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Fractured Social Studies or Integrated Thinkers

The End Results of Curriculum Integration

In an effort to counter the effects of the reduction of social studies instruction that has resulted from the pressure to increase test scores in reading and mathematics, many educators promote the idea of integrating the curriculum. For many modern elementary teachers, integrating the curriculum has become a means for infusing social studies content in the curriculum while maintaining the focus on teaching reading and language arts skills. This practice of teaching social studies or other content areas while maintaining a focus on reading differs widely from the original purpose of curriculum integration. The following article asserts that the true purpose of integrating the curriculum has been to create children who will be able to use the disciplines to advance democratic thought and life. They will be able to fully integrate the disciplines into their own thinking processes in order to confront issues and problems in a democratic society. This article explores notions of curriculum integration throughout history and examines the ways in which teachers attempt to integrate the curriculum in schools today.



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Introduction

In the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st, schools have been under enormous pressure to quantifiably demonstrate student proficiency in reading and mathematics. The inextricable link between content knowledge and literacy (Gardner & Dyson, 1994) has been ignored, and elementary social studies is among the subject areas that have suffered as a result (Center on Education Policy, 2005, 2006, 2008). In an effort to counter the effects of the reduction of social studies instruction resulting from the pressure to increase test scores in reading and mathematics, many educators promote the idea of integrating the curriculum. By integration, they often mean correlating social studies skills and concepts with other areas, sometimes revolving all con-

tent areas around a theme (Lindquist, 2002), sometimes infusing one content area into another (Parker, 2005), and sometimes using children's trade books instead of, or as a supplement to, textbooks to teach social studies content (Krey, 1998; McGowan, Erickson, & Neufeld, 1996; McGowan & McGowan, 1989).

It is interesting to note that the purpose of integrating the curriculum today differs from the purpose of integrating the curriculum proposed by F.W. Parker (1894) and other early theorists and psychologists, such as Tuiskon Ziller, Johann Friedrich Herbart, and Charles De Garmo (De Garmo, 1896). For many modern elementary teachers, integrating the curriculum has become a means of infusing social studies content in the curriculum while maintaining the focus on teaching reading skills. It is a method for exposing students to disciplinary knowledge in bits and pieces in order to supplement or enhance language arts instruction (Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere, & Stewart, 2008). The original purpose for what is now called integration was quite different, however. F.W. Parker believed that schools were the most important means for preserving and perpetuating democracy (F.W. Parker, 1894). He believed, as many still do (cf. Center for Civic Education, 1994/2003; Hahn & Torney-Purta, 1999), that the main purpose of schools was to create the conditions that lead to growth for "ideal citizenship" (Cooke, 1937, p. xix). F.W. Parker expressed anxiety that the specialization of subject matter, that is, teaching subject matter unconnectedly, would not promote citizenship.

Based on the ideas of the aforementioned American and European educators and psychologists, the purpose of integrating the curriculum has been to create children who will be able to use the disciplines to advance democratic thought and life. Integrating the curriculum will help children to fully integrate the disciplines into their own thinking processes in order to confront issues and problems in a democratic society. That is, giving students the

ability to think like disciplinarians (historians, geographers, etc.) in understanding the world around them. Integration is about creating modes of thinking and not the ability to access facts. The goal of curriculum integration should be to help students understand the world by thinking according to the disciplines. Curriculum integration in recent years, though, has often led to social studies being disconnected from the child's life as well as the rest of the curriculum, as the next section describes.

The prominent weakness of education is isolation of subjects; reading by itself – first steps and consequent ones; writing in copy-books; arithmetic with an occasional application; geography without history; history without geography; 'art for art's sake.' Indeed, it seems as if the universal tendency has been to separate subjects as widely as possible; to completely ignore organic synthesis ... No truth is more striking than the essential relation of all subjects to each other. (F.W. Parker, 1894, p. 394).

Fractured Social Studies

Mrs. Smith is a first grade teacher in a wealthy school in the Southwest. In her efforts to teach her students social studies content while keeping the instructional focus on reading, she attempts to do what she calls "integrate" as much social studies content into her reading lessons as she can. Recently, in her classroom, the students were reading a story about a little boy and his grandmother. In an effort to tie social studies into the reading story, the students watched a video about the many faces of grandparents and then completed a worksheet. The next week, the students read a story in their basal reader about penguins. Mrs. Smith showed pictures of penguins, pointed out Antarctica on the map, and then had the students color a picture of pen-

guins and write a one-sentence caption about something they learned about penguins from the story. The sentence was graded for spelling and punctuation. As Thanksgiving was approaching, the students read about the Pilgrims and constructed Pilgrim hats and buckles for their shoes.

In the course of one month the social studies to which these students were exposed addressed concepts of grandparents, penguins, and pilgrims. In this day of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), where elementary social studies has been severely marginalized (Center on Education Policy, 2005, 2006, 2008), many educators would laud Mrs. Smith's attempt at integrated lessons. At least, they could argue, she is teaching some semblance of social studies in an elementary classroom and not completely neglecting the subject.

There are serious problems with the way in which social studies is taught in this classroom, however. The students are not learning the values, dispositions, and knowledge necessary for citizens in the U.S.A and of the world, which is the main purpose of social studies (Adler, 2001). In a truly integrated curriculum, social studies helps students to think like disciplinarians, that is to think historically, spatially, civically, and economically. Integrating social studies across the curriculum should help students become integrated thinkers. As Benjamin Bloom (1958) pointed out, the learning experiences are organized to give meaning, depth, and multiple perspectives to their lives. The first graders in Mrs. Smith's room, instead, are learning reading skills with some semblance of social studies content attached, and the content to which they are exposed is disjointed from the rest of the social sciences and unconnected to their lives outside of the classroom.

Mrs. Smith's classroom is typical of what Boyle-Baise, et al. (2008) found in their study of elementary classrooms. They noted that elementary teachers often make reference to social studies content simply as a way to enhance reading instruction. For these teachers,

social studies is a vehicle for learning reading, when, as educators and philosophers have espoused for over 100 years (De Garmo, 1896; Parker, 1894; Thorndike, 2005/1917), it is through the content areas that students learn to read. As early as 1917, E.L. Thorndike (Moore, Readence, & Rickelman, 1983; Thorndike, 2005/1917) argued that "perhaps it is in their outside reading of stories and in their study of geography, history, and the like that many school children really learn to read" (Thorndike 2005/1917, p. 97). Any attempt to integrate the curriculum while disregarding disciplinary knowledge fractures the curriculum and results in "superficial programs that do justice to neither discipline" (Wineburg & Grossman, 2000, p. 58). Mrs. Smith's efforts to integrate the curriculum were done without consideration of disciplinary thought as a means for understanding the world and rendered social studies content knowledge simply as a supplement to reading.

Integration Defined

Educators today often use the terms interdisciplinary and integration interchangeably. Howard Gardner (1999), however, takes issue with the interchangeable use of the two terms. For a curriculum to be interdisciplinary, teachers and students must be able to demonstrate that knowledge of all the disciplines have been mastered and are "appropriately joined" (Gardner, 1999, p. 217). The teacher and students have enough expertise in all the disciplines that they are able to effectively access knowledge of the disciplines in order to engage in disciplinary thinking. Their mastery of the major disciplines allows them to be able to use their knowledge to view issues and events from multiple perspectives. In an interdisciplinary curriculum, students and teachers are able to examine events and issues critically and deeply because they are able to access their knowledge of the disciplines to engage in informed discussions and investigations. The disciplines provide the means for addressing questions and

issues from a variety of perspectives in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the world. According to Gardner (1999), elementary age learners are just beginning to get a sense of the disciplines and the world around them, so an interdisciplinary curriculum is unfeasible for elementary learners. Therefore, an interdisciplinary curriculum at the elementary level is not appropriate. An in-tegrated curriculum is quite different and is appropriate for elementary learners, though.

Curriculum integration is not a trend or new fad in education (Hinde, 2005); it has been a part of the pedagogical landscape for over a century. In a review of a book by French scholar Alexis Bertrand, J. O. Quantz (1899) describes 19th Century French schools that provided a unified curriculum in order to develop mental powers and resulted in, “an integrity, an entireness, of mind” (p. 553). According to C. E. Knudsen (1937), Bertrand emphasized that true instruction should be integral and not divided into small bits. Knudsen further argued that integration aligns with what was then current thinking about what psychologists deemed the development of the Gestalt view. That is, integration describes efforts by educators to provide experiences that will further the, “process of integration,” (p. 21) within a student and will, “facilitate social adaptation” (p. 21). From a psychological perspective then, the goal of integrating the curriculum is to create a child where disciplinary thinking is integrated into their thought processes inside school and in society at large. The disciplines are the means of creating a thought process that facilitates their abilities to cope and thrive in society.

In another study, Grossman, Wineburg, and Beers (2000) point out, that the early use of the term “integration” differs from today’s use of the term. Even Knudsen (1937) indicated that the term integration shifted from the psychological use of the term, to educators’ idea of the correlation of subject matter. That is, educators co-opted the term “integration” from psychology so that it most commonly means a

correlation of one subject area to another. Curriculum integration, as it is frequently practiced in many classrooms today is a method of infusing one content area into another, or fusing two or more content areas together, without much thought to the goal of creating an integrated person who is capable of using the disciplines to make sense of his or her world.

Walter Parker (2005) proposes the following definition of an integrated curriculum, which approaches the original reasoning for curriculum integration:

A curriculum approach that purposefully draws together knowledge, perspectives, and methods of inquiry from more than one discipline to develop a more powerful understanding of a central idea, issue, person, or event. The purpose is not to eliminate the individual disciplines, but to use them in combination (pp. 452-453).

In order to use the disciplines in combination, a teacher must have knowledge of the disciplines, along with effective communication skills so that he or she is capable of helping students achieve a deep understanding of their world. The disciplines are the means by which citizens come to know their world and are capable of addressing questions and issues in their lives. Language arts are the means by which students communicate and continue to enhance their knowledge of the disciplines, but the end goal of teaching reading and writing is to help students access their knowledge of the disciplines so they can become purposeful citizens.

Curriculum Integration as a Way to Save Time

A common and justifiable complaint teachers often express is that the quantity of content they are required to teach is too vast and there is simply not enough time to teach it all. Robert Marzano (2003) lends credibility to their argument. He calculated that there is an

average of 200 standards and 3,093 benchmarks in 14 different content areas that teachers are expected to teach during the course of one school year. As a result, teachers have prioritized the curriculum according to the areas for which they will be held most accountable. Subjects that are tested (mainly reading, writing, and mathematics) receive the most instructional attention, and the content areas, like social studies, fall below them on the list of priorities.

This issue of the quantity of content teachers must teach is not a recent development in schools. It is one of the oldest issues with which educators have had to accommodate. In 1896 De Garmo referred to the curriculum as being “congested” (p. 117).

It is universally acknowledged that our present curriculum, if not already badly congested, is likely to become so. Subject after subject has been added, not from any demonstrated pedagogical need, but in obedience to popular demands or to the professional zeal of specialists... The result is often a detrimental atomization of the pupil’s time and attention. Not having time to digest any subject thoroughly, he soon becomes a mere taster in all learning (p. 117-118).

A “taster” of learning is a logical outcome of teachers attempting to cover as much information as possible in a short amount of time without effectively integrating knowledge of the disciplines into the students’ lives. The result is a curriculum that includes bits of information from numerous content areas that lack proper depth in any of the disciplines (Hinde, 2005) and leave the learner with superficial knowledge of the world.

In response to the congestion of the curriculum, De Garmo (1896) espoused Ziller’s idea of the concentration of studies. Ziller (1817-1882), who was influenced by Johann Freidrich Herbart, suggested that the curricu-

lum should be centered on a core and all learning should emanate from that core. In that way all the subjects that teachers are required to teach would be related, and the curriculum would be organized for efficient transmittal to the students. The core that he suggested was made up of the moral lessons found in history and literature.

The key to integration according to Ziller, De Garmo, F. W. Parker, and recent thinkers like Gardner, is not to cover all the topics within the disciplines, but to train students’ minds to think like disciplinarians. Students will have the ability to approach any topic from a temporal (historical), spatial (geographical), political (civic-minded), or economic point of view. They will be able to digest the information because they have been trained to think in terms of the disciplines, which in turn help them to make sense of the world.

As the previous paragraphs suggest, for over 100 years educators and psychologists have warned of the dangers of the quantity of content and attempts to cover as much content as possible without taking time to present multiple perspectives or allowing students to make sense of the learning in the contexts of their own lives. It is this sense of urgency to teach as much as possible that has once again led to the idea of creating integrated or interdisciplinary curricula in modern classrooms. It is important, though, that teachers do not provide a disjointed view of the curriculum and an illogical view of the world, in attempts to integrate in order to save time.

Stealthy Integration

In a recent article, Diane Carver Sekeres and Madeleine Gregg (2008) discuss what they call the stealth approach to teaching geography in elementary grades. The stealth approach refers to teaching language arts (specifically poetry), and sneaking geography concepts into the lessons. Teachers can somehow circumvent the pressure to concentrate all their instructional time on reading and writing by covertly in-

fusing geography into language arts. Teachers can then assure their supervisors that they are meeting mandates in reading and writing without having to be explicit in their teaching of social studies. In the Sekeres and Gregg (2008) article, the authors explain that students can be exposed to major geographic concepts while learning poetry. The main objectives of the lessons revolve around reading and writing poetry, but savvy teachers should choose poems that have rich geographic content, and therefore, students will learn spatial concepts as well as the required language arts content.

The article by Sekeres and Gregg (2008) advocating stealthy integration of geography was published in a leading geography journal. It is ironic that the earliest educators (De Garmo, Herbart, and F. W. Parker, for instance) believed that the curriculum should center on geography since it is through geographic concepts that children first experience the world around them. The curriculum should start with geography and reading should focus on geographic concepts, according to early educators and psychologists. The stealth approach that is proposed by Sekeres and Gregg (2008) demonstrates how thinking about the curriculum has changed in a century. Geography in the stealth approach is not the center of the curriculum, as was proposed by early education theorists. In the stealth approach the curriculum revolves around reading and writing.

The problem with the stealth approach to geography is that this form of pedagogy assumes that geography has no unique pedagogy of its own. Teaching geography according to the stealth approach, “strips the subject of its integrity and renders it simply a nice way to enhance reading lessons,” (Boyle-Baise, et al., 2008, p. 248) and, in this case, poetry lessons. Teaching geography effectively, like all the disciplines, requires that the teacher has fundamental knowledge of the content and is able to help students think spatially. If the teacher’s objective is to teach students to think spatially through poetry, then there is no need to employ stealth. Students should be aware that they are

learning geography and how to think spatially, so they can generalize that learning to other areas, including poetry.

The stealth approach is a creative way that some educators employ in efforts to keep geography in the curriculum. Cynthia and Dennis Sunal (2008) report that in many K-3 classrooms, social studies is not only marginalized, it is discontinued altogether in order to focus instructional time on reading, writing, and math. They also found that some teachers subverted the established system of teaching reading (and some math) in K-3 by disguising social studies in the form of reading themes. Students learn a little history, a little geography, and perhaps a little civics and economics if concepts from those areas relate to the story du jour, much like Mrs. Smith’s class that was described earlier.

Teaching social studies stealthily, or disguising it through reading themes, results in a diminished view of the subject. Social studies concepts in this case are secondary to reading activities and may be the reason that social studies continues to be regarded as an unimportant subject by both teachers and students (Zhao & Hoge, 2005). Critical thinking and in-depth analysis of social studies content is not required in stealthy social studies, since the main objectives of the lessons are related to language arts and not knowledge of the disciplines. True integration of social studies involves students learning to think historically, spatially, civically, or economically throughout the school day. Integration helps students adjust their way of thinking so that when they conduct their reading activities, they are able to access their knowledge of social studies content to help them make sense of the reading.

Another problem with disguising social studies or stealthily teaching is that it is not an effective form of curriculum integration. It is not truly interdisciplinary either. Teachers who are familiar with social studies concepts should be explicit in their teaching of the content while teaching language arts as well. As Gardner (1999) points out, it is the disciplines

that motivate students to read. So, explicitly teaching the disciplines furthers reading skills through motivating students to read to find answers to their questions about the world to which the social sciences introduces them. Teachers who realize that the language arts are the vehicles through which students learn and communicate geographic concepts (or historic or other disciplinary concepts), need not resort to stealth and can help students clearly make connections between their studies in school and the real world.

The publication of an article promoting a stealthy approach to teaching geography, however, indicates that modern teachers are searching for ways to keep social studies in the curriculum, in this era when social studies instruction is being curtailed (Center on Education Policy, 2005, 2006, 2008). It is still unclear if NCLB is the main reason for the reduction of social studies instructional time, or if social studies has never been a favorite area to teach and NCLB is the latest excuse not to teach it (Sunal & Sunal, 2008). Regardless of the reason, the fact remains that students in elementary grades are often not getting the foundational knowledge in the social sciences they need for later success in school and in democratic life. Therefore, healthy, not stealthy, integration is needed.

Healthy Integration

Mrs. Hunter, like Mrs. Smith, is a first grade teacher in wealthy school in the Southwest. She wants her students to be motivated to read and to understand the world around them. As one learning goal, she wanted her students to learn about families and each other in the classroom. She had the students read the same story as Mrs. Smith's class read about a little boy and his grandmother. In an effort to tie the reading curriculum to the students' lives, Mrs. Hunter had the students bring in artifacts (pictures, letters, etc.) from their grandparents and invited the students' grandparents to the class one day. Students heard stories about

each other's families and were introduced to primary sources. Mrs. Hunter provided books and magazines that the students could peruse during their free time, and students wrote or drew pictures about their own families compared to the characters in the story. They saw a connection between school and their own lives and learned to express the connection through reading and writing.

In another instructional unit, Mrs. Hunter wanted her students to be introduced to geographical concepts and skills. She decided that for reading time, she would have the students focus on a book from a spatial perspective. The class read *Mr. Popper's Penguins* (Atwater & Atwater, 1994) with reading and writing activities focusing on such geographic concepts as place and human-environmental interaction. To accompany the reading lessons, Mrs. Hunter showed videos and had pictures of penguins on the walls around the room; she introduced maps to the students and had them find their own country in relation to Antarctica; and they discussed the climate and conditions under which penguins thrive. Students compared and contrasted their own climate to Antarctica's and discussed what local zoos have to do in order for penguins to live there. They even wrote poems and letters concerning penguins and Antarctica. Again, students were provided opportunities to connect reading to real life and used literature as the vehicle to make sense of the world.

Around the time of Thanksgiving, Mrs. Hunter wanted her students to appreciate the conditions of the lives of the Pilgrims: to think historically (temporally). She and the class read a story from their basal reader about the Pilgrims and then she had the students ask questions about the time period spurred by the story. Later, the children assumed roles of Pilgrims and Indians, and wrote (or told) stories from the perspectives of both. She also provided books that they could peruse concerning the time period, and briefly visited a website and had the class listen to audio of actors speaking English as it was spoken in the 17th

Century. She helped the children come to a rudimentary understanding of the conditions the Pilgrims faced, and introduced the fact that Native Americans were already on the land when the Pilgrims arrived. Since Thanksgiving was a dominant feature of students' lives at that time of year, Mrs. Hunter used it as the basis for meaningful integrative learning.

Mrs. Hunter understands that in order to effectively integrate the curriculum, it is essential teachers have disciplinary knowledge and the ability to translate that knowledge into forms students understand. Prior to teaching

her class, she spent time refreshing her knowledge of the disciplines and skills she would be introducing. Mrs. Hunter understood her students' learning abilities so that she could provide rich learning opportunities. Her students, therefore, were able to achieve a deep understanding of the content and were motivated to learn more through reading and writing. It is notable that she also addressed state mandated standards in language arts and social studies in her lessons. She also explicitly expressed to the students and their parents that they were learning social studies.

Approaches to curriculum integration described in the article.

Fractured Social Studies	“Stealthy” Integration (Sekeres & Gregg, 2008)	Healthy Integration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small chunks of content area information related to the weekly reading or language arts activities are presented to students without much depth. • Social studies content has no connection to children's lives or other areas of the curriculum. • The purpose of social studies is to enhance reading/language arts. • Does not inspire disciplinary modes of thinking because content is fractured. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disguises geography content as poetry lessons. • Covertly teach social studies content in order to satisfy mandates to spend instructional time on language arts activities by choosing reading/language arts materials with rich spatial or historical content. • Reading/language arts is the center of the curriculum. • Social studies has no pedagogy of its own. • Does not inspire disciplinary modes of thinking because content is disguised as something else. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading/language arts activities focused on developing disciplinary frames of mind. • Connection of social studies between children's lives and other content areas is explicit. • Reading/language arts are recognized as tools for helping children come to an understanding of the world (and how to communicate that understanding) and are not considered the purpose of schooling.

True integration helps students come to understand the world around them. They learn to use reading, writing, and mathematics as the tools by which they understand and communicate their understanding of the world. Effective, healthy integration motivates students to continue to learn, and does not relegate social studies content or any other disciplinary knowledge to a lowly status.

Conclusion

Curriculum integration has a long history in education and psychology. Whether a teacher is attempting to create integrated individuals who are capable of using the disciplines to make sense of their world, or simply trying to keep social studies content in the school day, educators have often turned to the idea of combining the, “knowledge, perspectives, and methods of inquiry from more than one discipline to develop a more powerful understanding of a central idea, issue, person, or event” (Parker, 2005, pp. 452-453).

It is in the best interest of students that teachers truly integrate the curriculum so students become integrated thinkers, and do not think of social studies as an add-on to reading lessons. Truly integrating the curriculum will result in students who are able to access disciplinary knowledge and modes of thinking so they can effectively participate in a democratic society.

All the disciplines are important and the skills of reading, writing, and ciphering are essential in comprehending and communicating understanding of the disciplines. It is through the disciplines, specifically the social sciences, that individuals make sense of their world. Reading, writing, mathematics, and the content disciplines, therefore, are equally important and none of them should be neglected or relegated to a lowly status in the curriculum if schools are truly going to fulfill their purpose of creating purposeful citizens.



Notes

Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Hunter are pseudonyms of teachers with whom the author has worked.

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