

Chapter 7

TPACK Vernaculars in Social Studies Research

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ABSTRACT

To address the myriad effects that emerge from using technology in social studies, we introduce in this chapter the concept of vernaculars to represent local conditions and tendencies, which arise from using technology in social studies. The chapter includes three examples of TPACK vernaculars in social studies. The first explores a theoretical TPACK vernacular where Web 2.0 technologies support social studies and democratic life. The second example is focused on a three-part heuristic for seeking information about digital historical resources from the Library of Congress. Example three presents personalized vernacular TPACK developed by teachers planning to use an online gaming website called Whyville. Research and theorizing on vernacular forms of TPACK in social studies can aid teachers as they reflect on their own experiences teaching with technology.

INTRODUCTION

The unique democratic purposes of social studies demand forms of research that are focused and long-range in view. This condition is particularly important in research on technology and social studies, where the connections between content and technology are complex. While technology

offers much in terms of access to information and new tools to learn using this information, technology can divide people based on socio-economic status and, in some educational settings, may distract from democratic and authentic learning.

In view of social studies' central purpose as a set of courses designed to prepare young people for participation in democratic life, the usefulness of technology is much debated (Berson, Lee, & Stuckart, 2001). Some proponents argue that

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technology can support democratic purposes by addressing social problems, facilitating the political processes, and enabling access to information (O'Brien, 2008). At the same time, technology can distract from some of the humanistic and interpersonal aims of social studies, such as face-to-face dialogue and equal access to information (Tally, 2007).

Technological pedagogical content knowledge (originally TPACK, now known as TPACK, or technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge) is a helpful context for exploring the various contradictions and complexities related to how teachers use technology in their planning and teaching. Within the TPACK framework is a mechanism for articulating the decision-making processes that teachers engage in when determining how to use technology. TPACK is a complex and situated process that occurs within very local and particular contexts. In their seminal work on the TPACK conceptual framework, Mishra and Koehler (2006) argued that the complexity of TPACK emerges out of multiple contexts including the rapid rate of change in technology, the inappropriate design of software, and the situated nature of learning. Consequently, Mishra and Koehler (2006) suggested that, "quality teaching requires developing a nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between technology, content, and pedagogy, and using this understanding to develop appropriate, context-specific strategies and representations" (p. 1029). In addition to being complex, TPACK is particularistic. Mishra and Koehler (2006) have gone so far as to argue that there is "no single technological solution that applies for every teacher, every course, or every view of teaching" (p. 1029). Perhaps what is most difficult about operationalizing TPACK is that it attempts to capture the internal dialogue of the teacher. TPACK is a fluid form of teacher knowledge that is continually growing and changing based on new experiences. What works in one classroom, may not work in another.

To address the myriad effects that emerge from using technology in social studies, we introduce in this chapter the concept of vernaculars to represent local conditions and tendencies, which arise from using technology in social studies. We further explore specific TPACK vernaculars as they take form in planning and teaching social studies. In the next sections, we discuss the unique purposes of social studies and ways that TPACK vernaculars may emerge using examples from three situated research contexts. The first of these contexts is a theoretical consideration for how Web 2.0 technologies might support social studies aimed at democratic life. Two case studies are also presented as additional research contexts that attempt to unpack local conditions that emerge when pre-service social studies teachers plan to use technology in social studies.

Conceptual Framework

The Purposes of the Social Studies

Social studies includes content and disciplines that are incomplete, contradictory and changing. Social studies has no standing as an academic discipline, and instead relies on disciplines such as economics, geography, history, and political science for content and structure. As Cherryholmes (2006) has noted "one important consequence for social studies educators is that there is no one or set of undisputed, authoritative stories or theories or concepts or facts for social studies educators to adhere to and teach" (p. 6). Consequentially, social studies content instruction is often unique and hard to standardize as seen in the many failed or under-realized efforts to establish national standards for the field. Thornton (2005) argued that social studies content is particularly unique because it seeks to meet John Dewey's standard of relevance for life. As such, social studies is characterized by complex, overlapping disciplinary frames and rapidly evolving definitions and approaches to the field. Unlike other school

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