

Transformative disciplinary learning in history and social studies: Lessons from a high autonomy curriculum in New Zealand

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Abstract

The challenges of naming a bounded disciplinary body of knowledge for the social sciences has made it difficult to define and clearly articulate ‘what counts’ for disciplinary learning in school curricula. The shift to ‘new’ generic skills with an associated autonomy of curriculum content choice and learner-centred approaches has introduced further challenges for the social sciences. In this paper we consider what transformative disciplinary learning might look like for two core social science subjects in New Zealand – history and social studies. We begin by outlining what we mean by transformative disciplinary learning in history and social studies. Drawing on two in-depth classroom-based studies, we then examine the strategies, practices and processes that supported or undermined transformative disciplinary learning in history and social studies. In the absence of prescribed content, both subjects relied strongly on procedural approaches (historical and social inquiry processes) which helped to sustain some coherency and disciplinary learning. However, poor topic choice meant that students often missed out on in-depth knowledge and/or opportunities for effective and transformative citizenship engagement. We conclude by highlighting the importance of content selection if students are to widen their horizons and experience transformative disciplinary learning in history and social studies.

Keywords: curriculum studies, history education, social studies education, disciplinary knowledge, citizenship education

Introduction

In the past decade, it has become clear that “curricular debate is alive and well” (Priestley & Philippou, 2019, p. 347) especially regarding the relative importance of disciplinary knowledge in school curriculum (Adolfsson, 2018; Biesta, 2014; Maton, 2009; Priestley & Sinnema, 2014; Young 2008, 2013;). As these debates have continued, often in the pages of this journal, it has become clear that not only does the state of knowledge matter in curriculum design, but also that the structure of knowledge between disciplines differs widely (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Bernstein, 2000), and that this has important implications for teaching, assessment and learning (Alvunger, 2018; Smith, 2019; Yates & Millar, 2016; Yates, Woelert, Millar, & O'Connor, 2017). In this paper we turn our gaze to the school-based curriculum in the social sciences with a particular focus on history and social studies, and ask the question, what does it take to teach these with a commitment to disciplinary learning? This question takes on a new sense of urgency given the recent uptake of ‘new’ competency-based curricula which favour skills, competencies and procedural learning over content and knowledge (Biesta, 2014; Priestley & Sinnema, 2014) alongside growing pressure placed upon traditional disciplines to adapt to the ‘21st century’ needs and modes of learning (Yates, et. al., 2017) with associated higher levels of curricular autonomy and learner-centred ideologies (Sinnema, 2015).

Our paper contributes to these debates in two ways. First, recognising the difficulties in framing social science disciplines due to their ‘weak grammar’ (Bernstein, 2000) and absence of a clearly defined body of knowledge (Alvunger, 2018; Powell, 2018), we outline a framework for disciplinary learning using history and social studies as examples. We propose that disciplinary learning in history and social studies does not merely include the *transmission* of ideas and knowledge, but also a *transformative* component that involves a deep commitment to a more just, equal, and inclusive society and learning that enables students to critique the dominant social order and to participate as critical citizens (Dewey, 1916/1963; Stanley, 2009). Second, by examining curriculum implementation in the context of a high autonomy, competency-based curriculum such as that of New Zealand since the launch of the *New Zealand Curriculum* [NZC] in 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2007), we consider the strategies, practices and processes that might support (or undermine) the type of disciplinary learning we advocate for. Our goal is to contribute to broader discussions about the

contested nature and framing of the social sciences disciplines, and provide evidence to support teachers with strategies to deepen disciplinary learning in the social sciences.

The paper begins with a brief introduction to the curriculum context of New Zealand followed by an examination of the origins and the nature of transformative disciplinary knowledge for the two curriculum areas of history and social studies. We outline our position on transformative disciplinary learning, drawing on theories of Dewey and critical citizenship education scholars. We explain how our paper is a re-analysis of two empirical classroom-based studies which examined the implementation of history and social studies in New Zealand since 2007, with our particular focus on the strategies and approaches to build procedural and substantive knowledge in history and social studies. Our analysis draws attention some of the strengths of student interest and engagement in historical and social inquiry, but also the need for a concerted focus on the type of disciplinary knowledge that enabled in-depth and transformative citizenship opportunities in the context of a high autonomy curriculum.

The New Zealand context

New Zealand's educational system has been described as "an early reformer, a forerunner, an education 'experimenter' and a key player in the global education market" (Dobbins, 2010, p. 153). Beginning in 1989, with what was known as the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms, schools became self-managing and autonomous entities; an initiative marked by community responsibility, parental choice and a withdrawal of state involvement in school governance, curriculum resourcing and professional development (Codd, 2005; Openshaw, 2009; Roberts, 2009). These ideas in turn shaped the 2007 NZC, which was also influenced strongly by the OECD's *Knowledge-based Economy Report* (OECD, 1996), and the subsequent *DeSecCo Report* (OECD, 2005) (for an overview Wood & Sheehan, 2012). The NZC mandated little curriculum content: it merely sets "the direction for student learning" (Ministry of Education, 2007 p. 6), supported by broad conceptual achievement objectives for each curriculum area and an overall 'vision' for learning. This curriculum employs a "generic, skill-based approach; a greater emphasis on the centrality of the learner; and [ostensibly] greater autonomy for teachers in developing the curriculum in school" (Priestley & Sinnema, 2014, p. 50), thus leaving decisions about content in the hands of teachers.

While popular for the freedom it offers, this high autonomy curriculum has not met with universal approval. In recent times, a number of researchers in New Zealand have warned that this approach is 'downgrading' or 'dislodging' knowledge (McPhail & Rata, 2016; Priestley & Sinnema, 2014; Roberts, 2009; Sinnema, 2015; Sinnema & Aitken, 2013; Wood & Sheehan, 2012). This tendency to overlook disciplinary knowledge has been compounded in the senior secondary school (Year 11-13, ages 15-18) by the National Certificate of Education (NCEA) assessment system which employs a 'parity of esteem' model, awarding similar achievement credits for all curriculum areas which are broken down into small portions that can be assessed (Hipkins, Johnston, & Sheehan, 2016). Teachers are given broad conceptual ideas to focus on but minimal guidance on content choice which has led to critiques about fragmentation and lack of curriculum cohesion between (and even within) schools, in terms of subject content and knowledge (Hipkins et al., 2016; Wilson, Madjar, & McNaughton, 2016).

This approach is followed by New Zealand history and social studies subjects which have no prescribed content knowledge, and instead, teachers select topics to study guided by broad conceptual achievement objectives and procedural approaches (Harcourt, Milligan, & Wood, 2016; Harcourt & Sheehan, 2012; Priestley & Sinnema, 2014). Social studies is a foundational social science course for all students in New Zealand from Years 1-10. At Years 11-13, students elect to study from a wide range of social science courses including history, geography, economics and also senior social studies for the NCEA. Both history and social studies focus their substantive learning around key concepts and procedural learning through social and historical inquiry processes.

History education in New Zealand has been influenced by the framework for historical thinking derived in Canada (Seixas 2012; 2017). The Canadian approach had much to say to teaching and learning history in New Zealand as both countries grapple with the challenge of incorporating indigenous notions of the past with historical thinking concepts such as significance; evidence; continuity and change; cause and consequence; perspectives and the ethical dimension of historical interpretations which help students to understand how the discipline of history operates (Davison, Enright, & Sheehan, 2014; Harcourt & Sheehan, 2012; Seixas, 1993, 1994; Seixas & Morton, 2013). The adoption of this historical thinking approach has helped to strengthen cohesion and

consolidate pedagogy in history education in New Zealand (Davison et al., 2014), but debates about *what* is taught; in particular, the extent to which the controversial aspects of New Zealand's colonial past should feature in history programmes, have emerged in recent years. The openness of content choice and associated focus on learner-centred pedagogies has also raised concerns as teachers often rely on student interest to guide content choice, often resulting in eclectic or weak historical knowledge (Ormond, 2017). These debates reached a head in late 2019 (after the research in this paper was conducted), when the government made the aspirational commitment that New Zealand history will be compulsory by 2022 (New Zealand Government, 2019).

New Zealand social studies also has a strong focus on concepts (such as, culture, identity human right and participation) and a democratic citizenship and inquiry-approach focus (Abbiss, 2016; Barr, 1998). Broadly, social studies, as understood in New Zealand, has two goals: 'understanding the world, and helping students to become informed, confident and responsible citizens of that world' (Barr, 1998, p. 109). The tradition of social inquiry is strongly embedded in current curriculum documents and provides a distinctive approach for the social sciences (Harcourt, Milligan & Wood, 2016). Curriculum documents describe social inquiry as an integrated approach to the study of human society that involves finding out information about social issues/society, exploring values and perspectives, considering social decisions and action and the development of students' own reflective research skills (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Our interest in examining both these subjects in this paper stems from an awareness that they share similar epistemic, substantive and procedural approaches that seek to equip students with disciplinary knowledge and a transformative citizenship education. We recognise that differences and tensions sit between social studies and history (Barton, 2017; Brant, Chapman, & Isaacs, 2016; Sears, 2011). However, in this paper we were interested to explore the experiences of curriculum implementation for both subjects within New Zealand's open and high autonomy curriculum, recognising the similarities and differences in their disciplinary structures.

Disciplinary structures of knowledge and the social sciences

Disciplines define particular frameworks that categorise the acquisition and dissemination of academic knowledge and tend to reflect traditions of inquiry found within the organisational structure of universities (Abbott, 2001). Theoretically, we position our approach upon a notion of disciplinary structures of knowledge as articulated by Bernstein (1999; 2001) and advanced in more recent years by Young (2008, 2013) and others (e.g. Biesta, 2014; Deng, 2018; Parker, Valencia & Lo, 2017). Disciplinary knowledge provides a framework of specialised knowledge that is shaped by distinctive methods of inquiry, methodological approaches, theoretical perspectives and core concepts (Young, 2008, 2013). It is the type of knowledge which is “adaptive, flexible and transferable” (Parker et al., 2017, p. 4), open to critique, and provides the learner with the capacity to move beyond what they already know and their everyday experience (Maton, 2009; Young & Lambert, 2014; Young & Muller, 2010).

Drawing boundaries between the nature of different disciplines is a challenging yet important task and most typologies distinguish broadly between the ‘hard’ physical and natural sciences on one hand and the ‘soft’ humanities and social sciences on the other (e.g. Becher & Trowler, 2001). Bernstein (1999) explains this through his theorisation of the structures of knowledge and a distinction between ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ knowledge. He proposes that the ‘vertical’ natural and physical sciences are founded on a ‘strong’ grammar (set of logic, rules principles) with a “coherent, explicit and systematically principled structure” (Bernstein, 1999, p. 161). In contrast, the ‘horizontal’ humanities and social sciences have a comparatively ‘weak’ grammar as their structure consists of an “array of languages” and weak disciplinary boundaries (pg, 164). While the ‘hard’ physical and natural sciences are structured and paradigmatic disciplines and hold clear criteria for verification and consensus, the humanities and social sciences hold holistic and reiterative knowledge that does not typically draw on a single agreed body of theory or a prescribed set of validity measures (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Yates et al., 2017). The ‘weaknesses’ of subject grammar and the ‘soft’ nature of the social sciences’ disciplinary culture therefore makes it particularly difficult to define and clearly articulate ‘what counts’ in terms of knowledge.

These differences between the structures of knowledge also have a profound impact on the reconceptualization of the social sciences subjects into school subjects.

While disciplinary research is primarily interested in the production or acquisition of knowledge, school subjects have a broader purpose in that they also serve societal, cultural and individual expectations and are shaped by pedagogical and assessment imperatives (Nordgren 2017). However, differences in the structure of knowledge between school subjects have frequently been ignored when developing curricula, learning, and assessment with many countries opting for generic and uniform approaches across all subjects. In the social sciences this has often led to poor assessment practices and the weakening of student learning through absorption of social sciences into other curriculum areas – such as through curriculum integration – resulting in the loss of specialist social science knowledge and understandings (Yates et al., 2017) and minimising the potential for transformative disciplinary learning.

Transformative disciplinary learning in history and social studies

In this section we present a brief overview of the disciplinary structures of knowledge which underpin both history and social studies. We acknowledge the constraints of time and space to do this with sufficient depth in this paper as our brief analysis underplays the contested nature of claims (Barton, 2017).¹ Our position is that these two subjects – and indeed, the wider social sciences – require transformative and not just transmissive learning which we see as an integral part of a students' exposure to these disciplines.

History: Becher and Trowler (2001) characterise history as a soft-pure discipline, meaning it does not have a high degree of theoretical consensus and nor is it concerned with practical application. Instead, it is holistic, reiterative, concerned with particulars, characterised by a focus on a wide range of historical questions and diverse methodologies (Curthoys & Docker, 2006; Gaddis, 2002), with its purpose to produce understandings and/or interpretations (Becher & Trowler, 2001). While differences exist between how schools and academics understand the discipline of history (Yates et al., 2017), broadly students develop disciplinary history knowledge when they learn to master the intellectual tools that historians use when they produce and critique knowledge. Developing these skills in schools primarily relies on the acquisition of two interrelated forms of historical knowledge – substantive and procedural knowledge

¹ It is worth noting also that while we recognise this common purpose and structure, we have no intention of integrating history and social studies together (cf. Barton, 2017).

(Seixas, 1994; Wineburg, 2001; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Lee & Shemilt, 2004; VanSledright, Kelly, & Meuwissen, 2008).

However, learning about history through an evidence-based approach is not enough in itself. Developing the dispositions to think critically about the past are counter-intuitive and have been described as an ‘unnatural act’ (Wineburg, 2001). They can seldom be acquired from everyday experiences (Young & Lambert, 2014) and equip young people to not only engage in deep understandings about difficult aspects of the past, but also to make evidence-based judgements about the validity of particular historical narratives and competing claims of historical truth. A *transformative* history education therefore involves the ability to think critically about a contested notion of the past, to understand multiple perspectives on historical events, and to recognise how these understandings give clearer insight into events today (Barton, 2017; Sheehan 2016, 2017). Transformative history teaching also involves “a critical understanding of the conflictual past through the cultivation of historical thinking, empathy, an overcoming of ethnocentric narratives and the promotion of multiperspectivity” (Psaltis, Carretero, & Cehajic-Clancy, 2017, p. vi).

Social studies: Emerging out of the work of progressive educators such as John Dewey, social studies was first mooted as a curriculum subject in the United States around the turn of the twentieth century (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1978). Early advocates argued that while history could educate about the past, social studies was needed to educate democratic citizens to live in their present world (Smith, Palmer, & Correia, 1995). Yet even with this clear sense of purpose for citizenship education, social studies has evolved broadly into three dominant traditions (Barr et al., 1978): (i) *citizenship transmission*, highlights the role social studies plays to pass on an accepted body of knowledge and a nations’ traditions and belief (ii) *social studies as a social science*, emphasizes social studies as an integrated introductory subject of the social sciences; and (iii) *reflective inquiry*, focuses on skills for reflective and critical decision-making about social issues.

The ambiguities of definition that have dogged social studies historically still make it difficult to frame it as a discipline and as a distinct school subject (Powell, 2018). Powell suggests that it has been difficult to pin down social studies’ pedagogical content knowledge as the knowledge base of social studies lacks firm criteria as “social

studies is by its very nature an interdisciplinary subject” (p. 253). The primary approach jurisdictions have used to cope with this potentially unending content base has been to develop understandings through a conceptual lens and to explore multiple perspectives on these ideas through procedural social inquiry approaches rather than accumulating vast quantities of facts (Aitken & Sinnema, 2008; Taba, Durkin, & Fraenkel, 1971). Alongside this ‘knowing’ dimension of critical procedural and substantive knowledge, the citizenship commitments of social studies also require a ‘doing’ dimension, with the aim of creating “citizens who are both democratically enlightened and democratically engaged” (Parker, 2008, p. 76). The *transformative* aspects of disciplinary learning in social studies therefore involve a commitment to a critical and multi-perspectivity understandings of social issues, alongside active civic engagement strategies that seek to transform oppression and create a more just and sustainable society (Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Wood, Taylor, Aitken & Johnston, 2018).

As this very brief overview of history and social studies shows, while there are significant differences in how they are framed and approached, they also share some things in common, including a commitment to conceptual approaches to learning, engaging with multiple perspectives and a focus on human agency (Barton, 2017; Powell, 2020; Sears, 2011). A central tension across both subjects is whether social studies and history should play a ‘transmissive’ role in recreating the dominant social order, or a socially ‘transformative’ role that seeks to address social problems and enrich democracy (Stanley, 2009; Engle & Ochoa, 1988; Parker, 2008). For both subjects, transformative learning involves a *critical* approach to knowledge building which centres on the development of conceptual understandings about society (past, present and future) through robust procedural social science methodologies (such as historical and social inquiry processes) in order to collect and evaluate evidence that provides a rigorous understanding of human society. In addition, students of both history and social studies need the ability to develop critical and contested understandings of events and social issues, including knowledge of multiple perspectives.

A further key commitment that transformative learning in history and social studies requires, is the capacity (knowledge, skills and dispositions) to act as citizens upon these understandings. Education for democratic citizens requires students to

engage in 'real world' or authentic contexts for learning, thus providing potential for transforming students' dispositions (including, affective aspects such as empathy, justice and rights) as well as encouraging meaningful and community-inspired responses as democratic citizens (Dewey, 1916/1963, 1947; Engle & Ochoa, 1988). For both history and social studies this involves critically examining topics that can serve to develop the skills of democratic citizens to be able to deal with complex social issues with a commitment to social justice, and collective living with others, and to develop "the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder" (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 99). As Parker (2008, p. 76) states, "engaged citizens who don't know what they are doing is not the goal; nor is the prospect of knowledgeable citizens who are disengaged from the problem of living together". Instead transformative disciplinary cultivates the habits of mind, heart and participation. While space prohibits us from developing this framework further here, we believe the addition of this transformative component to disciplinary knowledge adds a layer of complexity which traditionally has not been included in debates. In the following section we turn to how we examined this within two studies of social studies and history education in New Zealand.

Methodology

The two studies discussed here were independent research projects that took place at a similar time (2013 -2016) and while having a different focus, shared a collective interest in what effective and deep disciplinary learning looked like in the senior secondary curriculum. The studies had employed similar mixed methods approaches to data collection and both were two-year collaborations between university researchers and secondary school teachers. Discussions between the two principal investigators led to the realisation that the two data sets provided an opportunity to explore some common themes about students' experience of disciplinary learning – and that these were worth further comparison and deeper exploration.

The history research focused on how young people developed an understanding of second order or procedural concepts, such as significance, perspective, evidence, cause and consequence, and continuity and change (Lee 2004; Seixas and Morton 2013) as these were identified as key components of disciplinary history learning. This study included a historical thinking questionnaire ($n=152$), documentary analysis of curriculum

and assessment texts, in-class observations and interviews with teachers and history students ($n=98$, ages 16-17) in five schools. In order to explore critical and contested aspects of history, participants were asked questions such as: '*why is this event in the past significant?*' and '*what evidence do we use to explain different interpretations of what happened?*' Analysing responses to these questions and the content choices made by teachers and students provided a lens into the disciplinary learning occurring.

The social studies research had a particular focus on how teachers and students were enacting the social action assessment within NCEA. These assessment standards employed aspects of social inquiry research and required students to research a social issue, develop and undertake a social action campaign to address concerns and then to evaluate and reflect on this. The study included a questionnaire of social studies teachers ($n=124$), classroom observations and interviews with teachers and students ($n=93$, ages 15-18) in five schools. Participants were asked questions such as '*how do you evaluate the 'success' of a social action project?*' and '*how can social action be critical and transformative?*' Examinations of these questions with students focus group interviews and through classroom observations led to some insights in their critical and contested understandings of social studies. Teachers engaged in a number of key readings on critical transformative citizenship and these helped them to reflect in their interviews upon and evaluate their observations of students' transformative disciplinary learning in social studies and the part they might play in this.

The data in this paper involved returning to the original data sets for further analysis to identify themes across both data sets to consider what strategies, practices and processes supported and/or undermined transformative disciplinary learning. Data were compared between the two data sets using a constant comparison analysis (Boeiji, 2002) to "discern conceptual similarities, to refine the discriminate power of categories and to discover patterns" (Tesch, 1990, p. 96). This revealed that the most powerful comparative data was in our classroom and interview data sets so while the quantitative data affirmed these patterns, for this paper we focused on these qualitative data. Our comparison of the experiences of teaching and learning history and social studies identified two key strategies teachers used to deepen critical thinking and disciplinary learning. These centred on procedural strategies associated with historical inquiry (which also derived from historical thinking processes) and social inquiry for

social studies. In addition, we identified a number of strategies for developing substantive and critical forms of knowledge (including historical and conceptual thinking). However, in both subjects, learner-centred approaches and autonomous content choice became two areas that potentially undermined disciplinary and transformative learning which we discuss in greater detail in the following sections.

Transformative history in a high autonomy curriculum

History teachers in the study had adopted wide use of both historical thinking tools and historical inquiry. The New Zealand senior history curriculum places a strong emphasis on learner-centred historical inquiry. These assessment standards are internally assessed and require students to demonstrate an understanding of the research protocols of the discipline of history. Classroom observations and interviews with teachers and students revealed that such approaches introduced students to the element of criticality in the research traditions of history. They provide students with a firm direction in *how* to study and think critically about historical events. Interviews with students following their research assessments revealed that many found this learning helped to develop historical criticality and thinking, as these three students describe below:

I think it is important not to read any historical document and see it as fact, I think you have to read multiple ones ... then people will be able to draw their own conclusions from what has happened in history and you can work out by cross checking everyone's information that is out there as well (17 years)

There are two sides to every story, so then there are different points of view and you can't say one is necessarily better unless you are trying to look at it from their point of view. (17 years)

Well a good thing to do with sources, especially with reliability is comparing them to other things. So, if it is an account of a certain event ... to compare it to another source that also has the same things happening, you can tell whether it's just a perspective or whether someone's just kind of put forward their own point of view (17 years).

Interviews with teachers also revealed that they valued historical inquiry as it provided potential for students not only understand the role of evidence in constructing historical arguments, but also adjudicate between competing claims of historical authenticity, evaluate multiple perspectives on the past and make informed judgements about the

plausibility of historical interpretations. The historical thinking tools featured as a central premise of how they supported students-centred historical inquiries.

However, while such critical learning as above was demonstrated in the classrooms, it was evident that some students were limited by topic and content choices. The more open-ended 2007 curriculum had not led to students learning about a broader range of history, but instead they were exposed to a narrow content base and to topics which were strongly tied to students' immediate interests (confirming Ormond's (2017) similar findings). This was compounded by NCEA assessments where students may be developing an understanding of how to think critically about the past, but the substantive knowledge they studied was broken down into small portions and this had the effect of a narrowing of content offered to students. If they only needed to understand one event for their NCEA history assessments, then students would often be exposed to not much more than this. For example, students observed in the study had look at a particular historical question such as the experience of New Zealand conscientious objectors in World War One in considerable detail for an NCEA assessment, but they had no wider understanding of the wider context of the causes and consequences of the First World War. And while some engaged in substantive topics such as the experience of women and children in World War II, others studied the history of surfing, or hip-hop. This reduced curricular coherency and perspectives-thinking and undermined the integrity of transformative disciplinary history learning.

In addition, while the framework of historical thinking provided a strong approach to develop critical processes to enable deep understanding about the past, it was evident that students had less exposure to the type of history education that could be called transformative. There was evidence, for example, in classroom observations, that many teachers avoided some of the most controversial aspects of history teaching, including avoidance of New Zealand's difficult colonial history despite teachers being expected to ensure their topics were of significance to New Zealanders and that such history has resonances with current issues today. This led to learning that avoided challenging assumptions or addressing unconscious biases, thus reducing the potentially transformative nature of history teaching.

Transformative social studies in a high autonomy curriculum

Teachers and students in the social studies research similarly demonstrated a strong commitment to procedural inquiry-based and learner-centred approaches to social studies learning with a strong focus on citizenship action, in keeping with the 2007 curriculum and NCEA assessment. Teachers framed their approach through social inquiry processes – which included an examination of background information, the values and perspectives of multiple stakeholders and the social decision-making and actions in response. Students, in turn, conducted their own social inquiry research into social issues of their choice and linked these personal social actions (such as writing letters to MPs, talking with members of the public about their topic, undertaking surveys and lobbying for change) as required by the NCEA assessment. This assessment encouraged a highly reflective approach towards the nature of their research and their social actions. Some students showed that their research and reflection helped them to critically evaluate their own actions and knowledge. For example, one group of students reflected that “when we researched more, we realised there were a lot more limitations to what we were doing [...] and maybe we could have done things a lot better than we did”.

However, while the strong procedural approach of social inquiry helped to induct students into social science methods and rigour, the study identified a number of factors which potentially reduced disciplinary social studies learning. In particular, teachers described a tension between guiding students towards more effective topic choices for student-led inquiry and social action as they wanted them to be “passionate about their topic choice” (Teacher interviews). There was a tendency to let the students be driven by their passions, as fears of reining them in were seen to potentially inhibit their enthusiasm. Teachers described how they need to ‘inspire’ students to care about social issues and get them enthused through a range of affective and other strategies. One teacher described how she played a video from an NGO to the students several times “in order to rattle them up a bit” and to keep them enthused in citizenship action and engagement. Students (especially younger ones) responded to this enthusiastically:

Yeah ...the more we learned about [child poverty], the more it was like, ‘Oh my goodness, I really wanted to help, I really want to contribute like to bettering our society and stuff’ and yes it was really fun... because it was kind of like it opens your eyes... (15 years).

These open approaches to promote high engagement and student choice were appreciated by many students as it gave them the ability to “pick what we can write on, we can pick what we do” (17-year-old). Many expressed how this meant they cared about the topic more, frequently became quite passionate about it and developed real life skills such as advocacy and civic engagement (such as writing petitions). However, this focus on ‘passion’ was not always possible to fulfil as students themselves recognised. For example, one participant stated “I think actually the biggest thing was that we found was we weren’t very passionate. Like my group wasn’t really passionate about anything in the community” (Student interview). This meant her group struggled to complete an effective project in the absence of teacher guidance.

The high priority given to learner-centred approaches and student topic choice also revealed that, at times, deeper cognitive understandings were traded off for higher student engagement. For example, two 18-year olds male participants had selected the right to have facial hair at school as their social action for their ‘personal social action’ assessment. Whilst passionate – and exhibiting some stubble on their chins to support their cause – their topic provided them with little ability to talk about wider societal issues or to explore multiple perspectives. In addition, the learner-centred philosophy with less teacher guidance meant that opportunities to deepen students’ knowledge with, for example, an in-depth examination of broader human rights, were missed. Further, when pressed, some students had little in-depth knowledge of their chosen social issue. For example, when a group of 17 year old girls who were raising money for housing in Cambodia were asked questions by members of the public about their chosen focus, they struggled to answer why they had chosen this topic and how their social actions could bring about sustainable and transformative change for the community in Cambodia (Researcher observations and interview). Unless teachers made a concerted focus on students gaining in-depth knowledge during these learner-centred inquiries, there was a risk they could end up with thin understandings, weak knowledge, and reduced opportunities for critical and transformative citizenship learning in social studies.

Discussion

Our analysis of the two studies revealed a number of strategies and practices that that strengthened and/or undermined transformative disciplinary learning in a high autonomy curriculum. First, procedural approaches (such as historical and social inquiry processes) were a considerable priority for teachers in both subjects. It appeared these procedural approaches provided an important way for students to develop skills in conducting research and analysing and communicating findings in ways that reflected disciplinary social science methodologies and epistemologies. In addition, it appeared that teaching inquiry skills provided a way to deal with the absence of prescribed knowledge as it could account for multiple contexts. While these procedural approaches weren't exactly the same in history and social studies, students had to learn a range of languages and procedures of investigation in order to acquire specialist history and social studies knowledge which is in keeping with Bernstein's (1999) understanding of the 'weak' grammar of the social sciences. Second, learning about perspectives in both subjects was an important dimension of deepening critical understandings, as it taught students to recognise the diverse values, attitudes and beliefs that motivate people in any given period (Barton, 2017). Learning about perspectives also reflects the horizontal knowledge structure and 'social' (Bernstein, 1999) nature of social science disciplines in which deeper understandings are gained through exposure to an 'array' of languages, each revealing some further aspect of 'truth' (Bernstein, 1999).

However, our analysis of the enactment of the history and social studies curricula showed that procedural approaches didn't guarantee transformative disciplinary learning. For history teachers, the use of the international historical thinking framework (Seixas & Morton, 2013) provided some buffer to New Zealand's high autonomy model as it deepened procedural approaches and employed a strong focus on identifying credible evidence, understanding the significance and causation and consequences of historical events as well as the interpretative dimension of the subject. However, this could still be undermined by the choice of thin topics (such as the history of surfing) or the avoidance of 'difficult' historical topics (such as New Zealand's colonial past) that didn't allow for in-depth or transformative understandings to develop. On the other hand, while some disciplinary coherency for social studies was found through a broad commitment to conceptual learning, social inquiry processes and

participatory citizenship, the frameworks for enriching students' substantive knowledge were not clearly articulated and at times weakened by a hit and miss approach to knowledge and a much stronger focus on action and doing. To return to Parker's (2008) statement, the 'doing' dimension of social studies at times eclipsed the 'knowing' dimension of critical disciplinary learning – thus weakening the transformative potential of both learning and action.

As we outlined earlier, a commitment to transformative disciplinary learning requires a much deeper engagement with social science ideas than simply transmitting or regurgitating ideas that reproduce the dominant social order (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). Transformative approaches involve not only critical understandings of knowledge, but also the consideration of meaningful responses to these as citizens. Our study showed how curriculum content choices by teachers and students either deepened or weakened transformative learning, with poor or thin topic choice resulting in fewer opportunities to learn deeply about societal events and issues, or to undertake critical citizenship response. In both subjects, the openness of topic choice meant that a significant weight was placed on student interest and student engagement, often at the expense of broader and deeper knowledge. In history this meant that at times teachers would choose topics which could hook in students' interest, but with less consideration about how these might weaken opportunities to develop multiple perspectives and student's own identities (as New Zealanders in a settler colonial society). In a slightly different way in social studies, the priority toward affective student citizenship engagement meant that considerations of rich knowledge contexts were often placed lower down in the criteria for topic choice. This was problematic when students had weak knowledge of the issues they were focusing on or couldn't find a 'passion' topic to select. Similar to Smith's (2019) history research in Scotland, in the absence of any prescription, pupil and teacher's interests often governed selection of topics, rather than consideration of the type of learning that could be personally and socially transformative.

Conclusion

The nature of disciplinary knowledge that defines and frames the social sciences has frequently been difficult to conceptualise and articulate due to its 'weak' grammar (Bernstein, 1999) and its unlimited potential body of knowledge. In this paper, we have

proposed a framing for disciplinary learning in history and social studies that holds specialised knowledge that is shaped by distinctive methods of inquiry, theory and core concepts. While our comparison of history and social studies identified clear differences, both shared a commitment to an explicit social science methodology that reflected their key purpose, the identification of key conceptual learning alongside a focus on developing critical thinking about societal ideas and events, the exploration of multiple perspectives and opportunities for students to reflect and respond as young citizens. In addition, we argued that the nature of knowledge in the social sciences necessarily involves more than the transmission of ideas, and needs to include a transformative dimension that develops skills to enable students to respond to issues of social injustice and inequalities in ways that enrich democratic society (Dewey, 1916/1963). This aspect of disciplinary knowing has received much less attention to date.

The combination of horizontal social science subjects with looser disciplinary boundaries taught within a high autonomy curriculum with strong learner-centred approaches did open up considerable risk that students could miss out on transformative disciplinary learning. Our analysis confirmed the importance of the critical role of deliberate content selection as weak choices potentially reduced both the knowledge base and transformative citizenship learning (see Parker, et al, 2017, for similar findings). While the emphasis on procedural approaches in both subjects encouraged the enhancement of research and inquiry skills, these were potentially undermined by weak content choices (by teachers and students) and/or low levels of teacher guidance into effective contexts for deeper learning studies. For history, weak choice of topics at times led to poor opportunities for exposure to controversial issues or discussions on the contemporary implications of historical ideas, thus reducing opportunities for more transformative citizenship reflections and responses. In contrast, while social studies maintained a focus on democratic participation, unless there was a concerted focus on selecting effective content and developing in-depth content and conceptual knowledge, the impact, significance and sustainability of students' transformative disciplinary knowledge and engagements were similarly weakened. It is evident that content selection matters if teachers are to offer students "opportunities for widening their horizons, transforming their perspectives, and cultivating their moral sensitivity" (Deng, 2018, p. 377).

In sum, while the high autonomy curriculum in New Zealand has encouraged a great deal of freedom, far too little attention has been paid to the type of knowledge that might deepen students' learning in social studies and history. What young people actually learn in history and social studies matters if their learning is to be transformative and challenges assumptions and unconscious biases and equips them with the skills to tackle social issues that threaten our ability to live well together. This is a challenge in a competency-based, constructivist curriculum environment that is characterised by 'learnification' (Biesta, 2011, 2014), with teachers as facilitators and a highly autonomous model of selecting content. While we know that one of the risks of high autonomy curricular, is their reliance on a highly professional teacher workforce, capable of developing and designing curriculum at the school level (Sinnema, 2015; Priestly & Sinnema, 2014), there has been few resources or conversations about how to equip teachers to select rich contexts for deep learning. There is an imperative to address the question of content and ask what the purpose of education is and what actual functions we want the social sciences curriculum to perform (Biesta, 2011, 2014). Our intention is that this paper has gone some way toward identifying what matters for transformative disciplinary learning in history and social studies learning, and what students are at risk of missing out on in a high autonomy curriculum such as New Zealand's.

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