

Ruth Reynolds, Journal Editor. Social Studies teachers as agents of change.

As I watch unfolding scenes of devastation and war on my television screen and hear groups affiliated with opposing perspectives arguing and threatening each other I am tempted to despair. How can we be so cruel to each other? Have we learnt nothing from decades of previous pointless battles and senseless deaths and suffering? In Australia we are scrutinising all citizens who have visited the Middle East at our borders to ensure they are not terrorists and they run the risk of being arrested. Refugees are not allowed on Australian soil if they arrive by boat. Children are kept in detention centres awaiting processing with their parents for a number of years and mental health issues in this younger populations, most of whom will be future Australian citizens, are very evident. Australian tourists are shot out of the sky and Australian citizens are joining terrorist groups and foreign armies overseas. This is not only about Australia, it is a difficult world we live in and inequality is writ large within nations and between nations. Is this what living in a global world is all about? Clarifying on a larger scale than ever before who are our friends and who are our enemies and trying to subjugate them. Allowing others to suffer so we can prosper?

What sustains me and excites me is the way in which social studies teachers keep fighting for equity and social justice and address in many ways the tough questions of our time. Education has to be the answer. Certainly war and conflict cannot be. In a curriculum which seems to disregard the ethics of human interactions and focuses on testable outcomes social studies teachers have a big job to do. They have to seize the teachable moment, try to sort and sift and clarify and weigh up with their students, the myriad influences that are influencing our perspectives and help our community find a way through a world beset with conflict. This edition provides some great insights into ways in which some gifted researchers and teachers are going about making real changes in the lives of students and ways of thinking in our disparate communities.

Toni Fuss Kirkwood-Tucker has been kind enough to allow us to publish an abridged speech on global critical dialogue she made to a conference in Florida. She pointed out that Dr. Edvard Dmitrievich Dneprov, the Russian Minister of Education, appointed by President Yeltsin, had this to say at the opening of Russia's first international education conference at Sochi in 1991 after the fall of the Berlin Wall:

It is education that is to destroy old-fashioned stereotypes and will change the psyche of the nation. It is education as well that is to lead the way in developing people's democratic world outlook, their acquiring new political culture and their economic awareness.

By reacquainting us with the work of Hanvey (1976) on teaching for global education and what this means for her and other teachers like her she helps us refocus on tried and true themes that persist despite our troubled times. Read this in the Media Perspectives section of the journal.

Dr Gloria Alter, our Social Justice editor, introduces us to some exciting ideas about reforming and reframing critical democracy studies from talented authors Dr Matthew Knoester and Dr. Wangari Gichiru. They argue for the need for our students to learn the 'trade of democracy', to make arguments and get involved in a critical manner and provide examples from Kenya and from international student experiences to clarify their points.

Dr Anatoli Rapaport, our International Perspectives editor, has similarly worked with researchers with an international background to help raise a lens to examine our taken-for-granted practices in

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the so called developed world. Dr Najwan Saada writes about how teaching strategies using postcolonial theory in social studies education can help us as teachers and our students better understand some of the sources of tension evident in our world today. He argues that:

applying postcolonial theory in social studies education will encourage students and teachers to challenge the dichotomy between East and West, and to understand, for instance, that democracy, with free and fair elections, which gives real representation for all citizens, can be produced in Middle Eastern countries as well. I believe that democracy is context-based, and each society may develop its own understanding of democratic values, processes, and culture.

I can see that Dr Saada and Drs Knoester and Gichiru may have some meaningful conversations starting here.

Dr Acikalin from Istanbul University ponders on the future of social studies teaching drawing on the precedents of his country and the United States to build a plan for a meaningful future for social studies teaching.

The fully refereed research articles in our edition continue the important conversations about how to teach social studies and how to teach it to transform our world. Jeroen Bron from the Netherlands has investigated how to best teach to provide students with voice in terms of their education. He argues that students arguing for their own curriculum and negotiating their learning is part of 21st citizenship skills. Our classrooms are where our students should be active citizens. Jessamay Pesek likewise has also addressed issues of learning for democracy in her study of youth opinions toward compulsory voting across five countries. Her research provides some interesting perspectives on how students construct their views of democracy and how our own taken for granted views can be held to account.

Approaches in the classroom and teacher decision making is also addressed by Dr Debra Donnelly in her study of teachers' use of historical feature films in the teaching of history. She pointed out that these 'films can be used to teach rich lessons about the nature of historical inquiry and the subversion and redrafting of history in contemporary media'. She argues that these films appeal to the emotions and as such can help develop epistemological and ethical debate around the ideas promoted by popular culture and those that may have been evident in the period under discussion.

The last two papers in our peer reviewed section address cultural diversity and intercultural understanding. Dr Maguth's paper investigates how technology can be used to build global awareness using an example from a study and class connection with Thailand and Drs Kambutu and Nganga explore changes in perceptions of African peoples in a period of globalisation. They traveled to Kenya and investigated changes in perceptions as a result of such a visit – the value of study tours to develop global awareness. Intercultural understanding must surely be a major focus for educators for the 21st century.

Enjoy this fantastic read.

Ruth