



# **SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION AS A PROBLEM-SOLVING DISCIPLINE AND THE LGBT DISCOURSE: THE NEED TO ADD ‘OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY’ IN SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM.**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Currently, there is intense pressure to reform social studies education to address the changing social, political, economic, and technological demands of contemporary society. Evans (2004) believes that ‘the start of the third millennium, it is not enough to simply prepare ourselves to function effectively with discoveries, remarkable inventions, and utopian visions’ (pp:8). Instead, we need to reflect on how the future will affect the quality of our lives, the kind of citizens we would like to have in the future, and how we will live and work in our future (Marker, 2006).

## **SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE GLOBAL SOCIETY .**

However, social studies educators are in danger of reproducing the curriculum of a hundred years ago; adopting and accepting an unyielding history-based and corporate-influenced curriculum that renders it resistant to change in an information age. Ross and Marker (2005) *argue that rather than a singular or narrow perspective on teaching social studies, a pluralism of views on the nature and purposes of social studies education is beneficial.*

Worldwide social studies curricular *reforms effort have brought to the fore the primary tensions in the field of social studies education:*

- *the relative emphasis on the cultural heritage of the dominant society versus the development of critical thought; and*
  - *conflicting conceptions of citizenship- citizenship for social reproduction or social reconstruction.*
- Social studies educators' differences can be described along a continuum with polar purposes of "indoctrination" and "critical thought" (Ross, 2006). This debate and its incumbent tensions indicate the need for social studies educators to begin a serious conversation that can help the field chart a deliberative, divergent, and flexible course for its curriculum. The history-centered social studies curriculum, created in 1916 for a factory model of teaching and learning, is no longer adequate to address the challenges of our twenty-first-century society. It is not an oversimplification to say that history, by itself and for its own sake, is not enough to make good citizens of our students (Sunburst, 2004). As did our social studies colleagues from the early twentieth century, who created a curriculum that has spanned the twentieth century, we also need to begin to think about the kind of society that the future may hold for us, and the kinds of citizens we want to participate in that future. Currently, the world is occupied by two generations, these are, the baby boom era and the millennials' era ((Marker, 2006). The baby boom era –spanned from people born within the era of television age whilst the Millennials are influenced by media*

and the Internet. Unlike television, which is a passive, homogeneous medium, the Internet is driven by the millions of people who, in an instant, can have their thoughts, interests, hopes, and fears broadcast. Longstreet and Shane (2006) identified the unprecedented resources that are generating huge amounts of information about the state of the planet and its people. This demands a social studies curriculum that provides for the sharing and processing of accurate information to help the millennials—and those that follow them—gain a sense of important patterns, divergent points of view, and future trends. The social studies curriculum that we currently have appears to lose focus on the future—is in peril of being deemed irrelevant to the millennials and the generations of students that will follow them into our future( Marrs,2017). A primary way educators can expand their spatial and temporal frameworks that can inform curricular planning is to consider scenarios of possible futures (Evans, 2004)). Longstreet and Shane (2006) argue that considering the future can serve as the basis for “acquiring a set of tools important to the development of educated foresight and thus, to the competence of curriculum workers in the twenty-first century” (p. 166). Using this futurist perspective, imagine looking back from the middle of the third millennium. In the year 2056, these are some of the developments that will be part of contemporary life (Longstreet and Shane 1971):

***Concerning Education, the following are anticipated –***

- Multidisciplinary and nonlinear thinking approaches will be commonplace in most educational curricula;
- That, a transition will be made from a mostly illiterate world to a mostly literate world;
- Interactive, virtual learning rooms will be adapted to whatever is being learned will replace the classroom—virtual trips can be taken to any part of the planet and the communities in space;
- The term *teacher* will be eliminated from the lexicon; learning. Specialists will work with students on planning and reviewing work;

- Virtual learning rooms, cyber networks, will allow students to view and question scientists and other professionals as they do their daily work;
- Students will have individual, lifetime Web sites that provide information, feedback, and updates regarding their learning styles and guides students to resources that fit their specific learning needs and interests.

These are the possible future that the world may go concerning education which social studies curriculum will be bound to unearth, explore and study so that possible solutions can be proffered.

Lifestyle is another area that can impact social studies education and its curricular development. The following are discourses that may prevail in the not too distant future:

- Shopping will be augmented by personal databases that can help persons determine and design personal wardrobes (e.g., as you browse your shopping database, you get a message that announces “that jacket won’t match the slacks you bought last month”);
- Electronic sensors in clothing can transmit mood, smell, taste, anxiety via cyberspace;
- Artificial intelligence (AI) systems using neural networks augment human intelligence and improve human decision making;
- The computer keyboard is a relic in the Smithsonian Museum.

Critically analyzing these possibilities (education and lifestyle) from a sociological perspective, one may be tempted to conclude that some of these characteristics are already manifesting themselves in 2021. The information above makes it imperative for social studies educators to start thinking about possible areas we have excluded, not explored, ignored, and forgotten within the curriculum for a very long time. Out in the classroom and beyond, social studies educators must start addressing and researching the future of the world in which we live concerning social issues that keep becoming complicated and deviant to our long-held values put a lot of responsibilities on the practitioners of the subject to stay relevant. This view is in sync with Quartey (1984) that social studies offer a tool for solving societal problems.

Today’s students live in a world where issues of sexual orientation and gender identity are headlines from pages on both print and non-print media and prime-time realities. Listening to politicians' pontificate on

gay marriage, today's students know lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). *As one conservative educator recently put it, "The love that once dared not speak its name now can't shut up." The fact is, there is a complete disconnect between the "real world" for which social studies classes prepare students and the curriculum of those classes, at least when it comes to LGBT issues (Jenning,2006).* This may be possible because of our understanding of social studies education from the relative emphasis on the cultural heritage of the dominant society and citizenship for social reproduction perspective. Because, the earlier 'scholars' of social studies believe in cultural heritage and its transmission, anything that is contrary to what they already know and believe is ignored and branded 'others', cruel, satanic, and unfit for purpose. A typical example of a discourse narrative that has suffered and been ignored for a very long time is LGBT education (Jennings, 2006). Caught between two evils, this side of the 'other' can be redeemed by social studies scholars who pursue the discipline from the 'development of critical thought or social reconstruction' perspective (Ross, 2016:9). Through a cursory look at Ghana's educational system's curriculum from primary to tertiary level, little mention is made to this narrative. . A 2002 study by Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that the most popular social studies textbooks in America and another part of the world are almost completely devoid of LGBT-related content. A content analysis of the most widely used social studies textbooks found that only a few directly address gay and lesbian issues with photographic representations of gay and lesbian themes (Marker,2006). The researcher sampled renowned social studies textbooks and curriculum in Ghana's educational system, which appears to confirm the observations made by Ross(2016). In the same vein "Gays and Lesbians" or "Gay and Lesbian Rights" in the index or table of contents that they explored, none of the textbooks addressed bisexual or transgender topics, overall, there was less than one page of text (0.9 of a page, to be exact) that directly addressed LGBT issues of 12,530 total pages of text read from both developing and developed worlds (Hirschfield, 2002). The effect of this "erasure" is negative. For those who think "we don't have any gay students in our school," keep in mind that, in a 2004 poll of high school students, 5% self-identified as gay (Widmeyer, 2004). Similar research was conducted in the year 2001 by National School Climate Survey, it became evident, 27% reported that they felt gay (Kosciw &Cullen, 2002).In January 2016, a mob of students at Opoku

Ware Senior High School in Kumasi attempted to lynch three male students who were accused of having "engaged in homosexuality." The attackers, who were prevented from attacking by some of the teachers at the school, had been armed with clubs, machetes, and stones. This and many other reasons compel us to strongly recommend that LGBT education should be considered as part of Ghana's Social Studies Curriculum. This is because though it is not currently taught in any of our educational systems explicitly, but in real practice, it is staring us at our faces in all our social institutions. The church, school, organizations, family, and the communities are interacting with them without knowing. They catch our innocent children and prey on them; they are forming groups on campuses and in the societies in which we live. Pretending LGBT is far away from us is an illusion. The following literature will confirm the claim that we better start researching and arming ourselves with this social discourse as social studies practitioners.

*Social studies education in Ghana has an underpinning philosophy of solving social problems: the case of LGBT and fundamental human rights.*

Myjoyonline(3<sup>rd</sup> October 2021) reported some civil society organizations (CSOs) and prominent Ghanaian Lawyers drawing the citizenry's attention to the need to discuss LGBT in Ghana. However, the following incidents have been reported in the Ghanaian media. In May 2012, a group of schoolboys from the Volta Region assaulted an educator from an NGO who was on his way to teach a workshop on sexual health (Ghanaweb May 07, 2012). He was carrying educational materials about safe sex, such as condoms and pamphlets, when he was attacked. Moreover, daily graphic (2011) reported that 34 female students were expelled from Wesley Girls Senior High School in Kumasi for "engaging in lesbianism. News reports, for example, October 2014 article 'I Was Introduced into Gayism by My Class Teacher', published by an online news publication News Ghana, warns of "an underworld of child recruitment into homosexuality," in which homosexuals "are constantly on the prowl for somewhat unsuspecting minors that they can lure astray." According to the author, "Our children in secondary schools and everywhere are massively exposed," necessitating "a deliberate massive response. Uproar ensued when, in July 2012, Ghana's

Constitution Review Commission recommended that Ghana's Supreme Court decision on "whether the country should legalize same-sex acts. "Over 98% of the submissions received by the commission were against LGBT rights." Tribal leaders, government officials, and even members of the Commission openly criticized the suggestion calling homosexuality "un-African" and "morally repugnant." In February 2013, former President of Ghana, John Dramani Mahama, also distanced himself from LGBT rights activists, saying, "Homosexual conduct which is the unnatural carnal knowledge of one person or another is criminal and punishable by the laws of Ghana." On July 18, 2015, in Takoradi, the Muslim Chief Imam of Takoradi, Alhaji Mohammed Awal, publicly condemned homosexuality "as dirty and abominable." At the opening prayers of Eidul-Fitr at the end of Ramadan, he encouraged his Muslim followers to shun the "devilish acts" of homosexuality. The irony of these public utterances and public fury is that Ghana as a country has signed on to International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ("Covenant"). This convention compels the government of Ghana to protect the right of the minority groups who constantly have their rights abused. The Center for International Human Rights of Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, and the Global Initiatives for Human Rights of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights, in anticipation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ("Covenant") Committee's consideration at its 117th Session of the Republic of Ghana's compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ("Covenant"). The purpose of their report was to direct the Committee's attention to serious and ongoing violations of the Covenant rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender ("LGBT") individuals by the Republic of Ghana (117th Session of the Human Rights Committee Geneva, June-July 2016, PP 2). Their report focused on the following violations: • Criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct and the resulting arbitrary arrests and detentions, in violation of Articles 2(1), 9, 17, and 26 of the Covenant; • Violent attacks motivated by the victim's real or perceived sexual orientation and a pervasive climate of homophobia, in violation of Articles 2(1), 7, 9, 17, and 26 of the Covenant; and • Discrimination in education based upon the victim's real or perceived sexual orientation, in violation of Articles 2(1) and 26 of the Covenant. The report continued that one positive development that they noted was the establishment in 2013 of a "Discrimination Reporting System" by Ghana's Commission on Human Rights &

Administrative Justice (“CHRAJ”). This mechanism is charged with receiving complaints, investigating them, and attempting to resolve them. According to the Complaint Form, “[a]ny person who believes he/she has experienced discrimination based on HIV status, gender identity or sexual orientation may report an incident through the CHRAJ stigma and discrimination reporting portal.” 4 Complaints were filed online, by text message, or in person at the CHRAJ offices (117th Session of the Human Rights Committee Geneva, June-July 2016).

Fast track 2021, the same music is being played and Ghanaians are dancing to the same tune in a dangling mode. This appears to be based on the stands of the individual contributing to the discussion. The clergy appears wideout with their mouth ready to catch anyone who goes against their view as to how it must be controlled. The practitioners of LGBT and their surrogates who find themselves at the far end of the equation are fighting boot to boot in eagerness to catch any ball that will be thrown to them individually or collectively. Traditional authorities who are advocates of cultural preservation and continuity of refined and culturally acceptable behaviours are also giving their stand as to how to contain LGBT. The voice of social studies educators appears missing in this discourse. The deafening silence of social studies practitioners is resurrected by this concept paper. The researchers are of the view that the social studies curriculum must give attention to this sidelined content. If practitioners of social studies have an overall objective of solving individual and societal problems, then this challenge of LGBT has equally become a social problem that we must tackle with our weapon of social studies. Interestingly, what will be the atmosphere of a social studies classroom when a student openly walks to the teacher and tells him 'Sir I am gay. We must wake up from our slumber and do the needful. When care is not taken this social canker gets out of hands, social studies practitioners would have been judged to have failed this litmus test of being problem solvers.

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