



Editorial

# The End-Purpose of Teaching Social Sciences and the Curricular Inclusion of Social Problems

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## 1. Aims and Scope

The most recent scientific literature on the treatment of social problems or controversial social questions in the social sciences classroom and their inclusion into curricula emphasizes the need to introduce students into large-scale social debates where different points of view exist, different interests are at stake, and where it is desirable that they construct their own opinions in that respect from a critical and reasoned perspective. Research on social problems permits a typology of analysis that includes the relative experience of the past and the expectations for the future in a present that is lived and to consider the temporal relation on the basis of an analysis of changes and continuities that are observable from a comparative perspective. In the comprehension and interpretation of the historicity of the present and in planning the social future, social problems would have to represent a fundamental curricular tenant that gives relevance to the contemporaneity of the student.

This Special Issue offers a rich collection of studies aimed at answering two structural research questions:

- What are the purposes of teaching history and social sciences at schools today?
- What is the place of social thought formation and social problems in learning/teaching in Social Sciences?

## 2. Selected Studies

A total of 13 studies were submitted, resulting from quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research designs. Finally, 9 passed the peer review process and consequently met the scientific quality standards required for its approval, subsequent publication, and inclusion in the Special Issue “The End-Purpose of Teaching Social Sciences and the Curricular Inclusion of Social Problems”. The articles that make up this research topic have been written by renowned international specialists from Spain, Canada, and Chile in the field of social sciences didactics. Among them, special mention should be made of Dr. Joan Pagès (Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain), Dr. Pedro Miralles (University of Murcia, Spain), and Dr. Antoni Santisteban (Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain), leaders in this area of knowledge in the Ibero-American region.

The monograph opens with the article “The End-Purpose of Teaching History and the Curricular Inclusion of Social Problems from the Perspective of Primary Education Trainee Teachers” (Ortega-Sánchez and Blanch 2020). With a sample of 232 Spanish primary education trainee teachers, this study shows, among other results, an explanatory-predictive relationship between the variability of the degree of curricular relevance of social problems in primary education and the level of importance given by future teachers to its didactic treatment at this educational level. Likewise, this research provides qualitative evidence of the permanence of an instructional approach as the basic purpose of history teaching, to the detriment of others aimed at education for a democratic, global, equal, and inclusive citizenship from the assumption of human rights. As described in “Chilean Teacher Educators’ Conceptions on the Absence of Women and Their History in Teacher Training



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Programmes. A Collective Case Study" (Marolla et al. 2021), this majority instructional approach seems to correspond equally with the permanence of patriarchal, hegemonic structures in the practices of history teachers, despite the existence of a teaching intention toward inclusion and social justice.

From this perspective, the research "Pre-Service Teachers' Critical Digital Literacy Skills and Attitudes to Address Social Problems" (Castellví et al. 2020) analyzes the difficulties of future primary school teachers ( $n = 322$ ) in constructing critical discourses on certain social problems appearing in digital social media. These difficulties are confirmed in the research "Global Citizenship and Analysis of Social Facts: Results of a Study with Pre-Service Teachers" (González-Valencia et al. 2020), in which the distance of future secondary education teachers from conducting a true model of critical global citizenship education, based on the critical interpretation of social information with global implications, can be verified. On the contrary, the analysis of the social representations of primary education students ( $n = 70$ ), "Students' Social Representations of Forced Migration as a Relevant Social Problem and Its Curricular Inclusion at the End of Primary School" (García-Morís et al. 2021), reports the predisposition of students in the last year of Spanish primary education to the curricular inclusion of social problems in the social studies education.

As argued in "The Consensus on Citizenship Education Purposes in Teacher Education" (Estellés et al. 2021), the difficulties and limitations of this priority purpose of social studies education are explained by the gap between the purposes of education for democratic citizenship and the reality of the social studies classroom. In this sense, "School Inquiry in Secondary Education: The Experience of the Fiesta de la Historia Youth Congress in Seville" (De-Alba-Fernández et al. 2021) analyzes the possibilities of including relevant social problems for the construction of global citizenship from the school. However, the results obtained continue to confirm the gap identified by Estellés et al. (2021), the disciplinary attachment, and the need to implement didactic proposals aimed at the teaching and learning of citizenship competencies.

Finally, with a large sample of students in the last year of Spanish secondary education ( $n = 1714$ ), the research "Secondary School Students' Perception of the Acquisition of Social Science Skill" (Álvarez-Martínez-Iglesias et al. 2021) reveals the relational influence of assessment processes and the acquisition of competencies, key curricular elements in teaching social studies. Likewise, as evinced by "Educational Intervention through a Board Game for the Teaching of Mathematics to Dyslexic Greek Students" (Malliakas et al. 2021), this influence can be proven in the implementation of alternative teaching and learning interventions, and in obtaining positive effects and improvement of competency learning in students with dyslexia.

The relevant research results obtained in this Special Issue have been part of the [International Seminar Integrated Teaching in Specific Didactics: Potentialities and Challenges of Transdisciplinary Integration for the Resolution of Contemporary Social Problems](#) (2021), held between 8 and 12 November 2021. This event, organized by the Vice-Rectorate for Social Responsibility, Culture, and Sport of the University of Burgos, and by the Consolidated Research Unit 285—Didactics in STEAM areas (DAS) of the same institution, focused its interest on two interdependent lines of work:

- (1) The epistemological reflection and analysis of the potentialities and challenges of integrated transdisciplinary teaching in specific didactics from social and scientific-experimental studies;
- (2) The contribution of this integrated approach to the understanding, intervention, and resolution of contemporary social problems and to the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, which is the specific theoretical and methodological development area of the present Special Issue.

### 3. Conclusions

The core concept of education for citizenship is called active citizenship, understood as social participation based on mutual respect and non-violence, in accordance with human rights and democratic principles (Abs 2021). More than two decades have passed since the Council of Europe included, within the framework of the well-known Lisbon Strategy, the promotion of the concept of active citizenship and the learning of values and democratic participation as educational objectives.

To speak of education for citizen participation or for the exercise of active citizenship implies reflecting on how to teach in order to intervene, based on commitment and responsibility in issues-centered education, controversial issues, or socially acute questions. Despite the progress made, it is still necessary to design educational programs and practices specifically aimed at dealing with social problems and intervening in the community from an active citizenship approach.

The purpose of the teaching of social and human science disciplines must be directed toward education for an active, inclusive, and responsible democratic citizenship with the problems of its environment. Its natural contribution to education in democratic culture involves 10 key formative characteristics: (1) humanizing, (2) inclusive (gender), (3) based on otherness, (4) intercultural, (5) controversial (controversial issues), (6) aimed at the development of critical thinking skills, (7) based on peace, (8) sustainable, (9) aimed at the future, and (10) transformative. In this line, socio-scientific inquiry-based learning (SSIBL) could be of special didactic significance. The central idea of this methodology is the investigation of a problem that leads to the improvement of local and/or global conditions, producing actions through democratic processes and taking advantage of scientific knowledge, which can be re-contextualized as part of this process.

This essential purpose of social science education should keep its focus on intervention in community problems, assuming the notion of the problem as a connatural part of the very concept of democracy and the nature of social reality. There is no doubt that this intervention constitutes a basic element of education for the future and social action.

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