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TEACHING, LEARNING,
AND CURRICULUM STUDIES

UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BELIEFS ABOUT
DEMOCRACY AND PRACTICE: HOW THREE BEGINNING SOCIAL STUDIES
TEACHERS ENACT PERSONAL PRACTICAL THEORIES (332 pp.)

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This study addressed the gap between teacher beliefs studies that claim beliefs of teachers influence practice and the recommendations for democratic practice presented in much of the literature on democracy in education. A collective case study methodology was selected to explore the processes and ways in which three beginning teachers' beliefs about democracy in education were related to their teaching behaviors and decision-making. The question guiding this study was, in what ways are these beginning social studies teachers with democratic purposes influenced by their personal practical theories of democracy in the secondary classroom?

To address this question, three participants were selected for this study based on the criteria assumed by the questions. Data was collected from in-depth semi-structured interviews, post-observation debriefing interviews, observation field notes, and artifacts from teaching practice. The results of this research included three to five personal practical theories of democracy for each participant, a substantive theory of how these three teachers enacted their personal practical theories of democracy, and three major findings. These findings included: conceptualizing democratic living; mediating factors in the belief-practice dialectic; and purpose and practice in social studies. These results are presented in this dissertation in support of an argument for the need for social studies

teacher candidates to engage in a process of refining purpose by exploring beliefs, images, assumptions, and notions of what it means to teach social studies and the potentially problematic concepts in the field of social studies as they relate to practice, namely democracy.

Key words: teacher beliefs, democratic education, social studies, citizenship education, beginning teachers, secondary education, purpose in practice, practical inquiry