

5. Social Studies: Unencumbered with principles

[Article 5 of 10: The previous article took the Social Studies Frameworks to task for representing only cultural biases, not principles. This article pursues consequence of the absence of principles.]

For the Social Studies frameworks, democracy is vexing. Democracy is treated as a principle when it is only a process. Democracy doesn't validate a proposition; it is a way to discuss it. Democracy codifies the humility that what one thinks just might be wrong. It codifies that even the smallest voice might suggest a better way to an audience tuned to hear it.

Yet for the frameworks, a democratic principle is one "that should guide the behavior and values of institutions and citizens in a democracy."^[1]

They assert as "principles" adherence to the social contract, consent of the governed, limited government, legitimate authority, federalism, separation of powers, equality, freedom, liberty, respect for individual rights, and deliberation. They don't explain why. The New York framework asserts democratic principles include dignity for all, equality, fairness, and respect for authority and rules. Such assertions are dangerous because, for instance, diversity is popularly encouraged

to a degree that suggests groups have privileges beyond what is extended to individuals.

Frameworks across the states examine the requirements for living in a democracy but leave unexamined why one should want to do so. The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) framework wants lessons to explain how a democracy relies on people's responsible participation. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Executive Summary theme, "Civic Ideals and Practices", wants students to learn the "rights and responsibilities of citizens of a democracy."^[2]

Authorities have come to promote democracy as if it were a good in itself. More dangerously, political habit has come to treat democracy as if it legitimizes policy. It does not. History is replete with examples the tyranny of the majority. Approval by a majority only signifies that something is popular, not reasonable or justified.

A major theme of education should be to teach students to detect the difference between a real principle and a false bloom. Anything less is schooling, not education. Frameworks ideas blossom from cultural experience making them simply so-called natural law, unable to

explain where principles and ideals come from or why they should be held. The frameworks do not explain how, if American culture arrived at certain principles, those principles resolve when they compete with other principles at home or abroad. The frameworks are blind to the underlying society that holds different cultures together, allowing them to deal across their cultural boundaries.

The Social Studies Frameworks bandy about "Key Idea" and "Compelling Understanding" concepts erroneously labeled principles. Still others are labeled virtues with no other justification than assertion. The frameworks presume authorities are authorized to determine the common good. They would have students believe experts know principles when they see them, even if ordinary citizens don't.

[Next article: Social Studies Frameworks "themes" are claimed to unify useful ideas. Instead, they obscure in so many ways.]

[1] National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) College, Career & Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards (C3 Framework). Page 99.

[2] <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/execsummary>.