

## **In Response to NCLB: A Case for Retaining the Social Studies**

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### **Abstract**

The proliferation of state standards, high-stakes accountability, and mandates stemming from the No Child Left Behind Act have worked to sever social studies from the common experience in many schools and has prompted a myopic interest in low-level declarative knowledge. This paper examines the consequences of NCLB for social studies education and provides a defense through the lenses of the learner, the subject matter, and the values of society, as well as a rationale for entrenching and strengthening the social studies given this formidable challenge.

### **Introduction**

The enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002 was not an isolated attempt to reform education. Rooted in the evolutionary and paradigmatic changes following Sputnik, the reform movements of the 1960's directed toward the economically disadvantaged, and the oft repeated demands for a world class education, NCLB is the manifestation of broader political, social, and economic goals. More recently, interest in and proliferation of state standards and high-stakes accountability mechanisms created the context for legislation that demands that students be 100% proficiency by 2014. Embedded in high-stakes testing is the assumption that improvements in education will necessarily result from accountability and testing, though scant evidence supports this claim (Brennan, 2004). Although a high degree of variability exists among and within states about what the fulcrum concepts 'proficiency' and 'challenging' actually mean (McCombs & Kirby, 2004), the premise of ensuring basic and fundamental achievement among all members of society is both remarkable and laudatory.

Assuming that all students could achieve a meaningful level of proficiency in mathematics, reading, writing, and science, which is currently an untenable proposition, numerous problems with NCLB would still persist. For example, students with limited English proficiency, learning disabilities, or a low income background, would no longer require societal attention if they were deemed proficient. Moreover, by addressing the needs of only those students at or near proficient territory, we overlook the needs of average and above-average students (Brennan, 2004). But rather than provide a cursory overview of these problems, this paper seeks to focus on the consequences of NCLB for

social studies education in a democratic society and provide a defense of the social studies through the lenses of learners, the subject matter, and the values of society.

### **Marginalizing the Social Studies**

The skills and knowledge privileged in state standards, which are actually assessed for NCLB proficiency standards, fail to include the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of social studies. Perhaps this is due to the contentious debates in the 1990's concerning national history standards, whereby "no government body dares go near history assessments again" (Rabb, 2004, p. 21). At first glance, this might be viewed as a major benefit that would minimize the risk of teaching the social studies in rote, declarative, and low-level ways, but it also sends a message to administrators and policymakers that the social studies are expendable. After all, NCLB focuses on narrowing and simplifying the macro-curriculum, whereby students are taught skills and content that train, rather than educate (Rabb, 2004). Instead of preparing students for future life as democratic citizens, the result of accountability of this kind is a diminution of the curriculum which sorts students and their schools through standardized testing (Marshak, 2003). As a result, NCLB is considered by some to be the "worst thing that has ever happened to social studies" (Instructors Say, 2005).

The amount of instructional time devoted to social studies instruction has declined since the passage of NCLB, though most markedly within elementary, middle, and low performing schools (Manzo, 2005). Because elementary and middle schools were initially the primary focus of NCLB, teachers tended to sacrifice social studies instruction in favor of remediation in those subject areas which are tested (Knighton, 2003; Manzo, 2005). The U.S. Department of Education has responded to this decline, noting that history is a core subject area which is part of a "well rounded" curriculum and that it is "deeply distressing to hear that some schools and school districts out there are not focusing on history" (Manzo, 2005). Given the unrealistic demands and real consequences of failing to reach proficiency, however, declining instruction should come at no surprise. In Florida, for example, students can purportedly complete their high school education without taking a social studies course and social studies teachers receive fewer professional development opportunities that teachers in other disciplines (Rosenfield, 2004). This marginalizing consequence of NCLB is, however, incongruous with public opinion, as 81% of respondents in a recent poll voiced concern about basing school decisions on students' math and reading scores and the resultant reduction of instructional time in art, music, history, and other subjects (Rose & Gallup, 2004).

Declining instructional time is exacerbated in low-performing schools. For example, Maryland no longer tests social studies and over 50% of the state's K-5 principals have reported a decrease in time spend on social studies (Manzo, 2004). Rather than teach history, many schools have instituted a three-hour block to teach reading, in addition to math and other subjects. If a student attends low-performing elementary and middle-schools in some California districts, "they won't have history until they're 15 or 16, and all they'll have is 20<sup>th</sup> Century history" (Manzo, 2005). Under NCLB, low-performing schools need to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP), which

means that students who fail to perform at proficient levels are less likely to receive a substantive citizenship education in favor of remediation. The result is that many of these students will not receive the necessary tools for transforming systemic societal inequities and injustices.

But marginalizing social studies education and focusing on basic proficiencies is incongruous with the stated aims of NCLB, which seek to reduce the achievement gap and provide more opportunities to low-performing students. Not only will a focus on standards and testing fail to yield significant citizenship benefits, but the impoverished educational experience will neglect the skills necessary for college and employment. The skills required to succeed in high-growth jobs or post-secondary education include the ability to read and interpret materials, judge the credibility of sources, make evaluations of arguments, write effectively, and understand complex information (McCombs & Kirby, 2004), which are often cultivated in the social studies. The narrowing of curricula and focus on lower-order skills therefore creates unintended consequences (Mathis, 2003) that are inimical to the historical context which NCLB is situated. As a result of NCLB, students will be able to read and count “but certainly not [be able] to think, let alone understand how they have been shaped by their past” (Rabb, 2004, p. 21). Focusing on basic academic knowledge and skills minimize the vital importance of preparing students for active membership in their communities as future citizens and workers (Manzo, 2005).

### **Education in a Democracy**

In contrast to democracies, totalitarian states aim for student acceptance of specific attitudes and habits, as well as an awareness of a body of facts that are carefully selected for consumption. Primarily, the difference between totalitarian and democratic education is that totalitarian societies have a specific end-in-view while democracies do not. In a democracy, the *process* of education is exceedingly significant as students must develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions in ways that perpetuate free, active, and harmonious social life with no definite end, for ends change as a result of new experiences. Democratic education challenges students to judge the ways societal values and standards originate and are perpetuated, while totalitarian states seek to minimize these “occasions for doubt” (Griffin, 1942, p. 84). Learning experiences in keeping with NCLB demands for accountability tend not to be those that engage in expressions of doubt and the questioning of beliefs and values. This is symbolic of a larger statement about what our society values and trajectory. As society continually negotiates the degree to which students will rationally grapple with closed and grey areas, we are simultaneously deciding whether our society will become more totalitarian or democratic (Hunt & Metcalf, 1968). Democratic education requires preparing citizens to at least be able to rationally deliberate on these matters (Parker, 2003; Ross & Marker, 2005). If these conversations are not held, then the totalitarian spirit of acquiescence to state generated approbation is honored, as well as minimization of students overhauling their beliefs and assumptions within the light of reason.

The current focus on individual academic learning leaves little room for experiences that develop necessary responsibilities to promote and enable the common good. Without background study of the social domain, content from other disciplines is isolated and removed from its social bearings and utility (Dewey, 1938). But education must prepare students to become just, responsible, and effective citizens who promote social well-being within a world community (Committee on Social Studies, 1916; Whelan, 1997). As the most inclusive of all subject areas, the social studies examine the social nature of mankind within the context of humanity across space and over time (Committee on Social Studies, 1916; Ross, 1997). In short, the purpose of the social studies is to prepare students for active participation in civic life (Ross, 1997) and to help young people “develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (NCSS, p. vii).

Because citizenship is the central purpose of the social studies, as well as the bedrock upon which schooling functions (Hamot, 2000), it is necessary to delineate those attributes which would demonstrate competency or even proficiency. High (1962) suggested that students need to develop social competence, including learning how to live with others locally, globally, and nationally; moral competence, including knowledge and use of acceptable systems of judgment; personal adjustment, or having the ability to participate harmoniously within groups; global awareness, including knowledge of humanity and its place within environmental, technological, and cultural milieus; political competence, involving legal and moral participation in the democratic process; as well as skill and technical competence, which includes understanding the necessary dependence on and reciprocity with others. Social studies represent the core of study in any public institution that seeks to deliver a general education for citizenship preparation but it also contains a body of knowledge that all people ought to acquire (Levi, 1948; Whelan, 1997). The well-being of this country, as well as the world, is in many ways reliant upon the ability of future citizens to understand a body of knowledge but more importantly to learn how to think, become competent citizens, and be able to resolve the issues of significance for humanity (NCSS, 1994)

Given the nascent challenge of NCLB to the legitimacy of substantive social studies instruction, the remainder of this paper seeks to provide a rationale for keeping and strengthening it, given this formidable challenge. Following Schwab (1973) and Hlebowitsh's (2004) use of lenses drawn from the commonplaces of the educative process, this rationale will examine social studies in terms of the learner, the subject matter, and the values of society. Hopefully this explication will make clear the public interests that public schools and social studies education are charged with providing and the need to re-evaluate NCLB in light of a more refined sense of what ‘proficiency’ might mean.

### **The Learner**

The social studies have much to offer individual students as they embark on civic life, employment, and further education. First, the social studies is well-suited for

enabling students to understand multiple perspectives, across both time and space, which is necessary for harmonious and profitable life in a multicultural society. Second, students in social studies classes are faced with reckoning the individual and communal life ultimately acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for cooperative living that recognize the equality and dignity of all, as well as the need to consider the impact of individual acts on the common good. Third, social studies students learn to think reflectively and deliberatively, which enables them to solve problems, make good decisions, and become active citizens. Finally, social studies education prepares students to disrupt prejudices, reconsider the status quo, and engage in critical inquiry of the values and assumptions that undergird society.

### **Multiple Perspectives**

The ability to view the world through multiple perspectives requires learning from others, listening, recognizing the value of diversity, as well as widening the consciousness of students so they can recognize their connection to the world at large. Through the social studies, students move beyond mere toleration of alternative views and are asked to recognize and embrace the *utility* of diverse opinions and perspectives for solving problems. Moreover, when students contemplate diverse opinions and perspectives they achieve other skills and dispositions, such as open-mindedness, skepticism, reflection, and fairness, which also constitute moral tools. Ultimately these attributes lead to social responsibility, which is the ability to *see* others who are not directly involved when reflection occurs, but who are involved over time and space, which in turn requires that students use multiple perspectives and make connections between individuals, society, and the world (Bigelow, 2000; Singer, 2000; Hartoonian, 2001).

Viewing the world from multiple perspectives requires that students learn from others. The way in which this is done has profound implications for the kind and quality of perspective that students gain. Student consideration of others and otherness is a highly ethical activity requiring attention, listening skills, and knowledge gained about the condition of others (Todd, 2003). Responsible and ethical responses to others demands an open and receptive stance to beliefs and opinions, which in turn requires listening in such a way as to not obfuscate the experiences and information that others provide.

In the social studies multiple perspectives penetrate student construction of views (Wade, 2004) and simplistic conceptions of right and wrong are complicated and investigated. The shared undertakings and experiences that students enjoy in social studies classes are fundamental not only for civic life, but for a just society (Dewey, 1916). Civic questions such as “how ought people be treated and how should disputes between people be resolved?” require students to extend their views and use the best available evidence to make reasoned judgments (Wright, 1993, p. 149). The socializing nature of social studies education allows students to recognize and understand the views of their colleagues, but there is also a need for depth and breadth of information, as well as opportunities to make rational and balanced assessments. This ability to reason

together, discuss issues, and share knowledge is necessary for a participatory democracy (Morse, 1993) and for developing socially informed and reflectively moral individuals.

Students living in diverse and multicultural societies need to understand other points of view, structures of inequality that affect the affairs of others, and consider how society can be more just and equitable as a result of analyzing privilege, identity, subordination, and power (Hursh, 1997; Tatum, 2000). The social studies also address multicultural issues, which increases the number of perspectives that students examine as they seek out honest representations of women, the poor, and minorities. These perspectives ultimately draw on competing views of truth, multiple sources of knowledge, as well as the common values of our democracy (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2004). Although multiculturalism has failed to address economic and class perspectives because of its focus on individual cultures (Sleeter, 1995), students also need to understand issues in these terms. As a result of a multicultural education, students will become more tolerant of others, be less likely to hold racist beliefs, and develop more refined views of the world from different frames of reference (Spring, 2000). Multiculturalism, when properly enacted, is not an ethnic or gender specific movement, but one which seeks to empower all students to become caring, knowledgeable, and active citizens (Banks in Nelson, et al., 2004).

### **Social Consciousness and Cooperation**

Because contemporary life is so complex and dynamic, preparing students for present or future life is often a difficult task. Therefore, each discipline must continually ask of itself what it offers to the garden variety citizens (Tyler, 1949), who are unlikely to pursue a career in the particular discipline of study, but rather seek employment and be desirous of leading a good life. To prepare students for any conceivable life path is to give them full and active use of their capacities as well as understanding the consciousness of the human race (Dewey, 1897). Because individuals are, in their isolation, nothing, education should direct individual capacities toward common aims and the betterment of society (Dewey, 1916). The social studies can meet this demand through the development of cooperation, common goals, harmony, and temperance (Purpel, 1991), as well as through disrupting prejudices and increasing tolerance (Hamot, 2000). Social studies education also prepares students for cooperative democratic life by engaging in moral issues and the concepts of liberty, equality, rights, duties, and responsibilities to others (Gagnon, 1989). As a result, the social studies achieve a primary aim of education, which is the formation of citizens, rather than individuals (Dewey, 1916).

### **Reflective Thinking**

Reflective thinking empowers students to rationally choose among options, which is the essence of citizenship in a democracy (Whelan, 1997). The reflective process, which constructs and reconstructs knowledge, has a unique place within democratic education (Griffin, 1942) as it enables the progressive transformation of society (Ross, 1997). Students learn to think reflectively in the social studies and this skill has broad

application to their lives as critical, aware, active, and rational members of society. Dewey (1933) defined reflective thought as the “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 9). Reflective thinking disrupts beliefs and prejudices by demanding warrants based on evidence, thereby making thought and action intelligent. When students learn to think reflectively, they can apply any question, problem, or doubt to the rigor of evidence collection, development of hypotheses, judgment, and testing, in order to decide whether a particular solution or action is good and defensible.

Social studies education provides a forum for students to vocally and publicly work through questions, problems, and doubts using reflective thought within the process of deliberation. Deliberation involves dialogue and debate to decide the “best course of action among alternatives” (Parker, 2003, p. 101), in the form of judging a variety of hypotheses and critically examining alternatives. In deliberation, students express their reflective activity, realize new evidence as a result of diverse experiences among group members, and reckon individual desires with those of their colleagues. As a result of deliberation, students learn how to effectively and democratically listen, talk, share, decide, and choose. Deliberation also develops a sense of justice as the group critiques dominant norms and arrives at rationally defensible beliefs that are “fair to everyone concerned” (Parker, 2003, p. 111). The social studies are uniquely qualified to both provide opportunities for reflective thought and deliberation, but also apply these methods to social, political, and economic problems that students will be engaged in during their life as citizens.

### **Prejudices and Problems**

Our society is replete with problems, many of which constitute closed areas (Hunt & Metcalf, 1968). Topics that are closed to reflective thought result in the perpetuation of beliefs and the formation of decisions which are based on blind impulse, emotion, and prejudice. When closed areas are not uncovered in the school, prejudices are not corrected and progress cannot be made. Effective social studies instruction requires that students practice dealing with decisions that have no right or wrong answers (Morse, 1993), rather than advance abstract and unassailable assertions, such as the ‘value of freedom,’ that ultimately have no corresponding reality in civic life (Levitt & Longstreet, 1993). Opening closed areas and entering polemical discussions are a necessary part of education if we desire student engagement in meaningful and relevant political issues (McGowan, McGowan, & Lombard, 1994). The widening and enlarging normative mandate of the public school experience is the proper venue for these discussions and considerations (Hlebowitsh, 2004), and if students do not address difficult questions there is a minimizing of the development of life skills. Instead, we need to realize that students can broach difficult issues and begin to work toward their resolution (Fluckiger & Wetig, 2003).

Because any belief that is not “subjected to rational examination is by definition a prejudice no matter how correct or incorrect it might be” (Hunt & Metcalf, 1968, p. 27),

the public school must provide a suitable environment and a significant amount of time for prejudice reduction. The social studies, already charged with the transmission of cultural values, is well suited to apply the methods of reflection to not only values and beliefs, but to the school curriculum and organization as well (Kumashiro, 2004). Social studies classes are the appropriate place for students to develop conceptions of justice (Makler, 2000) and this requires the rational investigation of societal assumptions, values, and problems. Reflective classrooms do not seek “right answers” (Hunt & Metcalf, 1968) nor focus on isolated and declarative knowledge, making them ill-suited to meet the requirements of NCLB. Yet if society is desirous of students becoming citizens and adults who actively engage in solving problems of any kind, they will require substantive exposure to the method of reflection as well as the closed and problematic areas of our society.

### **The Subject Matter**

In addition to NCLB’s threat to citizenship training, it also represents a danger to the vast and democratically salubrious content of the social studies. When social studies instruction is diminished, global studies, women’s studies, lessons about human rights, and vast array of other content is as well (Crocco, 2003). Part of this problem arises when the social studies are conflated as ‘history’ and taught in isolated and declarative ways. But the social studies encompass the subject areas of not only history, but philosophy, geography, political science, economics, sociology, anthropology, and psychology. These subject areas build active and socially just citizens through understanding how individuals work with others as well as how people think, communicate, act, decide, and reflect. In addition, the social studies cover thematic strands that include:

- Time, continuity, and change; which includes understanding historical roots, multiple perspectives, informed choices, and decisions in the present and future
- People, places, and environments; which examines, space, place and the implications of our interaction with the environment
- Individual development and identity; which examines how people come to understand their world, human behavior, and the ethical principles that underlie action, as well as social processes, norms, and identities
- Individuals, groups, and institutions; includes issues of control, influence, rights, responsibilities, and how they promote or diminish the common good
- Power, authority, and governance; examines origins of power, its manifestations, resulting problems, sovereignty, order, and conflict
- Production, distribution, and consumption; critiques what is produced, the rationale for doing so, and the treatment of labor
- Science, technology, and society; looks at issues of progress, quality of life global interaction, and how technology changes the world
- Global connections, civic ideals, and practices; uncovers diverse and numerous global tensions, issues, and relationships within our interdependent world (NCSS, 1994).

These strands ultimately help students decide how they ought to live in accordance with others based on experience of humanity. When addressed through different content areas, these strands help students understand both present and future issues while simultaneously experiencing freedom of thought and engagement within democratic life (Saxe, 1997). History may be the manifestation of social study for the lay, as it is the most common content that students study, but it also provides a unifying structure to the other content areas. Therefore, a thorough explanation of its benefits and necessity for a democratic society is in order.

### **The Purpose of History**

History is often incorrectly thought of in terms of disconnected, trivial, and meaningless factual information, which might be accurate if only textbooks comprise the class material. This is because the subject matter of history textbooks is often portrayed in uncontroversial ways due to its politicized nature. Sanitizing textbooks has ultimately “stripped them up their ability to present a critical, intellectually honest assessment of controversial subjects” (Ravitch, 2003, p. 147), which has resulted in the avoidance of poverty, power, justice, and morality issues. Textbooks typically avoid relevant, controversial, and challenging civic issues (Wade, 2002) making teacher construction of complicated issues that have more than one legitimate response even more essential. Unfortunately, the heightened sensitivity that our culture has in discussing controversial, closed, and grey areas, as well as fears of indoctrination, has resulted in the neglect of these sorts of moral and civic problems in history classes (Chance, 1993).

But history is the associated life experience of mankind that furnishes *context* for students (Dewey, 1916). History, when taught properly, will recover expurgated content and provide students with a meaningful and useful frame of reference for considering societal problems. History is therefore a tool for students to use as they reflect and deliberate on competing moral and normative claims about how society should be. The intention of historical study is not memorization of disconnected trivia, but a subject that helps students understand the relationship of past and the present (Dewey, 1916; Whelan, 1997) and inform intelligent and active citizenship (Committee on Social Studies, 1916).

Although the social studies cultivate a great number of skills, they excel in providing thinking, interaction, and participation skills (NCSS, 1994). In addition, reading, studying, reference, information, and technical skills are honed and refined in social studies learning experiences. The study of history allows the individual to expand their thinking to all others and those that came before, as students engage in historical thinking that examines point of view, perspective, source, epistemology, and significance. The work of Fred Morrow Fling (1860-1934) highlighted other concomitant benefits of historical inquiry (Osborne, 2003). In particular, certain assumptions make apparent the need of historical study that draws on primary source document analysis. These assumptions suggest that:

- The historical method, not the coverage of content, should be the primary goal of history teaching
- Understanding the nature of historical evidence and interpretation is a fundamental for a worthwhile curriculum
- Historical thinking and consciousness is an important goal
- Investigation of open-ended problems and ill-structured domains is a worthy undertaking
- Becoming educated requires a trained intellect and a knowledge of the processes by which the true is distinguished from the false
- History is not static and is constantly being rewritten from the sources (Osborne, 2003).

As a result of primary document analysis, students learn how to interrogate informational sources, think in disciplined ways, examine evidence skeptically, understand that knowledge grows, and that arriving at certainty is quite difficult and only possible through reflection and becoming conscious of beliefs, assumptions, and values. History which is taught using primary source analysis supports and reinforces reflective, open-minded, wholehearted, and responsible citizenship.

### **Social Studies as Problem-Centered**

If subject matter is to be correlated to the social life of the child (Dewey, 1897), then students should encounter persistent social problems, connect the past with the present, and consider progress-oriented choices. Issue and problem-centered approaches to social studies are rooted in ethics, diversity of views, deliberation, and reflection (Hunt & Metcalf, 1968; Evans, 1997). Although examining the problems of society is and has been controversial (Hunt, 1962), the fusion and use of the social studies content areas for analyzing “modern life and how it came to be” (Rugg, 1932, p. vii) provides the basis for a problem-centered course. Rugg (1941) noted that:

the only hope of solving the American problem lies in the education of a large body of citizens who understand its factors and who are concerned to do something about them by building a program of action (p. xv).

Investigating social controversies and problems by drawing on multiple perspectives, sources, and a diversity of experiences within the school develops skills similar to those that emerge primary source analysis. Reflective thinking about controversies and problems prepares students for active and efficacious democratic life, but these experiences are in jeopardy given the demands of NCLB.

### **The Values of Society**

Education is charged with addressing the gap between what is and what should be for both the individual (Tyler, 1949) and society. Both totalitarian and democratic states would agree with this charge and ultimately use education to perpetuate or challenge norms, values, and beliefs. Although some democratic values can be cultivated in every

subject area, through collateral learning and the emergent formation of attitudes, only in social studies is there a conscious and deliberate attempt to furnish these values. Because the school is “an institution erected by society to maintain and advance the welfare of society, we must ensure that the social aim remains in focus” (Dewey, 1909, p. 7), especially given the challenges of NCLB. Social studies responds to the values of society in numerous ways, including, but not limited to, civic competence, moral education, social justice, and global education.

### **Civic Competence**

The formation of the citizen is the aim of education (Dewey, 1916). Civic competence uses the knowledge from academic disciplines to perpetuating democratic ideals and applying knowledge for democratic life. It also cultivates open participation with a meaningful voice, adjudication of information, valuing diversity of human forms, treating people equally, respecting the rule of law, upholding human rights, and recognizing social obligations (Saxe, 1997). Civic competence fosters shared interests among individuals and creates opportunities for the intersection of diverse individuals in order to achieve justice and stability (Dewey, 1916).

Dewey (1909) noted that engaging in social life is the only way to prepare for social life. Often, the knowledge acquired within the school and social engagement outside of the school point to a fundamental difficulty in application. The social studies responds to this disconnect through community based projects, interviews, and service, whereby self-interest becomes pregnant with an interest in the betterment of others. Because the good citizen is an efficient and serviceable member of society who takes on positions of responsibility and contributes to serviceable endeavors, the social studies must provide opportunities for students to practice these values. Dewey (1916) noted that:

There is an old saying to the effect that it is not enough for a man to be good; he must be good for something. The something which a man must be good is capacity to live as a social member so that what he gets from living with others balances with what he contributes (p. 359).

Democratic society requires “reflective action, mutual learning, and genuine collaboration” (Wallis, 1998, p. 335) which is sometimes contrary to many of the current educational policy priorities. Because a democracy is not just a form of government, but rather a “mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey, 1916, p. 87), students need to practice conjoint life within the school.

In the social studies, students reflectively examine the rights and responsibilities that society wishes to perpetuate. The rights of the individual, including the rights to life, liberty, dignity, security, equality of opportunity, justice, privacy, and private ownership of property, are unpacked, critiqued, and complicated. Individual freedoms, such as the freedom to worship, associate, think, assemble, inquire, and express, also undergo critical reflection. Though often glossed over, responsibilities of both the individual and society, including respect for human life and the rights of others; being tolerant, honest, and

compassionate; participating in democratic process, exercising self-control, working for the common good, and respecting the property of others; and protecting individual rights, freedoms, and liberties, are part and parcel of social studies education (NCSS, 1994). NCLB threatens the transmission and critique of these rights and responsibilities by not only reducing instructional time but altering the content and methods of reflective and problem-oriented social studies instruction.

### **Moral Education**

Life abounds with choices and social life inherently involves choices that affect the affairs and experience of others. In social studies, students learn how to make rational and defensible choices that influence what kind of person they are and the sort of society we, in total, shall enjoy. The social studies allow students to critically analyze and construct value systems (Makler, 2000), as well as deepen and extend the values brought from the home, and ultimately unify the individual with others in a form of proper moral relations (Dewey, 1897). Although NCLB has resulted in the narrowing of subject matter and reduced time for moral education, Dewey (1893) suggested that “if other studies do not correlate well with this one, so much the worse for them—they are the ones to give way, not it” (p. 60).

The social interest is identical to the moral interest and social understanding is significant for moral development (Dewey, 1916). Democratic education needs to allow each individual to “refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own,” which is also a core element of reflective morality (Dewey, 1916, p. 87). The liberation of all possible data and storehouses of information for thought (Dewey, 1960) corresponds to the civic need to take on multiple perspectives and the moral need to resolve dilemmas. Students need not simply tolerate diversity, but rather analyze and recognize the value each group “contributes to the clarification and direction of reflective morality” (Dewey, 1960, p. 28). Failure to remain open and tentative to diverse opinions is suggestive of certainty, which results in the cessation of thought and deliberation.

Reflective morality demands the inclusion of all possible perspectives and data to allow the student to “make for himself an analysis of the elements of good and evil in the particular situation in which he finds himself” (Dewey, 1960, p. 141). In this way, moral principles and the ability to take multiple perspectives are tools that assist ever-changing students to engage in our dynamic society so that they may act on the basis of, and for the benefit of, the social whole. The ability to discern right and wrong is fundamental for students’ entry into public life, to be sure, but morality is also a method of approaching the social world of education. When we view moral education as the skills, dispositions, and mindset required for social life, it begins to sound much like preparation for democratic living. Teaching students to see beyond themselves, embrace a higher common value, and recognize a shared existence, constitute the basic aims of moral education (Hartoonian, 2001).

Reflective morality arises when anyone asks, “Why should I act thus and not otherwise? Why is this right and that wrong?” (Dewey, 1960, p. 5). Creating environments that value open-mindedness, reflection, deliberation, and active participation enable students to ask questions of this ilk. Non-democratic classrooms which remove occasions of doubt (Griffin, 1942) stymie this sort of cerebral itch and prevent civic and the development of moral skills. Dewey (1960) advised that students:

consider how you will come out if you act upon the desire you now feel; count the cost...all folly and stupidity consist in failure to consider the remote, the long run, because of the engrossing and blinding power exercised by some present intense desire (p. 39).

This prudent technique demands that students are open to all possible ways of thinking about a problem and consider all data that can potentially inform a decision. Reflective, tentative, and open-minded students mix their thinking with the problem, take ownership in its resolution, and become active, involved, and engaged moral agents. The struggle of surrendering the actual for the possible is undoubtedly arduous (Dewey, 1971), but it constitutes a fundamental task for societal improvement.

Teachers need to engage students in reflective civic investigations that interrogate contemporary problems (Chance, 1993), as well as involve students in *knowing themselves* as antecedent to responsible action (Hartoonian, 2001). Student investigation of ‘who they are’ and ‘where they are going,’ within the context of understanding community members’ actions and motivations, constitute civic and moral thinking skills. Because being a spectator is also an ethical response (Bigelow, 2000), students require opportunities to question stereotypes and approach others in equal and dignified ways (Burke-Hegen & Smith, 2000) so they may actively disrupt structures of inequality and oppressive elements within our society.

Dewey (1893) noted the societal imperative of arriving at an ethical theory that is teachable and inherent in all curricula. He also noted that the subject matter of ethics must determine the value of other studies, not vice versa. Morality is not only central to the school experience, but it also works symbiotically with citizenship education and social engagement. The declining rate of civic engagement (Putnam, 2000) and increasing selfishness (Lasley, 1987; Lasley & Biddle, 1996) pose a risk to our democracy and its communitarian way of life. We need a re-examination of the way in which we teach morality and a widening of our imagination in order to construct a moral education system that reflects the profound changes in our social environment (Purpel, 1991), rather than its expurgation due to testing mandates.

### **Social Justice**

Another social studies aim that is contrary to the structure of NCLB is the opportunity for students to start contemplating and constructing a just society. Social justice is both a way in which a society can operate as well as an individual process that attempts to create socially just systems and structures. Both of these product and process

paradigms are fundamentally connected by *individuals* and their moral orientation due to the underlying essence of social justice, which seeks to improve the condition of other people and groups. This moral underpinning is, to some extent, obfuscated in the social justice literature, primarily because of the chasm of universal and contextual justice, as well as competing interpretations of what social justice actually means. The implication that stems from realizing a moral structure underlies social justice is that we need to consider reframing the way in which we think about teaching for social justice and our expectations of how the end product of a socially just community or world might look.

Social justice is, at its core, about our treatment of those outside our familial bounds and fundamentally about a broader sense of human relations in action. The essence of social justice is the concern for the good of others, which involves rooting out oppression, exploitation, powerlessness, marginalization, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young, 2000). Although few who use the term “social justice” define it (Novak, 2000), the examples scholars provide of injustice represent conceptions of what social justice is not. For example, Young (2000) defines injustice in terms of oppression and suggests that there is no one thing common to all of its variegated forms.

Another approach to social justice suggests that it “reflects the way in which human rights are manifested in the everyday lives of people at every level of society” (Just Comment, 2000). Other scholars contend that it includes the skills for organizing people to resolve injustices (Novak, 2000). Common to all denotative variants and conceptions of social justice are assumptions of goodness and humane treatment of others, which highlights its moral underpinnings. Todd (2003) expressed this idea and asserted that ethics is central to social justice and “marked by a moral concern with those who have been ‘othered’ and marginalized through discriminatory relations that are seen as violent, both in symbolic and material forms” (p. 1).

Social justice involves the moral outcroppings of individual virtues and when these virtues are constructed as a movement, through coalescing, the culmination of individuals directed toward the common good represents the *par excellence* of active citizenship. This concerted process constitutes an awakening of individual responsibility and its alignment, in social terms, toward the resolution of injustice. Responsibility is very much a moral component that contains a willingness to adopt the consequences of the reasonable solution and move forth with fortitude to realize the resolution (Dewey, 1933). Responsibility is “one of the most obvious aims of social justice” and this is stimulated through the development of a concern for others (Todd, 2003, p. 66). Each of us has a fundamental responsibility to others, which requires that we attend to our manifold choices and reflect on the way in which they have cascading effects.

Each choice within a social milieu is thus a moral statement of who we are and of who is within our purview. For example, institutional structures that beget exploitation are the confluence of the moral choices, past and present, of institutional members. Everyone makes choices about the treatment of others on a daily basis, whether as an institutional agent or as an individual citizen. Individuals within the dominant domain *decide* whether people lack utility, whether they should enjoy more power, that their

culture deserves primacy, or if they will engage in violent acts. Novak (2000) notes the problem of ‘diffusion of responsibility’ through the rise of conglomerations and the rise of science, which has produced new patterns of value that lack individual responsibility, but the insidious diffusion of responsibility within institutions is not a sufficient warrant for acting immorally. Jasper’s (1947) conception of metaphysical guilt offers a different view of responsibility which suggests each human is culpable for every injustice, especially those which are committed in their presence or with their knowledge.

It is not enough to realize privilege in a dominant role. Self-knowledge and understanding the far-reaching effects of our choices, which is a moral undertaking, must accompany this awareness. In the case of an individual simultaneously existing within dominant and subordinate structures, the moral complexities may thicken (Tatum, 2000), but only by delineating our laminated identities and choosing to make informed moral choices can we work to disrupt injustices. We are all potent agents and by rethinking modernist epistemologies of institutional power we can realize individuals as moral agents of change and choice and not as passive objects that are subsumed within larger structures (Crossa, 2005). Given that social justice aims to radically transform specific social relations, it makes sense to question the kinds of human relations that we have (Todd, 2003). Because ethics is a statement of active human relations (Dewey, 1893) we need to ensure that students engage in topics of morality, oppression, and inequality. The social studies, therefore, prepare students to transform and reconstruct society in equitable ways, though NCLB presents a significant obstacle to fulfilling this goal.

### **Global Life**

A largely axiomatic value of society that requires attention in public education involves the profitable, responsible, and ethical global interaction of individuals and societies. Social studies provides students with a substantive global framework, including understanding their perspectives as well as others, knowledge of interconnected global affairs, and how choices, both individually and societal, can influence the welfare of others. Globalism and globalization entered the English lexicon in the 1960’s and today it is considered to be a “process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements receded and [as a consequence] people become increasingly aware that [such constraints] are receding” (Waters, 1995, p. 3). The implications of accelerated globalization for society are numerous. First, globalization changes our reality and, hopefully, our perception of reality. Second, those changes translate into qualitatively different social relations. Third, as a result of the changes in human relations, the way in which we consider choices that influence others, domestically and internationally, demands reexamination given the close proximity that we have to others economically, environmentally, politically, and perhaps most important, morally. Finally, this necessary shift in our moral orientation requires significant instructional time in order to ensure that students become active, efficacious, and aware globally moral citizens.

Democratic and multicultural societies need to prepare students for life within a more pluralistic, intertwined, and international milieu, which is part and parcel of social

studies education. This requires student competency and skill in interdisciplinary learning that is not bound in cultural, temporal, or spatial terms (Becker, 1990). Because globalization will continue to influence an array of changes worldwide, we need a better understanding of how education will be shaped by and in turn shape the globalization process (Gardner, 2004). The traditional aim of training future citizens to understand and sympathize with others is not enough. A revised imperative speaks to a new 'world citizenry' who "acknowledge interdependency, act independently of their nation states, and are constructing universal morality in order to create a more just global society" (Fujikane, 2003, p. 145). Global education should take on a transformative role, rather than an additive one, whereby classrooms contain a "different story about the world, [and] about Americans' role in it" (Bales, 2004, p. 209). Because globalization has profoundly affected space, time, and interconnectivity, national citizenship is giving way to a more world oriented citizenship where the individual is now more in control and more morally potent than ever before. Global education is therefore responsive to the values and aims of the world society, given receding space and boundaries, though the construction of this harmonious coexistence is threatened by the macrocurricular changes resulting from NCLB.

As a result of global education, students develop perspective consciousness, which fosters recognition multiple points of view and disrupting seemingly infallible beliefs. Students come to understand that each individual has a perspective, which is shaped by numerous influences. Hanvey (1976) noted the importance of student inquiry *within* perspectives and the inherent recondite evaluations and judgments based on those perspectives. Perspective consciousness generally includes the analysis of belief systems and varied ways of knowing (Collins, Czarra, & Smith, 1996), as well as knowledge and respect for one's own traditions (Gardner, 2004). In the social studies, students also grasp cross-cultural understanding, which includes an awareness of diverse of ideas and the degree to which they can coexist with each other. As a result of cross-cultural understandings, students learn how societal ideas might be viewed differently, given different perspectives, and how one might re-view their own society with fresh eyes. Global education also provides opportunities for students to develop an awareness of how other cultures *feel* from an insider's perspective and believe what others believe, momentarily, which is somewhat akin to a feeling with and for others (Todd, 2003). If students are able to accomplish transpection and therefore view themselves and their own society through foreign eyes, they can develop self-knowledge and responsibility.

Global education also provides students with knowledge of global dynamics including the current state of affairs of political, social, military, economic, religious, and ethical issues. Achieving a general awareness is perhaps a realistic goal, though ultimately students should be able to use this knowledge and awareness to influence policy-makers and affect specific change. Included in this broad knowledge and value based dimension is student understanding of the global system (Gardner, 2004); knowledge of the changing world and planetary home (Anderson, Nicklas, & Crawford, 1994); knowledge of the international affairs and the ability to participate in policy debates (Lamy, 1990); and student awareness of global issues in depth, their interrelatedness, and the limitation of our knowledge concerning global issues (Collins,

Czarra, & Smith, 1996). As a result of teaching about global dynamics and interconnectedness, students begin to *see* the effects of change. Students need to uncover how the world works as a system, how changes ramify, the way in which effects of change are helpful or hurtful to others, and questions that raise “subterranean assumptions to the surface” (Hanvey, 1976, p. 102). By raising questions concerning the *meaning* of progress, what constitutes *desirable* change, the cascading effects resulting from consumption, and the complexity of seemingly insignificant decisions, students can begin to grapple with the world as a system in which they play a major role.

In keeping with the benefits of reflective thinking, students become aware of choices in global education. But the awareness of choice is not simply a lesson in self-knowledge. Rather, students realize the effects and consequences of choices on future generations. Traditional assumptions of ‘the good’ need to be reevaluated in the light of global rationality as we increasingly question settled beliefs based on a dynamic reality (Dewey, 1960). Hanvey (1976) termed this ability to bring heretofore unquestioned assumptions into a reflective and critical dialogue *global cognition*. Required for a global cognition is the ability to set aside custom and look, through deliberation, for effective measures “even though these outrage conventional wisdom or morality or national sensitivities and sovereignties” (Hanvey, 1976, p. 109). Choice therefore becomes a reflective enterprise which marshals evidence, perspectives, and information sources in global ways. This enlarged ken for student decision making represents the culminating dimension of global education.

Over 90% of adults believe their children should have broad understandings and knowledge of international issues (Cummings, 2001) and 80% of adolescents feel it is important to learn about global issues in order to make good choices in life (Hicks, 2003). Although global education seeks to empower students in order to make informed choices, we often neglect the milieu in which choices are made. Therefore, recent conceptions of global education seek to disempower students and depoliticize global life in order to “retrieve a sense of the human agency behind ‘globalization’” (Blaney, 2002, p. 268). Global education reconstructs students’ ways of knowing by disrupting and problematizing how they *come to know*, in addition to what they think they know. By combating tacit cultural superiority and privilege we can confront and challenge dogmatism, imbue self-reflection, and engage in responsible agency that has a receptive, humble, and balanced approach (Blaney, 2002). Rather than assume global issues and problems, students can revalue what they know, how they know it, how they think of others, how they think about power, what responsibilities are obligatory, and how to make morally informed choices.

## **Conclusion**

Social studies education provides the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for democratic living. NCLB has worked to sever social studies from the common experience in many schools and has promoted a myopic interest in low-level declarative knowledge. If continued, the development of learners, understanding of subject matter,

and the reflection of societal values will occur, to be sure, but not in a progressive and democratically oriented fashion.

The social studies prepare the learner for social living, regardless of future occupation, income, or education. As a result of understanding different perspectives, students are able to empathize, cooperate, and consider others as they make decisions and grapple with societal problems. The reckoning of the individual and community allows students to develop cooperative, trusting, and reciprocal relationships that enable harmonious and progressive living. By learning how to resolve problems using the method of reflection, students can arrive at defensible and reasoned decisions that draw on the best available evidence and are considerate of the effect of resultant consequences on others. Because the attitudes and beliefs students hold are subjected to reason within the social studies, prejudice is ultimately reduced and open-mindedness proliferates.

The allied subject areas of the social studies build active and socially just citizens through understanding how to live in accordance with others based on humanity's experience. Very much future-oriented, the subject matter assists students in developing informed decisions that are responsive to the numerous controversies and problems of contemporary life. In addition to furnishing a context for inquiry, the subject of history offers numerous concomitant skills which enable and promote active and informed citizenship. In response to Tyler's (1949) question concerning what any subject area can offer the common citizen, the social studies replies with knowledge, skills, and dispositions for conjoint living par excellence.

Societal values are transmitted, unearthed, and critiqued within the social studies. Although every learning experience within the school should be, in some part, responsive to the normative mandate of the school itself, only in the social studies are democratic values the core mission. Civic competence, moral education, social justice, and global education are four domains in which societal values are examined, discarded, or perpetuated in social studies classes. When these domains connect with the appropriate subject matter and the nature of the learner, substantive individual and societal improvement result.

Making a case to retain social studies education seems an absurd task given its historical and contemporary significance for our society. The benefits of social education, given the commonplaces of students, the subject matter, and society, render the consequences of NCLB in a rather pernicious light. Education in a democracy can ill afford the reduction or the marginalization of authentic and meaningful social studies education. If anything, the knowledge, skills, and dispositions which prepare students for 'proficient' active, reflective, moral, and cooperative citizenship in an interdependent world deserve more prominence in the school day.

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