

International Perspectives

From the International Perspectives Editor

The *Journal of International Social Studies* welcomes you to a new international section. Social studies, unlike other areas of education, is unique in the sense that we still debate its many aspects, including its goals and content. One aspect of social studies that is particularly elusive is its internationality. We routinely use the term *international social studies*—we even have a *Journal of International Social Studies*—but it is still not clear what the term connotes. The lack of a clear definition is normally harmful: it disorients researchers, shifts the focus of the problem, taints the rationale of research in a given area, and may eventually result in a vague and amorphous result. On the other hand, the lack of a clear definition is sometimes beneficial: scholars are free in their conceptualizations and interpretations of a phenomenon. I believe we need at least an operational definition or definitions so that we spend less time deconstructing the phenomenon of international social studies and more time studying it.

It seems the term *international social studies* has several dimensions. The first is its global dimension or the ways in which social studies is taught around the world and positioned in various national or local systems of education. The greatest challenge within this dimension is the acknowledged institutionalized status of social studies in some educational systems and the lack thereof in others. This challenge is further exacerbated by well-documented “social studies wars” within national systems.

The second dimension, which can be called internal, is the ways in which social studies content addresses the array of topics that are normally referred to as international. There is little doubt that social studies or social science education is one of the most—if not *the* most—politically and ideologically determined and driven areas of education. Consequently, social studies is particularly vulnerable to changes in our fast-changing world. The examples of disconnect between changes, sometimes radical, in various nations and outdated social studies or social science curricula are abundant.

The third dimension in international social studies can be called methodological, and it concerns pedagogies. Social studies and social science education professionals have gained immense experience in teaching in various environments. It is impossible to overestimate the impact of these experiences on educators’ professional development and growth.

We hope that the *Journal of International Social Studies* will serve as a reliable platform for the exchange of such experiences and a vibrant forum for the discussion of all aspects of international social studies.

In this issue, we asked scholars from Australia, Canada, Japan, Norway, and Russia to share the challenges that social studies education faces in their respective countries and to recommend topics our journal should cover. We also welcome an article from Takeshi Miyazaki who explores the issues of introduction of service learning in teacher education in Japan.

About the International Perspectives Editor

Anatoli Rapoport is Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Purdue University College of Education. Before he received Ph. D. in Social Studies Education, he had worked as classroom teacher and school administrator. Since 1999 he has actively participated in international programs for educators. Dr. Rapoport is the past Chair of Citizenship and Democratic Education Special Interest Group (CANDE SIG) of Comparative and International Education Society. His research interests include: comparative aspects of education, influence of culture and ideology on education, and global and international perspectives in citizenship education.

Challenges of Social Studies Education: Views from Around the World.

What problems do social studies or social science education face in different countries? I asked this question our guests: Dr. David Zyngier (Monash University, Australia), Dr. Alan Sears (University of New Brunswick, Canada), Dr. Takeshi Myazaki (Soka University, Japan), Dr. Heidi Biseth (Buskerud University College, Norway), and Dr. Andrey Ioffe (Russian Academy of Education). I also asked our guests to recommend topics that will make the *Journal of International Social Studies* more attractive for international readership.

Dr. David Zyngier - Senior Lecturer in Curriculum & Pedagogy, Monash University, Australia

What challenges does social studies education face in Australia?

Now more than ever before, young people need and deserve a social education that will allow them to develop understandings of the varied dimensions of their world; the past, present, future; local, national, regional and global perspectives, and most importantly, opportunities to develop critical perspectives on the issues of our times. Social studies in Australia is under attack from neo-liberal reconfiguration of curriculum with an emphasis on Australian (white, male and main-stream) History and the parliamentary procedures of Civics as distinct from teaching about society.

We need a thorough and carefully considered debate about the place of SOSE [Studies of Society and Environment] in schooling. While Australian history is important for all young Australians, achieving a balanced curriculum is what is critical. The curriculum for the future should not be fragmented into separate disciplines. It is especially important for students to see the connections and interdictions between all parts of their social world and the environment. Students need practice in considering topics through these multi-disciplinary lenses, and indeed, this is integral to the federal government's current commitment to Education for Sustainability. Such multi-perspective practice can only occur through SOSE, where it is expected that all discipline perspectives would be considered with integrity.

It is much easier for SOSE than for separate discipline subjects to take on board initiatives in

education such as has been the case with Civics and Citizenship Education (CCE), Education for Sustainability, Global Education, Asian Studies, Values Education and Futures Studies, as all of these are holistic and multidisciplinary in nature. If cultural studies and Civics (and it is assumed. Education for Sustainability, and whatever else comes along) are tacked onto separate History and Geography, students might just as well be doing an integrated subject. However, with an integrated subject, the intention would be for those perspectives to be coherently planned and not simply appendages. However, it needs to be reiterated that the basis for focused learning in SOSE still involves the content, concepts and skills from the main social science disciplines.

What topics, issues, or problems should JISS address to attract international readership?

Comparative analysis of attacks on studies of society; new innovations and curricula design; teaching innovations about studies of society at University and especially in teacher preparation courses.

Dr. Alan Sears – Professor of Social Studies Education, University of New Brunswick, Canada.

What are the main challenges to social studies education in Canada?

There are several significant challenges to social studies education in Canada. One is the lack of a national scholarly and professional community in the field. Responsibility for education in Canada lies with the provinces and there is no federal department or office of education. Consequently, curricula vary from province to province and there is no national organization of social studies professional and academics analogous to NCSS. There is a journal titled *Canadian Social Studies* but it has struggled to maintain its existence. Social studies in Canada would be strengthened by more opportunities for social studies educators from across the country to meet together and collaborate.

Another implication for social studies of the absence of federal presence in education is the lack of any national discussion of the goals or purposes of social studies education in general or its constituent parts (i.e. history education, citizenship education). Australia, England, and the United States, for example, have all had national initiatives related to standards for several areas related to social studies but that kind of discussion has never taken place in Canada.

A second challenge for social studies in Canada is its low status as a curricular priority. Across the country there is an overweening focus on subjects considered to be more practical or relevant to the economy. Standardized tests, for example, focus on literacy, math, and science with only one province having a regular assessment program related to social studies.

A third challenge that leads from the second is a significant lack of capacity in Canada for meeting the stated outcomes of social studies curricula. Some key areas where capacity is lacking include: both pre and in service teacher education in social studies (especially for elementary teachers); the development of exemplary teaching resources to support current

curricular approaches to teaching social studies, and support for research about and assessment of social studies programs. One article comparing Canada's capacity in this area to that of other countries was titled, "Citizenship Education: Canada Dabbles While the World Plays On." [Hughes and Sears, 2006, <http://www.cea-ace.ca/education-canada/article/citizenship-education-canada-dabbles-while-world-plays>]

What topics, issues, or problems should be addressed in IJSS to make it more interesting for an international audience?

The journal might consider some special theme issues around how key areas of social studies are dealt with in jurisdictions around the world. Some themes might include: history education, citizenship education, multicultural or diversity education, the place of religion in social education (I would love to guest edit an issue on this topic). Authors could be asked to address common questions and a set of commentators might seek to respond highlighting areas of agreement, controversy, and possible directions for new work. The best of comparative work provides an opportunity for dialogue and learning from each other about common problems and issues and the journal might seek to foster that kind of work.

Dr. Takeshi Myazaki – Associate Professor, Graduate School of Teacher Education, Soka University, Japan

What are the main challenges to social studies education in Japan?

Despite the efforts of social studies educators, the social studies being taught in the field is based on memorization. This is especially obvious in secondary education. Students are required to understand the information and efficiently memorize and retain facts. Some of the reasons are as follows:

The need for information or study material to correspond with material on entrance exams; Social studies, for secondary education, is a combination of civics, history and geography. Students need to master all these topics for high school and university entrance exam. For this reason teachers often develop their lessons based on what expect students to know for the exam.

The pursuit of objective assessment; the reality is that, while methods of multifaceted assessment are being adopted, teachers can't help but depend on paper tests. The paper tests are required because of the objectivity and accountability that they offer.

The amount of content that needs to be taught has increased; as a result teachers are not covering all of the material in the textbook. Due to the limited time, teachers mostly teach facts instead of teaching critical thinking.

A second challenge is the need to nurture citizens who participate in society. Social studies is a subject that teaches people to be aware of the workings of democracy. Students should learn about political decisions not only by words, but also through real experience, though most of the time this is not the case. In practice, Japanese youth lack interest in politics, and

the desire to volunteer to solve social problems. Voter turnout among young voters is extremely low.

A third challenge is the need to foster global citizenship. The sequence for social studies starts with the study of the development of a small political unit, for example, a ward or a town. Gradually this expands to the level of the country. This nurtures a sense of understandings, and love for a country. Our efforts to bring a global perspective in order to create global citizens have been insufficient.

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How do we foster the capability of students to participate in society?

What is the best way to teach social studies and civics with a global perspective?

What are the limits and restrictions that the national standards system has in each country and how are social studies teachers restricted by such limits? For example, what are some conflicts that can arise when minority groups assimilate into another culture?

Dr. Heidi Biseth - Associate Professor, Buskerud University College, Senior Advisor Education, Save the Children Norway

What are the main challenges to social studies education in Norway?

Social Studies Education in Norway post-July 20 2011. Norway is considered a well-established democracy. More than 95 percent of the students attend the public school system and all schools have to comply with the National Curricula. This provides a rather cohesive national education which has to, according to Educational Act, promote democracy, human rights, equality, and respect for the individual's convictions. An act of terror took place in Norway on the 22nd of July 2011, something that has had a major impact on Norwegian society. 77 people were killed based on the acts of one man, Anders Behring Breivik. A car bomb was planted at the Government buildings downtown Oslo and the perpetrator went on a killing spree at a political youth camp. He was convinced that immigrants in Norway are a threat to social, economic and political cohesion and that politicians are not handling the situation appropriately. During the first six months of 2012 his court case took place. One of the core issues discussed both in court and in the media was whether Behring Breivik could be counted as sane or insane at the time of his acts. The reluctance to understand his far-right military ideology and political conviction as belonging to a sane person was obviously demanding. The Norwegian society is characterized by its focus on equality as meaning "sameness", implying that what is considered not belonging to societal mainstream is a topic difficult to discuss. Diversity in religion, life-style, and extreme political views (cf. Behring Breivik) are subjects challenging to discuss in school in general and in social studies in particular. Making diversity the normal state of affairs in a democracy is a huge task for social studies education, particularly post-July 20 2012.

What topics, issues, or problems should be addressed in IJSS to make it more interesting for an international audience?

Based on the above, it is highly appreciated if JISS could address how it is possible for education to handle deviating ideologies in society, what can we expect in of diversity in a democratic society, and practical examples on how social science teachers deal with these complex topics.

Dr. Andrey Ioffe – Senior Researcher, Russian Academy of Education, Russian Academy of Teacher Professional Development

What are the main challenges to social studies education in Russia?

There is an interdisciplinary course Study of Society (*Obshchestvoznaniye*) that is a part of a national social science curriculum along with History and Geography. These courses are taught separately in secondary school. New academic standards were adopted in 2010-2012. Their implementation will be completed in 2020. According to the new standards, a number of new subjects will be introduced in the high school: *Economics, Law, and Russia in the World*. The latter is planned as an integrated course that will include topics from history, geography, and sociology. However, it is still not clear how this course will function. In the 4th grade, students will take the course *Basics of Religious Culture and Secular Ethics*. Within this course, the students select one of six possible modules, four of which cover fundamentals of Russia's traditional (i.e. officially supported) religions (Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism) while the other two teach about basic nondenominational religious ideas and secular ethics. Although there is no nationally required course in civics, there are debates on how to improve citizenship education. Currently, a new state program and conception of citizenship education in Russia are being discussed.

The following are the challenges that the social science curriculum faces in Russia:

What sciences should be included into social science curriculum, and into Study of Society in particular? Many complain that currently this subject is overloaded with philosophy, social psychology and sociology.

How does Study of Society correlate with citizenship education? One can point to the topics of politics, economy, or law that bridge the former and the latter but those topics are usually overly theoretical rather than practical.

What is most important in teaching Study of Society: social theories, skills, or broadmindedness? There is still no consensus among specialists.

How to make social science curriculum more relevant to everyday needs? There are a lot of contradictions: between the theory of democratic development and day-to-day practice in Russia; between what we teach in schools and what students see around them; generation gap and as a consequence a tension between young people's needs and outdated curricula.

What topics, issues, or problems should be addressed in IJSS to make it more interesting for an international audience?

Innovative methods (e. g. projects, research-based learning, work with primary documents, games) in the social science classroom: methods, techniques, and evaluation of results.

The latest research in the use of the Internet and educational and instructional technologies in social science education.

Learning styles and student motivation in social science subject areas.

Reflective teaching methods.

Comparative research and analysis of social science standards, models of teaching, or content in various countries