

# Chapter 8

## Social Studies Education From the Socialisation, Qualification, and Subjectification Perspectives: A Proposed Synthesis

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In most countries, social studies education is the assigned subject responsible for citizenship education, that is, developing students' attitudes, experiences, knowledge, abilities, and the skills that they need to be active participants in a democratic society. The role of social studies can be defined using Gert Biesta's three concepts of the domains of education: socialisation, qualification, and subjectification. First, schools have a role in socialising students into society, passing on values and knowledge. Second, the school system should contribute to students' qualification as citizens by helping them enhance their civic and critical literacy. Third, education should equip students with the necessary skills to allow them to develop their own political identity. Each of these domains gives rise to challenging questions related to educational outcomes. This chapter theoretically examines how Biesta's educational domains relate to social studies education in a synthetic understanding.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The benchmark of democratic schools is the assumption of a dual responsibility in developing young peoples' knowledge and abilities and to instil shared values of democracy among students (Gutmann & Ben-Porath, 2015). In this chapter, this responsibility is referred to as *citizenship education*. Citizenship education involves attitudes, experiences, knowledge, abilities and skills that students need in order to be active participants in a democratic society (Campbell, 2012, p. 1). Historically and presently, the most salient subject in schools that aims to foster citizenship education in western liberal democracies is social studies – a school subject comprised of different disciplines such as history and various social sciences. It mainly explores human activity in past and present societies, and aims to equip students with the necessary skills to inquire social issues and consider the role of values in these issues (Barton, 2011). The development of students' subject matter knowledge and its connection to citizenship education is often implicitly formulated in curricula and teachers seem to struggle in connecting the two (Sandahl, 2013; 2015).

Additionally, research suggests that the choice of school seems to matter less than other factors in developing the preferred attitudes, experiences, knowledge, abilities and skills that students need as citizens. Several studies have also come to the same conclusion – schools' impact is small compared to other variables such as socio-economic factors (Torney-Purta, 2002; Ekman & Zetterberg, 2011; Manning & Edwards, 2014). However, there is a common denominator in most of these studies, which is a pre-set idea regarding what a democratic citizen is, including values, virtues, knowledge and skills, where students' statements and ideas are fit into theoretical understandings of democracy (Biesta 2006, p.124; cf. Olson 2012). Although many lessons can be learnt from these studies of adolescents' democratic thoughts and behaviours, it also important to underscore the fact that teaching and learning in school might be more complex and that the outcomes might not always be easy to fit into fixed surveys. Furthermore, this study contends that it could, so I would argue, be appropriate for researchers in political sociology to not only study the outcomes of schools, but also take up the challenge of contributing in developing a better citizenship education that fosters active and critical citizens – democracy is not a spectator sport.

Consequently, it is crucial to define what a good citizenship education in social studies entails. In order to explore the complex reality of teaching and the challenges that social studies teachers face, the educational domains of Biesta (2006; 2010; 2012) – *socialisation*, *qualification* and *subjectification* – are used to reason about aspects of the function of social studies education in relation to citizenship education and thereby offer a synthesis of different line of debates in the social studies education discussion. By doing so, the chapter argues that the combination of these

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