THIRTY YEARS AND SOME OF THE SAME ISSUES

Allen D. Glenn
University of Washington

Social studies educators who were in graduate school in the late 1960s entered the profession at a wonderful time. First, enrollments in higher education and PK-12 schools were growing rapidly, and jobs were plentiful. Second, social studies education focused on inquiry as *the* instructional strategy, and inquiry was going to change the social studies classroom. Third, the social science disciplines held center place, and social studies was to teach the concepts, generalizations, and skills of these disciplines. And lastly, emerging computer technology expanded the possibilities for hypothesis testing, data analysis, modeling, and simulation. Finally social studies would have new tools for inquiry into the social sciences. At the time few of us realized how much these technologies would change our professional lives. But, in each of the following three decades, my social studies career was shaped by computers and emerging digital technologies.

In 1973 I joined a small group of teacher educators from around the country at Stony Brook, New York, to explore the Huntington II computer software materials. Ludwig Braun directed the project. Professor John Lee, Northwestern University, and I were two of the social studies educators. We explored the models on population growth and voting behavior, learned how to run related computer simulations, and ate a lot of fish. We returned to campus convinced that these new materials could be powerful tools for social studies. What we quickly realized was that getting other social studies educators interested in this new technology and software was not going to be an easy task. It was perplexing to us because so many social studies educators were strong advocates of inquiry and hypothesis testing and these new computer simulations enabled us to do these things with students. But, learning to operate this new technology was pretty formidable. Inquiry could wait.

About the same time the state of Minnesota decided that it was the state's responsibility to ensure that all the schools in the state had access to computers. In a very farsighted move the legislature created the Minnesota Education Computer Consortium[1] (MECC). MECC

• **Allen D. Glenn**, Dean Emeritus & Professor of Education, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington. E-mail: aglenn@u.washington.edu

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was to carry out research projects, develop new computer applications, train educators, and assess the impact of technology on teaching and learning. MECC became the General Motors of software and training–creating hundreds of good quality software programs and training teachers and teacher educators.

As an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota, I was in the right place at the right time. MECC trainers and developers were graduate students and students in my classes, and research and development projects sought out interested university professors. Suddenly social studies courses had access to a time-share system with hundreds of programs and to a new microcomputer called Apple. Critics claimed that too much of the software was "drill and kill," focused on low-level learning, and didn't use proper learning strategies. In some ways all those things were true; however, social studies had entered into a new era.

One product symbolized this early era–Oregon Trail. Don Rawitsch, a young MECC developer, was a social studies master's student. He was interested in developing a simulation for the time-share system based on experiences of the pioneers who traveled the Oregon Trail. From a butcher paper map to a time-share simulation that required reading a printout and then typing a response on a TTY, Oregon Trail became a classic that is still being used in classrooms across America. The instructional issue surrounding Oregon Trail remains however.

Oregon Trail was created as a simulation to help students understand the events surrounding the trip west, to help develop decision-making skills, and to enable students to work together. Far too often however it is played as a game with students more interested in hunting game, fighting hostile riders, and trying not to die on the trail. The problem existed in 1975 and exists today–integrated as part of the instructional lesson or student game?

NCSS was not all that enamored with computers in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For example, in 1981 NCSS was in Detroit, Michigan, and several of us wanted to set-up a microcomputer lab to demonstrate social studies software. NCSS wasn't keen on the idea, but finally agree. We couldn't have space in the main convention hotel so we were sent several blocks away to the old Cadillac Hotel. We were worried that no one would walk those many blocks from the main hotel. We were wrong. The room was packed!

Growing interest among a small core of members lead to a Special Interest Group (SIG) in Computers in the early 1980s. I can't recall if I was the first, but served as the chair in 1982-83. I do remember that there weren't a lot of us at those early meetings. The SIG worked hard over the next decade to create more sessions, to get more space at the convention, and then to set-up computer labs for members. A strong core of hard-working social studies educators and computer company representatives did the background work to keep technology on NCSS's agenda.

In 1984 Steve Rose, Allan Brandhorst, James Hodges, Charlie White and I wrote the first set of guidelines to help teacher assess courseware (Rose, Brandhorst, Glenn, Hodges, & White; 1984). Enough software was appearing in the marketplace that NCSS thought it worthwhile to publish some guidelines. Software has fallen on hard times during the past decade. Many of the companies that created materials for social studies have been sold or disappeared from the marketplace. The Internet and the World Wide Web have changed the role of courseware. Questions about quality remain however.

By 1990 when the *Handbook of Research in Social Studies and Teaching and Learning* was to be published instructional technology was given a space. Two old timers, Lee Ehman and I, were given the opportunity to examine the literature and research. We concluded that there was a "low use of interactive technology in social studies classrooms and a very thin knowledge base from research." (p.520) However, we found that new tools were coming into the classroom and concluded, "It is the

task of social studies educators–teachers, supervisors, researchers, teacher trainers–to understand these new possibilities and devise ways to implement them." (p. 520)

A decade later it is encouraging to see that technology has a visible place in social studies. *Social Education* allocates space to technology issues and there are discussions about how emerging technologies can assist the classroom teacher. The recent publication of *Critical Issues in Social Studies Research for the 21st Century* (Stanely, 2001) has a thoughtful chapter on technology. And, CUFA's participation in *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education (CITE Journal)* in establishing a joint educational journal devoted to technology applications bodes well for the future.

In 2001 however some of the same issues remain. Inquiry is still widely discussed in the literature and new standards speak of students who are able to problem solve, analyze data, and effectively use emerging technologies. New technologies allow access to information as never before, make it possible to develop creative products, and to collaborate with others around the globe. But social studies instruction remains much the same.

Maybe it is not technology. Maybe it is a philosophical issue. Certainly new technologies require new skills and are always a challenge to use. But, as evidenced by any seven-year-old, these skills can be acquired. What must be confronted at some point are social studies educators' beliefs about knowledge, teacher and student roles, and fundamentals of learning. Maybe these are the issues that social studies educators should be exploring. As emerging technologies continue to connect learners to a global environment, social studies educators will need to re-examine some of these basic philosophical assumptions. This will be harder than learning to create a webpage.

NOTE

1. Later the state would divest itself of MECC and "Consortium" became "Corporation" which later was sold to the Learning Company who later sold the remaining pieces to Riverdeep in 2001.

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