

Media Review

Exploring challenging, controversial and confronting topics in Social Studies teaching: Editor's Message

Editor Dr Kate Ferguson-Patrick

I would like to introduce myself as the new media Editor for the *Journal of International Social Studies*. I hope to bring a perspective to the journal from outside the United States as I was born and grew up in the UK and completed my teaching degree at Nottingham Trent University and now work at The University of Newcastle, Australia. After a period of teaching in the UK, I moved to Australia where I worked in primary (elementary) schools for 13 years before embarking on an academic career at the University of Newcastle as a teacher educator with Primary Education specialisation. My teaching includes Primary Maths, Social studies and integrated curriculum as my main specialist areas. I have recently completed a long term study of Cooperative Learning with early career teachers and how this classroom approach leads to democracy classrooms using an action research approach. I developed professional development programs for early career teachers to assist them in implementing cooperative strategies and democratic processes in busy and ever increasingly accountable primary classrooms leading to my doctorate degree. My research strengths lie particularly in this area of globally valuable strategies to build cohesive classrooms.

The media review section of *The Journal of International Social Studies* offers a framework for readers interested in sharing resources they have discovered so please participate in discussions with the reviewers and feel free to submit your own reviews of appropriate texts.

This edition reviews include three interesting reviews of texts that Social Educators can use in their teaching, particularly educators of older students (what we would term secondary school students in Australia and elsewhere may be called senior high school students). The first is a review of a reputable social studies methods text in its 4th edition by Dr Debra Donnelly (Australia). The text edited by Ross (2014) "The Social Studies Curriculum: Purposes, Problems and Possibilities" is, as Donnelly mentions, a text that uses a successful formula with chapters from leading scholars, theorists and educators from the Social Studies area and includes 12 new contributions from previous editions. Donnelly mentions the progressive nature of the contributions and also the various lenses used to examine the social studies curriculum in practice. This "progressively oriented collection" will be a "welcome addition" to the libraries of all social studies scholars, policy makers and teachers. Tensions and challenges within social studies education are examined as well as chapters which highlight the irony of transmission models on citizenship education and a calling for participatory democratic classrooms. Two chapters in the second part of the book look at the gap between equality and inclusion and the "reality of racism, prejudice and heteronormativity in U.S. society". The chapters in the last section contain topics such as Islamophobia which is topical at the present time in Australia with the rise of people gathering in racist and proto-fascist groups like the the 'Reclaim Australia' groups to protest against Islam and its people living in Australia. Other people (thankfully) have gathered in protest against these groups arguing that the current

government's ambiguous leadership that did not seem committed to questions around social cohesion and the importance of having civil conversations has led to the rise of such groups. Donnelly mentions that this chapter discusses the stark and timely reminder of the power of the media and the impact of racial and religious stereotyping on students and teachers alike and how the social studies classroom is "fertile ground in which to redress misinformation and injustice and bring about social transformation". The recent SBS documentary I watched this week <http://www.sbs.com.au/programs/go-back-to-where-you-came-from/about-series> reminded me too of the importance of the need for such texts that helps social studies teachers promote the teaching of democracy and social justice issues at a time when the world is seeing the rise of such groups.

The final two reviews have a nice synergy. The first by Dr Heather Sharp (Australia) examines a new text, "As the Witnesses Fall Silent: 21st century Holocaust Education in curriculum policy and practice" and the second is a text about using film as a tool for teaching and discussing genocide by Lisa Pennington (USA) titled "Through a Lens Darkly: Films of Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing and Atrocities".

The first text reviewed by Sharp examines the approaches to the Holocaust in curriculum, policy and practice and has been listed as the most comprehensive collection of empirical research on the Holocaust ever produced. Sharp mentions the chapter about the importance of textbooks as texts as providing a "fascinating insight into the state of contemporary History curricula, on a global scale" and she notes the interesting point about the way the Holocaust is named in the textbook, with some nations avoiding the term. This lengthy text is a "valuable handbook" and resource for educators with a range of perspectives and approaches provided to teach such a complex historical topic. The text allows educators to sensitively approach the topic but approach it applying historical principles; allowing them to treat the topics with some degree of accuracy with the range of contributors from various backgrounds allowing a comprehensive understanding from across the globe.

Pennington's review of the text which examines film as a tool for teaching "Through a Lens Darkly" also covers a large section about the Holocaust (the longest section of the text) with eleven Holocaust films providing historical contexts and brief useful synopsis. The introductory chapter in this section however by Michalczyk also focuses on the importance of film and the Holocaust. Pennington argues that the films listed would not be necessarily on an educators list and she claims that they help to examine alternative angles to present to students with the films allowing discussions about cultural genocide, the role of the bystander and accounts that allow students to make connections to the victims such as *The Last Letter* which is described as a film that could be used as an alternative to the more commonly used *Diary of Anne Frank*.

This text however provides a more global account of atrocities highlighting marginalized groups often overlooked in schools. Such accounts as the genocide of Native Americans in North America; the Armenian genocide; Bosnia and ethnic cleansing; Africa and the genocide in Rwanda and finally the conflict in Sudan and the Congo are included in the text. Pennington mentions that some of the films would not be suitable for showing for various reasons including horrific scenes not suitable for student viewing, but overall the essays are useful providing a good synopsis, allowing teachers to explore key concepts, leading to discussion of interesting and difficult topics.

References:

E.D. Stevick and Z. Gross (Eds.) (2015). *As the Witnesses Fall Silent: 21st Century Holocaust Education in Curriculum, Policy and Practice*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Michalczyk, John J. and Raymond G. Helmick, (Eds.) (2013). *Through a Lens Darkly: Films of Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing, and Atrocities*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Ross, E.W. (Ed.) (2014). *The Social Studies Curriculum: Purposes, Problems and Possibilities* (4th ed.) Albany, NY: University of New York Press.

<http://www.sbs.com.au/programs/go-back-to-where-you-came-from/about-series> retrieved on 31/7/15

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