



education review
a journal of book reviews

Volume 12 Number 10

August 18, 2009

Social Studies in the Postmodern World: An Essay Review

Ashwani Kumar
University of British Columbia

Segall, Avner; Heilman, Elizabeth E. & Cherryholmes, Cleo H. (Eds.)
(2006) *Social Studies—The Next Generation: Re-searching in the Postmodern*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
Pp. vii + 299 ISBN 0-8204-7067-8

Citation: Kumar, Ashwani. (2009, August 18). Social studies in the postmodern world: An essay review. *Education Review*, 12(10). Retrieved [date] from <http://edrev.asu.edu/essays/v12n10index.html>

Social Studies—The Next Generation: Re-searching in the Postmodern is an edited anthology of seminal articles aimed at providing poststructural foundations to social studies research and teaching. The editors, Avner Segall, Elizabeth E. Heilman and Cleo H. Cherryholmes, and the contributors, are seriously concerned with the present status of social studies research that is rooted in the principles of modernity, which sees truth and knowledge as “objective,” “uniperspectival,” “hard,” “attainable,” and “transmissible.” Social studies, editors argue, has been in a theoretical “time warp,” excluding itself from some of the more interesting conversations (postmodern, postcolonial, poststructuralist, critical feminism, and cultural studies) going on in academia (and beyond) since the 1980s. The editors urge social studies scholars to consider more inclusive, reflexive, and democratic approaches to research and teaching.

The main objective of this volume, according to the editors, is to broaden the imagination within social studies education by highlighting current, cutting-edge scholarship incorporating critical discourses. The volume brings together the works of those social studies scholars who have been influenced by post discourses and in turn incorporating diverse themes, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks. The contributors intend to explain the need for problematizing the assumptions of modernity regarding “knowledge” and “truth” and the hitherto taken-for-granted notions of nation, state, sovereignty, citizenship, and several others key concepts in social studies.

According to the authors, none of these categories is fixed and stable and all of them need to be critically examined, with reference to those dominant discursive practices and regimes of truth that give rise to and perpetuate them.

Social Studies—The Next Generation is divided into four parts, with a total of twenty-two chapters: Part I “Introduction and Context” contains two valuable introductory chapters by the editors to orient readers to the features of postmodernism and what it offers to social studies education; Part II “Postmodern Propositions” has 11 chapters, each representing a distinct theme and its postmodern treatment aimed at illustrating the relevance of post lens to understand social issues; Part III “Responses” consists of six reviews of the anthology by established scholars in the field; and Part IV “Afterwords” provides a concluding overview.

Poststructural Foundations of Social Studies Research and Teaching

Cleo H. Cherryholmes in Chapter 1, “Researching Social Studies in the Postmodern: An Introduction,” declares that the “essays in this volume are bold and varied departures” from the social studies education of the beginning of the twenty first century. He briefly discusses the need and relevance of postmodernism and poststructuralism in the wake of growing discontentment with positivism and scientism that view truth as absolute and uniperspectival. He lays the foundation for the “postmodern turn” in social studies by examining Rorty’s “linguistic turn”; Foucault’s emphasis on the relationship of “knowledge and power”; and Derrida’s stress on “deconstruction.” Cherryholmes considers “postmodern turn” as tremendous moment for social studies educators where “there is no one set of undisputed authoritative stories or theories or concepts or facts for social studies educators to adhere to and teach...” (p. 6). He clarifies the place of theory in postmodernism and challenges a key criticism of postmodernism in stating that

... not having one set of agreed upon theories and concepts, or a stance from which to engage them, doesn’t mean we can avoid taking a stance. Indeed a stance is inherent in whatever we choose to say or keep silent about (p. 6).

In Chapter 2, “Social Studies Research in the Context of Intellectual Thought,” Elizabeth E. Heilman and Avner Segall stress the importance of postmodern and poststructural perspectives in social studies and provides explanations how the former has evolved through the critique of preexisting “scientific,” “modern,” and “progressive” ways of viewing the world.

Heilman and Segall explain that during the late 1970s modernism and structuralism were begin to be replaced by postmodernism and poststructuralism (based on theories of Barthes, Derrida, and Foucault). Postmodernism, they maintain, isn’t just a temporal phenomena or something that came after modernism; rather, it is “a way of thinking about the world which challenges modernism with its emphasis on logic, progress, universality, and objective truth” (p. 17). Postmodern viewpoint, on the one

hand, stresses on “context and situation,” while on the other, critiques “grand narratives” and monolithic and linear theories about political, social, aesthetic, and literary events. This critique allows us to think, “that such narratives serve to mask the contradiction and instabilities inherent in any social organization or practice”(p. 17).

Heilman and Segall acknowledge that social science disciplines such as Geography, History and Anthropology have been influenced by “reflexive,” “linguistic,” and “critical turns” and in turn are contributing towards generating interesting intellectual conversations. Postmodern theory, they argue, is to problematize the taken-for granted binary frameworks of understanding social issues such as developed/developing, public/private, and local/global. Besides, in the postmodern perspective, such traditional concepts as nation, state, culture, and sovereignty are no longer viewed “neutral, deterministic, and concrete but rather as created academic concepts which are ill-defined and in flux” (p. 20). Heilman and Segall show their concern over the fact that social studies has only marginally participated in postmodern discourse in spite of having “progressive roots,” “inherently inter-, if not antidisciplinary” and because of issues of power, representation, identity, subjectivity and voice are being fundamental to its nature. Why did social studies did not participate in postmodernism?

According to Heilman and Segall, the prime reason why mainstream social studies did not welcome postmodern critical discourse was the general refusal to explore postmodern themes. In spite of the contribution of scholars such as Giroux, Cherryholmes, and Popkewitz to education, social studies did not welcome them much in spite of the fact that their initial affiliation was with social studies. Heilman and Segall refer to the 1982 issue of *Theory and Research in Social Education (TRSE)*, which included articles by Giroux and Cherryholmes where former focused on critical theory (based on Frankfurt School) while latter on Habermas and partly on Foucault. They also mention the special issue of *Social Education (SE)*, “New Criticism and Social Education,” which brought articles of Apple, Titlebaum, Giroux, Wexler, Cherryholmes, Gilbert, and Stanley together. These scholars emphasized upon “moving beyond the immediate conditions of schooling...[to]...the political, social, economic, and cultural basis underlying current conditions of schooling, teaching and learning as well as the taken-for-granted ideologies that give rise to them” (p. 22). These two issues of *TRSE* and *SE* could not give way to critical discourses afterwards until the late 1990s. In the late 1990s critical issues occupied a significant place in *TRSE* due to its new editor E. Wayne Ross and the emergence of critical scholarship among social studies researchers. The latter includes scholars who were nurtured through interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary doctoral programs and who based their works on a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives such as cultural studies, curriculum theory, women’s studies, African studies, and queer Studies. Heilman and Segall believes that the *Social Studies—The Next Generation* is yet another attempt to emphasize upon critical perspective in social studies research by bringing to together the works of those social educators who employ postmodern and poststructural lens in their research and teaching.

Now, I turn to a discussion of the major features of each chapter by the contributing authors to provide a glimpse to the readers what it looks like to research and teach in the postmodern.

Kevin Vinson in Chapter 3, "Social Studies in an Age of Image: Surveillance–Spectacle and the Imperatives of 'Seeing' Citizenship Education," discusses the image-surveillance-spectacle complex, based on the philosophical ideas of Foucault, Debord, Baudrillard, Bogard, Lyon, to explain how the former is related to social studies/citizenship education. By critiquing the notions of "accountability" (which puts teachers and students under strict surveillance of policy makers, parents and administrators) and standardized tests (spectacle) in order to have acceptability according to the set "image" in citizenship education, Vinson urges teachers and students to be aware of "the extent to which and how surveillance and spectacle rule and 'define' their lives as teachers, students and citizens" (p. 43). He urges them to raise questions such as:

Is the disciplinary society based on seeing-being seen consistent with their vision of democracy? Is the life under such circumstances consistent with their vision of "good life"? Why or why not?... Are they comfortable with the way things are? Do they seek change? In what directions? Why? [and to see] "how might the varieties of their available citizen/social knowledge help them here? ...[and], what might it—all of these—means for classroom based citizenship/social instruction? (p. 43).

Lisa J. Cary questions the taken-for-granted notions about female juvenile offenders in particular and citizenship in general in Chapter 4 titled "Within and Against Citizenship: Bad Girls in Deviant Subject Positions." Cary points towards a "social crisis" wherein deviant individuals are termed as "bad citizens" and deviant juvenile female offenders as "bad girls" and "pathologized women." She explains that these categories are "historically framed through the intersection of multiple discursive practices" (p. 48).

Cary invokes the postmodern works of Stanley (1992) and Popkevitiz (1998) based on Foucauldian (poststructural) analysis, to go beyond the "metanarratives" and work against the "normalizing tendencies of dominant discourses"... to complicate its [social studies'] understanding and presentation of fixed signifier and stable collective subjects that are both exclusivist and essentialist, such as the good citizen and the bad girl" (p. 51). Using the lens of postcolonialism and cultural studies, based on the works of Bhabha (1994), Pratt (1992), Spivak (1993), Delgado (1999) and Ong (1999), she urges us to look for "alternative ways of thinking about epistemological spaces [or "curriculum spaces"] in social studies that can be useful in interrupting the im (possible) constructions present within existing dominant discourses [such as "good citizens" and "bad girls"]" (p. 51). In order to understand deviant subjectivity, Cary employs Jennifer Terry's (1991) work of deviant historiography that focuses on the construction of "deviant subjectivity" with reference to lesbians and gays. Deviant historiography makes it apparent how historical texts and emergent discourses can shed light on the deviant subject positions constructed on /for/with juvenile female offenders.

By combining critical discourse analysis and deviant historiography, Cary explores how the construction of identities such as “good girls,” citizen, child, adolescent, progressive era notions of women (social hygienists and eugenicists), social institutions of education and detention, and populist discourses, all tie in a “multiply-layered discursive spaces” that is exclusivist and reductive. The ways in which female juvenile offenders historically have been constructed as “deviant” in these epistemological spaces includes the highly sexualized and pathologized medico-scientific discourses and aggressive behavior that has been analyzed as suggestive of masculine tendencies.

Cary’s major purpose behind deconstructing the historical discursive practices and institutional arrangements regarding juvenile female offenders is “to make possible interruptions of that essentializing and exclusivist construction for teachers, teacher educators, counselors, administration, juvenile justice officials and other state agents who are among first to position and label these girls” (p. 60). Cary also wants to inform the work of social studies educators about taken-for-granted notions of citizenship that marginalizes students considered bad or deviant in society.

Lisa Loutzenhiser in Chapter 5, “Gendering Social Studies, Queering Social Education,” points out the continuing lack of focus on gender, sex, and sexuality within social studies in spite of the fact that “teaching for diversity” and “teaching for social justice” are highlighted as major concerns within education. Her main focus is to question “what is normative and *normalized* in schools and classrooms in relation to gender and sexuality?” (p. 62). Grounding her arguments in the works of Warner (1993), Sumara and Davis (1999), and Rodriguez (2003), she critiques the notion of “heteronormativity” that calls for assimilation and similarity rather than uncertainty of partial, messy differences. She argues for anti-oppressive pedagogies that incorporate queer theories, fluidity and non-essentialized categories to offer help for theorizing about teaching and learning of difference. Fluidity theories, according to her, gives attention to the complicated and incomplete picture that subjectivities and identities offer. She also stresses the need for “intersectionality” where the diverse subjective identities meet momentarily and the way categories of race, gender, and sexuality undergo change within local contexts. She critiques the “assimilation,” “add and stir”/“focus on similarity” models of curriculum that assume student identities as universal, non-intersectional and fixed, and the idea that the insertion of “multicultural” curricula content into already established lessons, without making changes to the purposes of lessons or units, will suffice.

Drawing upon Felman (1992), Loutzenhiser acknowledges the difficulties that a teacher might face teaching a curriculum that assumes classroom reality to be “normative” and “normalized.” She suggests that the “conversation about gender, sexuality and (and in) their intersections cannot occur unless teachers also have experienced the hard conversations [in their pre-service teacher education program]” (p. 58).

In Chapter 6, “Citizenship and Belonging: Constructing “A Sense of Place and a Place that Makes Sense,”” Dawn Shinew reports a study involving six elementary female education student-teachers placed in two high-need schools in an urban school district.

The study focused upon exploring “participants’ beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors regarding the role of teachers in a democratic society and encouraged them to examine the extent to which knowledge about what it means to educate democratic citizens is constructed, situated and political” (p. 84).

Developing on Haraway’s (1991) concept of “situated knowledges,” Shinew observes the concepts of citizen and democratic citizenship as situated knowledge. The basic question explored was: How has the meaning of citizenship been shaped by locationality and positionality? Shinew intends not for constructing one definition and proving it better than the others but for multiple definitions through the participants’ experiences. She proposes a shift

... away from a foundational notion of citizen that rejects “real” all-embracing definition in favor of a perspective that acknowledges the validity of partial truths, socially constructed narratives and “situated” knowledge, all of which reflects a postmodern epistemology... Instead of presenting citizenship as a static, sterile, unchanged concept, social studies should be promoting critical, radical, lived democracy in which competing definitions challenge and complement one another. It is in these spaces that pre-service teachers and their future students can create new meaningful ways to act out their roles as citizens (p. 82).

Brenda Trofanenko in Chapter 7, “The Public Museum and Identity: Or, the Question of Belonging,” explains the role museums play in constructing national identity and propagating those historical representations which emphasize dominant culture at the expense of native culture in Canada. She argues that “public museums carry ideas of inequality and dominance” that try to propagate the view of nation being a singular identity rather than something that has grown out of conflicts and tensions “between belonging and non-belonging of unity and diversity, of cohesion and dispersion” (p. 97).

Trofanenko considers public museums part of State apparatuses to educate and civilize the public in particular ways by attempting to control exactly what the former wished the latter to know. She questions such unwarranted authority and power as well as trouble the trust over the objects displayed as neutral and “scientific” evidence of the past. She argues that these museums do not give space to the role of indigenous people in the formal nation-building; rather, they are seen as “marginalized and pre-modern people, whose identities are tied to objects from which the public understands “culture.” She urges that museums should be critical of the past instead of presenting a positive image. She suggests that the critical study of museums should start with “not only what is being represented but also how it came to be represented in the first place. The effect of the representation can and should be questioned and critiqued” (p. 105).

Robert J. Helfenbein, Jr. provides us with an intriguing critical geography perspective to teach history in Chapter 8 titled “Space, Place and Identity in the Teaching of History: Using Critical Geography to Teach Teachers in the American South.” Helfenbein’s chapter is the outcome of his experience of teaching an online history

course (part of social studies) to pre-service teachers in North Carolina. In this course, Helfenbein explores three questions:

How does a critical geography approach challenge a traditional history/social studies curriculum? In what ways could social studies teachers incorporate such approaches to both curriculum and pedagogy? Finally, what is at stake—for both teachers and students—in such an approach? (pp. 111-112).

The “critical turn” in geography, attributable to the works of geographers like Harvey (2001), Allen (2003), Massey (1995), and Soja (1989, 1996), involves dissolving the traditional, physical/human geography divide as well as the notion of “border” as fixed entity. In critical geography perspective “borders and boundaries are troubled, crossed and complicated ... [and this is] part of the process of place-making” (p. 113). Critical geography applies multiple hierarchical level analyses to understand the complexity of curriculum, educative practice, and social formation.

Helfenbein cites responses of several students in his history course to question the relationship of pre- and post-civil war condition of slavery to explain that history cannot be understood through grand narrative; rather it is so rich and complex that it requires multiple perspectives of the people whose identities and perspectives have been shaped (not in a deterministic fashion) due to being in different places. By means of various case studies, he “challenged students to think of space as contested, navigated and negotiated” (p. 118). Rather than conceiving of geographic regions as determining contexts for the unfolding of history, the critical perspectives encouraged students to see the people living within these contexts as flexible, responsible actors who struggle with conditions of their existence. This helps students, Helfenbein explains, move from the beginning questions of “how does *where* we are help make us *who* we are? to “how does *who* we are help us make *where* we are” (p. 122). This shift determines the possibility of history. Following Pinar (1994), Helfenbein maintains that curriculum is not about subjects of history or geography but about “subjectivity” where people make their own history under conditions that are often not of their own making. Thus, he stresses that the autobiographical account of history of the teachers and students (that he also employed in his own course) is significant to point out and reflect on our own subjectivities as knowers of history. He believes that such understanding helps teachers see their own “classrooms, content and pedagogy as spaces of possibilities—indeed, as spaces of hope” (p. 124).

Avner Segall has authored Chapter 9, “What is the Purpose of Teaching a Discipline Anyway? The Case of History,” where he identifies and analyses the limitation of “collective memory” and “disciplinary” orientations in order to highlight the significance of “critical postmodern approach” to the discipline of history and history education. He questions Peter Sexias’ work for undermining postmodern approach to history while supporting the disciplinary orientation. According to Sexias (2000), “disciplinary orientation” provides student with multiple versions of the past. It teaches students to reach the “better interpretation” on the basis of a series of documents,

historians' assessments, and other materials, as well as construct their own interpretations. Sexias points out that postmodern orientations suspect grand narratives and questions disciplinary notions of truth by seeing knowledge and knowing always as positioned and positioning. Sexias questions the importance of postmodern orientation, which, unlike disciplinary orientation, does not allow educators and students to reach at the "best" or most historically valid approach based on evidence, to understand how different groups organize the past into histories, and how these histories are implicated in, and serve larger political and social purposes. For Sexias postmodern approach is "too overtly political and ideological, overly relativistic, present-day oriented, and circulatory reflexive to meaningfully guide history education in schools" (Sexias, 2000 in this volume, p. 127). Sexias, not being against questioning the foundation and examining the assumptions, asks: "How much is enough? What sense of the world of knowledge of history does the open-ended free-play of argument, plot, ideology and narrative trope offer students. How do they become aware of the limit?" (Sexias, 2000 in this volume, p. 127). Segall, on the contrary, argues in favor of "critical postmodern" approach and explains that the term "disciplinary" should be attributed to the postmodern approach rather than to the disciplinary approach. According to Segall, the emergence of postmodern, poststructural, feminism, and postcolonialism has made the hitherto unproblematic concepts of "facts," "reality," and "objectivity" problematic. Thus, reality and interpretation are not separable entities. Informed by the post discourses, feminism and cultural studies, Segall stresses that critical perspective allow critical examination of ... disciplinary practices, arrangements and the boundaries and the regimes of truth emanating from them, with a particular focus on what the above require [for inclusion] as they make knowing possible, and what and who are silenced and ignored [excluded] through these requirement (p. 134).

Segall points out that it is in the context of inclusion and exclusion in the construction of subject—both as the substance of knowledge and knowing—critical approach stands in sharp contrast to the disciplinary approach. What becomes important for disciplinary approach is not an exploration of history or its education as text but rather an examination of individual texts, that is, carefully and meticulously exploring sources and measuring them against other individual sources. A critical approach, on the other hand, implicates individual text sources in their discursive modes of production, connects them to the broader discourse that made them possible. Critical perspective is not interested in "what" questions, for example, what is the meaning of a particular text? but with questions related to "why" and "how" that text and its meaning become important.

Recognizing the fact that historians and educators in disciplinary camp have charged critical approach with relativism (that makes it difficult to teach students, if not impossible, how to make sense of the past), Segall build on Stanley (1992) to argue that "use of relativism as a negative characterization only makes sense if we assume the possibilities of objective stable knowledge" (p.137). Employing Derrida (1979), Segall believes that truth is plural and so relativism (or perspectivism) is the background

condition under which the knowledge is sought in humanities and in our daily life. Relativism, Segall argues, does not mean that educators can't make discriminations or moral judgments but it eschews the possibility of a metaphysically grounded knowledge. However, the criteria for such judgments are not neutral but positioned.

Segall concludes that although all the three orientations engage some aspect of the discipline, it is the critical approach that is self-reflexive and helps students and teachers to know about the disciplines unlike collective memory (that exposes students to a limited dimension of subject) and disciplinary (that has criteria and method to analyze the past but does not question the tools or discipline itself). Thus, the main objective of critical approach is to help students question the very tools of historians and the discipline itself, which actually makes it "disciplinary."

Greda Wever Rabehl strongly argues for the place of "tragic knowledge" in social studies in Chapter 10 titled "The Tragic Knowledge of the Social." Rabehl points out that much of our social studies curriculum and pedagogy is disconnected from the real concrete contexts. This detachment, she explains, signifies a particular kind of abstract thinking and blindness to concrete human realities.

Grounding her ideas in the works of Simon Weil (1949/2002), Rabehl recognizes the importance of "witnessing" the social reality including that which we have chosen not to see, or have in the name of romanticism refused to see. She questions the attitude to view social reality that is "blinded by the complacency of optimism" that does not allow to see reality "rooted in a specific existential terrain, a terrain inherited by much pain and suffering" (p. 143). By providing us with excerpts from an autobiographical narration of a former displaced person and a prisoner of war, she raises very significant and deep issues regarding "violence." She points out that seeing violence, as just the obvious form of cruelty and hatred is not sufficient. "Violence is everywhere, where we act as if the other is only to receive... violence is found in whatever narcissistic strategy the self uses to reduce, use and annihilate the other" (p. 145).

Rabehl urges the social studies educators that if the latter seriously want to take the issues of social justice in their work then violence and cruelty cannot be seen as exclusive attributes of "others" but means by which the self, whether collectively or individually, perpetuates itself. With reference to social studies curriculum and pedagogy in school, she wants to take up Piaget's suggestion of providing students with lived experiences in which they may explore the nature of social conflicts and problems. She also sees social studies as an important field of research wherein space should be provided for the study of the social knowledge of the tragic and its remembrance so that it can emerge as coherent field of study. She urges the social studies educators in schools and the social studies research in universities to focus on the personal and autobiographical memory as the link between collective memory and personal responses in order to disrupt self-deceiving collective interpretive frameworks.

Tammy Turner-Vorbeck presents a critique of the modernist concept of "family" prevalent in the present social studies curriculum and pedagogy in Chapter 11 "Representation of Family in Curriculum: A Poststructural Analysis." According to

Turner-Vorbeck, a poststructural examination of the conception of family suggests that modernist social science discourses have developed “a normative conception of what defines a “family” as well as what constitutes a normal, healthy, and thus, valued “family.” Form of family that diverts from the so-called standards, for example, single-parent, gay, lesbian, transgendered, adopted and grandparent, etc. often go unrecognized and unappreciated and even pathologized by labels such as “dysfunctional” or “morally wrong” (p. 133). These social science discourses are reciprocally related with political discourse. Referring to Chambers (2001), she argues that the academic discourses have followed the governmental rhetoric and reproduced similar biases in upholding a white middle-class, aspirational, nuclear version of family as a mythical norm. As well, the family policy is strongly influenced by research agendas that get shaped by political agendas. Government funds those researches generously, which uphold the dominant family ideals. These academic and political discourses on family are further supported and perpetuated by media discourses and their consistent portrayals of the normative and ideal family forms—as natural, biological, heterosexual, cohabiting conjugal unit. These three discourses—social science, political, and media—perpetuate those discursive practices that normalize the traditionally held belief of a family and excludes any “other” version of a family as “dysfunctional” or “abnormal” in spite of the fact that existing social reality has deviated to a considerable extent from the traditional/ideological conception of family as something biological, inevitable, unchangeable, and universal. Given such prevalent conceptions of family, Turner-Vorbeck urges for a social studies curriculum and pedagogy that interrupts this normativity with reference to the issues of family and gives space to more critical and plural forms of understanding the diverse ways in which people in society are related and have organized their relationships.

In Chapter 12, “Adventures in Metropolis: Popular Culture in Social Studies,” Trena Walker presents an emphatic case for the incorporation of popular culture in social studies for the development of “civic competence” and “democratic education.” Walker points out that our environment is a “media-saturated environment,” which not only provides us with images of the world around us by means of television, films, video, magazines, posters, video games and Internet but also suggests us ways of understanding the world. She is amazed at as well as critical of the fact that in spite of the power and pervasiveness of popular media many of the educators simply ignore this fact. She considers media as the “first curriculum” whereby students construct most of their images, and critiques those teachers who think that just by refusing to incorporate popular media in their classrooms they can save students from the negative impacts of the former.

Rather than escaping from the reality of the deep-seated influence of popular media, Walker calls for the development of critical literacy following the works of Freire (1997) and Aronowitz and Giroux (1993). Critical literacy, she emphasizes, helps students develop the connection between knowledge and power. It helps them know how knowledge is socially constructed and serves specific economic, political, and social interests. Thus, critical literacy provides students with the tools of reading the world and their lives critically and relatedly, which may grow their potential for social action and

change. According to her, social studies curriculum provides the needed space for the development of critical literacy. She urges us to go

... beyond the traditional methods of merely teaching through popular media texts (for entertainment, relevancy or the perceived immediacy of experience) and engaging students to think critically about popular media texts.... [This] approach helps students critically examine assumptions, attitudes and values underlying the production, mediation, and consumption (especially students' own consumption) of such texts and how they position students to assume particular social, gendered, and racial reading positions (p. 173).

Such an approach, Walker thinks, provides space for "civic competence" as defined in NCSS (1994) and "democratic education," based on the ideas of Nelson (2001), Dewey (1916/1966), Giroux (1988), McLaren (1995), and Tucker and Evans (1996), that basically requires critical examination of social issues, active participations, community living, fighting against social discrimination, and a global perspective to contribute towards a common good.

Elizabeth Heilman in Chapter 13, "Critical, Liberal, Poststructural Challenges for Global Education," makes a strong case for the significance of global education in social studies curriculum given the pressing political, economic, cultural, and environmental problems that spawn the planet earth. She remarks that though issues of global concern have been part of social studies curriculum, the nature of global education presents distinctive philosophical and conceptual challenges and often contradictions between theorists. She carries out a critical examination of the philosophical and conceptual claims and counter claims to bring about substantial improvement about "global" in social studies curriculum.

Heilman's basic thesis is to undermine modernist idea (based on positivism and empiricism) of neutrality, subject area division, and concepts such as state, identity, power and culture, and pose global education as essentially an integrative postmodern study. Heilman recognizes and exposit upon four aspects of theory of globalization: 1) The overarching philosophical rationale for global education, and whether global citizenship should be understood as a "status" or as an inclusive "critical capacity." 2) What can be involved in cross-cultural understanding and "knowing" the other? 3) What is the meaning of culture? and 4) How might we think about the various media through which our global learning occurs?

Heilman opens up the debate between two strands of citizenship: "citizenship as status" and "citizenship as practice." Citizenship as status is given/available to those who are full members of a community, and who are equal with respect to the rights and duties that comes with the status. Heilman critiques this concept of citizenship for being confined to those who have the status, and thus having very limited implications for education. She favors the concept of "citizenship as practices," which is more expansive and introduces an important "ethical dimension" and highlights the need to make judgments that affect others and to listen to others across differences. She points out that

these intellectual and ethical capacities are not particularly natural, and this situation requires thoughtful education if they are to be successfully realized. Citizens, she argues, are not only law obeying people, they are also those who are actually engaged to bring about changes in the laws, if the latter are in conflict with significant values. She articulates that

... global education is fundamentally a moral, political and critical endeavor rooted in a particular idea of citizenship that asserts responsibility for all people, all species, and for the environment, and express faith in democratic dialogue and decision-making (p. 192).

Heilman also questions the view of multiculturalism wherein other cultures can be known in their entirety and, thus, all differences and conflicts can be resolved. She remarks that “cross-cultural knowing is to begin with the idea that whoever the “other” is, the “other” can never be fully known and that coming to know across difference is an acutely difficult process”(p. 196). She considers it naive to think that one can know the other without any struggle for uncomfortable feeling of difference. Demanding appreciation of other perspectives underestimates the discomfort of real difference. She stresses that though the global citizenship requires “sincere and empathetic interpreters,” it does not mean that the criticism of other individuals and culture should be suspended. What is required is not superficial appreciation or criticism but deeper examination of world that is not composed of homogenous reality but of incompatible belief systems. And such examination, she thinks, needs imaginative and emotional capacities. She greatly emphasizes for the incorporation of postcolonial studies and hybridity theory to understand the term culture and its implications for global education.

Heilman also carries out a critical examination of media that often makes it hard for people to access the “real.” She explains that besides formal curriculum and trips, it is the popular culture through mass media that shapes students imagination about other cultures. She refers to work of Baudrillard (1993) and explains how mass media create hyperreality where truth does not exist. She warns us of using the popular culture and the teaching resources with great caution and critical analysis to make students aware of misinformation and cultural chauvinism. Following Merryfield (2001), she urges for “globalizing” global education through literature, theories, and diverse practices that reflect the complexity of our world in the present time.

Reviews within the Volume

Part III, “Responses,” includes reviews of the volume by the established scholars in the field, namely, Joe Kincheloe, Merry M. Merryfield, William B. Staley, Margaret Smith Crocco, Walter Parker, and Keith C. Barton.

Reviews by Stanley and Barton are particularly critical of the project. Stanley’s critique mainly constitutes two points concerning the volume’s lack of effective contribution to the debate on the purpose(s) of social studies education, and the challenges postmodernism has faced from various quarters for being hopeless, nihilistic,

relativistic, fascist, apolitical and for not being in favor of political, social, and economic reforms. He urges the authors of the volume to theorize and respond to these critiques.

Barton applauds postmodernism for rich critical examination of issues, but questions how far it will be able to contribute towards developing curricula and instruction. He critiques the idea of limiting postmodernism to a mere “reflexive encounter.” He challenges the authors’ view that proposing a new curriculum and instructional practices is an act of “imposition.” Barton argues that we, the educators, can’t do without imposition, what we can do is just to “debate which ways are better... [Otherwise,] why should we require [students] to go to school if we don’t have anything to teach them?” (p. 243). He concludes that in the critical examination of postmodernism space must be given for the ideals of “reason” and “progress” toward a just society.

The other respondents are more supportive. For Kincheloe, the volume provides plethora of theoretical discourses for social studies scholars to deploy in their scholarly academic labor. He considers the work to be very timely especially in the wake of standardization propagated by No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that, if left unchallenged, is certain to push the social sciences and humanities to the “desert of irrelevancy.” Kincheloe suggests that reconceptualization of social studies requires intellectual rigor, criticality, and practicality.

Crocco raises the issue of the “undertheorization” in the field of social studies with reference to its cardinal concepts of nation, state, identity, citizenship etc. This undertheorization she attributes to the over dominance of practice; positivistic orientation of the field’s primary research journal, *Theory and Research in Social Education*; lack of distinctive research methodology; and divisions among social studies educators who lack any common goals to bring about a just social order. Merryfield appreciates the volume’s emphasis on multiple perspectives, derived from the post traditions. However, she shares her concern that the book is reduced to “university rhetoric” for it lacks contributions from classroom practitioners.

Parker presents a case for “critical pragmatism.” Though he appreciates the way many contributors of the book have “packed and unpacked” educational practice, he asks questions such as:

What is accomplished as a result? Are the analyses more powerful? Are the objects of attention worthy in the grand scheme of things, of readers’ time given the on the ground problems and crisis we face? Are the solutions and actions proposed less naive and superficial and more wise and humane—and workable? (p. 239).

The last part, “Afterwords,” answers (some of the) points raised in the “Responses.” The main points discussed are: 1) Editors maintain that postmodernism in social studies is not to replace the existing curriculum and practices by new ones. Rather, it is to promote a critical, reflexive engagement with existing disciplinary discourses and practices, one that attempts to subvert them through a process of critical engagement with these practices. 2) Editors respond to the critique that labels postmodernism as a form of relativism. They argue that valuing multiple perspectives simply means the impossibility

of objective knowledge but that does not mean that one cannot make value claims about knowledge and visions for a better future. However, value claims and judgments are never neutral or disinterested. 3) Editors also defend the criticism that the works in the volume are too theoretical and is devoid of direction for practice. According to Segall, theory is not opposite to practice rather

theory and practice are always already inherent in the other...theory is inherently practical not only when it is practiced but *as* a practice, one that does not simply precede practice...theory, then, is the practice of intelligibility. This kind of practice—a critical-reflexive engagement with the existing forms of knowledge—contributes to the coming together of theory and/as practice... (p. 249).

Critical Evaluation

Social Studies—The Next Generation. Re-searching in the Postmodern successfully serves the purposes for which it has been collected: it provides poststructural foundations to social studies research and teaching by highlighting cutting edge scholarship incorporating critical discourses. Chapter authors very well problematize various basic notions pertinent to social studies, such as nation, identity, citizenship, state, culture, multiculturalism, global citizenship etc., which are usually taken-for-granted. Contributors have also been able to show to the readers that most of the current research in social studies is simply positivistic that not do not question the dominant discourses that shape and reshape present day reality and perpetuate it further.

Social Studies—The Next Generation is also very significant for, perhaps, being first of its kind that brings together the works of social educators employing poststructural methodological and theoretical frameworks. The volume is certainly beneficial for those researchers in the field who wants to question the existing social reality from postmodern lens. Treatment of several themes such as gender and sexuality, deviant girls, museum, family, popular culture, multiculturalism etc. through employing diverse methodologies (for example deviant historiography, discourse analysis, autobiography, and media analysis) and theoretical frameworks (for example situated knowledges, critical geography, heteronormativity, critical history, feminism, cultural studies, and poststructuralism) can certainly help others in the field to understand, reflect upon, and enrich their own teaching and research. The book will certainly serve as a Postmodern Reader for students, teachers, and researchers in the field of social studies. The volume also has a high credibility for being edited by the established scholars in the field who have been laboring hard through their scholarship and through encouraging new scholars to undertake and enhance postmodern investigations in the social studies.

More specifically, the first two introductory chapters by the editors provide readers with a rich conceptual background explaining the major differences between modernism and postmodernism and structuralism and poststructuralism. The introductory chapters also provide detailed theoretical argument for the incorporation of post-

discourses in the social studies research and teaching. Furthermore, chapter authors very innovatively present several case studies to share their practices as postmodern social studies scholars in their specific contexts. Chapters 6 and 8 by Dawn Shinew and Robert Helfenbein, jr., respectively, are very good examples of the same. In addition, authors analytically show how important it is to understand the perspectives of “other” through incorporating themes like tragic knowledge and juvenile female offenders. The chapters dealing with popular culture (Chapter 12), museum (Chapter 7) and global education (Chapter 13) are particularly intriguing for their analysis and suggestions. Segall’s emphasis (in Chapter 9) on critical postmodern approach to history and history education is a brilliant piece that argues for history teaching and learning as a reflexive engagement.

Additionally, contributors of the book, though claiming to be researching in the postmodern, also draws heavily from diverse critical traditions of feminism, queer studies, fluidity theories, critical theory, psychoanalysis and cultural studies and, thus, respects multiple-perspective and plurality of truth. Chapter authors have supported their claims with sound theoretical argument and empirical evidence. All the chapters (including endnotes and bibliography) contain accurate information, are well written, and easy to follow. Chapter wise endnotes and references are also immensely valuable for further investigations. The editors’ innovative idea of incorporating reviews by established social studies scholars should also be appreciated. Such an effort discloses editors’ sincerity towards sharing their work and seeking critical feedback—the backbone of any sound research.

I see *Social Studies—The Next Generation* as a valuable contribution to the field of social studies that offer plethora of post perspectives to view social reality. It surely engages with the current debates in social studies education ridden with undertheorization and positivistic research.

Nevertheless, in addition to the aforementioned merits, the *Social Studies—The Next Generation* also has certain limitations that need to be pointed out for the benefit of the reader.

First of all, in their introduction, Heilman and Segall inadequately explain how structures influence psychology, linguistics, and sociology, which in turn influence education. It was difficult to understand why they reduced Piaget to be a structuralist. Interestingly, one of the contributors of the volume, Rabehl, invokes Piaget’s work for experiential learning. Moreover, Heilman and Segall’s references to modern period and its thinkers were inadequate. They did not refer to the works of Marx and Durkheim and only sketchily touched upon Freud.

Moreover, though Heilman and Segall briefly describe existentialism, phenomenology, and pragmatism, they do not refer to any of the works that grew in education/social education due to such influences. Besides, while discussing how pragmatism led to progressive education and constructivist philosophy there is no reference to John Dewey. It was difficult for me to know on what basis did the put Althusser’s (1971) work under the category of post- discourses on page number 19. Althusser’s work is counted as one of the most significant representative of reproduction

or structural paradigm. In addition, the paragraph on critical theory did not mention even a single critical theorist except Paulo Freire. (However later on page 22 they refer to a few critical theorists such as Michael Apple, Henry Giroux, and William Stanley, among others while discussing the place of critical scholarship in the *Journal of Social Education* and *Theory and Research in Social Education*).

Furthermore, in the Endnote 2 on page number 258, Heilman and Segall have categorically deprived Goodman, Ross and Gibson from having any say in postmodern discourses. Indeed Rich Gibson is a staunch Marxist, but E. Wayne Ross, in addition to his allegiance to Marxist theories of education, has employed the critical perspectives of Debord and Foucault to explain the importance of “surveillance” and “spectacle” on our social and educational system in his *Image and Education* (2003) (co-authored with Vinson). Moreover, while Segall and Heilman have singled out Goodman, Ross and Gibson as people whose works cannot be seen as critical postmodern, Shiner’s references in her chapter to the works of critical theorists (for example Goodman (1992) and Giroux and McLaren (1986)) and Vinson’s references in Chapter 1 clearly reflects the significant role that critical theory plays in postmodern age. It is difficult for me to find out the need to see critical theory and postmodern from dualistic lens.

Also, throughout the book I have been struggling to understand the difference between postmodern, critical postmodern, and critical theory. Editors of the book describe the works in the book as “critical postmodern.” If “critical postmodern” is different from “postmodern” then what is the exact difference between the two? and what made them abandon the postmodern and choose critical postmodern? No explanation can be found throughout the book how critical postmodern is different from “critical theory.” Given the fact that many of the contributors in this volume, including Segall and Heilman, describe themselves as critical theorists and quote critical theorists, I wish to ask whether they are appropriating critical theory to postmodernism or postmodernism to critical theory. If former is the case, then, it seems impossible as critical theorists have the well-defined goals of achieving social justice, equality, and freedom for the common good of the public. Postmodernism, of course, sees such goals as idealistic constructs that are impossible to be achieved. If the latter is the case, then, postmodernism should be welcomed by critical theorists as it can really add to their work by helping them understand how the forces such as neoliberalism and standardization gets accommodated and modified in specific contexts.

In addition, the editors and the contributors have exaggeratedly associated modernism with positivism. Their critiques of positivism are valid, but these critiques have been offered by several other traditions within modernism itself, including pragmatism, existentialism and phenomenology (as also noted by Heilman and Segall in Chapter 2). Moreover, besides these traditions Marxism, psychoanalysis, and critical theory also fall within the modern that have contributed greatly to understanding social and individual problems, and cannot reasonably be discarded for being “modernist.” What is the purpose of postmodernism in education? Is it to replace modernism? Or, is it to keep the core values of modernism such as social justice, freedom, and equality and

help us see how the limitations of modernist thinking might be overcome? If former is the case, then why? and, how? If latter is the case, then I would ask: Is it essential to look at modernism and postmodernism from dualistic lens? If yes, why? Is looking at them from dualistic lens a mere academic exercise or is there some serious concern towards the problems of our existence, which is already very complicated?

Moreover, throughout the anthology, contributors discuss the oppressive conditions created by standards-based reforms and high-stakes standardized testing that slowly and steadily is eliminating social studies from the school curriculum. This is a circumstance that is not particular to US, but is happening throughout the world (Ross & Gibson, 2007). Standardized tests and successful performance on them is being considered as the sole purpose of education. Though authors of the volume raise this issue, they are unable to explain how these tendencies are linked with and can be explained through understanding the extent to which behaviorism and positivism is part and parcel of capitalist schooling and society. Capitalist society and its schooling gives value to what can be commodified through production, quantification, marketing, and consumption. Standardized tests are the very manifestation of positivism and behaviorism, which value objective, measurable, reproducible, and transmissible knowledge, and is bound to be popular in capitalist society for they fit the very notion of commodification on which the capitalist society rests (Kumar, 2008a; 2008b).

Additionally, contributors of the volume illustrate their serious concern over the issues of social justice, but readers will not find an explanation of how and why injustice exists in the first place. None of the contributors employ the category of “class” to explain social injustice. There are no references to how the capitalist economy gives rise to social injustice and is reflected through poverty, unemployment, poor funding of schooling etc. Such issues seem not to be the concern of postmodern scholars in social studies. There is no discussion of the expanding empire of capital, by means of neoliberalism and neocolonialism spearheaded by World Trade Organization, World Bank and International Monetary Fund. There is no concern over the issues of war, nuclear crisis, and ecological problems. Are these not concerns of postmodern social studies researchers? Social studies educators are surely interested to know how postmodernism responds to such issues.

Finally, the authors of the *Social Studies—The Next Generation. Re-searching in the Postmodern*, appear to offer the critical lens for examining present circumstances, but are ultimately unable to offer anything new for curriculum and instructional practice in social studies. Obviously, the authors are not satisfied with the present state of social studies education and urge social educators to engage with social reality with reflexivity and criticality. A key question remains: What is the purpose of this exercise if the authors have no plan for change? Most certainly they *have* ideals and visions for how social studies teaching and learning might be transformed, but then why keep them secret? Is it a fear of being labeled as “modernist” or escaping from the “dirty work” in the reality of the classroom, with which they so strongly claim to be associated with?

Acknowledgement

I sincerely thank Dr. E. Wayne Ross for encouraging me to write this review and providing generous feedback in its preparation.

References

- Allen, J. (2003). *Lost geographies of power*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Althusser, L. (1971). Ideology and the ideological state apparatus (Trans. B. Brewster). In *Lenin and philosophy and other essays* (pp. 127-186). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Aronowitz, S., & Giroux, H. A. (1993). *Education still under siege*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Baudrillard, J. (1993). The evil demon of images and the precession of simulacra. In T. Docherty (Ed.), *Postmodernism: A reader* (pp. 194-199). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Chambers, D. (2001). *Representing the family*. London: Sage Publications.
- Delgado, R. (1999). Citizenship. In R.D. Torres, L. F. Miron, & J. X. Inda (Eds.), *Race, identity, and citizenship: A reader* (pp. 247-252). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Derrida, J. (1979). *Spurs: Nietzsche's styles* (Trans. B. Harlow). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dewey, J. (1916/1996). *Democracy and education*. New York: The Free Press.
- Felman, S. (1992). Education and crisis. In S. Felman & D. Laub (Eds.), *Testimony: Crisis of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history* (pp. 1-56). New York: Routledge.
- Freire, P. (1997). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Trans. M. Ramos). New York: Continuum.
- Giroux, H. A. (1988). *Schooling and the struggle for public life: Critical pedagogy in the modern age*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Giroux, H. A., & McLaren, P. (1986). Teacher education and the politics of engagement: The case for democratic schooling. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56, 213-238.

- Goodman, J. (1992). *Elementary schooling for critical democracy*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Harvey, D. (2001). *Spaces of capital: Towards a critical geography*. New York: Routledge.
- Kumar, A. (2008a). A review of *Social education in Asia: Critical issues and multiple perspectives*. *Education Review*. Retrieved May 15, 2009 from <http://edrev.asu.edu/reviews/rev715.htm>
- Kumar, A. (2008b). A review essay of the book *Neoliberalism and education reform*. *The Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies*, 6 (2), 218-236.
- Massey, D. (1995). The conceptualization of place. In D. Massey & P. Jess (Eds.), *A place in the world? Places, cultures, and globalization* (pp. 45-85). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Merryfield, M. M. (2001). Moving the centre of global education: From imperial world views that divide the world to double consciousness, contrapuntal pedagogy, hybridity, and cross-cultural competence. In W. B. Stanley (Ed.), *Social studies: Research, priorities and prospects* (pp. 197-208). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- McLaren, P. (1995). *Critical pedagogy and predatory culture: Oppositional politics in a postmodern era*. New York: Routledge.
- National Council for the Social Studies (1994). *Expectations of excellence: Curriculum standards for social studies*. National Council for the Social Studies: Washington.
- Ong, A. (1999). Cultural citizenship as subject making: Immigrants negotiate racial and cultural boundaries in the United States. In R.D. Torres, L. F. Miron, & J. X. Inda (Eds.), *Race, identity, and citizenship: A reader* (pp. 262-294). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Pinar, W. F. (1994). *Autobiography, sexuality, and politics: Essays in curriculum theory 1972-1992*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Popkewitz, T.S. (1998). The culture of redemption and the administration of freedom as research. *Review of Educational Research*, 68(1), 1-34.
- Pratt, M. L. (1992). *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation*. New York: Routledge.

- Rodriguez, J. M. (2003). *Queer Latinidad: Identity practices, discursive spaces*. New York: New York University Press.
- Ross, E. W., & Gibson, R. (Ed.). (2007). *Neoliberalism and education reform*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Sexias, P. (2000). Schweigen! Die kinder! Or, does postmodern history have a place in the schools? In P. N. Stearns, P. Sexias, & S. Wineburg (Eds.), *Knowing, teaching and learning history* (pp. 19-37). New York: New York University Press.
- Soja, E. W. (1989). *Postmodern geographies: The reassertion of space in critical social theory*. New York: Verso.
- Soja, E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Spivak, G. C. (1993). *Outside in the teaching machine*. New York: Routledge.
- Stanley, W.B. (1992). *Curriculum for utopia: Social reconstructionism and critical pedagogy in the postmodern era*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Sumara, D., & Davis, B. (1999). Interrupting heteronormativity: Toward a queer curriculum theory. *Curriculum Inquiry* 29 (2), 191-208.
- Terry, J. (1991). Theorizing deviant historiography. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3(2), 55-74.
- Tucker, J., & Evans, A. (1996). The challenge of a global age. In B. Massialas & R. Allen (Eds.), *Crucial issues in teaching social studies K-12* (pp. 181-218). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Vinson, K.D., & Ross, E. W. (2003). *Image and education: Teaching in the face of new disciplinarity*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Warner, M., & Social Text Collective. (1993). *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Weil, S. (1949/2002). *The need for roots*. New York: Routledge.

About the Reviewer

Ashwani Kumar is a second year PhD student at the department of Curriculum & Pedagogy in the University of British Columbia, Canada. His research focuses upon understanding why education/social education works as an agent of reproduction of hegemonic ideologies, socio-economic inequalities, and cultural orthodoxies instead of acting as a catalyst agent to bring about transformation in the structure and consciousness of human existence for a just, democratic, and peaceful world.



Copyright is retained by the first or sole author,
who grants right of first publication to the
Education Review

Editors

Gene V Glass

Arizona State University

Gustavo Fischman

Arizona State University

Melissa Cast-Brede

University of Nebraska, Omaha

<http://edrev.asu.edu>