politics, geography, and economics. This teacher was able to show how social science is interconnected with other disciplines. One example I remember is that a developed country like the U.S. can provide foreign aid like farm equipment to Africa; however, if the people do not know how to use the farm equipment then this type of foreign aid has been wasted. This is an excellent example of how this teacher was able to tie agriculture to governmental and cultural geography issues. My eighth grade agriculture teacher may not be the primary reason I want to become a social studies teacher; however, I hope to be as effective in making interconnections between other disciplines as my teacher was.

My interest in teaching social studies continued to develop during my high school years, as I had a couple of teachers stand out. My ninth grade geography teacher would have us play games like jeopardy to help us in learning geography concepts. My classmates and I really enjoyed these games, plus these games were real productive in helping students in learning the information. Then my world history teacher was really good and he threw political correctness out the window in the classroom. While political correctness may have a place in the classroom, too much of it results in social studies teacher not being able to teach their content effectively. Others and I can learn better too when political correctness is removed from the classroom in a reasonable way. He was upfront that he was a Christian, and he was going to talk about it in class which may have resulted in an ACLU lawsuit if they knew about it. However, he never imposed his beliefs on anybody else in the classroom. This is also when culture comes into play as I consider the school system I came from in Dinwiddie to be very Christian and Conservative county in Southside Virginia. A more liberal school system would be less tolerant of a teacher effectively relating world history to modern day religious views.

I also had a good eleventh grade AP U.S. History teacher, as he was an engaging lecturer. However, he also played relevant videos in class, and we also played games like shooting mini basketballs into the hoop if we got a question correct. I think games like this and videos in general used in any classroom can help students learn the content better. A teacher that I and many of my classmates did not care for was our dual enrollment government teacher at Richard Bland College during my senior year of high school. I believe he was a Doctorate student at the time at VCU, and I believe VCU is a good school. However, his attitude came off poorly and he would usually only lecture straight from the book. He was probably the only teacher during my secondary school years or college that I did not enjoy learning from. If I teach dual enrollment government in the future, I would definitely try diversifying lessons more and also have a better attitude.

During my middle school and especially my high school years I developed a belief that I could do a good job teaching the subject matter. After sitting hundreds of hours in social studies classrooms observing my teachers, I saw I was capable of teaching. I also saw that teaching social studies was a profession that I could enjoy doing. Despite this belief, by the end of high school I was still not committed to be a social studies teacher. Some of that may have had to do with the fact that I and many other students were looking forward to finally getting out of high school. I considered being a Business major toward the end of high school; however, I did eventually decide to major in History with plans on working toward becoming qualified to teach social studies.

It is interesting to look at the theme of Time, Continuity, and Change during my educational career. There have been a lot of changes in the educational system and how social studies was taught during my educational career. During my earlier years of school any videos that were watched in class were on VCR and many papers were not required to be typed. Other than the VCR, about the only other technology incorporated into a lesson was the overhead projector, which by today’s standards is not considered high-tech. By middle school and high school, PowerPoint and DVD’s became more common forms of presentation. Since Dinwiddie is not a high-income county, students were not issued lap top computers and I think teachers were only issued lap tops towards the end of my high school career. Also, events that occurred during my career like the terrorists attacks on September 11th, Bush’s invasion of Iraq in 2003, and Hurricane Katrina in 2005 are now being put into social studies textbooks. I think all of the changes that have occurred in education during the past twenty years can benefit social studies teachers today. However, the Constitution, Civil War, World War I and II, Cold War, and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement are only a few of the vital subjects that need to remain a constant in the classroom no matter how much technology advances.

In less than a year, I may be a full-time social studies teacher in Virginia or in a neighboring state. My journey toward working to become a social studies teacher has been long and it is one that is still continuing. My family, friends, teachers, religious faith, and growing up in Southside Virginia have all influenced my decision to become a social studies teacher. Today, my family and friends are very supportive of me in pursuing my goal. I cannot guarantee that I will remain a social studies teacher during my whole professional career. However, being a social studies teacher is a career that I believe I can enjoy and more importantly a career in which I can make a difference in students’ lives for years to come.

**Personal Teaching Metaphor**

In the classroom I see myself as an explorer looking to make new and important discoveries about the past, as well as the present. Ever since I was a little kid I enjoyed exploring the world by foot, canoe, kayak, or car. I also have enjoyed for many years exploring history and government books looking forward to making more discoveries. It is important for both teachers and students to be explorers in a social studies classroom. I have to explore student’s minds to see what they know and help students make new discoveries. My students and I both have to explore past history to see how our ancestors lived as well as how it can be applied today. We also have to explore government and see how we can participate more effectively in our government. In our exploration we may find an answer to some of government’s present day problems or help prevent war. I hope students in my classroom will join me in the exploration of social studies.