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Let's Dig Down Deep

A philosophical look at social studies education in New Zealand using a post-structural genealogical analysis

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Abstract:

Post-structural analysis is a valuable tool for offering different perspectives, highlighting possible disparities, and suggesting new ways forward. This paper applies a post-structural analysis to social studies education and Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1997). The analysis reveals that social studies education restricts many diverse groups in Aotearoa/New Zealand from identification as "New Zealand citizens" through a focus on "citizenship" education and a singular "national identity". It is argued that social studies education should move into the postmodern allowing for teachers and students to think across multiple dimensions that recognise diversity and reflect a postmodern philosophy.

In 1997 the Ministry of Education published *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1997) – a curriculum document born out of controversy, developed from two drafts and focused on processes of "citizenship" for the development of a "national identity." What these concepts mean has implications for how academics, teachers and students speak, communicate and interpret social studies. As an academic interested in post-structural ideas of multiple identities, knowledges and the questioning of universal truths, I found myself wondering where such a curriculum would lead us if a genealogical analysis was applied. The concept "genealogical analysis" comes from the work of Michel Foucault (1980) and involves the reader in an investigation of a particular form of knowledge or *discourse* to establish how the voices of others are constrained and silenced through

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the promotion of certain truths manifest in the discourse. Such a genealogical analysis is a "history of the present" allowing the reader to see the covert enforcement of inequities through policy and institutional practices. In a world where political correctness, "agency" and the efforts of various liberation groups are celebrated, such an analysis may trouble the waters of progressive Western history. However, on the flip of a coin, such analysis may alert us to the silences in our past and how these remain in our present.

This article investigates social studies education and the current New Zealand social studies curriculum by applying a genealogical analysis to the predominant terms and discourses found within the curriculum document and influential social studies literature. This analysis has two purposes: the first being an exploration into these concepts and the possible effects these may have in the classroom; the second being a postmodern alternative to the teaching of social studies that may in some way move educators beyond the limitations posed in the current curriculum or even echo what happens at the diverse chalkface of Aotearoa/New Zealand's classroom. Literature on the need for social studies education (Barr, 1997; Codd, 1999; Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Parker & Jarolimek, 1984) stresses the importance of teaching for democratic citizenship and encourages educators to see social studies as "an agent of socialisation" (Barr, 1997, p. 6) for our young children.

Socialisation in the Social Studies

Walter Parker and John Jarolimek (1984) argue that social studies occupies a "critical role" in democratic education. It is only in a democracy that citizens govern themselves, and therefore, there is a need for individuals to possess rational, critical thinking skills. Consequently, the role assigned to social studies education is the reproduction of a form of thinking and conduct conducive to a democracy. In line with the argument of Parker and Jarolimek, Shirley Engle and Anna Ochoa argue that democratic education cannot overtly coerce an individual into a particular form of thinking and behaving. Because of this, it is the role of social studies education to "place its faith in *reason* and on the capacity of people to think for themselves and to reach reasoned conclusions" (1988, p. 99, [italics added]). This democratic reasoning is reliant on "universal truths" inherent in all societies and the function of socialisation in social studies conserves these truths. In a New Zealand commentary on social studies education,

Barr (1997) describes social studies as a tool of both socialisation and counter socialisation. In accordance with American writings (Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Parker & Jarolimek, 1984), Barr argues that socialisation preserves democratic values and truths. Counter socialisation, as maintained by both Barr and Engle & Ochoa, involves the development of critical thinking. This is a skill which involves the individual in applying rational thought on the basis of universal truths, such as freedom and justice, to the critical analysis of values and beliefs held by "other" groups of people.

Ramirez and Boli (1987) maintain that democratic education does not just involve the direct transmission of dominant discourses, or ways of thinking. It also includes the socialisation, or assimilation, of deviant societal groups into the democratic discourse. So we get an effect where social studies education assimilates the uncivilised into a position of civilised (Danaher, Schirato & Webb, 2000). Education and assimilation can be seen in the recent New Zealand history of European/Maori relations. In the following I will provide and discuss two examples of European assimilation policies, evident in the educational research literature.

Socialisation: the process of assimilation

The mass education policies within the last century in New Zealand demonstrate the application of education to socialise overtly the "savage Maori" culture and further assimilate Maori into a position of civilised. In a historical review of education in New Zealand, Simon (1994) describes how the first European policies aimed to subjugate the customs and language of the Maori people, in an effort to assimilate them into a European way of thinking. For example, according to Simon, the Native Schools Act of 1867 displayed how the European-based government in New Zealand sought politically to educate Maori in the English language in established schools near Maori settlements. Such policies attempted to overtly relocate the Maori individual into a civilised position in society from their previous uncivilised, savage position. For example, in the words of James Pope, the first inspector of Native Schools in the 1880 education code, Native Schools were:

To bring an untutored but intelligent and high-spirited people into line with our civilisation and by placing in Maori settlements European school buildings and European families to serve as teachers, especially as exemplars of a new and more desirable mode of life. (quoted in Simon, 1994, pp. 61-62)

Contrary to its purpose, the overt socialisation of Maori people did not take the "savage" out of the Maori or bring them into line with the civilised position of their European colonisers. Instead, while Maori language and customs diminished, Maori people continued to be defined as "different" from and "lesser" than the European.

But that was in the 1800s. One would think that some progression of thought would have happened since then. But similar echoes continued into the 1970s. For example, further political moves by the white-male majority government served to attempt an assimilation of the Maori people. Michael Hollings maintains that the educational policies developed in the 1970s to incorporate Maori aspects into the school curriculum did not positively promote Maori perspectives. Instead, these policies acted as a vehicle to "empower Pakeha further by giving them access to knowledge that was previously unavailable to them" (1991, p. 56). Consequently, the classroom became one in which Maori individuals were required to explain and validate their position in society under the European guise of "oneness", "sameness" and "acceptance" (Jones, 1999). Such an application of terms, (viz., oneness, sameness and acceptance) operates covertly as a discursive tool, which continued to socialise and assimilate the "savage" Maori, into the "civilised" European position (Jones, 1999). Socialisation and assimilation, therefore, are terms dependent upon a dialectical power relationship between the "same", or definer, and the "other" or defined. To this point I have loosely alluded to the terms citizen and savage in discussing examples of assimilation policies and practices. The following section will focus on exposing some of the myths associated with the term "citizen", a term central to the aim of *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1997).

The Citizen/Barbarian: A genealogical analysis

Social studies education clearly locates the term "citizen" in the classical era of ancient Greece, Egypt and Rome (Barr, Barth & Shermis, 1987; Parker & Jarolimek, 1984). Focusing on the word "citizen" alone, one might note that the *Oxford Concise English Dictionary* (Thompson, 1995) attributes some Latin basis to the word.¹ However, in the same definition it notes that the word "citizen" did not originate within the classical era, that "citizen" is a middle English word constructed between CE 1100-1500.² The "citizen" within this dictionary definition by Thompson is a participating member of the state; hence at time of this word's appearance it did not include women, lower classes,

non-property owning men and children. Moving back to the present, social studies writers continue to echo the middle English definition in maintaining that the citizen can only be defined as one who accepts and actively participates in democratic society (Barr, 1997; Barr & Carryer, 1991; Barr et al., 1978; Codd, 1999; Engle & Ochoa, 1988). Therefore, if a person does not accept and actively participate in a democratic fashion, the very definition alone excludes one from the *claim* of national identity as a “New Zealand citizen”.

Danaher et al. (2000) also maintain that the word “citizen” did not emerge in the classical era but became common within speech and literature in approximately CE 1700. Furthermore, they claim that the Latin-based attribution of the word “citizen” and the further justification of it through links to the classical era:

Provided a moral justification for European colonisation. If the colonising countries could perceive [and define] themselves as being more civilised than the people in the countries they colonised then ... the colonising project might be seen as bringing the light of civilisation to the dark and barbarous parts of the world. (2000, p. 110)

An example of the colonising citizen justification appears in the English version of the preamble in the Treaty of Waitangi where the Crown upheld the need to establish a “civil” government in order to circumvent the “evil consequences” of native ignorance.

It was through the enactment of the Treaty of Waitangi that Maori became “British Subjects”, words that cannot be linked directly to the concept of the participating “citizen”. Contrary to the Maori Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the English version shows a difference between “citizen” and “subject” by claiming that the Crown held both governorship and sovereignty. This enabled the establishment of various laws to restrict and define the “participating citizen”. For example, in 1853 New Zealand was granted self-government by the Crown. Voting rights were restricted to individual adult males whose land assets exceeded £50. This criterion excluded the majority of the Maori population (McKinnon, 1997), and further excluded other groups in society such as women, children, the poor, and the disabled. Thus the emergence of the word citizen in New Zealand only referred to the participating male of European descent and excluded all others, allowing these others the status of subjects to the Crown. Genealogical argument would follow that as the assimilation agenda echoes throughout the modern history of New Zealand, so too do the exclusions surrounding “citizen”. And,

that although others now may have the right to participate in their role as a voter, the road to full active participation is a very difficult one, as their voice will always be compared to that of the unmarked individual who first defined the position of citizen.

The connection between the European male and citizenship is not limited to the defining criteria of participation. Democratic citizenship not only requires a participating member, but also an individual who possesses the essential critical thinking skills³ needed for the continuance and progression of democratic values (Barr, 1997; Codd, 1999; Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Patrick, 1986). Parker and Jarolimek (1984) condense the skills of “critical thinking” into three categories:

- Selecting and acquiring democratic knowledge;
- Classifying and organising such knowledge in accordance with universal truths;
- Using reason and rationality to validate and critically assess other truth claims.

A democratic citizen can be further defined as a rational member of society (Codd, 1999; Parker & Jarolimek, 1984). Such an inclusion of the word “rational” can further be assumed in a post-structural sense to be restrictive to those who can fully occupy the citizen position. Without initiating a genealogical analysis of the word “rational,” an expansive study in itself, it may be appropriate to simply cite the work of Genevieve Lloyd (1993) in justification of this post-structural assumption. Lloyd, through her study of Western philosophy, concludes that Western conceptions of reason and rationality have been defined by male thinkers, and as a result exclude female or other dimensions of thought. Furthermore, Danaher et al. (2000) argue that the dialectical oppositions existent within Western rational thought designate as different (and consequently exclude) anything that does not concur with the European male conception of reason.

Consequently, following a genealogical analysis and from a post-structural position, the application of words such as “citizen” and “rationality” in educational documents, such as *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1997) enforces Western patriarchal modes of thinking and can be seen as excluding all others. For the diverse range of children within Aotearoa/New Zealand classrooms, the position of national identity becomes incredibly complicated, and further restricted by the echoes of our past defining who a New Zealand citizen *is not*. Parallel to this conclusion, social

studies education implies that individuals within the category of “other” need to be defined and not only assimilated into the position of a participating citizen, but also into the skill of rational critical thinking. From this, I believe a paradox results. In order to be assimilated, one needs to be defined. This assimilation cannot be complete, as the definition of “same” is dependent upon that of the “other,” or defining who one *is not* (Jones, 1999). The final part of this initial discussion will directly associate how *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* reflects this paradox.

Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum: Socialisation and Assimilation in Action

It is the aim of *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* to “enable students to participate in a changing [democratic]⁴ society as informed, confident, and responsible citizens” (Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 8). Earlier discussion in this paper has already established the exclusions and limitations of the application of the word “citizen”. The curriculum document also continues to establish the same/other assimilation paradox throughout the structural dimensions of *Strands, Processes, Settings, Perspectives, Essential Skills* and *Essential Learning*. All of these structural dimensions assume a fixed national identity. This identity agrees to universal truths, possesses rational thinking skills and exists within a diverse society (Barr, 1997; Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Parker & Jarolimek, 1984).

Furthermore, a common theme within the document is that of comparison. Within all structural dimensions the teacher and students are involved in a process of comparing the ideas, values, beliefs, actions and technologies of past and present “others” to those of present day New Zealanders. For example, within the *Culture and Heritage Strand*, and also in the *Essential Learning* requirements, children come to an understanding of what it is to be a New Zealander through comparing themselves to other cultures and societies. This may seem straightforward, but what happens to children who immigrate to New Zealand? At this point one falls back again on what “citizen” once meant – the child is not labelled a New Zealander, but Romanian, Cook Islander, Muslim, etc. Further to this, the document encourages teachers to encompass the perspectives of others into their teaching. These *Perspectives* include both Maori and female views; two groups one would assume could call themselves New Zealanders, but are clearly excluded from this claim through the label *Perspectives* and the further

silent authoring Pakeha male voice of the document. Consequently the limitations on national identity posed by this document are immense; one is either included or excluded. I propose a movement beyond the restrictive nature of identity and dialectical comparisons between same/other in the formation of such an identity. Instead of focusing on establishing what constitutes identity, by replacing this word with subjectivity, an allowance can be made for the acknowledgement of multiple, overlapping, compatible, and conflicting positions (Sarup, 1996).

In the final part of this article, I would like to argue for the replacement of *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1997) with a curriculum document focused on the postmodern ideas of subjectivity and discourse – a document that would be more reflective of the diversity in Aotearoa/New Zealand and of a teaching practice apparent in a number of Aotearoa/New Zealand classrooms.

A Postmodern Social Studies

In a postmodern curriculum, philosophy moves out from a focus on universal truths to one that allows many truths to be voiced (Lyotard, cited in Sarup, 1996). Subjectivity has a clear place, as knowledge itself is fragmented and is no longer subject to one definition, but is open to redefinition. Social studies too, being a study of the “social”, moves beyond investigation of the once stable dimensions of race, gender, class and culture to include dimensions of instability, such as technology and consumerism. In the following, I will review the postmodern ideas surrounding subjectivity particularly by two postmodern/post-structuralist thinkers, Foucault and Baudrillard, and close with an application of these ideas to the world of many students in Aotearoa/New Zealand, encompassing the culture of consumerism. I conclude that through a curriculum focused on “subjectivity” the teacher and students have more opportunity to expose and challenge the possibilities available for them within the discourses located in their society.

Postmodern ideas concerning “subjectivity”

In his description of identity, Sarup (1996) describes how the postmodern ideas of shifting subjectivities have decentred and disestablished the foundations of traditional identity. Using Foucault’s

ideas concerning the discourse, Sarup (1996) suggests that in order to understand the subjectivities available in the postmodern world, one must first explore subjectivity in the contexts one operates in. As an individual is constituted by and occupies a variety of contexts, the cancellation of the possibility of one identity occurs in place of shifting and overlapping subjectivities. In such a position, individuals and groups have the opportunities to effect the discourses or ways of thinking, speaking and acting that surround them and constitute their subjectivities. Foucault (cited in Sarup, 1996) described the techniques that individuals apply to author subjectivities and challenge dominant discourses. These he referred to as four “technologies:”

- “Technologies of production,” tools of manipulation and production;
- “Technologies of power,” tools of intrapersonal and interpersonal control;
- “Technologies of sign systems,” tools of signification;
- “Technologies of the self,” tools of self-transformation.

Foucault (cited in Danaher et al., 2000) additionally proposed that individuals could, through “technologies” and discourses, take the subjectivity positions available and use these positions in order to challenge the power structure and knowledge base of a society. Consequently, the subjectivity perspective offered by Foucault and applied by other postmodern/post-structuralist authors allows the individual access to multiple positions; a self-authoring of subjectivity; and an opportunity to transform society. This is reflected in the work of Baudrillard (cited in Sarup, 1993, 1996) who applies ideas of consumer society to subjectivity in the postmodern world. Concerning the consumer society, Baudrillard maintains that an individual uses consumer products⁵ to create his or her personal subjectivity. Within various contexts in society, some products are more esteemed than others. Hence, consumers can locate and challenge their own subjective positions through identifying and purchasing products.

Through positioning subjectivity within consumer culture, Baudrillard’s ideas reflect those of today’s New Zealand, for many young people. For example in September 2000, the cover page of the *New Zealand Listener* showed a 10 to 12 year-old girl wearing make-up and the “latest-fashions.” She stood behind the headline “Material Girl: What the new generation of consumer kids want and what it costs their parents.” Within the magazine, Steve Braunias describes a new

generation of children in a multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-gendered, multi-classed, that is, *multi-dimensional* society. These children no longer identified themselves through location, culture and gender. Instead, they situated themselves within a variety of “cool” discourses through the clothes they wore; the movies they watched; the music they listened to; and the language they used. Through combining the subjectivity ideas of Baudrillard and Foucault within the context of social studies, an opening occurs for the exploration and questioning of the complexities apparent within a variety of traditional and contemporary subjectivities. As a result, this enables both the teacher and students to explore not only the democratic discourse and resulting claims to truth but also other discourses, identifying how language, institutions and technologies influence subjectivity in multi-dimensional Western societies. This approach is not a search for one’s self or even a quest for the identity one would like to be. Both of these, as Drewery and Monk (1994) claim, lead back to the universal concept of identity. It is, rather, an opening for students to learn what constitutes subjectivities and the discontinuities existent in the concept of identity (Foucault, cited in Horrocks & Jevtic, 1997).

By applying such a focus, the traditional comparison relationship between citizen/savage no longer sustains a basis for social studies education and the aim of creating a national identity as a New Zealand citizen is disrupted and questioned. Consequently, in changing the focus from identity to subjectivity one must also address the thinking processes inherent within social studies. Using critical thinking for subjectivity analysis will lead back to ideas of oneness and a single identity, as the other is excluded through references to universal truths (Danaher et al., 2000; Lloyd, 1993). Instead, critical thinking needs to be replaced with the skill of multiple thinking. This is a skill that results from genealogical investigations of discourses within societies (Foucault, in Gordon, 1980).

Multiple thinking in the Social Studies

Danaher et al. describe Foucault’s genealogical approach “as a process of analysing and uncovering the historical relationship between truth, knowledge and power” (2000, p. xi). It is different from traditional historical analysis, which investigates the past to explain the present in a teleological fashion. Instead, the genealogical approach investigates discourses throughout specific periods in history with the aim of exposing discontinuities within society, truth and identity (Foucault,

cited in Horrocks & Jevtic, 1997). Within the genealogical approach, the researcher exposes the authors, institutions, inclusions and exclusions within the governing discourses existent in the period under investigation (Foucault, 1972; Gordon, 1980). As Foucault's genealogical project (cited in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982) was essentially concerned with the individual and subjectivity within the interplay of power and knowledge in society, it is usable with subjectivity exploration in social studies.

The genealogical approach allows a critical investigation of the democratic discourse both by the teacher and students. That is, social studies education, using the genealogical approach, will allow individuals to establish:

- when and where the democratic discourse arose;
- who were its authors;
- the institutions which maintained its claims to truth;
- inclusions within the discourse;
- exclusions within the discourse;
- possibilities for transformation.

This, consequently, will allow individuals to identify and question their position within the discourse in the social context of the classroom environment.

Furthermore, social studies education should not begin and end with only the investigation of dominant discourses such as democracy. Foucault (1972) established that many discourses operate in society at one time – thus many truths and subjectivities exist. This idea is reflected throughout postmodern/post-structuralist literature (Sarup, 1993). Consequently, to be effective, the genealogical approach in social studies needs to investigate the many discourses that students occupy and are constituted by. Through including all students within this approach, both students and teachers will be involved in locating the discourses and the transformations possible for subjectivity. Thus, the development of multiple thinking opposed to critical thinking occurs, as the students and the teacher will have opportunities to see the world through a variety of discourses, not just that of the rational democratic citizen.

I also believe that it is within the genealogical approach that the questioning of one's current subjectivity positions becomes possible. Through locating discourses and then exploring one's own positions of

subjectivity within these, one can be encouraged to use Foucault's "technologies" to challenge and expose limitations within the dominant knowledge a society claims as truth. The genealogical approach does not socialise or assimilate an individual, but rather it exposes the function and purpose for social studies education. Thus, subjectivity analysis allows the individual a form of "agency" to choose the way he or she wishes to be positioned, within the limitations and possibilities of governing discourses. I would argue that the genealogical approach applied to analyse subjectivity does not annihilate the conception of the nation state, comprised of like-minded individuals. Instead, it allows students to locate themselves and further transform governing discourse possibilities within a nation state, through collaborative exploration and analysis. It allows the participants to deconstruct the past in order to reconstruct the present (Drewery & Monk, 1994).

Conclusion

Applying a genealogical analysis to social studies education reveals current social studies thinking and curriculum as a discursive and covert agent of socialisation and assimilation. Many children are excluded from the position of New Zealand citizen, through the use of terms such as "identity". These children become objects of comparison as democratic knowledge seeks to reproduce itself in the citizens of tomorrow. In a country as diverse and complex as Aotearoa/New Zealand such comparisons restrict, limit and silence many voices. Hence, a genealogical analysis exposes a need for the replacement of identity exploration with subjectivity analysis and the development of multiple thinking.

So, in the context of democratic education, social studies education aids in the formation and maintenance of a particular national identity. When that identity is restricted through the promotion of particular knowledges and skills, students are merely socialised into governing discourses. By allowing the exploration of a variety of discourses through a genealogical approach, teachers and students can transform society through exposing the limitations and opening possibilities for transformation. Identity exploration limits the participants in social studies to the position of the defined element. By changing to subjectivity analysis, the participants can be both the defined and the definer, thus allowing individuals to use discourse to transform society.

"Yes ... You want to be the subject of your history instead of the object you felt yourself to be."

"The subject, yes – but also the object. It's the synthesis of the two, isn't it?"

"The author of your childhood; the historian of your past."

(Fraser, cited in Sarup, 1996, p. 23)

Notes

1. According to the Oxford Concise English Dictionary, the word citizen is a derivative from the Latin *civitas-tatis*, the noun for "city".
2. CE refers to the Common Era, and is used here to replace the Latin AD (Anno Domini).
3. Critical thinking is a term used in many pedagogical contexts and has several definitions. For the purposes of this article I have chosen to use only the definitions found within social studies literature.
4. The insertion of the word "democratic" into this definition reflects the broader definition in the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 14), which incorporates this word within the broader contextual aim for social studies education.
5. Baudrillard refers to consumer products as "objects of consumption".

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