The Social Studies Curriculum

Purposes, Problems, and Possibilities

5th Edition

Edited by

E. Wayne Ross

To

Rich Gibson & Kevin D. Vinson

Comrades and collaborators from whom I have learned so much.

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Preface

The fifth edition of *The Social Studies Curriculum: Purposes, Problems, and Possibilities* arrives a quarter century after the first edition and the aim remains the same, that is, to encourage, even provoke, readers to reconsider the dominant assumptions about the purposes, possibilities, and challenges of the social studies curriculum. Like the schools in which it is taught, social studies as a subject is full of contradictions. After over a century as a key subject in North American schools, social studies remains an engine of social reproduction and the transmission of hegemonic ideas that has myriad oppressive and inequitable by-products. While rarely experienced, social studies still retains the possibilities for liberation and transformation. I believe that social studies has the potential to contribute in significant ways to creating a society where individuals have the power and resources to realize their own potential and free themselves from the obstacles of classism, racism, sexism, other inequalities often encouraged by schools, the state, and oppressive ideologies.

Each of the editions of *The Social Studies Curriculum* book has presented a critical perspective on social studies curriculum, teaching, and learning. Taking a critical perspective on social studies is not merely about pointing out what is not right, but as both John Dewey and Michel Foucault remind us, being critical is a process of unearthing assumptions and taken-for-granted understandings of the world and subjecting them to analysis. Challenging dogma and tradition and illustrating that things are not as self-evident as we might have believed is a fundamental principle of critical approaches to social studies education. And, this is not an easy path, indeed, as Foucault said, "practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult" (1988, p. 154). Social studies is closely tied to narratives of and pursuit of democracy,

citizenship and freedom, constructions that Paulo Freire (2005) helps us to understand as never finished and which demand commitment, political clarity, coherence and decision.

This edition has seen a significant revamping of contents to address both perennial and current issues. Like previous editions, this edition has some familiar topics and authors, but also includes many new contributions, reflecting changing social contexts and the evolution of social studies education. Readers will find new chapters on: the politics of the social studies curriculum, historical thinking, critical historical inquiry, narratives of power, critical race theory, gender and sexuality, decolonizing and Indigenous issues, anarchism, villianification and evil, critical media studies, and economics.

Curriculum is much more than subject matter knowledge – a collection of facts and generalizations from history and the social science disciplines to be passed on to students. The curriculum is what students experience. It is dynamic and inclusive of the interactions among students, teachers, subject matter and the context. The true measure of success in any social studies course or program will be found in its effects on individual students' thinking and actions as well as the communities to which students belong. Teachers are the key component in any curriculum change and it is my hope that his book provides social studies teachers with perspectives, insights, and knowledge that are beneficial in their continued growth as professional educators.

I am very appreciative to all the authors who made contributions to this edition as well as those who contributed chapters to previous editions of *The Social Studies Curriculum*, including: Jane Bernard-Powers, Margaret Smith Crocco, Abraham DeLeon, Terrie Epstein, Ronald W. Evans, Linda Farr Darling, Stephen C. Fleury, Four Arrows (aka Don T. Jacobs), Kristi Fragnoli, Rich Gibson, Neil O. Houser, David W. Hursh, Kevin Jennings, Gregg Jorgensen, Lisa

Loutzenheiser, Joseph Kahne, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Christopher R. Leahey, Curry Stephenson Malott, Perry M. Marker, Sandra Mathison, Cameron McCarthy, Merry Merryfield, Jack L. Nelson, Nel Noddings, Paul Orlowski, Valerie Ooka Pang, J. Michael Peterson, Marc Pruyn, Greg Queen, Frances Rains, David Warren Saxe, Doug Selwyn, Binaya Subedi, Brenda Trofanenko, Kevin D. Vinson, Walter Werner, Joel Westheimer, and Michael Whelan. Each of one of these contributors are exemplary scholars and educators and their work has had a tremendous impact on my own thinking and practice as well as many other educators.

My relationship with the State University of New York Press stretches all the back to 1991, when I first served on the Editorial Board. This is my sixth book with SUNY Press and I am grateful for the support I have received over the years from a long list of editors and directors. I want to express my thanks to the people who worked with me on this edition of *The Social Studies Curriculum*, including my editor Rebecca Colesworthy, editor-in-chief James Peltz and all the people in production and marketing.

It has been my privilege to collaborate with many wonderful scholars and educators over the years on a variety of projects, but two people who have been long-time friends and collaborators deserve special mention. Kevin D. Vinson, has taught me much about educational theory and has been a source of imaginative ideas about how we might understand and re-imagine teaching and curriculum. He is a scholar, comrade, counselor, and friend. Rich Gibson has been a great friend and comrade. He's a dedicated teacher who is seriously committed to helping people construct meaningful understandings of the world. He is also a scholar of Marx, Marxism, and critical education; a student of empire and spy craft, organizer for social change; and a world class shit disturber.

My daughter Rachel Ross Hillberry is a joy as are my two beautiful rambunctious grandsons, Holden Colin and Brian Leo.

My son, John Colin Mathison Ross, remains a constant force in my life even though he left this world six years ago. As a high school student, he hated social studies. One evening at the dinner table he asked, “If you’re the king of social studies, why does it suck so much?” I am not the king of social studies, but I have been trying my entire career to make social studies not suck.

Sandra Mathison is the love of my life. She gives me everything I need, and much, much more.

E. Wayne Ross
Vancouver, British Columbia

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Introduction: Curriculum Ideologies, Social Studies Traditions, and the Teacher-Curriculum Encounter

E. Wayne Ross

The fields of social studies education and curriculum studies are both just over 100 years old. The origins of social studies as a school subject can be traced to a 1916 Report by the Committee on Social Studies of the National Education Association's Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (Dunn, 1916; Jorgensen, 2012). The commonly accepted date for the birth of curriculum studies as a field of study is 1918, when Franklin Bobbitt's book *The Curriculum* was published. One might think that after a century these two fields would have produced a consensus on the nature of curriculum and social studies, but this is not the case. And, importantly, this lack of determinacy should not be seen as a shortcoming or inadequacy at the core of the fields, but rather a characteristic that reflects the multiplicity of perspectives that co-exist within their boundaries. Definitions of curriculum as well as articulations of the nature and purposes of social studies education reflect various and disparate worldviews and ideologies. Given this situation, it's important we consider two questions that may seem on the surface to have straightforward answers, namely what is curriculum? and what is social studies?

What is Curriculum?

Pause a moment and consider the question: what is curriculum? Common responses include: school subjects, academic disciplines or a body of knowledge; a planned sequence of instruction; content to be taught or learned; materials and resources to support teaching and learning; government mandated learning outcomes and examinations. In your mind's eye, what does curriculum look like? What are the symbolic metaphors that you associate with curriculum? When I was a classroom teacher, I thought of curriculum as the three-ring binder that sat on the

bookshelf, with descriptions of courses, content outlines, objectives, and resources for teaching. Perhaps you see curriculum as a textbook; a teacher's guide; a plan for action; a schematic of inputs, throughputs and outputs; recursive circles or spirals; a staircase of incremental, sequential skills; webs of related content, ideas, topics, activities, and knowledge; structure of a discipline; a way of knowing; a teachable moment; everything that happens in school; or life itself!

Our ideas about curriculum are important because they play an important role in the ways in which we think about the teacher-curriculum encounter and the myriad assumptions about our roles as a teacher, learning and learners, nature of knowledge and student assessment and evaluation.

Curriculum Ideologies

Ideology is a contested concept, but in general it can be understood as a set of beliefs, attitudes, and understandings shared by a group or society – a collection of "truths" about what is valuable, correct, desirable, normal or natural. Ideologies explain and justify goals, decisions, and behaviors. Often, we think of ideology as a comprehensive world view associated with specific positions that are consciously worked out with regard to society, culture, and economics (e.g., Marxism, anarchism, capitalism or neoliberalism). Ideologies, particularly those that are dominant or hegemonic within society, shape how our understandings of how things are and ought to be. Hegemonic ideologies are often "invisible", that is they so thoroughly shape our understandings of what the world is that the values, assumptions, logic, and desires embedded within and emerging from the ideology seem natural rather than the normative constructions that they are. In his famous graduation speech at Kenyon College in 2005, "This is Water", David Foster Wallace related this parable:

> There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, "Morning, boys. How's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, "What the hell is water?" (Wallace, 2005, n.p.)

His point, of course, is that the "most obvious, important realities are often the ones that are the hardest to see and talk about … the value of real education has almost nothing to do with knowledge, and everything to do with simple awareness, awareness of what is real and essential, so hidden in plain sight all around us all the time, that we have to keep reminding ourselves over and over: 'This is water. This is water.'" (Wallace, 2005, n.p.).[1]

The ways we think about curriculum (and teaching and learning) are reflections of ideological positions, whether we are aware of them as such or not. What we accept as the aims of education, the role of schools in society, our assumptions about what it means to be a good teacher or student, the nature of knowledge, may be taken for granted because they are deeply engrained in the way we understand the world. So, thinking about curriculum ideologies can provide a heuristic for uncovering familiar, unchallenged, and unconsidered ways of thinking and the practices that result.

Consider the Bobbitt's (1918) conception of curriculum:

> The central theory [of curriculum] is simple. Human life, however varied, consists of the performance of specific activities. Education that prepares for life is one that prepares definitely and adequately for these specific activities. However numerous and diverse they may be for any social class they can be discovered. This requires only that one go out into the world of affairs and discover the

> particulars of which their affairs consist. These will show the abilities, attitudes, habits, appreciations and forms of knowledge that men need. These will be the objectives of the curriculum. They will be numerous, definite, and particularized. The curriculum will then be that series of experiences which children and youth must have by way of obtaining those objectives. (Bobbitt, 1918, p. 42)

Clearly Bobbitt thought of curriculum in terms of productivity, efficiency, and management. His ideas were influenced by Frederick Winslow Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911), the most influential management theory of the 20th Century. The principles of "scientific management" – also known as Taylorism – were widely adopted by educational administrators in the early twentieth century and their impact remains evident in 21st century schools. Even though evidence of Taylorism has largely vanished in the contemporary workplace, superseded by new techniques of flexible specialization and lean production, walking into a school today is often like walking into a past where scientific management is still the order of the day, and, indeed, it is. Contemporary schools are still largely driven by conceptions of teaching and learning that have their roots in Taylorism or what is often described as the "factory model" of schooling (Ross, 2010).

The progressive education movement of the 1920s and 1930s provides an alternative vision to Bobbitt's technical-behavioral ideology, with a focus on the interests of the child rather than the content to be taught and the "needs of society". Building on the "romantic naturalism" of Rosseau, Pestalozzi and Pestalozzi and informed by the theories and practices advocated by John Dewey, A. S. Neil, Maria Montessori, this "social-romantic" ideology emphasized curriculum that began with child (rather than pre-selected bodies of knowledge); envisioned teachers as facilitators and learning as based on active inquiry. While never a widespread

approach in public schools, this child-centered approach to curriculum, nonetheless remains an important framework in early childhood education and in many alternative schools, such as Summerhill (UK), Peninsula School (USA), Albany Free School (USA) and the recently closed Windsor House School (Canada).

But by the mid-20th Century, Bobbitt's emphasis on science and efficiency in curriculum would be combined with the rise of behavioural psychology to produce what is the hegemonic framework of school curriculum, "The Tyler Rationale". Based on the work of Ralph Tyler (1949), this approach to curriculum emphasized changing students' behavior and set out a simple set of questions that were quickly reduced to a formula by educational administrators, curriculum specialist, and teacher educators.

> Since the real purpose of education is not to have the instructor perform certain activities but to bring about significant changes in the students' pattern of behaviour, it becomes important to recognize that any statements of objectives of the school should be a statement of changes to take place in the students. (Tyler 1949, 44)

Tyler presented four fundamental questions to be answered in developing any curriculum or plan of instruction:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (Tyler 1949, p. 1)

Critiques of the Tyler Rationale abound (e.g., Doll, 2008; Kliebard, 1970; Petrina, 2004), but one of the most powerful and concise is the distinction Aoki (1988) makes between curriculum-as-planned versus the curriculum-as-lived. The curriculum-as-planned ignores the diverse lives and experiences of the students who are expected to achieve a priori learning outcomes not the experiences, values, and desires of the teachers who work with them. Aoki brings our attention to the dynamics of the classroom as a completely different type of curriculum, what he calls the curriculum-as-lived. This curriculum is inclusive the hopes, dreams, motivations, and curiosities of students and teachers, their past experiences, inside and outside of school.

Aoki's conception of curriculum focuses on what is actually happening in classrooms and in the lives of teachers and students, the enacted or experienced curriculum. In this way of thinking about curriculum the interactions among teachers, students, knowledge and the milieu are prioritized. As Connelly and Clandinin point out, curriculum as experience emerges

> When we set our imaginations free from the narrow notion that a [curriculum] is a series of textbooks or specific outline of topics to be covered and objectives to be attained, broader more meaningful notions emerge. A curriculum can become one's life course of action. It can mean the paths we have followed and the paths we intend to follow. In this broad sense, curriculum can be viewed as a person's life experience. (1988, p. 1)

Thinking of curriculum-as-lived experience highlights how teachers live in "the zone of between," as Aoki described it, and the potentially conflicting demands teachers face: teaching to the official curriculum or responding to the hopes, desires, and curiosities of their students or creating a path that is in-between.

Critical-political ideologies, such as critical pedagogy, focus on issues power, emancipation from oppression and go beyond a focus on the learning experience and an attempt to expose the underlying values of the curriculum and analyze issues of social and economic inequality, racial and gender relations. The aim of critical pedagogy is social reconstruction or transformation as well as cultural renewal. Obtaining social justice and democratic social relations in society is understood as part of the processes of teaching and learning. Education is never a neutral process. Critical pedagogy is understood and enacted in many ways (Ross, 2018). Its foundation is the thought and work of Paulo Freire (1970) whose problem posing approach and emphasis on critical consciousness provides opposition to the traditional banking method of education (e.g., fill students heads with information). The core idea of critical pedagogy is to submit received understandings to critical analysis with the aim of increasing human knowledge and freedom. Shor (1992) provides a straightforward description of critical pedagogy:

> Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse. (Shor, 1992, p. 129)

Other ideologies that have been identified and described by curriculum scholars including longstanding and popular curriculum conceptions such as academic rationalism (focusing on the disciplines, knowledge-driven, with development of the mind as a key focus); theo-religious ideologies (curriculum based on religious traditions, authority, dogma); and existential and personal-caring ideologies (focused on personal growth, self-actualization, moral decision-

making) among others (see Eisner, 1979; McKernan, 2008; Kliebard, 2004; Schiro, 2013; Schubert, 1996).

Thinking about and analyzing curriculum ideologies is a way make explicit the beliefs and assumptions that shape our understanding of the world and the actions we take. We all hold beliefs or rationales for what we do that have not been critically examined, some beliefs are adopted through tradition, imitation, authority, or dogma – beliefs or thoughts that are "unconsciously part of our mental furniture" (Dewey, 1933, p. 7). Culture is not a self-conscious or self-critical medium and we rarely recognize the extent to which our beliefs, our assumptions about what is worthwhile and our theories of action (rationales for what we do) are shaped by what we take for granted. Dewey argued that "the things which we take for granted without inquiry or reflection are just the things that determine our conscious thinking and decide our conclusions" (1916, p. 18). The antidote to these prejudices – judgements that have not been subjected to critical analysis – is "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends' (Dewey 1933, p. 9). When critically examining the ideological frameworks, we have adopted or work within it is important to remember that every ideology:

- Harbors explicit and implicit beliefs, values, and virtues;
- Legitimizes certain educational practices and negatively sanctions others;
- Has some form of political potential and support;
- Suggests different roles for the teacher and learner;
- Suggests different kinds of access to knowledge (How much? What kind of knowledge? For whom?);
- Suggests an educational climate in which teachers and learners must work;

- Suggests what is included, excluded and formally or informally made to seem legitimate;
- Suggests content and process that are "appropriate"';
- Has the potential to professionalize or de-professionalize teachers and the process of education.

What is Social Studies?

Social studies is the most inclusive of all school subjects. Stanley and Nelson, for example, define social studies education as "the study of all human enterprise over time and space" (1994, p. 266). Determining what is included in the social studies curriculum requires facing key questions about social knowledge, skills, and values, including how best to organize them with respect to specific subject matters and disciplines (e.g., history, geography, anthropology, etc.) and in relation to the unique subjectivities of teachers and their students. Given this, it is not surprising that social studies has been racked by intellectual battles over its purpose, content, and pedagogy since its very inception as a school subject in the early part of the 20th century.

The roots of today's social studies curriculum are found in the 1916 report of the Committee on Social Studies of the National Education Association's (N.E.A.'s) Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Schools. The final report of the committee, *The Social Studies in Secondary Education,* illustrates the influence of previous N.E.A. and American Historical Association committees regarding history in schools, but more importantly, emphasized the development of "good" citizenship values in students and established the pattern of course offerings in social studies that remained consistent for the past century.[2]

Throughout the twentieth century the social studies curriculum has been an ideological battleground in which such diverse curricular programs as the "life adjustment movement," progressive education, social reconstructionism, and nationalistic history have held sway at various times. The debate over the nature, purpose, and content of the social studies curriculum continues today, with competing groups variously arguing for a "social issues approach," the "disciplinary study of history and geography," or action for social justice as the most appropriate framework for the social studies curriculum (see Evans, 2004. 2007, 2015; Hursh & Ross, 2000). As with the curriculum field in general, social studies curriculum has historically been defined by a lack of strong consensus and contentiousness over it goals and methods.

But there has been at least superficial agreement that the purpose of social studies is "to prepare youth so that they possess the knowledge, values, and skills needed for active participation in society" (Marker & Mehlinger, 1992, p. 832), but the content and pedagogies of social studies education have been greatly affected by various social and political agendas. What does it mean to be a "good citizen"? Arguments have been made that students can develop "good citizenship" not only through the long-privileged study of history (Whelan, 1997), but also through the examination of contemporary social problems (Evans, 2021), public policy (Oliver & Shaver, 1966), social roles (Superka & Hawke, 1982), social taboos (Hunt & Metcalf, 1968), by becoming astute critics of one's society (Engle & Ochoa, 1988) and as part of an pedagogical and political insurgency for social and racial justice (Au. 2021; Merchant, Shear, & Au, 2022).

Competing Viewpoints within Social Studies Education

Because of the diversity of viewpoints on the meaning of citizenship education—and thus diversity in the purposes, content, and pedagogy of social studies education—social studies educators have devoted considerable attention to identifying categories and descriptions of the

major traditions with the field, you can think of these viewpoints or traditions as curriculum ideologies for the field. Various schemes have been used by researchers to make sense of the wide ranging and often conflicting purposes (Vinson, 1998). The most influential of these was developed by Barr, Barth and Shermis (1977), who grouped the various positions on the social studies curriculum into three themes: cultural transmission, social science, and reflective inquiry. Martorella's (1996) framework extends the work of Barr, Barth, and Shermis, and includes social studies education as: (1) citizenship (or cultural) transmission; (2) social science; (3) personal development; (4) reflective inquiry; and (5) informed social criticism. Each perspective is briefly summarized below.

Social Studies as Citizenship (or Cultural) Transmission

In this tradition, the purpose of social studies education is to promote student acquisition of certain nationalistic or "democratic" values via the teaching and learning of discrete, factual pieces of information drawn primarily from the canon of Western thought and culture. Content is based on the beliefs that: certain information is important to the practice of good citizenship; the nature of this information remains relatively constant over time; and this information is best determined by a consensus of authorities and experts. From this perspective, diversity of experience and multiculturalism are downplayed, ignored, or actively challenged. Cultural and social unity are proclaimed and praised. In the curriculum, history and literature dominate over such considerations as learner interests, the social sciences, social criticism, and personal-subjective development. This perspective has long been dominant in the field and has seen a resurgence (see, for example, revisions to social studies curriculum in Texas and Florida (Chavez, 2021; Foner, 2010).

Social Studies as Social Science

This tradition evolved during the Cold War and directly out of the post-Sputnik effort of social scientists to have a say in the design, development, and implementation of the social studies curriculum. From this viewpoint, each individual social discipline (e.g., political science, history, economics, geography) can be considered in terms of its own distinct structure of concepts, theories, and modes of empirical inquiry. In educational scholarship this idea was most widely and successfully advanced by psychologist Jerome Bruner (1969, 1977) and curriculum theorist J. J. Schwab (1969); it formed, in part, the basis for what became known as the "new social studies" (Fenton, 1966; Massialas, 1992).

In this tradition, citizenship education includes mastering social science concepts, generalizations, and processes to build a knowledge base for later learning. Social studies education provides students with the social scientific content and procedures for successful citizenship, and for understanding and acting upon the human condition in its historical, contemporary, political, social, economic, and cultural contexts. In general, instructional methods include those that develop within learners the characteristics of social scientists, characteristics indicative of conceptual understandings as well as modes of strategic inquiry (e.g., an anthropology course might focus conceptually on "culture" and methodologically on "ethnography" as was the case with the curriculum project Man: A Course of Study[3]).

Social studies scholars have moved away from the more traditional social studies as social science approach to disciplinary structure and toward increasingly complex interrogations of the importance of particular constructions of the specific social and historical disciplines. From this newer perspective, academics, teachers, and students all have some understanding of the structure of the various social sciences that relates to how they produce, use, and disseminate disciplinary knowledge. These ideas of disciplinary conceptualizations influence all individual

modes of teaching and learning. Thus, it is impossible to teach social studies according to any other approach without simultaneously maintaining some structural comprehension of the knowledge and modes of inquiry of the various academic disciplines. There are, however, competing and dynamic possibilities such that teachers and students may each possess a unique orientation. Within the social studies, much of this contemporary work has focused upon history education, and has emphasized multiple, complex instructional approaches, constructivist understandings of meaning, the production and interpretation of text, historical sense-making, and interdisciplinary conceptions of content (e.g., Seixas, 2004).

Social Studies as Personal Development

Focusing again on the role of citizenship education, this position reflects the belief that citizenship education should consist of developing a positive self-concept and a strong sense of personal efficacy among students. It is grounded in the idea that effective democratic citizenship involves understanding one's freedom to make choices as well as one's obligation and responsibility to live with their ultimate outcomes. Social studies content is selected and pursued by the students themselves so that it is embedded in the nature, needs, and interests of the learners. Instructional methods are shared between teachers and students, but include techniques such as Kilpatrick's "project method," various forms of individualized instruction, and the Socratic method of dialogue. For in essence, this approach evolved out of the child-centered progressive education movement of the early 20th century and within the settings of humanistic psychology and existential philosophy. Its best-known contemporary advocates include Nel Noddings (1992) and in the social studies scholars such as Pearl Oliner (1983).

Social Studies as Reflective Inquiry

This approach to social studies developed originally out of the work of John Dewey (1933), particularly his socio-cognitive psychology and philosophical pragmatism. From this position, citizenship remains the core of the social studies. But unlike citizenship transmission, in which citizenship rests on the acquisition of pre-established values and content, or social science, where citizenship involves the range of academic social disciplines, citizenship here stresses relevant problem-solving, or meaningful decision-making within a specific socio-political context.

From this perspective, then, the purpose of social studies education is nurturing within students' abilities necessary for decision making in some specified socio-political context (e.g., liberal democratic capitalism), especially with respect to social and personal problems that directly affect individual students. This presupposes a necessary connection between democracy and problem solving, one in which the key assumption behind this link is that within the social-political system significant problems rarely imply a single, overt, or "correct" solution. Such problems frequently require decisions between several perceived good solutions and/or several perceived bad solutions. Democracy thus necessitates a citizenry capable of and competent in the identification of problems, the collection, evaluation, and analysis of data, and the making of reasoned decisions. Dewey's work on democratic reflective thinking led to the evolution of a powerful pragmatic theory of education, prominent during the early to middle post-World War II era, spearheaded in social education by Hunt and Metcalf (1968) and Engle (1987). The continuing influence of this tradition in social studies is found in works by authors such as Evans (2021) and Ross (1994). By carrying forward Dewey's legacy, these scholars offer an alternative to the social sciences per se and to contemporary "back to basics" movements, one grounded in reflective decision making centered on so-called "closed areas" or taboo topics representing a

precise time and place—or, more precisely, problem solving within a specific socio-political context.

Social Studies as Informed Social Criticism

This framework is rooted in the work of social reconstructionists (Brameld, 1956; Counts, 1932) and related to the more recent work of "socialization-countersocialization" theorists (Engle & Ochoa, 1988) and critical pedagogues.[4] The contemporary literature primarily addresses themes such as the hidden curriculum, socio-cultural transformation, and the nature and meaning of knowledge and truth. The work of Nelson (e.g., 1985; Nelson & Pang, 2014), Stanley (1985), and Hursh and Ross (2017), along with the contributors to this book perhaps best represents the status of this tradition.

From this standpoint the purpose of social studies is citizenship education aimed at providing students opportunities for an examination, critique, and revision of past traditions, existing social practices, and modes of problem solving. It is a citizenship education directed toward:

> Social transformation [as] defined as the continuing improvement of…society by applying social criticism and ethical decision making to social issues and using the values of justice and equality as grounds for assessing the direction of social change that should be pursued. (Stanley & Nelson, 1986, p. 530)

Social studies content in this tradition challenges the injustices of the status quo. It counters knowledge that is: generated by and supportive of society's elites; rooted in logical positivism; and consistent with social reproduction and the replication of a society that is classist, sexist, and racist. While it is specific to individual classroom settings and students, it can include, for example, redressing the needs of the disadvantaged, increasing human rights conditions and

stimulating environmental improvements. Moreover, teachers and students here may claim their own knowledges—their content, their individual and cultural experiences—as legitimate. Instruction methods in this tradition are situational, but are oriented away from lecture and information transmission and toward such processes as "reflective thinking" and the dialogical method (Shor & Freire, 1987), socio-cultural criticism, textual analysis, deconstruction (Cherryholmes, 1980, 1982), problem-solving, critical thinking, and social action.

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Of course, in the real world we rarely encounter social studies teaching and learning that is completely and exclusively "true" to a single tradition or perspective, so it is important to remember that these categories are heuristics to be used in making sense of where one stands as a teacher in relation to the field, to identify the ideological foundations of official curriculum, and to understand and guide an analysis of what the purposes, problems, and possibilities of the social studies are or should be.

What you will find in this book is a collection of perspectives that generally cut across or merge emphases on social studies as personal development and reflective inquiry with a clear central commitment to social studies as informed social criticism. As mentioned above this critical orientation to social studies teaching and learning is a longstanding perspective in the field, but also a perspective that has, for the most part, remained marginalized in mainstream of schooling because it calls into question the status quo and hegemonic worldviews that create oppressive social, cultural, and economic conditions. But there are examples of social studies as informed social criticism having broad uptake in schools. In his book *This Happened in America*, Evans (2007) describes the work of Harold O. Rugg, a progressive professor at Teachers College, Columbia University and a leader of the 1930s "social frontier" group that argued that

schools should play an important role in reconstructing in more socially and economically just ways. Rugg's best-selling social studies textbooks were attacked by business and patriotic groups and ultimately removed from schools. In the 1960s and 1970s there were various progressive and critical approaches schooling in North America, many informed by anarchist principles that flourished in public and private schools (see Miller, 2002) and these ideas are still driving teaching and learning in various formal and informal educational contexts (e.g., Haworth & Elmore, 2017; Hern, 2007).

Today social studies education is confronted with powerful challenges from social and political forces grounded in authoritarian politics, white supremacy, and conservative religious groups that seek to impose their values on others.

> Teachers, schools, and school districts are threatened with punishment if teachers express unsanctioned views on contemporary or historical issues, introduce content and concepts that could hypothetically make a student feel uncomfortable in class, or recognize the diversity of the student population. Government funds support schools run by religious fundamentalists. (Singer, 2023, n.p.)

Singer is describing the current situation in the United States where at least 42 states have passed legislation restricting the teaching of race, racism, and gender and sexual orientation, these "educational gag orders" effect the curriculum experiences 18 million public school students.[5]

In Canada, there have been recent attacks on drag story times, banners strung over highways targeting the LGBTQ+ community, and hateful rhetoric suggesting that gender identity education in schools is grooming children. Two students and a professor were injured in a University of Waterloo stabbing during a gender issues class. It has been reported that the

planned act was motivated by hate related to gender expression and gender identity (Baig, 2023). As in the U.S – where the American Civil Liberties Union reports there are nearly 500 anti-LGBTQ+ bills that targeting transgender people, limiting local protection and allowing the use of religion to discriminate – there is a rise in anti-LGBTQ+ hate, violence, and threats in Canada (Ryan, 2023).

There is a current phenomenon of history — and history and social studies curriculum — being re-written in illiberal democracies across the world and in many U.S. states.[6] For example, a 2023 Florida law restricts how teachers and professors in the state's public schools and universities can teach about the racial oppression of African Americans. The law, known as SB 266, forbids teaching that "systemic racism is 'inherent in the institutions of the United States.'[7] Similarly, they cannot teach that it was designed 'to maintain social, political and economic iniquities" (Davis & Kane, 2023). The Florida law is similar to what is happening in illiberal democracies of Israel, Turkey, Russia, Poland. Davis and Kane (2023) describe it this way:

1. **Invent a threat that taps into anxieties and then declare war against it.** In Florida the phantom threat is "wokeness" a reference to the Black Lives Matter movement. To be "woke" is to be self-aware and committed to racial justice. Russian president Putin claims the invasion of Ukraine is to "denazify" the country; Turkey's president Erdoğan labels critics of state violence "terrorist" and academics who signed a peace petition condemning Turkey's violence against Kurdish citizens face trials, convictions and jail time for "spreading terrorist propaganda."
2. **Criminalize historical discussions.** Once the fake threat is created, leaders use it to create new laws to criminalize speech and critical discussion. In Russia, Putin uses "memory laws" to supress knowledge of Stalin's crimes against the Soviet people; in

2018 Poland enacted “memory laws” to defend the “good name” of Poland from accusations of complicity in the Holocaust and history who defied the law have faced harassment and death threats; in Turkey the government has a law against “denigrating the Turkish nation” that makes it a crime to acknowledge the Armenian genocide. Florida’s SB 266 requires general education courses to “provide instruction on the historical background and philosophical foundation of Western civilization and this nation’s historical documents.” And it prohibits general education core courses from “teaching certain topics or presenting information in specified ways.” Davis and Kane point out that vagueness of the law precludes teaching anything related to the United States’ history of racism.

3. **Punish transgressors.** Once laws criminalizing dissenting interpretations of history are in place, governments can punish violators (e.g., threats of arrest and imprisonment; stripping funding from schools or universities). In this way Israel’s 2011 Nakba Law authorizes funding cuts to institutions that acknowledge the Nakba (the displacement of the majority of the Indigenous Palestinian population and destruction of their communities that resulted from the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Similarly, Florida’s SB 266 defunds diversity, equity and inclusion efforts in public post-secondary education and empowers school administrators and boards to punish teachers who defy the rules. Many Florida teachers have purged their classrooms of materials they word could land them a five year jail sentence based on Florida’s 2022 “Stop WOKE” law.
4. **Write new history.** Once actual historical events are denied or suppressed, government can then rewrite history to further impose their ideologies. In 2021, Putin

published an article that claimed Ukrainian and Russian people are one and the same. Critics correctly branded the article as a pre-emptive justification for his invasion and war on Ukraine. Florida governor Ron DeSantis like many right-wing political leaders elsewhere rewrites history by turning study of history of anti-Blackness in the U.S. into indoctrination[8] or repacking bigotry as patriotism.[9]

Racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and other oppressive ideologies know no borders. And social studies educators have a key role to play in the classroom and beyond in helping to create and advance an inclusive and democratic society that recognizes "the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human [and non-human] family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world" (United Nations, 1948). In this book (and its previous editions) you will find contributions from social studies educators committed to these principles and providing analysis social studies curriculum issues and examples that illustrate the possibilities for a social studies curriculum that contributes to an inclusive democratic society.

The chapters in Part 1 of this book explore what it means to adopt a critical stance as a social studies educator and the purposes of the social studies curriculum. Au (Chapter 1) explores the impossibility of a neutral or apolitical social studies. In Chapter 2, den Heyer provides a curricular reading of historical perspective, agency, and viral futures in social studies.[10] Marmol deconstructs social studies education using critical media analysis in Chapter 3.[11]

Part II focuses on social issues in the social studies curriculum. Race, racism, anti-racism and critical race theory are the subject of four chapters in this edition by Busey and Dowie-Chinn (Chapter 4); King, Pitts and Tulino (Chapter 5), Hawkman (Chapter 6) and Sensoy (Chapter

10).[12] Decolonizing social studies is the focus of chapters Leddy (Chapter 7) and Shear and Sabzalian (Chapter 8).[13] In Chapter 9, Sandra Schmidt explores "A Queer Agenda for Gender<>Sexuality and Social Education".[14] Part III contains chapters that explore social studies curriculum in practice: critical historical inquiry (Salinas & Blevins, Chapter 11); studying evil in social studies (van Kessel, Chapter 12); economics in social studies (Adams, Chapter 13); eco-anarchic social studies (Edwards-Schuth & Lupinacci, Chapter 14).[15] The next two chapters focus on social studies and citizenship education, "Teaching for critically engaged denizenship" (Wright, Chapter 15) and "Dangerous citizenship" (Ross, Chapter 17). Collectively these chapters put flesh on the bones of what is means to adopt a critical perspective as a social studies educator.

In the final chapter I explore what the future might hold for social studies curriculum. The short answer to this question is that future is in your hands. The ways you in which you approach your work as a social studies teacher will shape the what the curriculum is and becomes. Your encounter with curriculum is the crucible that will shape its future.

The Teacher-Curriculum Encounter

Clearly, the conceptions of curriculum and social studies are wide ranging and often in conflict with one another regarding education aims, purposes, priorities, conceptions of learners and learning, the role of teachers, nature of knowledge, etc. As a result of mandated curriculum content and student examinations, some teachers are faced with curriculum contexts designed to minimize teachers' influence, leaving little room or no room for teachers to mediate the curriculum and exercise professional judgement. "Teacher proof" curriculum reduces teachers to conduits for content and ideas developed by others, such as government ministries, textbook

authors, test developers. This separation of the conception of teachers' work from its enactment (aka division of labor) is the residue of Bobbitt's notion of curriculum and Taylorism.

Fortunately, most teachers are in a situation where there is at least some wiggle room for mediating what happens in the classroom, though there are usually limits. For example, the curriculum experience in specific classrooms may mediated by teacher but with fidelity to the formal curriculum – here teachers function as gatekeepers. In present times, it is more rare for teachers to be treated as curriculum makers, changing and transforming materials and creating new alternatives, but isn't this the circumstance that every professional teacher envisions for their work?

How should teachers respond to the circumstances where they are dwelling among various curriculum worlds which may be in conflict with the hopes, values, and desires that they bring to their work? This is yet again another question to which there is no simple answer, but here are some guideposts to follow.

What we understand about the world is determined by what the world is, who we are, and how we conduct our inquiries. Inquiry also contributes to change. In understanding any social issue, and how things change, it helps to "abstract" or start with "concrete reality" and break it down. Abstraction is like using camera lenses with different focal lengths: a zoom lens to bring a distant object into focus (what is the history of this?) or using a wide-angle lens to capture more of a scene (what is the social context of the issue now?)

A good place to start is clarifying and analyzing your own commitments (pedagogical and political), the values and beliefs that drive your practice, and creating a vision of the teacher you want to be. What are beliefs and values that shape your conception of teaching? What are your conceptions of curriculum, the nature of knowledge, assumptions about learners and

learning, the role of schools in society? Have you articulated these ideas, examined them closely, and considered their implications?[16]

Context matters, so another key part of how one navigates competing conceptions of curriculum and social studies involves observing, analyzing, and responding the present circumstances in which you find yourself. Orienting oneself in the context is important. The next step is exploring why things are as they are, even if you can only develop a partial understanding. What are the factors, the pre-conditions, that led to present circumstances? This requires attending to the nested contexts of the classroom – school, community, society – and the social forces affecting each as well as the most important connections to the past. Having a vision for the future is crucial. What would your work as a teacher look like if the pedagogical, curricular, and social contradictions you (and your students and their communities) experience were resolved? The final step in this "dance of the dialectic" is to look for the pre-conditions of your envisioned future in the present and develop tactics and strategies that lay the foundation for the future (Ollman, 2003).

Schools, and indeed all institutions, by their very existence, regulate human actions by establishing predefined patterns of conduct. But institutions are not one-way streets. Even as institutional mores have a profound, controlling effect on the practice of teachers, professors, and other professionals, individuals also affect institutional culture.

People use various social strategies when adapting to and struggling with professional workplace situations. Some chose to comply with institutional demands and adopt the belief that the constraints of the situation are for the best. It is not uncommon for teachers (and professors) to set aside their previously held beliefs or goals and assimilate into the institutional culture in which they work. The desire for institutional (and peer) approval, affirmation, and recognition as

a new professional is understandable. There are a host of concerns and risks confronting educators as they begin careers: building professional confidence, acceptance by peers, performance evaluations, contract renewals, attaining tenure, as well as the personal and financial implications of "failure." But uncritical assimilation into institutional culture carries risks too, including abandonment of personal values and principles and ultimately, perhaps, alienation from oneself and dissatisfaction with one's work.

Strategically complying with institutional demands is an alternative to internalized adjustment. Strategic compliance is a social strategy used by many educators who "work within the system" but sustain oppositional viewpoints and practices. I often talk with my students about the risk and reward structures of internalized adjustment and strategic compliance, advising them that it's preferable to stay true to yourself and have a short stay in a particular school or university as opposed to assimilating into an institutional culture to keep your job. I tell them it's better to be like a supergiant star—live fast and die young, detonating as supernova—than a white dwarf star that was once hot, but has run out of fuel, and now lacks the mass to force elements into a fusion reaction. I've also found there aren't many folks who like to think of themselves as a detonating supernova, completely disintegrating their professional selves in the process.

There is a third way. Strategic redefinition is change that causes people, including those with authority, to alter their interpretation of what is happening in a situation. I've learned from my experience in schools and universities – as a teacher, professor, university department head, and faculty union vice president – it is not very likely that one person can effect dramatic change – strategic redefinition – in the culture of an organization. My experience was affirmed at a conference for academic chairpersons, when a Harvard-based leadership expert told me that if I

thought I was going to change the culture of my department I would be better off resigning as department head immediately!

Strategic redefinition is best thought of as a strategy that requires moving away from the Hollywood ideal of a triumphant individual working within the system to the creation of self-critical communities of educators in schools and universities working collaborative toward transformative outcomes. Think of the bumper sticker truism: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Social studies curriculum, teaching and learning should be about uncovering the taken-for-granted elements in our everyday experience and making them the target of inquiry. Critical examination of the nexus of language, social relations, and practice can provide insights into our work as teachers and uncover constraints that affect our approaches to and goals for social studies. The teacher and curriculum are inextricably linked. Our efforts to improve and transform the social studies curriculum hinge on developing practices among teachers and their collaborators (colleagues, students, research workers, teacher educators, parents) that emerge from critical analyses of teaching and schooling as well as self-reflection – the exploration of practical theories employed by teachers and the actions that they guide.

In the end, the question is whether social studies education will promote citizenship that is adaptive to the status quo and interests of the socially powerful or whether it will promote a transformative citizenship that aims to reconstruct society in more equitable and socially just ways. Social studies teachers are positioned to provide the answer.

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[1] In *Through These Eyes* (2004), a documentary film about the 1960s social studies curriculum project Man: A Course of Study, project leader and cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner says "It comes head-on when you take a look at the whole conception of trying to use another culture as a medium for making one more aware of one's own culture. I'm not saying that the only important thing in the world is awareness, but I'm saying that without awareness, there is moral and metal death."

[2] See Jorgensen (2012; 2014) for more on the history of social studies as school subject.

[3] Man: A Course of Study (MACOS) is a curriculum project from the 1970s, funded by the National Science Foundation. Students studied the lives and culture of the Inuit of the Canadian Artic to see their own society in a new and different way. Students were asked to consider the questions: What is human about human beings? How did they get that way? How can they be made more so? The core curriculum materials included the Netsilik Film Series, which captured a year in the life of an Inuit family and became an acclaimed achievement in visual anthropology. The curriculum, and particularly the films, became the subject of a major political and educational controversy in the United States. Print materials from the project are available for non-commercial use at http://www.macosonline.org. The documentary *Through*

These Eyes (Laird, 2004) examines the curriculum and the controversy it sparked and includes excerpts from the Netsilik Film Series. *Through These Eyes* (http://www.nfb.ca/film/through_these_eyes/) and the Netsilik Film Series (http://www.nfb.ca/explore-all-directors/quentin-brown) can also be viewed on the website of the National Film Board.

[4] Also important here are earlier works by authors such as Anyon (1979); Bowles & Gintis (1976), Freire (1970), and Willis (1977/1981).

[5] See: Eesha Pendharkar, "Efforts to Ban Critical Race Theory Could Restrict Teaching for a Third of America's Kids." Education Week, January 7, 2022, https://www.edweek.org/leadership/efforts-to-ban-critical-race-theory-now-restrict-teaching-for-a-third-of-americas-kids/2022/01; Sarah Schwartz, "Map: Where Critical Race Theory Is Under Attack," Education Week, January 25, 2023, https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06.

[6] An illiberal democracy or post-democracy is when democratic institutions exist formally but their substance has disappeared (Couch, 2004). Put another way, illiberal democracy is when a government or governmental system hides it's non-democratic practices behind formally democratic institutions and procedures (Bonet & Zamorano, 2021).

[7] Florida's SB 266 is part of Governor Ron DeSantis' war on "wokeness" which includes an ongoing book banning campaign; rejection of AP African American Studies course with the Stop WOKE Act; eliminating diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in universities; reviewing course content to ensure it aligns with the new legislation; dismantling tenure; ending health care funding for gender-affirming health care; and staging a "hostile takeover" of the progressive New College of Florida (Cineas, 2023).

[8] *Tampa Bay Times* reports "Gov. Ron DeSantis repeatedly says he opposes indoctrination in schools. Yet his administration in early July approved materials from a conservative group that says it's all about indoctrination and "changing minds" (Ceballos, 2023).

[9] DeSantis' handpicked Florida Board of Education has approved social studies curriculum that requires middle school students be taught the "benefits" of slavery such as, "how slaves developed skills which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit" (Bouie, 2023).

[10] For other perspectives on the future of social studies see: DeLeon (2007) and Marker (2006).

[11] For more on critical media literacy in social studies education see Orlowski (2014).

[12] I encourage you to also read and study the work of Ladson-Billings (2001; 2022; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson Billings, 2023); Valerie Pang (Pang & Nelson, 2006); Vickery and Rodríguez (2022); Shatara (2022); An (2016); La Familia Aponte-Safe Tirado Díaz Beltrán Ender Busey Christ (2022); Merchant, Shear & Au (2022) and many other social studies scholars writing on issues of race, racism, and critical race theory.

[13] For more on Indigenizing social studies see the work of Four Arrows (2007; 2019), Sabzalian, Shear and Snyder (2021); Turtle Island Social Studies Collective (2022a; 2022b) and Rains (2006).

[14] Excellent sources on sexual orientation and gender identity and the social studies curriculum include: Crocco (2006); Dozono (2022); Keenan (2017); (Loutzenheiser (2014). See also chapters on gender and feminism by Noddings (1992) and Bernard-Powers (2001).

[15] For more work on eco-politics, anarchism, community and sustainability, class struggle and radical politics in social studies see: DeLeon and Ross (2010); Houser (2014); Queen, (2014); Malott and Pruyn (2014).

[16] Inspired by John Dewey's "My Pedagogical Creed" (1897) I ask my students to write their own as a way of making explicit the values and beliefs that are the foundation for their teaching practice and as a source for analyzing their teaching. Begin with the writing prompt "I believe…" and create at least 5 statements illustrating your thinking about social studies education (e.g., curriculum, teaching, students, social context of schools, etc.). For each statement, include a paragraph illustrating your thinking, experiences, and the implications of this statement for your teaching practice. Several years ago, I, along with a group of other social studies educators, wrote our pedagogical creeds, see Totten (2015).