MEDIOCRITY AND MINI BOOKS: AN ANALYSIS OF FIRST-GRADE GEOGRAPHY LESSONS FOUND ON TEACHERS PAY TEACHERS

By

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ABSTRACT

Elementary social studies resources have faced criticism for well over 30 years. Text that is too complex (Beck et al., 1989; Beck & McKeown, 1991), contains questionable content (Chu,2017; Wade, 2012), and is boring to students (Kelley, 2021; Schug, 1982) and teachers (Zhao & Hoge, 2010). More recent studies have found that teachers are turning to outside resources to supplement their lessons. Teachers Pay Teachers (TPT) is a well-criticized (Rodríguez et al., 2020; Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2021; Swalwell et al., 2023) but popular online marketplace for teachers to buy and sell lesson plans. This quantitative study explores a group of 50 elementary 1st-grade social studies geography lesson plans available for purchase on the TPT website.

The Checklist of Online Assessment of Lesson Plans in Social Studies (COALSS) was created to evaluate each lesson plan systematically. The CAOLSS evaluates the areas of Standards, General Instruction, Assessment, Geography Content/Process, Illustrations, and Justice and Equity on a scale from zero to with an option for not applicable (NA). The information from COALSS was used to organize the lesson plans into three categories: The Focused Top, The Mediocre Middle, and the bottom lessons titled Listen to Learn. Each area had defining characteristics that were repetitive throughout lesson plans. Beyond the COALSS rankings, the 50 1st-grade social studies geography lessons had other significant problems, including an absence of standards, inaccurate maps, and literacy-focused lessons disguised as social studies.

This work's implications allow teachers to glimpse the quality of content available on TPT, upholding the warnings of other researchers (Aguilar, 2022; Shelton & Archambault, 2019; Shelton et al., 2022; Swalwell et al., 2023). This study, however, looks specifically at early elementary social studies content and demonstrates how little connection exists between

nationally developed standards, such as the *C3 Framework*, and available outside resources. More work must be done to unite early elementary social studies teaching, including clearly articulated goals and clear expectations for lessons that are just and equitable to all learners.

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INTRODUCTION

The lack of national standards and testing in social studies has led to the marginalization of the subject in many early elementary classrooms (Fitchett et al., 2014; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; McGuire & Cole, 2010; Russell & William, 2009; VanFossen et al., 2005). School districts have invested heavily in math and reading curriculums, leaving little time or funding for subjects such as science or social studies.

Research has shown that social studies textbooks in elementary classrooms are difficult for students to understand (Beck et al., 1989; Beck & McKeown, 1991), contain questionable content (Chu,2017; Wade, 2012), and are boring to both students (Kelley, 2021; Schug, 1982) and teachers (Zhao & Hoge, 2010). It is logical to conclude that overworked teachers may be drawn to online websites such as Teachers Pay Teachers (TPT), hoping to quickly supplement a lacking social studies curriculum.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many changes in how teachers and educators worked to meet the needs of their students. One such ripple is the increased use of lesson-sharing websites in the teacher planning process (Shelton & Archambault, 2022). Websites such as TPT offer thousands and thousands of lesson plan ideas in all subject areas. Teachers report using teacherspaysteachers.com most commonly to "fill holes" and "to supplement an existing curriculum that is lacking" (Carpenter & Shelton, 2024, p. 224). Carpenter and Shelton asked teachers their reasoning for using TPT; "44% referenced time-related factors, pressures, or considerations" (p. 224). With the well-documented issues facing elementary social studies, including lack of instructional time (Fitchett et al., 2014) and suitable curriculum materials (Duplass, 2007), the lure of quick and easy social studies lesson plans is understandable and strong. TPT, however, has problems vetting lessons and creators (Shelton et al., 2022). Social

studies researchers have documented numerous lessons containing little content, racial stereotypes, and misinformation (Gallagher et al., 2022; Harris et al., 2021; Rodríguez et al., 2020). Despite repeated warnings from researchers about the reliability of TPT, teachers are still using it. How can teachers, searching for useful elementary social studies lessons, decipher the good from the bad?

Social studies at the elementary level is a broadly encompassing subject that covers four main disciplines: history, civics and government, economics, and geography. Student success in geography has been particularly challenging. "The overwhelming majority of American students are geographically illiterate" (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). The 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing in geography determined this statement about American students. In 1994, 2001, 2010, and 2014, the NAEP tested the geography proficiency of students in 4th, 8th, and 12th grade in public and nonpublic schools (NAEP, 2022). The results repeatedly showed little to no change in test scores over the years. These dismal results prompted a "The Road Map for 21st Century Geography Education Project" (Bernarz et al., 2013). "The Road Map for 21st Century Geography Education Project" was created by collaborating groups, including the National Geographic Society, the Association of American Geographers, the National Council for Geographic Education, and the American Geographical Society. Its purpose was a call for greater research in geography education. The document subtitled "Recommendations and Guidelines for Research in Geography Education" presented thirteen recommendations designed to "improve research in geography education and, thus, to develop a more geographically proficient and literate society" (p. 8). Among those recommendations were "that geography education researchers engage in systematic efforts to identify learning progressions in geography both within and across grade bands (e.g., grades K–

4, 5-8, 9-12)" (p. 8) and "The Committee recommends research that examines the components and characteristics of exemplary geography curricula" (p. 8). While the geography community may have taken up these recommendations, the NAEP results continued to show little progress. Unfortunately, in 2018, due to budget cuts, the decision was made to test only 8th-grade students (Solem, 2020). The students' final assessments in 2018 showed little progress from the original scores in 1994. Little improvement has been seen in geography education. Without universal standards, it is difficult to know what is being taught in geography classrooms in the United States, let alone how to improve it. Individual state curricula could provide some answers, but that would be time-consuming to research.

The idea for this study is influenced by the recommendations of "Road Map for the 21st Century Geography Education Project" and extends upon original recommendations one and two. Recommendation two "recommends research that examines the components and characteristics of exemplary geography curricula" (p. 8). What if instead of exploring only exemplar lessons in geography teaching, we systematically explore a group of geography lessons teachers use in classrooms around the country? While controversial, a large source of teacher-used lessons is on the website teacherpayteachers.com. A simple search for "geography resources" yields 150,000+ items. Continuing to refine the search to a specific grade level can simplify this enormous task. the *C3 Standards* for early elementary are presented in the grade bans K-3 and 3-5TPT only allows for searches in one grade level at a time. To stay within the K-2 grade ban, I will explore geography lessons in only one grade level, first grade.

This study explores a group of elementary social studies lesson plans available on TPT designed for first-grade geography. I chose the number 50 as a stopping point after lesson ideas and activities began to be repetitive; in other words, I had reached the point of saturation.

Teachers purchasing lesson plans and activities on the site are given the option to leave a review. Purchasers are not required to leave a review. TPT does not offer an exact count of how many times an individual lesson plan has been purchased. The only way to track the number of times a lesson or activity has been purchased is the reviews, which are counted. The lessons in this study were reviewed over 10,000 times. TPT only allows a review after purchasing a lesson. This means that the 50 lesson plans in this study were purchased by at least 10,000 individuals, not accounting for those who did not leave a review. There is no denying the impact TPT has on teaching and learning.

This study uses qualitative critical content analysis and a modified version of the "Pinning with Pause Checklist" (Gallagher et al., 2019), which I have named Checklist to Analyze Online Lesson Plans in Social Studies (CAOLSS) to evaluate 50 first-grade geography lesson plans available for purchase on TPT. I designed the CAOLSS evaluation tool to analyze existing lesson plans in six critical areas in social studies lesson planning: standards, general instruction, assessment, geography content and process, illustrations, and justice and equity. While the CAOLSS evaluation tool is used specifically for first-grade geography lessons in this study, a few simple changes in the *content* and *general instruction* categories make it useful for online lessons in other social studies areas.

The CAOLSS was used to evaluate the first 50 lesson plans on TPT when narrowing the search feature to look specifically for "lesson plans-first-grade-social studies-geography." Collecting a large group of lesson plans is challenging, and the online lesson planning site provides a unique opportunity. The lessons uploaded to and purchased from this site represent teachers from all over the United States and the world. Assessing the online geography lessons can provide a glimpse of current teaching and learning. Using data from these 50 lesson plans,

this study intends to address the following questions:

(1) How do the first 50 lesson plans that appear when searching lesson plan-first-grade-social studies-geography using the TPT search tool measure along criteria including geography content, assessment, alignment with standards, and justice and equity?

(2) What are the significant problems within these TPT lessons?

This dissertation first reviews the research in the four main areas of geography education. 1) young children's spatial understanding, 2) geography instruction in the lower elementary classroom, 3) using children's literature to teach social studies, and 4) teaching online resources are all pieces of the larger elementary geography puzzle. Teaching any subject requires some developmental knowledge of skill levels and pedagogical techniques that have successfully taught it. All the lessons used in this study were purchased on TPT, an online lesson planning site, so it will be necessary to understand a bit about how online lesson sharing is used.

I will then discuss obtaining this study's 50 first-grade geography lessons. I describe the six categories on the COALSS tool used to evaluate each lesson. Lessons will be given a score and ranked in order from highest to lowest. An analysis of these lessons and their scores provided three clear groups. The qualities of each group and several lesson examples are provided.

The study ends with a discussion of the findings and how they affirm and contradict current research in young children's spatial understanding, geography instruction in lower elementary classrooms, using literature to teach social studies, and teaching online resources. The results speak quite clearly about changes that could be made in geography instruction to standardize the process and end areas of misrepresentation clouding the teaching and learning of the subject.

THEORECTICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was designed to examine a group of first-grade social studies geography lessons on the website TPT. The startlingly high number of teachers using TPT begs the question of why teachers would need to use outside instructional materials. In the area of elementary social studies, the work of Diliberti et al. (2023) and their theory of "the missing elementary infrastructure" helps explain the findings of this question. This theory argues that, unlike other domains, elementary social studies does not have a robust infrastructure to support teachers in enacting high-quality social studies education. Social studies education is currently supported by piecemeal efforts rather than a comprehensive set of supports at the state and local levels. As such, this theory does not blame teachers who use TPT or teachers who create TPT lessons; it merely explains the proliferation of TPT lessons and argues that teachers have had to look for creative workarounds for the lack of quality elementary geography lessons, unfortunately without the expertise in geography education. This theory helps inform teachers' decision-making regarding what elementary teachers find valuable in geography education. The following sections will break down the "Hypothesized Infrastructure Leading to Student Learning" levels and how failure at each level of support classrooms affects instructional decisions. I will then describe the four common social studies instruction types that have emerged from infrastructure deficiencies.

The Policy Level

Effective social studies instruction requires support from all bureaucratic levels of the education system. Diliberti et al. "Hypothesized Infrastructure Leading to Student Learning" (2023, p. 4) looks at social studies learning and instruction from a big-picture view. Effective social studies instruction involves actions that stakeholders must take in multiple contexts.

Decisions made at state, district, and classroom levels ultimately influence social studies instruction. Diliberti et al. label these levels as the "State context," "District and School context," and the "Classroom context," all of which work together to support elementary students' social studies learning. Within each of these levels lies four supporting factors.

State Context

At the state level, the supports are a *supportive political environment* around creating *rigorous state standards*, accompanied by *high-quality instructional material and policies* and *strong accountability and assessment.* The visual image created by Diliberti et al. (2023) features a strong, broad base where each of these factors works separately and together to determine what is happening at the top of our scaffolding, the classroom. A state without a political climate that supports a pluralistic society struggles to create rigorous state standards that represent current research and the ever-shifting cultural understanding and expectations. Without agreed-upon standards at the state context, developing instructional policies that influence purchasing and distributing high-quality instructional materials is difficult. The lack of an agreed-upon group of standards and materials ultimately leaves nothing to be assessed and little to be accountable for regarding social studies instruction. All of these factors support what teachers are using in the classroom. Without a clear message to teachers from the top in these areas of standards and instructional materials teachers can be left making uniformed instructional decisions.

District and School Context

The district and school context include the factors of *clear guidance around curriculum* materials *adopted,* which can facilitate *common instructional practices* supported by *frequent professional development*. More teacher evaluation is necessary to maintain accountability for the clearly laid out expectations on this level, specifically in social studies instruction. Each of

the four areas in the *district and school context* area requires support from the four levels of the *State Context*.

Classroom Context

The final context, influenced by the previous two contexts, is the *Classroom Context*. This context cites *prioritized goals for learning activities* supported by the *use of high-quality curriculum materials* with *ample instructional planning time* and *sufficient instructional time*. Teachers left without one of these supports may struggle to include social studies instruction in their classrooms.

Each area represents part of a "Hypothesized Infrastructure to Student Learning" (Diliberti et al., 2023, p. 4) but could also be used to understand why teachers seek social studies resources on TPT. Failure of one area at any context level may leave classroom teachers without clear guidelines and quality materials in social studies instruction.

Teacher Decision Making

The "Hypothesized Infrastructure to Student Learning" showed how failures at each level influence instructional decisions made at the classroom level. But how are teachers making instructional decisions regarding social studies teaching? Diliberti. et al.'s study went on to survey social studies teachers, asking, "What social studies curriculum materials published or locally created required by their school districts in 2021-2022, what curricula they used, and for what portion of their instructional time did they use those materials?"=" (p. 25). Based on responses, the researchers placed teachers into four groups: *Textbook Teachers*, *Local Materials Teachers, Do-it-Yourself Teachers,* and *Cobbler Teachers. Textbook Teachers* and *Local Material Teachers* who use social studies materials exclusively provided by their district or school are unlikely to turn to TPT for classroom materials. The *Do-It-Yourself Teachers* and

Cobbler Teachers may better explain the popularity of online resource sites such as TPT.

Do-it-Yourself Teachers

The group of teachers that make up this category "used self-created materials for the majority of their instructional time, regardless of whether this practice was required or recommended by the school district" (Diliberti et al., 2023, p. 25). Do-it-Yourself Teachers made up approximately 22% of the respondents. The teachers in this category are either unaware of state or district requirements and are ignoring them. These teachers are making their material to teach social studies. It is unknown where the ideas for their DIY lessons and materials are coming from. It's not too much of a stretch to assume the use of online materials. I cannot be sure where their ideas come from, but TPT would be a space to find ideas. Whether purchasing lessons for their classroom or recreating lessons in their own way, the source remains the same.

Cobbler Teachers

The Cobbler Teachers represent the largest group of respondents at 52%. This group of teachers does not fit exclusively into any of the other groups. Diliberti et al. break this group into smaller groups: "35% of these teachers did not use any curricula regularly, whether published or locally created, meaning they likely rely solely on additional supplemental materials for their lessons. 16% used some combination of published curricula and locally created curriculum materials regularly (at least one per week) but did not use either for the majority of their instructional time" (Diliberti et al., 2023, p. 25). These teachers admit to using supplemental materials in their classrooms when teaching social studies. The source of the supplemental materials is not clear. Again, like the DIY Teachers, the internet and TPT offer a wealth of options.

Decisions at the Top Lead Connect to TPT Use

Diliberti et al.'s (2023) study examines social studies instruction and the decisions that occur at the classroom level, which are influenced by state, district, and local decisions. Their study found that a good number of teachers chose their materials. Teachers in the Cobbler and Do-It-Yourself groups represent 51% of the respondents. This study demonstrates little consensus on material in social studies instruction. The researchers stated, "We hypothesize that the high prevalence of cobblers and DIY teachers is related to the lack of guidance teachers were receiving from their local school systems about what materials to use and their perception that they have autonomy to determine what materials to use in their classrooms" (Diliberti et al., 2023, p. 25).

This study explores a group of first-grade geography lessons that are available for purchase from the online teaching site Teachers Pay Teachers. The number of teachers using the site is high. The reasons for this are not as clear. In the area of social studies, failure to develop a sound elementary social studies infrastructure has left teachers to make curricular decisions for their classrooms. Teachers are cobblers and do-it-yourself curricular makers who source resources and materials from places beyond textbooks and state guidelines. Sources on the internet seem the most easily accessible place to find classroom materials.

Literature Review

This study is grounded in four streams of research: young children's spatial understanding, geography instruction in the lower elementary classroom, using children's literature to teach social studies, and teaching online resources. Analyzing first-grade geography lessons, the focus of this study requires a grounding in how children learn complex geographical ideas, the ways in

which literature can effectively (and less effectively) teach social studies concepts, and the affordances and constraints of online resources.

Young Children's Spatial Understandings

There are conflicting theories about how children understand the space around them and at what age that understanding begins. Piaget and Inhelder (1956), in *The Child's Conception of Space,* stated their original theory on how young children develop their understanding of developmental space. The two theorists are separated between "practical" and "representational" space. Downs and Liben (1991), summarizing Piaget and Inhelder's theory, described practical space, available from infancy, "allows the child to act in and on the physical environment based on sensorimotor feedback" (p. 310). An example might be seeing the objects in the way and feeling the pain involved with running into that object.

The concept of representational space begins at an early age, and it is the ability to conceptualize spatial information through symbols that stand for spatial data. Representational space can be interpreted by children in three basic ways 1) topological concepts, 2) projective construction, and 3) Euclidean concepts. Topological concepts have young children starting to recognize space features in relation to a fixed object. For example, the child can say something is "on" or "in" the box. Projective construction takes topological concepts one step further by understanding that spatial relationships change with the point of view, i.e., liner or aerial view. The final way is through Euclidean concepts, which "comes with the capacity to establish and use arbitrary but fixed reference systems (such as cartesian or polar coordinates) for specific location, direction, size and distance" (Down & Liben, 1991, p. 310). Scholars such as Beilin (1989), Blaut (1997), and Downs and Liben (1991) have questioned the entire theory but

recognized the importance of spatial awareness in the teaching and understanding of map skills. Downs and Liben stated,

> Development of understanding representation (Piaget, 1962) underpins the ability to understand the symbolic nature of maps. Understanding logical inference (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; Piaget, 1952) is critical for understanding relationships logically implied by maps. For example, the ability to reason for the premises, A is contained in B, and B is contained in C, to the inference that A is contained in C, underlies the ability to understand geographic hierarchies (p. 309).

Blaut (1997) called Piaget's theory "pessimistic" (p. 168) because of its strict age parameters. He noted that these age parameters have been used as guidance for teaching standards in elementary geography, placing real work in map studies into later grades. Blaut cited studies of children as young as two and three years old making simple maps (Blaut & Stea, 1974) and navigating using aerial view (Rieser et al., 1982). Studies have also shown that children as young as four and five years old can find hidden objects in a room using maps (Blades et al., 1996; Newcombe & Huttenlocker, 1992) even if the map is not initially properly aligned (Bluestein & Acredolo, 1979).

Although researchers disagree on the developmental nature of spatial awareness, they have found that spatial awareness is linked to student success in mathematics, science, and social studies (Bednarz et al., 2011; Newcombe, 2013). Newcombe pointed out the relationship between spatial awareness and map skills, "Navigation, or 'wayfinding' is a somewhat different kind of spatial ability than mental rotation tasks typically used to assess spatial ability, but navigation may be as important in STEM learning and social studies learning as mental rotation, likely because of the usefulness of maps" (p. 28). Newcombe's article encourages educators to

"spatialize the existing curriculum" (p. 29) rather than teaching spatially related activities in isolation. She recommended teachers, "strengthen their (students) ability to learn spatially and benefit from studying visualizations such as maps and graphs" (p. 28).

Geography Education in the Lower Elementary Classroom

The *C3 Framework* is designed to be used by states as a framework for developing K-12 social studies standards. The *C3 Framework* advocates using inquiry to cover the social studies disciplines of civics, economics, geography, and history. One of the many purposes of geography education is described as follows: "Geography inquiry helps people understand and appreciate their own place in the world and fosters curiosity about the Earth's wide diversity of environments and cultures (NCSS, 2013, p. 40)

There are several organizations dedicated to geography education. These groups include the National Geographic Society, the National Council for Geographic Education, and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), among others. Each group uniquely articulates a similar vision of geography education. Geography education, according to Gilbert M. Grosvenor, Chairman Emeritus of the National Geographic Society (NGS), is described as "defined by 18 standards grouped handily in 6 'essential elements' each addressing a core set of geographic perspectives, skills, and experiences" (Grosvenor, 2007, p. 5). Those six categories are *Understanding the World in Spatial Terms*, *Studying Places and Regions, Understanding Physical Systems*, *Human Systems*, *Environment and Society*, and *The Uses of Geography.* The National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) cites the creation of National Geography Standards titled "Geography for Life," which was created in 1994 and revised in 2012 (National Council for Geographic Education, 2024). The same six categories are used, although NCGE calls them "Essential Elements." These "Essential Elements are then divided into three

‘Geography Standards,’ for a total of eighteen ‘Geography Standards’” (National Council for Geographic Education, 2012). These standards have not been adopted nationally, as each state has created its own geography standards for K-12th graders heavily influenced by the essential elements and standards stated in “Geography for Life.”

The NCSS also reflects the work of the NGS and the NCGE in the geography section of The College, Career, and Civics Framework for Social Studies Standards, known as the *C3 Framework*. The *C3 Framework* considers the six essential and eighteen standards in the Dimension 2 Geography section, which creates a “Suggested K-12 Pathway” (NCSS, 2013) for implementing these ideas into the classroom. The NCSS goes one step further by dividing its expectations into grade-level bans “by the end of second grade, By the end of 5th grade, By the end of 8th grade, and By the end of 12th grade” (NCSS, 2013, p. 4). These bands consider prior skills obtained and developmental readiness for topics and ideas.

The NCSS explained the importance of map-related education as follows: “Creating maps and other geographic representations is an essential and enduring part of seeking new geographic knowledge that is personally and socially useful and that can be applied in making decisions and solving problems” (NCSS, 2013, p. 41). The importance of teaching map skills to children is undisputed. Researchers have spelled out a pedagogically appropriate timeline for these lessons.

This study focuses on the *C3 Framework* standards for Geography “By the end of 2nd grade.” These three dimensions, “Geographic Representations,” “Human-Environment Interaction,” “Human Populations: Spatial Patterns and Movements,” and “Global Connections,” are broken down into twelve standards. The standards stated below represent the standards used for this study.

D2. Geo.1.K-2. Construct maps, graphs, and other representations of familiar places.

D2. Geo.2.K-2. Use maps, graphs, photographs, and other representations to describe places and the relationships and interactions that shape them.

D2. Geo.3.K-2. Use maps, globes, and other simple geographic models to identify the cultural and environmental characteristics of places.

D2. Geo.4.K-2. Explain how weather, climate, and other environmental characteristics affect people's lives in a place or region.

D2. Geo.5.K-2. Describe how human activities affect the cultural and environmental characteristics of places or regions.

D2. Geo.6.K-2. Identify some cultural and environmental characteristics of specific places.

D2. Geo.7.K-2. Explain why and how people, goods, and ideas move from place to place.

D2. Geo.8.K-2. Compare how people in different types of communities use local and distant environments to meet their daily needs.

D2. Geo.9.K-2. Describe the connections between the physical environment of a place and the economic activities found there.

D2. Geo.10.K-2. Describe changes in the physical and cultural characteristics of various world regions.

D2. Geo.11.K-2. Explain how the consumption of products connects people to distant places.

D2. Geo.12.K-2. Identify ways that a catastrophic disaster may affect people living in a place.

In a 2007 special edition of *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, Grosvenor summarized the idea of "Understanding the World in Spatial Terms" (NGS, NCGE) as "Geography's most defining characteristic in its use of the spatial perspective. Much as historians look at events chronologically, geographers use maps and other tools to ask questions, acquire and organize information, and find answers by looking at how things are organized spatially on the Earth's surface" (p. 5). Maps are a common form used to understand the world in spatial terms. Map-making and map-reading occur in developmental stages, something that is often overlooked by those who write elementary social studies curricula. "Developmentally appropriate geography and sense of place activities are sometimes completely missing from the elementary curriculum, or they are often conducted in an inaccessible fashion with children" (Sobel, 1998, p. 11).

Sobel detailed the results of his study, which analyzed the mapmaking of young children in the United States, England, and Grenada. His study begins at ages five and six when children create child-centered maps that are more detailed pictures than maps. "The early cartographer chooses a frontal perspective for his or her map. There is usually only one baseline in these early maps and not much sense of depth" (1998, p. 16). This means that early maps look much like pictures with a defined ground line, such as a sidewalk, and objects rest directly on that baseline. An example would be three houses sitting beside each other on a sidewalk. The child does not add any background objects. If people, pets, or cars are involved in the map, they also stand on the baseline. All objects on the map rest on one baseline. There is no sense of perspective with larger houses in front and small houses in the background. As children reach seven and eight years old, their worlds expand, affecting their mapmaking abilities. "A sense of depth starts to characterize the maps of seven- and eight-year-olds. A distinction between foreground and

background emerges, often by the inclusion of multiple baselines" (p. 17). Children's mapmaking begins to include a greater perspective, aerial view, and roads at the ages of nine and ten. "Real perspective has emerged for many children by this age. Many maps are drawn as if the cartographer is up on top of a high hill or very tall building looking down at the neighborhood or community" (p. 19). Sobel's analysis of children's map-making ends at ages eleven or twelve, where he states, "The aerial view, prematurely imposed on children starting in kindergarten and first grade, finally flourishes now" (p. 20).

The lessons used in this study are intended for first-grade students, who are typically about six or seven years old. Students in this age range create maps that are just beginning to move beyond one baseline. The world of a six- or seven-year-old is only beginning to expand as the child notices things that are beyond his immediate surroundings. According to Sobel, the idea of perspective as it relates to maps only begins around age nine or ten, three years after the age of a typical first-grader. This means any lessons using aerial perspective may be beyond the understanding of a first grader. Asking a child to create an aerial view map of the classroom or their neighborhood might be premature.

These developmental stages of map-making and understanding are not set in stone. As we know, there are no definite patterns in children's development. Frazee (1984) stated, "because a child does not seem developmentally ready to master a particular mapping skill does not mean the child should not be introduced to it" (Frazee, 1984, p. 79). Mapmaking skills are added to elementary social studies curriculums in part because "A pupil should be informally introduced to specific concepts which can be related to the child's actual experiences, even though the student may be limited in the ability to comprehend the particular ideas fully" (p. 79). Continuing the debate on age and developmental readiness in geography education, Downs and

Liben (1991) found that even college students may lack the cognitive and spatial skills necessary to understand map projections.

One of the most common ways to teach students geography is by using maps. The *C3 Framework* three standards in *Geography Representation-Spatial Views of the World, By the End of Second Grade* state: "Construct maps, graphs, and other representations of familiar places; Use maps, graphs, photographs, and other representations to describe places and the relationships and interactions that shape them; Use maps, globes, and other simple geographic models to identify cultural and environmental characteristics of places" (NCSS, 2013, p 41). make a note of the use terms such as "familiar places" and "simple geographic models to identify cultural and environmental characteristics of places." The *C3 Framework* does not mention creating world maps or memorizing the names of continents and oceans.

A map is defined by the *C3 Framework* as "a representation of an area and is usually depicted on a flat surface. Maps describe spatial relationships of the specific features represented" (NCSS, 2013, p 102). Maps vary in size and purpose. When thinking about a map, it is important to consider the scale, the projection, and what each thing on the map is meant to symbolize. Monmonier (2018) explained, "Each element (scale, projection, and symbolization) is a source of distortion" (p. 5). Scale refers to the size of the map in relation to the set measurement used on the bottom of the map. For example, 1 inch may represent 1000 miles, and 1 centimeter may represent 10,000 miles. The larger the ratio, the wider the scope of the map. As the map widens, small details tend to disappear. Map projections also known as the flat maps most frequently seen in geography textbooks and lesson plans, "transform the curved, three-dimensional surface of the planet into a flat, two-dimensional plane, can greatly distort map scale" (Monmonier, 2018, p. 8). Despite the seemingly straightforward appearance of maps, each

one is created with a specific purpose and perspective. Kaiser and Wood (2001) remind us that "maps are not neutral" (p.21). Rodríguez (2024) pointed out that "maps always construct a narrative, which means we need to be mindful of power and perspective" (p. 22). Wood et al. (2006) stated, "Every map is a purposeful selection from everything that is known, bent to the mapmaker's ends. Every map serves a purpose. Every map advances an interest" (p. 4).

The Mercator Map, created in 1569, is the most commonly used world map projection in the United States. The Mercator Map places the continents between equal lines of longitude and latitude. A map style best used in ship navigation. The line of latitude stretches around the globe, starting at the equator. The lines of longitude start at the Prime Meridian, which runs through England. On a sphere-shaped globe, the lines of latitude get smaller as the area around the globe gets smaller, for example, near Greenland. The lines of longitude on a globe will all meet at the North and South Poles. The Mercator Map takes the idea of lines of longitude and latitude and flattens the space. The consequence of this is that all latitude lines become the same length while lines of longitude simply run off the edge of the paper instead of meeting the North and South Poles. The land masses closest to the two poles stretch and increase in size. The countries closest to the equator, which take up the most space widthwise on a globe, must shrink to fit all continents and countries within the grid system on a flat map.

The Mercator Map is the most widely used, but not without controversy. It "has been attacked as being Eurocentric and wildly distorted. It has become an icon of Western superiority, reflecting an era of imperialism and colonial domination" (Wood et al. 2006, p 153). Distorting the size of the seven continents, particularly the areas near the Equator and Poles, distorts our perception and understanding of size.

The Peter's Projection Map, introduced in 1974, shows each country in proportion to its actual size (Wood et al., 2006, p.152). The map is named for Arno Peters, who "believed that widespread use of the Mercator maps for purposes that had nothing to do with navigation built up in our minds a seriously distorted image of the world" (Wood et al., 2006 p. 10). This map was intended to be a more accurate representation of the world. It significantly shrinks the size of the United States and Europe compared to the Mercator Map. Peter's map is inspired by current issues related to equity and justice, "Peters was especially concerned about our image of Africa and the countries close to the equator that were given short-shrift as a consequence of the Mercator projection" (p. 11). Peters believed that size equated to power. That people's perception of a powerful country could be influenced by repeated exposure to geography maps studied in school. Wood et al. (2006) used the example of the space occupied by the former Soviet Union, "On the Mercator, the former Soviet Union is much larger than Africa…Africa is actually about the same size as the former Soviet Union and the United States combined. Africa is *substantially larger* than the United States and the current Russia" (p. 11).

In summary, it is necessary to understand the differences between the two map styles and how the largest countries on the map shift dramatically between the two perspectives. In the Mercator projection, the United States appears much larger than other continents closer to the Equator. The Peters projection more accurately shows how much larger South America and Africa are than the United States and Europe. In a society where the saying "bigger is better," size can equal power. Using the Mercator projection maintains the dominant narrative, which gives power to the United States and Europe.

Children's Literature to Teach Social Studies

Researchers have suggested that teachers looking to move away from traditional methods of teaching geography, such as maps and globes, look to children's literature for help (Gandy, 2007; Hannibal et al., 2002). Pitts et al. (2023) advocated for using picture books for social studies instruction at the high school level, demonstrating the timelessness of children's literature: "whimsy and nostalgia shouldn't be contained to only elementary classrooms" (p. 147). McGowan et al. (1996) noted, "Educators have long argued that many features of trade books, particularly their detailed descriptions, complex characters, and melodic passages, allow young readers to construct understanding in powerful ways" (p. 87).

Children's books related to basic geography ideas are certainly in short supply. Finding quality resources related to early geography map skills can be even more difficult. Despite the noted potential, "When early childhood educators learn to use children's literature as a resource in teaching essential geography concepts, they move away from a map-and-globe- approach and enable children to learn that geography is made up of real people, places and events in their world" (Hannibal et al., 2002, p. 86).

The NCSS annually convenes a group of social studies educators and researchers to evaluate the most recently published books, children's and young adult books, both fiction and nonfiction. An annual list, "Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People," is created to help educators quickly find valuable classroom resources. The list is divided into categories based on the social studies disciplines of civics, geography, government, history, and economics. Most recently, the geography category has been titled "Geography/People/Places." Earlier lists had the category "Geography/People/Places/Culture." Culture has recently been moved to its own category. Despite being published since the mid-1990s, it has only recommended one title

designed to teach map skills: *Follow That Map! A First Book of Mapping Skills* by S. Ritchie. This children's book was published in 2009 but not recommended until the "2020 Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People" (NCSS, 2022). In contrast, searching "Follow That Map! A First Book of Mapping Skills" on TPT only yields two results.

The Notable Studies Trade booklist does not ignore geography but recommends books related to specific places, such as China or Australia. They are focusing more on the geographic category of the Study of Places and Regions (Grosvenor, 2007). The list has also recommended Atlas in 2009 and 2016. While an atlas can be an excellent reference book, they are not as helpful when teaching children the overall geographic ideas of location. The May/June 2023 issue of the popular social studies journal *Social Education* is dedicated to "Literature and the Social Studies." This issue did not feature any articles related to geography education. Despite a lack of children's books specifically explaining geographic terms and ideas, some connection between geography instruction and children's literature seems probable.

Curriculum Integration Challenges

Literacy and language art instruction is a key focus in early elementary classrooms. Standardized tests in language arts and mathematics, linked to school funding, prioritize these subjects over science and social studies. Time is a limited resource in any elementary classroom, and finding ways to include science and social studies instruction can be challenging. One commonly attempted solution is curriculum integration. Although researchers have found benefits from combining social studies and ELA curriculum, including "more opportunities to address required (social studies) standards, curriculum, and objectives" (Huck. 2019, p.14), this match is not always a good solution. Hinde (2015) noted three "Common Manifestations of Curriculum Integration in Elementary Classrooms" (p. 25) for social studies. Hinde categorizes

these common manifestations as “fractured, stealthy, and healthy integration” (p. 25). Hinde describes “Healthy Integration” as when “Reading and language arts activities are focused on developing disciplinary frames of mind in students” (p. 25). The counter to a “healthy integration” would be one that is fractured. In “Fractured Integration,” “The purpose of social studies is mainly to enhance reading/language arts and is not focused on preparing students for effective citizenship” (p. 25).

Somewhere between these two integration examples lies “stealthy integration.” This type of integration occurs when social studies is used as the topic of the reading lesson. Often, “Teacher chooses reading/language arts materials with rich spatial or historical content but focuses on reading/language arts skills.” (Hinde, 2015, p. 25). In examples of stealthy integration, the teacher tries to slip social studies content into other subjects without creating a separate space for the subject. Children may not even realize they are learning content related to social studies. The heavy emphasis placed on reading and mathematics in the early elementary classroom makes teaching social studies difficult. Some school districts mandate a set amount of daily time spent on language arts/reading instruction. Attempting to integrate curriculum is a good solution. Unfortunately, integrating social studies and language arts in these classrooms resembles Hinde’s “fractured” and “stealthy.”

The integration of social studies and ELA may be easier for grades 3-5 than in k-2, “The historical content of the curriculum in those grades is more readily integrated into other content areas such as ELA, because of the need for accessing and applying literacy skills to the many features of text prevalent in reading instruction (Huck, 2019, p. 3; Vogler, 2011).” Brugar and Whitlock’s (2020) case study of a first- and fifth-grade teacher found “healthy” (Hinde, 2015) examples of social studies and literature. Again, they noted the availability of historical fiction

for older grades or more advanced readers. “Healthy, Stealthy, and Fractured” (Hinde, 2015). Ultimately, successful curriculum integration lies with the teacher: “student achievement hinges on the teacher’s ability to integrate content across disciplines effectively in meaningful ways” (Hinde, 2005, p. 107).

For years, education scholars have researched the ways that language arts can be integrated with geography education through children’s literature and informational books. Specific book lists and lesson ideas have repeatedly been shared. Hannibal et al. (2002) specifically addressed the idea of teaching geography with children's literature. Their article included rational and specific examples of texts that teachers could use. The work of Fertig and Silver’s (2007) article contains a reader’s theater that helps students learn about place. Hann and Hagelman (2021) wrote an article that contains specific examples and lists of current children’s books that can assist in teaching the five themes of geography. These researchers have introduced texts that help teachers successfully integrate language arts and geography.

The NCSS is also involved in assisting with the curricular integration of language arts and social studies. They regularly publish a list of “Notable Social Studies Books for Young People.” Unfortunately, the books for the geography section often have to do with specific countries instead of broader geography themes. One highlight, however, created by Ballock and Lucas (2013) is a pullout section as part of their article listing the five themes of geography with activities and books corresponding to each theme. Despite several lists containing relevant children's books for teaching geography, one book seems to dominate.

Me on the Map and Expanding Communities.

Me on the Map (Sweeney, 1996, 2001) is a tremendously popular book for teaching elementary students and combines the subject areas of literacy and geography. *Me on the Map* is

a controversial title among social studies educators and researchers. There are both pros and cons to its use in the elementary classroom. A Google search for "*Me on the Map* activities" yields 933,000,000 results. The exact search on Teacherpayteacher.com yields 3,200 results. Youtube.com has dozens of videos of educators reading *Me on the Map* aloud. The Ohio Council for the Social Studies suggests explicitly using the book in its publication, "Using Children's Literature to Teach Social Studies in the Ohio Content Standards" (2018, p. 64). Researchers have also recommended using the book in social studies education in academic and practitioner journals (Britt & LaFontaine, 2009; Fertig & Silverman, 2007; Gandy, 2006, 2007), including recently (Gandy, 2020; Swift & Brown, 2022).

The children's book *Me on the Map* by Joan Sweeney is a popular social studies teaching tool because it very literally illustrates a core idea that the elementary social studies curriculum is based on, is developmentally appropriate for elementary students, and covers multiple social studies-related curricular standards in geography. It shows the expanding communities, also called expanding environments or expanding horizons, an approach popular as a framework for elementary social studies curriculum. The expanding communities approach is built from the ideas of German Charles A. McMurray. Paul R. Hanna popularized the idea in the 1930s and 1940s (Bisland, 2009; Halvorsen, 2009, 2013; Stallones ,2013). Hanna's expanding communities model advocated, for the elementary and junior high school student, a multidiscipline, wholistic, and coordinated study of people living in societies which he referred to as communities:

> With the Learner placed at the center, or core, of his/her environments, it was maintained that every one of us lives simultaneously in all communities: the family, the school, the neighborhood, the local, the state, the regional, and the national community… Hanna proposed that the 'action' involved within the 'Expanding Communities" model moved

> from the smaller and more intimate communities to the larger and more inclusive communities as the child progressed through the elementary school and expanded his/her activities geographically and culturally (Baskerville & Sesow, 1976, p. 20).

Although seen primarily in geography curricula, examples of this approach can also be found in other areas, including history and civics, and in other elementary subjects such as reading. The expanding communities approach is a natural approach to understanding geography. "Of all the social science disciplines, the expanding communities approach is especially well developed in geography" (Halvorsen, 2009, p. 119).

Critics of the expanding communities approach feel the process "lacks intellectual rigor and is redundant in that it repeats what children already know" (Halvorsen, 2009, p. 115) as well as only studying only one 'environment' or community at a time "obscures interrelationships among communities" (Wade, 2002, p. 118) creating "the unrealistic notion of isolated and separate levels of political organization (LeRiche, 1992, p. 130). Wade (2002) summarizes the objections to the expanding communities approach in her article, calling for new curricular directions for social studies curriculum. Wade, drawing on the work of the Curriculum Task Force of the National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools (1989), points out that even "from a young age due to television, travel, and the Internet…children in today's society come to school knowing, more about the world and with interests that transcend the 'environments' of self, family, and neighborhood presented to them in their social studies curriculum" (Wade, 2002, pp. 116-117). *Me on the Map* attempts to illustrate this critical concept to children.

Although I referred to *Me on the Map* as a good example of the expanded community approach to teaching social studies, its representation is only surface level. *Me on the Map* actually misses the most essential point of the expanded communities approach:

interconnectedness. The book illustrates where a child is on Earth; each set of pages represents one level of this placement. For example, the opening pages are in the main character's bedroom, and the pages expand outward from there. This design allows young readers to focus on each level separately. This single focus may be more appropriate for learning new concepts and vocabulary. Unfortunately, the book never demonstrates how these separate areas are all interconnected. One's bedroom can be affected by what is happening to the house. The house is affected by what happens on the street and in the city. The city is affected by what happens in the state and so forth. The pages of the book treat each area as a separate entity. The only thing that ties all these separate places or pages together is that they are contained in one book. The book fails to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the expanding communities' different levels, which is essential to its purpose (Doornbos, 2014).

Me on the Map has also been criticized for perpetuating a Eurocentric narrative through its limited viewpoint and troublesome illustrations (Doornbos, 2014). A "refreshed version" of the book, with a new illustrator, was published in 2018. The main character was changed from a blond, white girl to a dark-haired Asian girl. The main illustrations of the book are primarily the same. The *Me on the Map* as a lesson in elementary geography was featured in 25 of the 50 lessons reviewed for this study.

Teaching Resources Online

The Internet has forever changed how teachers prepare engaging lessons for their classrooms. Long gone are the days of libraries and local teacher's stores with books and magazines filled with lesson-planning ideas and reproducible activities. The internet offers seemingly endless resources for teachers. One study citing a multistate survey by Blazar et al. found "that 95% of all teachers report using materials sources from the internet- and about half

use such materials in at least one-quarter of their lessons (Polikoff, 2019, p. 20). This section will examine the reasons behind the sudden popularity and the internet's most frequently used site or buying and selling lesson plans.

Online Lesson Popularity

The COVID-19 pandemic also changed the teaching profession forever, finding students at home and teachers scrambling to create lessons accessible online. With little time to rework current lesson plans, teachers needed help. The availability of teaching resources online looked to be the answer. The end of the pandemic brought students back into the classrooms and presented teachers with new lesson-planning challenges. Again, teachers faced too much to do and needed more time to do it. The popularity of online lesson planning websites is understood.

Teachers Pay Teachers (TPT)

Internet search engines such as Google and social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest are popular free spaces for teachers and educators to share their ideas and experiences. Amazon Ignite, ReadWriteThink, and Share My Lesson are sites allowing teachers to buy and sell prepared lesson plans. The most popular of these sites is TPT.

TPT is an online site that offers opportunities for teachers to buy and sell lesson plans. Sellers can create a virtual storefront where they can post various lesson plans. Buyers can easily search lesson plans by format (PDF, Easel, Google Apps), grade level, Common Core State Standard, subjects, price range, and keywords. Sellers use this search system to their advantage by tagging their lesson plans in various areas to ensure more traffic to their virtual storefront.

According to its website, TPT was created by a New York City public school teacher named Paul Edelman in 2006. The website stated, “TPT is the largest marketplace for PreK-12 resources, powered by a community of educators" (teacherpayteacher.com). While reliant on a

community of teachers who buy and sell lesson plans, TPT is actually a for-profit company that was purchased by IXL Learning in 2023. “IXL is a developer of personalized learning tools for schools. They also own several other brands, including Rosetta Stone (Nagel, 2023). “Developed to turn a profit, the TPT platform earns 20% from most sales, collects user data, and encourages future buying behavior” (Shelton et al., 2022, p. 268). The parasitic relationship between TPT and its contributors has not gone unnoticed (Brown et al., 2023) “Developed to turn a profit, the TPT platform earns 20% from most sales, collects user data, and encourages future buying behavior” (Shelton et al., 2022, p. 268).

The contributors to TPT have become known as teacherpreneurs. The parasitic relationship between TPT and its contributors has not gone unnoticed (Brown et al., 2023). “The practice thrives because teachers are willing to spend their personal funds to purchase teacherpreneurs’ resources” (Shelton & Archambault, 2019, p. 399). Despite the one-sided nature of TPT, teachers see a cost analysis benefit: “Teachers report accessing material to save time. They find a lot of lessons that they, too, could have developed, had they enough time, but downloading ready-made resources saves hours” (Polikoff, 2019, p. 33). Polikoff quoted one teacher: “Two dollars is a lot cheaper than two days of my time” (p. 33).

Researchers have criticized TPT for its lack of oversight, particularly for not vetting its users or reviewing content posted on their site (Aguilar, 2022; Shelton & Archambault, 2019; Shelton et al., 2022; Swalwell et al., 2023). This has led to inaccurate content (Bauml, 2015), lack of Common Core alignment (Aguilar et al., 2022), and misrepresentation of ideas of race and ethnicity (Rodríguez et al., 2020; Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2021; Swalwell et al., 2023). TPT relies on its users to police the site for inaccurate or offensive lesson plans. Users must file a formal complaint with the TPT, which then asks the user to remove the lesson or risk losing their

storefront on the site (Swalwell et al., 2023). Swalwell (2023) noted that TPT created a Content Moderation Board; however, “the group’s specific responsibilities, frequency of meeting, or impact remain unclear” (p. 106).

In summary, this study is grounded in young children’s spatial understanding, geography education in the lower elementary classroom, using children’s literature to teach social studies, and teaching online resources. It seeks to build on these streams of research by documenting the specific ways in which first-grade geography lessons reflect, contradict, or extend the ways in which TPT lessons have been analyzed.

METHODS

Research Design

This study is a qualitative text analysis (Kuckartz, 2014) of a subset of lesson plans posted on the popular teaching website TPT. Each lesson plan was chosen for its intentional focus on early elementary social studies geography skills. Although text analysis brings to mind the analysis of texts as books, the term texts can undoubtedly be broadened for this study to include the written lesson plan. In keeping with Kuckartz (2014), qualitative text analysis uses primarily one of three methods: thematic, evaluative, or type building. This study uses qualitative text analysis's "evaluative method."

The evaluative method follows this path: "(1) Define evaluative categories; (2) Identify and code the relevant text passages for the evaluative category; (3) Compare the text segments coded with the same code; (4) Define levels (values) for the evaluative categories and assign them to the text segments. If necessary, modify the category definition and the number of category values; (5) Evaluate and code the entire data set; (6) Analyze and present results 1: Category-based analysis; (7) Analyze and present results 2: Overviews, in-depth interpretation of cases" (Kuchartz, 2014, p. 89).

Purchasing and accessing 50 different first-grade geography lessons proved more challenging than I expected. In organizing and numbering the downloaded lesson plans, I found that I had downloaded the same lessons several times. Duplicate purchases occurred for one of two reasons. First, TPT uses only a preview photo and occasionally a few screenshots to describe the lessons. Only after you purchase the lesson can you see the whole lesson plan. Someone can buy the same lesson plans in different ways. The preview window can show alternative screenshot pages from the lesson, and the title could differ. This means you could purchase the

same lesson by a different author. The second reason I had difficulty obtaining 50 unique lesson plans is that lessons can be available individually and as part of a bundle. When purchasing a bundle, I did not realize that specific individual lesson plans I had already purchased were part of this bundle. This left me with duplicate lesson plans, which I did not know until I began numbering the lesson plans for organizational purposes. For example, Lesson 7, "Learn the Continents and Oceans-Geography" was also included in the three-bundle pack 18. I had two of the same lesson plans. After downloading the lessons, I realized the authors and the cover page were identical. The individual lesson and the bundle preview windows were different, making them appear to be different lessons. Several times, I thought I had 50 unique geography lesson plans, only to find that I had duplicate copies. The website TPT did not attempt to alert me that I had already purchased part of this bundle or lesson plan. I cannot speculate whether this is a problem for teachers in the field as I do not know how often teachers purchase and download multiple lessons on one topic.

Data Sources

There is one data source for this project: online lesson plans for first-grade (N=50) geography. The lesson plans used in the data analysis were downloaded and purchased from the popular website TPT, widely known as TPT, over several months. Although there are other lesson plan-sharing websites, this study will only focus on TPT because of its broad base, accessibility, and popularity among elementary school teachers. The TPT website boasts a user base of "7 million teachers worldwide" and "1 billion resources downloaded". If these claims hold, the lesson plans on this site may significantly impact current and future educators (TPT, 2024).

Lesson Plan Collection

The following steps were taken to find the specific lesson plans for this study and narrow the field on the expansive website TPT. I began by logging in to teacherpayteachers.com. Creating a log-in is free and requires very little personal information. I selected “lesson plans” from the “Resource Type” tab at the home screen's top. Initially, the plan was to check the kindergarten, first, second, and third grades because they represent where early elementary social studies learning would occur. The TPT site limits users to choose only one grade. This study focused on first grade, representing the middle of the K-3 grade span. The *NCSS C3 Standards* in elementary group grades K-2 and 3-5. Choosing first grade allows the study to narrow its focus on the standards for the K-2 range. Continuing the TPT search, I chose “Social Studies-History” and specified only “geography”-related content. To give the reader an understanding of the effectiveness of the TPT filters, a search on TPT in the category “Lesson Plans” yields 800,000 + results. Adding the additional “Elementary 1st-grade” filter narrows the field to 160,000+ results. Choosing the subject of “social studies” brings the search results down to 8,241. Adding the final filter of a geography focus within the social studies subject brought our search to the final numbers. The TPT search for this study, “Resource Type-Unit Plans-1st grade-’Social Studies-History’-geography,” yielded 1,747 options for purchase.

I ultimately purchased and downloaded the first 50 unique lesson plans. Compiling the 50 lesson plans for this study happened over several months. I purchased the lessons from TPT in groups of ten. Purchasing and downloading the lesson plans in groups of ten allowed me to manage the data and examine each lesson plan before continuing the search. Lesson plans were ultimately chosen from a preview screen, which provided only general overview information about the lesson's content. Working in small batches allowed me to carefully evaluate the

content to ensure it met the qualifications for the study. I was able to recognize lessons and activities that were repetitive. I stopped at 50 because I was no longer seeing any "new" or "different lesson ideas: I had reached a saturation point. Examining lesson plans in small batches also proved beneficial because TPT repeats and offers lesson plans and activities in multiple ways. For example, one lesson plan may appear with one title, and the same lesson plan would be listed by another title or as part of a "bundle." Bundles are a way to buy a group of lesson plans on the same topic or by the same author. Bundles are intended to benefit teachers but proved time-consuming when gathering lesson plans for this study.

I chose the lesson plans for this study from a preview screen offered by TPT. This preview screen provides little information to potential buyers. Buys can only see the author, a short description, often containing the keywords and phrases I searched for, and a small cover picture. Occasionally, sellers offer a sample page for viewing. I assume TPT limits the specific details of their lessons to promote purchase. Teachers purchasing lessons on TPT may have to gamble on their purchases, as I found in my duplicate purchasing.

I narrowed the 1,747 lesson plans available by omitting lesson plans that were state—or country-specific or focused on areas outside of the United States. For example, lessons specific to the geography of Texas or Australia were not considered for this study. On a side note, there was a surprising number of lesson plans available related to the geography of Australia. One exception to the omitted state-specific lesson plans is lesson plans that claim to follow particular state standards. An example is Lesson Plan 13, "All About Maps-South Carolina College and Career Ready Standards-Unit 2 Lesson Plan", which claims to follow the state standards created by South Carolina but ultimately covers map skills. I omitted these lessons because I wanted the lessons in this study to be universal, meaning that teachers from any state could use them in their

classrooms. Teachers looking for state-specific lesson plans would encounter a much smaller field. Also, in many state standards, such as Michigan (3rd), New York (4th), California (4th), and Texas (4th), state-specific history and geography occur beyond first grade.

The lessons downloaded and purchased for this study were numbered according to the date I purchased them. Lesson 1, "Mapping Skills Unit Maps and Globes Continents and Oceans," is the first lesson plan purchased for this study. The final lesson I purchased for this study was Lesson 5, "Continents and Oceans Mini Book." It is important to note that the numbering system used for the lessons does not reflect the points accumulated on the CAOLSS used to evaluate each lesson plan.

The lesson plans used in this study varied greatly in size, specifically the number of pages. Some lessons were as few as ten pages, while others were 130 pages. When I use the term "lesson plan," I refer to the entirety of the product purchased. The lesson can include a written lesson plan, student worksheets, assessments, and other things needed to implement the lesson or lessons successfully. Some lessons contained only one lesson that teachers could use in their classrooms.

Other lesson plans were more like units comprising many different lessons. An example of this would be Lesson 20, "Social Studies First Grade Dynamic Relationships." This lesson was 19 different lessons that covered a variety of relationships, including family relationships, economic relationships, and relationships with the environment. There were also lesson plans downloaded that could be used as an entire social studies curriculum. An example is Lesson 23, "Comprehensive Social Studies Unit for 1st Grade Covers All Standards". This lesson plan included units on "Government," "History," "Geography," and "Economics". Despite narrowing my search by specifying "Lesson Plan" on the "Reference Type" tab on teacherpayteachers.com,

many lessons were curriculum, unit plans, or activities. TPT has a broad definition of the term lesson plan.

When analyzing the more extensive lesson plans, such as Lesson 20 or Lesson 23, I evaluated lessons related only to geography. I did not evaluate any lessons that were not geography-specific. This means I did not evaluate every lesson in every lesson plan downloaded. However, if one lesson plan had several lessons in geography, I would evaluate all those lesson plans using the CAOLSS.

Data Analysis

Research Tool and Application

This study aims to help teachers assess the quality and content of geography lessons, units, and activities for early elementary students available on the website Teacherspayteachers.com for purchase. A checklist (Appendix 1) was created to help evaluate these geography lessons. This checklist, written in seven categories, is influenced by the "Pinning with Pause Checklist" (Gallagher et al., 2019, p. 221). The original "Pinning with Pause Checklist" is designed to help teachers quickly evaluate the effectiveness and appropriateness of the 7,400,000+ elementary lessons available on TPT. Gallagher et al.'s checklist challenges teachers to think critically about a lesson plan's *purpose*, *reliability*, and *perspective*.

There is some overlap between the original "Pinning with Pause Checklist" and my new modified geography-focused version. The checklist used for this study intends to evaluate the *purpose, reliability,* and *perspective* of a specific area of social studies, first-grade geography. The checklist I created for this study was used to evaluate each of the 50 TPT purchased lessons in 1st-grade geography. The checklist used in this study went through several iterations during

its creation. Throughout the process, my advisor helped me clarify and narrow down the questions on the checklist.

The process of designing the questions for the checklist began by envisioning the "ideal" first-grade geography lesson plan. This lesson plan would have all the main components of a good lesson plan, including stated standards and outcomes, accurate information presented, active student participation with developmentally appropriate expectations for 1st-grade students, and a formative or summative assessment to gauge student understanding. Beyond these essential components of a lesson plan, the lesson would be considerate of the context in which it was being taught. Are there considerations for equity and justice issues that "may harm students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds" (Gallagher et al., 2019, p. 221).

I titled the checklist I created CAOLSS, an acronym for Checklist Assessing Online Lessons Plans in Social Studies. The CAOLSS contains seven categories evaluated on a scale from zero to three with an option for not applicable (N/A). The checklist's evaluation categories are Standards, General Instruction, Assessment, Geography Content/Process, Illustrations, and Justice & Equity. Each category contains between two and seven questions. Unscored areas for evaluating the Qualities of Powerful and Authentic Social Studies and a holistic lesson evaluation are also on the checklist. However, the results from these sections were not included in the findings of this study.

I created a scoring scale to evaluate each area. Questions in each area could score between 0-3 points depending on the prevalence and quality of the area. The rubric in Figure 1 describes the criteria for the scores between 0-3. Zero means no or not evident in the lesson, and three points indicate yes or present in the lesson. The middle score of two was used for some

evidence present in the lesson, but it may be difficult for novice teachers to spot. There are 87 possible points on the checklist.

An N/A category was added for each question so that lesson plans would not receive a lower score because they did not do something from the checklist they never claimed to do. For example, Lesson 26, "Maps and Globes Sort," is a one-page activity where the kids sort descriptive phrases about a map or a globe. This lesson does not feature maps, so questions about map accuracy would be non-applicable (N/A). A score of N/A deducted 3 points from the total points available for the lesson. This means that lessons with one or more N/A areas have a lower starting score than lessons with all categories included. In the example above Lesson 26 would have a starting score of 84 points because it had an N/A to one question.
Questions in the Justice & Equity section did not have an N/A section. Questions in this section are representative of themes and ideas that should be present in all lesson planning. All lesson plans used in this study were evaluated on each question in this section. No N/A answers were given. It was expected that each lesson would include themes of justice and equitable representation of all people of the world. Lessons that failed to do this received lower scores.

Four questions were reverse-scored (that is, reversing the numerical values of responses, whereby a 0 would be a 4, a 1 would be a 3, and so forth) to account for a "yes" answer being negative. These questions are "Does the lesson rely exclusively on vocabulary cards?", "Does the lesson feature the Compass Rose (NESW) without any scaffolding?" "Are the maps digitally altered to fit the page?" and "Does the activity, resource, or idea harm students- especially those with marginalized backgrounds?" (Gallagher et al., 2019, p. 221). A zero or no answer to these questions received three points. The reversed-scored questions are marked on the checklist by an asterisk.

According to the checklist, the top-scoring first-grade geography lesson plan would score three points for each question, earning 87 points, with no areas scored an N/A. Lesson plans with areas marked N/A had lower starting scores to account for the difference in point value. For example, a lesson plan that did not have an assessment would not be evaluated on the authenticity of that assessment, taking the total starting score from 87 points to 84 points.

Figure 1

Evaluative Scoring Rubric

Numeric Score	Reasoning
0/No	No evidence
1	Little evidence, inappropriate, failed to include
2	Some evidence, an attempt to thoughtfully include may be difficult to spot
3/Yes	Evident in lesson
N/A	Not Applicable

The following paragraphs describe the six categories, and the questions present in each.

Standards. The Standards category (Figure 2) of the CAOLAA seeks to discover the lesson plan's claim to align with current elementary geography standards. The lack of nationally agreed upon elementary social studies standards explains the need for my checklist to access state-specific or local standards and the *C3 Framework* elementary geography standards. The *C3 Standards* cover grades k-2 and have been influential in developing many state-specific social studies standards. The first question this study seeks to answer is: How do the first 50 lesson plans that appear when searching lesson plan first-grade-social studies-geography using the TPT search tool measure along criteria including geography content, assessment, alignment with standards, and justice and equity?

The TPT website cross-references the Common Core State Standards in Literacy and Mathematics for all lessons in those subjects. This feature is not available for lessons in subjects outside of Language Art and Mathematics, even though there is clearly a crossover. It is unreasonable to expect that TPT would check each social studies lesson against the social studies standards of each state. This section's first, second, and fourth questions assess whether the author claims to cover local, state, or *NCSS C3 Standards* in their lesson plan. What standards or lesson outcomes does the author claim to fulfill with this lesson? Elementary teachers have too much curriculum to cover and too little time. Covering as many standards and subject areas as possible in one lesson makes sense. Question four looks to find if the TPT lesson plan claims to cover any other standards, such as those from literacy or mathematics.

The third question seeks to discover if the lesson covers any *C3 Framework* K-2 geography standards, regardless of whether the lesson plan makes a claim. This means that if the lesson plan stated it would cover *C3* Standards, I would assess that. If the lesson plan did not claim to cover C3 Standards, I would still examine the lesson for areas that meet the *C3 Framework* geography standards. A detailed list of the twelve standards can be found on page 2 of the CAOLSS.

The *C3 Framework,* Dimension 2, contains the four disciplinary areas of social studies: civics, economics, geography, and history. Within each discipline there are categories and standards. The discipline of geography focuses on four main areas: *Geographical Representations*, *Human-Environment Interaction*, *Human Population: Spatial Patterns and Movements,* and *Global Interconnections* (NCSS, 2013). Each geographically related area has three standards.

In assessing each lesson plan, I did not use the 0-3 scale, which appears throughout the rest of the checklist. The lesson plan either claimed to cover a standard, ending in three points for a "yes," or made no claims or statements about standards, earning zero points for a no. No "1" or "2" points scores were awarded in this area.

Data were recorded directly on printed checklists alongside anecdotal notes with the answers to the questions. Digital copies of lesson plans were collected and stored on my computer, and a printed "hard copy" of the checklist was collected for each lesson. Combining these two evaluative approaches allowed me to generate qualitative and quantitative data.

Figure 2

Questions from the Standards Section as They Appear on the Checklist

Standards Question	0/No	1	2	3/Yes	N/A
Does the document claim to support a local or state elementary geography standard?					
If so, which one(s):					
Does the document claim to support a *C3* elementary geography standard?					
If so, which one(s):					
Does the document claim to support a *C3* elementary geography standard?					
If so, which one(s):					
Does the document claim to support a standard **NOT** related to geography?					
If so, which one(s):					

General Information. Section two of the CAOLSS, entitled "General Information," assesses the appropriateness of the pedagogical techniques used in the first-grade social studies

geography lesson (see Figure 3). This section intends to closely examine what activities, if any, the lesson plans are asking the students to do. Is the lesson asking students to be actively involved in their learning, or does the lesson place the teacher as the primary source of information? The zero to three scale applies to this section of questions. Questions two and three address the students' opportunity to write and create. The first and fourth questions examine any passive aspects of the lesson. The assumption is that first-grade students will not benefit from a lesson that asks them to sit passively and simply remember complicated vocabulary. Lessons that focus on something other than rote memorization score higher than those that do not—the simple addition of having students write and create moves the lesson away from simply memorizing facts.

The scale proved helpful in assessing the areas of writing and creating. There is an expansive range of what it means to "ask a student to write independently" and "create/produce something." The study examined lessons that only asked students to cut out a booklet, producing something but not much (1 point). Alternatively, lessons that asked students to create a complete map of their classroom (3 points). In some lessons, the students do nothing but listen and watch their teacher present a PowerPoint presentation (0 points on the last two questions). In the area of writing independently, some lessons had students simply trace over the names of the oceans or continents (1 point) or write their address, city names, and state (2 points). While requiring students to copy the names of continents and oceans may be active, it does not require much thought on the part of the student. In a few lessons, students write about their city or describe a new place they would like to visit. These writing activities ask students to express their thinking with words (3 points).

Figure 3

Questions from the General Information Section as They Appear on the Checklist

II. General Instruction

Questions from the General Instruction Category II as They Appear on the Checklist

General Instruction Questions	0/No	1	2	3/Yes	N/A
Does the lesson rely on vocabulary cards? *					
Are the children asked to write independently?					
Are the children asked to create or produce something?					
Does the lesson ask the children to do anything beyond *remember* level?					

Assessment. Questions in the "Assessment" section (Figure 4) are intended to audit the lesson for noted formative or summative assessments. The first two questions, about the presence of a summative or formative assessment, were not scored on the 0-3 scale. The "0/No" and "3/Yes" were the only choices used. To receive a "3/Yes," the lesson must identify a summative or formative assessment somewhere within the lesson. This means the assessment is labeled, or the lesson discusses or references an assessment. If an assessment was not noted or labeled, the lesson received a score of "0/No" points. It could be assumed that the lesson activity's successful completion could be used as an assessment. I did not make this assumption. Good lesson plans contain thoughtful consideration for all lesson plan components, including assessment of stated goals or outcomes. Most lesson plans within this study did not claim to cover any standards, goals, or student outcomes. Perhaps it is unreasonable to expect an assessment of the unstated standards, goals, or student outcomes.

The last question in the "Assessment" section evaluated the lesson assessment and the authenticity of the task. Were the students asked to simply regurgitate facts or make selections on a multiple-choice or true/false test? Or did the assessment ask students to apply what they have learned? The 0-3 scale was used for this question. A score of "0" was given to multiple choice, fill-in, or true/false quizzes and tests. A "3" was given to assessments that asked children to create, compare, apply, or write about what they had learned. A "2" or "3" point assessment was often presented as an activity instead of a quiz or a test for which students would be expected to study.

As a final note to this section, lesson plans that did not claim to contain a formative or summative assessment were not evaluated on the final question, "Does the summative assessment ask the children to do an authentic task?" If a "0/No" was scored on "Does the lesson have formative assessment checks?" or "Does the lesson have a summative assessment?", the third question was "NA." It would not make sense to assess the authenticity of a task that was not provided. The total point value for lesson plans with an "NA" on this question was lowered by three points.

Figure 4

Questions from the Assessment category III as they appear on the checklist

Assessment Questions	0/No	1	2	3/Yes	N/A
Does the lesson have formative assessment checks?					
Does the lesson have a summative assessment?					
Does the summative assessment ask the children to do an authentic task? **					

Note: Question taken from "Pinning with Pause Checklist" (Gallagher et al., 2019)

Geography Content/Process. The fourth section, "Geography Content/Process" (Figure 5), was created to assess the factual accuracy of the geography-related content within each lesson plan. Are the lesson plans accurately presenting information related to geography? Or, in an attempt to make complex concepts understandable to children, was the information dumbed down or changed in a way that creates misrepresentation or misunderstanding? This section is also designed to search for necessary scaffolding for understanding geography content related to maps.

The "Geography Content/Process" section addresses two specific concepts related to geography. These concepts are map type and aerial view, which are necessary to teach map making and use. Does the lesson address map types? This checklist asks only specifically about "flat maps" but ultimately seeks clarification for children about the difference between maps (paper and digital) and globes. In a first-grade lesson plan, discussing the idea of aerial or bird's-eye view would also be relevant for presenting children with maps to navigate. Does the lesson address aerial view? Is there any evidence that the maps the children are navigating from are different from what they usually see? Even the task of mapping your classroom requires children

to understand the visual perspective they are using. See the checklist "Key (Figure 1) to know how scoring decisions were made in these categories.

Section four, "Geography Content/Process," also evaluated the use of the compass rose within the lesson. Studies have shown (Downs & Liben, 1991; Muir & Cheek, 1991; Towler, 1970) that young children need to understand words that describe a relative location, such as up, down, left, and right before being expected to understand the nature of north, south, east, and west. Memorizing the letter placement on a compass rose is of little help if the student is unfamiliar with directionality. A common problem with the compass rose taught without context is the misconception that the North is always up.

In addition to proper scaffolding, understanding geography related to map skills requires appropriate representation. The CAOLSS questions "Are any maps presented in the lesson accurate?" and "Are the maps digitally alerted to fit the page?" assess the illustrative choices made in an attempt to teach the continents and oceans. Design choices can misrepresent states, countries, and continents. For example, in Lesson 27, "Continents and Major Oceans 1st grade", the continent of North America is drawn as one solid shape with curved lines, which omits the state of Michigan. It could be difficult for a child from Michigan to understand the scope and shape of the continent on which they live. They would not be able to see their home state in a map of their continent North America. This map also illustrates the third question in this section, which assesses digitally altered maps. The maps in this lesson have clearly been stretched and altered to fit neatly on one page. The islands of Cuba and Hawaii been omitted because they do not fit on the page with the continental portion of North America. This maps' accuracy has compromised for the sake of a neat-looking lesson. Although not all lessons within this study, many lessons contained maps that had mistakes or omissions. "No map can match the globe in

preserving areas, angles, gross shapes, distances, and directions, and any map projection is a compromised solution" (Monmonier, 2018, p. 14) However, expecting maps to represent areas as accurately as possible is reasonable. Moving or eliminating places on a map marginalizes the importance of that area. The findings section will discuss this point further.

It is common to associate geography and map skills with the continents and oceans of the world. The question, "Does the lesson cover continents and oceans?" is intended to discover how often that occurs in the 50 Lesson Plans used in this study. If the lesson featured the continents and oceans as the center of the lesson, where students were asked to write out continents and oceans names or label continents and oceans on a map, the lesson received a score of "3". If the lessons featured the continents and oceans without requiring students to memorize, write out, or label, the lesson also received a score of "2" or "1". The difference between a score of "2" and "1" considered the prominence of the continents and oceans in the lesson. If the continents and oceans were simply mentioned or pictures included a score of "1" was given. If the continents were a more significant part of the lesson and mentioned often, but students were not required to write out the names of label maps, the lesson received a score of "2". If the lesson did not feature continents and oceans anywhere in the lesson, a score of "0/No" was given.

Figure 5

Questions from the Geography Content/Process section as they appear on the checklist

Questions from Geography Content/Processes Category IV	0/No	1	2	3/Yes	N/A
Does the lesson feature the Compass Rose (NESW) without any scaffolding? *					
Are any maps presented in the lesson accurate?					
Are the maps digitally altered to fit the page? *					
Does the lesson include map types beyond "flat maps"?					
Does the lesson include instruction on absolute vs. relative location when relevant?					
Does the lesson address aerial view (bird's eye view)?					
Does the lesson cover the continents and oceans?					
Does the lesson make the ideas concrete for children?					

Illustrations. This checklist's illustrations section evaluates the illustrations of people and the overall "look" of the lesson plan (Figure 6). The first question, "What are the illustrations of (if there are illustrations)?" refers to illustrations anywhere in the overall lesson. This question was not scored as part of the CAOLSS total. The section was used as an anecdotal way to record the images used in elementary lesson plans. These could include recognizable images, such as people or buildings, and colorful images used to enhance the look of the lesson plans, such as a decorative border along the outline of the page. There were also many illustrations of animals, some with human characteristics. Many lesson plans feature people as representatives of a place or culture. The illustrated people in this study include drawings of

male and female children, grandparents, adults, teenagers, and those of an indeterminate age or gender.

The two questions, “Are the representations of children/people culturally authentic and nuanced?” and “Are the children/people representative of an identifiable cultural background beyond white?” assess the look of any illustrated or photographs of people in the lesson plan. This section was inspired by the work of (Rodríguez et. al., 2023), which found online history lessons filled with stereotypical images of Indigenous peoples, some without faces altogether. These questions were designed to evaluate the nature of clip art related to people used in geography lessons. Lesson plans that did not feature illustrations or photographs of people received an “NA,” and the total score was reduced by 3 points for each question, for a total of 6 points.

Figure 6

Questions from the Illustration Section as They Appear on the CAOLSS

What are the illustrations of (if there are illustrations)?

Questions from the Illustrations Category V.	0/No	1	2	3/yes	N/A
Are the representations of children/people culturally authentic or nuanced?					
Are the children/people representative of an identifiable cultural background beyond white?					

Questions from the Illustration Section as They Appear on the CAOLSS

Justice & Equity. Section VI. is titled “Justice & Equity,” and is intended to evaluate each lesson plan's attention to issues of justice and equity. It is also inspired by the work of

scholars evaluating online lesson plans (Gallagher et al., 2019; Rodríguez, 2023; Shelton et al., 2022). The final question is from the "Pinning with Pause Checklist" (Gallagher et al., 2019, p. 219). The other questions in this category evaluate the lesson plans for activities that push geography teaching beyond stereotypical ideas that are Eurocentric or prioritize the United States over other countries. These questions evaluate the lesson's ability to use geography education to help children gain agency in effecting change in their world.

The 50 lesson plans in this study were all scored in the "Justice & Equity" section, meaning there were no "N/As" given to any question. Each lesson was held to the same standard regardless of topic (aerial view, continents and oceans, map skills) or size (1 page or 130 pages). In scoring this section, I found that I was answering dichotomously. The lesson plans either presented evidence of the question ("3/yes") or did not present evidence ("0/no); there was little nuance ("2" or "1") to any of the lessons used for this study.

Figure 7

Questions from the Justice & Equity section as they Appear on the CAOLSS

VI. Justice & Equity

	0/No	1	2	3/ Yes	N/A
Does the content reflect my students' cultures or contexts?					
Does the content give my students windows into new cultures or contexts?					
Does the lesson help my students question dominant ideas about what is normal or good?					
Does the lesson emphasize that cultures and communities are diverse?					
Are the representations of place broad (beyond stereotypes)?					
Does the lesson encourage children to learn skills to effect change in the world?					
Does the activity, resource, or idea harm students—especially those with marginalized identities and/or backgrounds?*					

Interscorer Reliability

To ensure the reliability of the CAOLSS that I created and used to evaluate each of the 50 lesson plans in this study, I administered an interscorer reliability test. I enlisted the help of

two researchers with expertise in teacher education. Each researcher evaluated five lesson plans I selected, representing 10% of the total studies used for this research. The lesson plans varied in topic, page length, quality, and pedagogical techniques. I wanted to give the researchers a wide range of CAOLSS options. The five lessons used for this interscorer reliability text were Lesson 2, Lesson 7, Lesson 22, Lesson 26, and Lesson 28. The initial percent agreement among the two researchers and me was 74%.

After analyzing the scores, I thought a few areas of disagreement could be resolved with additional conversation. The researchers and I met again to discuss four questions that reflected disagreement in all five lessons. These questions were "Does the lesson ask for the children to do anything beyond the remember lesson?", "Does the lesson make ideas concrete for children?", "Does the content reflect my students' cultures or contexts?" and "Does the activity, resource, or idea harm students-especially those with marginalized identities and/or backgrounds?" Each of these questions contained terms that could be interpreted differently. For example, what is meant by "making ideas *concrete* for children" or "does the content *harm* children". In creating these questions, I had a clear idea of the definitions of each term. I don't believe I explained my understanding of these terms well. After a thorough discussion, the researchers understood my thinking and agreed to modify their responses to these questions. This revision of their scores brought the total agreement to 84%.

Researcher Positionality

A research positionality statement is necessary here because my perspective has been shaped by my experiences and ways of understanding the world. It is important to note how my identities, such as gender, race, socio-economic status, and cultural ethnicity may have influenced my research (Milner, 2007). As a young, white, female third-grade teacher in an

affluent school district from 2000 to 2015, I taught many geography-based lessons in social studies. I always aimed to make social studies lessons exciting and engaging for my students. I expect most of the lessons downloaded for this study to feature some variation of hands-on projects I used in my classroom. One of my favorites was the "Me on a Map" activity. This project features a series of concentric circles, each representing one level of the student's physical location on Earth. The smallest circle is labeled "me" to represent the child, followed by circles of ever-increasing size labeled house, city, state, county, continent, and planet. The circles glued to one another, with the smallest circle in the middle, represent the child's location. The student can then read from the project that they live in a house, in a city, in a state, in a country, on a continent, on Earth. I created tracers for the circles and downloaded and printed little state, county, and world maps for the students to color and glue.

Knowing what I know today about social studies education in early elementary grades, I would have made many changes to my original lesson plan. I placed such heavy emphasis on the craft part of the project, tracing, cutting, and gluing, glossing vital points regarding the intricate relationship among these circles. I did not spend much time thinking about students who did not live in houses or suburban settings. I realize now the potential negative impacts of this lesson on my students. I was reinforcing the centering whiteness, middle-class values in *Me on the Map*. How many students did I assume had all the same privileges I had growing up? Who was I marginalizing by assuming students lived in houses? I realize now that these privileges influence my perspective and understanding of the world. Recognizing this privilege allows me to begin to change my perspective and become more inclusive and understanding in my teaching. It is ultimately a privilege to be able to purchase lesson plan materials from an online source. No matter how problematic the lessons on that site may be. Many teachers and districts cannot use

TPT. I recognize the bias that I continue to have and how that may have influenced my analysis. My limited experiences shape my thoughts and ideas. As a researcher I strive to be inclusive and open to new ideas and experiences. But obviously I cannot know what I do not know. It is likely I am missing something from others' perspective in my analysis of these lesson plans. Recognizing this idea leaves me open to new ideas and interpretations. I hope to use my research to help others with similar backgrounds begin to see the world differently.

FINDINGS

The findings section is organized along the research questions. I begin by addressing Research Question 1: *How do the first 50 lesson plans that appear when searching "lesson plans-first-grade social studies-geography" on Teachers Pay Teachers- measure against criteria including geography content, assessment, alignment with standards, and justice and equity?* These results were determined from the numerical score after each lesson was evaluated using the Checklist to Access Online Lesson Plans in Social Studies (CAOLSS) evaluation tool. The CAOLSS scores were sorted into three distinct categories using a weighted scoring system, which emphasized specific categories. I will describe each category in detail, including examples from the TPT lesson plans. I will then move to Research Question 2: *What are the significant problems within these TPT lessons?* This section describes problematic patterns among the geography social studies lessons used in the study.

RQ1: Measurement of TPT Lessons Along Criteria

In this section, I report the overall scores of the 50 lessons I evaluated. I used a weighted scoring system to keep the study of social studies focused, emphasizing the areas of standards, assessment, geography content and process, and justice and equity. The illustration and general instruction areas were given less emphasis. The resulting scores from the CAOLSS placed the lesson into three groups: the *Focused Top*, a large middle section of *Mediocrity and Busy Work.* and the *Listen to Learn* bottom.

Evaluation of the TPT Lessons

Table 1 shows the titles of the 50 lessons and the total points earned from the CAOLSS checklist. There are 13 lessons in the top group, 27 in the middle group, and 10 in the lowest group. The green color titles represent the *Focused Top*. A purple color font was used for the

Mediocre Middle and Busywork. The lowest scoring lesson plan titles *Listen to Learn* are in red font.

Table 1

CAOLSS Percentage Scores

Lesson Number and Title	Percent Score
46. Location, Location, Location Rural, Urban, and Suburban	80%
37. Multiple Perspectives Week Long Unit with Book: This Is How We Do it "World Perspective Detective"	79%
26. Maps and Globes Cut and Paste Sorting Worksheet-Social Studies	69%
30. Aerial View Mapping Activities (Geography Bundle K-1 Bundled Activities)	67%
39.Geography Bundle-Map Skills, labeling, Questions for Atlas & Internet (K-12)	63%
33. Bite Sized Social Studies Landforms Social Studies Lesson PowerPoint & Google Slides	57%
41. Little 1st Grade SOCIAL STUDIES Thinkers {UNIT 5: Geography}	53%
28. Where I Live Social Studies Unit with Lesson Plans-K, 1st & 2nd Grades	49%

Table 1 (cont'd)

6. Absolute and Relative Location (Geography Bundle K-2 Bundled Activities)	49%
44. Continents Book-Map Activities-Color, Cut, and Paste-7 Continents and 5 Oceans	48%
5. Types of Maps	46%
14. Physical and Human Characteristics	46%
12. Map Skills, Location, Urban, Suburban & Rural Grid Maps, Landforms, Trace Ancestors (Map Skills Bundle)	45%
36. Communities: Urban, rural and suburban!!	45%
1. Mapping Sills Unit Maps and Globes Continents and Oceans	44%
13. New South Carolina Social Studies 1st Grade Unit 2: All About Maps	44%
23. Comprehensive Social Studies Unit for 1st Grade: Covers All Standards	44%
31. Map Skills Unit Reading Maps Activities for Primary Grades	44%
40. Kinds of Communities: Urban, Suburban, Rural-Complete Project and Rubric	42%
27. Continents and Major Oceans for 1st Grade	42%

Table 1 (cont'd)

22. Continent Coloring Pages- Maps of all Continents to Color-World Geography	39%
20. Social Studies Grade 1 Unit 2 Dynamic Relationships	39%
42. 7 Continents Mini Book {Black and White}	37%
19. Simply Social Studies First Grade-Unit 5- On the Map	37%
9. My Place in the World Project: "Me on the Map" Geography for Kids (Geography for Kids: Three Hands-on Activities)	36%
25. Mapping Skills with Google Earth: How to Read a Map Gr. PK-2	35%
15. 2nd Grade Map Skills Worksheets, Maps Activities, Lapbook Template and Posters	35%
32. Map Skills Worksheets First Grade Mapping Activity- Candy Map Mapping Lesson	33%
21. "Where in the World?" A free mini geography unit for first grade	32%
29. Let's Make a Map!	32%
38. Build A Treasure Island Design & Craft-Pirate & Mapping Geography Resource	29%
34. Where We Live- A Map and Globe Thematic Unit	29%
50. Continents and Oceans Mini Booklet and Worksheets	28%
49. Me on the Map Mini Book	28%

Table 1 (cont'd)

35. Map Skill Bundle (Lesson and Worksheets) Key/Legends/ Compass Roses, Titles	28%
16. Finding My Place-A Mini Unit for Young Learners (Map Unit)	26%
3. Maps and Globes	26%
8. Landforms Let's Learn About Them	25%
24. Communities-A Social Studies Unit	24%
7. Learning The Continents and Oceans Geography Map Activity	23%
2. Landforms Unit for Little Learners	22%
17. Mapping My Classroom Pop Up Style Kindergarten & First Grade Social Studies	22%
18. Map the Route Activity to Learn Continents Geography for Kids (Geography for Kids Bundle: Three Essential Hands-on Activities)	21%
47. Continents and Oceans Lapbook	21%
45. Where in the World Am I? Kindergarten Social Studies Unit	20%
43. Me on the Map Student Book (all 50 states included)	20%
11. Continents and Oceans Anchor Charts	19%
48. Me on the Map Flipbook	17%

Table 1 (cont'd)

10. Mapping Skills Reader for Kindergarten and First Grade Social Studies	16%
4. Me on the Map: A Literature & Social Studies Mini-Unit	12%

The Focused Top

The thirteen lessons comprising this top first-grade geography lessons group ranged in scores from 72-110 overall points and scored higher than average in each category. These lessons had several factors in common: a sharply defined lesson focus (thus the label of The Focused Top), stated standards, clearly stated goals or objectives, detailed instructional activities and/or a pacing chart, and assessments to check for understanding. I describe three lessons in this category that exemplify the general characteristics of "Focused Top" lessons.

Lesson 30, "Aerial View," by The Principal's Wife, represents the qualities of lessons that fit the top group. In this lesson, the students begin learning the idea of aerial view, a concept necessary to understanding the perspective used in map making. The general learning target for this lesson is that things look different if you look at them from above (i.e., aerial perspective) compared to straight on (i.e., linear perspective). Although maps were a part of almost every lesson in this study, most lessons lacked the basic idea of aerial perspective. This lesson began by addressing the necessary concept of aerial view as a perspective from which to see things. The lesson is scaffolded so that students can compare perspectives first, whereas other lessons in this study simply use maps to explain maps without intentionally presenting the perspective in which maps appear. Students may not recognize this change in perspective without deliberately addressing the idea.

This “Aerial View” lesson contained stated goals and directions for the teacher, including tips and a pacing guide. The lesson begins with having students look at actual photographs (included in the lesson) of objects, such as a building, from the aerial view. The lesson also includes the phrase “bird’s-eye view,” another common way to describe this perspective to young children. The lesson also includes additional activities for the students to practice the concept. It begins with a hands-on picture- sort of “Aerial View” and “Not Aerial View” photographs.

The students then use an imaginary classroom map to identify symbols representing objects from an aerial view perspective. Rectangles represent tables, and squares represent individual desks. The lesson concludes with an opportunity for students to draw an aerial view map of their classroom and create symbols for the four items of their choice. The final activity can be used to assess student understanding as the teacher evaluates the students' drawings. The student-drawn classroom map allows for students to demonstrate various levels of understanding. For example, the student may understand that a table appears as a rectangle from an aerial perspective but may draw another object, such as a chair or computer, from a non-aerial view perspective. As with many concepts, the aerial view can be easier to visualize with some objects than others.

The appearance of Lesson 30 is straightforward, with no superfluous graphics or embellishments. Emerging readers would be able to easily read the chosen font. There are no cute borders or smiling cartoon children at the corners. The materials for the students are photographs of objects they will recognize, as opposed to stylistic cartoon illustrations used in other lessons. The example classroom map contains simple shapes to represent everyday classroom objects. The lesson also resists opportunities to add additional extra practice lessons

or worksheets.

Lesson 39, “Geography Bundle-Map Skills, Labeling, Questions for Atlas & Internet (K-12),” sold by The Harstad Collection, downloads as a large file with five files and three activities inside. Unlike many lesson plans in this study, Lesson 39 does not have specific lesson plans for teachers to follow. It is more of a reference source than a teaching lesson plan or unit. Lesson 39 contains folders with detailed outlines and maps from the United States and worldwide.

The United States folder contains 28 different maps of the United States. There are a variety of maps in this folder, including physical maps, electoral maps, federal land maps, and maps with major cities included. Some maps isolate significant areas of the United States, such as the Northeast and the West. This collection of maps, while not a lesson alone, demonstrates the variety of ways maps are used. The maps from this section could be printed or projected for students to explore.

Lesson 39 also includes maps from around the world, a folder of “World and Science Maps,” and a group of maps for labeling. Also included are “200 Map Questions” for students to answer using some of the maps provided. These activities could be completed independently or in groups by students. The large number of maps and questions provided allows for some differentiation in difficulty and length.

Intended for students in K-12 grades, many of the activities in this lesson are too advanced for first-grade students. It may be difficult to envision a lesson that could be useful to teachers in such a large grade span. Lesson 39 accomplishes this, however, and is a valuable resource for teachers. The maps provided are diverse and detailed in appearance. The attention to detail in the maps provided in this lesson is considerably better than the maps of any other lessons in this study.

The final example of the lessons of the Focused Top is Lesson 33, “Bite-Size Social Studies Landforms,” sold by Sarah Gardner. This lesson is a web quest with informational links, online videos, and songs. A web quest (it may have a more updated name) is a PowerPoint presentation with embedded links and videos for students to explore. Each child would have this lesson on their computer. The student clicks through the pages and clicks on things to learn more. A web quest is an online activity where children can work independently. Each child creates their unique lesson by making decisions and choices about what interests them. Lesson 33 is a colorful web quest with a mixture of animated and authentic images used to introduce basic landforms. This lesson covers water types, large and small, from a vast ocean to a much smaller bay. It also includes water in the frozen form of the glacier. While clicking through the slides, the students can click on fish and other pictures, where they are directed to videos from educational websites, such as National Geographic Kids and PBS.com. The lesson also covers landforms such as mountains, volcanos, and valleys using the same web quest technique used in the water section. At the time of my evaluation of the lessons, I found that all the embedded links worked.

The lesson ends with a game students can play and an opportunity to write and draw. I did not understand how students were to complete the writing and drawing activities, as there was no way to type or draw in that section. Perhaps these activities could be done on paper later. The lesson provides a valuable opportunity to synthesize and reflect, which is the important part. In summary, the thirteen lessons in *The Focused Top* most resemble a traditional teaching lesson plan. These lessons featured clear lesson standards, objectives, or goals with accompanying assessments to assess student understanding. The lessons focused on small concepts and ideas within geography, allowing the scaffolding of ideas for a better understanding of larger

concepts.

The Middle of Mediocrity and Busywork

The 27 lessons in this middle group are primarily big units that attempt to cover all aspects of early geography concepts. These lessons attempt to cover as many geography-related topics as possible, blurring the lines among a lesson, a unit, and a full geography curriculum. The lessons in this group present geography learning, as they say, a mile long and an inch deep.

The lessons in this group were often over 100 pages long, filled with worksheets, cartoon illustrations, and pre-written sentences for students to cut and glue onto their craft projects. The worksheets and projects in these lessons will look impressive when sent home to parents and hung in school hallways. Unfortunately, when digging deeper, little actual geography content is taught. The projects and worksheets in these lessons require little independent thinking by the students. This group represents geography-based projects that produce a classroom of twenty-one identical "Me on the Map" books.

Printable student worksheets make up the majority of the content of the lesson plans in this middle group. Opportunities for teachers to hand out the worksheet students may or may not be able to read on their own and write in answers the teacher puts on the board. These worksheets are billed as "extra practice" but actually amount to busy work. There were many opportunities within these lessons for students to practice their navigational skills using the cardinal directions in imaginary flat map neighborhoods.

A good representation of the lessons in this middle section is Lesson 19, "Simply Social Studies-Unit 5-On the Map," created by Cara Carroll. This 130-page document features 12 topic-based lessons, each with suggested ELA extension books and activities, discussion prompts, and colorful vocabulary cards. Lesson 19 contains colorful cartoon illustrations of children and

geography-related objects. The aesthetic is cute and happy, although, as Bauml (2016) noted about elementary social studies curriculum, “cute” is often at odds with whether it “counts.” In addition, colorful signs and pictures are included to hang around the classroom. The bundle consists of six complete PowerPoint presentations that can be presented to the class. Each lesson has at least two student worksheets.

On the surface, this stylistic and colorful unit has everything a teacher would need. In examining the lessons presented in the unit, minimal social studies content is hidden in a lot of printing. The PowerPoint presentations are thorough, but it might be unreasonable to expect first-grade students to learn from this type of teaching. There are vocabulary cards with geography terms for the students to cut out and keep. Much like the worksheets, these cards are written using language that might be difficult for many first graders to read independently. The cards and worksheets make it easy for parents to see the geography content covered in the classroom. Even if in the completion of the project, little was understood or retained. The unit itself is more “teacher-friendly” than “kid-friendly.”

Lesson 9, “My Place in the World Project/Me on the Map,” is 103 printable pages used to make a Me on the Map concentric circle project. This lesson is page upon page of circles with one or two words printed on the bottom. For example, the largest circle, which all other circles fit into, has “My Planet” printed across the bottom. The following pages are “My Continent,” “My Country,” “My State,” “My City,” and “My House.” The lesson also includes circles of “My Province” and “My Territory” for students in countries such as Canada and Australia. The first few printable pages allow students to illustrate their planet, country, state, and home. The remaining pages of this lesson are labeled circles with the drawn outlines of the select continents of North America, Europe, and Australia. The only countries outlined are the United States and

England. In what I assume is an inclusive gesture, outlines of all 50 states and Washington D.C. and outlines of all Canadian provinces and Australian territories are included.

Lesson 9 is a pre-made opportunity designed for teachers to simply print off the appropriate number of copies and go. This lesson is convenient for teachers but requires very little work on the part of the student. Students must simply cut along the dotted lines and staple or glue the circles together. There are many ready-made printable student projects in this Mediocre Middle group of lessons.

Lesson 38, "Build a Treasure Island," is the final example from this middle group. This lesson has students cutting and gluing printed examples of geography-related objects to an island to create their own Treasure Island. The lesson offers five different black outlined blobs that represent the island. The students then cut out pictures of mountains, trees, rooks (*sic*), rock caves, bridges, treasure marks, treasure chests, compass roses (*sic*), empty scrolls, and sand blobs. These pictures are then colored and added to the initial blob, the island, to "Build a Treasure Island."

Lesson 38 does offer some opportunities for students to use spatial management skills and be creative. The thoughtful placement of objects such as mountains, bridges, and trees could demonstrate an understanding of a few geographic landforms. However, this idea could be implemented without all the pre-drawn objects. This lesson style makes things easy for the teacher but limits a students' creativity.

In summary, the majority of the lesson plans used in this study fell into this group. Thirty-one lesson plans make up the middle group. The lessons in this group were often large in number of pages and scope of lessons. Many lessons in this group could be seen as a social studies curriculum or unit instead of what one thinks of as a lesson plan. The lessons are packed

with printable worksheets and activities for students to complete. The fill-in-the-blank style worksheets allow little opportunity for independent student thinking or exploration. Teachers could easily print off many of the printable activities in this group and have social studies work with little prep or time spent teaching. This group is best summarized by its title, *The Middle of Mediocrity and Busywork.* The lessons could be thought of as more teacher-friendly than student-friendly.

Listen to Learn

The ten lessons that comprise the bottom group contain many of the same characteristics as the middle group but with no opportunities for students to do any work independently. There are no opportunities for students to write, draw, or express their thoughts and ideas. The lessons in this group are literacy lessons with a social studies focus. These lessons are teacher-centered and require little active participation from the students. These texts in the lessons are reminiscent of a typical elementary social studies textbook, as they are dry and challenging for students to read independently. The learning in this lesson involves only listening to an adult read and looking at the pictures.

An example of the lessons in the bottom group is Lesson 10. This lesson consists of a ten-page booklet entitled “All About Maps.” Two versions of the same book are included, one in color and one in black and white. There is no lesson plan, suggested activities, or even a few sentences about how someone could successfully implement the activity in their classroom. The assumed use would be to copy one booklet for each child. The child would then read the book independently or as a choral reading whole class activity. Either option is a literacy activity with social studies as the subject. The book features two children in a car and describes aspects of a map, including the focus vocabulary terms: map, compass rose, symbol, and key. These concepts

are explained in one short sentence with no additional context or scaffolding, “A map has symbols. It shows something in the real world. Where is the park?” This description is at the bottom of a page with two children looking at a folded map with ambiguous blobs on it. The pictures do not match the descriptions on the page. The book pages introducing the concept of symbols have no examples of symbols for children to look at. The children are asked, “Where is the park?” We will never know the answer to this rhetorical question because there is no park anywhere in the picture to spot. The pictures do not provide key context clues that help first-grade readers. Emergent readers use pictures to help them with new or difficult words. This book presents new words without any pictures to match the words. Using the black-and-white version of this booklet would allow the students to color the pictures on each page, which is another decidedly non-social studies activity.

Lesson 47, “Continent and Ocean Lapbook,” is another example of a lesson in the *Listen to Learn* group of lessons. The resulting product of this lesson is a file folder with preprinted information about the seven continents and four oceans glued in specific areas. This project looks impressive when completed, but it requires very little active thought on the part of the student. The student must only follow the teacher's lead regarding where sections should be glued to the file folder. There is a foldable with each ocean printed on the front. The instructions read, “On the inside of each fold, students can write something interesting about the ocean.” No facts are included in the lesson, and where students would obtain this information is unclear. This section could be considered a social studies activity if an actual research component was included in this section. However, it is intended for first-grade students, most of whose reading levels and their limited reading skill would make independent research difficult. If the teacher provides the “ocean facts,” the student only copies the text again.

The seven continents are described on pre-printed squares with problematic stereotypical images. For example, Africa focuses on safari animals, and Asia features a man without shoes who is farming rice in a cone-style straw hat. Much like the previous example, the only learning activity is for students to read complicated text or listen to someone reading it. The lessons in this bottom category are solid examples of a "sit and get" style activity.

In summary, the lessons in this category are pre-printed books and activities that "look" like geography lessons without requiring much actual thought from the learner. These lessons would signify to parents the content covered in school, but little was made by their children. The social studies lessons in this category require children only to color or listen. This section described the enormous range in the quality of the first-grade geography lesson plans. There was considerable variation even within the three categories of The *Focused Top, The Mediocre Middle and Busywork,* and the *Listen to Learn*. The next section takes a deeper dive into the five major significant problems that appeared in lessons across all three categories.

RQ2: Significant Problems within the TPT Lessons

This section describes the five significant problems found within the 50 first-grade geography lesson plans used for this study. As the lesson scores on the CAOLLS varied, so do these lesson plans. Not all lesson plans have all of the five problems listed below. However, one or more of these five problems can be found in each lesson plan for this study. These significant problems are as follows: an absence of stated standards, poorly drawn maps, few formative or summative assessments, the overuse of literacy activities labeled as social studies, and the neglect of justice and equity.

Absence of Stated Standards

Standards could be considered the building blocks of a curriculum. They represent the outcomes

for student learning and drive lesson planning. Although there are no national social studies standards, each state has developed a set of K-12 social studies standards on which their lessons and curricula are based. As discussed in the literature review, individual state standards are often influenced by the *C3 Framework* developed by the NCSS (2013).

The 50 first-grade geography lessons analyzed largely did not reference any social studies standards. Only nine of the fifty lesson plans included a stated social studies standard. The authors of these lesson plans state standards written by a school district, state, or country. The remaining 41 lesson plans had no clear standard(s) for which they claimed to cover.

The standards represented in these lessons came from Ohio, California, South Carolina, and Saskatchewan, Canada. Of the nine lessons with standards provided, only four gave the exact state or country codes attached to the standard, which allows the user/buyer to understand the origin of the standard. This standard could then be compared to a state standard more applicable to the user/buyer. For example, Lesson 23 states it covers "California Second Grade Social Studies Standard: 2.2 Students demonstrate map skills by describing absolute and relative location of people, places, and environments". Lesson 23 claims to align with "Ohio's New Learning Standards for 1st grade" and provides specific Topics, Content Statements, and Expectations for Learning. Lesson 20 featured standards in "Dynamic Relationships," a Canadian social studies area citing standards "Saskatchewan DR1.1, DR1.2, DR1.3, DR1.4, and DR1.5."

Three lesson plans stated standards but used vague language regarding where the standard was created. For example, in Lesson 6, the author writes, "Standards Covered: Describe places using absolute location (e.g., home address) or relative location (e.g., left, right, front, back, next to, near)." No specific state or country is included. Lesson 28 had similar standards

without clear origins, except the author included codes such as “SSKG3, SSKG4, SSKE4 and SSKG2”. Using my knowledge of how standards-related codes are written, I believe these codes simply state Social Studies, Kindergarten, Geography, or Economics, and a number. This lesson does not include any information about the location from which it was created. A positive outlook on this strategy leads us to believe that the author did not realize that each state had its own set of specific social studies standards and assumed the ones they were given were universal. The negative approach is that they simply made up the standard codes in hopes that no one would check.

Section one of the CAOLSS evaluated standards and references to the NCSS *C3 Framework.* There were zero references to the *NCSS C3 Framework* within these lesson plans. I could find no references to the *C3 Framework* in any of the 50 lesson plans used in this study.

Although few lessons indicated that the lesson covered any recognized standards, I found that all lesson plans in this study covered at least one or more of the influential NCSS *C3 Framework* Standards for K-2 Geography; in each lesson, I could find parts that met the *NCSS C3 Framework K-2 Geography* requirements. The most frequently covered standard was D2. Geo.2.K-2 *Use maps, graphs, photographs, and other representations to describe places and the relationships and interactions that shape them (*NCSS, 2013).

Lack of Stated Assessment

The idea of standards is in tangent with the concept of assessment. Each stated outcome or goal must have a way to measure its success. In lesson planning, the goal or outcome generally drives the lesson. What steps must occur to help students understand the intended concept or idea? Teachers can know to what extent a goal or outcome has been met. There must be some type of assessment. Thirteen of the fifty lesson plans used in this study had clearly stated formative or

summative assessments. The remaining 37 of the 50 lesson plans had no stated assessment piece.

Only four of the thirteen lesson plans with an assessment also stated standards. Only four of the fifty lesson plans had a stated social studies standard and assessment to understand if the student met that standard. Only four lesson plans recognized a state (or province) standard and an assessment to measure student success. Nine lesson plans had assessments, but no clear standards or outcomes were stated at the beginning of the lesson. What exactly was being assessed needs to be clarified.

The most common type of assessment was summative after the unit or series of lessons. This first-grade summative assessment often contained multiple choice, true and false, and fill-in-the-blank questions. Labeling the continents and oceans was also a popular way to assess geography understanding in these lesson plans. Even though no specific geography standard requires first-grade students to memorize and label the continents and oceans, it was still part of an assessment in multiple lesson plans in this study. The assessments in this study often boiled down to memorizing geographic locations and vocabulary.

A few lessons contained assessments that asked students to extend their thinking beyond basic memorization. Lesson 40 included a rubric that could be used to evaluate students' understanding based on their level of project completion. Lesson 13 included specific instructions to assess the learning during the lesson with statements throughout the lesson such as "To check my student's understanding of aerial view, I have them complete this picture sort activity," "Because the standard being covered wants the students to draw an aerial view of the classroom, I have my students complete this mock classroom aerial view activity to make sure they understand what an aerial map looks like." and "This is the activity I created for my

students to show mastery of the social studies standard being covered." This clear language throughout a relatively short lesson explains the purpose of the activities and provides ample opportunities to check for student understanding.

Many lessons did not have structured assessments. Without a structured assessment, teachers may assess different students in different places during the lesson, creating a situation where students are treated unequally. Without structured formative and summative assessments within a lesson, the teacher could treat student learning differently. Each student may be accessed in a different place in the lesson. Demonstrating knowledge of some aspects of the lesson but not all. Teachers may also not have time to access all students. Structured assessments let teachers know who retained the information and who could use additional support. Without a structured assessment, teachers may assess different students in different places during the lesson, creating a situation where students are treated unequally.

Maps: Misshapen, Misplaced, and Missing

The maps featured in the lessons of this study were often created with an artistic or stylistic flare. These maps were aesthetically pleasing to look at on the page but frequently misrepresented the size and shape of actual places occupied by actual people. It is unknown why the stylistic choices in creating the maps for this lesson are made; perhaps it is to make the map look more kid friendly. Ultimately, the maps presented in the lesson plans for this study featured misshapen spaces, were misplaced, or were just plain missing.

Thirty of the fifty lessons in this study featured print versions of mapped land for students to use as a reference. These maps of states, countries, continents, and the Earth varied greatly in accuracy and quality. Twenty-three of the thirty lessons containing maps feature apparent errors. These geography lessons intended for first-grade students may introduce the

skills necessary to read or create a map. As with many academic skills, the scaffolding of information is essential. Often, lessons in map skills begin with mapping small areas such as a classroom or school building and then branch out to neighborhoods and larger areas such as cities and states until, eventually, children are shown maps of the continent and world. This progression in the presentation of the maps to young children makes sense. Often, the lesson plans in this study featured "fake" or "made-up" maps of classrooms and neighborhoods for students to practice with. I am not considering these maps in my overall findings on the accuracy of maps with the lesson plans. When the lessons begin to present maps of actual places, gross misrepresentations often occur. While the scope and scale of a flat map representation of a country or continent can never be considered "perfectly accurate" the maps in these lesson plans were far from what might be regarded as reasonably accurate.

The authors of the first-grade geography lessons in this study seemed concerned with ensuring that the map fit neatly on the page and that the students could easily cut or trace the landform's borders. The lessons may also attempt to simplify the shapes of states, countries, and continents to help young children understand. Whatever the motivation for making changes, the maps featured in the lesson plans for this study featured states, countries, and continents that were misshaped, misplaced and often missing altogether.

Many lessons featured world maps and introductions to the seven continents. These lessons often had children coloring and cutting out the continents, then gluing them to blue paper in an attempt to replicate a World map. The borders of the seven continents are drawn with soft, rounded edges, significantly changing, and misrepresenting the shape of the land. Using a more accurate border would involve intricate cuts, an action with scissors that can be difficult for young hands still developing fine motor skills. While the consequences of this action may seem

small, the more significant issue lies in the misrepresentation of states, countries, and continents. Ultimately, when these small changes are made, the land of actual people is changed. Consider the hundreds of islands off the continent of Asia. Drawing and cutting that area can be tedious and difficult. Placing dotted lines around continents can simplify the cutting process for young children and include all surrounding land. This strategy can be used, and the lesson map still misrepresents the actual space. Unfortunately, the dotted lines often resulted in smaller islands and countries with jagged borders being eliminated.

Michigan, Alaska, and Hawaii. The need to have a map that fits neatly on a standard sheet of paper is a common occurrence within the lessons in this study. Maps featuring spaces closer to home, such as maps of the United States and North America, were also changed to simplify borders. The states of Michigan, Alaska, and Hawaii were often casualties of a map simplified for young children.

My home state of Michigan can be seen pictured with rounded-out borders distorting the state's recognizable shape of a mitten. Michigan is a state with two peninsulas, a simple fact not represented in some of the maps in this study. In more than one map, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan was eliminated completely. Michigan was not the only state on the map to be removed.

The state of Hawaii was also frequently missing in maps of the United States. This exclusion might be blamed on its proximity to the contiguous states; however, even on maps that included Alaska, the state of Hawaii still needed to be added to the map. Of the thirty lesson plans featuring maps, twelve had Hawaii missing from the map. Admittedly, creating an accurate flat map of a large area is challenging, but numerous errors overshadow a reasonable attempt at trying. Removing a portion of a U.S. state is misleading to children and inaccurately teaches

about our country's geography.

Removing Alaska, Hawaii, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan from a map raises concerns related to geographic representation and inequality, and injustice toward people from those states. Removing the land from a map effectively removes the people of that place. Considering the people who occupy these areas, we are continuing to marginalize certain people. The states Alaska and Hawaii represent some of the high populations of Indigenous and native peoples. Alaska has 229 Federally recognized tribes living in the area (U.S. Department of Interior, n.d.). Hawaii is occupied not only by Native Hawaiians but also by people representing Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). Alaska, Hawaii, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan represent remote locations that can be difficult to travel to. The people in these areas often receive few resources, such as gas or groceries, because of the difficulty of reaching their location. Eliminating Alaska, Hawaii, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan also marginalizes people in rural areas, who often do not receive as many resources as people in urban or suburban areas,

The placement of Alaska and Hawaii on maps for young children in this study was rarely accurate. Map creators employed one of two strategies: the aforementioned absence or the misplacement of the states. Many representations of the United States place the states of Alaska and Hawaii below the state of Texas in an area where the country of Mexico lies. Often these two states are placed in small boxes below the southern border of the United States.

Placing the 49th and 50th states of Hawaii and Alaska below (i.e., South of) California and Texas allows the fifty United States of America to fit neatly on one page. This inaccurate map placement is certainly not a new finding but a continuation of a problem that has existed for decades. As mentioned previously, of the 50 geography lessons reviewed for this study, 30

contained maps or representations of the physical geography of the United States. Seven of these maps placed Alaska and Hawaii in boxes below the southern border of the United States. A number more shocking considering that 17 of the 30 maps eliminated Alaska, Hawaii, or both from the map of the United States. Placing the state of Alaska South of Texas also creates issues around power and influence. The state of Alaska is 663,267 sq. Miles. If you were to place the state of Alaska on top of a map of the lower 48 states it would cover most of the states of the Midwest with the Aleutian Islands stretching all the way to California. The state of Alaska is almost three times as large in square miles as the state of Texas. Placing Alaska, clearly the largest state, South of Texas makes it appear small. This placement of Alaska makes the state of Texas look as though it is the United States' largest state (physically). Texas, being presented as the physically as the largest state, is represented as powerful and misrepresents its physical size. In a country where "bigger is better," being the physically largest state holds power. Reducing the size of Alaska also diminishes the needs of the people of Alaska. Without an understanding of the size and scope of the state, it is difficult to understand the needs of its people. Whether intentionally or not, placing Alaska South of Texas prioritizes one state over another (Rodríguez & Swalwell, 2022).

Antarctica. On a larger scale, the continent of Antarctica, our Southernmost continent, is misshapen, misplaced, and missing throughout the lesson plans in this study. Again, placing a small continent situated on the very bottom of the three-dimensional world is difficult to represent on a flat map. The only way to truly see the continent of Antarctica is to place the South Pole at the center of the map, a view in which most other continents cannot be seen. This aerial view of the bottom of the globe shows the shape of Antarctica, a representation used in very few maps in this study. This view is more accurate in terms of the size and shape of the

continent but misrepresents the land if placed that way on a map of the seven continents. Antarctica's more prevalent representation in this study's lesson plans is the misleading "side view". Some lesson plans chose to eliminate the continent altogether.

The side view of Antarctica is designed to represent the continent of Antarctica as though one is looking at one section of the world from an aerial view. Suppose one were to stand back and view the world from an aerial perspective, with Europe as the center continent; a small amount of Antarctica could be seen at the bottom of the world. The side view of Antarctica elongates the continents and makes the land appear much larger than many other continents. Antarctica is larger than the continents of Australia and Europe (Boudreau, 2023) but certainly smaller than North America and South America.

More disturbing than the "side view" representation was the frequent elimination of the continent of Antarctica altogether. The elimination of the continent of Antarctica occurred in both stylistic maps of the world and more realistic representations of the world. Interestingly, I found the same world representation without Antarctica in at least three different world map representations. The "side view" of Antarctica was overinflated in size but at least represented the continent's existence. The lesson plans that did not have Antarticia on the map ignored one of the seven major continents, ultimately teaching inaccurate information. There are obvious potential consequences for first-grade students taught from one of the "no Antarctica" lesson plans and geography lessons in later grades.

Literacy Activities Labeled as Social Studies

The most common activity in the 50 first-grade-social studies geography lessons for this study is the making and reading of short books about topics in geography. The main activity in 25 of the 50 lessons is the making, reading, or both of small books. The small books, or lapbooks

as they are sometimes called, could represent a failed attempt at integrating social studies and literacy (Heafner, 2018) or the need for unique lesson ideas in social studies. Over and over again, these social studies lessons have students assembling pre-printed books about geography topics with titles such as “A Book about Maps,” “All Kind of Landforms,” “My Continents Book,” and the most frequently used “Me on the Map.” While some informational reading can be used for social studies lessons, creating books is a literacy activity. These books represent a case in which a literacy activity has a social studies theme (Heafner, 2018). The primary student activity with each of these books is reading. Reading is a developing skill at the first-grade level, so reading the words in these small books might be challenging. The previously mentioned titles contain words such as “continent,” “information,” symbols,” and “cardinal directions” all multisyllabic words. These lapbooks are often just vocabulary words with definitions put together in book form.

The most commonly used small book or activity is the “Me on the Map” project. This project can be completed in various creative ways, including in book form, concentric circles, or foldable paper. The purpose of this activity is to show children their place on the planet using geographic terms. This activity is based on a children’s book called *Me on the Map* (Sweeney, 1998). The story follows a little girl in her bedroom and expands outward to her room, her house, her neighborhood, city, state, county, and continent until it reaches the planet. A “Me on the Map” project recreates this journey for each student. The activities can be called “My Place in the World,” “Where We Live,” or “Where in the World Am I.” However, the basic concept remains the same. A “Me on the Map” project was the focus of 25 of the 50 lessons evaluated. This data is not the same as 25 of 50 activities that featured the creation of a book, although there is some overlap.

The problem with this project lies in where the student's journey begins. In the book, the main character has a large bedroom inside a large single-family home on a tree-lined street. When the project begins inside the child's bedroom, one type of living situation is prioritized. The large single-family home with individual bedrooms is normalized, othering children with different living situations. The book and related projects do not mention additional living situations such as apartments, condos, multi-family homes, shelters, houseboats, or cars. This book ignores the realities of some students' living situations. In most of the lessons in this study, these projects started in the students' "room" and had no alternative options.

There were a few exceptions that honored the unique lives of children. In one project, the "Me on a Map" activity started at the school. A school building is shared by all children. That building is on a common street, in a neighborhood, city, state, country, continent, and planet. The outcome of the lesson remains the same regardless of where students start. Students still learn geographic terms such as street, city, state, country, continent, and planet. While also learning about their size and relationship with each other.

Another lesson started with the children in "My Special Place," and the students could decide where to start the journey. These simple changes opened the lesson to all students and normalized various living arrangements. No student is left feeling inadequate when the project begins in a shared space.

The CAOLSS on Justice & ***Equity***

Seven questions on the CAOLSS evaluated areas of justice and equity. Table 2 below shows each question in the Justice & Equity category and the total scores. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, not all 50 lesson plans in this study have all five significant problems, but each lesson had at least one. The most common significant problem was related to issues of

justice and equity. Although I did not provide a table for the other categories on the CAOLLS checklist, I felt it was important to share these scores. Unlike other categories on the CAOLLS checklist, lesson plans could be given an N/A (not applicable) if the question did not apply to the lesson. For example, if there was no Compass Rose used in the lesson, any question related to the Compass Rose received an N/A. The areas of the Justice & Equity were used to evaluate all lesson plans. There were no N/A scores given.

Table 2

Total Results of Section VI Justice

Question	No/0	1	2	Yes/3
Does the content reflect my students' cultures or contexts?	10	3	6	31
Does the content give my students windows into new cultures or contexts?	19	8	9	14
Does the lesson help my students question dominant ideas about what is normal or good?	44	2	1	3
Does the lesson emphasize that cultures and communities are diverse?	31	6	2	12
Are the representations of place broad (beyond stereotypes)?	37	3	2	8
Does the lesson encourage children to learn skills to effect change in the world?	50	0	0	0
Does the activity, resource, or idea harm Students-especially those with marginalized Identities and/or backgrounds?*	23	3	10	15

*(Gallagher et. al., 2019)

Overall, the content of the lessons reflects the culture or context of students in the United States. In evaluating these lessons, I assumed they would be used in a classroom in the United States. Most of these lessons placed the United States at the center of the lesson. There is also some attempt to give students a "window into new cultures or contexts." Often, these attempts were minimal, but an attempt was made.

The actual glaring areas of concern are the questions that touched on ideas about "broad representation beyond stereotypes, "questioning a dominant narrative," "emphasizing that cultures and communities are diverse," and "encouraging children to learn a skill to effect change in the world." In these areas, the 0/No outnumber the more positive responses of 1,2,3/Yes, overwhelmingly. These big social studies ideas are not being addressed in any recognizable way in the lesson plans for this study.

The "Me on the Map" project beginning in *a bedroom,* or *a single-family home* was an automatic *0/yes* or *1* on the reversed scored question "Does the activity, resource, or idea harm students-especially those with marginalized identities or backgrounds." The desired answer to this question would be *3/No*. This means that the lesson did not have the potential to harm students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. A score of *1* was given if the activity featured blank circles for students to draw and write on. Pre-printed activities with the words "My Room," "My House," or "My Home" were scored *0/Yes*.

In summary, the findings in this section show that little attention was given to issues of justice and equity in the lesson plans used in this study. Areas where students can *question dominant ideas of good and bad, move beyond stereotypical representations of place,* and learn *to make change in the world,* were in seriously short supply. A highlight in the justice and equity areas may be the attempt, by many lessons, to introduce students to new cultures and contexts.

DISCUSSION

Summary of the Findings

In this study, I examined 50 lesson plans available for purchase on the lesson-sharing website Teacher Pay Teachers. These lessons were chosen using the internal search feature and narrowing my search by type, grade, subject, and discipline. I purchased the first 50 lessons available when searching *lesson plan-first grade-social studies-geography*. The large number of lesson plans available for purchase on Tpt.com makes it necessary to narrow a search or risk wasting valuable time searching through countless lesson plans. Each lesson plan was evaluated using the CAOLSS created based on the Pinning with Pause checklist (Gallagher et al., 2019). The lesson plans were scored and placed into one of three groups: the *Focused Top*, the *Busy Work Mediocre Middle*, and the *Uninvolved Student* bottom.

The findings from this study informed my two research questions: (1) *How do the first 50 lesson plans that appear when searching lesson plan-first-grade-social studies-geography using the TPT search tool measure along criteria including geography content, assessment, alignment with standards, and justice and equity?* (2) *What are the significant problems within these TPT lessons?*

Through this study, I found that elementary geography lesson plans available for purchase on TPT contain little resemblance to the lesson plans one might have learned to create in school as a pre-service teacher. Even when searching specifically for *lesson plans*, most of the lessons purchased for this study were, at best, classroom activities. While intending to help teachers, these activities available on TPT are overwhelmingly not aligned with stated social studies standards with clear outcomes and assessments. Additionally, these activities often misrepresented people and places, choosing stereotypes and cute illustrations over accuracy.

Most of the lessons were rated low on the justice and equity questions, raising concerns for all students and particularly students from marginalized backgrounds.

Situating the Findings in the Scholarship

The findings for this study contribute to and contradict previous research in TPT and curriculum integration of social studies and language arts curriculum. This study's findings support the work of those who warn against the use of TPT lesson plans without a thorough review of the lesson or activity. Like in previous studies little alignment was present between curriculum standards and the lessons available on TPT. Previous studies found little alignment between the CCSS the lesson was intended to cover. This study found few claims or attempts to align with or even recognize current standards.

This research supports and contradicts research on the curriculum integration of social studies and language arts. 25 of the 50 lesson plans featured an attempt at combining these subjects. Most of these attempts were unsuccessful despite one previous study finding improvement in this area.

Saving Teacher Time/The Fallacy of TPT

This study continues the work of scholars who have warned against using the online lesson marketplace, TPT (Aguilar et al., 2022; Bauml, 2015; Brown et al., 2020; Sawyer & Myers, 2018; Schroeder & Curcio, 2022; Shelton et al., 2021; Swalwell et al., 2023). Despite repeated warnings about the lessons on TPT, teachers are either unaware of them or unconcerned. TPT boasts that "85% of educators" use the site with "7M+" teacher-created resources and "1B+ resources downloaded." The obvious next step may be to find ways to help teachers navigate the site. This research supports the careful examination of materials and tools to help teachers make wise decisions about the content available on TPT (Archambault et al.,

2021; Bauml, 2015; Carpenter & Shelton, 2024; Gallagher et al., 2019; Shelton & Archambault, 2019, 2022).

This study adds to the growing scholarship that notes a lack of standards alignment and poor-quality lessons. The lack of social studies standards present in these lessons speaks to the research of Shelton et al., 2021, who stated, "A key concern is that TPT frames curriculum as a good to be bought and sold by individual entrepreneurs, not provided by the state or created collectively by practitioners" (p. 272). Others recognize the lack of Common Core State Standards alignment in lessons in math and literacy (Aguilar et al., 2022). Although there are no common core state standards for social studies, the lack of TPT lesson alignment in other CCSS areas such as math and literacy speak to the findings in this study. This study shows that the presence and alignment of state standards do not appear to be a big concern for the buyers and sellers on TPT.com. Despite only evaluating a relatively small number of lesson plans in one focused area, there is strong evidence of teacher interest overall. The 50 lessons reviewed for this study were purchased and positively reviewed by 9,964 people.

Harris et al., 2022 also created a tool to evaluate online lesson plans, inspired by Gallagher et al.'s 2019 "Pinning with Pause Checklist." Their research evaluated 11th-grade history content on TPT and found that "70% of U.S. history activities were of *moderate* or *low* overall quality, including posing potential harm to students" (p. 15). This study reflected similar results but at an elementary level. "Curating and Creating with Care" and my CAOLSS each specifically addressed the growing concern over "posing potential harm to students" (Gallagher, 2019). This research study, combined with L.M. Harris et al., provides empirical evidence of low-quality social studies at the elementary and secondary levels.

The finding of this study went deeper examining the type of activities the students were

asked to do, finding a large percentage of language arts-based activities with social studies as the subject. The overlap between social studies and language arts standard exists at all grade levels. The current problem at the elementary level may impact future social studies instruction. Students need some separation between the two subjects so that disenchanted or struggling readers don't make the same assumptions about social studies.

This study fills a gap in research on early elementary social studies available for purchase on TPT.com. This lack of research is interesting, considering that Aguilar et al. (2022) found that "TPT predominantly serves elementary school grades" (p. 1) and "The most widely available materials on the site are aimed at early elementary grades and are in the 'printable' format (p. 2)." The availability of lessons and materials in printable format was a key finding in this study. One of the key characteristics of *The Mediocre Middle,* the largest group of lesson plans in this study, was the abundance of worksheets and activities. Further adding to Aguilar et al. findings from their study, "Close to 70% of material is characterized as being a 'printable,' or an 'activity'" (p. 1). These two studies combine to illustrate the value of hands-on materials to buyers and sellers on TPT.

The research is specific to early elementary social studies instruction in geography—a topic not widely researched as it relates to standards alignment and quality. In 2019, Aguiar et al. found that "While sellers have the option to tag their materials with the learning standards they address, only approximately 15% of materials were tagged with a learning standard (p. 2)." The research for this study suggests that not much improvement has occurred in the area of social studies geography in the last five years.

Standards and Developmental Readiness

The lessons I analyzed did not reflect what scholars recommend regarding either the use of standards or children's developmental readiness for geography concepts. The lessons in this study seem to assume children have moved past topological concepts, which require recognizing space features in relation to a fixed object and being ready for projective construction and Euclidean concepts (Downs & Liben, 1991). Children using projective construction can determine what perspective a map is portraying, for example, linear vs. aerial view. Deciding about perspective is a task Piaget and Inhelder (1956), Blaut (1997), Downs and Liben (1991), and Sobel (1998) all thought best was suited for children older than first grade.

The use of Euclidean concepts was another activity featured frequently throughout the lessons in this study. Euclidean concepts require students "to establish and use arbitrary but fixed reference systems (such as cartesian or polar coordinates) for specific location, direction, size and distance" (Down & Liben, 1991, p. 310). The first-grade geography lesson plans in this study contained many worksheets where students are required to navigate areas as large as the world and as small as a classroom using lines of latitude and coordinate grid systems.

This study showed that recommendations from official geography organizations (NCGE, NGS) and the *C3 Framework* were largely ignored. The *C3 Framework* clearly outlines twelve standards that students should be able to do by the end of 2nd grade (NCSS, 2013). Those twelve guiding standards are written in the literature review chapter. Euclidean concepts are not in the K-2 standards. Nowhere in these recommendations for first-grade students is the memorization and placement of continents and oceans. In alignment with the *C3 Framework,* the eighteen standards written in *Geography for Life* (NCGE, 2012) do not require students to memorize continents, countries, or ocean names at the first-grade level. The lessons in this study assume

greater development in the teaching and learning of geography concepts.

Social Studies Disguised as Literacy

In contrast to Huck's research, this study did not find any evidence of improvements in social studies and literacy integration (Huck, 2019), with the caveat that my research cannot speak to all areas of social studies, only integrating geography and literacy. I found that half of the lessons reviewed for this study attempted to integrate geography with literacy. These lessons featured books that were created for students to read on their own about geography and map skills. In first grade, most students are emerging readers and are still working to sound out words like *symbols* and *oceans*, which are included in many of the lessons I analyzed. These lessons, thus, are more about sounding out words than understanding social studies concepts.

This research highlights the prevalence of stealthy and fractured curriculum integration (Brugar & Whitlock, 2020; Hinde, 2015). This research shows that despite evidence of successful social studies and literacy integration suggestions (Britt & LaFontaine, 2009; Fertig & Silverman, 2007; Gandy, 2006, 2007, 2020; Swift & Brown, 2022), teachers still need more practice. Brugar and Whitlock noted that skilled teachers were more successful with intentional social studies and literacy integration. These skills assumingly come from good training and practice. Hinde (2015) noted, "when teachers have the knowledge of the content and areas being integrated and possess the ability to translate that knowledge in ways for their students understanding, integration is particularly effective." (p. 25). The teachers responsible for creating and posting the lesson plans for this study are still lacking some of these skills and knowledge.

Misrepresentation of Land

This study highlights how often map projections misrepresenting place can be found in first-grade geography lesson plans. Although only specific to one group of first-grade geography

lessons, this research study beautifully illustrates Rodríguez and Swalwell's point, “Maps always construct a narrative, so we need to be mindful of power and perspective” (p. 22).” A demonstration of how “power and perspective” relate to the creation of maps used in elementary classrooms can be seen in these findings. The findings of this study show how often these issues can occur even in a small group of lesson plans. Map distortions of states, countries, and continents run rampant. I discussed previously the justice and equity implications of removing states and counties. Placing Alaska and Hawaii below Texas also removes Mexico from the map. Removing the county of Mexico removes family origins for many of our current student population in the United States.

This study illustrates the need for more books to recognize problematic geography content, specifically at the elementary level. Many of the lessons evaluated for this study contain problematic content that would need reworking. Rodríguez and Swalwell (2022) bring attention to the justice and equity issues in elementary social studies teaching and take readers through the process of rethinking and rewriting these lessons. They discuss The Four Problematics (p. 47), which are “Normalization,” “Idealization” and “Problematic Dramatization/Gamification” (p. 47). The CAOLSS evaluation tool used for this study included questions inspired by meant to encompass ideas behind the Four Problematics.

This study found repeated use of the *Me on the Map* project also known as *My Place in this World*. Regardless of what it’s called, the illustration of the expanded communities model is the same. This lesson showed up in 50% of the lessons in this study. Three of the Four Problematics of Elementary Social Studies (Rodríguez & Swallwell, 2024, p. 47) are embedded in this project alone. Normalization and Idealization can be found in the assumption that all students live in a home in a nice tree-lined neighborhood. Idealization when the project fails to

address those experiencing homelessness or those struggling to find stable housing. The *Me on the Map* book and project eliminate any problems related to housing, communities, or cities. Problematic Dramatization/Gamification occurs as emphasis is placed on the craft portion of the project. More time is spent coloring, cutting, drawing, and gluing than discussing the interconnectedness of the home, street, city, state, country, continent, and world the student lives in. The expanded communities model (Bisland, 2009; Halvorsen, 2009, 2013; Stallones, 2013) is prevalent across my analyzed lessons.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The research from this study could be used to make positive changes to educational policy and practice. Diliberti et al. noted the missing infrastructure in elementary social studies. This infrastructure should provide research-based clearly articulated standards with classroom materials and resources that match these goals. Elementary social studies teachers are left to become cobblers "teachers (who) used self-created materials for most of their social studies instructional time" (Diliberti et al. 2023 p. 25). The internet would be the most logical place to search for instructional materials and TPT offers a large selection of lesson plans.

TPT should shoulder the responsibility for improving the quality of lesson plans available on their site. At present time there is no official vetting process for lessons and activities that are posted on their site. The seller must register with the site, so as to share a portion of their profits, but no review of the material they upload is made by TPT. TPT relies on user reports for policing inaccurate or inappropriate information. TPT could appoint an advisory board to decide a bare minimum set of requirements. These requirements should include alignment to some recognized standard or guideline. TPT currently assigns all math and language arts activities with a CCSS. The practice does not currently include social studies and

science. Social studies and the language arts share many CCSS, particularly those in critical thinking skills and informational writing.

This TPT advisory board could also ensure lesson plans are updated by their sellers. Although not included in the Findings chapter of this dissertation many of the lesson plans purchased for this study had not been updated by their seller since 2016. Lesson Plan 12 dated back to 2013. The annual or biannual updating of lessons could help eliminate some of the outdated lesson plans and activities on the site. It is unlikely that TPT will eliminate outdated lessons on their site. They wouldn't want to jeopardize their claim of "7+M teacher-created lessons". The newly appointed TPT board could start by ensuring that those uploading lessons to their site were actually teachers.

There are research implications for practice as well. The COALSS evaluation tool would be helpful in evaluating lesson plans on the site. The process of completing the checklist doesn't take long and provides teachers with a better understanding of what they are purchasing. Lesson plans that score poorly in categories on the COALSS are not a total loss if the teacher knows of the problem and has the skills to fix or eliminate it. A lesson plan containing a map of the United States without Alaska or Hawaii becomes a lesson in what is missing and what it means to be taken off the map.

I would also encourage teachers using TPT to leave negative review and report problematic lessons and activities. The 50 lesson plans in this study all receive four- or five-star reviews. No lesson plan received a review of fewer than 4 stars. Reviewers are also able to leave comments. Use this section to point out issues. For example, one might add to their review, this world map is missing Antarctica. TPT is making a profit and has no incentive to police their work. Teachers need to work together to protect the interests of other teachers.

Limitations

There are two main limitations to this study. The accuracy and reliability of the search feature on TPT and the amount of teacher fidelity to the lesson plan. The search function (TPT) ultimately decided which lesson I could review. There were approximately 1,400 lesson plans available for purchase after searching "lesson plans-first grade-social studies-geography." These lesson plans were displayed across roughly twenty online pages. This study only reviewed the first 50 lesson plans that met the criteria. The results of this study may not represent the lessons that appeared after I reached the limit. However, I selected the first 50 lesson plans with the assumption that these are far more likely to be used than the other lesson plans, and they reflect lessons that are more likely being downloaded and used. I should see the same search results as any first-grade teacher seeking geography lessons.

My findings also only reflect what is written on the page. I cannot know the intention of the author. The results of this study do not reflect how teachers (or those who purchase the lessons) may do with the lessons. It is unknown how teachers alter or change these lesson plans when they are implemented. Perhaps the creators of the lesson plans assume that purchasers (teachers) will make the necessary adjustments to the lesson plan for their students' needs. Skilled teachers may know which standards they are trying to cover. They may also know how to assess the lesson. As a researcher, I do not know how the lesson plans were used by teachers

Areas for Future Research

The are two main areas for future research. These areas are continued research in curriculum integration and research on how teachers are using TPT lesson plans in their classrooms. Continued research to help teachers properly integrate social studies and language arts, such as the work of Hann and Hagelman (2021), which specifically lists children's literature

that can assist in teaching the five themes of geography. It will be important to continue to update the lists as new children's books are published every day. Previously recommended books may become out-of-date based on societal shifts in attitudes or changes in geographical borders.

Additional research could also explore how teachers implement TPT-purchased lesson plans in their classrooms. Are they altering the lesson? How faithful to the written word on the page are they? Are the lesson plans purchased supplemental to a larger social studies curriculum, or are teachers using the lesson plans on Teacher Pay Teachers as their curriculum?

Concluding Thoughts

TPT influences the teaching and learning in classrooms thought out the United States and beyond. Despite numerous studies by academic researchers in many subject areas about the poor quality of the lesson plans and activities available on the site, demand still exists for the product. In fact, there is so many products a teacher can get lost looking for lesson plans on the site. Why do we need 1,400 lessons in first-grade-geography? Why do we need "7+ M Uploaded Resources"? It's too much. The findings from this study demonstrate that the search function isn't much help as many lesson plans were omitted from this study because they were off topic. The first 50 lesson plans that were on topic certainly weren't ranked from best to worst. If the intention of the teacher is to save time by using a social studies online lesson plan or activity, TPT is not the answer.

I believe teachers are constantly trying to improve their craft and make learning active and exciting for their students. As discussed in the introduction teachers struggle finding useful and active social studies materials. If a school district isn't providing social studies materials that are working for students where else is a teacher to go. Many of the current social studies

materials can be improved upon. This study demonstrated there are a lot of materials out there. Trained and talented teachers can create worthwhile social studies materials for early elementary students. Cobbler Teachers and DIYers deserve a better placeform in which to share their ideas.

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APPENDIX A:

COALSS

Checklist of Online Assessment Lessons in Social Studies

Teacher Pay Teachers First-grade Geography Lesson Plans

Lesson #: _____

Lesson Title: _____

What does the author categorize the document as? _____

I. Standards

	0 / No	**1**	**2**	**3/ Yes**	**N/A**
Does the document claim to support a local or state elementary geography standard? If so, which one(s): _____ _____					
Does the document claim to support a *C3* elementary geography standard? If so, which one(s): _____					
Does the document cover any *C3* K-2 elementary geography standards? If so, which one(s):					
Does the document claim to support a standard **NOT** related to geography?					

If so, which one(s):					

Geographic Representations

D2. Geo.1.K-2 Construct maps, graphs, and other representations of familiar places.

D2. Geo.2.K-2 Use maps, graphs, photographs, and other representations to describe places and the relationships and interactions that shape them.

D2. Geo.3.K-2 Use maps, globes, and other simple geographic models to identify cultural and environmental characteristics of places

Human-Environment Interaction

D2. Geo.4.K-2 Explain how weather, climate, and other environmental characteristics affect people's lives in a place or region.

D2. Geo.5.K-2 Describe how human activities affect the cultural and environmental characteristics of places or regions.

D2. Geo.6.K-2 Identify some cultural and environmental characteristics of specific places.

Human Population: Spatial Patterns and Movements

D2. Geo.7.K-2 Explain why and how people, goods, and ideas move from place to place.

D2. Geo.8.K-2 Compare how people in different types of communities use local and distant environments to meet their daily needs.

D2. Geo.9.K-2 Describe the connections between the physical environment of a place and the economic activities found there.

Global Interconnections

D2. Geo.10.K-2 Describe changes in the physical and cultural characteristics of various world regions

D2. Geo.11.K-2. Explain how the consumption of products connects people to distant places.

D2. Geo.12.K-2. Identify ways that a catastrophic disaster may affect people living in a place.

II. General Instruction

	0/ No	1	2	3/ Yes	N/A
Does the lesson rely exclusively on vocabulary cards?*					
Are children asked to write independently?					
Are children asked to create/produce something?					
Does the lesson ask the children to do anything beyond *remember* level?					

III. Assessment

	0/ No	1	2	3/ Yes	N/A
Does the lesson have formative assessment checks?					
Does the lesson have a summative assessment?					
Does the summative assessment ask the children to do an authentic task?**					

IV. Geography Content/Processes

	0/ No	1	2	3/ Yes	N/A
Does the lesson feature the Compass Rose (NESW) without any scaffolding?*					
Are any maps presented in the lesson accurate?					
Are the maps digitally altered to fit the page?*					
Does the lesson include map types beyond “flat maps”?					
Does the lesson include instruction on absolute vs. relative location when relevant?					
Does the lesson address aerial view (bird’s eye view)?					
Does the lesson cover the continents and oceans?					
Does the lesson make the ideas concrete for children?					

V. Illustrations

What are the illustrations of (if there are illustrations)?

_____
_____
_____

	0/ No	1	2	3/ yes	N/A

Are the representations of children/people culturally authentic or nuanced?					
Are the children/people representative of an identifiable cultural background beyond white?					

VI. Justice and Equity

	0/ No	**1**	**2**	**3/ yes**
Does the content reflect my students' cultures or contexts?				
Does the content give my students windows into new cultures or contexts?				
Does the lesson help my students question dominant ideas about what is normal or good?				
Does the lesson emphasize that cultures and communities are diverse?				
Are the representations of place broad (beyond stereotypes)?				
Does the lesson encourage children to learn skills to effect change in the world?				
Does the activity, resource, or idea harm students—especially those with marginalized identities and/or backgrounds? *				

VII. Qualities of Powerful and Authentic Social Studies (Descriptors-not scored)

Meaningful builds curriculum networks of knowledge, skills, beliefs, and attitudes that are structured around enduring understandings, essential questions, important ideas, and goals	
Challenging The curriculum should promote critical, creative, and ethical thinking on problems faced by citizens and leaders.	
Integrative subjects that comprise social studies—i.e., history, economics, geography, civics, sociology, anthropology, archaeology and psychology—are rich, interrelated disciplines, each critical to the background of thoughtful citizens.	

Value-based the social studies program should consider the ethical dimensions of topics and address controversial issues while providing an area for reflective development of concern for the common good and the application of democratic values.	
Active Active learning is not just "hands-on," it is "minds-on.	

Does the lesson claim to integrate subjects beyond social studies?

Holistic Evaluation of the Lesson:

Other Notes:

Key

0/no	No evidence
1	Little evidence, inappropriate/failed attempt to include
2	Some evidence, an attempt to thoughtfully included, may be difficult to spot
3/yes	Evident in lesson
N/A	Not applicable

*reverse scored
** NA if no assessment is included

APPENDIX B:

LESSON PLANS RETRIEVED FROM TPT

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Class of Kinders, (2016) *Mapping My Classroom Pop-Up Style Kindergarten & First Grade Social Studies* [lesson plan]. Retrieved March 6, 2024, from teacherspayteachers.com

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Hall, Elizabeth-Kickin' it in Kindergarten, (2016) *Landform Unit for Litter Learners* [lesson plan]. Retrieved February 2, 2024, from teacherspayteachers.com

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Just a Primary Girl, (2019) *Map Unit* [lesson plan]. Retrieved March 6, 2024, from teacherspayteachers.com

Kid World Citizen, (2017) *Geography for Kids Bundle: Three Essential Hands-on Activities* [lesson plan]. Retrieved March 6, 2024, from teacherspayteachers.com

Kid World Citizen, (2017) *My Place in the World Project: "Me on the Map" Geography for Kids* [lesson plan]. Retrieved February 2, 2024, from teacherspayteachers.com

Kids and Coffee, (2016) *7 Continents Mini Book {Black and White}* [lesson plan]. Retrieved July 9, 2024, from teacherspayteachers.com

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