
BOOK REVIEW

New Zealand Social Studies: Past, present and future, edited by Roger Openshaw, 1992, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.

Will Social Studies Survive Beyond the 1990s? - it is as serious as that according to Roger Openshaw. This 200 page collection of a dozen articles looking at New Zealand Social Studies past, present and future is a response to his concern about a weak theoretical and historical framework in which Social Studies in New Zealand schools operate. He is concerned with the current emphasis on literature based largely on practical suggestions for teachers; a response, it may be suggested, to the part-time role most teachers feel about their Social Studies status. Divided into two sections, the articles provide insights into the origins, developments and underlying assumptions of the subject. The book will prove invaluable to students, teachers and policy makers. Openshaw identifies the major challenge to those involved in Social Studies to be to halt the growing isolation of teacher from researcher, schools from tertiary institutions. He could have added teachers from teachers, schools from schools, and course material from the real life issues children so urgently need help to understand.

It is going to be this very isolation which will form barriers to the dissemination of the ideas presented in this publication, especially amongst the limited group of teachers who regard themselves firstly as Social Studies teachers, the specialist, and not the part-time teacher of Social Studies.

I hope that this group of specialists get access to this book, become better informed about the continuity of Social Studies past, present and future, and identify the very real dangers facing the survival of the subject. If they do not fight for it, the history as presented here suggests precious little support from any other quarter.

I was impressed with the selection of articles (although 'selection' may be a little grand if the indication of a very bare shelf of theoretical and historical literature in Social Studies is the case). I recommend the book to all teachers, particularly in the patch 'Social Studies, Geography and History', but also in other subjects struggling for 'core' status in the curriculum and a place in the school's timetable and funding. The irony is that a lot of what is now the 'New' curricula - in language, science, technology, health, even mathematics - the people bits, the cultural dimensions, the parts about values and responsibilities and citizenship were once the sole domain of Social Studies. Maybe the social meliorist movement is more subtle and pervasive than acknowledged.

The introduction is followed by an article by Eric Archer and Roger Openshaw in which they examine the inherent difficulty any subject must face when entrusted with the responsibility for 'citizenship transmission'. And the present time amply illustrates the conflict between 'the Left, feminists and Maori radicals demanding materials and strategies to combat sexism and racism and the Right, the politicians and employers pressing for greater receptivity to supply-side economics, while fundamentalist Christians plead for a return to 'traditional' values teaching' (p9)

Contributions by Roy Shuker and again Openshaw and Archer examine the continuing conflict between subject disciplines over status, resources and territory in secondary schools. Speculation about what might have been if Social Studies had been compulsory in Forms 1-5, and the theme of Power had survived and been included as an examination subject, would have been fascinating. It is difficult not to wonder why Geographers and Historians failed to recognise or chose to ignore the

links between the processes and values and content of Social Studies and their subject areas, and the advantages to be gained from a powerful grouping of subjects involving social study.

Joe Diorio links tensions within New Zealand Social Studies to origins in the long standing purposes of schooling in the United States, in a most fascinating essay - defining along the way the useful conceptions of social efficiency, developmental and social meliorist movements in education. It is just a shame that the major impact of the Taba Social Sciences Project was not explored further, and with it an assessment of Tony McNaughton as a change agent in this field.

Sam Sturmis continues with the parallels between New Zealand and the United States, especially in education but in broader social terms as well. This is another great case study for teaching about the Americanisation of New Zealand, if your theme is social change.

Into this broad historical and global canvas the Editor then weaves the articles in the second section which suggest that the dilemmas and dichotomies of the past are alive and challenging and contradicting today.

James Collinge examines 'peace' education which Social Studies seems happy to embrace, but wonders why it should not equally be in all areas of the curriculum. Surely participation, justice, conflict resolution, interpersonal relationships, respect for rights ought to part of any institution's culture. Similar messages are delivered by Stephen May on relationships between biculturalism, multiculturalism, structural inequalities and the challenge for Social Studies, and the whole school, to focus on life's chances rather than life styles.

A similar theme of structural inequalities and access to a fair deal is developed by Philippa Smith - in her case, gender rather than race relations. She argues that Social Studies has a responsibility to go beyond mere description of inequality to the incorporation of a critical perspective, examining how our society is structured, why it has come to be that way and what we can do to make it a better place for all students from all background. Good stuff this, and well argued.

Teachers will need to make up their own minds about the benefits advocated by Mary Faire and Kelvin Smythe in the so-called 'feeling for' approach to the study of other cultures. Their programme is based on exploring issues in a child centred way rather than with the critical perspective's advocated by May and Smith and endorsed by Rex Bloomfield in his critique of the 'feeling for' approach. This raises questions about the relationship between age and stage and social awareness of the learner, the Bruner-Piaget debate, the perceptions of the teacher and the willingness of institutions to be questioned about structures and equity and opportunity.

Certainly Clive McGee's review of the Social Studies Subjects Survey highlights the enormous gaps between the actual, the intended and the formal curricula - a clue probably to the willingness of the Department of Education to forget about the Survey. If Smythe's 'feeling for' approach encourages teachers to take on a facilitating role, this could in fact be the first step in teacher development toward managing a classroom with a truly critical perspective, especially at secondary level. As the Survey identified, teachers at all levels are reluctant to let too much of the controversy of the real world into their classrooms.

Smythe discusses children's comprehension of concepts traditionally used in Social Studies. As reviewer I must be allowed the temptation to advocate for a part of the curriculum which, through adequately trained teachers, develops in children a critical awareness of the issues, controversies and contradictions which face society - in fact develops the ability to handle concepts as the base for questioning, analysis and advocacy. This would produce young people who are truly socially literate.

I felt this thought-provoking publication could have been even more useful with a stronger and clearer analysis of challenges for the future of New Zealand - issues such as the reality of living in a pluralist society, the fact of race relations, the questions of skills for genuine cultural choice, the implication of the Treaty of Waitangi, a new definition of work. There is a need also for a clearer

analysis of the Form 1 - 4 Social Studies Syllabus, the impact of British thinking (*Stenhouse* and currently the anti-racist writers), developments in Australia, and the inclusion of exemplars of quality Social Studies programmes. While many of the contributors at some stage were involved in Social Studies programmes in Colleges of Education, this publication lacks by failing to evaluate the role of Social Studies Departments in the Colleges in initiating, interpreting, modelling and resourcing the 'new' curriculum in Social Studies over the years.

These few quibbles aside, I sincerely recommend *New Zealand Social Studies: Past, Present and Future* as a basic reference to all teachers and policy makers. The *past and present* must be understood if the *future* challenges are to be met, especially in the implementation of Charter goals and school policies. With urgency, Social Studies must claim the patch which services the curriculum of the Treaty of Waitangi, race relations, equity, multicultural understanding, community relations and social relationships.

Gordon Chandler