

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Influence of Partisanship on Social Studies Education and Curriculum

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SPRING 2024

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in Secondary Education
with honors in Secondary Social Studies Education

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the intricate challenges posed by partisanship in shaping social studies education curriculum. By delving into historical contexts, ideological agendas, and the influences of social, cultural, and moral debates, it aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how curriculum decisions are shaped by diverse factors. This analysis seeks to offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers, shedding light on the complexities of curriculum development in a politically charged environment. As the landscape of education intersects with partisanship, this study endeavors to navigate these dynamics and anticipate future implications for educational practices. Recognizing the evolving nature of this intersection, it emphasizes the importance of not only reflecting on past findings but also preparing for future challenges and opportunities.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to first and foremost thank my Thesis Advisor and my Honors Advisor, Dr. Scott Metzger. Dr. Metzger is one of the most dedicated and caring professors I have had during my time at Penn State, and the compassion and kindness he has shown to me during my time of knowing him do not go unappreciated. I would also like to thank Dr. Stephanie Schroeder for serving as my Faculty Reader and for also being an amazing professor and role model during my time in her class.

Thank you to my friends who have listened to me ramble on for hours about my research and the seemingly impossible task of finishing this thesis.

And finally, I would like to thank my parents. Mom and Dad, you have been my biggest supporters since the beginning. I would be nothing without either one of you, and I am so grateful each and every day that I have such amazing people standing behind me no matter where life takes me.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis explores the pervasive influence of partisanship on social studies curriculum and its role in shaping various curricular policies. Political choices and conflicts deeply penetrate educational frameworks, sculpting state curricular standards and overarching guidelines that not only reflect ideological disparities but also dictate the educational content students encounter. These debates extend beyond state standards, encompassing the selection of textbooks and teaching materials, highlighting the political undertones inherent in the information students receive.

Local school boards serve as arenas for heated discussions and disagreements regarding curriculum and textbooks, operating within the boundaries set by state standards. The existence of these debates allows communities to tailor education to their unique needs and values. However, this autonomy granted to schools and teachers can lead to controversies when individual instructors make choices that provoke concerns from parents or local citizens. The autonomy granted to teachers in their classrooms becomes a double-edged sword, fostering diversity in educational approaches but also becoming potential sites of tension and disagreement.

In this intricate educational ecosystem, accountability to citizens takes various forms. State boards of education, textbook commissions, school boards, and teachers all bear a degree of responsibility to the public. While local discussions often refer to taxpayers due to stake that

taxpayers have in what goes on in the schools, the definition of "citizens" can be contentious. Some argue that only parents of school-age children should be considered, while others advocate for a broader interpretation that includes the entire community. As such, public opinion becomes a significant factor in shaping educational policies and practices at both the state and local levels. The interplay between political choices, accountability, and public sentiment is intertwined with the complex nature of education.

The evolution of curriculum politicization in the United States reflects a complex interplay of social, cultural, and political factors across different historical periods. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, education was deeply influenced by religious and moral values, resulting in a traditional, Eurocentric curriculum that often-marginalized minority perspectives. The Progressive Era (late 19th to early 20th centuries) saw a shift towards child-centered learning and social justice, though debates over inclusive curricula persisted.

In the 1930s and 1940s, there was a great social studies textbook controversy centered around Harold Rugg, an educator who argued that schools should play a stronger role in helping to reconstruct or improve the society. He was the author of best-selling social studies textbooks, but patriotic and business groups heavily criticized the content and Rugg was under fire. These textbooks were censored or banned in some schools, and Evans described this time period as the beginning of the "war on social studies" (Evans, 2007, p. 5). Evans goes on to explain this issue by saying, "Rugg' story reminds us that education is always political and can never be neutral...the battles among the competing versions of social studies represent the larger ideological struggles for hegemony and social direction in the modern era" (Evans, 2007, p. 3).

Post-World War II, the Cold War era emphasized science, mathematics, and language arts to compete globally, while the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s prompted efforts to integrate African American history and create more inclusive curricula. Also in the 1950s, specifically the year 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite. Interestingly, this event significantly influenced education in the United States. In his book, *Schoolhouse Politics*, Peter Dow examines this influence and establishes that a newfound focus was placed on science education for the purpose of bettering U.S security. Sputnik was a wakeup call for the U.S; it was evident that the Soviet Union was advancing at a rapid pace, and science education needed to be revamped so that the United States could keep up. Federal were put into place to achieve this goal, and the event of Sputnik showcased an educational transformation and increased federal involvement (Dow, 1991, p. 74).

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed heated "culture wars," where conservatives and liberals clashed over issues like sex education and historical portrayal. The No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 aimed to improve outcomes but inadvertently led to a narrowed curriculum due to a focus on standardized testing. However, the right versus left issues were not unobserved in earlier eras; in the aftermath of Sputnik-inspired education reforms, there was a clash between both sides. Dow establishes that despite the initial success of the reforms, the reforms "were sabotaged by a combination of right-wing citizens' groups and congressional suspicion that federal funds were being used to convey subversive ideas contrary to those of mainstream America" (Dow, 1991, pg. 89).

The Common Core State Standards initiative in 2010 sought national educational standards but faced opposition, raising concerns about government overreach. In the 2010s and

2020s, ongoing debates center around the teaching of controversial topics like racism, slavery, and LGBTQ+ issues. Critical race theory, cultural competency, and historical accuracy have become focal points, reflecting the ongoing politicization of curriculum influenced by changing societal dynamics, policies, and cultural attitudes. Policymakers, educators, parents, and advocacy groups continue to shape the educational content and focus within the United States.

This paper aims to explore various dimensions of how partisanship interlaces with social studies curriculum and teaching practices, particularly in the context of curriculum development and implementation. The key areas identified for elaboration include:

Ideological Agendas: An examination of how the partisanship of policymakers impact curriculum decisions, revealing the values, beliefs, and priorities that shape the educational content.

Social and Cultural Values: An analysis of how the prevailing political climate influences the integration of social and cultural values into the curriculum, thereby determining what is deemed relevant and significant for students to learn.

Cultural and Moral Debates: An analysis of how political debates on cultural and moral issues spill over into the curriculum, prompting discussions about what should or should not be included in educational content.

Local Control vs. Federal Influence: A consideration of debates surrounding the balance between local control and federal influence in education, exploring how political decisions, influenced by extreme partisanship, at different levels of government shape school curriculum.

Through a comprehensive exploration of these key areas, the paper aims to unravel the intricate ways in which political dynamics shape and influence the educational environment—in terms of the past, present, and future--particularly in the development, approval, and implementation of curricula.

Chapter 2

An Overview of Social Studies Curriculum

Understanding a topic such as the influence that partisanship has on social studies curriculum, it is essential to examine its evolution over time, revealing how certain dynamics have shaped educational content and practices . The intersection between what is taught in schools and what is deemed “too political” is a facet of a larger picture, painting an image of time-period specific partisanship and debates. To elaborate on this, it should first be noted that political or controversial topics can be defined as “those on which society at large (or the local community, or even the school itself) is clearly divided and for which different groups offer conflicting explanations and advocate conflicting solutions based on alternative values” (Stradling, 2006, p. 16). In other words, these are the issues that create a polarized narrative—when this extends to how teachers present certain topics number of external factors.

Curriculum debates go as far back as the 19th century, but the focus here will primarily be examining the large controversies that started occurring during and after the 1990’s. This thesis will look specifically at the nature of social studies education, which can be defined as “the education and preparation of young people so that they possess the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for active participation in society; this has been a primary part of schooling in North America since colonial times” (Ross, 2006, p. 21). In his book, E. Wayne Ross goes on to make the argument that, “Social Studies teaching should not be reduced to an exercise in implementing a set of activities predefined by policymakers, textbook authors, or a high stakes test”.

This is an interesting take for several reasons, one of the most significant being that policymakers have implemented vast control over social studies curriculum and would strongly disagree with the claim made by Ross. In terms of a brief history of social studies, below is a timeline that includes the key dates in its development and curriculum focus.

- (1916) Publication of *The Social Studies in Secondary Education*: This was the final report of the Committee on Social Studies of the National Education Association (NEA) Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Schools, which included an emphasis on citizenship values.
- (1958) New Social Studies: During this year, the National Defense Education Act helped to import disciplinary specialists to design curriculum packages for schools. In the social studies, these curriculum innovations were collectively called the New Social Studies, the purpose of which was to “capture the main ideas and curriculum approaches to knowledge represented by academic disciplines” (Marker and Mehlinger, 2002, p. 83).
- (1970s-1980s) Critical Race Theory (CRT): Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in the legal field in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a response to the limitations of traditional civil rights approaches to combating racism. It emerged within a broader movement of critical legal studies, which sought to examine how law and legal institutions perpetuate social inequalities. CRT emerged as a critical and interdisciplinary approach to examining the intersections of race, law, and power. It then melded into feminist and

queer theories; Gloria Ladson-Billings and several other scholars drew from the theory and began applying it to education in 1995)

- (2001) No Child Left Behind Act: This United States act of Congress (promoted by the Presidency of George W. Bush) that intended to close the achievement gaps between K-12 schools by mandating standardized assessments in reading and math. The problem with this act is that it fails to comprehensively address what this means for the future of social studies Education. One author and education professional, S.E Noffke, makes the argument that this realm of education is not set-in-stone and universal for all students. To elaborate on this, she argues that “Debates over social studies have failed to acknowledge the widening gap between haves and have-nots and their racialized and gendered patterns of oppression, which to a larger degree from the basis of U.S economic and cultural life, are not addressed in contemporary proposals for curriculum reform” (Noffke, 2000, p. 32).

- (2010) Common Core Standards: These standards were first mandated by the Obama administration and its subsequent incentive program called “Race to the Top” with the goal of increasing education consistency between all of the states. As with many other education mandates, most states went on to create their own variations of the initiative for the Common Core standards. These standards are in math and English but have broad effects on subjects such as science and social studies as well.

When looking at social studies as a limited scope curriculum, one will likely realize that it is much broader than what immediately meets the eye. History reflects time periods, cultural patterns, global situations, etc. This means that there is not a set curriculum with (a) a clear start and end date due to the fact that we are currently living through what will one day be considered history and (b) is multifaceted in its ability to reflect various historical situations and commonplaces from the time being examined.

Additionally, there have been a number of topics discussed in social studies classes that have been met with apprehension and even criticism by students, parents, legislators, teachers, and many other individuals. These topics have historically ranged from basic ideas of fairness and equality in a democracy, to immigration, to the distribution of resources, to government responses of the past and present, etc. Therefore, social studies educators must be equipped to tackle these controversial concepts and must figure out what approach works best for their classrooms.

Tyack makes a similar assertion in his book, *Seeking Common Ground: Public Schools in a Diverse Society*. Tyack explores the role of public schools in addressing diversity within society as a whole, not just the classroom environment. He delves into the historical evolution of public education in the United States and explores how schools have navigated issues of race, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status. Tyack emphasizes the importance of public schools as a common ground where diverse communities come together and aims to provide insights into how schools can effectively serve all students while promoting unity and understanding in a heterogeneous society (Tyack, 2003, p. 85).

Another proponent of civic education, John Dewey, advocated that citizenship should ultimately be the core of social studies education. Citizenship rests on the acquisition of

preestablished values and content, or social science, where citizenship involves the range of academic social disciplines, such as problem solving in a certain political context. Dewey supported the idea that “The purpose of social studies is nurturing within students the abilities necessary for decision making with respect to social and personal problems that affect individual students” (Ross, 2006, p. 22).

This view reflects the belief that understanding one’s place in the United States is based upon their understanding of the past, the present, and the future. Therefore, when curriculum becomes debatable and tense, the flow of education is disrupted and students, the future generation, are the ones who will be most affected by this shift.

Also, with the intersection of social studies into the day to day lives of students, teaching this curriculum requires patience, sensitivity, awareness, and compassion. Not all of the teachings encompassed within this overarching topic are easy to conceptualize or apply to one’s life today, and it is the role of the educator to constantly be mindful of the different students and backgrounds in the classroom.

Social studies did not always exist, but understanding the key topics that it consists of and how these are taught to students of all ages is vitally important. Thus, given the history of social studies curriculum development, this thesis will attempt to break the complex issue down further and establish what this means for the future of education as a whole.

Chapter 3

Ideological Agendas

Social studies curriculum is a dynamic process shaped by various stakeholders, including teachers, policymakers, and states as a whole. Beneath the surface of seemingly objective educational planning lies the influence of ideological agendas. This chapter discusses and examines the ways in which the ideologies of these stakeholders shape the content, focus, and delivery of social studies curriculum and education in classrooms.

First, the role of teachers and their respective ideologies should be understood. Teachers play a crucial role in impacting the teaching of various social studies topics; their personal beliefs, values, and ideologies inevitably influence the content of the lessons by what they choose to emphasize and the perspectives they present to the class. Educators bring their own experiences and biases into the classroom, thus heavily impacting how historical events, societal issues, and cultural narratives are portrayed.

In classrooms where teachers hold conservative ideologies, there may be a stronger emphasis on traditional values, patriotism, and a glorified (and sometimes misleading) portrayal of historical figures and situations. Conversely, teachers with more of a liberal stance might prioritize critical analysis, social justice issues, and multicultural perspectives. These differences and gaps in one's approach versus another educator's can significantly alter the learning experience and the understanding students gain from their social studies classes.

Moreover, teachers often face pressures from external sources, such as parents, school boards, and standardized testing requirements. This pressure can influence their curriculum approaches, leading them to prioritize certain topics and perspectives over others to align with prevailing ideologies within their communities.

In her book *Controversies About Controversial Issues in Democratic Education*, Hess explores the challenges and debates partisanship and the progress that is made in the classroom. She discusses the tensions between the promotion of critical thinking and open discourse in the classroom and the desire to maintain social cohesion and avoid polarization. The article highlights the importance of addressing controversial topics in education to promote civic engagement and democratic values, while also acknowledging the complexities and potential risks involved. Hess makes the argument that social studies educators must spend less time addressing the critics of the curriculum and must devote more time towards encouraging critical analysis among their students (Hess, 2008, pg. 129). This claim is not only well-founded, but it sheds light on the fact that progress cannot be made simply by avoiding or limiting discourse on certain topics. In order to foster critical learning, Hess makes the cogent assertion that this must be modeled by the people closest to the advancement of student thinking—their teachers.

In terms of what research has been done on the role of social studies teachers and the potential controversies surrounding various topics, not much has been done. One article highlights the interplay between social studies teachers and their understanding of student conceptualization abilities and emotions that inherently impact how certain pieces of the curriculum are taught in the classroom. Due to the heavy nature of many social studies topics, the role of the teacher is described as, “an ethical agent who confronts complex and controversial issues in the classroom and who supports students with a variety of emotional responses to being asked to see their world, and possibly themselves, in new ways” (Sheppard & Levy, 2019, p. 34).

In a small study done with social studies teachers, seven out of the eight participants revealed that they had reflected their ideologies in class. When asked by the research why they chose to do this, one of the participants responded by saying, “We do not know what to do...some issues in the official history of social studies are to be objective but that is not true for all” (Demir & Pismek 2018). To elaborate on what this participant means, it would be fair to conclude that this individual is trying to say that there is a lack of guidance in terms of how teachers should go about not revealing their personal ideologies and beliefs in the classroom.

One controversial issue in social studies curriculum has to do with the historical portrayal of women. For example, women are historically underrepresented in social studies textbook, as supported by the finding that on average, “women were mentioned 258 times in history textbooks, while men were mentioned 2899 times” (Avery & Simmons, 2001, p. 16). However, the issue does not rest only with textbooks. One researcher states, “Beyond the lack of representation of women in textbooks, the ways in which women are represented in the larger historical curriculum can be problematic. Recent research concerning gender and human rights in national history standards presents a dismal picture of a woman’s place in history” (Crocco, 2008, p. 23). This “sprinkling” of women into social studies curriculum does little to emphasize the increasingly prevalent role women have played throughout history, and it is doing a disservice to social studies students. One article highlights this fact by arguing that instead of being a catalyst for change and consciousness-raising, schools might exacerbate the issue. Specifically, while the social studies classroom is perceived as a space to question cultural norms and foster awareness of gender inequality, evidence from social studies curriculum materials indicates otherwise (Hooks, 2000, p. 105). Feminist teachers attempt to change this classroom “norm” by seeking to empower women to change their status, along with studying how certain classroom choices can serve to change the current power structure.

The issue of how to teach race and racial injustices throughout history is another complex and nuanced topic. To elaborate on this, it should first be noted that race does not appear in every social studies unit when it very well was prevalent during the time period being examined. With that being said, it is important for one to ask themselves why race typically only appears in race-related curriculum units in history, such as slavery, European imperialism, the Civil Rights movement, etc. However, not all social studies teachers choose to move the conversation of race and the impacts of racism to the center of their classroom. In one study, ten “race-conscious” social studies teachers and their approaches to these difficult conversations are examined. On the other hand, some social studies teachers often teach a colorblind or white-specific version of history that is presented as neutral, factual accounts of the past and present, and it is believed that these lenses “are prevalent across the disciplines of history, government/civics, geography, and economics” (Martell & Stevens, 2017, p. 11).

When teachers utilize this “race-invisible” approach, they are indirectly alienating their students of color and making them disinterested in what they are learning do the fact that they are only hearing this traditionally white narrative and perspective. In several studies of history teachers, one researcher discovered that the perspectives of White students regarding the past tended to mirror those presented by their White teachers. These portrayals predominantly emphasized White heroes and the historical experiences of White individuals (Epstein, 2013, p. 12). Additionally, in his study of a middle school social studies classroom, another researcher (Howard, 2004, p. 18) found that students of color described their previous social studies courses as “race-invisible” and not a place to develop their racial awareness.

Following this problematic approach, in their case study of a white history teacher in a predominately Mexican American school, Almarza and Fehn (Journall, 1998, p. 4) showed that when the teacher presented an exclusively white view of history, her students felt academically alienated and viewed their social studies classes as incomplete or meaningless. Finally, in his case study of six government teachers during the 2008 election, Journell (Journell, 2010, p. 12) found that while race was a curricular focal point for all six teachers, teachers and students at predominately white schools focused more on the role of race in electoral strategy or consequences as opposed to teachers and students at a racially diverse school, who focused more on the role of race and racism.

Despite the literature mentioned above, there is little research or studies conducted that examine how exactly the ideologies of teachers can influence teaching topics such as injustices and racial issues. However, it would still be fair to make the assertion that there is a strong correlation between a teacher's personal ideology/partisanship and the ways in which they teach topics coinciding with these beliefs—there just need to be more studies to examine the impact these two variables have on each other.

Next on the list of factors that can impact curriculum instruction and approach are policymakers. Legislative policymakers and their partisanship can wield significant influence over social studies curriculum development and emphasis through pieces of legislation, standards, funding mechanisms, and through various other avenues as well. Ideological agendas within government bodies can shape the overarching goals and priorities of social studies education at a local, state, or even national level.

Conservative policymakers may advocate for curriculum content that promotes national identity, traditional values, and American progress. Topics falling under this approach may strongly emphasize the role of the Founding Fathers, the Constitution, and the free-market economy while downplaying or omitting critical examinations of power structures and historical injustices.

On the other hand, liberal policymakers may push for a more inclusive curriculum that highlights diversity, equity, and social justice issues. They may advocate for the incorporation of multicultural perspectives, the contributions and struggles of marginalized or underrepresented groups, and the shortcomings and biased viewpoints of many historical figures, such as the Founding Fathers.

The interplay between policymakers and schools can result in contested debates over curriculum standards and content. These debates often reflect underlying ideological divides within society and have far-reaching implications for the social studies education of younger generations.

Michael Kirst encapsulates an aspect of this issue, highlighting a tension between the role of schools in serving the entire community or its typical members, and the promotion of pluralistic social and cultural groups. While some community members believe that school personnel should meet citizen expectations, educators argue that they operate at a level of expertise beyond that of the general public. The reports do not explicitly address who should govern public education or which perspective is most suitable.

When looking at Critical Race Theory, defined as “a set of ideals holding that racial bias is inherent in many parts of western society in its legal and social institutions, on the basis of

their having been primarily designed for by white people” (Google 2024), one can see this liberal and conservative policymaker issue intensify.

Finally, states have considerable autonomy in shaping their own social studies curricula, leading to a diverse landscape of educational priorities and approaches across the country. Ideological agendas at the state level can result in significant variations in content, standards, and instructional methods.

In some states, conservative ideologies dominate the political landscape, leading to curricular frameworks that emphasize state history, traditional values, and limited government intervention. Meanwhile, in more progressive-leaning states, there may be a greater emphasis on global perspectives, environmental issues, and social activism within the social studies curriculum.

To support this, Gainous and Martens explored this ideological conflict and concluded that conservatives and liberals have not only disagreed on issues of pluralism and multiculturalism regarding what facts and whose history should be taught in social studies classrooms to foster political knowledge, but they have also debated the appropriate focus for teaching facts in those classrooms (Gainous & Martens, 2016, p. 28). These researchers go on to make the argument that in the context of the classroom, one might anticipate that liberals would be more open to embracing student input, which could introduce new ideas and disrupt classroom dynamics, compared to conservatives who may prioritize certainty, tradition, and hierarchy more than their liberal counterparts. With all of that being said, the different approaches towards what is “best” for classroom instruction have created quite a rift between legislators on both sides of the equation.

Furthermore, states often grapple with contentious issues such as the teaching of evolution, climate change, and LGBTQ+ rights, where ideological divides are particularly pronounced. Debates over these topics can lead to heated political battles and influence the content of social studies education in profound ways. The ideological agendas of teachers, policymakers, and states exert significant influence over social studies curriculum development.

In his book *Whose America?* Zimmerman paints a clear picture of this issue by revealing the long-standing culture war between the right and the left when it comes to education and curriculum. He describes this when he mentions the 1619 Project, a series of examinations of America's foundations in slavery and racism. Zimmerman states, "Opponents of the 1619 Project said it would indoctrinate students about racism instead of encouraging them to discuss and critique it; meanwhile, supporters of the project said the GOP attacks on it aimed to remove racism from discussion and critique" (Zimmerman, 2022, p. 8). This highlights the culture war between conservatives and liberals and how specifically this impacts the type of education that is provided to students across the country. What is the "norm" in red-state Alabama is likely not the "norm" in blue-state Massachusetts, so it would be fair to assert that this divide has various implications for schools and their policies.

In Missouri, a traditionally right-wing state, two administrators of color at the Rockwood School District announced their resignations after receiving death threats upon promoting the teaching of CRT (Morgan, 2022, p. 62). This demonstrates the gap between what conservative states deem worthy of being taught in schools versus what more liberal states decide to teach. In California, a traditionally left-wing state, CRT curriculum was met with overwhelming support (Morgan, 2022, p. 63). Thus, one can see the difference in responses to the same curriculum that vary on an ideological-state basis.

Another example of states utilizing their autonomy when passing legislation that influences curriculum implementation and instruction can be seen by the fact that, in July of 2021, five states passed legislation that banned teaching CRT in schools. These states included Tennessee, Texas, Iowa, Oklahoma, and Idaho, all very right-leaning states (Morgan, 2022, p. 64). Morgan goes on to further this claim, arguing that some Republicans may be opposed to Critical Race Theory due to concerns that it may induce feelings of guilt among white children. Additionally, he explains that in the state of Texas, legislation was enacted prohibiting schools from imparting any teachings that could potentially cause discomfort based on race or gender. While this legislation doesn't explicitly prohibit the discussion of racism and slavery, it suggests that such topics can only be addressed in a manner that aligns with the nation's founding principles, implying that deviations from these principles led to these historical happenings.

These agendas shape not only the content and focus of education but also the values, beliefs, and perspectives imparted to future generations. Understanding the interplay between partisan ideology and curriculum development is essential for fostering informed citizenship and promoting a more equitable and inclusive society. By critically examining the ideological underpinnings of social studies education, stakeholders can work towards creating a curriculum that reflects diverse perspectives, encourages critical thinking, and prepares students to navigate an increasingly complex world.

Chapter 4

Social and Cultural Values

Social studies curriculum and teaching play a pivotal role in shaping the understanding, perspectives, and actions of individuals within society. This educational domain is deeply intertwined with the prevailing social and cultural values of a given society. In this chapter, we will explore the intricate relationship between society's social and cultural values and the development, implementation, and delivery of social studies curriculum and teaching methodologies. We will examine how these values influence the content, methodologies, and outcomes of social studies education, ultimately impacting the way individuals engage with and understand the world around them.

Before delving into the influence of social and cultural values on social studies curriculum and teaching, it is essential to define these terms. Social values refer to the shared beliefs and norms upheld by a society, guiding individuals' behaviors, interactions, and perceptions of what is desirable or acceptable within that society. Cultural values, on the other hand, encompass the customs, traditions, beliefs, and practices that characterize a particular cultural group. Together, social and cultural values form the foundation upon which societies construct their identities, organize their institutions, and navigate social interactions.

The development of social studies curriculum is heavily influenced by the social and cultural values prevalent within a society. Curriculum developers must consider the values deemed important by the community, as reflected in national standards, educational policies, and societal expectations. For instance, in democratic societies that prioritize civic engagement and democratic principles, social studies curricula often emphasize topics such as citizenship, government structures, and civic responsibility. Conversely, in societies where cultural

preservation is paramount, such as indigenous communities, social studies curriculum may focus on indigenous history, language revitalization, and traditional knowledge systems.

Moreover, social and cultural values influence the selection of content, resources, and instructional materials used in social studies education. Textbooks, teaching resources, and supplementary materials are often scrutinized to ensure alignment with prevailing societal values and cultural sensitivities. However, this process is not without its challenges, as curriculum developers must navigate diverse perspectives, contentious historical narratives, and evolving societal norms when crafting inclusive and culturally relevant curricula.

The influence of social and cultural values extends beyond curriculum development to encompass teaching methodologies employed in social studies classrooms. Educators are tasked with delivering content in a manner that resonates with students' backgrounds, experiences, and cultural identities. As such, teaching strategies must be culturally responsive, acknowledging and valuing the diverse perspectives and lived realities of students.

In culturally diverse societies, teachers may incorporate experiential learning activities, multicultural literature, and collaborative projects to foster empathy, cross-cultural understanding, and critical thinking skills. Additionally, the use of culturally relevant pedagogies, such as culturally responsive teaching and culturally sustaining pedagogy, can empower students from marginalized backgrounds by affirming their cultural identities and validating their lived experiences within the curriculum. Ross and Mathison highlight this by arguing that there are a number of strategies like this that can be useful in fostering a better social studies learning experience, especially for students in minority groups (Ross , Vinson, & Mathison, 2014, p. 28).

Furthermore, social and cultural values influence the teaching of controversial or sensitive topics in social studies education. Educators must navigate these discussions with sensitivity, respect, and inclusivity, acknowledging diverse viewpoints while fostering open dialogue and critical inquiry. By addressing difficult topics such as racism, colonialism, and social injustice within a framework of empathy and understanding, teachers can cultivate students' capacity for empathy, ethical reasoning, and social responsibility.

The influence of social and cultural values on social studies curriculum and teaching has profound implications for student learning and engagement. When students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and teaching methodologies, they are more likely to feel valued, connected, and motivated to participate actively in their own learning (Ross, Vinson, & Mathison, 2014, p. 72). Conversely, a lack of cultural relevance or inclusivity can alienate students, perpetuate stereotypes, and reinforce existing power dynamics within the classroom.

Research suggests that culturally responsive teaching practices are associated with improved academic achievement, increased student engagement, and enhanced cultural competence among students. By incorporating diverse perspectives, narratives, and voices into the curriculum, educators can create learning environments that foster empathy, critical consciousness, and respect for cultural diversity (Morgan, 2022, p. 37).

However, addressing the complex interplay of social and cultural values within social studies education requires ongoing reflection, dialogue, and professional development among educators. Teachers must critically examine their own biases, assumptions, and cultural blind spots to ensure that their instructional practices promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in the classroom.

In conclusion, society's social and cultural values exert a profound influence on social studies curriculum and teaching. From the development of curriculum standards to the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices, these values shape the content, methodologies, and outcomes of social studies education. By embracing cultural diversity, fostering empathy, and promoting critical inquiry, educators can empower students to become informed, engaged, and responsible members of society who are capable of navigating complex social issues with empathy, understanding, and respect for diverse perspectives. Ultimately, the integration of social and cultural values into social studies curriculum and teaching is essential for creating inclusive, equitable, and empowering educational experiences that prepare students to thrive in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

Chapter 5

Moral Debates

Education is not merely about imparting knowledge; it also involves shaping values, beliefs, and perspectives. Moral debates surrounding what should be taught in schools have been ongoing for centuries, reflecting society's evolving norms, values, and ideologies. Within the realm of social studies, these debates are particularly important, as they directly influence curriculum content and pedagogical approaches. This essay explores the intricate relationship between moral debates and social studies curriculum and pedagogies, examining how competing viewpoints shape educational practices and impact the development of informed, engaged citizens.

Moral debates in education revolve around questions of ethics, values, and morality concerning what should be taught in schools and how it should be taught. These debates are often rooted in differing perspectives on the purpose of education, the role of schools in moral development, and the boundaries of educational content. Key stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, parents, and community members, engage in these debates, reflecting diverse ideological, religious, cultural, and philosophical viewpoints.

Moral debates profoundly influence the development of social studies curriculum, shaping decisions about which topics to include, how they are framed, and the values they prioritize. At the heart of these debates lie questions about national identity, citizenship, and collective memory. For example, debates over the teaching of history often center on whose

stories are included, how historical events are interpreted, and which perspectives are privileged or biased.

In other societies, where cultural, religious, and ideological diversity is celebrated, curriculum developers must navigate competing demands for inclusivity and cultural sensitivity. Content selection may reflect efforts to represent diverse perspectives, challenge dominant narratives, and promote empathy and understanding across cultural boundaries. However, attempts to address controversial or sensitive topics, such as colonialism, slavery, or genocide, may spark heated debates about historical accuracy, political correctness, and the appropriate age for exposure to such content.

In one such examination of such debates, Dewey and Tufts looked at the question, “What is the primary function of government?” and were met with conflicting answers from students, educators, parents, and other members of society. They explain that there were conflicting perspectives regarding moral and ethical dilemmas concerning the appropriate roles of government. These encompassed fundamental assumptions and beliefs regarding the ethical considerations of federal government intervention in safeguarding citizens during times of terrorism and the nation's approach to international relations with other countries worldwide (Dewey & Tufts, 2013, p. 41). With that being said, this one simple question sheds light on the fact that there is very rarely mass agreement on the best course of action for such issues.

Furthermore, moral debates extend to discussions about the inclusion of values education within the social studies curriculum. Proponents argue that schools have a responsibility to cultivate ethical reasoning, empathy, and civic virtues among students, preparing them to contribute positively to society. However, opponents raise concerns about indoctrination, the imposition of moral values, and the erosion of parental authority over moral education.

The moral debates surrounding social studies curriculum also shape approaches used in the classroom. Educators must navigate competing demands for academic rigor, critical inquiry, and moral development while fostering an inclusive and respectful learning environment.

Pedagogical approaches range from traditional methods, such as lectures and textbook readings, to more experiential and inquiry-based methods, such as simulations, debates, and community engagement projects.

In certain societies, educators often employ multicultural and inclusive pedagogies to promote empathy, cultural competence, and social justice. By incorporating diverse perspectives, narratives, and voices into the curriculum, teachers can challenge stereotypes, foster appreciation for cultural diversity, and empower students to become responsible global citizens.

However, navigating moral debates within the classroom requires careful consideration of students' developmental readiness, cultural backgrounds, and individual beliefs. Educators must create opportunities for open dialogue, respectful disagreement, and critical reflection while maintaining a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Moreover, addressing controversial topics may require additional sensitivity and support to ensure that all students feel valued, heard, and respected.

The influence of moral debates on social studies curriculum and pedagogies has profound implications for student learning and engagement. When students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and pedagogical approaches, they are more likely to feel connected, motivated, and empowered to participate actively in their own learning. Conversely, a lack of inclusivity or relevance may alienate students, perpetuate stereotypes, and reinforce existing inequalities within the classroom.

Research suggests that inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies are associated with improved academic achievement, increased student engagement, and enhanced critical thinking skills. By fostering empathy, critical consciousness, and a sense of social responsibility, educators can empower students to become informed, ethical, and compassionate members of society. In her article, LaSpina asserts that while it's challenging for any curriculum to be completely inclusive, the political choices upholding the conventional canon in public education frequently overlook the perspectives of marginalized members of society. This omission results in a broader narrative that consistently portrays minority groups as victims of oppression (LaSpina, 2003, p. 14). Thus, it is of the utmost importance that better representation is required in social studies textbooks, lessons, and approaches in order to foster better learning outcomes for minority students plagued by this ethical issue.

However, addressing moral debates within the classroom requires ongoing reflection, dialogue, and professional development among educators. Teachers must navigate complex ethical dilemmas, cultural sensitivities, and competing viewpoints with integrity, sensitivity, and respect for diverse perspectives. Moreover, fostering ethical reasoning and moral development among students requires a collaborative effort involving schools, families, communities, and policymakers.

In conclusion, moral debates surrounding what should be taught in schools exert a profound influence on social studies curriculum and pedagogies. From content selection to instructional approaches, these debates shape educational practices and impact the development of informed, engaged citizens. By navigating competing demands for inclusivity, academic rigor, and moral development, educators can create learning environments that foster empathy, critical inquiry, and ethical reasoning among students. Ultimately, addressing moral debates within

social studies education is essential for cultivating responsible, compassionate, and socially conscious citizens who are equipped to navigate complex moral challenges in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

Chapter 6

Local Control vs. Federal Influence

Social studies curriculum in the United States is shaped by a complex interplay of local, state, and federal influences. While education policy is primarily the responsibility of states and local school districts, the federal government exerts influence through funding, standards, and initiatives. This essay explores how local and federal influences intersect to shape social studies curriculum in states, examining the roles of policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders in determining the content, scope, and instructional practices within the discipline.

At the local level, school districts and individual schools play a significant role in shaping social studies curriculum to meet the needs and preferences of their communities. Local school boards, administrators, and educators collaborate to develop curriculum frameworks, select instructional materials, and design pedagogical approaches that reflect local priorities, values, and cultural contexts.

Social studies curriculum may be influenced by the values, beliefs, and preferences of the local community. For example, in conservative-leaning communities, there may be greater emphasis on patriotism, traditional values, and American exceptionalism in the curriculum. Conversely, in progressive-leaning communities, there may be a focus on social justice, diversity, and global citizenship.

Local history, culture, and geography often inform the content and scope of social studies curriculum. For instance, schools located in regions with significant immigrant populations may

incorporate multicultural perspectives and immigrant experiences into the curriculum to promote inclusivity and cultural understanding.

Local school boards and administrators have the autonomy to make decisions about curriculum content, resources, and instructional approaches based on the unique needs and priorities of their communities. This flexibility allows for responsiveness to local concerns and preferences, but it can also lead to variability in curriculum quality and consistency across districts. One researcher shares that while many states have implemented extensive education reforms in recent years, these initiatives have primarily been approved by local school boards before being enacted on the legislative level (Danzberger, 1987, p. 6). This still holds true today—school boards are often forgotten or overlooked in the grand scheme of curriculum, instruction, and teaching approaches but they hold a vast amount of sway and importance.

While education policy is primarily the responsibility of states and localities, the federal government exerts influence on social studies curriculum through various mechanisms, including funding, standards, and initiatives. Federal involvement in education aims to ensure equity, accountability, and quality in K-12 education across the nation.

The federal government provides funding to states and school districts through programs such as Title I, which allocates funds to schools serving low-income students (Danzberger 1987). While federal funding is generally not tied directly to curriculum mandates, it can influence instructional priorities and resource allocation within schools.

The federal government has played a role in shaping academic standards and assessments through initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). These laws require states to develop and implement standards-based accountability systems, which often include social studies as a tested subject. As a result, states

may align their social studies curriculum with state standards and assessments to ensure compliance with federal requirements. With No Child Left Behind, the federal government dictates priority subject areas, restricts teaching methods, and specifies reform options for school districts that don't show improvement (Hursh, 2013, p.13). This is just one example of the large role the federal government has when determining where funding gets allocated, what lessons are deemed required, and how those lessons are taught.

The federal government supports various programs and initiatives aimed at improving social studies education, such as the Teaching American History Grants program and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). These initiatives provide funding, resources, and professional development opportunities to educators, schools, and organizations to enhance the quality and effectiveness of social studies instruction.

The influence of local and federal factors on social studies curriculum in states is dynamic and multifaceted, with both levels of government shaping curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation in different ways.

Local school districts often align their social studies curriculum with state standards and assessments to ensure students are adequately prepared for standardized tests and to demonstrate compliance with federal requirements. However, local educators may also have the flexibility to adapt curriculum content and instructional approaches to better meet the needs and interests of their students and communities.

Federal funding streams can influence resource allocation within schools, including staffing, materials, and professional development opportunities for social studies educators. Local school districts may prioritize funding for social studies programs based on federal funding requirements, community priorities, and instructional needs.

Federal initiatives aimed at improving social studies education, such as professional development grants and resources provided by the Department of Education and other federal agencies, can support local efforts to enhance teacher effectiveness and curriculum quality. Local educators may participate in federal programs and initiatives to gain access to specialized training, instructional materials, and best practices in social studies instruction.

While the interplay of local and federal influence on social studies curriculum can enhance educational quality and equity, it also presents challenges and considerations for policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders.

The decentralized nature of education governance in the United States can result in variability and inconsistency in social studies curriculum across states and school districts. Differences in standards, resources, and instructional approaches may contribute to inequities in educational opportunities and outcomes for students.

Social studies curriculum is often the subject of political controversy, with debates over topics such as historical narratives, cultural representation, and civic education. Local and federal policymakers may face pressure from interest groups, advocacy organizations, and constituents to shape curriculum in ways that reflect particular ideological perspectives or agendas.

Socioeconomic disparities in access to quality social studies education can exacerbate existing inequalities in educational outcomes. Federal initiatives aimed at improving educational equity, such as Title I funding and support for underserved populations, play a critical role in addressing disparities in social studies curriculum, resources, and opportunities for students (Benson & Puckett, 2007, p. 51).

The connectedness of local and federal influence on social studies curriculum in states reflects the complexity of education governance in the United States. While local school districts

have autonomy to shape curriculum to meet the needs and preferences of their communities, federal policies and initiatives play a role in shaping standards, assessments, and resource allocation. By considering the unique needs and contexts of their communities while also aligning with federal requirements, policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders can work together to ensure that social studies curriculum is rigorous, relevant, and equitable for all students.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

While exploring the challenges of partisanship to social studies curriculum, it becomes evident that the educational landscape is profoundly influenced by partisan ideologies and agendas. Through a review of the literature, several key findings have emerged, shedding light on the complexities faced by schoolteachers and administrators in navigating these issues. Firstly, the politicization of curriculum decisions often leads to a lack of inclusivity, with marginalized voices and perspectives being sidelined in favor of traditional narratives. This perpetuates a distorted representation of history and society, reinforcing the victimization and oppression of minority groups.

Furthermore, the influence of partisanship extends beyond content selection to pedagogical approaches and instructional methods. Political tensions dictate the boundaries of permissible discourse in the classroom, stifling critical thinking and open dialogue. Moreover, federal mandates and reforms impose constraints on curriculum development and implementation, limiting the autonomy of educators and administrators to address the diverse needs of students and communities.

The complexity of political polarization in social studies is deeply rooted in the fundamental disagreement over many of the terms and concepts used in its discourse. Progressives advocate for "social justice" and "antiracism," but to some traditionalists or conservatives, these terms may seem inherently anti-white, anti-police, and anti-America. Conversely, what conservatives cherish as "tradition" or "patriotic" may appear racist and anti-diversity to progressives. This stark disparity in interpretation highlights a significant challenge

within social studies education—a lack of a common baseline of factual information or shared understanding and interpretations of these terms. Without this common ground, conflicting perspectives perpetuate mistrust and polarization, creating a detrimental cycle that erodes the integrity of the public school system.

Compounding this issue is the disproportionate representation of ideological leanings among school personnel. With the ideological left significantly outnumbering conservatives in public schools, often by very wide margins, there exists an imbalance in perspectives. This overrepresentation fuels conservatives' discontent with progressive-oriented social studies curricula, leading to resistance against such educational reforms. Furthermore, it drives a growing trend of conservatives opting out of the public school system altogether, turning instead to homeschooling, charter schools, and private institutions as alternatives.

In light of these dynamics, it becomes apparent that the lack of ideological diversity among educators exacerbates political polarization within the realm of social studies education. The dominance of progressive perspectives not only alienates conservative students and parents but also creates a cycle of ideological reinforcement within the educational system. Consequently, efforts to foster a more inclusive and balanced approach to social studies curriculum design and implementation become imperative to mitigate polarization and restore trust in public education.

Addressing the challenge of political polarization in social studies demands a complex approach that acknowledges and confronts the underlying issues. Educators must strive to create learning environments where diverse perspectives are respected and encouraged, fostering critical thinking skills and civil discourse. Additionally, efforts to diversify the teaching profession to better reflect the ideological spectrum of society can help bridge the gap and

promote understanding among differing viewpoints. By promoting inclusivity, fostering empathy, and prioritizing factual accuracy, educators can work towards breaking the issue of mistrust and polarization plaguing the public school system. Only through concerted efforts to promote understanding, respect, and inclusivity can we hope to overcome the challenges facing social studies education and build a more cohesive and informed society.

Regarding these challenges, it is imperative for schoolteachers and administrators to critically engage with the existing literature and draw upon its insights to improve secondary education for young people and the public. Firstly, fostering a more inclusive curriculum that incorporates diverse perspectives and experiences is essential to providing a comprehensive understanding of history and society. This can be achieved through the selection of textbooks and teaching materials that reflect the richness of human experiences and contributions.

Secondly, educators should prioritize critical thinking skills and encourage students to interrogate and analyze different viewpoints, rather than passively accepting information. By creating a classroom environment that values intellectual curiosity and respectful dialogue, teachers can empower students to become active and informed citizens.

Additionally, school administrators play a crucial role in advocating for the autonomy of educators and resisting external pressures to conform to partisan agendas. They should support teachers in implementing innovative and engaging instructional methods that cater to the diverse needs of students. Moreover, administrators should actively collaborate with community stakeholders to ensure that curriculum decisions are reflective of local values and priorities.

In conclusion, the challenges posed by partisanship to social studies curriculum are significant but not insurmountable. By embracing inclusivity, critical thinking, and autonomy, schoolteachers and administrators can work together to create an educational environment that

fosters civic engagement, social justice, and intellectual growth. Through these efforts, secondary education can serve as a catalyst for positive change in society.

This thesis has examined a number of implications and influences on this process, and the research is far from done. It is of the utmost importance that this issue does not stop being evaluated and examined, for as new issues arise and time progresses, the social and educational landscape will continue to grow in what it needs to be successful. Therefore, schools and governments, local and federal, must work together to achieve the overarching goal – to create a robust civic education for the future of the United States.

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