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Book review

Post-pandemic social studies: how Covid-19 has changed how we teach, W. Journell (2022)

Today, it seems there is more controversy in our society than in recent memory. The continued use and rise of misinformation, polarization among various political ideologies and political parties, and protests regarding racial and other social injustices, is all creating tension among various groups of people in our country. All the while with the Covid-19 pandemic raging across the world, over 1,000,000 people in the United States alone passing away due to the virus. While there are various monumental events that have occurred since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, it has created new learning moments and opportunities for both educators and students. This is the time for social studies educators to get out of their comfort zone and change how they teach their students. *Post-Pandemic Social Studies: How COVID-19 Has Changed the World and How We Teach*, edited by Wayne Journell, provides social studies educators at various levels with lessons, activities, concepts, and other points of conversation to help address new and current issues going on in education today. The goal of this collection is to “be a thought experiment about how social studies teachers could teach about Covid-19 in the future, as well as how this crisis should impact the social studies curriculum more broadly” (Journell, 2022, p. 4). With this framework in mind, Journell and others provide strategies to help social studies educators tackle the issues of today and look ahead to tomorrow.

The format of the collection is broken down into two sections. The first section is how to teach about the current Covid-19 crisis as a historical event with the second section debating more about how the pandemic serves as a way for social studies educators to examine current social studies curriculum and teaching. This serves as a balance to help educators teach their students about how the pandemic is similar to what our society has experienced in the past. In addition, it also allows for educators to examine their curriculum and instruction and the impact that it has on the students that they have in their classrooms.

The collection has 17 chapters, with each chapter written by a different author(s). The authors throughout offer expertise in different areas related to social studies education as well as knowledge in various levels of education within the k-12 context. Some of the topics covered in this collection are past pandemics, how to cope with grief, an inquiry related to socio-emotional learning, the history of protests in the United States, and rethinking what it means to be free in the United States, just to name a few. The array of subjects, as well as educational levels, provide educators of all ages insight into how to approach current events that students are dealing with today. It is also important as it provides educators multiple insights and perspectives about the issues that are impacting our society today and how to best approach challenging topics with students.

The chapters themselves are presented in different ways as the reader moves through the collection. They provide detailed lesson plans, discussion topics and questions with students, inquiry topics to use, and lastly, the occasional call to action chapter for educators. This layout serves as a strong guide for educators to use if they are not familiar with the topic or if they want to try new teaching strategies in their classroom. Overall, the collection is easy to follow and insightful when presenting the information. As an educator, it is easy to tell that this collection is specifically made for teachers, based on the content and layout.

One of the chapters that stood out as an issue that needs more attention and consideration from social studies educators is the “Inclusion of Economic Inequality in the Social Studies Curriculum.” Written by Leonel Pérez Espósito and Varenka Servín Arcos, discusses the importance of integrating discussions of economic inequality. The authors provide examples of economic inequalities, including people having to drive to local libraries to access the Internet and the growing wage gap between the rich and the poor. This chapter goes on to further explain how this issue intersects with other social justice issues within our society, such as race, political involvement and engagement, and education inequality. This chapter highlights topics that educators need to discuss with their students to help them become more aware of the current issues in our society and to potentially create new solutions in the future. Espósito and Arcos’s chapter serves as an excellent example of how the work in this collection can be used to influence teaching practice and social studies curriculum for the future.

In the chapter, “Putting Covid-19 into Historical Context”, Catherine Mas presents the pandemic through a historical lens as the current pandemic is compared to past pandemic outbreaks, how politics have played a role in response to Covid-19, what has been done to combat pandemics, and how Covid-19 has revealed cracks in our current healthcare infrastructure. The chapter also discusses perspectives on how past viruses and pandemics have impacted marginalized peoples in our society, ranging from African slaves

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during the Transatlantic slave trade to the AIDs crises that impacted the LGBTQ community during the 1980s and 1990s. The historical events described throughout the chapter in order to understand how our world viewed and dealt with past pandemics provides conversation to how our current society is living with the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, the chapter serves as a way to help educators and students understand how pandemics have impacted all aspects of our society and what can potentially be done in order to prevent another pandemic from happening again.

Death is a natural part of life but as a society, we do not do a good job of teaching and helping people understand the grieving process. In the chapter, "Situating Covid-19 Within the Context of Death and Grief", the authors discuss the importance of unpacking death with their students how to provide a safe space for students to grieve. Within the social studies context, it is common for students to learn about past historical figures, including when and how they died. However, it is unheard of to discuss death and how to grieve for a loved one in real time in a classroom setting. With the pandemic impacting people from all walks of life, it is important for educators to learn how to talk about death and grief with their students. The authors provide examples on how to work through death and grief with students in various ways, such as the role of the media, the effect of natural disasters, and unpacking grief in past historical events such as genocide. By discussing these topics with students, it helps create a safe space for them as well as help provide the coping skills that they will need in the future.

While the chapters provide a great deal of information and knowledge related to historical and current events and educational issues, some chapters felt out of place. For example, federalism was discussed as a point on how the government structure impacted the United States' response to the pandemic. Although it is important for educators and students to think about how the different levels of government work together, this topic did not seem as important compared to others, such as the mental health and emotional impact that this pandemic has had on our society. Recent studies have been conducted in relation to how the pandemic has impacted on student's emotional and mental health. This includes at various educational settings as well as the support needed for students going back to school in person full time (Conrad et al., 2021; Hamilton & Gross, 2021; Rao & Rao, 2021; Yoder et al., 2020). The chapter on political ideologies also seemed to have missed the mark in the same regard, as political ideologies have been demonstrated for years prior to the January 6th insurrection to have had impacted how people see the role of the government and/or what the government is able to accomplish. For example, in 2016 in his book, *Teaching Social Studies in an Era of Divisiveness: The Challenges of Discussing Social Issues in a Non-Partisan Way*, Wayne Journell discussed the importance of understanding political polarization and the impact it had on how society views our two main political parties and ideologies. With these topics feeling insignificant compared to recent events and issues today, those chapters felt out of place.

The purpose of this collection is to help get educators to think about new ways to teach social studies in meaningful ways to their students, specifically to "help provide young people with the knowledge, skills, resources, and dispositions to live in an increasingly diverse and democratic society" (Journell, 2022, p. 252). The content presented provides a strong guide in helping educators at all stages in their careers to think about their teaching practice and how the social studies curriculum is currently impacting their students. The implications of this collection are for students of all ages to think more critically about the world around them and to challenge teachers to tackle difficult topics in their classrooms to help their students to be active citizens in society. *Post-Pandemic Social Studies: How COVID-19 Has Changed the World and How We Teach* overall serves as a tool for all social studies educators to reflect and build upon their current practice, improve curriculum and to approach critical topics in engaging ways with their students.

Declaration of competing interest

I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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