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Who Actually Sets the Criteria for Social Studies Literacy? The National Core Curricula and the Matriculation Examination as Guidelines for Social Studies Teaching in Finland in the 2000's

The issue of how to define the content of social studies literacy has become topical in Finland in the 2000's in a new way as a result of social studies having been instituted as an independent subject in upper secondary school and in basic education. Freedom from the ties confining social studies in the role of a subdivision of the subject history has entailed a need to profile social studies and also to problematize the parameters of social studies literacy more clearly and consciously than before. However the question remains as to who defines the content of social studies literacy. In this article we will argue that in Finland today the most central role in this respect is being played not by the national core curricula where the competence aims of social studies teaching are rather vague, but by the social studies exam in the national matriculation examination. This is not necessarily a bad situation in terms of the outcome but it is noteworthy that the task of operationalizing social studies literacy is here as if "outsourced" to a small group of social science and social studies education experts who design social studies exam questions, whereas the authority responsible for developing the national core curricula only sanctions very general descriptive objectives for social studies teaching.

Keywords:

Social studies literacy, political literacy, civic literacy, assessment, criteria, Finland

Clearing the theoretical ground – the concept of literacy in the context of social studies

Generally, the objectives of social studies and civics in the European school systems have been geared toward ICCSDs transmission of knowledge and socialization of the young but with the advent of information society, public demands for lifelong learning, and programmatic declarations to expand democracy at all levels in society the objectives have gradually moved in the direction of enhancing the competences and skills of the young to participate in society as active citizens. The situation differs, of course, from country to country in terms of how politics of education is situated in the wider frame of public policies, what demands are placed on schools in producing results which are readily measurable and quantifiable, and how the content of democratic citizenship is understood, for example. In this paper we discuss the Finnish situation, based largely on our experiences as teacher educators and as designers of the national matriculation examination social studies exam. We think that one reason why the Finnish case can be of special interest to colleagues in other countries is the rather striking discrepancy between Finnish adolescents' excellent performance in the knowledge items and very weak interest in the issues of political and civic life in the two most recent large-scale international assessments of civic knowledge and attitudes, CIVED (1999) and ICCS (2010). The competences of the Finnish young seem curiously bifurcated, alerting us to analyze the content of social studies literacy and also, more specifically, to identify the major chal-

lenges in enhancing the social studies literacy of the Finnish young.

Social studies literacy is an ambiguous concept, given that both of its components, social studies and literacy, can be understood in several ways. Social studies is a conglomerate subject which has a different content in different school systems, often incorporating history and geography in addition to civics and economics. However in this article we will focus on those parts of social studies which are connected to social sciences more specifically.

Initially literacy has pertained to the skills of reading and writing but the scope of the concept has both deepened and broadened, and both these dimensions of change are embedded in more general cultural and social developments. The changes are related to the new conceptions of learning and teaching which emphasize active learning and knowledge construction instead of a traditional conception of learning as knowledge reception. A "deep" interpretation of literacy implies functional and critical literacy, whereas a "broad" interpretation can be characterized as analogies or metaphors for understanding or competences which are related to various fields (historical literacy, science literacy, moral literacy and political literacy, social science literacy, etc.), or technologies (visual literacy, digital literacy, etc.). (Virta 2007, 11-13.) Also when we here discuss issues that are mostly related to the social scientific elements of the subject social studies, it can be argued there are different forms of literacy also within the broad area of social studies literacy, such as civic literacy or political literacy. Although the concepts including the word 'literacy' are not directly favoured in the Finnish discourse on social studies education, elements of these 'literations', and goals related to them, can be observed also in the Finnish context.



The aforementioned concepts have also been used and defined in different ways by different authors. For example, Henry Milner (2002) uses civic literacy as a concept referring primarily to the skills and knowledge needed in society and also to the skills needed in political participation. Moreover, he suggests there is a close connection between the concepts of civic literacy and social capital. Ian Davies (2008) presents a summary of the British discussion on political literacy and concludes that political literacy has been characterized as “a compound of knowledge, skills and procedural values” (respect for truth, reasoning and tolerance) and that it is also close to political action and engagement. Related to these concepts we can add Tiina Ekman’s (2007) notion of democratic competence whose components are knowledge about political processes, political self-confidence, attitudes, and political behaviour. These do not cover all the area of social studies but in general they embrace the levels of knowing, understanding, and using knowledge.

A major contradiction embedded in the goals of social studies in any society is that the subject has a double mission, to educate students in critical literacy and to function as a channel of socialization, although the latter may not be that obvious in the written curricula. However, the gap between socialisation and critical competence, or counter-socialisation, is often not perhaps very dramatic as the requirements in contemporary developed societies are fairly broad in terms of what qualities citizens are expected to show (Ochoa-Becker 2007).

The tradition of Finnish social studies – transmission of factual knowledge

The social studies subject content in the Finnish school consists of elements in civics (politics), economy, social policy and law. The subject does not have a very prominent status in the Finnish compulsory education as it is usually taught only in the final year of basic education, on Grade 9. The number of lessons per week was increased with one in the latest reform in 2004; the lessons now amount to three per week. In upper secondary schools there are two compulsory social studies courses, *Politics and society*, and *Economics*, each equal to one lesson per week. *The National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools, 2003*, mandates two additional courses, *Citizens and law*, and *Europeanism and the European Union*, that each upper secondary school has to offer but they materialize only if adequate number of students will sign up for the course.

According to the *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2004*, social studies should contribute to the students’ critical capacity and knowledge and understanding of society, but there is obviously also a social ethos as the objectives also imply that the students become interested in civic participation, learn

to develop their abilities as responsible consumers and actors in society, and know the legal consequences of their actions. The students are also expected to learn the basics of enterprise and understand its importance for society. However, social ethos is totally ignored in the criteria for student assessment in social studies which divide in two categories only, “Acquisition and use of social information”, and “Understanding social information”. The criteria thus betray a narrower understanding of the concept of social studies literacy than the general objectives formulated for the subject in the core curriculum (*National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2004*).

The *National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools, 2003*, defines the aims of social studies teaching at a somewhat more advanced level in terms of what kind of cognitive processes it refers to. For example, it propounds that the students should be able to handle the major concepts of civic life and economy and form well-grounded opinions on social and economic issues that involve value-laden judgments. Like in the *National Core Curriculum for Basic Education*, the students’ ability to acquire and judge critically information about society is also emphasized (*National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools, 2003*).

The aforementioned objectives appear conducive to educating active critical citizens, yet one can argue that regarding the core concepts of social studies and the means of promoting the competences which constitute the directives of social studies teaching, the *Core Curricula*, like most of their predecessors, are helplessly vague. We assume this is often the case in curriculum texts across the countries: the objectives are stated at such a general level that teachers are not likely to find useful instruments for their work there. The elevated words on students’ critical citizenship notwithstanding, the *Core Curricula* present a conventional and institution-centred list of items the social studies courses have to cover, ranging for example from “the population structure of Finland” to “purpose, roles and forms” of social policy (*National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools, 2003*). The kind of dynamic analytic concepts that social sciences operate with – authority and cooperation, public and private, norm and role, etc. – do not feature in the *National Core Curricula*, power and democracy being the major exceptions (Löfström 2001).

We would argue that the aforementioned conventionality and institutionalism in the *Core Curricula* for social studies is part of a tradition where the parameters of social studies teaching are effectively set very much in terms of factual knowledge rather than particular analytic and critical competences. The tradition has been visible, for example, in the matriculation examination where the social studies questions until the mid-1980’s invariably would concern facts about the constitution, institutions of civ-

ic society, and the models of economy. An analysis by Arja Virta (2000) shows that still in the 1990's the civics textbooks in basic education were also largely descriptive and declarative, implying a direct socialization of the pupils in the prevailing political and social structures. In fact, in the 1999 CIVED survey the Finnish social studies teachers themselves voiced the opinion that social studies teaching in basic education tilted too heavily toward transmitting factual knowledge whereas there was too little practice on civic participation and thinking skills and too little reflection on the questions of values (Suutarinen 2007).

We can propose two intertwining causes for this persistent tradition in social studies in Finland. The first is the historical origin of the subject as a vehicle of conservative civic education. Embarrassed by the growing intensity of political antagonisms in the Finnish society in the early years of the twentieth century and the Civil War, in 1918, the political authority saw civics as a tool for socializing the young into conservative values and institutions of the Republic. Internal political tensions remained strong in Finnish society after Second World War. In the precarious situation those responsible for politics of education considered it best that social studies (civics) would remain an ostensibly neutral space for transmitting "cold facts" about society, economy and law, without any critical analysis of the prevailing structures. For example, one prominent figure in social studies education declared, in 1958:

"[Social studies] presents what society is like. It does not explore society, nor does it pose problems about society for us to solve. It does not give advice or norms to heed. It does not predict the development of society. It does not give verdicts on whether some social phenomenon or state of affairs is good or bad" (Kerkkonen 1958).

This approach would remain alive in the decades to come, demarcating descriptive accounts and factual information as the content that the social studies teachers could claim as legitimately theirs in all circumstances and against every critic – also in the turbulent years of the 1970's when they tried to avoid criticism from the politically active Leftist teenagers as well as from the suspicious Right-wing circles (Arola 2002). From the 1970's onward the political landscape was, however, characterized by an aspiration for political consensus and avoiding committed ideological debate (Taivalsaari 1990). Understandably it was not a fertile ground for social studies to become politically more engaging.

The second explanation for the lack of dynamic analytic qualities in the social studies is that in the curriculum the concepts constituting the scaffolds for teaching have often been concepts referring to institutions, like parliament or elections, which do not very much help to explain the form of knowl-

edge in social sciences and to interpret social and political processes. In the early twentieth century it was the history teachers who got the task to address issues of economy and constitution in the class. This mandate was formalized in 1963 when social studies was introduced officially in the national core curriculum of the upper secondary school as part of the dual subject History and Civics. Hence social studies teachers have usually been experts in history rather than social sciences; they have majored in history (MA) and have additionally studied two or three social sciences (oftenmost economy, politics and/or sociology), nowadays 25-35 ECTS in each and the total of social science studies amounting to 60 ECTS at the minimum. Thus their competences in social sciences is often rather shallow, and one can assume this may easily result in teachers having difficulty in generating analytic and critical perspectives in the social studies classes. It is noteworthy that when Arja Virta studied upper secondary school students' knowledge structure in history and in social studies she found that the students' answers on social studies exam questions often failed to show coherent structure and would rather consist of dispersed factual statements (Virta 1995). We suggest this may reflect not only the students' but also the teachers' difficulties to construct coherent analytic perspectives on political and economic issues.

Social studies covers a field of topics that fall in the diverse realm of social sciences, from economy and political science to sociology and law. Hence it may be too much to ask that the social studies curriculum could closely reflect the form of knowledge of all those academic disciplines. The *Economics* course in upper secondary school is structured rather closely upon the scaffolds of neoclassical economics and concepts like supply and demand have a central role there, but the course *Politics and society*, for example, is not in the same degree hinged upon the concepts of political studies and sociology. As a whole, social studies is in this respect different from history, and the difference was strikingly visible in the criteria for student assessment on grade Nine (*Perusopetuksen päättöarvioinnin kriteerit...*, 1999), which mentioned explicitly a number of concepts relevant to historical thinking (continuity, chronology, evidence, cause and effect, etc.) but which outlined students' expected competence in social studies only in very general descriptive terms. As a point of interest it can be noted that the 1999 criteria differ from the *Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2004*, in that the first document includes, albeit vague, references to the nature of societal knowledge and it mentioned skills like "being able to use public services" and "being capable and becoming encouraged to use channels of influence in society", but these were dropped in the 2004 *Core Curriculum*.



The matriculation examination as a proxy of social studies literacy criteria

The aforementioned issues have been discussed by Finnish social studies educators in a number of texts in the past 20 years (e.g. Ahonen 1996; Löfström 2000; Virta 2000). However the question of core concepts and competences in social studies literacy has become more pressing lately also because of the reform of the national matriculation examination: since 2006 upper secondary school graduates can take a separate exam in subjects like geography, physics, chemistry, philosophy, history and social studies which previously were all placed on the same tray in one single exam where students could freely choose the exam questions they would answer. The system with separate exams for these so-called realia subjects was supported, among other things, with the argument that it would better allow designing individual exams so that they will more validly assess the competences typical of each subject.

As the social studies core curriculum has been rather vague on competences also the designers of the social studies matriculation examination have faced a challenging situation where they, in fact, are the major interpreters of the objectives and aims of social studies teaching and learning. Preparing the exam questions they effectively make authoritative statements about what the core concepts and competences in the subject are. The group designing the exam consists of four to six university teachers and researchers in the fields of history, social sciences and social studies education, and the only mandatory guideline for their work is that the exam, according to *The Amendment in the General Upper Secondary Schools Act, 2004/766 (18 §)*, has to assess if the students have attained the knowledge and the competences required by the national core curriculum for upper secondary schools. There is feedback from social studies teachers to the expert group in that teachers can ventilate their views regarding the exam in various meetings with the representatives of the expert group. Thus communication between the expert group and the teachers can not be regarded as one-way only (Gunnemyr 2010). However it is not incorrect to say that the expert group has an exceptionally central role in translating the diffuse objectives of social studies teaching in the *Core Curriculum* into a set of more operational concepts. As the teachers understandably are keen to prepare their students for the matriculation examination as well as possible they can also be assumed to take heed of what the matriculation examination questions are like and what skills and competences they actually test. Thus also the social studies exam may have considerable influence on how teachers in upper secondary schools conceive the components of social studies literacy, as the teachers themselves have pointed out (Virta 1998, 131-139; Vuorio-Lehti 2006).

Let us look briefly at what kind of tasks exactly are set in the questions in the social studies exams. The matriculation examination is arranged twice a year, in the spring and in the autumn, thus in 2006-2010 the social studies exam has been arranged ten times, the total amount of exam questions during this period amounting to 106. As a rule, each social studies exam has ten optional questions and the student may answer to six of them. Some questions include two or more parts and the student is asked to show different modes of cognitive processing in them (for example first comparison, then judgment or creating a synthesis). This multi-layered nature of some questions notwithstanding, we would argue on the basis of a crude analysis that the 106 social studies exam questions can be divided in three groups, each group comprising about one third of the total number of questions:

- 1) Questions where the student has to reiterate factual knowledge more or less in the same format as it can be found in school textbooks.
- 2) Questions where the student has to assess the plausibility of a particular statement or to consider the consequences or the advantages and disadvantages of a particular political, economic or judicial situation.
- 3) Questions where the student has to analyze and interpret one or more pieces of text documents, images, statistical data or maps, explain it or draw inferences from it, and to set the information in a wider national or global framework with the help of his/her background knowledge.

As examples of the first group we take the following exam questions, the first from Spring 2010, the second from Autumn 2009 (translation by authors):

"How is marriage, cohabitation, and registered partnership initiated, how are they dissolved, and what legal consequences do they have, respectively?" (6 points)

"How is power divided in the European Union between The European Parliament, The European Commission, and The Council of the European Union?" (6 points)

In the second group we can place the following questions, for example, the first from Autumn 2009, the second from Autumn 2008:

"Ponder what are the effects of the following actions on an individual Finnish citizen:

- a) The State cuts the VAT on food in Finland. (2 points)*
- b) The state loan raising is increased substantially in the State Budget in Finland. (2 points)*
- c) The European Central Bank raises its principal rate of interest." (2 points)*

"Give an account how consultative referenda have been used in Finland and ponder on the strengths and weaknesses of such referenda from the perspective of how they realize democracy." (6 points)

Finally, in group three we find questions of the following type (Spring 2009):



“The quotes below discuss the economic relations between the US and China and their development in recent years.

- a) Explain the underlined economic concepts in the quotes. (3 points)*
- b) Compare the views that George Bush and Stephen Jeffrey have on the impact of the yuan’s value on the US economy and explain the logic that their assessment is based upon. (3 points)*
- c) On the basis of the quotes and other information you have, discuss the development of the US and Chinese economies in recent years. (3 points)*

‘One of the issues that I emphasised to [China’s vicepremier] Madame Wu Yi, as well as the delegation, was that we’re watching very carefully as to whether or not they will appreciate their currency. [The US] \$233bn trade deficit must be addressed. And one way to address it is through currency revaluation [of the yuan].’

– US President George Bush Jr. reports on his discussions with the Chinese delegation on May 2007, Financial Times, 25.5.2007

‘The biggest myth of all is that a revaluation of the [Chinese currency] yuan would greatly reduce America’s trade deficit. The real cause of the deficit is that Americans spend too much and save too little.’

– Stephen Jeffrey, Lost in transition, Economist.com, 17.5.2007

‘The [US November 2007] trade gap widened by more than expected, with economist forecasting a deficit of \$59bn compared with \$57.8bn in October. The US [monthly] trade deficit with China shrank slightly to \$24bn, down from a record high in October when shops were receiving shipments of toys in time for Christmas. However, the figures brought the year-to-date deficit with China to \$237.5bn at the end of November, already eclipsing the annual record of \$232.6bn set in 2006.’

– BBCNews 11.1.2008

The expert group seeks to design each exam so that there are questions from all these three categories and that the questions mobilize a wide range of cognitive skills, from rather simple rendering and organizing of factual knowledge to comparison, analysis, and more complex multiperspectival interpretations and explanations. From our own experience of having participated in the expert group we would argue that occasional disagreements on the balance between more complex and more traditional questions notwithstanding, the group members think it is important that the exam encourages the students to test the limits of their intellectual capacity rather than fail to provide such challenge. However there are some technical and economic limitations which effectively obstruct designing the exam so that the students would be given the task of producing something more extensive where their own active input is more central, for example, designing a community develop-

ment project, contributing to political debate or planning a small enterprise. Thus the exam is vulnerable to the critique that it does not nowadays provide a very wide perspective on students’ competences or their social studies literacy.

The school textbooks in social studies have developed considerably during the last 20 years, they operationalize the *Core Curriculum* well, and in terms of the material and exercises that are intended to help the readers to practice their analytic and critical thinking they also have followed the developments in the social studies matriculation examination question.

Finnish adolescent’s social studies literacy in recent studies

In this article we have so far not addressed the issue of Finnish adolescents’ societal knowledge and civic engagement but it is relevant to do it briefly here. The question of how to set the parameters of social studies literacy is, we think, not only a question of arriving at a theoretically valid operationalization of social studies literacy but also identifying where the most acute challenge in promoting the adolescents’ citizenship might be.

Our earlier critical remarks on the Finnish tradition of social studies notwithstanding, the state of social studies literacy among the Finnish young is not desperately bleak. In the international surveys on adolescent societal knowledge and attitudes, CIVED 1999 and ICCS 2008-2009, the societal knowledge of the 14-year-old Finnish young has been well above the international average despite the fact that the tests have been administered in Grade 8 where the Finnish young have not yet studied civics at all as it is usually in the syllabus of Grade 9. However the Finnish adolescents’ attitudes to active citizenship and civic participation have been clearly below the international average (Suutarinen 2002; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, Losito 2010). Obviously this is a challenge for social studies teaching but where should we locate the problem in terms of which areas of social studies literacy might be most concerned?

Apparently knowing facts about society and the key concepts of politics and economy is something the Finnish young master relatively well. This is perhaps not surprising, given that the Finnish teachers in the CIVED survey considered social studies is very much tuned toward teaching facts, as we pointed out earlier. It is worth noticing that the questions in the CIVED where the Finnish students had most difficulties were the ones which concerned connections of politics and economics, that is to say questions where the student should be able to conceptualize society as an entity of complex and multiple intertwining structures and modes of power (Suutarinen 2002). This may, in fact, reflect the fact that in the social studies curricula and in the textbooks economy often appears



as a separate realm with few sociological or political dimensions.

At this point it is important to note that the results above are from studies which target 14-years-old adolescents in basic education. After basic education there appears to be polarization, however, in that the young in vocational schools have much lower levels of civic knowledge than those in upper secondary schools (Elo 2009). This may be an indirect outcome of the students' differential socio-economic background which then also relates to differences in social and cultural capital, but it is also noteworthy that the amount of social studies teaching in vocational school is nowadays extremely small.

In a recent study Marko van den Berg has interviewed Finnish upper secondary school students about their societal interests. He has asked them about their views of the past and future developments at the national and global level and about their expectations concerning their own life. According to the students, social development has been and will continue to be strongly guided by economy rather than politics. Congruently with this they would explain change in the world in terms of economic developments rather than political programs. In their opinion increasing income differences is primarily an outcome of differences in personal abilities. Their views about the national and global prospects were rather pessimistic and again implied a strong belief in the determining role of economy. As for their own future they were fairly optimistic and believed that social success and failure "depends on yourself" (van den Berg, 2010). There is thus a kind of discrepancy between the students' strong belief in individual agency and their skepticism about the role of collective political pursuit in the world ruled by impersonal forces of economy. The results in van den Berg's study seem to resonate with the earlier survey findings where the Finnish adolescents had some difficulty in recognizing more complex societal dynamics, like connections between politics and economy.

The Finnish adolescents in the CIVED and the ICCS surveys had very little interest in politics, and this attitude comes forth clearly also in the interviews that van den Berg (2010) has made for his study. However it seems that the negative attitudes of the adolescents are directed against party politics rather than politics in a broad sense: according to a number of recent surveys the young at large are actually concerned at issues like environmental protection and human rights, but as for the programs of the political parties they regard them as too vague and indistinguishable from each other, as opposed to the more narrowly focused objectives of many new civic organizations. Moreover the young are polarized in their interest in societal issues so that we find a number of young participating very actively in civic life but equally those who have

no such engagement at all (Myllyniemi 2008; Paakkunainen 2007; Suutarinen 2000)

Where does this leave us with regard to identifying the major challenges in improving Finnish adolescents' social studies literacy and civic competences? It seems to us that the scepticism of the young about the meaningfulness of active civic participation and engagement has probably following explanations: society appears often too complex for the young to grasp, and politics seems to lack ideological differences and tensions that would motivate personal investment of time and effort in politics. According to Anu Kantola, since the 1990's there has been a trend in the Finnish political culture that the decision-makers have wanted to distance themselves from outspoken political ideologies and have rather presented themselves as administrators who rationally only react to the necessary demands from external forces, mostly economy (Kantola 2002). In this framework the social implications of the decisions are often not acknowledged. As public affairs easily seem like technocratic administration, it should not come as a surprise if the young fail to see politics as a meaningful field of civic activity. Here there is a challenge to be tackled also in the future social studies core curricula of the Finnish school.

Operationalizing social studies literacy in the future national core curricula

A point we have wanted to convey is that the matriculation examination is nowadays in Finland a major vehicle, or actually *the* major vehicle in defining the parameters of social studies literacy and disseminating them to schools. That is to say the elements that are constitutive of social studies literacy are stated not so much by the authority responsible for curriculum development generally, The National Bureau of Education, but by a group of social science and social studies education experts who design the questions for social studies matriculation examination, guided by their conviction of what informed citizens should be capable of in their political and economic thinking. We have been involved in designing the exam, and we would like to believe that the outcome of our endeavour has not been irreconcilable with the overall objectives of social studies in the *Core Curriculum*; in fact, we believe that experienced specialists in social sciences and social studies education can exert a positive influence on social studies teaching in upper secondary school through this channel. Yet we also believe that the skills and competences that constitute social studies literacy should be clearly stated also in the *Core Curriculum* whereas now they are primarily discernable in the matriculation exam.

Regarding the two challenges that we proposed in the previous chapter we think that the way to proceed in developing the social studies curricula is, first, to

give a more prominent place to the dynamic core concepts of relevant social sciences in the core curricula, and, second, to give space and clear guidance on students' practicing their analytic gaze and critical reasoning on issues of values and ideologies. As for the first suggestion, in fact there is a kind of inventory that has been made on potentially most fruitful social scientific core concepts and their usability in social studies teaching; it suggests that concepts like role, identity, norm, control, status, segregation, mobility and modernity, or pairs of concepts like state and civil society, private and public, or power and cooperation would bring to social studies a more dynamic element as they would offer the students tools to handle and conceptualize their environment and their experiences in a way which is not easy with the conventional core concepts of social studies like elections, president, constitution, etc. (Löfström 2001). In this approach we are following the argument presented, amongst others, by Howard Gardner, that disciplines and their conceptual structures "serve as points of entry for considering the deepest questions about the world" as they provide students with intellectual tools to approach the world (Gardner 1999, 157). More specifically, we find support to our stand, for example, in the study by Sirkka Ahonen (1990), on how children explain historical events: the ability to reconstruct historical interpretations – that is, to think historically! – which would meet the criteria of rationality and critical evidentiality required an advanced consciousness of the concepts like interpretation, evidence, change, and cause which are precisely the major constitutive elements of historical disciplinary epistemology (Ahonen 1990).

As for our second suggestion, let consider an example: *The National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary School, 2003*, mandates that the objective for the students is to "be capable of forming justified personal views of controversial social and economic issues that are bound to values" It is definitely positive that the important objective of multiperspectival thinking is explicated but we think it should be dissected more so as to give the teacher a better idea on through what kind of methodology formation of "justified personal views" can be practiced and where to look for such "controversial social and economic issues that are bound to values". For example, the objectives can be that the student will be able:

- * to follow public discussion and media reporting on social and economic topics,
- * to analyse their underlying values and ideologies,
- * to judge critically the motivations for social and economic decisions, and
- * to assess the implications of these decisions from different perspectives and from the point of view of different population groups.

Here the curriculum would explicate what concrete targets will be approached (media reporting, etc.),

what phenomena will be the object of analysis (values, "ideologies"), and what will be the envisaged outcome from the analysis (judgments, assessments). This example focuses on only one particular line in the *Core Curriculum*. We would suggest that the objectives of social studies teaching and, consequently, the elements of social studies literacy could reasonably encompass following items: The students:

- can analyse the logic in the arguments used when discussing social and economic questions, and can identify what kind of major premises or ideological traditions of social and economic thinking are present in them,
- can identify different types of sources of societal information and understand their differences as vehicles of communication (advertisements, interviews, media reports, political party programs, official statistics, etc.),
- know how knowledge about society is produced and on what grounds one can assess the credibility or plausibility of that information,
- can formulate independently their own views about societal questions on the basis of available information,
- understand that the notions about society and economy are contingent upon people's aspirations and intentions and that they are historically changing, and
- can make informed assessments on how societal decisions may have different effects on individual citizens of different population groups.

In addition to the two suggestions above we also have a third: there should be space in the Core Curricula also for students' opportunities to practice real participation in civil society. Competence in such participation is, in fact, mentioned as an objective in the *National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools, 2003*, but it does not feature in any concrete sense in the list of subject contents in the *Core Curriculum* and there is no reference to this competence area in the part which concerns student assessment in social studies.

The ideas about the objectives and content of social studies teaching that we suggest in this paper are surely not unfamiliar or alien to the social studies teachers, some of whom, we believe, also put them into practice in their work. However it is important that the parameters of social studies literacy and the methodologies of improving that literacy should be stated more clearly in the core curricula so that the aforementioned teachers would also have a solid moral and judicial support for their decisions.

It may have become clear in the chapters before that social studies literacy in our view predicates a perspective where society, as a collective of citizens, is taken seriously as an analytic category and a major framework of individual experience. Given that



there has been a rampant “ideology of privatisation” (Baumann 2008) in the Western World in the past odd twenty years where many people have become accustomed to looking for individualized explanations to problems which are rather socially generated, social studies in the tapping that also we here champion could have a healthy corrective and balancing effect

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