



Book Review

## **Introducing Nye spadestikk i samfunnsfagdidaktikken [New sods digging into social studies didactics]**

Kjetil Børhaug, Odd Ragnar Hunnes, Åshild Samnøy. Fagbokforlaget, 2022. 308 pp. ISBN:9788245037913

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As the shovel bites into the earth, it marks a beginning. The Norwegian word “spadestikk” refers to this process which chat gpt describes as: “a unifying force bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds who share a common interest in the project`s success fostering unity and camaraderie, reminding everyone involved that they are contributing to something larger than themselves”.

The book`s title is suitable. It describes a process reminding everyone involved that they are contributing to something larger than themselves. When it was published in 2015, the book “Spadestikk i samfunnsfagdidaktikken”, turned the first sod in establishing a collaboration about research on social studies education in Norway. It had the same editors, Hunnes, Samnøy and Børhaug, from a combination of disciplines in the social studies [samfunnsfag]: geography, history and political science. The book collected contributions from a network of scholars from the Western region of Norway. At the time the academic field of research on social studies education was smaller, and thus collaboration between the institutions was of great importance in connecting scholars and establishing the field. It had ten chapters with nine contributors from different disciplinary social studies backgrounds, but all with experience from teacher education aiming to bring the chapters closer to practice experiences.

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The book addressed some of the themes relevant for social studies didactics, spreading from the role played by local communities as a starting point for grasping the world, what concept of democracy and which view of “the others” the subject could and should present. One contribution used interview data with teachers to address what it means to discuss in the social studies, while another examined the role of values. Furthermore, what it means to progress from elementary to upper secondary in social studies was introduced and analyzed. The potential for using maps as a tool to reflect on the world was also explored. Two of the chapters examined the students’ perspectives, one based on interview data of how children understand international aid work, and the other based on results from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study. The book addressed what social studies can be about, with regards to content, methods and student prerequisites. The book consists of examples of research in need of more research.

Thus it fits that the new version “Nye spadestikk i samfunnsfagdidaktikken” was published in 2022 adding “new” to the title and turning the second sod in research on social studies didactics. In seven years the context had changed. First, the government had decided to turn Norwegian teacher education for compulsory school into a five-year integrated master’s program, starting from 2017 (The Ministry of Education and Research, 2014). This meant that there was an incentive to promote research in teacher education institutions, increasing research in social studies education in breadth and depth. With this reform, the students must be equipped to plan and implement an independent research master project in a subject discipline such as social studies. To do this, students need research- based literature, and good empirical examples of how this kind of research can be conducted. Second, from 2020 a new curriculum was introduced (LK20) organizing around three interdisciplinary topics; health and life skills, democracy and citizenship and sustainable development (The Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). In social studies, the traditional distinction between geography, history and social studies was dissolved and replaced by core elements: (1) sense of wonder and exploration, (2) deliberating on society and interconnections, (3) understanding and participating in democracy, (4) sustainable societies and (5) development of identity and belonging (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

The book responds to these contextual changes and presents 15 chapters with 18 contributors from different disciplinary backgrounds such as political science, history, geography, sociology and Sami studies. In the first chapter of “Nye spadestikk i samfunnsfagdidaktikken” Børhaug, Sæle and Sætre give an overview of research in Norway, including master theses the last five years. They conclude that there is a lack of empirical research, in which this book wants to contribute. A concern throughout seems to be building interconnections in the subject. What is the interconnection in social studies between the school subject, the subject disciplines, and the core elements? What is the role of the map in exploring interconnections? What should progress look like in social studies and how should it be assessed? What is social studies beyond the nation state?

Hunnes (chapter 2) looks at which values the Norwegian curriculum from 2020 is based

on. He analyses the connection between the various curriculum levels and asks how and to what extent values are defined in the social studies curriculum. He argues that important values disappear on “the trickling down” to the subject curriculum and the values still there are vague and left to teachers and textbook authors to define. Børhaug and Muñoz (chapter 3) further develop the topic of progress. They argue that to assess progress, it is important to discuss what it is. What should be taught at the different levels and why? They analyze the curriculum and find that the competence goals are vague, and that, to mention one finding, a focus on personal opinions- and not necessarily qualified opinions- exist throughout. In chapter 4 Langø and Børhaug argue, based on teacher interviews, that high achievers may benefit more from formative assessment in social studies than other students, as the teachers to a large extent leave it up to the students to implement the assessment in their own continued learning. The curriculum developments from 1994 to 2020 is examined by Trysnes and Skjølberg in chapter 5 who, based on the analysis, contend that there exists an ideal of the student in the LK20 as a social science researcher already from the second grade, and worry that this general focus on scientific methods is on the expense of subject matter. In chapter 6 Hasle and Straume conduct a literature review and build an analytical framework to analyze the role the local community plays in identity formation in social studies and put forth that national perspectives are still dominant in empirical research. Jøssang presents the benefits of using microhistoric cases in social studies education in chapter 7, whereas Tafjord, in chapter 8, analyses the (little) use of history compared to historical consciousness in a history textbook written for the upper secondary school curriculum (LK20). In chapter 9 Straume reviews international research on the use of geographic information systems (GIS) and discusses opportunities and challenges related to the findings. Sæther, in chapter 10, reflects around how the concept of citizenship is changeable, and whether the climate crisis can and should lead to changes in citizenship status, such as the inclusion of non-human animals and nature. Borgebund continues the global arena in chapter 11 and argues that while the social studies curriculum presents global citizenship for the students, it is questionable whether such an arena for political influence exists as long as citizenship is tied to the state. He therefore claims that views of international politics (realism, liberalism, and critical theory) have different implications for citizenship. In chapter 12 Børhaug analyses the curriculum (LK20) based on the implications for citizenship education that views of democracy offer and finds that role of political institutions is downplayed. The curriculum instead focuses on democracy as learning how to cooperate and work together at a micro level. “Students learn how to have an opinion, but not how to use it in political life” (p. 246). In chapter 13 Samnøy taps into the debate about what can be considered as controversial issues. Based on an analysis of teaching material, developed by peace and human rights institutions which have a mandate from the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research to aid schools in the teaching and learning of democracy and human rights, she argues that the issues they present as controversial, racism and freedom of speech, are in fact settled political issues and not to be considered

as controversial. In chapter 14 Olsen and Evju reflect around the new curriculum's emphasis on integrating indigenous people and national minorities. In Norway this refers to the Sami as an indigenous people and Kvens/Norwegian Finns, Jews, Forest Finns, Roma and Romani people/Tatars as national minorities. One challenge in implications for education lies in addressing the distinct national minorities separately, another question relates to how we can educate about minorities without framing it in relation to the majority. In the final chapter Ferrer conducts a deductive content analysis of textbooks in the 5th grade from LK 20. Based on these findings she talks back to the instrumentalist view of history education and argues that also what might be considered worthless at the first glance, might be useful in creating democratic citizens. History teaches us that the world is not a given, it is changeable, and this should, she argues, be introduced in the classroom.

As promised this book serves as an important contribution to the research-based literature in the field of social studies education and collects good empirical examples of how this kind of research can be conducted. As the concept of sod-cutting itself is reserved to the celebration of the first day of building, I don't necessarily see a third version of this book coming soon. I think, in the Norwegian context, it is more likely that the research will be further specialized in addressing the many areas, topics and questions that the authors express is in need of further research. First, they argue that there exists a lack of theoretical perspectives, most research is either based on general didactical theory, pedagogical theory or disciplinary theoretical perspectives such as from geography or political science. This means that we will probably see more subject specific didactics for social studies in general, and the subdisciplines in particular. We already see some tendencies of theorization of social studies didactics, although these are still not so much used in the Norwegian research. Second, the authors point to a lack of quantitative analyses. As colleagues keep working together nationally and internationally it is easier to commit to larger studies. Third, the authors comment on a lack of scholarly interest in the elementary social studies in Norway, and at the primary level. With the master criteria established also for teaching 1-7 grade, this area is in great need of research-based literature and empirical examples with regards to students' prerequisites, methods and classroom research.

This book sets the standard for commitment and collaboration to the field inspiring a Norwegian audience to keep digging in understanding how young people can get a better grasp of the world.

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