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# LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR VISIBLE LEARNING<sup>®</sup> FOR SOCIAL STUDIES



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What does the future hold when the vast majority of middle and high school students are unable to tell the difference between an online news story and an advertisement (Wineburg, 2019)? Or when they fail to answer basic questions about slavery in the United States or about the Holocaust (Shuster, 2018)? Or when 24 percent of US millennials considered democracy to be a *bad* or *very bad* way of running the country (Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017, p. 3)? Healthy, thriving democracies depend upon an educated citizenry. Today's social studies teachers face new challenges that have significant consequences.

Picture a middle school classroom where students begin their geography lesson by viewing images of an oil rig, a boat full of freshly caught fish, a pile of raw cut emeralds, a large freshwater lake, and a field of wind turbines. The students discuss what these images have in common and determine that they are all *things we use from the earth*. Their teacher, Katie Robinson, clarifies that these are examples of the concept called *natural resources*. She then defines *natural resources* and asks students to complete an elaboration activity to make meaning of the term for themselves. The next day, she provides several choices of articles to read about various natural resources so that students can see the application of this term. The students complete a short journal prompt to summarize their understanding of the term *natural resources*.

What did you notice about these instructional strategies? Ms. Robinson does not jump straight to asking students to evaluate a country's access to natural resources until she is sure that her students understand what the term *natural resources* means, helping them to identify the critical attributes as exemplified across multiple examples. This is surface level learning done well, which we will focus on in Chapter 2. Surface level learning is when students explore new concepts and build initial understanding. The next day, students conduct similar activities with the concepts of *scarcity* and *power*. Ms. Robinson explains that they are going to look at situations in which there is a limited supply of natural resources and that, eventually, they will extrapolate the relationship that scarcity, natural resources, and power have in each situation. When students make generalizations about the relationships between and among concepts, they are moving into the deep learning phase, which we will explore in Chapter 3.

Next, Ms. Robinson models how she analyzes primary and secondary source documents using a strategy called IREAD (Monte-Sano, Paz, & Felton, 2014), which we will describe in Chapter 2. The students practice annotating a primary source document in small groups while Ms. Robinson circulates to check their conversations and offer feedback on their work. In this case, the students are back at surface level learning for source analysis, even though they are simultaneously in deeper levels of learning as they examine the relationships among scarcity, natural resources, and power. Next, she introduces the scenario of the Nile River and students complete a jigsaw activity with both primary and secondary sources to find out more information about the water crisis on the Nile. While completing graphic organizers, students begin to notice that there is relative power among nations such as South Sudan, with proportionally little international power compared to Egypt. They begin to grasp the role that international power plays in situations where natural resources are scarce. Deep learning occurs when students start to generalize to broader rules about how concepts interact, and we will examine this phase in more detail in Chapter 3.

Ms. Robinson's students are now ready to transfer their learning to a new situation where natural resources, scarcity, and power play a role. We will investigate the transfer phase of learning more carefully in Chapter 4.

The point here is to see that Ms. Robinson is intentional about the phase of learning her students are in and plans accordingly. **Surface level learning** occurs when students gain initial understanding of the concepts, terms, skills, facts, and vocabulary of a topic. **Deep learning** occurs when students begin to make connections between these ideas and generalize about broader principles based on their classroom experiences. **Transfer of learning** occurs when students apply these connections to new situations. The other key aspect is that students increase their independence from one phase to the next and begin to choose among their understanding and skills to suit the new situation at hand. See Figure 1.1 for a chart of the instructional strategies shown in each phase of the example above. The remaining chapters of this book will provide details about each of these phases and instructional strategies.

With limited instructional time and numerous standards or learning outcomes to teach, the question for social studies teachers is: How do we maximize precious time to ensure that students grasp enough to prepare them for informed civic life? The discipline of social studies is far more than memorizing dates and facts. It involves the skillful ability to conduct investigations, analyze sources, place events in historical and cultural context, and synthesize various points of view, while recognizing our own biases. Recent developments in the field ask us to reorient our thinking about good social studies instruction—moving from one of passive memorization of facts and dates to a more dynamic process of disciplinary inquiry. We need to teach students how to evaluate and synthesize vast amounts of information, analyze divergent points of view, and work collaboratively to build prosperous and fair societies.

Doug remembers his US history class. We created pages and pages of outlines from the history textbook. We used the headings from the textbook as the major organizer and included details under each heading. We were required to include each bold word in our notes. On Fridays, we watched a movie that was somehow related to the chapter and took more notes. Some of the movies were documentary and some were tangentially related stories. On Mondays, we took a test on the information from the week before. And then the process started anew. The teacher never talked in class, other than when students misbehaved.

## EXAMPLE OF SURFACE, DEEP, AND TRANSFER STRATEGIES IN GEOGRAPHY

Phase of Learning	Example Instructional Strategies
Surface level learning of the terms: natural resources, power, scarcity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocabulary instruction of <i>natural resources</i></li> <li>• Wide reading about natural resources</li> <li>• Summarizing understanding of natural resources</li> <li>• Repeating above strategies with the terms of <i>power</i> and <i>scarcity</i></li> </ul>
Surface level learning of primary and secondary source analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher modeling source analysis using IREAD strategy (Monte-Sano et al., 2014)</li> <li>• Teacher providing feedback on source analysis</li> <li>• Jigsaw strategy with sources on the Nile river</li> </ul>
Deep level learning about power, resources, and scarcity on the Nile as well as source analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completing graphic organizers about power, resources, and scarcity on the Nile River</li> <li>• Close reading of differing opinion articles about the situation on the Nile River</li> <li>• Engaging in a class discussion to generalize about the relationships between and among these concepts</li> <li>• Thinking metacognitively about their understanding of the relationship</li> </ul>
Transfer level of learning about power, resources, and scarcity as well as source analysis to new situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students compare similarities and differences between the Nile river situations and another situation where resources, scarcity, and power play a role, such as the Tigris river that flows through Turkey and Iraq.</li> <li>• Students debate about the role of international groups where resources become scarce</li> <li>• Students compose an essay about an international conflict among scarce resources and make recommendations about solving the problem</li> </ul>

Figure 1.1

The following year, Doug's world history class was very different. Like the year before, we read a textbook. We also read many primary source documents. The teacher scheduled frequent short lectures. We created concept maps. We had debates. We put world leaders, portrayed by the teacher, on trial. We wrote essays in which we had to make a claim and

support it. One memorable unit required that we explain the phrase: The sun never sets on the British Empire. We had to discuss the literal and figurative meanings of the phrase, identify if this was ever true, and note whether it remained true today.

How much history do you think Doug remembers? From which experience? What type of learning experiences work best to help accelerate learning and deepen understanding that can be applied to new situations? This book strives to answer that question, drawing on a very large database about what works best to improve students' learning.

We have chosen the term social studies as we hope it serves as an umbrella term for the various aspects of the study of human society. This includes all of the content that students need to learn related to history, geography, economics, civics, anthropology, sociology, government systems, and political science—and we've included examples from kindergarten to grade 12. Yes, it's a lot and it's foundational to the ways in which people interact with each other, their communities, and the world at large. We would be remiss if we didn't include the words of George Santayana: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." In other words, society's progress is dependent on members of the community to know their past and to recognize the social systems in place in a society.

## The Evidence Base

The starting point for our exploration of social studies learning is John Hattie's books, *Visible Learning* (2009) and *Visible Learning for Teachers* (2012). At the time these books were published, his work was based on over 800 meta-analyses conducted by researchers all over the world, which included over 50,000 individual studies that included over 250 MILLION students. It has been claimed to be the most comprehensive review of literature ever conducted. And the thing is, it's still going on. At the time of this writing, the database includes 1,800 meta-analyses, with over 90,000 studies and 300 million students. A lot of data, right? But the story underlying the data is the critical matter.

Before we explore the findings and discuss what we don't cover in this book, we should discuss the idea of a meta-analysis because it is the basic building block for the recommendations in this book. At its root, a meta-analysis is a statistical tool for combining findings from different studies with the goal of identifying patterns that can inform practice. It's the old preponderance of evidence that we're looking for, because individual studies have a hard time making a compelling case for change. But a meta-analysis synthesizes what is currently known about a given topic and can result in strong recommendations about the impact or effect of a specific practice.

EFFECT SIZE  
FOR CLASSROOM  
DISCUSSION = 0.82

Many of the instructional strategies found in the Visible Learning research work best at a specific phase of learning.

The statistical approach for conducting meta-analyses is beyond the scope of this book, but it is important to note that this tool allows researchers to identify trends across many different studies and their participants. For example, Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey, and Alexander (2009) conducted a meta-analysis on classroom discussion. They combined the findings from 39 studies that had over 84,000 participants. They note that there are some discussion approaches that are more effective than others, but that “talk appears to play a fundamental role in text-based comprehension” (p. 761). Given that, it seems reasonable to suggest that teachers integrate talk into their classrooms. Before you put down this book and run back to class to get students to talk about what they are reading, we caution that many of the instructional strategies found in the research work best *at a specific phase of learning*. As we will see, classroom discussion is particularly effective for deep learning but doesn't do much good for surface learning. More on these distinctions soon. For now, let's keep focused on the evidence.

### Effect Sizes

In addition to the meta-analyses, the largest summary of educational research ever conducted (*Visible Learning*) contains *effect sizes* for each practice. An effect size is the magnitude, or size, of a given effect. But defining a phrase by using the same terms isn't that helpful. So we'll try again. You might remember from your statistics class that studies report statistical significance. Researchers make the case that something *worked* when chance is reduced to 5 percent (as in  $p < .05$ ) or 1 percent (as in

$p < .01$ )—what they really mean is that the effect that was found in the study was unlikely to be zero: something happened (but no hint of the size of the effect, nor whether it was worthwhile!). One way to increase the likelihood that statistical significance is reached is to increase the number of people in the study, also known as sample size. We're not saying that researchers inflate the size of the research group to obtain significant findings. We are saying that simply because something is statistically significant doesn't mean that it's worth implementing. For example, say the sample size was 1,000, then a correlation only needs to exceed 0.044 to be *statistically significant*; if 10,000 then 0.014, and if 100,000 then 0.004—yes, you can be confident that these values are greater than zero, but are they of any practical value?

That's where effect size comes in.

Say, for example, that this amazing computer program was found to be statistically significant in changing student achievement. Sounds good, you say to yourself, and you consider purchasing or adopting it. But then you learn that it only increased students' performance by 3 points on a summative assessment (and the research team had data from 10,000 students). If it were free and easy to implement this change, it might be worth it to have students get a tiny bit better scores. But if it were time-consuming, difficult, or expensive, you should ask yourself if it's worth it to go to all of this trouble for such a small gain. That's effect size—it represents the magnitude of the impact that a given approach has. We think about it like the Richter scale, which is used to measure earthquakes. In California, we have about 10,000 earthquakes per year. But we don't feel all of them because their impact is small. They register very low on the Richter scale. In the language of learning, they have a very minimal effect.

*Visible Learning* provides readers with effect sizes for many influences under investigation. As an example, classroom discussion has a reasonably strong effect size at 0.82 (we'll talk more about what the effect size number tells us in the next section). The effect sizes can be ranked from those with the highest impact to those with the lowest. But that doesn't mean that teachers should just take the top 10 or 20 and try to implement them immediately. Rather, as we will discuss later in this book,



some of the highly useful practices are more effective when focused on surface level learning while others work better for deep learning and still others work to encourage transfer. Purpose, context, and timing of practices all matter and must be considered. For more information on effect sizes, visit the companion website at <http://resources.corwin.com/VL-socialstudies>.

## Noticing What Works

If you attend any conference or read just about any professional journal, not to mention subscribe to blogs or visit Pinterest, you'll get the sense that everything works.

Yet educators have a lot to learn from practices that do not work. In fact, we would argue that learning from what doesn't work, and not repeating those mistakes, is a valuable use of time. To determine what doesn't work, we turn our attention to effect sizes again.

Effect sizes can be negative or positive, and they scale from low to high. Intuitively, an effect size of 0.60 is better than an effect size of 0.20. Intuitively, we should welcome any effect that is greater than 0—as 0 means *no growth* and clearly any negative effect-size means a negative growth. If only it was this simple.

It turns out that about 95 percent plus of the influences that we use in schools have a positive effect; that is, the effect size of nearly everything we do is greater than zero. This helps explain why so many people can argue *with evidence* that their pet project works. If you set the bar at showing any growth above zero, it is indeed hard to find programs and practices that don't work. As described in *Visible Learning* (2009), we have to reject the starting point of zero. Students naturally mature and develop over the course of a year and thus actions, activities, and interventions that teachers use should *extend learning beyond what a student can achieve by simply attending school for a year*.

This is why John Hattie set the bar of acceptability higher—at the average of all the influences he compiled—from the home, parents, schools,

Actions, activities, and interventions that teachers use should extend learning beyond what a student can achieve by simply attending school for a year.

teachers, curricula, and teaching strategies. This average was 0.40 and Hattie called it the *hinge point*. He then undertook to study the underlying attributes that would explain why those influences higher than 0.40 had such a positive impact compared with those lower than 0.40. His findings were the impetus for the *Visible Learning* story.

Borrowing from *Visible Learning*, the barometer and hinge point are effective in explaining what we focus on in this book and why. Here's an example of how this might play out:

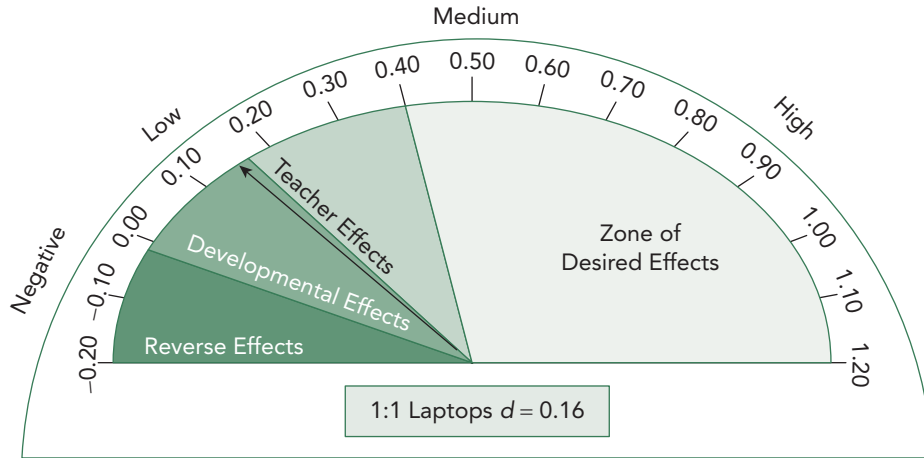
Let's focus on 1:1 technology initiatives, which are popular in some circles. In essence, students are taught using a laptop or tablet. This is an expensive intervention and yet one that parents feel is important, as computers are part of the world today. And there are sales people who claim that learning accelerates and there are testimonials about the students engaging in learning using devices. School systems have spent millions on technology. That's where the meta-analyses and effect size efforts can teach us. The barometer and hinge point for one-on-one laptops are presented in Figure 1.2. Note that at 0.16 this influence rests in the zone of *developmental effects*, which is below the average teacher effects and better than reverse effects. In other words, the evidence suggests that this has a limited influence on student learning. The technology might make it easier to store documents and provide access to materials, sure. But there isn't evidence that this is an accelerator of learning.

EFFECT SIZE FOR 1:1  
LAPTOPS = 0.16

Our focus in *Visible Learning for Social Studies* is on actions that fall inside the *zone of desired effects*, which is 0.40 and above. When actions are in the range of 0.40 and above, the data suggest that the effort extends beyond that which was expected from attending school for a year.

CAUTION. That does not mean that everything below 0.40 effect size is not worthy of attention. In fact, there are likely some useful approaches for teaching and learning that are not above this average. For example, collaborative learning has an effect size of 0.34, almost ensuring that students gain a year's worth of achievement for a year of education.

# BAROMETER FOR THE INFLUENCE OF 1:1 LAPTOPS



Source: Adapted from Hattie (2012).

Figure 1.2

We are not suggesting that collaborative learning be removed from the classroom. We are suggesting that it probably should not be the only thing that a teacher does to ensure deep learning. Another critical finding was the very low effect of teacher's subject matter knowledge. While we may accept the evidence that it is currently of little import, surely this means we should worry and investigate, first, why it is so low; and second, how we can change what we do in the classroom to ensure that the knowledge teachers bring to the classroom has a much higher effect.

It is important to note that some of the aggregate scores mask situations in which specific actions can be strategically used to improve students' understanding.

Simulations are a good case. The effect size of simulations is 0.34, below the threshold that we established. But, what if simulations were really effective in deepening understanding but really, really bad when

EFFECT SIZE FOR SIMULATIONS = 0.34

used with surface learning? In this case, the strategic deployment of simulations could be important. There are situations like this that we will review in this book as we focus on surface level learning versus deep learning and transfer learning. For now, let's turn our attention to actions that teachers can take to improve student learning.

## Learning From What Works

The majority of this book will focus on learning social studies, specifically. In this next section, however, we focus our attention more broadly. The learning of social studies is situated in a larger classroom environment and is contextualized in the general learning situations that students encounter. We believe that the following influences deserve attention from teachers in all classes, including those devoted to social studies.

### Teacher Credibility

A few things come to mind when we consider actions that teachers can take at the more generic level. On the top of the list with an effect size of 1.09 is teacher credibility. Students know which teachers can make a difference in their lives. Teacher credibility is a constellation of characteristics, including trust, competence, dynamism, and immediacy. Students evaluate each of these factors to determine if their teacher is credible, and if they are going to choose to learn from that teacher. Teachers can compromise their credibility when they violate trust, make a lot of errors, sit in the back of the room, or lack a sense of urgency. They compromise their credibility particularly if they are not seen to be fair.

EFFECT SIZE  
FOR TEACHER  
CREDIBILITY = 1.09

Of course, each of these needs to be held in balance. For example, too much pressure and students will think that a given teacher is a stress-case. Not enough and they think their teacher doesn't care. Similarly, students might think a teacher is weird when they fake excitement about a topic of study or realize that their teacher doesn't care about the unit at all. Although not specifically focused on social studies, the dynamic of teacher credibility is always at play.

Consider Angela Conner. She's always excited about everything. She knows her content well and works to establish trusting relationships with her students. But every time something happens, it's as if it's the most important and exciting thing ever. She is over the top with enthusiasm. This worked well for her with her kindergarten students, but her fifth graders think she's a fake. As one of the students said, "Yeah, Ms. Conner pretends to be excited, even when we get a test back. Really? It's important, but it's not like she should be jumping around like she does." This student and likely many more are questioning Ms. Conner's credibility and thus compromising their ability to learn from her.

On the other hand, Brandon Chu exudes excitement episodically and his students wait for it. Certain things seem very important to Mr. Chu. He tells his students why they are important and explains how the class builds on itself over the course of the year. In one lesson, Mr. Chu said, "We've got some pressure on us to get some major work done. It's crunch time, people, and we need to support each other in our learning. Please make sure that each of you has completed the concept map [effect size 0.64] and are ready to write. If you haven't had a peer review yet, let me know. We need to get these done so that they can be included in the upcoming e-zine. If we miss the deadline, we're out of the issue." Mr. Chu's students trust him and know when it's time to focus. They appreciate his dynamic, yet not overzealous style. And, importantly, they learn a lot.

### Teacher–Student Relationships

Closely related to teacher credibility are teacher–student relationships, which have an effect size of 0.48. When students believe that the teacher is credible, they are more likely to develop positive relationships with that teacher, and then learn more from him or her. But relationships go deeper than credibility. Of course, relationships are based on trust, which is part of the credibility construct. But relationships also require effective communication and addressing issues that strain the relationship. Positive relationships are fostered and maintained when teachers set fair expectations, involve students in determining aspects

EFFECT SIZE FOR  
TEACHER–STUDENT  
RELATIONSHIPS = 0.48

of the classroom organization and management, and hold students accountable for the expectations in an equitable way. Importantly, relationships are not destroyed when problematic behaviors occur, either on the part of the teacher or students. This is an important point for all educators. If we want to ensure students read, write, communicate, and think at high levels, we have to develop positive, trusting relationships with students, all students.

Optimal relationships develop when the teacher establishes high levels of trust with and among students. When a student asks a question indicating they are lost, do not know where they are going, or are just plain wrong, high levels of peer-to-peer trust means that this student is not ridiculed, does not feel that they should be silent and bear their not-knowing, and can depend on the teacher and often other students to help them out.

Unfortunately, in some cases, specific students are targeted for behavioral correction while other students engaged in the same behavior are not noticed. This happens often across the K–12 grade span. We remember a primary grade classroom in which a student with a disability was repeatedly chastised for a problematic behavior, but then other children engaged in the same behavior were ignored and allowed to continue. Yes, the children noticed. As one of the students said, “Mr. Henderson doesn’t want Michael in our class.” It’s hard to develop positive relationships, and then achieve, when you are not wanted. But, perhaps even more importantly, the poor relationship between Mr. Henderson and Michael spilled over to the rest of the students who didn’t think their teacher was fair or that he was trustworthy.

We have also observed this phenomenon in secondary classrooms. There always seem to be some students who can get away with problematic behavior. Sometimes, these students are athletes, other times cheerleaders or drama students or musicians or students whose parents work in the district. It doesn’t really matter which group they belong to, their status allows them to get away with things that other students don’t. And it always compromises the trust students have with their teacher and the relationships that develop.



**Video 1.1**  
Teacher–Student  
Relationships That  
Impact Learning

[http://resources.corwin.com/  
VL-socialstudies](http://resources.corwin.com/VL-socialstudies)

But we're not saying that educators should be strict disciplinarians who mete out punishments and consequences for every infraction. We are saying that it's important to be consistent, fair, and to repair relationships that are damaged when problematic behavior occurs. To develop positive relationships, it's important that teachers do the following:

- Display student work
- Share class achievements
- Speak to the accomplishments of all students
- Be sincere in your pride in your students and make sure that pride is based on evidence of student work, not generalized comments
- Look for opportunities for students to be proud of themselves and of other students or groups of students
- Develop parental pride in student accomplishments
- Develop pride in improvement in addition to pride in excellence

We've spent time on this because relationships matter and students achieve more and better when they develop strong interpersonal relationships with their teachers. It's these humane and growth-producing conversations that help students grow in their prosocial behaviors. (Note, that the greatest effect on achievement when a student joins a new class or school is related to whether they make a friend in the first month—it is your job to worry about friendship, counter loneliness, and help students gain a reputation as a great learner not only in your eyes but also in the eyes of their peers.) And by the way, effectively managed classrooms, ones in which students understand the expectations and are held to those expectations in ways that are consistent with relationship development and maintenance, has an effect size of 0.35. A poorly run classroom will interfere with high quality learning.

### Teacher Expectations

Another influence on student achievement that is important for educators is teacher expectations, with an effect size of 0.43. In large part, teachers get what they expect; yes teachers with low expectations are

EFFECT SIZE  
FOR TEACHER  
EXPECTATIONS = 0.43

particularly successful at getting what they expect. The more recent research has shown that teachers who have high (or low) expectations tend to have them for all their students (Rubie-Davies, 2015). Teachers' expectations become the reality for students. A kindergarten teacher who expects students to understand temporal order and be able to place days, weeks, and months in the proper order will likely have students accomplish that goal. A high school history teacher who expects students to develop habits of debate and to argue with evidence will likely produce students who can do so. Hattie (2012) called this the *minimax* principle, "maximum grade return for minimal extra effort" (p. 93). And it gets in the way of better and deeper learning. When expectations are high, the minimax principle can work to facilitate students' learning.

This does not mean that teachers should set unrealistic expectations. Telling first graders that they are required to memorize the names of all of the state capitals is a bit too far. Teachers should have expectations that appropriately stretch students, and yet those expectations should be within reach. Sixth graders who are held to fourth grade expectations will be great fifth graders when they are in seventh grade; the gap never closes. And students deserve more. When high yield instructional routines are utilized, students can achieve more than a year's growth during a year of instruction. And that's what this book focuses on—maximizing the impact teachers have on students' learning.

Establishing and communicating a learning intention is an important way that teachers share their expectations with students. When these learning intentions are compared with grade-level expectations, or expectations in other schools and districts, educators can get a sense of their appropriateness. We will spend a lot more time later in this book focused on learning intentions and success criteria. Another way to assess the level of expectation is to invite students to share their goals for learning with their teachers—especially early in the instructional sequence. If students have low expectations for themselves, they're likely hearing that from the adults around them, and often this is what they achieve. And finally, analyzing the success criteria is an important way of determining the expectations a teacher has for students. A given

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Teachers' expectations become the reality for students.



learning intention could have multiple success criteria, some of which may be fairly low and others of which may be high. The success criteria communicates the level of performance that students are expected to meet, yet is often overlooked in explorations about teacher expectations. We'll return to success criteria in the next section of this chapter, but before we do so, it's important to note that teachers establish expectations in other ways beyond the learning intention.

The ways in which teachers consciously and subconsciously communicate their expectations to students are too numerous to list. Expectations are everywhere, in every exchange teachers and students have. When teachers use academic language in their interactions with others, they communicate their expectations. When teachers maintain a clean and inviting classroom, they communicate their expectations. When teachers assign mindless shut-up sheets, they communicate their expectations. When teachers provide honest feedback about students' work, they communicate their expectations.

When teachers give one class two days to complete work and another class one day, they communicate their expectations. We could go on. Students watch their teachers all the time, trying to figure out what is expected of them and if they are trustworthy. Learning can be enhanced when teachers communicate specific, relevant, and appropriate expectations for students. From there, teachers can design amazing learning environments. But it's more than instruction. Teachers should focus on *learning*. It's a mind-set that we all need, if we are going to ensure that students develop their literate selves. A major theme throughout this book is about how teachers think (and also how we want students to think). Hattie (2012) suggests ten mindframes that can be used to guide decisions, from curriculum adoptions to lesson planning (Figure 1.3).

Taken together, these mindframes summarize a great deal of the *what works* literature. In the remainder of this book, we focus on putting these into practice specifically as they relate to social studies learning, and address the better question: *what works best?* (Hattie, 2009) To do so, we need to consider the levels of learning we can expect from students.



**Video 1.2**  
Mindframes of  
Assessment-Capable  
Teachers

[http://resources.corwin.com/  
VL-socialstudies](http://resources.corwin.com/VL-socialstudies)

## MINDFRAMES FOR TEACHERS

1. I cooperate with other teachers.
2. I use dialogue not monologue.
3. I set the challenge.
4. I talk about learning not teaching.
5. I inform all about the language of learning.
6. I see learning as hard work.
7. Assessment is feedback to me about me.
8. I am a change agent.
9. I am an evaluator.
10. I develop positive relationships.

Figure 1.3

How then should we define learning, since that is our goal? As John himself suggested, learning can be defined as

*[t]he process of developing sufficient surface knowledge to then move to deeper understanding such that one can appropriately transfer this learning to new tasks and situations.*

Learning is a process, not an event. And there is a scale for learning. Some things, students only understand at the surface level. As we note in the next chapter, surface learning is not valued, but it should be. You have to know something to be able to do something with it. We've never met a student who could synthesize information from multiple primary and secondary sources who didn't have an understanding of each of the texts. With appropriate instruction about how to relate and extend ideas, surface learning becomes deep understanding. Deep understanding is important if students are going to set their own expectations and monitor their own achievement (effect size 1.33). But schooling should not stop there. Learning demands that students be able to apply—transfer—their knowledge, skills, and strategies to new tasks and new situations. That transfer is so difficult to attain is one of our

closely kept secrets—so often we pronounce students can transfer but the processes of teaching them this skill is too often not discussed. We will discuss it in Chapter 4.

Unfortunately, up to 90 percent of the instruction we conduct can be completed by students using *only* the surface level skills (Hattie, 2012). Read that sentence carefully—it did not say that teachers do not ask students to complete deeper analyses and it did not say that teachers do not ask students to complete tests and assignments that focus on deeper learning. It said that students only need a high level of surface level knowledge to do well on this work. Why? Because despite teachers preaching deeper learning, the instruction we conduct does not match this value. We need to balance our expectations with our reality. This means more constructive alignment between what teachers claim success looks like, how the tasks students are assigned align with these claims about success, and how success is measured by end of course assessments or assignments. It is not a matter of all surface or deep, it is a matter of being clear when surface and when deep is truly required.

The ultimate goal, and one that is hard to realize, is transfer (see Figure 1.4).

When students reach this level, learning has been accomplished. One challenge to this model is that most assessments focus on surface level learning because that level is easier to evaluate. But, as David Coleman, president of the College Board, said, test makers have to assume responsibility for the practice their assessment inspires. That applies to all of us. If the assessment focuses on recall, then a great number of instructional minutes will be devoted to developing students' ability to demonstrate *learning* that way.

As teachers, we are faced with a wide range of assessments that are used to evaluate student achievement and teacher performance. But these come and go. Teachers also make tests and should assume responsibility for the practices that result from their own creations.

In this book, we devote time to each level or phase of learning. Importantly, there are teacher and student actions that work best at

*What and when  
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# LEARNING DEFINED: THE THREE-PHASE MODEL

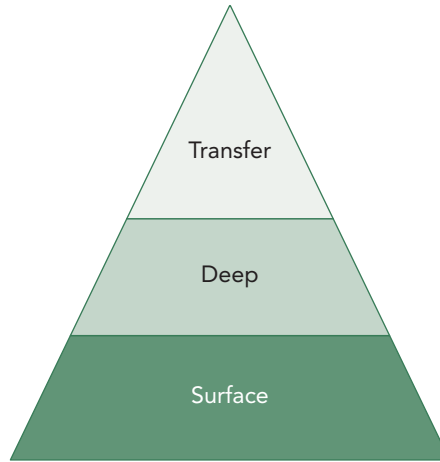


Figure 1.4

each of these phases. For example, note-taking works well for surface level learning whereas class discussions and close reading probably work better for deep learning. A key point that we will make repeatedly is that teachers have to understand the impact that they have on students, and choose approaches that will maximize that impact. Mismatching an approach with the level of learning expected will not create the desired impact. *What* and *when* are equally important when it comes to instruction that has an impact on learning.



**Video 1.3**  
The Right Strategy at the Right Time: Surface, Deep, and Transfer Learning

<http://resources.corwin.com/VL-socialstudies>

## General Learning Practices

Before we dive into the levels of learning as they relate to social studies, there are three aspects of learning that transcend the three-phase model:

1. Challenge
2. Self-efficacy
3. Learning intentions with success criteria

These should be considered in each and every learning situation, as they are global factors that impact understanding. We will explain each of these in more detail below.

## 1. Challenge

The first of these global aspects is challenge. Students appreciate challenge.

They expect to work hard to achieve success in school and life. When tasks become too easy, students get bored. Similarly, when tasks become too difficult, students get frustrated. There is a sweet spot for learning, but the problem is that it differs for different students. There is a Goldilocks notion of not making a task too easy (or too boring), or too hard. It needs to be just right. As Tomlinson (2005) noted,

Ensuring challenge is calibrated to the particular needs of a learner at a particular time is one of the most essential roles of the teacher and appears non-negotiable for student growth. Our best understanding suggests that a student only learns when work is moderately challenging that student, and where there is assistance to help the student master what initially seems out of reach. (pp. 163–164)

How then can educators keep students challenged but not frustrated? There are several responses to this question, and our answer is embedded in every chapter of this book. In part, we would respond that the type of learning intention is important to maintain challenge.

### Surface, Deep, or Transfer

The teacher should know if students need surface, deep, or transfer type work—or what combination—while ensuring the parts are explicit for the student. In this way, the teacher can maintain the challenge while providing appropriate instructional supports.

Showing students near the beginning of a series of lessons what success at the end should look like is among the more powerful things we can do to enhance learning. There are many ways to do this, including

EFFECT SIZE FOR  
APPROPRIATELY  
CHALLENGING  
GOALS = 0.59

- showing them worked examples of an A, B, and C piece of work, and discussing how they differ;
- giving them the scoring rubrics at the outset and teaching them what they mean;
- sharing last year's students' work in the same series of lessons; and
- building a concept map with them up front to show the interrelationships between the various parts they will learn about.

These tools help provide a coat hanger for students to know what good enough is, what success looks like, and how they will know when they get there. Not showing this is like asking a high jumper to jump the bar but not telling or showing them how high the bar is!

### Student-to-Student Interaction

In addition, we would add that schools should be filled with student-to-student interaction. As one of the mind frames (Figure 1.2) suggests, classrooms should be filled with dialogue rather than monologues. We say this for several reasons, including the fact that no one gets good at something they don't do. If students aren't using language—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—they're not likely to excel in those areas.

Further, as students work collaboratively and cooperatively (which has an effect size of 0.55) rather than individualistically, the assigned tasks can be more complex because there are many minds at work on solving the tasks. Of course, this requires clear expectations for group work and instruction about how to work with others. But the outcomes are worth it—students learn more deeply when they are engaged in complex tasks that involve collaboration (they don't necessarily learn more from collaborating with others when the learning focuses on surface level content). Further, when students work together in groups, they have an opportunity to engage in peer tutoring, which has an effect size of 0.51.

## 2. Self-Efficacy

A second global consideration for educators is students' self-efficacy. Hattie (2012) defines self-efficacy as “the confidence or strength of

EFFECT SIZE FOR  
STUDENT SELF-  
EFFICACY = 0.71

belief that we have in ourselves that we can make our learning happen” (p. 45). He continues, with descriptions of students with high self-efficacy, noting that they

- understand complex tasks as challenges rather than trying to avoid them;
- experience failure as opportunities to learn, which may require additional effort, information, support, time, and so on; and
- quickly recover a sense of confidence after setbacks.

By contrast, students with low self-efficacy

- avoid complex and difficult tasks (as these are seen as personal threats),
- maintain weak commitment to goals,
- experience failure as a personal deficiency, and
- slowly recover a sense of confidence after setbacks.

It almost goes without saying that the impact of self-efficacy on learning is significant. Our emotions, the sense of failure, and our anxieties are often invoked in our learning—or more often in our resistance to engage in learning. Building a sense of confidence that you can indeed attain the criteria of success for the lessons may be a first critical step—without a sense of confidence, we often do not open our ears to what we are being taught. Most of us are more likely to engage in difficult, complex, or risky learning if we know there is help nearby, that there are safety nets, that we will not be ridiculed if we do not succeed—this is where the power of the teacher lies.

Students with high self-efficacy perform better and understand that their efforts can result in better learning. This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Students with poor self-efficacy see each challenge and setback as evidence that they aren’t learning, and in fact can’t learn, which reduces the likelihood that they will rally the forces for the next task the teacher assigns.

In their study about ways to increase students' self-efficacy, Mathisen and Bronnack (2009) suggested a combination of the following (each of which is addressed later in this book in more detail):

- Direct instruction with modeled examples
- Verbal persuasion through introductory information
- Feedback on attempts made by learners
- Guided use of techniques on well-defined problems
- Supervised use of techniques on self-generated problems

To which we add the following:

- Demonstrating your credibility by being fair to all
- Being there to help students reach targets
- Creating high levels of trust between you and the students and between student and student
- Showing that you welcome errors as opportunities for learning
- Others have made different recommendations (e.g., Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003) and our point here is not to endorse one approach over another but rather to confirm that teachers can change students' agency and identity such that self-efficacy, the "belief that we have in ourselves that we can make our learning happen" (Hattie, 2012, p. 46), is fostered.

### 3. Learning Intentions With Success Criteria

The third and final global aspect that should permeate social studies learning relates to being explicit about the nature of learning that students are expected to do and the level of success expected from the lesson. Teacher clarity about learning expectations, including the ways in which students can demonstrate their understanding, is powerful.

The effect size is 0.75. Every lesson, irrespective of whether it focuses on surface, deep, or transfer, needs to have clearly articulated learning



intentions and success criteria. We believe that students should be able to answer, and ask, these questions of each lesson:

1. What am I learning today?
2. Why am I learning this?
3. How will I know that I learned it?

EFFECT SIZE  
FOR TEACHER  
CLARITY = 0.75

The first question requires deep understanding of the learning intention. The second question begs for relevance, and the third question focuses on the success criteria. Neglecting any of these questions compromises students' learning. In fact, we argue that these questions compose part of the Learner's Bill of Rights. Given that teachers (and the public at large) judge students based on their performance, it seems only fair that students should know what they are expected to learn, why they are learning that, and how success will be determined. The marks teachers make on report cards and transcripts become part of the permanent record that follows students around. Those documents have the power to change parents' perceptions of their child, determine future placements in school, and open college doors.

We're not saying that it's easy to identify learning intentions and success criteria. Smith (2007) notes, "Writing learning intentions and success criteria is not easy . . . because it forces us to 'really, really think' about what we want the pupils to learn rather than simply accepting state-ments handed on by others" (p. 14). We are saying that it's worth the effort. Clearly articulating the goals for learning has an effect size of 0.50. It's the right thing to do, and it's effective.