

Book Review

Social Studies as New Literacies in a Global Society: Relational Cosmopolitanism in the Classroom

Mark Baildon and James S. Damico
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For much of their careers, Baildon and Damico have examined the intersection of social studies, literacy, and technology. In *Social Studies as New Literacies in a Global Society: Relational Cosmopolitanism in the Classroom*, the authors further clarify the key concepts that buttress their claim that 21st century classrooms call for a new genre of skills. Emphasizing that “social studies can help students develop the knowledge and the interpretive, reflective, and deliberative practices necessary to make sense of new historical realities” (p. 11), the authors acknowledge and contribute to the long history of calls for issue-centered, discourse-based instruction through their “viable vision” (p. 159) of what inquiry should look like in these *new times*.

Baildon and Damico divide their book into three parts, the first of which provides a theoretical foundation for their arguments. The authors frame their understanding of *new times* primarily by Appadurai’s (1996) Five Dimensions of Global Flows: *technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, ideoscapes, and ethnoscapes*. Using Singapore as an example, the authors illustrate how the “transnational flow of goods, people, and ideas, new identity movements and cultural politics, the information society and knowledge economy, new technologies and fast capitalism, and increasing inequality and uneven development” (p. 13) are both causes and consequences of globalization and require new policies and practices on the part of governments and schools. These new practices expand on the understanding of social studies as *inquiry-based social practices* to enable students to better grapple with our “complex interconnected world” (p. 25) by identifying critical, multimodal, and action-oriented *new literacies* as essential elements in learning. Drawing upon work in critical literacy, the authors define new literacies as socially situated, critical practices that are informed by cultural and historical forces along with technological change. Therefore, they argue, educators “need to be concerned with teaching students how to be *continuously* [emphasis in original] literate, helping them learn new literacies called for by new technologies as they continuously develop” (p. 31). The authors hope these literacy practices not only help readers recognize the lenses through which they read, but also lead to an “individual and collective understanding . . . in ways that can lead to transforming unjust and inequitable social conditions” (p. 32).

The ultimate result, according to the authors, is *relational cosmopolitanism*, a term that

they employ as both philosophy and pedagogy. Informed by the emphasis placed on care, concern, and community by the likes of Martin (1994) and Nussbaum (1997), the authors claim that relational cosmopolitanism “comes with a commitment of all members of a community to embrace complexity, understand global interconnections and patterns, and to act skillfully and judiciously in the face of pressing problems and injustices” (p. 27). When practiced in the world, relational cosmopolitanism is open-minded, deliberative, and boundless. These same facets characterize relational cosmopolitanism in the classroom, the ideal of which deserves to be quoted at length:

This means that teachers and students collaboratively deliberate over which issues are significant, relevant, and worthy of investigation and action; determine which texts and sources of information are of most value for fully understanding particular issues; critically analyze and evaluate selected texts, information, and issues; and develop shared criteria and standards for guiding their work. These are classrooms where multifaceted issues provide opportunities for rigorous investigation, deliberation, and action and where classroom activities ensure the multiple and competing views about multifaceted issues are acknowledged, fairly considered, and critically evaluated (Hess, 2009). These are classrooms that make full use of the range of meaning-making resources offered by new transnational flows of media, technologies, texts, and ideas and students are guided to continually make connections between their own lives, subject matter, and broader social, historical, cultural, and global contexts as well as consider social responsibilities with significant issues (Goodman, 1992; Giroux, 1988). (p. 28)

For readers hoping to move schooling in this direction, the authors offer recommendations as to how to create a relational cosmopolitan classroom. Responding to the teaching and learning challenges that occur when using 21st century texts, technologies, and issues (e.g., volume of available information, commercialization of the Web), the authors present a five-phase inquiry model that they suggest can be useful when creating this type of classroom. The inquiry model includes developing an investigative question, finding and evaluating resources, and synthesizing and communicating findings. To support teachers' work with this model, the authors outline three literacy practices that are rooted in relational cosmopolitanism pedagogy (multiple and varied traversals across a problem space, dialogue across difference, and building of perspective) as well as two metaphors that illustrate the difficulty of working with internet-based sources (excavation and elevation). Each of these practices supports the authors' view that working with complex problems necessitates repeated exposure to different texts and ideas, best accomplished through deliberation with others, so that students are encouraged to dig into sources, find connections among sources, and recognize their own and others' points of view. Part 1 concludes with a discussion of the unique difficulties and opportunities that web-based technologies, specifically Web 2.0 tools, add to the inquiry process. I am especially appreciative that the authors provide a number of specific resources, including their own *Critical Web Reader* (a web-based tool that provides *lenses* to assist in the close and critical reading of web-based texts), which teachers and students can use when implementing their inquiry model. Although, as discussed below, the suggested resources are not equally distributed across the five phases, the authors provide a comfortable starting place for teachers while also acknowledging that technology alone does not make for a high-quality learning experience.

In Part II, the authors move their vision of relational cosmopolitanism to practice through case studies of an elementary classroom in Singapore, a secondary classroom in Taiwan, and a postsecondary classroom in the United States. In each chapter, the authors examine how

students and teachers struggle with 21st century teaching and learning challenges and the tools they develop to strengthen students' inquiry skills. As a former high school teacher, I found Part II particularly valuable, not only because of the focus on specific implementation but also because of the realistic portrayal of teachers and students. I thought of my own students' anemic research skills when reading about students who, when tasked with a research project, tended to, "type in a keyword, get a list of websites, open a few, copy and paste information into a word document, find a few pictures, and repeat the process" (p. 76). As in Chapter 5, when approached by students who were intrigued by the internet video *Loose Change 9/11*, I struggled to help my own students consider texts critically. The teachers (including one of the authors) at the center of these classrooms do not have all the answers, but they are willing to work *with* their students to build a relational cosmopolitan classroom. I saw myself not only in the teachers' struggles but also in the teachers' achievements. The collaborative development of a Research Resource Guide (pp. 83-87), being conscious of how open students are to other perspectives (Chapter 6), or providing online space to facilitate group discussions (Chapter 7), identified by the authors as steps toward relational cosmopolitanism, come across as practical, feasible tasks that many teachers already attempt to implement.

The last two chapters in Part II are particularly insightful because they follow the same cohort of pre-service social studies teachers as they move through the entire inquiry process during a multidisciplinary investigation into globalization and capitalism. Although a postsecondary example, it is clear that the challenges faced by these college students are similar to those faced by students at any age. Throughout the inquiry, the most common struggle for students was a lack of background knowledge, which significantly impacted their ability to develop an inquiry question, gather and evaluate sources, and synthesize their findings. Similar to the elementary and secondary students profiled in this part of the book, these pre-service teachers benefited from supportive spaces and scaffolds, and produced their best work when actively engaged with each other. The importance of collaboration to inquiry and its place in relational cosmopolitanism is especially clear in this example, for it was when students worked closely together that students were most likely to consider alternative perspectives and make multiple traversals across text resulting in a continually and collectively developed knowledge base. These two chapters also emphasize the importance of strengthening the inquiry skills of pre-service teachers if we want them to implement similar practices in their own classrooms.

In Part III, Baildon and Damico bring the many pieces of their book together into two multi-dimensional and multi-faceted figures that convey why and how to prepare students for new times. The first figure, a macro-level illustration, situates *disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary tools* and the inquiry practices outlined in Part I of the book within a conceptual landscape of transnational flows and scapes (Appadurai, 1996), depicting these concepts in a way that emphasizes their recursive, interactive, and dynamic nature. The second figure, a micro-level illustration, brings to life relational cosmopolitanism as pedagogy through their "inquiry in use" (p. 163) model. Based on six dimensions: resources of participants; relational knowing; rigorous content and curricula; facility with key tools and resources; dialogic, problem-solving pedagogies; and transformative goals and outcomes, the authors clarify this model through thoughtful descriptions and by returning to the classroom examples discussed in Part II. The authors claim that

taken together, the six dimensions of inquiry in use support a notion of civic education that consists of commitments to justice, connection, concern, and care for people within and outside of the nation-

state, coupled with informed social action to address issues that are no longer solely national in scope. (p. 170)

Acknowledging that relational cosmopolitan classrooms will only thrive if schools reconsider their approach to standards and curriculum, the authors leave the reader with a call to recognize that “individual growth along with the well-being and sustainability of our global society depend on our ability to create and live out such conditions in and outside of classrooms” (p. 172). Baildon and Damico provide a compelling argument for why new times call for new skills, which can best be realized in classrooms rooted in relational cosmopolitanism.

Because much of the book is focused on *how* teachers can create such classrooms, I am left with a few questions. Throughout the text, it is clear that background knowledge (or lack thereof) has a tremendous impact on inquiry, but how should teachers respond to these deficits? Should teachers spur inquiry? Slow down inquiry? Simplify inquiry? The authors stress the ability of collaborative knowledge construction to ameliorate knowledge deficits during inquiry, but are there circumstances when inquiry around complex problems is not appropriate or circumstances during which more traditional strategies must be used to get students ready for inquiry? For this “vision” (p. 159) to be truly useful for teachers, further direction on how to approach gaps in background knowledge must be provided. Lastly, the authors mention the importance of strong inquiry questions and that these questions should be rooted in multifaceted, complex problems. Although they acknowledge the difficulty of developing such questions, the limited guidance they provide (e.g., draw from the practices of the disciplines; provide students opportunities to build background knowledge) is not overly helpful. Although the examples, both from the classroom snapshots and suggested web-based tools, are extensive and helpful for Phases 2 through 4 in their inquiry model, because a strong question is so key to the process advocated in the text, a more thorough discussion of how to support students as they develop questions would be valuable.

On the whole, I believe Baildon and Damico have successfully provided a “viable vision” (p. 159) of social studies in the 21st century. As illustrated by the imperfect classrooms from Part II, relational cosmopolitanism continues to be something to which classrooms must aspire. Through useful literacy practices, non-threatening web-based tools, and realistic examples of teachers and students collaboratively engaging with multifaceted problems, the authors provide valuable guidance for understanding social studies in new ways.

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