

International instructional systems: social studies

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Abstract

This paper reports on research conducted as part of the International Instructional System Study that explored five subject areas across nine jurisdictions in six high-performing countries. The Study's overall aim was to understand what, if anything, there is in common in the curricula and assessment arrangements among the high performing jurisdictions to see if there are aspects of instructional system design that might account, in part, for high performance. This paper focuses on social studies which in most jurisdictions includes elements of history, geography and citizenship and highlights a number of emerging issues. These include the advantages and disadvantages of teaching history and geography separately or within a social studies program; the extent to which key concepts are embedded within the social studies/history/geography curricula; whether the level of demand should be considered in terms of a generic taxonomy or in terms of subject specific models; how progression might be defined and considerations of an appropriate balance between teacher assessment and external assessment.

Keywords: education reform; social studies; history; geography; citizenship; national curriculum; International Instructional System Study; Center for International Education Benchmarking.

Introduction

The International Instructional System Study (hereafter the Study; see Creese, Gonzalez & Isaacs in this issue) explored five subject areas – language of instruction, mathematics, science, social studies and vocational/applied learning – across nine jurisdictions in six high-performing countries, as defined by the 2012 PISA rankings. The countries/jurisdictions researched were: Australia (New South Wales and Queensland); Canada (Alberta and Ontario); China (Hong Kong and Shanghai); Finland; Japan; and Singapore. Two US states were also included for benchmarking purposes (for reference for the Study’s funders). The Study’s overall aim was to understand what, if anything, there is in common in the curricula and assessment arrangements among the high performing jurisdictions to see if there are aspects of instructional system design that might account, in part, for high performance.

Desk research was conducted in 2013 and 2014. Subject experts looked across the stated, intended (i.e. written) curricula and attendant assessments through a common framework that included: orientation; coherence and clarity; scope; levels of demand; progression; assessment; and key competencies (see Creese, Gonzalez & Isaacs in this issue for a fuller explanation).

There are tensions, in both research and policy literatures on curriculum (see, for example, Oates, 2011, 2015; Fordham 2015; White 2004; Young 2011, 2013; Young et al 2014). Social studies, the focal point of this article, presented specific challenges from the outset. Unlike language of instruction, mathematics or science, social studies is defined differently in different jurisdictions and does not exist by that name in some. History, geography and citizenship/civics are separately taught in some of the jurisdictions in the Study, at least at secondary school level. Economics (among other minority subjects) features in some social studies programmes, but for the purposes of the Study it has not (and they have not) been included in the analysis. In the USA, for example, most social studies courses concentrate on history, and there are published standards not only for social studies (from the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) but also history (National Center for History in the Schools), geography (National Geographic Education) and civics and government (Center for Civic Education). For reasons of coherence, history and geography were the main areas under scrutiny in the Study, but the importance of citizenship and civics could not go

unnoticed – they underpin the social studies programmes found in the US states, the Canadian provinces, Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong, albeit with slightly different emphases (see below) .

Through delving into the seven questions above, a number of key questions and issues emerged. Among them were:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of history and geography taught separately or within a social studies program? What is the place of civics and citizenship in social studies/history?
- What might constitute a credible balance of content and skills and/or concepts? To what extent are key concepts embedded within the social studies/history/geography curricula?
- What ways are there to balance national and international history? What ways are there to balance political history and social history?
- How might level of demand be defined? Should level of demand be thought of in terms of a generic taxonomy such as Bloom's (Bloom et al, 1956) or in terms of subject specific models? How might progression in history, geography and social studies be defined?
- What are some of the models for balance between teacher assessment and external assessment? What are some of the models for balance between assessment for learning and assessment of learning? Can social studies objectives be adequately assessed through multiple choice questions?

These questions and issues posed problems that could not be addressed fully by desk research. Comparing curricula (and curriculum systems) is, as Adamson and Morris (2014) state, 'an on-going investigation of a complex, dynamic entity, and these insights continue to challenge beliefs and understandings that shape and are shaped by curricula' (p. 310) (see also Cowen, 2006; Crossley & Watson, 2009; Phillips and Schweisfurth, 2014). We were able to compare the instructional systems through their curricular plans but did not form firm judgements, due to a lack of on-the-ground evidence such as interviews with policy makers, head teachers and teachers as well as classroom observations that might have allowed us to develop an analytical framework for so doing.ⁱ

Looking back on the original remit – what high performing jurisdictions might have in common in their social studies curricula – it seems that the answer might be ‘not very much’, which is, in itself, an interesting answer and highlights the limitations of pursuing questions of this nature. We are hopeful, though, that this exploration might encourage further research into comparative social studies curricula.

After a brief exploration of the variety of approaches to social studies education, this article grapples, largely comparatively, with each set of themes in turn before summing up the role of social studies education within curriculum systems.

International trends in social studies education

What is Social Studies?

In the USA, the NCSS (2010) defines social studies as:

...the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.

Social studies is probably the most commonly integrated programme of study although in mostⁱⁱcases, especially in the United States, its primary emphasis is on history with geography and citizenship/civics featuring alongside. Different nations take different approaches to social studies; Ross et al (2014) state that the most common are a social issues approach, a disciplinary approach (history, geography, civics etc.) and action for social justice. What these approaches can have in common is the aim of developing the knowledge, conceptual understandings, skills and values in young people necessary for reflective inquiry, informed examination of the past and present, and personal development through active participation in society. However, when asked about why social studies was taught in Canada, pre-service social studies teachers gave Gibson (2012) content related answers: history, geography,

Canada and the world, current events, and so on, rather than education for good citizenship, which she claims is social studies' primary goal in Canada.

An emphasis on developing national identity, shared commitment to the country and even patriotism (Carretero, 2011) is not unusual in social studies and civic education curricula. For example, Singapore's mandatory social studies programme, introduced in 2001, emphasises civic knowledge, national identity and national values (Ho, 2013). Singapore and Japan, according to Ho use social studies programmes to promote a state approved version of national history, values and identity. In an era of increasing globalisation, though, social studies (and history and geography) curricula also include global perspectives.

The NCSS standards (2010) highlight 10 themes: culture; people, places and environments; individuals, groups, and institutions; production, distribution, and consumption; global connections; time, continuity, and change; individual development and identity; power, authority, and governance; science, technology, and society; and civic ideals and practices. Social studies teachers, in the Council's view, are responsible for teaching the content, skills and values that are necessary to fulfil citizenship roles and responsibilities in democratic societies in a globalised world (Zadja, 2012). NCSS's themes echoed throughout this aspect of the Study, but, not surprisingly varied in emphasis from one jurisdiction to another.

Findings

Separate or combined subjects?

The Study focused on secondary social studies education because of the wide variety of humanities/social science/history/geography/ citizenship teaching at primary. Lower secondary is also the time where in most systems subject specialists take over classroom from generalists. Our research uncovered a common tension between history and geography having their own identities and subject characteristics and those subjects being subordinated to a social studies programme whose over-arching objectives emphasised citizenship. The latter echoes Young's (Young et al 2014) 'Future 2' for the curriculum, where boundaries between curriculum subjects are weakened, interdisciplinary studies are promoted and 'everyday' knowledge – what you need to know and be able to do to be a responsible citizen – is privileged. Another tension was between conceptualising social studies as a list of topics to be taught against a conceptualisation of curriculum in terms of students' learning outcomes

and progression. Some of these tensions resolve themselves in the jurisdictions' rationale for studying history, geography and/or civics (Arthur et al 2003; Davies & Issit 2005; Isaacs & Creese 2015).

Most of the jurisdictions featured a civic values-based curriculum. In Australia, the New South Wales (NSW) syllabi are heavily outcomes oriented, with an unusually heavy stress on values, attitudes and civic competencies. Subject disciplines are seen as resources that can be drawn upon, although the rationale for history introduces a disciplinary orientation for the subject. Queensland organises its courses somewhat differently, and has introduced a Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) course focused around key values (for example, ecological and economic sustainability), processes (for example, investigating) and concepts (for example, evidence, empathy, human rights, sustainability) and emphasizes students as active learners. This strand emphasises the use of evidence to create understandings of changes and continuities from ancient to modern times. The key values of democratic process, social justice, ecological and economic sustainability and peace are applied to inquiries about people and their contributions over time, the causes and effects of ideas and actions, and the heritage that evolves from these changes and continuities. History does not figure as a discrete element of SOSE until upper secondary; disciplines are meant to complement the wider SOSE aims, content and outcomes. The Melbourne Declaration (2008) proposed that schools were responsible for teaching national values such as democracy, equity and justice as well as personal values such as honesty, resilience and respect for others. These are clearly placed within the SOSE curriculum in which learning about the democratic process, social justice, ecological and economic sustainability and peace is explicit (Zadja, 2012).

In Alberta, history and geography are subcomponents of a social studies program that is focused on developing 'glocal' (global/local) citizenship. It is a reflective and deliberative programme through which students come to understandings of self and others in which agency is with the student. History is understood not as content to be mastered so much as a process that students engage in, in order to achieve the kind of active and pluralistic citizenship that the programme foregrounds. Accordingly, history is presented as 'historical thinking' (something that students do and engage in) rather than as historical content. Ontario also offers history and geography within a social studies setting. A citizenship

rationale is emphasised. There could be some fundamental tensions between the integrative impulse of social studies and what it refers to as ‘disciplinary thinking’. This tension remains unresolved, sitting beneath the explicit and elaborate goal to serve citizenship education, identity and inclusion.

Hong Kong combines humanities and social science subjects, although three modes of subject teaching are possible: a discrete subjects approach, an integrated approach or a mixed approach. Geography here includes generic skills, citizenship and discipline specific goals. For history, key documents suggest an integrated humanities approach in a learning to learn framework. Chinese history, however, remains an independent subject, separate from world and other histories (see below). Secondary students in Shanghai are taught history and geography separately; respect for the past, broadening of horizons, patriotism, internationalism and respect for diversity feature heavily in history (Lo, 2004).

Finland is unusual in that geography does not align with social studies or the humanities, but instead with the biological sciences. Geography’s orientation is not found within the context of citizenship and/or civic competencies, rather it is aligned with the notion of the Earth as an object of study. History and social studies are treated as two separate subjects; while both are oriented toward turning students into ‘responsible players’, the former emphasises understanding both current and past events and the value of mental discipline and the latter, in line with Finland’s overall social curricular goals, stresses active citizenship and tolerance.

Social studies’ premise in Japan is that history and geography matter as foundations for civics rather than as ends in themselves, but the time allocated to the subjects tells a rather different story since history, geography and civics all have substantial allocations. Recently the education ministry has recommended that Japanese history is made mandatory for high school students, reflecting Prime Minister Abe’s renewed emphasis on patriotism. It also proposed the creation of a new mandatory citizenship subject as part of civics education in order to inspire greater social participation (Japan Times, 2015).

Singapore, like Hong Kong, has both integrated social studies and separate history, geography and citizenship courses. Not surprisingly in a country where education aims are inextricably linked with the government's political aims (Sim, 2012) a comprehensive programme of *National Education* features strongly. It aims to develop national cohesion and confidence by inculcating a sense of identity, pride and self-respect in students as well as teaching them Singapore's history. *National Education* transcends subjects, but some subjects such as social studies, civic & moral education, history and geography are its natural home. Lower secondary history is meant to complement the broader desired outcomes of education (students should become "confident... self-directed... active... and concerned citizens"). History is described as being crucial to the achievement of these outcomes, since it helps students "uncover the complexities that define the human experience" (CIEB 2015). And in 2001 social studies became a new compulsory examination-based subject in upper secondary. It is interdisciplinary and includes history, economics, political science and geography topics focused around two core ideas: 'being rooted' and 'living global' (Ho, 2013). Ho states that social studies, while recognising the importance of global perspectives, offers a nationalistic, parochial and instrumental focus.

Although in the US teachers are certificated in social studies, they mainly teach history courses, with the assumption that some geography will be part of the course (in the USA, earth science is a separate course and it is largely geography-orientated). Students generally take courses in US history and government with world history options. Massachusetts' history curriculum's aims are civic and patriotic, not unlike those found in Asian countries. They prioritise the transmission of tradition and a particular heritage rather than history as a discipline; its geography framework is unusual for the US in its international orientation.

Whether history, geography and civics/citizenship are taught together or separately the social studies reflect national interests, beliefs and values (Beltramo, 2013). There appears to be much scope for overlap between the subjects, if they are modelled in terms of common 'skills' rather than as bodies of content. The extent to which this can credibly be done, without compromising disciplinary integrity (Gardner, 2000) is a topic to which we now turn, in the context of a discussion of how social studies curricula frame relationships between component subjects.

Skills, concepts and content

Social studies brings different subjects together under a common umbrella. What is at stake in this aggregation and how can it be coherently modelled and implemented? Should we think about social studies in terms of a cross-curricular unity, where links between contents are enabled through skills and modes of reasoning common to all, or, alternatively in interdisciplinary termsⁱⁱⁱ where the subjects are understood as fundamentally discrete, albeit related, through a common humanities focus, in the modes of thinking and reasoning that they entail (Gardner, 2000)?

There are considerable tensions, in both research and policy literatures on the humanities and social sciences curricula. On the one hand influential curriculum theorists, such as White (2004), present humanities disciplines as mere historical products, whose boundaries and very identities are contingent, and conventional rather than coherently motivated and necessary. Here, ‘disciplines’ need themselves to be disciplined by overarching curricular aims and it is the latter, rather than the former, that should shape curriculum structures and determine relationships between their components. On the other hand, arguments for the integrity and *sui generis* nature of ‘disciplines’ are strongly urged by educationalists working within them, as the following examples, drawn from history, illustrate. (See Young 2014a and 2014b for a more general discussion of the concept of powerful knowledge and the case for a subject-based curriculum). Seixas (2006) and his colleagues (Seixas & Colyer, 2012 and Seixas & Morton, 2013) on the Historical Thinking project dispute the notion of historical skills and instead prioritise six historical thinking concepts that underpin historical knowing and “constitute a framework for helping students think about how historians transform the past into history and to begin constructing history themselves” (Seixas and Morton, 2013, p. 4). Van Drie and van Boxtel (2008) also propose a disciplinary model of historical thinking consisting of discrete, rather than generic, modes of thinking: asking historical questions; using sources; contextualisation; argumentation; using substantive concepts; and using meta-concepts. Wilschut (2010) argues that the US social studies model implies an emphasis on generic inquiry skills – forming hypotheses, handling potentially biased information, ascertaining reliability in sources, ensuring objectivity – rather than ‘historical thinking’ and that, although such an approach may make history appear more ‘useful’ it also puts the value of history (rather than the study of some other social science) in question. Counsell (2000) contends that the apparent dichotomy between content and skills is an unnecessary

distraction. She argues that teachers use the term ‘skill’ loosely for both understandings and processes, some historical, some general, thereby diminishing the term’s usefulness.

In curriculum policy discourses the tension between overarching aims and ‘skills’ – for example *21st century skills* (Dede, 2010) – and arguments for the integrity and priority of disciplines or subjects can be illustrated through recent curricular changes in England. The English National Curriculum of 2007, for example, nested subjects (understood as each having their own distinctive ‘concepts’ and ‘processes’ in addition to their own ‘content’) under overarching aims of a highly generic nature - the curriculum aimed to develop ‘successful learners’, ‘confident individuals’, ‘responsible citizens’ and nested generic attributes under each of these headers (HoCCSFC, 2009, pp.52-54), and thus simultaneously promoted discrete disciplines and an approach that subordinated disciplines to extra-disciplinary ends (Harris and Burn, 2011). The 2013 National Curriculum, by contrast, is represented by its architects as a return to rigour – understood in opposition to ‘skills’ arguments – and develops the notion of a subject as a discrete body of knowledge (Cain and Chapman, 2014).

How do the curricula that we examined deal with these issues and the problem of integration?

Whether or not, and in what way(s) to integrate curricula is not a straightforward subject. Protagonists of integrated curricula believe that it reinforces skill development and knowledge transfer and that it inspires students to take charge of their own learning. Opponents believe that it detracts from serious disciplinary learning and can be a source of confusion for students (see, for example, Fogarty 1991; Isaacs & Creese 2015; Stenhouse 1975; Young 2011, 2013; Young et al 2014).

In geography and history, the Australian national curriculum gives considerable emphasis to what it calls ‘general capabilities’, which are embedded in content descriptions. In history, it is clear that many key competencies and skills are likely to be developed by the course, for example, through the scope for individual investigation that it provides. History is now

compulsory for all Australian students and historical thinking concepts and skills are overtly embedded within the syllabuses (Parkes & Donnelly, 2014).

Competencies figure centrally in the Alberta social studies programme, supporting and enabling active, participatory and deliberative citizenship, a practice through which students are understood to be shaping and reshaping their social context. Ontario also pays extensive attention to key competencies in the development of literacy, financial and mathematical literacy, the development of inquiry skills, critical thinking and critical literacy and the development of IT skills. Problem solving and other thinking skills are clearly incorporated in citizenship outcomes. However, Canadian social studies teachers, according to Gibson (2012), are content-driven, especially covering those aspects of knowledge and skills that will be formally assessed. The result, he argues, is curriculum fragmentation and disconnection: ‘bits that can be memorized but not easily learned with understanding of their meanings or appreciation of their potential significance’ (Brophy & Allemann, 1993 p. 28 quoted in Gibson, 2012). Gibson (2012) notes that the shift to inquiry based learning in Canada may be more apparent than real, with teachers falling back on prescribed social studies textbooks that include little evidence of inquiry.

It is interesting, in light of Hong Kong’s learning to learn reform of 2001, that little more than lip-service is paid to competencies in geography; they feature heavily in the lower secondary history curriculum but far less so in upper secondary. Kan (2010) notes that while learning to learn curriculum developers had to incorporate broader curriculum emphases, gearing the programmes toward promotion of students’ thinking skills, that actual teaching practice does not necessarily reflect these changes. Instead, she states that the Chinese history curriculum is characterised by didactic teaching and examining ‘established knowledge’ (p. 275).

Curricular guidance in Japan, which teachers tend to rely upon, emphasises the ‘zest for life’ (see Nakayasu in this issue). The intention is to cultivate dispositions in students such as an interest in their own society. History materials focus on developing in students active modes of thinking in which they develop capabilities that enable them to express their views, to consider and to make decisions.

Singapore uses Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) to inculcate skills and values in its students. It promotes interconnectedness of core values, social and emotional competencies and critical literacy, global awareness and cross cultural skills through the study of national identity and nation building and active citizenship (Tan & Tan 2014). 21st century competencies are well integrated into the geography curriculum without undermining the disciplinary integrity of the subject. In history, the curriculum includes a detailed and extensive elaboration of competencies and the curriculum is exemplary of a competence based approach to curriculum design. This sits alongside a subject specific and research informed discourse. It seems possible, however, that the latter has more impact on practice since it informs external assessment arrangements.

The Finnish curriculum contains a strong ethos that includes values of social equity and environmental care. These values appear to imbue the curriculum with notions of cooperation, problem solving and team working, occasionally explicitly but more implicitly than in other jurisdictions. There is an ethics and a social studies component to the curriculum: geography is not included under social studies. The social studies assessment criteria do specify some key competencies.

Defining content

We can think of the coherence and clarity of a programme focused on a discipline in two parallel ways – in terms of the coherence and clarity of the body of disciplinary knowledge that the programme develops and in terms of the coherence and clarity with which it develops students' understanding of the discipline as a form of knowledge (Rogers, 1979). As we have seen, a number of approaches to 'form' of knowledge questions are possible under a social studies banner: an approach that eschews a disciplinary model but that seeks to achieve coherence through the articulation of an overarching set of competencies that the social studies are held to contribute to and develop; an approach that combines high level generic aims and that embeds disciplinary goals under them; approaches that seek to embed generic aims throughout the curriculum at all levels; and some combination or compromise between these approaches.

How do the social studies programmes that we have examined address coherence and clarity in terms of the bodies of knowledge that they seek to advance? We address this question by examining the programmes through their approach to history, since in all of the jurisdictions students studied history and fundamental questions such as how to balance national and international history and how to balance political, social and other types of history figured more or less prominently.

Carretero (2011) has noted oscillation in the way in which national education systems have framed history between a universalist pole, expressing the ideals of the Enlightenment and a nationalist pole, expressing the ideals of the Romantic movement by celebrating national particularities. Whereas the tendency, in the enlightenment mode, is towards global perspectives – expressed, most fully perhaps, in the ‘Big History’ project advocated by the Gates Foundation (Big History Project, n.d.) – the tendency in the national mode is, as Evans has argued, to understand history as identity-engineering narrative focused on celebrating ‘the wonderfulness of us’ (Evans, 2011).

The promotion of the nation featured fairly consistently in the jurisdictions we studied, albeit in some places more explicitly than others. In Singapore, for example, great efforts are made to have students identify with a particular national story and cultural values. Finland’s history curriculum is oriented to the modernist Eurocentric narrative, whereas Massachusetts has a US history programme that is largely economic and political history with less emphasis on social issues and very little, if any, focus on cultural history. Massachusetts’ world history course, however, breaks away from this traditional mode by being world, rather than Eurocentric/Anglo-centric, history.

Most of the history course content in NSW is political in focus, which means that it is possible that courses could be narrow in temporal and thematic terms. There is, however, scope for geographical breadth – with a requirement to take case studies from both the cluster ‘Europe, North America or Australia’ and one from the cluster ‘Asia, the Pacific, Africa, the Middle East or Central/South America’. It is also possible to study regions of the world not studied at the preliminary stage and to focus on people whose significance is not primarily political. Queensland’s SOSE programme involves students in historical enquiries and

thematic studies. The history that is put forward is recent and largely regional (Asia-Pacific) and framed in present-centred ways (in terms of contemporary issues rather than in terms of the contexts of the past), which is in keeping with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) endeavour to engage students' appreciation of people, events and ideas that have shaped the modern world (Zadja & Henderson 2015).

Hong Kong's overall history programme breaks strands down into knowledge and understanding, skills and values and attitudes. These objectives present a mixture of second order/conceptual-procedural objectives. The focus throughout is on promoting facilitative rather than didactic pedagogies, on project work, on field visits and on cross-curricular work. The curriculum provides a broad overview of world history in the twentieth century through the lens of the history of dominant world powers. Other aspects of history are regionally focused. The themes are mostly political and, to a lesser extent, economic although social and cultural history does figure.

Chinese history, however, as noted above is a completely separate programme and as Kan (2010) describes it, it features orthodox, prescribed, rote-learning, is geared toward social control and does little to encourage independent thinking. It is divorced from world history and even from the history of Hong Kong itself, being more of a moralising agent the purpose of which is to promote feelings of national identity, patriotism and belonging. The Certificate of Education Examination (CEE) syllabus for Grade 11 and 12 students, revised in 2003, states that history education should strengthen students' sense of China and its people. According to Kan (2010) curriculum developers saw the revision as an opportunity to reinforce China's history within the school curriculum.

Singapore's social studies, geography and history programmes are Singapore-centric. For history, aims and learning outcomes for knowledge and understanding, skills and values and attitudes are identified in detail. In terms of breadth and depth, the curriculum could be described as relatively narrow in content terms (Singapore-centric) but deep (the history of Singapore is explored in detail and in a number of aspects); in temporal terms, the curriculum could be described as broad (since at least six centuries are covered) and deep in some respects (for the twentieth century, which represents half of the content) but shallow in others

(five centuries are covered in the other half of the content). In lower secondary the curriculum embeds both historical enquiry and conceptual aspects in some detail, which is noteworthy. Upper and post-secondary history also balance what might be perceived as regional or chronological narrowness with depth in knowledge, conceptual understanding and skills.

Lee (2012) states that the Singapore government thinks of history education as an important nation-building policy tool that provides students with a sense of national belonging, loyalty and political awareness. It encourages constructive criticism that could enable self-improvement. Even though history is seen to have little directly to contribute to human capital development, history is used to endeavour to shape national identity through collective stories and socio-economic achievements, thus helping to consolidate the government's power. Content favourable to the government is featured in the history curriculum and Lee claims that potentially troublesome content is omitted.

All of the systems studied have to choose what sort of history to teach and why to teach it. According to Phillips (2000) such questions are particularly contentious when governments intervene to influence the selection process. Wilschut (2010) observes that policy-makers have used history education for reasons that do not always complement “distanced critical thinking, carefully balanced judgements, and a striving for unbiased interpretations” (p. 693). National history was seen to be attuned to bind together increasingly diversified peoples through inculcating loyalty, a sense of citizenship and coherence. There continues to be a debate on the role of history teaching in instilling patriotic values, especially democratic ones (Carretero, 2011; Harris, 2013). What Harris believes is missing is a deep examination of what the ‘national story’ comprises: great deeds, great people, positive achievements or a recognition that the past was not always positive, leading inexorably to a progressive future. It is worth noting that jurisdictions such as those in the Pacific Rim take it for granted that a curricular focus on national history driven by a patriotic purpose will, in fact, result in patriotic orientations among students. There is reason to doubt that it will and reason to distinguish between ‘mastery’ of a national narrative – something that instruction in it could very well produce, not least for the purposes of assessment – and the ‘appropriation’ of such a narrative in students’ identity construction (Wertsch, 2002). National ‘cultural literacy’, as

it were, might not have the consequences for individual citizens' self-identity that proponents of 'national history' education assume (Anderson 2006).

Level of demand and progression

Unlike mathematics or science where the subject content intrinsically gets more complex, in the social studies it is possible to ask students to address the same question – for example, 'What were the causes of the First World War?' or 'What are our responsibilities as citizens?' – at ages 10 and 18 and expect qualitatively different answers. So we are left with questions such as how can we define level of demand at different ages and ascertain whether or not it is appropriate as evidenced through the intended curriculum.

Again, where the subject disciplines aggregated by social studies are concerned, vexed questions arise. One approach is to model inclines of challenge in terms of generic cognitive objectives (such as Bloom et al, 1956), an approach that promises to enable curriculum architecture to be constructed primarily in contentless ways and in terms of the types of thinking that a curriculum scaffolds. Another is to posit progression in a subject-specific conceptual manner, in terms of mastery of, for example, the epistemologies that disciplines are held to express, or in terms of the concepts and processes that are held to embody disciplinary thinking (VanSledright, 2011). A third approach is to foreground content as 'core knowledge' approaches do (Cain and Chapman, 2014). A fourth approach is to emphasise the equal importance and interaction of knowledge as body and form, as, for example, in the model of 'historical literacy' that Lee has advocated (Lee, 2005a, 2011a and 2011b).

All of these approaches are controversial to one degree or another. A focus on 'core knowledge' has been criticised for taking an aggregative (rather than integrative) approach to the development of understanding, for neglecting cognitive dimensions of learning (Gardner, 2000), and for simply privileging the 'knowledge of the powerful' (Young et al, 2014). The use of Bloom's taxonomy has been particularly criticised for evacuating substantive knowledge entirely from curricula. Counsell (2000) cautions that models of progression that rely solely on discrete cognitive domains have their risks, especially if the relationship with essential content is unexplored. She argues that difficult questions about the quantity and

specificity of knowledge and content awareness with which students must grapple at a given stage can remain unanswered. It has also been repeatedly shown that conceptual development has domain specific dimensions (Limón, 2002; Donovan, Bransford and Pelligrino (eds.), 1999; Lee, 2005b) such that to measure progression in generic cross-subject terms is to miss the point and distort both pedagogy and practice – for example, by propagating the notion that historical description is an inherently low level activity, an idea contradicted by the contention and debate that can arise over descriptions of historical phenomena (de Ste Croix, 1993; Finley, 1998). Furthermore, although we can distinguish between historical description, explanation and evaluation for analytical purposes, as Megill has shown (2007) these tasks are intertwined in practice. The endeavour to model progression in terms of disciplinary forms of knowledge – exemplified, for example, in Seixas and Morton’s ‘The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts’(2013), which models curriculum and pedagogy as aiming to develop increasing levels of sophistication in students’ abilities, to, for example, ‘establish *historical significance*’ or ‘use primary source *evidence*’ – has, in turn been criticised by others, such as Wilschut (2012) who argue that many of these competencies are not unique to history and that they miss the point of historical learning, which is to enable thinking in and about time, a process inextricably linked both to the development temporal understanding and to mastery of extensive chronological knowledge.

Many of the jurisdictions that we examined, such as Florida, clearly set out expectations grade by grade. Massachusetts’ curriculum layout appears to owe a lot the Hirsch’s (2006) arguments about core knowledge, without attempting to moderate this with deeper, more conceptual intentions or outcomes (on which, see Gardner, 2000). Each grade has a number of standards linked to concepts and skills and a number of learning standards linked to content. Typically, the content learning standards are expressed in stems beginning with words such as describe, identify, explain, analyze and describe, identify and explain being the most common stems. History standards do not stress debate, exploration or interpretation. In geography, although the standards describe sequences and an accumulation of geographical terminology, progression in geographical understanding expected is less evident. And it is not possible to study geography as an elective beyond Grade 7.

In NSW geographical education heavily emphasises human perspectives, feelings and value positions. This, arguably, could lead to a superficial level of geographical knowledge expectations. However, a great deal of attention has been given to progression. The technically impressive curriculum documentation makes detailed statements about pedagogic strategy – an aspect of progression often overlooked. Level of demand for secondary history students is spelled out well, especially through elective courses that provide scope for additional focus on history and allow for a fuller focus on methodological aspects of the discipline, thus providing additional challenge for high achievers and students with particular interest in history. The Queensland geography curriculum adopts a series of end of year statements of expectation in order to articulate the level of demand. Similar end of year statements are produced for ‘skills’ as well. In history, the substantive historical content of the syllabus is limited and the conceptual/procedural historical content is more substantial. Demand across the historical courses seems variable, however and it is possible for schools to make broad choices or to remain relatively narrow in the range of content covered.

It is unclear from the Alberta program of study how its laudable goals of critical thinking, consensus building and deliberative enquiry are to be achieved through the highly specific content rich sequences. Gibson (2012) states that social studies outcomes are supposed to be cumulative, so that each year’s learning builds on the last one in order for Grade 12 students to graduate as good citizens who can influence change in their communities, society and the world. The social studies curriculum is issues-focused, stressing active inquiry, application of knowledge and critical thinking. Gibson (2012) found, however, that despite the ‘big ideas’ focus of the curriculum, teachers were more concerned about changes to grade level content and did not identify social studies with producing active citizens or global change agents.

Hong Kong’s geography programme has clear disciplinary expectations and rigor. There is extensive guidance on teaching and learning; emphasising enquiry, differentiation, diversity, and scaffolding. In history, the level of demand explicitly considers learner diversity and making the curriculum accessible. Features of the curriculum that enable both additional depth and a wide range of interests to be catered for are identified. Additional and more detailed advice on differentiating teaching and learning at both ends of the ability spectrum

are provided. In Shanghai, for history, the levels offered at each stage cater for a range of entry points/levels of demand. Recommended teaching approaches appear to be differentiated at each stage; at expansion phases, for example, it is expected that students will study by themselves and raise questions (rather than simply answer them) and that expansion students will analyse, select and present. In content terms it would appear that there is a clear progression in history between a China-centric approach at lower secondary to a comparative and thematic approach to Chinese and world history at upper secondary. Students study geography as a separate subject in lower and upper secondary. Each year has a different emphasis, so progression has to be based on skills rather than content.

Assessment Issues

Social studies assessment approaches vary among the jurisdictions studied. For most, there are fewer, if any, high stakes external tests associated with the subjects than with language of instruction, mathematics or science. Much of the judgement about student learning and progression in social studies subjects is teacher-based, which may or may not overtly follow the precepts of assessment for learning. And, interestingly in jurisdictions where the social studies are *not* subject to high stakes testing, such as in many of the US states take-up of these subjects may be declining and less attention paid to them in especially in primary school¹. Heafner and Fitchett (2012) found that the standardisation of curriculum, accountability and high-stakes testing all had negative effects on the amount of time schools allocated for social studies subjects when compared with externally tested subjects.

Measuring appropriately how well students are learning is a challenge, especially if what we want to measure is evidence of their critical and analytical abilities. Can social studies subjects be adequately assessed through multiple choice questions, which is the preferred format in the US, or do they need assessment by homework, short answer questions, oral presentations, group work, essays and/or extended projects? Even in the US, the 'gold standard' history curricula, the Advanced Placement programme, students are ultimately assessed through a combination of multiple choice and essay questions. Can multiple-choice testing, although cost and time effective, ever cover the entirety of course objectives and curriculum constructs? There is no doubt, however, that teacher-marked essay-based

¹ See National Council for Social Studies policy statement, <http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/nclbera>

assessment brings with it a whole host of reliability and comparability issues that are beyond the scope of this article to consider.

In Australia, according to Zadja and Henderson (2015) pragmatic issues coupled with university entrance requirements have affected the ways, both in external examinations and in teacher-based judgements, upper secondary history curricula have been organised. However, the emphasis in NSW on assessment for learning coupled with the localised assessment that is primarily the teachers' responsibility means that, at least on paper, the assessment framework seems well-balanced and aligned well with syllabus content. In upper secondary history, a range of question types and answer modes are present allowing for the full range of syllabus outcomes to be assessed. In Queensland, too, assessment is teacher led and advice to teachers encourages feedback between teachers and students, i.e. assessment for learning. In history, the focus is on purpose and process rather than on content, and assessment is based on the collection of portfolio evidence in a continuous way. Clear stress is placed on integrating learning and assessment and the approach is consistent with a formative approach.

Ontario, too, has a clear focus on assessment for learning and on formative assessment. Assessment is against clear expectations for each grade. Assessment is teacher-led and there is considerable scope for flexibility of approach. Clear statements are provided to allow portfolios of work to be graded in a criterion-referenced manner. Hong Kong, Shanghai, Japan and Singapore combine a renewed emphasis on formative assessment with high stakes examinations at the end of secondary (and in Singapore's case at age 16 as well). Hong Kong's extensive geography guidance focuses on the principles of assessment, placing due emphasis on assessment for learning. From 2014 this included a school based assessment (SBA) component based on fieldwork and a written report. This was justified in terms of raising validity. In history, assessment guidance identifies a range of strategies (from tests to project work) and places clear emphasis on peer-assessment and other aspects of formative assessment. The specification provides extensive and detailed advice on assessment principles and practices (including, for example, advice on question stems appropriate for different purposes). Formative assessment is advocated and explained and diverse modes of internal assessment are recommended to cater for a range of abilities and interests. External assessment in both subjects contains a combination of highly-demanding question types.

Outside the US, Singapore has the most extensive external testing programme of the jurisdictions studied. It too, however, emphasises strongly formative assessment practices. In geography, the curriculum encourages embedded assessment for learning and also a sophisticated approach to teacher- led summative assessment. Regarding the latter, assessment objectives are identified for teachers and a variety of assessment modes is encouraged. Thus, considerable professional expectations are placed on teachers to perform assessment processes in a reasonably consistent way between schools. In history, assessment arrangements are complex; there are assessment models with and without an examination component. It seems clear that assessment arrangements align with the curriculum in conceptual terms: assessment is driven by conceptually informed assessment objectives. Social studies programmes (see above) are also subject to high-stakes testing.

Concluding thoughts

In the quest to find what, if anything, high performing jurisdictions might have in common in their curricula and assessment arrangements for social studies a number of considerations have emerged. Looking through an intended curriculum lens at orientation, coherence and clarity, scope, levels of demand, progression and assessment issues we realised that we could not draw meaningful conclusions about relative quality (which jurisdiction might be stronger or weaker in its provision). We were, however, able to highlight various different approaches to the study of social studies disciplines – some jurisdictions teach social studies as a subject in its own right, others separate out the main components of history, geography, civics, etc.; the balance of content, skills and concepts are differently embedded within curricula; in some jurisdictions social studies are explicitly meant to further citizenship aims, in others less so. Progression and level of demand proved problematic to ascertain. While acknowledging the frustration of not being able to address squarely through desk research the questions and issues asked at the outset, we were able to compare jurisdictions' curricular plans. Our study has highlighted the need to develop an analytical framework that includes both desk and 'on-the-ground' research for deep evaluation of social studies curricula.

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ⁱ The larger study (see Creese, Gonzalez and Isaacs in this issue) was able to use many of Oates' (2011) control factors when exploring the contextual background to each of the jurisdictions. Those included: curriculum content; assessment and qualifications; national frameworks; inspection; professional development; institutional development; institutional forms and structures; governance; accountability arrangements and selection and gatekeeping, but not pedagogy or allied social measures, which would have gone some way to completing the picture.

ⁱⁱ In most cases (7/11) history is integrated into social studies and this is true in the two US jurisdictions; in a minority of these cases (3/7) history's identity is dissolved into social studies; and in a minority of cases (4/11) history is clearly treated as a discrete study in its own right (not merely as a component of social studies).

ⁱⁱⁱ see, for example, Harvard University's Project Zero *Id Global Project* <http://idglobal.gse.harvard.edu/>