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Commentary: Revisiting "Guidelines for Using Technology to Prepare Social Studies Teachers"

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Abstract

In Hicks, Lee, Berson, Bolick, and Diem (2014), the authors revisited and revised a series of principles focusing on the preparation of social studies teachers for using digital technologies in the classroom, originally presented in the inaugural issue of *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* (Mason et al., 2000). This commentary aims to extend dialog associated with the updated guidelines, through an enhanced discussion of each of the four revised principles within the context of time, technology, and teacher education. The authors' efforts to more effectively guide the preparation of social studies educators in the utilization of technological applications in more useful, efficient, and appropriate ways is readily apparent and appreciated.

In "Guidelines for Using Technology to Prepare Social Studies Teachers" (Hicks, Lee, Berson, Bolick, & Diem, 2014), the authors revisited and revised a series of principles focusing on the preparation of social studies teachers for using digital technologies in the classroom, originally presented in the inaugural issue of this journal (Mason et al., 2000).

This commentary represents the perspectives on the revised guidelines of a social studies education university faculty member who is deeply entrenched in the preparation of both preservice and in-service social studies and elementary educators and an instructional design and technology university faculty member who works closely with preservice and in-service teachers of all subject areas on the effective and appropriate integration of technology into the K-12 classroom.

These perspectives are intended to provide a comprehensive and interdisciplinary view of the impact of the revised guidelines, specifically in the context of social studies education, instructional design and technology, and elementary and secondary education. We also identify additional issues to consider as the field moves toward a more comprehensive approach to the preparation of social studies educators in regard to the effective integration of technology into instruction.

Researchers and practitioners in the field of social studies have clearly begun moving beyond the perceived reluctance to embrace digital technologies as change agents in social studies education (Manfra, 2014). More correctly, these stakeholders have begun making the paradigm shift espoused by Martorella (1997), as illustrated by both the original guidelines for using technology to prepare social studies teachers (Mason et al., 2000), as well as the updated guidelines (Hicks et al., 2014). However, the instructional approaches highlighted as examples by Hicks et al. are still less common than more traditional pedagogical approaches (Berson, Lee, & Stuckart, 2001; Cuban, 2001; DeWitt, 2007; Hammond & Manfra, 2009; Swan & Hofer, 2008).

The works by Martorella (1997), Mason et al. (2000), and others indicate recognition of the importance and role of technology in the social studies classroom. However, researchers and practitioners could not have foreseen the evolution that technological applications in the classroom would undergo in the years following their origination, as well as how these emerging applications might impact what happens in the social studies classroom.

Although these early tips of the hat were appropriate and timely, the decreased costs, increased functionality, increased usability, and almost ubiquitous access, along with immensely significant new potential to transform the social studies classroom, have changed the educational landscape. Thus, revisiting guidelines that were designed when access and instructional applications of the Internet were in their infancy was inevitable. Gone are the days of “oversold and underused” (Cuban, 2001) and Luddite perspectives being predominant in the social studies classroom. Educators are increasingly focusing on simply utilizing the most appropriate technological applications to support specific pedagogical goals and approaches.

In the updated guidelines for preparing social studies teachers the idea of intentional uses of technology, rather than simply using technology for technology’s sake, was clearly a driving influence throughout the revisioning process. Additionally, the ideas of the social studies teacher as a critic of the application of classroom technology and of preparing social studies educators to be critical of applications of classroom technology were clearly prominent (Thornton, 1991). These emphases seemed to validate Martorella’s (1997) assertion that, “perhaps most exciting will be the evolution, not of technologies, but constructivist instructional theories. Multimedia, designed to encourage interactivity, exploration, and creativity, may become the norm” (p. 68). This approach was admirable and effective as the authors examined a content-specific concern from an instructional perspective.

From “Extending Learning Beyond What Could Be Done Without Technology” to “Use Technologies to Promote Effective Student Learning”

Perhaps more than any other element of the revised guidelines, the first principle highlights the evolution of the increased functionality and potential of technology in the social studies classroom. With decreasing costs and increasing functionality, usability, and access, the potential of technology in the social studies classroom to support transformative and innovative instructional approaches and more meaningful and appropriate learning opportunities for students is greater than ever. We commend the authors for noting that “access alone does not directly equate to students learning anything. Teachers and their students must still learn how to develop and participate in discipline-specific inquiries, which means learning to manage research, organize data, and prioritize and unpack evidence in the construction of accounts and narratives” (Hicks et al., 2014, para. 7 under “Use Technologies to Promote Effective Student Learning”).

While this new principle addresses the increased utilization of technology in the social studies classroom, the focus on the importance of sound pedagogy is clear. As the consumption-based model of technology integration transitions to a participatory approach and technology transitions from a tool for accessing information to a tool to (a) support student authoring and creativity, (b) facilitate collaboration, communication, and social learning, (c) allow for more efficient organization and accumulation of resources, (d) provide venues for student voices through publication and sharing, and (e) support student immersion in learning environments, educators also transition from “extending learning beyond what could be done without technology” (Mason et al., 2000) to “use technologies to promote effective student learning” (Hicks et al., 2014). In the revisioning of the first principle, the authors did a commendable job of affording increased value to range of tools, methods, content, abilities, and varied contexts of social studies classrooms.

Introduce Technology in Context(s)

With the description of technological pedagogical content knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), practitioners and researchers have increasingly focused on the interconnectedness of pedagogy, content, and technology in instruction. Although a focus on this relationship was evidently important during the development of the initial guidelines, the emergence of issues related to this interconnectedness in subject-area domains has become more evident.

Additionally, as cited by the authors, today’s preservice teachers have a vastly different relationship with technology than did their predecessors. Today’s “digital native” teacher candidates have grown up with digital technologies as an almost invisible aspect of their lives (Prensky, 2001; Tapscott 1998).

Also noted by the authors is the importance of social studies teacher educators’ promoting methods discerning personal and instructional applications of technology. Additionally, while the benefits of instructional technology in the social studies classroom have been reported by many researchers in the field (e.g., Berson, 1996; Bolick, 2006; Friedman & Hicks, 2006; Manfra & Lee, 2012; Swan & Hofer, 2013; Waring, 2014; Waring & Bentley, 2012) and the need for teacher preparation is critical, teachers often refer back to more familiar instructional practices (Lortie, 1975). Thus, teacher educators need to work with existing pedagogical beliefs, content and technology knowledge and skills, and prior knowledge and experiences and seek ways in which more innovative instructional practices become commonplace and the appropriate and

effective utilization of technology to support innovative instructional practices is ensured.

While engaging in these practices, teacher educators should instill within teacher candidates the notion that they alone are the curriculum gatekeepers, individually taking the role of translating formal curriculum into instructional programs for their particular environments (Thornton, 1991). In addition, educators should understand that they should only employ technological applications in the classroom when it allows them to achieve something they were previously unable to accomplish or, at least, to accomplish in a more effective or efficient manner (Earle, 2002; Harris, 2005).

From “Foster the Development of the Skills, Knowledge, and Participation as Good Citizens in a Democratic Society” to “Cultivate and Support a Variety of Civic Practices with Technology”

With the revisioning of the 2000 principle, “Foster the development of the skills, knowledge, and participation as good citizens in a democratic society,” to the 2014 principle, “Cultivate and support a variety of civic practices with technology,” Hicks et al. addressed the transition of the Internet from a tool to access content passively to a tool where individuals can more actively contribute. They also acknowledged that this change influences civic knowledge and participatory opportunities.

A number of poignant considerations were made by the authors with the updating of this principle. First is the consideration that the Internet affords instantaneous and almost infinite opportunities for discovery while allowing instantaneous access to information (Sunstein, 2010). Problematically, as the access to information increases, “our abilities to know, in depth, a subject for ourselves, to construct within our own minds the rich and idiosyncratic set of connections that give rise to a singular intelligence” (Carr, 2010, p. 143) are decreasing.

Second is the premise that, with the change in the functionality of the Web from a passive tool for accessing content to a more participatory tool, civic opportunities are more varied, substantial, and far-reaching than in the past. However, with increasing opportunities for acquisition of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions, as well as more varied civic participation events, the need to provide more comprehensive preparation of social studies teachers to integrate these new possibilities into their classrooms is critical.

Additionally, with the emergence of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) framework (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2013) and the increased role of inquiry in the social studies classroom, the need to prepare teachers for their increasingly important role of supporting and encouraging inquiry through the application of both traditional and emerging technologies is critical. “Within the methods courses, preservice teachers must feel supported yet challenged to play within and through the field of digital technologies and examine the opportunities to engage in the type of systematic literacy work that is required in the preparation of flexible and mindful citizens in the digital age” (Hicks et al., 2014, para. 21 below “Cultivate and Support a Variety of Civic Practices with Technology”).

In order to further support this principle, more integrated in-service teacher training, and systematic, structured mentoring opportunities during the induction phase years are key to the ongoing successful communication, dissemination, and implementation of the new guidelines. Designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating methods and strategies

for both in-service teacher training and mentoring of early career social studies teachers by more technologically savvy social studies teachers is needed. Also, development of a strategy to communicate, disseminate, and revisit evaluation of the effectiveness of in-service teacher training and mentoring models would significantly benefit the field and result in an increasingly comprehensive approach to preparing social studies teachers to use technology effectively in the classroom, while also providing a model for influencing policy and continually improving practice.

Contribute to the Research and Evaluation of Social Studies and Technology

When the authors published the original guidelines, theory, research, and practice associated with the use of digital technologies in the social studies truly was in its adolescence (Berson & Balyta, 2004). The call to wake up the metaphorical sleeping giant has been heard (Martorella, 1997), as researchers and practitioners have moved the field in directions few could have imagined a decade and a half ago (Manfra, 2014). Today, social studies researchers need to make a concerted effort focused on evaluating, analyzing, and proposing ways in which the social studies are relevant and vital to the K-12 educational experience. Ways in which emerging and traditional technological applications can facilitate this undertaking should be showcased along with ways they prepare students to be personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented citizens (Kahne & Westheimer, 2004).

During the time that passed between the release of the two versions of the guidelines, marginalization of the various disciplines that make up the social studies was notable; however, with the unveiling of the C3 Framework a new and increased national focus on the importance of social studies and the efforts to create civically engaged students has developed. Thus, social studies researchers need to take this prime opportunity to shed additional light on the work that we do, especially in regard to the integration and utilization of emerging technologies in the areas of social studies and the training of teachers and teacher candidates, through the dissemination of research, theory, and practice in a variety of outlets and contexts (NCSS, 2014).

Conclusions

We commend the authors for their timely and diligent work in revisiting and revising the original guidelines for preparing social studies teachers to utilize technology in more meaningful ways. The updated guidelines address the complex nature of effective and appropriate technology integration in the social studies classroom and lay the foundation for future actions to support the preparation of social studies teachers to use technology as a tool to support the more inquiry-driven activities beginning to emerge more frequently in the social studies classroom. Educators who prepare social studies teachers must begin exploring and implementing approaches to support these guidelines in an increasingly complex environment. Social studies education researchers and practitioners play a significant role in extending this conversation through the communication, dissemination, and implementation of practices and solutions related to the guidelines espoused by Hicks et al. (2014).

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