SOCIAL STUDIES: EDUCATIONAL TOOLS FOR DIVERSE LEARNERS

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Abstract. The first section of this article presents a historical overview of social studies and the issues that have led to emerging reform efforts. The second section describes current social studies instructional practices from the perspective of the educational needs of diverse learners. The section includes a critique of the content, design, and difficulty of textbooks, although similar concerns can be raised for the full array of educational tools (e.g., textbooks, videos, software, activities). The last section describes four attributes in social studies tools that may help teachers solve some of the problems associated with current practices while trying to respond to the expectations of reform in the context of increasing diversity in American schools: (a) teaching the big ideas of social studies, (b) teaching conspicuous strategies for solving problems, (c) scaffolding the acquisition of meaningful learning, and (d) providing review that is sufficient, distributed over time, varied across contexts, and cumulative.

Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests, in subjects such as United States history, world geography, and civics education, indicate that general education students have a limited grasp of basic information and concepts in social studies (NAEP, 1990a, b, c). Those special education students who receive social studies instruction tend to perform even more poorly (Donahoe & Zigmond, in press). Limited-English-speaking students and children of poverty further increase the diversity that social studies teachers face.

Citing results from studies such as the NAEP (1990a, b, c), social studies educators now recommend the improvement of teaching methods, instructional materials, and a greater integration of the various social sciences with each other. However, these recommendations have emerged in an uncoordinated fashion from a series of national commissions, task forces, and professional organizations. In addition, these recommendations often are unsubstantiated and impractical to implement.

In short, teachers are encountering greater diversity in their students and greater expectations for improvement in the face of fragmented, untested, and possibly impractical recommendations.

SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM REFORM

Social studies is among the most complex and fractious of all academic fields and classroom subjects. It is a loose alliance of disciplines, including anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law-related education, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology. Educators and curriculum designers have struggled for years over which disciplines to include under the social studies umbrella and the relative weight to give the various disciplines.

In 1992 The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) agreed on the definition and purpose for social studies for the first time since the Council was founded. This researc

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formed in 1921. The NCSS defined social studies as “the integrated study of the social sciences and the humanities to promote civic competence,” with its overall purpose being “to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (Viadero, 1992c, p. 4).

Although the NCSS characterizes their broad definition of the goals of social studies education as new, they bear a strong resemblance to the goals of social studies education in the past. Early in the century, the goal of social studies was to provide millions of immigrant students with a standardized curriculum to “inculcate in them democratic traditions and values to prepare them to function as American citizens” (Brophy, 1990, p. 356).

By the early 1970s the new social studies programs fell into disfavor but were influential models for future curricula. For a brief time, the new social studies was replaced by curricula that stressed “personal development and citizen education accomplished through class discussion and projects concerned with values conflict and moral dilemmas, social and political issues” (Brophy, 1990, p. 361). This emphasis was an outgrowth of the social and political ferment that occurred during the 1960s.

In the 1950s and 1960s, social studies curricula were criticized for stressing “life-adjustment goals” instead of focusing on the underlying disciplines. Consequently, “new social studies” programs were developed that emphasized inductive teaching, discovery learning, and content drawn from the newer social sciences, such as sociology and political science. These programs were of great interest to scholars and university professors, but they were not a great success in the classroom. They were implemented only in a few grade levels, required impractical materials or tasks, and according to Hertzberg (1990, p. 359, in Brophy), “emphasized the brightest students without much consideration of other students.”

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The late 1970s and early 1980s ushered in a return to conservatism and the “basics.” Social studies was criticized for placing too much emphasis on process and individual issues of personal adjustment and morality. Influential educators with a high public profile (e.g., Ravitch & Finn, 1987) sought to restore history and geography to the core of the social studies. Their discontent focused on the elementary grades, where there was general agreement that the “expanding communities” curriculum structure was insubstantial. In the elementary grades, the expanding communities structure begins with topics related to the student, then expands in scope to the family, the neighborhood, the community, the state, the nation, and the world.

The current recommendations from social studies task forces, commissions, and professional organizations generally advocate that:

1. The purpose of social studies education is to develop well-educated citizens who share a common body of knowledge drawn in a coordinated and systematic way from a range of disciplines.

2. Content knowledge from the social studies should not be treated as knowl-
knowledge to memorize but as knowledge through which important questions may be explored.

3. Social studies education is essential for all students.

4. Higher order thinking skills are an integral part of social studies education.

These goals are not new. As Brophy (1990) pointed out, most of the changes associated with the goals of new social studies (e.g., inductive teaching, discovery learning, and content drawn from the newer social sciences) have been lasting ones that continue to influence social studies curriculum and instruction today.

For the most part, decisions about what content to include in social studies seem political and arbitrary. They are decisions based, not on a careful consideration of what is important and feasible to teach, but rather on the conventional wisdom of educators, national tradition, and the influence of special interest groups. Of particular difficulty is designing a social studies curriculum that accommodates each special interest group (e.g., evangelical and Pentecostal organizations, secularists, feminists, environmentalists) seeking inclusion of certain content or points of view.

Beck, McKeown, and Gromoll (1989) pointed out that attempting to satisfy special interest groups can lead to an unwieldy social studies curriculum. United States history is an example:

The typical American history survey course . . . comprises everything from Mayans to moon landings. We are, as far as I know, the only country in the Western world that tries to teach the whole of our history to students in a single year. It's just insane (Gagnon, in O'Neil, ASCD Update, 1989, p. 5).

Recommendations from the National Center for History in the Schools (1992) acknowledge these problems associated with overinclusive content selection, while on the other hand urging "a significant increase in the time currently devoted to history in most schools." The implication is that simply more time for history instruction can relieve an overloaded curriculum by distributing content across more grades or hours of the school day.

Proponents are vague about how to increase the time devoted to social studies instruction, appearing to disregard similar demands from other professional organizations representing disciplines such as mathematics, science, and so on. A school day is finite. A more important realization is that increasing time for social studies instruction will not ensure that students learn more. Social studies already has a notorious reputation among students as being of "little importance," "uninteresting," and "boring" (Atwood, 1991), and requiring "more of the same" is likely to increase students' disaffection for the subject.

Higher Expectations

Although many teachers are confused about the goals of social studies and unsure about how it should be taught, there is one area of widespread agreement among organizations developing national standards for history, geography, and civics. Competency in social studies, whatever that may be, is essential for everyone. The NCSS's Task Force on Standards for Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies (1993) stated: "A complete core curriculum should be available to all students, not just gifted students in advanced programs" (p. 215). Similarly, the National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS; 1992) recommended that "... a reformed social studies curriculum should be required of all students in common, regardless of their 'track' of further vocational and educational plans" (p. 9).

As noted in the introduction to this mini-series, the population of American classrooms is becoming increasingly diverse. National organizations such as NCSS and NCHS create a dilemma with their ambitious standards. What should be taught to students who are already behind and how should it be organized? The NCIS Social Studies Standards has few suggestions for answering this question. Educators are rightly concerned that
current reform efforts will result in “building a bomb that will be too big for the plane” (Viadero, 1993, p. 7).

In response to concerns about exactly what and how to teach, developers of history standards have told educators they can “pick and choose the standards that work best for them” (Viadero, 1993, p. 7). Because the development of standards is supposed to represent a consensus-based process to help social studies educators identify the most important knowledge and skills students should attain, a willingness on the part of the developers of the standards to sanction their discretionary implementation raises questions about their value.

**CURRENT INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES IN SOCIAL STUDIES**

Educational tools, such as textbooks, activity guides, computer software, and video tapes, not only influence what is taught but how teaching and learning accommodate the characteristics of diverse learners. Information about the how of teaching and learning of social studies is limited. Brophy (1990) noted that research in social studies is complicated by “different rationales for social education [that] lead not only to different goals and content choices, but to differences in how the same content would be treated” (p. 397). Social studies literature is filled with conceptual frameworks that describe or compare approaches to curriculum and instruction, but the field’s empirical knowledge base about what contributes to increased learning of social studies is minimal.

Educational tools provide the basis for what social studies teachers teach and students learn. Up to 90% of the time American students are in school involves interaction with these educational tools (Komoski, 1992). Textbooks comprise the primary educational tools for teaching social studies in elementary and middle school classrooms (Bean, Zigmond, Rogers, Hartman, & Gozdik, 1991). Understanding the shortcomings of these textbooks is instrumental to improving them and ultimately improving student learning.

**Analyses of Social Studies Instructional Materials**

Critiques of textbooks by researchers in the field of social studies and related areas such as reading have categorized problems in various ways. For example, Bean et al. (1991) used these categories: (a) content, (b) design or presentation, and (c) level of difficulty.

**Content.** Bean et al. (1991) pointed out that criticism of social studies textbook content is broad. In general, elementary grade social studies textbooks are criticized for teaching too little content. In contrast, secondary level textbooks are viewed as doing too much with too little time devoted to each topic, emphasizing coverage rather than depth. Rapid, shallow coverage creates particular difficulties for diverse learners. Kinder and Bursuck (1991) suggested that because textbooks tend to mention everything, students with learning disabilities usually have difficulty organizing social studies information into a conceptual framework.

**Design.** Beck et al. (1989), in an analysis of four widely used commercial social studies programs, found the presentation of content in textbooks did a poor job of helping students understand the underlying principles that account for historical events. The texts assumed an unrealistic variety and depth of background knowledge from students and made little attempt to establish such knowledge. “The approach the texts take is one of merely giving information rather than engineering it to bring about understanding” (p. 153).

Armbruster and Anderson (1985) referred to these as “inconsiderate texts,” because the relationships among ideas are unclear and unrelated. Tyson-Bernstein and Woodward (1986) described elementary social studies textbooks as “bland.”
and "homogeneous," consisting of many briefly mentioned facts that do little to generate reader interest. Parker (1989) observed that sequencing of content in social studies textbooks is "arbitrary and aimless" (p. 40), with poorly conceived questions and activities (Armbruster & Ostertag, 1987; Brophy, 1992).

In an analysis of the vocabulary targeted for instruction from five widely used elementary social studies series, Bean, Beck, Zigmond, and Bryant (1992) found that there was great variation across the text series in the words targeted for instruction and little rationale as to why these words were targeted. Although all series suggested approaches and activities to help students learn words, the quality of these techniques varied greatly in the five series.

**Difficulty.** Typically, students and teachers find social studies textbooks difficult. For example, readability assessments of upper elementary content area texts found that over one-half of all the students were at their frustration reading level in their textbooks (Wait, 1987). By high school, a similar assessment found that 92% of the 722 high school students tested at the frustration level in their assigned textbooks. As Sellars (1987) noted, "This result means that only eight percent of the subjects are able to profit from attempting to read these textbooks."

Students have difficulty with the technical vocabulary presented and cannot read the textbook material with understanding.

Teachers are aware of the difficulties resulting from textbooks that are too difficult for many students (Bean et al., 1991). But as Stephens, Blackhurst, and Magliocca (1988) pointed out, social studies teachers generally spend little time helping students develop strategies for learning and applying social studies content. Moreover, even when adaptations are made in the classroom, students with learning difficulties may experience misconceptions or may not learn the prerequisite information (Zigmond, Fulmer, Volonino, Wolery, & Bean, 1993), possibly because of an overall lack of coherence.

### Emerging Implications for Improved Social Studies Instruction

Brophy (1990) described the current debate about social studies content as being concerned with "what is worthwhile, why it is more worthwhile than alternatives, and how it can be taught effectively" (p. 393). Solutions are not imminent from society or within the educational establishment with regard to the disagreements over what content is worthwhile to teach.

Wronski and Bragaw (1986) remind us that "the social studies reflect and are influenced by the social setting in which they exist" (p. 4).

Because of the inevitable disagreements over what content should be taught in social studies, it is more practical to concentrate on the problems of engineering effective social studies educational tools. Thus our focus is upon these instructional factors that contribute to the problems students experience in learning social studies. In fact, the implications of these features extend beyond tools, such as textbooks, videos, and other multimedia materials, to include discussions, role playing, simulations, research, and collaborative learning. For this full array of activities, it is important to keep in mind the admonition of the NCSS Task Force on Standards for Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies (1993): "Learning activities are introduced and developed so as to make them minds-on activities that engage students with important ideas, not just hands-on activities that may or may not have educational value" (p. 215). The distinction between minds-on and hands-on is critical. The point is not whether instruction is educationally correct (e.g., hands-on), but whether it is effective (e.g., minds-on).

Problems in social studies instruction and possible effective educational solutions may be categorized as follows:

1. Topics in social studies often are treated as unrelated collections of names, definitions, and dates. When students encounter given events, facts, or concepts only once, they come to view social studies as a parade of facts rather than a network of meaningful concepts.
The solution is to structure content around big ideas to insure that important content is repeatedly examined. The process of weaving content around big ideas also helps teachers identify information that is not relevant to the big ideas and thus can be safely omitted. This selection process is important, because if teachers are to have time to focus on big ideas, they must save time by skipping less important material.

2. Some important facts, principles, or strategies may not be taught or may be obscured by an activity or by the design of social studies textbooks. The sheer quantity of information, topics, and concepts in social studies requires students to develop effective strategies for organizing information. All students can benefit from learning strategies for dealing with social studies textbooks. More able students develop useful strategies on their own without instruction; however, diverse learners need help learning how to make sense of social studies content.

3. Because social studies content is generally not hierarchical, differences in difficulty level depend on the degree to which the learner is supported in the pursuit of knowledge. The research suggests a need for learners to be scaffolded through a combination of teacher support and considerate educational tools. Scaffolding refers to temporary guidance and support provided to a learner as a transition to self-regulation.

4. As noted at the beginning of this article, most students have very limited knowledge of social studies (NAEP, 1990). It very well might be that important social studies concepts are taught but not adequately retained by students. Even if the content is taught initially, a lack of retention might be due to educational tools that do not provide students an opportunity to review meaningful concepts in the context of related information; students receive few opportunities to weave big ideas together. Once a social studies concept has been identified as important to teach, students should be provided with adequate opportunities to apply and remember information as part of a cohesive whole.

Up to this point the article has attempted to provide background information for school psychologists to use in consulting with teachers about learning problems in social studies. The intent has been to shift the emphasis from learning disabilities to curriculum disabilities. Curriculum disabilities result from a confluence of forces that act on teachers — poor performance in social studies, increasing expectations, curriculum reform, and current curricular practices. The next section discusses how curricular interventions can help solve and even prevent curriculum disabilities in social studies.

FOUR CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPROVING INSTRUCTIONAL TOOLS FOR DIVERSE LEARNERS

Clearly, instructional materials are only one influence on teaching and learning in social studies. The intent of well designed educational tools is to contribute to more effective interactions and activities in classrooms, which have great power in developing critical thinking in a wide range of students (Newmann, 1990).

The following considerations have been developed specifically as a means to help teach important social studies concepts to diverse learners. They are far more dependent on the quality of instructional materials than other students. In the absence of these considerations, instructional materials will not be successful in meeting the needs of many diverse learners. To a lesser degree, these instructional design considerations can benefit typical students, particularly the consideration of organizing content around big ideas.

Each consideration is summarized on one of four charts in the Appendix at the end of the mini-series. Although these charts are derived from a comprehensive review of the educational research literature on social studies curriculum and instruction (Miller, Crawford, Harniss, &
Hollenbeck, 1994), this article is not a research review.

**Big Ideas**

As noted earlier, current social studies textbooks seem to be annotated indexes that include all that can be, but is not, taught in a particular grade. Rather than teaching for coverage, one approach for bringing order to social studies content is to organize it around big ideas. Big ideas are important facts, concepts, or principles that enable learners to organize and interrelate information. Little intervention research exists on teaching big ideas in social studies. The closest proxy for teaching big ideas is teaching text structures, which are different ways for organizing content area material; for example, causal, compare, contrast, and descriptive. Several studies have shown that students taught to recognize and use text structures remember more than those not taught (Armbruster, Anderson, & Ostertag, 1987; Berkowitz, 1986; Taylor, 1980; Taylor & Beach, 1984). Bartlett (cited in Meyer, Brandt, & Bluth, 1980) found that instructing ninth graders in expository text structures “nearly doubled the amount of information remembered” (p. 97).

The “problem-solution-effect” structure is one example of a big idea in social studies. When applied to the study of history, it has the potential to help students understand that people and governments tend to react to common problems with identifiable causes and solutions.

**Problems.** Common problems in history can be attributed to (a) economic or (b) human rights issues. **Economic problems** are linked to conditions that create difficulty for people trying to acquire or keep things they need or want. At a basic level, people need and want to maintain the availability of food, clothing, and shelter. At a more advanced level, people use resources to support religion, art, and a higher standard of living. **Human rights problems** are usually linked to groups of people trying to achieve rights associated with basic freedoms (e.g., religion, speech, equal protection, equal rights for women, minorities, and different social classes).

**Solutions.** When students can classify common historical problems, they can relate this knowledge to recurring actions people use to solve problems. Recurring solutions to historical problems can be categorized as attempts by individuals or groups to either move, invent, dominate, tolerate, or accommodate a problem. When people move to solve a problem, they hope to find a new place where the problem does not exist. For example, United States history is filled with examples of immigrants who moved here in response to problems somewhere else. Throughout history, people have tried to solve problems by inventing new ways to do things they could not do before. For example, people could not farm on the Great Plains because the soil was too heavy to plow. The invention of the steel plow solved this economic problem.

People also have solved problems by dominating or controlling other people. The United States and its allies fought against Germany, Japan, and Italy in World War II. The opposing sides tried to dominate each other in response to human rights problems and economic problems such as inflation, unemployment, and limited natural resources. People often solve problems by accommodating each other; they adjust or adapt to solve a problem. Historically, people have accommodated each other by negotiating or compromising. For example, in the 1960s the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to compromise over the latter’s placement of missiles in Cuba, which prevented the possibility of a war between these countries. When one group of people decides not to move, invent, dominate, or accommodate, they tolerate a problem. Sometimes this solution is applied because there is no other choice. Before the United States Civil War, many African-Americans had to tolerate the problems of being slaves and of not having equal rights.

Understanding the relationship between common problems and solutions...
can help students view history as a dynamic subject. Common solutions to problems in one era often become less viable as times change. For example, moving to solve the problem of acquiring land to grow food today is less practical than it was 150 years ago when territory could still be taken (e.g., from Native Americans). Moving to acquire land to grow food has been replaced by the invention of new ways to grow more food on land that has already been settled.

**Effects.** Solutions to problems produce consequences or effects. One effect is that a problem may cease to exist, but an examination of history shows that solutions to problems often create new problems. For example, tribes of the Pueblo culture in the Southwest desert solved the problem of building shelters in an environment where wood was hard to find. Their solution was to build the walls of their homes with stones and use logs only to support the roof. However, building the walls with stone had the effect of creating a new problem, the extreme amount of hard work required to carry heavy stones for constructing shelters. The Pueblo tribes solved this problem by eliminating the space between homes so that they shared a common wall.

The problem-solution-effect approach is one example of a big idea in social studies instruction. Other big ideas include helping students understand that cooperation within groups evolves in identifiable stages of discussion, occasional voluntary cooperation, regular voluntary cooperation, and finally legally binding cooperation; the success of group efforts, such as wars or the establishment of colonies, is dependent upon a group's motivation, leadership, resources, and capability. When the study of history is taught in this way, it becomes possible for students to comprehend historical events as an interrelated network (Crawford & Carnine, 1994).

**Multiple perspectives.** One group’s solution may be another group's problem. Understanding this relationship can help students recognize that groups of people often have different perspectives about the same event (see Figure 1). The workers perceive the new airport as a solution to the problem of not having enough jobs; the people near the new airport view it as a problem because of the noise. Students do not need to decide which perspective is correct; they do need to understand each perspective and how it can differ for a single event.

**Strategies**

A strategy is a general set of steps used to solve a problem. Higher performing students are most likely to infer useful strategies, given adequate time. That is, given enough time and exposure, some higher performing students will come to understand many important concepts and relationships in social studies. On the other hand, sufficient time and exposure will not result in understanding on the part of many diverse learners. The purpose of explicit *strategy* instruction is to ensure that all students learn social studies.

The NCSS emphasis on critical thinking for all students provides a natural context for including explicit instruction in strategies. For example, students can be taught an explicit strategy for the big idea that group cooperation evolves in identifiable stages that relate historical conditions to the behavior of groups. Figure 2 summarizes four common conditions and their relationship to the development of group cooperation.

Application of this strategy in United States history can help explain why the Second Continental Congress gave almost no power to the central government in the Articles of Confederation. Students often regard the Articles of Confederation as somehow being imperfect because they failed to give the government essential powers needed to run the government. Textbooks often do not explain that, when the Articles of Confederation were conceived, *regular voluntary cooperation* between the states had successfully resulted in the elimination of British taxes and a Revolutionary Way victory. Without a strategy for understanding the development of group cooperation, even capable
students have difficulty understanding that the weak nature of the Articles and the government were due to the voluntary cooperation among the states at that time. The individual states did not want to limit their freedom by giving power to a central government. Only when economic problems threatened to destroy the country after the Revolutionary Way did states recognize the need for a stronger central government brought about by legally binding cooperation. A stronger central government did in fact help solve most of those economic problems.

However, if students learn that groups who regularly and successfully cooperate are not compelled to adopt legally binding agreements until it is necessary, this knowledge becomes a sophisticated strategy for understanding history at a deeper level. Using the stages of cooperation, students can relate their understanding of the Articles and the weak role of a central government to the current struggle for cooperation among the republics of the former Soviet Union. The United States moved, in order, through the Stages 1-4. The Soviet Union was at Stage 4 and moved back to Stage 3 — a loose confederation of republics. Students can use what they know about the problems of the United States at Stage 3 to predict the kinds of problems the Russian and the other republics might have today at Stage 3.

**Scaffolding**

Temporary assistance along the path to self-regulated learning can help students become independent learners. In social studies, this support or scaffolding can be provided through a variety of activities, including research, simulations, role playing, and cooperative learning. Scaffolding is particularly important to ensure that diverse learners comprehend the big ideas in social studies. Thus educational tools such as textbooks that often are used to introduce new content should provide carefully arranged scaffolds such as concept maps, timelines, and
FIGURE 2. Stages of cooperation.

1. Get Together and Discuss Problems

*IF* members of a group can agree on solutions to their common problems, *THEN* people will begin to cooperate occasionally.

2. Occasional Cooperation

*IF* occasional cooperation works for the group but problems continue to occur, *THEN* people will begin to cooperate regularly.

3. Regular, Voluntary Cooperation

*IF* the need for cooperation continues but voluntary cooperation fails, *THEN* people may agree to legally binding cooperation.

4. Legally Binding Cooperation

Study guides for all learners (Flood & Lapp, 1988; Mayer, 1989). Unfortunately, textbooks rarely present such scaffolds in a coordinated way, so teachers must supplement educational tools that are used with diverse learners.

Supplementing textbook instruction requires a careful analysis of textbook content. Because preparation time for teachers is a scarce commodity, this content analysis should focus on methods for scaffolding that are doable and that will accommodate the broadest range of diverse learners. Two particularly beneficial scaffolds for diverse learners are interspersed questions and oral reading.

One reasonable approach to scaffolding for diverse learners is for a teacher — *prior* to a lesson — to prepare questions that are interspersed during textbook reading. Interspersed questions prepared in advance can help reduce the number of questions that elicit irrelevant or trivial information. Well-designed, interspersed questions help students identify critical information and relationships needed for conceptual understanding (Andre, 1979; Duchastel & Nungester, 1984; Faw & Waller, 1976; Gall, 1984; Gall et al., 1978; Richards & McCormick, 1988; Rothkopf, 1966; Rothkopf & Bisbicos, 1967; Tobias, 1987). Such questions are more helpful if they are posed in close proximity to the material that answers them. In other words, if a question is widely separated from its answer, the question changes from a facilitator of understanding to a test of memory. In addition, interspersed questions allow the teacher to provide immediate feedback and enhance recall, both of which are critical components of efficient learning (Guskey & Gates, 1986; Henson, 1979; Hyman & Cohen, 1979; Slavin, 1989).

In addition to interspersed questions, teachers also may need to relate critical information in the textbook to the current experiences and knowledge of students by
using metaphors or analogies that help them understand and remember information. Thus the teacher helps students make connections between the events being studied and their prior knowledge. For example, a teacher may help students understand the importance of the Nile River to the Egyptians by discussing activities occurring on a local river.

Another example of scaffolding for diverse learners is reading aloud. When better readers read aloud, less skilled readers are able to hear the content of the text. Teachers also can combine oral reading with discussion by having students think about what the author said and explore its meaning (McKeown, Beck, & Worthy, 1993). Oral reading also can be used diagnostically by the teacher to check for student understanding and possible decoding difficulties required for learning. Moreover, the teacher can call attention to essential prerequisite information prior to the students reading a social studies selection. Oral reading prefaced in this manner is especially helpful for diverse learners who often have limited background knowledge of common social studies content.

The amount of scaffolding will vary according to the needs of the students. Diverse learners typically require more scaffolding, while more able students develop effective comprehension strategies independently. Regardless of a students' instructional level, scaffolding must be gradually withdrawn over time. It makes little sense to develop learners who can understand social studies only with textbook or teacher-mediated support.

### Review

A major goal for all students is to remember what they have learned. Retention of social studies content is especially difficult for diverse learners because of the superficial coverage of so many topics. Retention is dependent upon the use of effective review practices that are widely supported by research (Dempster, 1991). Reviewing the same or nearly same material ad nauseam promotes rote learning; however, effective review can lead to long-term retention and generalization. As is the case for scaffolding, review can be imbedded in many educational tools and activities, not just textbooks.

Effective review is achievable when the guidelines pertaining to big ideas, strategies, and scaffolding are inherent in the design of instructional materials for social studies. In other words, if a textbook lacks clarity and coherence, it also will lack a foundation for providing effective review. However, if instructional materials are structurally sound, then the following principles of effective review can be applied.

**Sufficient.** Adequate practice should be provided to enable students to reach a point of performance without hesitation. New knowledge is generally massed during initial and scaffolded instruction so students have adequate opportunities to apply new knowledge. For example, if students are taught that common problems in history can be attributed to economic and human rights issues, their instruction must include repeated examples in close proximity that require students to analyze history using this big idea.

**Distributed.** As students approach self-regulation of knowledge, review should be distributed across time and in increasing increments. The purpose of incrementally increasing review is to help students establish long-term retention and automatic retrieval of meaningful information. If students are provided with opportunities to apply their knowledge of the factors that determine group cooperation several times during the year, they will develop a more conceptual rather than rote understanding of the value of those factors.

**Cumulative.** Reviewing knowledge cumulatively simply means that the knowledge reviewed accumulates as knowledge accumulates. After the big ideas of problem-solution-effect and
group cooperation are taught separately, for example, both big ideas are reviewed together.

**Varied.** Introducing novel situations which require the use of previously learned knowledge can promote generalization and transference of knowledge. Varied review also preempts the possibility of students resorting to shallow, rote recall. For example, once students learn the four factors that determine group success, the factors can be reviewed through an analysis of various group efforts during the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the Civil War.

**CONCLUSION**

Social studies teachers are equipped with tools of questionable efficacy as they face greater diversity, higher expectations, and emerging tools of unknown effectiveness and feasibility. School psychologists can assist teachers by (a) helping them understand that they require support, part of which should be in the form of trustworthy educational tools, to meet the challenges they face, and (b) recognizing the need for such support and helping them obtain it. For example, the design considerations for educational tools illustrate criteria for screening tools to teach social studies to diverse learners. However, screening criteria cannot substitute for empirical evaluations of educational tools. Carefully evaluated educational tools and other supports (e.g., professional development, adequate instructional time, a school environment conducive to learning, etc.) will empower school psychologists to go beyond diagnoses that focus on students and their families to include an examination of teaching and learning as well. The implications of analyzing teaching and learning are more pronounced for interventions than for diagnosis. Such a shift in the scope of diagnoses and interventions will produce a dramatic change in the proportion of learning-disabled and curriculum-disabled students.

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