

6. Social Studies: Irrelevant themes

[Article 6 of 10: The previous article exposed that even the concept of democracy is not well presented in the Social Studies Frameworks. This article will examine how Frameworks Themes obscure.]

The Social Studies Frameworks themes[1] are supposed to unify but don't. They offer no useful concepts for students to revalidate and call their own. They rehash subjects and popular notions and misdirect attention away from useful lessons of history, economics, and political theory:

Theme 1, **Culture** [NYS: 1. Individual Development and Cultural Identity], resigns itself to moral relativism absent a viable path toward peaceful problem resolution and also presumes group identity matters more than individual identity.

Theme 2, **Time, Continuity, and Change** [NYS: 3], presumes the present day to be the end point rather than just another point along a continuum from the past, through the present, to the future. The missed precept makes institutions, values, and beliefs abstract and distant.

Theme 3, **People, Places and Environments** [NYS: 4. Geography, Humans, and the Environment], The frameworks don't use maps as metaphors for necessarily incomplete mental map every individual uses to make decisions. Once understood that "Sometimes you think you are correct, not because you are correct, but simply because you think you are correct", humility and respect for others become the cornerstones of society.

Theme 4, **Individual Development and Identity** [NYS: 2.

know? How should one behave? How should one interact with others?

Theme 5, **Individuals, Groups, and Institutions** [NYS: 5. Development and Transformation of Social Structures] retreats to the inadequate Greek view that cultural groups define individuals and group activities develop good citizenship. That overlooks that when individuals recognize their limits, they have compelling reason to socialize with others.

Theme 6, **Power, Authority, and Governance** makes no distinction between culture and society, which is necessary to overcome moral relativism between cultures. The minimum behavior at the edge where any two individuals or any two cultures meet, defines what is required to legitimize governments, understand limits, and recognize abuse.

Theme 7, **Production, Distribution, and Consumption** [NYS: 8. Creation, Expansion, and Interaction of Economic Systems] presumes economics requires a "system". If individuals decide to do what they are good at and swap surpluses to mutual benefit, that is a fact, not a theory and not a "system." Economic effects are in play whatever a government might plan. Structure need not be governmentalized because trade is the result of human action but not human design. The theme ignores unexpected consequences of over-organization, whether regulators have the information to make good regulations, or whether effective redistribution must be governmentally driven.

Theme 8, **Science, Technology, and Society**, ignores that

ence has caused impact over time is obvious and hardly worth a major theme. More significant are recursive feedback loops, relaxation cycles, and awareness that knowledge of Mother Nature's laws has put such power in the hands of anyone who cares to use it that we are in a race for civilization because isolation is no longer adequate.

Theme 9, **Global Connections**, suggests such connections are different than those between individuals, groups, cities, states, nations, cultures, and civilizations even though behavior at the edge where any two meet is scalable.

Theme 10, **Civic Ideals And Practices**, is unsettling. Releasing millions of political change agents unanchored to society by the lessons of history is not in the best interest of all our culture has accomplished in many hundreds of years of development. In the frameworks, one learns about the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy but, bizarrely, democracy is an unexamined and assumed given. Authors fail to distinguish between statistical inequality, the opportunity for individuals to achieve greater equality, and the attempts of political elites to play off perceptions of inequality to buy power with Other People's Money or to stifle upward mobility through middle class entrepreneurship. They unleash change for the sake of change.

[Next article: Social Studies Content specifications direct how vendors are supposed to shape lessons. The Content specifications are the "cut-out" that make it appear local districts are in charge of curricula, except

Development, Movement, and Interaction of Cultures], Substitutes external socialized behavior when the individual should be the primary theme. Traction comes within the personal perspective to ask: What can one

while science and technology may speed interactions and multiply power, they do not change the underlying society itself. The theme juxtaposes process, knowledge, and organization without justification. That sci-

that few practical choices are available.]

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