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Abstract:

Social studies is a subject discipline which has had significant dispute over a range of areas. There is much variation in how social studies is conceptualised, in terms of both terminology and definition, as well as in what subject content it is considered to encompass and how it is structured and organised. This article examines the various ways social studies has been defined and the different terms used, as well as what content is included and how it is organised.

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What is (or are) social studies?

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Introduction

As we are a global organisation, our customers and stakeholders often have very different educational traditions and systems. This can cause confusion when the same terms have different meanings in different countries and cultures. One area where we have found this to be the case is when talking about social studies. The aim of this research was to increase our understanding of what is meant by this widely, but variably, used term. Social studies is a subject discipline which has provoked significant dispute over a range of areas, including whether it should exist as a subject at all (Roldao & Egan, 1992). Broadly it is understood as a discipline which includes content from multiple subject fields. However, there is much variation in how social studies is conceptualised, in terms of both terminology and definition, as well as in what subject content it is considered to encompass and how it is structured and organised. This article first outlines the history of social studies as a school subject to understand its origin as a discipline. We will then discuss some of the issues around conceptualising social studies as a school subject, including different terms and definitions that have been used. Following this, we examine different approaches that have been taken to social studies as a subject in terms of what content is included and how it is organised.

History of social studies

To understand social studies as a subject in schools, it is useful to look at the history of its introduction. Most educational historians consider social studies to be an American invention and its origins as a subject can be traced back to the early twentieth century in the United States (US) (Roldao & Egan, 1992; Ravitch, 2003). A 1916 bulletin titled *The Social Studies in Secondary Education* was published by the US Bureau of Education and is viewed as seminal in the development of social studies in the US, and then ultimately around the world (M. Nelson, 1988). History, which was already a subject taught in schools in the US, was then integrated into social studies during the 1930s, alongside content from

1 The work was carried out when the author was a member of the Research Division.

geography and civics. Consequently, history subject content has driven much of social studies content and approach in many contexts.

Following the publication of the 1916 bulletin, social studies became increasingly widespread within education in the US. The global influence that the US had meant that social studies as a school subject also spread to numerous countries, often replacing or combining other subject areas. That said, much of the research on social studies education has been and remains US-centric (Parry, 1999).

This global trend of social studies adoption is illustrated by a comparative study of social science subjects in jurisdictions across the world during the period 1900–86 (Wong, 1991). This study looked at the presence of social science subjects in the curricula (which they defined as history, geography, civics and social studies), grouped into time periods. It found that 11 per cent (of 47 countries) had social studies as a subject in their curricula in the period 1920–44; increasing to 60 per cent (of 77 countries) in the period 1970–86. There was also a corresponding decrease in history (81 per cent to 47 per cent), geography (87 per cent to 47 per cent) and civics (40 per cent to 27 per cent) subjects, illustrating that social studies had replaced these subjects in many contexts.

However, social studies does not have the same pattern of use in all countries. Wong (1991) noted there were trends in the use of social studies curricula which were related to the region and colonial background of the countries. The shift to social studies was not seen in Eastern European countries. Additionally, while social studies largely appeared to replace history and geography in countries which had previously been Anglo–US and Spanish colonies, this was not the case in those with French colonial backgrounds.

Conceptualisations of social studies

Terminology

There is a great deal of inconsistency and ambiguity around terminology and definition of social studies and where it is considered to sit in the curriculum, in terms of overarching learning areas.

- **Social studies, singular or plural?**

There is variation in whether social studies is used in the singular, to mean a school subject; or in the plural sense (i.e., the social studies), as an overarching term or category that includes several subjects such as history and geography (J. Nelson, 2001; Mutch et al., 2008). In some cases, it has been used in both senses. This issue is interlinked with tensions in how the relationship between social studies and other disciplines is understood. In this review, we will focus on social studies as a school subject.

- **Social studies or social science**

A second issue is that social studies is sometimes used interchangeably with social science (Hertzberg, 1981), while other times it is seen as a subject within the overarching area of social science. Where both terms are used it is not always clear whether they are being accidentally conflated or whether they

are being used as distinct terms with a specific relationship to one another. This occurred in the New Zealand curriculum framework of 1993 where both were used with no explicit definition or explanation of their relationship to one another, leading to confusion (Sinemma, 2004).

- **Relationship with social science and humanities**

Another challenge is the lack of clarity about the relationship between social studies, social science, and the humanities. In some cases, social studies is seen as a subject within the overarching learning area of humanities. For example, in the new Curriculum for Wales, humanities is an “Area of Learning and Experience” and social studies is a discipline within this, alongside geography; history; religion, values and ethics; and business studies (Hughes et al., 2020, p.276). In other contexts, social studies is a subject which draws from both the social sciences and the humanities (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2010).

- **Relationship with science**

Sometimes, social studies type subjects are grouped into an overarching area with sciences. For example, in the primary curriculum for Ireland, there is an overarching curriculum area of “Social, Environmental and Scientific Education” which has science, geography and history subjects within this (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999). In other cases, social studies and science content is combined into a single subject, particularly for lower stages of education, for example Japan has a “Life Environmental Studies” subject which combines social studies and science content in grades 1 and 2 (Shimura, 2015, p.152).

- **Relationship with civics/citizenship**

Civics or citizenship education (amongst other names) often forms a key part of social studies curricula. Citizenship can be used for the purpose of social studies curricula; as a subject discipline that feeds into social studies; or as a standalone subject which exists instead of, or as well as social studies. For example, Singapore has both a social studies subject and a citizenship subject (Brant et al., 2016).

- **Social studies or another term?**

Social studies is not the only term used when discussing subject curricula in this area (Brant et al., 2016). Sometimes, this is by including another subject in the title, such as “history and social studies” in previous iterations of the Finnish Curriculum (Löfström, 2019, p.89). In others, alternative terms such as *society* are used as the subject name, for example Queensland previously had “Studies of Society and Environment” as an integrated subject area drawing from a variety of subjects typically included in social studies (Brant et al., 2016, p.67).

- **Translational issues**

It is apparent from literature looking at non-English speaking countries that in many contexts there are subjects which may be translated to mean social studies, but which could arguably be translated to another term. For example, the Danish subject of “samfundsfag” is translated to social studies by the Danish Ministry of Education, but arguably could also be translated

to social sciences (Hansen, 2020, p.96). This introduces further ambiguity in what is understood by social studies.

Definitions

There has also been much variation in how social studies is defined in different contexts, and even at different time points within contexts. J. Nelson (2001) identifies three categories of definitions and gives examples within these:

- Defining social studies in terms of the basic purpose, for example citizenship, social criticism, social responsibility.
- Defining social studies in terms of knowledge structure dimensions, for example history, law education, social science, humanities, integrative social knowledge.
- Defining social studies in terms of instructional or curricular criteria, for example critical thinking, issues-centred, multicultural studies.

While these categories overlap, it highlights that there are various ways of conceptualising social studies. This leads to significant variation in the content and structure of social studies curricula. There is a wide variety of definitions of social studies, and some of these are outlined below.

1916 bulletin definition

The definition given in the 1916 bulletin is useful to refer to as this has had a broad impact on understanding of social studies. They use the definition: “the social studies are understood to be those whose subject matter relates directly to the organization and development of human society, and to man as a member of social groups” (US Bureau of Education, 1916, as cited in M. Nelson, 1988, p.20).

National Council for the Social Studies

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), formed in the US in 1921, is a professional association dedicated to promoting social studies. In 1994 they published *Standards for Social Studies: A framework for Teaching, Learning and Assessment*, which has subsequently been revised, most recently in 2010 (NCSS, 2010), as well as a framework for social studies State Standards (NCSS, 2013). Within their *Standards for Social Studies* document they define social studies as:

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

(NCSS, 1994, p.3).

The NCSS has been highly influential on understandings of social studies, particularly in the US (Rutherford & Boehm, 2004). The NCSS Standards are intended to support the development and teaching of social studies both as a standalone subject, and for integration into subject discipline-based classes such as history and geography.

Dictionary definition

It is also useful to examine dictionary definitions of social studies as they show how the term *social studies* is commonly understood. The *Cambridge Dictionary* (n.d.) defines it as: “in the US, a course for younger students that includes many of the social sciences”. This highlights that social studies is perceived as an American concept in many contexts.

An alternative dictionary definition offered by Merriam-Webster (n.d.) understands social studies as an overarching area rather than a subject and specifies a variety of subjects that fall into this area: “a part of a school or college curriculum concerned with the study of social relationships and the functioning of society and usually made up of courses in history, government, economics, civics, sociology, geography, and anthropology”.

Meanwhile, the *Collins English Dictionary* (n.d.) makes a distinction between social studies in Britain and in the US, outlining differences in the subjects that are included in social studies: “In Britain, social studies is a subject that is taught in schools and colleges, and includes sociology, politics, and economics. In the United States, social studies is a subject that is taught in schools, and that includes history, geography, sociology, and politics”.

These dictionary definitions highlight some of the differences in understandings of social studies definitions such as whether it is understood as a subject and what other disciplines it is linked to.

Social studies traditions

The aims or purposes of specific social studies curricula play a large role in determining the content included, and in how social studies is conceptualised. There are several “traditions” of social studies curricula that have been identified in the literature (Ross et al., 2014; J. Nelson, 2001). One influential piece of work by Barr, Barth & Shermis (1977, as cited in J. Nelson, 2001) identified three key purposes or traditions of social studies; this was then expanded to five traditions by Martorella (1996, as cited in Nelson, 2001):

- **Citizenship (or cultural) transmission**

This tradition understands the purpose of social studies as promoting national values and ideas of “good citizenship”, with students taught a generally accepted body of factual knowledge. It focuses on promoting cultural and social unity and gives less attention to diversity of experience (Ross et al., 2014; Barr, et al., 1997).

- **Social science**
This tradition views the purpose of social studies as teaching students the key rules, principles, generalisations, and processes of social science disciplines such as political science, history, economics and geography. This focuses on teaching students techniques for gathering, processing, and applying information. Arguably much of the work in this area has focused on history, education and skills (Barr et al., 1997; Ross et al., 2014).
- **Reflective inquiry**
This tradition views reflective inquiry as the purpose of social studies, equipping students with decision-making and problem-solving skills to use in their lives (Barr et al., 1997; Ross et al., 2014).
- **Informed social criticism**
This perspective considers the purpose of social studies as challenging the status quo and addressing injustices. Social studies is intended to provide students with the opportunity and skills to examine and critique the past and present. This tradition gives more weight to teachers' and students' own experiences, including cultural knowledge and understandings (Ross et al., 2014). This tradition is sometimes merged with the reflective inquiry approach (e.g., Barr et al., 1997), as instructional methods used in this tradition focus on encouraging reflective and critical thinking.
- **Personal, social, and ethical development**
This tradition sees the purpose of social studies as empowering students to face problems in today's world, focusing on helping them to develop a positive self-concept and self-efficacy. It is grounded in ideas of democratic citizenship, highlighting personal freedoms and responsibilities (Barr et al., 1997; Ross et al., 2014).

Many curricula can be said to be drawing from each of these traditions to different extents (Mutch et al., 2008; Barr, et al., 1997), although it is generally agreed that citizenship transmission has historically dominated much of social studies education (Ross et al., 2014).

Structure and content of social studies curricula

Subjects within social studies

Social studies draws from a range of other disciplinary subjects. Therefore, another important part of defining social studies is considering its relationship with other subject disciplines, and which subjects it draws content from. Where a social studies subject exists, there are two broad approaches for including content from subject disciplines within it (Brant et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2020):

- An interdisciplinary approach—considering the subject disciplines to be related but distinct; this may be done by including them as strands within the social studies curriculum with connections drawn between them.
- An integrated or unified approach—focusing on the skills and types of thinking that are common across the disciplines included within the social studies curriculum.

History, geography and civics/citizenship

Social studies as a subject is predominantly made up from history, geography and civics/citizenship content, particularly in the US (M. Nelson, 1988). This explains why social studies curricula and research globally tend to focus on these areas. An example of this is seen in the curriculum comparisons review by Brant et al. (2016). While they acknowledge that other subjects are present in some social studies curricula, they focus on history, geography, and civics/citizenship as these are often considered core elements of social studies. They found a common tension in whether history and geography have their own disciplinary identity, or whether they are incorporated into an overarching social studies subject, which usually focuses on citizenship. That said, while both history and geography are frequently included in social studies curricula, they are not included everywhere. For example, in Denmark, social studies does not include geography and history, and instead focuses on politics, economics, sociology and international politics (Hansen, 2020).

History has largely been the dominant subject in social studies content, often focusing on transmission of historical knowledge and facts (J. Nelson, 2001; Brant et al., 2016). However, some historians feel very strongly that history should retain its status as a discipline rather than being taught entirely within the framework of a social studies subject or learning area. For example, Smith (2016) argued that including history content in social studies rather than as a standalone subject represents two competing purposes: history for its extrinsic utility, focusing on socialisation, understanding the self and cross-curricular learning; versus history as a discipline, providing an epistemic framework for uncovering the past and the pursuit of rigorous engagement with evidence. Geography is also a common component of social studies, but there is not as much contention around whether it should be a standalone subject or included within social studies. Brant et al. (2016) noted that in many of the jurisdictions, both geography and history were taught as foundations for civics or citizenship. That said, geography is not taught within social studies in all contexts. For example, in Finland it is instead aligned to the sciences, and focuses on physical geography content (Brant et al., 2016).

Civics or citizenship education (amongst other names) often forms a key part of social studies curricula. Social studies is often used to transmit ideologies and belief systems. Brant et al. (2016) found that a focus on citizenship, and promotion of national identity and sometimes patriotism were present to varying degrees in the different curricula. A further challenge here is defining what citizenship means. In many countries there is a specific emphasis on ideas of democratic citizenship (J. Nelson, 2001), however this is not relevant in all contexts.

There have been changes in how themes of citizenship are represented in social studies courses. Wong's (1991) review of social studies curricula found that while ideas of instilling national spirit, pride and patriotism had historically been the focus of curricula in many countries, social science curricula (including social studies) have increasingly shifted to ideas of responsible citizenship. Similarly, Lerch et al. (2017) reviewed history, civics and social studies textbooks from 78 countries from 1950 to 2011 and found that while references to social structures like democracy remained, there was an increase in references to human agency

and rights. They argued that this represents a core cultural shift from ideas of obedient citizenship to ideas of active and empowered individuals with rights and responsibilities. Similarly, themes around the environment are increasingly seen in social studies. For example, Bromley et al. (2011) analysed social studies textbooks in 65 countries and found that themes of environment had increased, alongside a shift to emphasising social issues and human rights above national citizenship. Additionally, many researchers have called for social studies to move from ideas of national citizenship to ideas of global citizenship instead (e.g., Myers, 2006).

Other subjects linked to social studies

While history, geography and civics are very commonly included and central in social studies curricula this literature review found reference to social studies as encompassing content from a wider variety of subjects and topics. As discussed, the NCSS references social studies as drawing from “anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences” (NCSS, 1994, p.3). Other subjects that have been discussed in the context of social studies include criminology (Solhaug et al., 2020) and tourism (Jaber & Marzuki, 2019). Altogether, there is a great deal of variation in which subjects are discussed as part of social studies in both research and curriculum.

Subjects and stages

Another area where there is variation, is whether social studies is taught as a subject across both primary and secondary levels. Some contexts have social studies as a subject throughout schooling, for example in Alberta (Hayward et al., 2018). However, in many curricula there is social studies as a subject at primary school level; with subjects such as history and geography taught separately from lower or upper secondary (Brant et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2020; Hayward et al., 2018). Sometimes these replace social studies, in other cases social studies continues to be taught alongside these additional disciplinary subjects (e.g., New Zealand). Where social studies is replaced or supplemented by subject disciplines at later stages of learning, this can be done in one level or over several (Hayward et al., 2018).

Components of a social studies curriculum

There is much variation in what is included within social studies curricula (Hayward et al., 2018; Hughes et al., 2020; Brant et al., 2016). There are different approaches to balancing knowledge and skills, with some social studies curricula also including values or dispositions (Hughes et al., 2020). Hayward et al. (2018) report that there was an overall tendency to emphasise “inquiry” skills, particularly in some jurisdictions. In some contexts, social studies curricula focus on knowledge content (Brant et al., 2016). Vogler and Virtue (2007) suggest that many social studies frameworks in the US are overloaded with knowledge content, and so teachers focus on factual content, rather than higher level thinking skills. This issue has also been noted in Canada (Brant et al., 2016). Many curricula bring together the subjects that can make up social studies through focusing on the skills that they

have in common, rather than bodies of knowledge. In some contexts, this focus on skills has been contentious. For example, in New Zealand in the 1990s, a draft for a new social studies curriculum provoked criticism that there was an emphasis on skills at the expense of content (Crittenden, 1998).

Hayward et al.'s (2018) review also looked at the presence of "big ideas" (also referred to as key areas, themes or ideas) within the curricula, how prominent their role was, and whether they were subject-specific or not. They considered big ideas to be core concepts which underpin the curriculum. They noted big ideas in various forms in Scotland, Singapore, Australia, Ontario, and British Columbia. In many cases, these big ideas spanned across grade levels, while in others (e.g., Ontario) there were also specific big ideas at each grade level.

Literacy

There is also discussion about the place of literacy or language arts within social studies. In the US, there has been an increased emphasis on integration of literacy with social studies. This has been partly because the Common Core State Standards have called for greater literacy integration into science and social studies, and accordingly have published English language arts standards for history / social studies (Lee & Swan, 2013). However, there are concerns that integrating literacy into the social studies curriculum can lead to a focus on teaching literacy skills, such as reading comprehension, at the expense of social studies specific skills and knowledge (McGuire, 2007).

Curriculum models

Social studies does not have intrinsic levels of progression to the same extent that subjects such as mathematics do. There is limited research on progressions in social studies, as the focus tends to be on progression within individual disciplines such as history and geography (Hughes et al., 2020). Consequently, there is much variation in how social studies curricula are organised and structured (Brant et al., 2016). Various curriculum models have been used, which also relate to the different traditions of social studies:

- **Expanding horizons model**—This model has been influential in social studies, particularly in the US (Rutherford & Boehm, 2004). There are various interpretations and terms used for this approach including "expanding environments" and "widening interests" (LeRiche, 1987). Broadly, this model argues that children should move from the known to the unknown, beginning by learning about familiar contexts, and expanding from the self out to the world. This model has been subject to various criticisms; it is argued that it is based on outdated theories of child development (LeRiche, 1987), that it does not apply well to the study of history (Krahenbuhl, 2019) and that it needs to be modified to take into account the technological and social changes of the modern world (Clarke et al., 1990).
- **Chronology model**—An approach commonly used in the US has been termed the "chronology model" (Rutherford & Boehm, 2004). This is rooted in the origin of social studies in the US and tendency to use history as the

central component of social studies. This model centres on history, with the curriculum organised by historical periods, with content from other disciplinary subjects such as geography linked to these. Consequently, it is criticised for allowing history to dominate social studies and treating other disciplinary content as secondary.

- **Core knowledge sequence**—This approach stems from the work of Hirsch and is a content-based approach to social studies (Rutherford & Boehm, 2004). A key limitation is how to select the content, and skews in focus can arise based on the disciplinary background of the curriculum developers. It has also been criticised for not taking into account cognitive dimensions of learning, and for focusing on the aggregation of knowledge. Additionally, there are concerns that it may focus on the “knowledge of the powerful” (Brant et al., 2016). “Knowledge of the powerful” refers to the idea that those who have the power in society define what is considered knowledge and who has access to it (Young, 2012).
- **Cognitive taxonomies**—Cognitive taxonomies such as Bloom’s taxonomy have been used for social studies, organising the curriculum around types of thinking (Brant et al., 2016). However, this approach has been criticised for failing to include substantive knowledge and there are concerns that it does not consider that there are domain-specific dimensions to conceptual knowledge (Brant et al., 2016).
- **Subject-specific disciplinary thinking**—Another approach has been to consider progression in terms of subject-specific disciplinary thinking. This approach focuses on mastery of the concepts and processes, or epistemologies that are core to the particular disciplines included in the social studies curriculum. However, there are concerns that this artificially separates disciplines, with many competencies not unique to specific disciplines, and misses the opportunity to draw connections between these (Brant et al., 2016).
- **Body and form**—Brant et al. (2016) suggest that another approach is understanding knowledge as both “body and form”, such as in “historical literacy” (Lee, 2011, as cited in Brant et al., 2016). There is limited explanation about this approach, but they suggest that it understands a subject as being both a body of knowledge, and a form of knowledge, with these interacting with each other and being of equal importance.
- **Spiral curriculum**—Several references were found to the use of spiral curriculum models for social studies. Broadly, this approach suggests that rather than being organised by disciplines or chronology, content should be organised in “spirals” of key concepts and skills, with progression from familiar concepts and skills to increasing abstraction (Parry, 1999, 2007; Matrai & Szebenyi, 1987).
- **NCSS National Curriculum Standards and C3 Framework**—The NCSS National Curriculum Standards and C3 Framework can also be used as an organising model for social studies. The National Curriculum Standards (2010) were developed to provide a conceptual framework for conceptual design and development of social studies curricula. The standards are

organised around 10 thematic strands. The C3 Framework was developed later and is intended to provide guidance on key concepts and inquiry skills that should be incorporated into social studies curricula, in the US context, including more discipline specific guidance (NCSS, 2013). The C3 Framework and National Curriculum Standards can be used alongside each other, with the C3 Framework building upon the National Curriculum Standards, as well as giving more disciplinary specific guidance (Herczog, 2013).

Representations of gender and race in social studies curricula

It is important to consider representations of gender within social studies. Bernard-Powers (2001) discusses the role for social studies in gender equity, through considering representations of gender dynamics and identities, highlighting gendered issues, and addressing gendered knowledge in social studies curricula. However, she argues that while the issue of gender equity in social studies has been discussed for decades, there remains substantial work to be done on this. Similarly, Engebretson (2014) critiques the NCSS standards for social studies for representations of gender. She highlights that they do not give explicit guidance on gender, focus on binary representations of gender, and have a gender imbalance with men over-represented among the notable people in the content they recommend covering.

Race and ethnicity have often been neglected in social studies (Branch, 2004; Howard, 2003); however, it is important that these are considered as part of social studies work. Branch (2004) highlights that although teachers may avoid discussing race and ethnicity in the classroom, social studies has an important role to play in affirming students' racial and ethnic identities and experiences. Howard (2003) suggests that social studies is well placed to discuss and address issues of race and that it has an important role to play in helping students to understand societal issues of inequality, discrimination, and racism. He argues that since social studies encompasses and often focuses on issues relating to citizenship, it is important that race and racism are discussed as part of this.

In some contexts, such as the US and Australia, where there are indigenous or aboriginal populations that have been marginalised, indigenous perspectives have been excluded or characterised in problematic ways. For example, Sharp (2013) reviewed references to Indigenous Australians in social studies textbooks in Australia from the 1960s to 1980s. She found a tendency towards tokenistic mentioning, and representing Indigenous Australians monoculturally. Where Indigenous Australians were discussed, they were often “othered” and shown as primitive or savage.

Controversial topics

A significant challenge for social studies curricula is how to handle topics that are controversial. This can be linked to the need to discuss race and ethnicity as outlined above; such topics are often avoided due to discomfort with the subject matter. It can be challenging to decide whether an issue is controversial or not. Issues that are considered as non-controversial by some, may be viewed as controversial by others, and this is ultimately affected by underlying ideologies

and bound by place and time. Whether topics are presented as controversial or not within a curriculum frames them as either open to discussion, or as being closed and conventionally agreed upon. Camicia (2008) argues that curriculum developers must continually consider the question “controversial to who, where and when” (p.312).

Colonialism is one example of a topic that may be considered controversial. Masta (2016) considered the issue of colonialism being taught in social studies curricula in a classroom in the US. They found it was often erased (not discussed at all) or normalised (presented as an inevitable and usual process). In social studies, there can be a tendency to attempt to avoid or to deliver a “neutral” approach to challenging topics such as colonialism, rather than engage in critical analysis, but by erasing or normalising colonialism the curriculum can perpetuate harmful colonial ideologies that marginalise ethnic minorities and allow damaging colonial legacies to continue.

Conclusion

This review sought to understand the various ways social studies has been defined and conceptualised as a school subject. Overall, there is a lack of consensus around terminology and definition of social studies and a great deal of variation in how it has been conceptualised and approached in different contexts. History, geography, and civics/citizenship seem to be the subject content most frequently included in social studies. However, there are numerous other subjects that have been included, and expectations about what is part of social studies vary across contexts. The diversity of understandings and approaches to social studies pose a challenge for educators and researchers as it is difficult to compare social studies across different countries and cultures, and to define social studies in an overarching sense. When discussing social studies, it is crucial to clearly and explicitly define the way in which it is being conceptualised. This is important in order to avoid misconceptions arising due to differences in how social studies is commonly understood in different contexts.

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