**Classroom by Classroom, School by School:
A Lens on the Past, A Vision of the Future**

*John Kornfeld
Perry M. Marker
Sonoma State University*

Once a week, a professor of social studies education in northern California moves his base of operation from the university to a nearby middle school. He works in social studies classrooms, observing, helping, and supervising his student teachers. After school, he and his students gather in a classroom to hold their social studies methods class. The students' resident teachers are intimately involved in teaching this course, offering their expertise in curriculum development, classroom management, and the politics of teaching in a large secondary school. The teachers' mentoring of student teachers and participation in the methods class requires that they spend considerable time discussing their teaching practices with one another. The social studies professor helps facilitate these discussions in weekly meetings with the teachers. "Initially, the teachers' goal in these meetings was simply to enhance the candidates' student teaching experiences," says the professor, "but now the teachers are also reshaping their own curricula through ongoing interrogation of their notions of social studies education."

Meanwhile, in the midwest, a university researcher spends every morning with an 8th grade social studies teacher committed to exploring new ways to approach curriculum with his students. For four months, they meet daily during the teacher's prep period to plan interdisciplinary approaches and inquiry-based projects designed to spark student interest, foster community in the classroom, and bolster students' knowledge of U.S. history and geography. Together they team-teach two of the teacher's social studies classes. Initially, the students balk at this revitalized curriculum, preferring the patterns of textbook-based instruction to which they have become accustomed. They talk and goof off or just stare into space. Responding to students' resistance, the teacher and researcher continually rethink and readjust their plans, coming up with ways to ease the students into this new approach to social studies. By the end of the researcher's stay at the school, students' eyes have opened to the rewards of

generative curriculum. Inspired by his fruitful relationship with the researcher, the teacher comes to see his role in a new light and begins seeking out other teachers at the school with whom to carry on this collaborative process.

Back in California, a high school social studies teacher is a familiar face at the nearby university's school of education. A graduate of the secondary education program, she has remained in close contact ever since with the university's director of social studies education. Over the years, she has worked with several student teachers sent by the director to her school; now, as the chair of her social studies department, she oversees the placement of several student teachers each semester, making sure that each of them receives guidance, support, and encouragement to put into practice the ideas taught in the university's methods courses. At the university, she helps teach one of those methods courses and, twice each year, helps interview new candidates for the teacher education program. She is also working on her master's thesis, an action research project that she is conducting in her classroom, under the direction of her social studies mentor.

The More Things Change...

In the past quarter-century, such collaborative endeavors involving teachers and university professors have been all too rare. Social studies research continues to be carried out, for the most part,

as it has been conducted in academia for decades—by university professors who communicate little, if at all, with the teachers whose curricula and practices they are investigating. During the past twenty-five years, many social studies researchers and curriculum developers have made forays into the classroom, but generally only to collect their data, after which they have returned to their offices to analyze their results and discuss their findings with colleagues. And far too often, these research projects have only perpetuated the schism that divides schools from schools of education, utilizing methodologies which preclude communication between researchers and subjects: surveys or process-product procedures whose validity would be suspect if the researcher discussed hypotheses or ideas with the teacher while collecting the data in the classroom. Teacher input has been virtually absent from such inquiry: teachers often have been the objects of research and development or have been eliminated from the research and development process entirely. Instead, researchers' communication with teachers has generally entailed merely requesting their cooperation in the studies and, perhaps, making diagnoses and dispensing prescriptions.

During the last twenty-five years, these prescriptions have taken the form of various plans for reforming the social studies curriculum—everything from lists of recommendations to sweeping new curriculum standards, from

teacher-proof lessons to complete overhauls of existing programs. The intelligentsia¹ has decided what is best for social studies teachers and students, and then has delivered these solutions to teachers, expecting them to carry out its mandates. Teachers have been given sweeping new standards to follow (e.g. The Bradley Commission, *Historical Literacy*; The National Commission on Social Studies, *Charting a Course*; National Center for History in the Schools, *National Standards for United States History*), and they have been handed such innovative programs as *Man: A Course of Study* (MACOS), the new social studies, character education, values education, and, most recently, the Teacher Curriculum Institute's *History Alive!*

Ironically, in spite of this plethora of carefully devised, research-based standards and curricula, few if any of these reforms have penetrated the social studies curriculum or significantly altered classroom practice. In the 1990s, in nearly every secondary grade level, students cover the same information in the same order that their predecessors had to learn in the '70s and '80s. Although some of today's teachers do introduce alternative social and historical visions to their students, the predominant world view presented in American classrooms remains the traditional Eurocentric perspective.

Instructional methods and curricular applications have also changed little in recent decades. Too often, daily activities are

dominated by dull textbook readings, teacher-controlled recitation and lecture, individual seatwork, and tests determining students' recall of low-level factual material. The teacher, primarily using the textbook, disseminates information to students who are expected to listen passively and absorb the information that they must know in order to succeed in the course. It should surprise no one that social studies continues to be named by students as their least favorite subject—uninteresting, unimportant, and irrelevant.

Why has all the diligent work of committed, well-intentioned, and talented social studies researchers and curriculum developers done so little to alter students' negative impressions of social studies? And why has it had such a minimal impact on actual classroom practice? Why have teachers been hesitant to embrace the standards and innovations which our research has produced? In truth, the teachers find little relevance in the university—particularly in the prescriptions its professors offer. And why should they trust our recommendations? For the most part, teachers have seldom been invited to participate in our lively and sometimes tediously circular debates about defining the social studies, and about the focus and direction of social studies inquiry. Instead, teachers have been given new standards and told to follow them; they have been handed new teacher-proof curricula and directed to implement them.

All of these curriculum reform initiatives have relied on the notion that change in the social studies must emanate from the intelligentsia and flow from the top down. Traditionally, standards-driven reforms have been developed by small, select task forces, whose political agendas behind the reforms have seldom, if ever, been openly discussed. Embodying a monolithic view of what the social studies curriculum ought to include, most of these lists of standards would (if followed) render the social studies curriculum even less responsive to diverse student, regional, and community-based needs than the guidelines they would be replacing. And while many curricular projects have pushed traditional boundaries of the social studies instruction, offering fresh new perspectives, challenging content, and/or much-needed departures from teacher-centered instruction, their origin, development, and dissemination were still carried out in a manner that was as authoritarian as the more conservative standards reform movements. Few teachers are apt to embrace such mandates if they have had no voice in developing them. They are much more likely to react to them with resentment than with excitement; as far as teachers are concerned, the intelligentsia which devised these plans has little respect for the expertise that teachers have to offer, and little understanding of the reality of life in the classroom. And in many cases the teachers have been right.

As a result of this approach to curriculum reform, many potentially worthwhile programs were doomed from the moment they were conceived in the "laboratory" of the university, destined to gather dust on classroom shelves all over the country. Instead of embracing these new ideas, the teachers have chosen to rely on their familiar curriculum and instructional techniques; the more we strive to tell them what to do, the less likely they are to attempt anything new. During the past twenty-five years, top-down curriculum reform efforts have done little to ameliorate the shortcomings that Hunt and Metcalf pointed to almost thirty years ago: that the social studies often reinforces the dominant beliefs, myths, and explanations for existing social and class stratification and often does not deal with the vital survival issues and problems that many students experience in their daily lives. In social studies education, the more things have changed in the university, the more they've stayed the same in the classroom.

School/University Partnerships: The Challenge of the Next Twenty-Five Years

Considering the way that business is conducted at most universities, this top-down approach to curriculum reform is certainly understandable. Working within a university structure that supports traditional modes of research, grant writing, and frequent publication, professors are expected to

develop, quickly and efficiently, projects for which they will be appropriately rewarded with salary increases, promotion, and recognition. Compared to conventional methods of inquiry and curriculum development, collaborative enterprises are inefficient means of attaining these goals, for such projects severely limit a professor's "productivity." Collaborative endeavors require considerable patience and tolerance for ambiguity; they demand tremendous amounts of time, energy, and commitment.

A number of such collaborative efforts in social studies research and curriculum development have taken place over the past quarter-century—with teachers and professors working together side-by-side to create substantive change, on a small scale, in social studies theory and practice. Many of our university-based colleagues have been engaging in collaborative action research projects, team-teaching undergraduate and graduate courses with teachers in the field, and developing curriculum with teachers in the context of professional development schools. But, because they tend to go unrecognized as legitimate research projects, these isolated efforts at school/university collaboration and grass roots innovation have received scant attention in the social studies literature.

In light of the social studies intelligentsia's failure to influence social studies education through top-down reform efforts, it would be wise for us to spend the next

quarter-century focusing instead on these alternatives to traditional methods of research and curriculum development. Our suggestion is that we begin by reconceptualizing the traditional school/university relationship, to make concerted efforts to break down the age-old barrier between teachers and researchers. This requires that social studies professors (indeed, all those engaged in teacher education, regardless of subject discipline), along with the universities that support us, develop new visions regarding the nature of our work.

In the first place, university reward systems, which define much of what we do and how we do it, need to broaden the conventional parameters for legitimate research and curriculum development, and to acknowledge that collaboration takes time away from performing the usual functions of the university professor. For example, working in professional development schools—which is rapidly becoming an important avenue for collaboration—must be recognized not just as community service, but as a powerful means of conducting ongoing action research.

Confident that our universities recognize and support our work with teachers, we need to leave the sanctuary of the university and spend considerable time looking at what is going on in the classrooms. This entails more than just sitting invisibly in the back of the room and taking notes or holding inservice workshops with teachers after school. We need to

engage in action research, becoming a part of their lives at school and getting involved in the daily classroom interactions and activities of students and teachers. The more we become involved in school life, the more teachers will be interested in talking with us. As they become convinced that we do understand the daily problems they face in the classroom, they should come to trust our opinions and respect our suggestions—which is just what happened in the opening vignettes. Indeed, many teachers are hungry to discuss what they do and to consider ways to change their practices, and would leap at the opportunity to converse with an outsider whom they felt they could trust.

Still, no matter how much time we spend in the classroom, we won't win teachers' trust if in our conversations we simply tell them what to do. Rather than imposing our agendas and expertise on teachers, we need to take our cues from them—to find out from them what they would like to accomplish through our collaborations. Change should be a continuous process of action and reflection among theoreticians and practitioners working together to transform schools in ways that benefit the agendas of both parties, but the ultimate responsibility for change must remain in the teachers' province, where it belongs. We can only offer support, suggestions, new ideas, and guidance to help them attain the goals that they set for themselves. As indicated by the examples de-

scribed above, each teacher/researcher collaboration will be unique, depending on the number, personalities, and goals of the people involved.

For university researchers, participating in these relationships can be an exhilarating, multifaceted endeavor. In the above vignettes, university faculty play many roles in their relationships with teachers: advisor, assistant, colleague, confidant, cheerleader, resource, soundingboard, advocate, mentor. Ultimately, all such roles can help to accomplish what should be the primary goal of social studies research: to help teachers envision and articulate new ways of teaching, and to help those visions become a reality. Curriculum reform cannot be top-down; it begins at the grass roots. Change is incremental, not all-encompassing—a process, not an event.

In a collaborative school/university partnership, the roles of teacher and researcher are far less distinct than in conventional research relationships. Traditional research is the province of the university, with professors providing the "experts and expertise" to help teachers "solve" the problems in the classroom. In contrast to this hierarchical relationship, in a school/university partnership research is not the private domain of the professors, nor is the classroom the exclusive realm of students and teachers. Spending so much time in the classroom, the professor comes to understand the lived experience of teachers and

becomes an integral part of the teacher's world. Meanwhile, teachers engaging in ongoing conversation about classroom practice inevitably become involved in systematic inquiry—a realm usually reserved for the researcher. Curriculum planning, staff development, and inquiry evolve into collective enterprises in which all the constituents engage. As the teacher/researcher relationship flourishes and their respective worlds begin to interconnect, the schism between university intelligentsia and school proletariat should gradually dissolve.

Of course it will take more than just the few inspired teachers and professors described above to transform social studies curriculum and the traditional research agenda. Examined in isolation, the scenarios illuminate valuable experiences for teachers and their students, but they hardly sound like the beginnings of a grass roots movement. Yet these and all such partnerships have the potential to grow and eventually reach far more people than those originally involved. Over the years, those California teachers working with a university professor and student teachers may influence hundreds of student teachers, and perhaps their success will inspire more of their colleagues to become involved in the program. The midwestern teacher seeking reform-minded colleagues may actually find others at his school with whom to share his new ideas about social studies curriculum.

How many teachers would it take to create a critical mass of educators at his school, a confederation of committed teachers which could continue to grow and make a significant mark on the way students and teachers perceive social studies education? What if there were thousands of similar scenarios playing out all over the country, with every social studies researcher working to facilitate grass roots reform in local schools? And what if a national social studies organization supported such an effort—not with the goal of forging national standards, mandating model curricula, or promulgating a monolithic vision of social studies reform—but with the commitment to support a sort of mosaic of reforms which reflects the diversity of teachers, students, and evolving visions of social studies education in this country?

Taken together, this mosaic offers some exciting new windows into the world of social studies theory, research, and practice—a world that should be at once exciting, mysterious, and full of promise. Too often in the last twenty-five years, that world has been comprised of disinterested, dispirited, and disconnected participants. But beginning with just a few committed participants working together over the next quarter-century, a grass roots social studies reform movement could revitalize and reconnect students, teachers, and professors, growing inexorably, as educator and author George

Wood writes, "classroom by classroom, school by school."

riculum development and classroom teachers.

Note

¹ The term *intelligentsia* was first used by James Shaver to define the relationship between the self-described leaders of social studies theory, research, and cur-

Authors

JOHN KORNFELD is Assistant Professor and PERRY M. MARKER is Associate Professor in the School of Education at Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA 94928-3609.

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