

## Social Studies

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**Restoring History to Social Studies—Had It Ever Left?**

From the state departments of California and New York to the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington, D.C., come plans and pleas to put core history content into the social studies curriculum, K-12. But had it ever left?

By many accounts, yes. Historian Diane Ravitch traces the demise of history to the influential report in 1916 of the Committee on Social Studies of the National Education Association. According to Ravitch, that report had the effect of replacing a liberal education for all (including a core history curriculum) with a differentiated curriculum, the goal of which was relevance to the real world. Writes Ravitch:

This principle of selection cut the ground away from ancient and medieval history and attached greater value to current events than to history. But history was not to be jettisoned altogether. The principle espoused by the committee for deciding what history to teach was this: "The selection of a topic in history and the amount of attention given to it should depend . . . chiefly upon the degree to which such topic can be related to the present life interests of the pupil, or can be used by him in his present processes of growth" (Ravitch 1985, p. 125; see also Ravitch 1987).

It has been a downhill slide ever since, Ravitch argues, all the way down to the something-for-everyone curriculum denoted in the phrase, "the shopping mall high school." Even the innovative social studies programs produced in the 1960s sidestepped history, opting instead to develop in students the skills of *investigating* history, or inquiry. No matter that students lacked the needed knowledge of history to engage in this inquiry. Anyway, claims Ravitch (1985), inquiry "is certainly less interesting than learning the actual stuff of history."

Who or what are the culprits for the demise of history? Ravitch points the finger at the philosophy of social relevance (utilitarianism) combined later

in the century with an emphasis on method over content. Lynne Cheney (1987) of the National Endowment for the Humanities underscores the latter of these:

[T]he culprit is "process"—the belief that we can teach our children *how* to think without troubling them to learn anything worth thinking about, the belief that we can teach them *how* to understand the world in which they live without conveying to them the events and ideas that have brought it into existence.

Others agree. Best-selling author E. D. Hirsch, Jr., calls the skills preoccupation *educational formalism*. The theory is misguided, he claims, because it counters the time-honored logic that the more you know (not the more you know *how*), the more you can learn. Moreover, he adds, the emphasis on process

encourages us to ignore the fact that identifying and imparting the information a child is missing is most important in the earliest grades, when the task is most manageable. . . . Supplying missing knowledge to children early is of tremendous importance for enhancing their motivation and intellectual self-confidence, not to mention their subsequent ability to learn new materials (Hirsch 1987).

The emphasis on skills is a cop-out, Hirsch continues, by educators unwilling to make the tough decisions about which content is of most worth.

The argument so far has been that students are being offered, and are expected to learn, less history. But do they actually evidence less historical knowledge? Noting the lack of conclusive data on the question, Ravitch and Assistant Secretary of Education Chester Finn conducted a study on a nationwide sample of 17-year-old students. They found that the sample could answer correctly only 54 percent of the history questions (e.g., "What was the Missouri Compromise?"; "What was the purpose of the *The Federalist Papers*?"; "When was World War I?"). The study concluded that what today's students know best is whatever

has been translated into movies and other pop media. What they know least are the books, ideas, events, and people taught in school (Ravitch and Finn 1987).

Are there critics of these critics? Most definitely. Some have alleged shoddy scholarship. Others have argued that the Ravitch/Finn/Cheney/Hirsch commentary is a concerted and deeply ideological attack on the gains made recently toward educational equity. The critics' critics contend that, taken together, the arguments for history and cultural literacy promote what might be called a "white studies" curriculum. Minorities are excluded twice over because *their* knowledge is devalued, and they are at the same time denied the skills that might give them access to the more valued knowledge. Others point out that Cheney's lament on "process" is chimeric: Most recent research on classrooms has found only a molehill of effective skills instruction but a mountain of facts instruction.

In the question-and-answer session that followed Secretary Finn's address last November at the annual meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies, several audience members contended that he was confusing learning problems with content problems. Their point was that history is taught *but not learned*. Many students have neither the enabling skills nor the motivation to learn the content, whatever it may be.

One thing seems clear: critics of the present social studies curriculum are articulating their argument better, more often, and in more places than are *their* critics. With little exception (e.g., Ayers 1987, Katsounis in press), the pen has been taken up by only one side in the debate. □

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## Textbooks

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### The Concept Development Trace

Because they are the most difficult to write, testing and questioning are often the weakest parts of any textbook program. Yet in many series, these portions are written by persons other than the content author; consequently, the possibility of mismatch and inaccuracy is increased. This is unfortunate because in too many classrooms the publishers' questions and tests determine success or failure for students. Therefore, whenever I evaluate a program, I begin with the testing. A technique called the *concept development trace* helps me determine whether the text presentation prepares students for a test.

To do a concept development trace, first identify a key concept, skill, or topic from your curriculum that is essential for students to understand. Choose something that is both difficult to understand and challenging for you to teach, something you could easily depend on the textbook to inform or instruct.

Second, begin with the unit test or, in the case of high school subjects, the

end-of-chapter or unit questions. Take the test yourself, writing down everything you need to know, including the test format. It is not necessary to write answers, just what you need to know in order to get the answers, including the test/question format.

Third, using the index or scope-and-sequence chart, find the initial presentation of instruction in your chosen topic, and begin reading there. Continue to read through all other references to that concept until you reach the test. While reading, pretend you are one of your students. Also, document your thinking by writing your reactions on the textbook pages, using bright highlight pens for quick references so anyone can retrace your reasoning and decision-making process.

Finally, retake the test to determine if what was tested was actually taught. Did the text provide what you needed to know in order to answer the questions?

If you find a mismatch between testing and instruction, your immediate reaction may be to reject this program. Don't. What if this program is actually the best? Therefore, repeat

this procedure on all other textbook submissions, comparing treatment of the same skill, concept, or topic.

The concept development trace is only one way to compare textbook programs and should never be the only method used. But if the concept, topic, or skill is presented inadequately, this technique will help you determine the quality of congruence of all text elements within a series: test questions, content, instruction, workbook, review, retesting, reteaching, whatever you want to include in your trace.

By choosing a concept, topic, or skill pivotal to your curriculum, you document for that one element which textbook will best match your unique student needs. By choosing a concept, topic, or skill you dislike or are unfamiliar with, you learn a variety of new ideas for how to teach it. With a concept development trace, the payoff is always well worth the time invested. □

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## Supervision

EDWARD PAJAK

### Research Trends in Supervision

During the early 1970s supervision in schools increasingly became associated with the observation of teachers in classrooms. This was partly a result of the popularity of the clinical super-

vision model and partly due to the importation of conceptual schemes from business and the military, where supervisors are mainly responsible for monitoring the activities of subordinates to make sure that they do as they are told.

This narrow interpretation of supervision ignores the work of Kimball Wiles and others who focused on the functions of district-level supervision not limited to classroom observation. Wiles emphasized that supervision was a collegial and professional rela-

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