

## **Sustainability and other good purposes in social studies education: What does it mean to educate for the future?**

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Social studies aims to enable students to engage as active citizens. The arenas of citizenship and the competences perceived as necessary vary over time (Børhaug, 2018). During the last two decades, the notion of educating for the future, has become customary. Representations of the present and the future are means to legitimize curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation in educational policies (Bernstein, 2003). Since all citizenship education conveys social and political imaginary of what a good society will be (Biesta, 2011) and education is assumed to hold the power to shape young people's understanding of themselves and their own agency in society (Tannock, 2021), it is essential to clarify the imagery of the future, underlying the scope of possibilities relayed to pupils. In this paper, we ask: *What are the roles and characteristics of representations of 'the future' in the current Norwegian curriculum reform?* International organizations such as the OECD, the Council of Europe and the United Nations are central in developing educational discourses, and Norway is a case exemplifying how these discourses are iterated and contextualized.

The article presents findings from a discourse analysis of the preparatory works to the latest Norwegian national curriculum "Knowledge Promotion Reform 2020", which is under implementation. In the analysis we explore how 'the future' works as a nodal point (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). The relationship between the here and now and the future presents as a kind of educational-societal dissonance in the material. Social studies aim at educating young people for purposes that the society around them do not (yet) fulfil. The powers attributed to critical thinking and pluralistic deliberation in solving this dissonance is striking. Building on Williams' (1973) concept of selective traditions in teaching, we discuss whether the Norwegian curriculum's emphasis on critical thinking is sufficient for opening up normative issues connected to good purposes for contention and debate.

In current social studies, internationally endorsed purposes as sustainability, democracy, and human rights have attained central roles. These purposes inform the school subject and shape notions of what a good citizen needs to learn, experience, and do. Less visibly, they also relay interpretations of the future in terms of possibilities, risks, and responsibilities. The role of the future is especially prominent within sustainability education, which is central to social studies. Sustainability education presupposes that education is decisive for creating necessary social change to mitigate climate and environmental crises (Tannock, 2021). Students as young people are seen as more receptive and able to change (Hartung, 2017), and as young people they have longer futures and will experience more of the consequences of climate and environmental crises.

We aim to facilitate a more transparent discourse about social studies, by disclosing the discursive engagement of "the future" in the Norwegian case. One contribution is the provision of a conceptual repertoire suitable to question and reflect on the implied "future", corresponding measures in the curriculum, as well as implications for teaching and students' learning about society, themselves, and their current and future roles as citizens.

Keywords: Sustainability Education, Curriculum, Citizenship Education, Selective Traditions

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