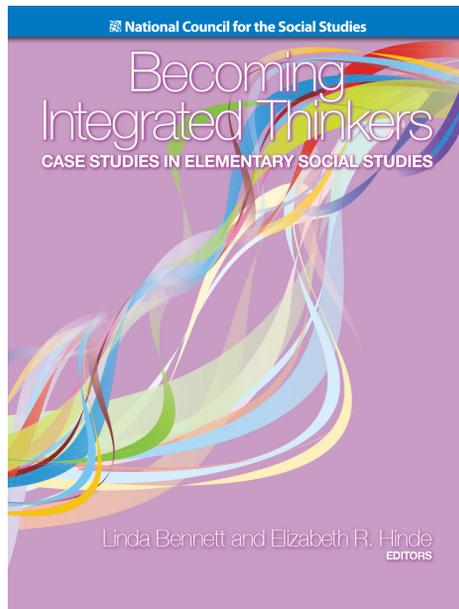


The following excerpt is from Chapter 2,  
“The Theoretical Foundations of Curriculum Integration and  
its Application in Social Studies Instruction,”  
by Elizabeth R. Hinde



Ineffective curriculum integration can have negative consequences for students. Teachers must be wary not to distort or water down content in the name of integration; they must be cognizant of the developmental appropriateness of their methods; and they must ensure that the content is of rich educational value. Poor application of integration can have the effect of students learning nothing at all, or of learning incorrect information.

On the other hand, when teachers have knowledge of the content areas being integrated and possess the ability to translate that knowledge in ways that their students understand, integration is particularly effective. In any case, curriculum integration is a powerful tool that can educate—or miseducate—students.

In today’s classrooms, attempts at integrating social studies across the curriculum are commonly manifested in three ways: fractured, stealthy, or healthy. Figure 3 describes each approach.

### Fractured Social Studies

When curriculum integration leads to social studies being disconnected from a child’s life and the rest of the curriculum, it is fractured. Fractured social studies results when teachers attempt to infuse social studies skills or content into, for instance, language arts lessons; in such cases, the learning outcomes of the lessons revolve around language arts, and social studies content or skills are only superficially addressed. Consequently, the language arts curriculum drives what is taught in social studies. In this case, social studies topics are chosen simply because they complement the reading or writing activities that the teacher has planned and students are not expected to come to a deep understanding of social studies. Students learn reading skills with some semblance of social studies content attached, and the content to which students are exposed is disjointed from the rest of the social sciences and unconnected to their lives outside the classroom.

An example of fractured social studies can be seen in the case of Mrs. Smith’s first grade classroom in a wealthy school in the American Southwest (Mrs. Smith is a pseudonym). In an attempt to teach her students some social studies content while keeping the instructional focus on reading, she tries to

**Figure 3**  
Common Manifestations of Curriculum Integration in Elementary Classrooms

FRACTURED SOCIAL STUDIES INTEGRATION	STEALTHY INTEGRATION	HEALTHY INTEGRATION
<p>Small chunks of content area information related to the weekly reading or language arts activities are presented to students without much depth.</p> <p>Social studies content has no connection to children’s lives or to other areas of the curriculum.</p> <p>The purpose of social studies is mainly to enhance reading/language arts and is not focused on preparing students for effective citizenship.</p> <p>Does not inspire disciplinary modes of thinking because the content is disjointed.</p>	<p>Disguises social studies content as language arts lessons.</p> <p>Covertly teaches social studies content in order to satisfy mandates to spend most of the daily instructional time on language arts activities.</p> <p>Teacher chooses reading/language arts materials with rich spatial or historical content, but focuses on reading/language arts skills.</p> <p>Reading/language arts are the center of the curriculum.</p> <p>Social studies has no pedagogy of its own.</p> <p>Does not inspire disciplinary modes of thinking because content is disguised as something else.</p>	<p>The connection of social studies to children’s lives and other content areas is explicit and clear to students.</p> <p>Reading/language arts are recognized as tools for helping children come to an understanding of the world (and how to communicate that understanding) and are not considered the purpose of schooling.</p> <p>Children and their knowledge of the content are the center of the curriculum.</p> <p>Reading/language arts activities are focused on developing disciplinary frames of mind in students.</p>

“integrate” as much social studies content into her teaching of reading as she can. For instance, one week the students read a story about a little boy and his grandmother. In an effort to tie social studies to the reading activities, the students watched a streaming video about the many faces of grandparents and then they completed a worksheet about the video. The next week, the students read a story in their basal reader about penguins. Mrs. Smith showed pictures of penguins, pointed out Antarctica on the map, and then had the students color a picture of penguins and write a one-sentence caption about something they learned about penguins from the story. The sentence was graded for spelling and punctuation. Since Thanksgiving was approaching, during reading time the following week, the students read about pilgrims and constructed pilgrim hats and paper buckles for their shoes.

In the course of one month the social studies to which these students were exposed was grandparents, penguins, and pilgrims. Many educators and parents would laud Mrs. Smith’s attempt at integrated lessons. At least, they could argue, she is teaching some semblance of social studies in an elementary classroom and not completely neglecting the subject.

However, there are serious problems with the way social studies is taught in Mrs. Smith’s classroom. In choosing social studies topics only because they relate to the content of the reading story of the week, students will not learn the values, dispositions, and knowledge that is necessary for citizens in the U.S. and of the world—the main purpose of social studies.<sup>25</sup> As mentioned previously, in a truly integrated curriculum, social studies helps students to think like disciplinarians—historically, spatially, civically, and economically. In other words, integrating social studies across the curriculum should help students become integrated thinkers. That is, as Bloom pointed out, the learning experiences are organized to give meaning, depth, and multiple perspectives to their lives.<sup>26</sup>

Mrs. Smith’s classroom is typical of what Boyle-Baise, *et al.* found in their study of elementary classrooms.<sup>27</sup> They noted that elementary teachers often make reference to social studies in order to enhance reading instruction. For these teachers, social studies content is a vehicle for learning reading, indicating that reading, not education for effective citizenship is the goal of schooling. Historically speaking, educators and philosophers have espoused for over 100

years that it is through the content areas that students learn to read.<sup>28</sup> As early as 1917,<sup>29</sup> E. L. Thorndike argued that “perhaps it is in their outside reading of stories and in their study of geography, history, and the like that many school children really learn to read.”<sup>30</sup> Reading is a vital skill that must be taught in order to help students further their knowledge of the disciplines—not the other way around.

Another issue with Mrs. Smith’s attempt to integrate the curriculum is that it does not allow for the effective pedagogical methods that are associated with teaching social studies. The methods that Mrs. Smith employed are centered on ensuring that students learn important reading skills and not on the critical thinking that is the hallmark of effective social studies methods and described in the C<sub>3</sub> Framework. Students are not taught to consider that there are multiple perspectives or to critically examine any aspect of the stories. In other words, methods that are associated with teaching social studies effectively are not employed in *Fractured Social Studies*.

Any attempt to integrate the curriculum while disregarding disciplinary knowledge fractures the curriculum and results in “superficial programs.”<sup>31</sup> Mrs. Smith’s efforts to integrate the curriculum were done without consideration of disciplinary thought as a means for understanding the world and therefore rendered social studies as just a supplement to reading and not a vital part of the curriculum.

### Stealthy Social Studies

In an article published in 2008, Sekeres and Gregg describe the stealth approach to teaching geography in elementary grades.<sup>32</sup> In the article, they describe the stealth approach as teaching language arts (in this case, poetry) while sneaking geography concepts into the lessons. Therefore, teachers can somehow circumvent the pressure to concentrate all their instructional time on reading and writing by covertly infusing geography into language arts. Teachers can then assure their supervisors that they are meeting mandates in reading and writing without having to be explicit in their teaching of social studies. In the Sekeres and Gregg article, the authors explain that students can be exposed to major geographic concepts while learning poetry. The main objectives of the lessons revolve around reading and writing poetry, but savvy teachers should choose poems that have rich geographic content, and in that way the students will learn spatial concepts as well as the required language arts content.

The problem with the stealth approach to geography is that this form of pedagogy assumes that geography has no unique pedagogy of its own. Teaching geography according to the stealth approach “strips the subject of its integrity and renders it simply a nice way to enhance reading lessons,”<sup>33</sup> in this case, poetry lessons. Teaching geography effectively, like all the disciplines, requires that the teacher have fundamental knowledge of the content and is able to help students think spatially. If the teacher’s objective is to teach students to think spatially through poetry, then there is no need to employ stealth. Students should be aware that they are learning geography and how to think spatially so that they can generalize that learning to other areas, including poetry.

Stealthy social studies is a creative way that some educators employ in efforts to keep social studies in the curriculum. Sunal and Sunal report that in many K-3 classrooms, social studies is not only marginalized, it is discontinued altogether in order to focus all instructional time on reading, writing, and math.<sup>34</sup> However, they also found that some teachers subverted the established system of teaching reading (and some math) in K-3 by disguising social studies in the form of reading themes and other stealthy curricular maneuvers. Students were exposed to a little history, a little geography, and perhaps a little civics and economics if concepts from those areas relate to the story du jour, much like in Mrs. Smith’s class.

Teaching social studies stealthily or disguising it through reading or other language arts themes, results in a diminished view of social studies. Social studies concepts in this case are secondary to language arts activities and may be the reason that social studies continues to be regarded as an unimportant subject by both teachers and students.<sup>35</sup> Critical thinking and in-depth analysis of social studies content is not required in stealthy social studies since the main objectives of the lessons are related to language arts and not knowledge of the disciplines. True integration of social studies involves students learning to think historically, spatially, civically, or economically throughout the school day. Integration helps students adjust their way of thinking so that when they conduct their reading activities, they are able to access their knowledge of social studies content to help them make sense of what they are reading.

Teachers who are familiar with social studies concepts should be explicit in their teaching and not attempt to disguise the content as something else. As Gardner points out, it is the disciplines that motivate students to read.<sup>36</sup> Explicitly teaching the disciplines furthers reading skills by motivating students to read to find answers to their questions about the world. Teachers who realize that the language arts are the vehicles through which students learn and communicate social studies concepts need not resort to stealth and can help students clearly make connections between their studies in school and the real world.

## Healthy Social Studies Integration

Healthy integration of social studies helps students come to understand the world around them and other content areas. It renders social studies as the thread that ties the curriculum together and connects school learning to the world. They learn to use reading, writing, and mathematics as the tools by which they understand and communicate their understanding of the world. Therefore, effective, healthy integration motivates students to continue to learn and does not relegate social studies content or any other disciplinary knowledge to lowly status in the curriculum, as the following teacher demonstrates.

Mrs. Hunter (a pseudonym), like Mrs. Smith, is a first grade teacher in a wealthy school in the American Southwest. She wants her students to be motivated to read and to understand the world around them. As one learning goal, students were to learn about families and each other in the classroom. She had the students read the same story that Mrs. Smith’s class read about a little boy and his grandmother. In an effort to tie the reading curriculum to the students’ lives, Mrs. Hunter had the students bring in artifacts (pictures, letters, etc.) from their own grandparents and invited the students’ grandparents to the classroom one day. Students heard stories about each other’s families and were introduced to primary sources. Mrs. Hunter provided books and magazines that the students could peruse during their free time, and students wrote or drew pictures about their own families comparing them to the characters in the story. The connection between school and their own lives was explicit, and they were able to express the connection through reading and writing. Students were assessed on the depth of their knowledge, as well as reading and writing skills.

In another instructional unit later in the year, Mrs. Hunter wanted her students to be introduced to geographical concepts and skills—to begin to think spatially. She decided that for reading time she would have the students read a book from a spatial perspective. The class read *Mr. Popper's Penguins*<sup>37</sup> and did other reading and writing activities that focused on such geographic concepts as place and human-environment interaction. To accompany the reading lessons, Mrs. Hunter showed videos of penguins and had pictures of penguins on the walls around the room; she introduced maps to the students and had them find their own country (U.S.A.) in relation to Antarctica; and they discussed the climate and conditions under which penguins thrive. Students compared and contrasted their own climate to Antarctica's and discussed what local zoos would have to do in order for penguins to live there. They wrote poems and letters to relatives and friends concerning penguins and Antarctica. Again, students were provided opportunities to connect reading to real life, and used literature as the vehicle to make sense of the world.

Around the time of Thanksgiving, Mrs. Hunter wanted her students to appreciate the conditions of the lives of the pilgrims—to think historically (temporally). She and the class read a story from their basal reader about the pilgrims and then she had the students generate questions about the time period. Later, the children assumed roles of pilgrims and Indians and wrote (or told) stories from the perspectives of both. She provided books that they could peruse concerning the time period, and briefly visited a website ([www.plimoth.org](http://www.plimoth.org)) so the class could listen to audio of actors speaking English as it was spoken in the 17th Century. She helped the children come to a rudimentary understanding of the conditions the pilgrims faced, and introduced the fact that Native Americans were already on the land when the pilgrims arrived. Since Thanksgiving was a dominant feature of students' lives at that time of year, Mrs. Hunter used it as the basis for meaningful integrative learning.

Mrs. Hunter understood that in order to effectively integrate the curriculum, it is essential that the teacher have disciplinary knowledge along with the ability to translate that knowledge into forms students understand. Prior to teaching, she spent time refreshing her knowledge of the appropriate disciplines and skills that she would be introducing, and she was cognizant of her students' learning abilities so that she could provide rich learning

opportunities. Therefore, her students were able to achieve a deep understanding of the content and were motivated to learn more through reading and writing. It is notable that she addressed state mandated standards in language arts and social studies in her lessons as well. She also explicitly expressed to the students and their parents that they were learning social studies.

## Conclusion

Curriculum integration has a long history in education and psychology. Early educators and psychologists from Europe and America promoted the idea of creating integrated thinkers through the school curriculum. That is, the curriculum should enable learners to access knowledge of the disciplines in order to understand the world and to advance a democratic way of life. Whether a teacher is attempting to create truly integrated individuals who are capable of using the disciplines to make sense of their world or simply trying to keep social studies content in the school day, educators have often turned to the idea of integrating social studies throughout the curriculum.

Researchers and educators have attempted to categorize the various ways that teachers integrate, and disagreements persist as to how integration is defined. The practice of curriculum integration falls onto a continuum that reveals student-determined curricula on one side and teacher-determined on the other. Regardless of where a teacher's pedagogy falls on the continuum, the practice of integration should be focused on the objective of creating integrated thinkers.

Although the ways that teachers attempt to integrate can be described using various models, teachers' attempts at integration today fall into three categories: fractured, stealthy, and healthy. Healthy integration should be the goal of teachers who try to integrate, in that it will lead to students being able to access disciplinary thinking and use reading/language arts as tools to enhance and communicate their understanding.

Regardless of the model of curriculum integration that teachers choose or the actual practice of integrating the curriculum, the main focus of teaching and learning in social studies continues to be to advance democratic thought and to create effective citizens of the nation and world. Curriculum integration is a powerful means of doing so.

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