Historical Perspectives on Social Studies Teaching Practices

Since the early twentieth century, two main curriculum and instructional focuses have dominated historians' and social studies educators' discussions: active, "constructivist" instructional methods and citizenship education. Although they did not use the "active" or "constructivist" terms to describe their instructional advice, the 1894 report from the American Historical Association's Committee on History, Civil Government and Political Economy (or so-called Committee of Ten) as well as the AHA's Committee of Seven's report in 1899 both stressed that history should be taught as analytical, inquiry-based discipline. Charles McMurry's *Special Method in History: A Complete Outline of a Course of Study in History For the Grades Below the High School* (1903), drawing upon the work of the aforementioned committees, emphasized several related aims of historical instruction that can be seen as authentic practices of the historical profession. He stressed how history instruction should "bring the past into manifest relation to the present." It should "interpret and value the present, to estimate properly the ideas and forces which are now at work around us." Instead of fostering uncritical patriotism, he suggested that students "should be made more intelligent about our country and more sensitive to its true honor and dignity." Moreover, historical instruction is primarily a "social and moral study" that should aid in making young people "less stubborn and isolated in [their] individuality." Not least of all, "historical studies, properly conducted, lead to a thoughtful weighing of arguments, pro and con, a survey of both sides of a question so as to reach a reasonable conclusion."

The citizenship education focus emerged most clearly from the views of social efficiency experts and their educational allies, who were typically followers of John Dewey's educational philosophies, who, in turn, advocated a more utilitarian approach to social education. Fundamentally, these reformers wanted education to produce social progress through curricular
and instruction that addressed current social problems and needs. While arguably less central to social studies' origins than that sparked by professional historians, this approach has wielded a great deal of weight in the field since the early twentieth century. As the numbers of students attending and graduating from high schools increased rapidly during the first two decades of the twentieth century, social efficiency experts stressed that subjects offered should contribute to the social welfare of the nation. Many felt that young people needed to be better prepared for the travails of modern life. Subjects such as Latin, algebra, and even history, championed during the nineteenth century as crucial for mental, particularly for college-bound youngsters, were seen as impractical. Instead, the masses of new students attending high school needed subjects that would better prepare them for life and active participation as citizens. By the World War I era, many Progressives saw history as useful for examining problems of the present, but not particularly important as a subject in itself.²

The citizenship education approach to social studies emerged most forcefully from the landmark National Education Association's 1913-1916 Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education's Committee on Social Studies' report. This committee promulgated its more diversified curriculum of geography, history, and government, which it termed "social studies," that also focused on analytical methods and critical thinking. Soon after the issuing of the committee's report in 1916, the National Council for the Social Studies was formed. Harold Rugg, one of the early NCSS founders, stressed analytical emphases and critical thinking as core elements of social studies teaching. Although World War II and the Cold War tended to discourage reflective, critical instructional advice, since the 1960s social studies educators have advocated social issues, interdisciplinary studies, and global education. These are approaches that all demand higher level thinking as well as inquiry-based learning.³

Yet how have history and the social sciences actually been taught? Larry Cuban's research on how social studies teachers actually behaved in the classroom suggests that they seldom heeded professionals' advice. At the secondary level, over virtually the entire span of the twentieth century, Cuban indicates that drilling and memorization of factual material dominated. More student-centered approaches could be found among elementary teachers'
repertoire. Nevertheless, Cuban found that when it came to social studies they used similar approaches as their secondary level colleagues: "homework assigned from a textbook, review of assignment in class, extensive teacher talk (lecturing, clarifying, and explaining), recitation, and seatwork, interspersed with occasional use of audiovisual aids and field trips." The persistence of instructional methods and activities that do not encourage students to see history and the social studies as investigative, open-ended, and research-based disciplines is a central paradox in social studies education.4

This apparent gulf between professionals’ advice and actual teachers’ practices deserves further exploration as well because it bears on current discussions about teachers’ use of authentic teaching strategies, including elements of historical thinking. That is, what do we learn about teachers’ conceptions about the actual methods needed in the various disciplines, including history, when we study their actual teaching behaviors?

The Goal of Social Studies Education

Although curriculum content has been challenged, altered, and restructured in other disciplines, most notably math, the focus of social studies education has undergone drastic changes over the past 150 years due to political and social influences. Within disciplines such as reading, writing, math and science, the pedagogy has been more often challenged than the content which is largely based upon the academic knowledge base of the discipline. New paradigms have influenced math and science, which have required an adjustment in the curriculum content of both elementary and secondary schools. Knowledge of learning styles and brain research has altered teaching of reading and writing skills. The question of what is appropriate social studies education, however, has been continually challenged as political and social forces align to either substantiate or alter the curriculum to support ideological positions.5

The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, which created programs to train students in the fields of agriculture, trade, industry, and home economics, is an example of political and industrial forces.
altering the social studies curriculum to meet business needs. Prior focus on citizenry, though not abandoned, became at the least marginalized by a continuing push to meet the perceived market needs of a growing industrial power. The matter of many disciplines creating the social studies field, and the sometimes disparately taught knowledge from each of these disciplines, provides a further challenge to the social studies educator to make the content meaningfully productive and interconnected as well as intraconnected. Stephen J. Thornton suggests that a more viable social studies curriculum should lessen its attachment to knowledge generated by each of the disciplines and make more of an effort to make connections between broad ideas and themes. Social studies curricula which focus on historical facts, geographic places, and political leaders are less likely to be accepted by business as valid and productive. In a recent study, Jeff Passe finds that effective employees are less a product of specific vocationally-oriented curriculum and more a result of interpersonal skills, problem solving skills, and decision making skills which are more aptly a part of the citizenship-based curriculum.6

If the modern goal of social studies is to develop productive citizens, are the roles of productivity and citizenry distinct, and perhaps parallel? Does teaching one complement the other or crowd the other? The answer may be changing as the economic landscape of America changes, and the productivity of a post industrial economy is dependent more upon the adaptability of its workforce. Statistics compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that service sector jobs are replacing manufacturing sector jobs at a rapid pace, and that many career changes might be expected within the lifetime of a person entering the job market today. Rather than specific vocational skills, schools should prepare students capable of adapting and gaining new skills throughout their lifetime. Can this challenge be met by the current social studies curriculum? If the content knowledge of the specific social studies disciplines is to be applied toward the development of a post industrial citizen, then it may benefit those who develop standards and benchmarks, as well as those who teach them, to recognize the need to apply broad constructs of the disciplines over specific content of the disciplines.
What Do the Standards Recommend As Best Practice?

All teachers, including those in social studies, can now look to a wide array of standards to guide their instructional practices. The Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), and various state discipline specific standards provide discrete indications of how social studies should be taught. Taking INTASC, NCSS, and the Indiana Professional Standards Board's (IPSB's) social studies standards together, five main elements of best teaching practice emerge from all three sources: (1) multiple representations or perspectives, (2) appropriate methodologies, (3) critical use of appropriate source materials, (4) interdisciplinary methods, and (5) ability to construct new knowledge or sound interpretations.

INTASC Standard 1, focusing on content expertise and the ability of the teacher to create meaningful learning experiences, notes the importance of multiple perspectives in both its dispositions and performances sections. Teachers should “use differing viewpoints, theories, and ways of knowing.” NCSS has promulgated both thematic and discipline specific standards for new social studies teachers. One of the ten thematic standards is “Culture and Cultural Diversity.” As might be expected, this standard focuses on students’ “need to comprehend multiple perspectives that emerge from within their own culture and from the vantage points of the diverse cultural groups within that society and with whom the society may interact.” The need for multiple perspectives is also cited in the NCSS History disciplinary standard and the IPSB’s Historical Perspectives standard. Multiple perspectives or representations are also evident in the NCSS Geography disciplinary standard in how teachers explain human interactions. The IPSB’s Government and Citizenship standard cites the need for teachers to be able to compare different political systems and political cultures with those of the United States. INTASC as well as the NCSS and IPSB standards are thoroughly infused with indications about teaching students using appropriate methodologies. INTASC Standard 1 starts by stating that the teacher "understands ... processes of inquiry...that are central to the discipline(s) s/he teaches." In terms of dispositions, teachers should "convey to learners how knowledge is developed." In their
performances, teachers need to "use ...methods of inquiry" and "test hypotheses according to the
methods of inquiry and standards of evidence used in the discipline." The NCSS disciplinary
standards, especially in the sections on high school applications, emphasize how students should
be allowed to analyze, explain, interpret, and solve problems. The IPSB's Performances sections
for Historical Perspectives, Geographical Perspectives, Government and Citizenship, and
Economics all stress activities that allow students to create new knowledge or apply previously
learned concepts to new situations.

As might be expected if teachers introduce students to the use of appropriate
methodologies in the various disciplines, the standards also emphasize that students should be
taught to critically examine appropriate source materials. INTASC Standard 1’s emphasis on this is
more implicit than either the NCSS or IPSB standards. The NCSS Thematic Standard on Time,
Continuity, and Change specifically notes that teachers should "guide learners as they
systematically employ processes of critical historical inquiry." The NCSS Geography Disciplinary
Standard says that teachers should "guide learners in the use of maps and other geographic
representations, tools, and technologies." Psychology teachers are urged to have students "study
personality and individual differences and commonalities." The IPSB Historical and Geographical
Perspectives Standards also stress that students actually use data and documents in the study of
these disciplines.

Great emphasis within INTASC Standard 1 is placed on the importance of
interdisciplinary perspectives. In the Knowledge section of the standard, teachers should
demonstrate an ability to "relate his/her disciplinary knowledge to other subject areas." In the
Performance section, the standard says that teachers should "create interdisciplinary learning
experiences that allow students to integrate knowledge, skills, and methods of inquiry from several
subject areas." A similar interdisciplinary focus is at the heart of the NCSS Thematic Standards.
Indeed, this interdisciplinary focus underscores the use of the very term social studies. The IPSB's
standard for World Cultures notes that teachers must "possess an understanding of the
interdisciplinary nature of the content of the subject matter of world cultures." Similar language is
found in the standards for Current Events and Sociology.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the various standards stress an active, hands-on, constructivist perspective about the teaching of social studies. One can read the Performances section of INTASC Standard 1 and conclude that students should be engaged in authentic experimental or research type exercises as a core part of their instruction. The NCSS Thematic and Disciplinary Standards as well as the IPSB Social Studies Standards refer repeatedly to enabling learners to predicting, constructing, explaining, investigating, interpreting, developing, exploring, applying, and analyzing new information to advance their own ideas about a particular subject.

The activities for learning both implicitly and explicitly suggested by NCSS, INTASC, and other standards create skills which allow the students to grow in their understanding of the content and, perhaps more importantly, in their development of decision making skills and adaptive learning techniques which prepare them for the roles of productive citizenry. These standards have been crafted with a view toward the big picture and, though not devoid of specific content knowledge, take ample consideration of the constructs of the disciplines or as INTASC #1 frames this "the tools of inquiry."

Assessment and Its Relation to the Standards

A recent study by Buckles, Schug, and Watts notes that thirty-four states currently have annual assessments in social studies. These assessments are based upon content knowledge primarily divided among history, geography, civics, political science, and economics. Although the elementary social studies curriculum contains subjects such as interpersonal relationships and identity, which might be more appropriately the domain of psychology or sociology, the secondary social studies curriculum and the high stakes graduation exams which are, (ideally), aligned with it, are dominated by the above mentioned disciplines. One of the prevailing criticisms of standardized tests is that they do not measure the types of skills which relate to higher order thinking or reasoning skills. Decision making skills are often cited as a prime product of the social studies
curriculum; yet they are difficult to measure using the types of instruments created for standardized testing. This is not to say that constructs can not be measured by an objective question, say a student's understanding of scarcity or ethnocentrism, but reliability may be questioned when a single response is required. The need to keep these exams efficient often discourages the use of many subjective question forms which may be better suited as assessments of the social studies curriculum and students' learning.7

If the standards and the tools used to assess performance are at odds, teachers are placed in a difficult position. If efficiency dictates more objective content, and students' performance is evaluated on retention of this content, then teachers have little choice but to tailor their instruction toward this design. This may be at the expense of higher order thinking skills which could and should be promoted through an active and dynamic social studies curriculum. It should be noted that content and thinking skills should not be divorced or exclusive from one and other, and that one should not replace the other. Content is necessary for understanding ideas and developing skills as understanding and ideas and developing skills are necessary for application of the content. Content, however, can be taught without the inclusion of higher order thinking skills, though these skills can not be developed without content. Stated less rhetorically, the content of the various social studies disciplines which include facts, names, dates, and places, are the foundation for building constructs and paradigms which help us understand our relationship to these facts. It is our understanding of these constructs which is the measure of our learning. The question which should not be dependent upon any tool for assessment is which teaching practices best develop an understanding of core constructs within the social studies disciplines.

Best Practice in Social Studies Teaching

Given the lofty goals of citizenry and productivity, what are the best practices in social studies teaching? Lawrence Resnick and Leopold Klopfer suggest that knowledge is acquired not from the information communicated and memorized but from the information that students elaborate, question, and use. It is the utilization or application of acquired knowledge which is both the product and process of social studies education. There have been few studies of teaching practice within
the social studies which illuminate how teachers best prepare students for application or demonstration of ideas. One recent study surveyed ninety-seven National Council for the Social Studies’ member teachers and found that a moderate majority (67 percent) of elementary teachers indicated that they sometimes used an interdisciplinary or thematic approach. Whereas this may suggest that these teachers are connecting ideas across disciplines and allowing students to generate understandings which go beyond a linear or sequential presentation of facts, it is also worth noting that the teachers surveyed were part of an organization which is devoted to promoting best practice in social studies education and therefore may be more likely than non-member teachers to employ such methods.

Some examples of construct application can be found in the literature on teaching pedagogy. Palmer promotes a practical application of conflict resolution as both a method and an outcome of social studies teaching. Several educational researchers have provided a theoretical framework and research to support methods that facilitate the development of attitudes and values, and the ability to consider multiple perspectives. If we return to our original mandate, development of a productive citizen, it is clear to see that value development and consideration of multiple perspectives are requisite to both the political and economic roles which a student will eventually play. Debate, Socratic inquiry, role playing, and individual research are teaching strategies which encourage the development of values and multiple perspectives. Other frequently employed methods such as lecture, text reading, and worksheets may be necessary for some fact gathering, but as relatively passive types of learning they may be inadequate for development of ideas, values, and perspectives. Instructional strategies which rely on investigation and promotion of ideas, however, require resources which may not be available or familiar to the classroom teacher. In the Haas and Laughlin study it was noted that less than 5 percent of the respondents typically used instructional resources such as artifacts and primary documents. Student-centered approaches to learning require the availability of resources beyond a single text. Although a text may include multiple perspectives on a topic, for students to generate their own multiple perspectives requires multiple and sometimes conflicting sources. The positive
impact of manipulation and integration of multiple source material is supported by a three-year study by Langer and Applebee.\textsuperscript{9}

Methods

A survey of all of the teachers, elementary through secondary, in a mid-sized Indiana school district was conducted to examine both the teaching strategies employed and preferred among the faculty of nineteen schools. Vigo County School Corporation is centered in Terre Haute, Indiana, with 420 full time teachers in four high schools, four middle schools, and eleven elementary schools. The demographics of the student population vary widely from school to school. There are inner city schools with over 50 percent free and reduced lunch and suburban schools located in relatively affluent neighborhoods. The performance of these schools on the state standardized exam (ISTEP) also varies widely. Many of the schools typically score within the 50th percentile in comparison with other schools in the state, while some score significantly lower even in relation to statewide schools with similar demographics. The maturity of the teaching core is exemplified by both the average years of service (over fifteen years), and the educational level attained (over 50 percent with a master’s degree).

Two mailings of the survey were sent over a two-month period, and 140 were completed and returned. The surveys were color coded to determine whether they were returned from an elementary or secondary school, though they were anonymously submitted. One hundred two elementary teachers and thirty-eight secondary teachers returned surveys. The specific grade level was not asked, nor was the school which the respondent taught at required. The teachers were asked to state how much of their teaching time was devoted to social studies, which was an additional indicator of grade level. Each of the surveys was coded, and the data collected was examined using frequency distributions and descriptive statistics.

Items on the questionnaire included questions which asked the teachers to (1) approximate what percentage of their social studies instruction time was spent employing various methods, (2) rank order NCSS themes in order of perceived importance, (3) describe the focus of their social studies instruction by identifying one or more disciplines, and (4) list the methods of
social studies instruction that they felt was the most effective for teaching students.

Results

When asked what percentage of their social studies instructional time the teacher spent employing various methods, the teachers were given seven categories to approximate percentages and an eighth category for other unlisted methods. The methods were derived from classroom observations by the researchers and literature review of common practices within social studies instruction. The mean percentage of time recorded along with the range of responses for each category are listed below in Table 1.

Among all respondents, secondary and elementary, lecture was chosen as the most applied method of instruction. The range in responses for all categories also shows that at least one respondent in each category did not employ that method in their social studies instruction. Missing values were deleted prior to calculation and do not contribute to the mean score recorded for each method. Individual and group projects also accounted for a mean of nearly 18 percent of the practiced methods and worksheets as a form of instruction averaged 12.5 percent of instructional time. Interestingly, role playing and debate, which are highly recommended by best practice guidelines, score among the lowest in average time spent during instruction.

Table 1:
Instructional Time by Method
N=140

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Class Time (Mean Percent)</th>
<th>Range of Responses (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>0-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Class Projects</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>0-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>0-98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worksheets</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>0-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film/Video</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>0-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Research</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>0-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Playing</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>0-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0-25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 shows how each of the averages compare when desegregated by primary discipline. Each of the respondents was asked to list the primary focus of his or her social studies instruction. In some cases, especially with the elementary teachers, multiple responses were recorded. In other words, respondents could and did list more than one discipline as a primary focus of instruction. The primary discipline data showed no variation on the original responses, thus the focus of instruction played no significant part in the choice of instructional strategy employed. Debate and role playing rank among the least used strategies regardless of the discipline being taught. It is surprising that teachers who focus on sociology or psychology as a primary discipline do not show a significant increase in employing interactive strategies such as debate and role playing and in fact employ these strategies less than their counterparts in the other four disciplines. Lecture is favored among teachers of sociology more than any of the other disciplines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Debate</th>
<th>Role Playing</th>
<th>Student Research</th>
<th>Individual/Group Project</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
<th>Worksheets</th>
<th>Film/Video</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked what the most effective teaching strategies within social studies were, the teachers' responses did not concur with their reports of strategies employed. This question was open ended and allowed for the respondents to either list one of the strategies mentioned in the first part of the survey or name one of their own. The results are shown below in Tables 3 and 4.
Among elementary teachers class projects are listed as the most highly ranked method for social studies instruction followed closely by discussion. Although discussion was not listed among the methods used for determining instructional time spent, one could make a reasonable argument that debate qualifies as a form of discussion. Perhaps the clarity of the term debate—between students or between students and teacher was not specified—led to its unpopularity as both an employed method and a preferred method among elementary teachers. In any case, discussion may encompass what is being termed as debate in the secondary results. Reading, videos, and lectures remain highly favored among elementary teachers as relatively passive forms of instruction, but projects and discussion should be considered as more active forms of learning and thus a marked change from the distribution of time noted in the earlier question. What is favored among elementary teachers as best practice is not necessarily what is being employed in their classrooms. Role playing remains among the lowest of those strategies listed, and debate was not listed as a preferred strategy among elementary teachers.

Table 3:
Elementary Teachers' Opinions on Most Effective Teaching Methods in Social Studies
N=102

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percent Favoring This Method*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Projects</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centers</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Research</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worksheets</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Trips</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Playing</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Respondents could select more than one method as most effective.
Table 4:
Secondary Teachers’ Opinions on 
Most Effective Teaching Methods in Social Studies*
N=38

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percent Favoring This Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Learning</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worksheets</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Respondents could select more than one method as most effective.

Among the secondary teachers, lecture is greatly preferred and shows a significant increase from the time spent employing this strategy. Sixty-three percent of the secondary teachers listed lecture as a most effective teaching strategy for social studies. The next four responses could all be considered active forms of learning: discussion, projects, cooperative learning, and debate. The respondents were not asked to define their terms so cooperative learning may have meant something different to many of the respondents. Perhaps most significantly, worksheets were preferred more often among secondary teachers than elementary teachers.

Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that among both elementary and secondary social studies teachers passive methods are used more frequently than active and, arguably, more authentic methods. One might conclude that teachers consequently do not have a sophisticated understanding of the methods practiced in the social science and historical disciplines. That is, for instance, their understanding of the processes of historical investigation and, in turn, their conceptions about the discipline of history might be weak. However, teachers’ instructional strategies may not necessarily be a result of a preference for these methods, but rather a minimal respect for social studies achievement as it is measured by standardized instruments of educational...
progress. In Indiana, social studies assessments on the state standardized exam were not implemented until the 2004-2005 school year. Language arts and math have been assessed for nearly a decade, which has focused instructional intensity on these subjects. Beyond the obvious skewing of the curriculum through subject exclusion, the types of information that has recently appeared on the state tests in social studies may further direct instruction toward a broad knowledge-based curriculum covering the most amount of information possible with the least amount of depth of understanding. Methods recommended in this report could sacrifice breadth for depth, and create a well educated yet poorly measured student. The teaching methods which do not show immediate dividends on the standardized test will likely be further marginalized in the classroom.

The results of this study also point to an interesting incongruity between elementary teachers’ ideas about best practice and their actual practices in the classroom. This might suggest several possibilities. It may be that the teachers do not possess the ability to translate active and authentic materials and activities into their preferred format. Further study on methods of instruction in Indiana teacher colleges may be necessary to determine whether teacher training adequately prepares teachers for developing and employing more active and substantive methods in the classroom. It is just as likely, however, that elementary teachers simply do not have the time necessary to develop these methods given the constraints of multiple subject assessments and the heavy weight of math and reading skills on these assessments. Remediation of these basic skills often takes a priority in the classroom, and a thematic approach which incorporates both the skills of math and reading and the content of social studies is notably absent in many classrooms. The inclusion of social studies on the state assessment will necessitate a thematic approach if students are to be successful in all areas assessed.

The lag between theory and practice suggests an urgent need to help teachers see the value of active and authentic instructional methods. Depending upon the structure of the state assessments, however, this value may be enhanced or diminished, and teachers’ selection of preferred methods are likely to follow suit. An alignment between the types of critical thinking and depth of understanding recommended by best practices in social studies and history and the structure of the assessments used to measure social studies knowledge and understanding is
critical to promoting these best practices.

NOTES


