1

Introduction to the *Wiley Handbook of Social Studies Research*

Meghan McGlinn Manfra and Cheryl Mason Bolick

For over 25 years, Shaver's (1991*) Handbook of Research on Social Studies Teaching and Learning* has been a foundational text in the field of social studies education. It was published by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) "to provide a comprehensive view and analysis of research in the field" (p. ix). The literal and figurative weight of that text, with its thick brown, hard back cover and gold letters, has been a perennial presence in the field since it was published.

Levstik and Tyson's (2008) *Handbook of Research in Social Studies Education* expanded on the previous handbook by including chapters about topics with considerable "research activity," "a major emphasis in the NCSS standards," or "an emerging or reemerging field within the social studies" (p. xix). They documented a vital and diverse field, while also illustrating the complexity of the field and the challenges faced.

We envisioned the present *Wiley Handbook of Social Studies Research* (2017) as building on and extending previous work by providing a comprehensive, contemporary discussion of issues facing our field. The task of picking up where previous handbooks left off seemed enormous. We understood the footsteps we were following and the high expectations for our work. Each of the authors we worked with took seriously the aim of this text—to clearly and concisely document the current state of the art in social studies research, while also charting a path forward for future research in the field.

1.1 Audience

This handbook has been developed for readers as a research reference text. It includes detailed chapters focused on the history of the field, research methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and current and emerging trends in social studies educational research. It is an authoritative reference guide for both novice and established researchers. The primary intended audience

includes social studies researchers, teacher educators, and graduate students. This text will also be helpful to preservice and in-service teachers, educational leaders, curriculum specialists, and policy makers interested in improving social studies teaching and learning.

1.2   Purposes

The field of social studies has evolved, matured, and shifted in focus since the Shaver (1991) handbook was published. At that time Armento wrote in the handbook (1991) about a "quiet revolution" in social studies research brought about by "four societal forces – public debate, funded projects, the cognitive psychology movement, and fervor in the social sciences" (p. 185). As a result of these social forces, she observed "fundamental" shifts in the research on social studies. Important among these shifts were the new epistemological traditions being employed by social studies researchers, especially "interpretive and critical analysis" representing a "more inclusive range of perspectives" (p. 186). She identified five characteristics that marked the evolution of social studies research, including: "changes in paradigms, in views of teachers, in the units of analysis, in instructional foci, and in the definition of the field" (p. 186). Contemporary social studies researchers have inherited the legacy of this "quiet revolution."

This current handbook demonstrates the extent to which our field has grown as a result of social and intellectual shifts over the past 25 years. The chapters in this handbook trace the emergence of new topics and concerns, as well as the evolution of educational research methodologies. As the field of social studies education has matured, we have witnessed an expansion in the form and function of educational research. Today, a majority of social studies educational researchers use qualitative research methodologies and, increasingly, they are engaging practitioners as collaborative partners in research endeavors.

The shift from mainly experimental or quasi-experimental designs to interpretive or critical approaches has led to changes in the way social studies researchers approach theory—from those interested in generating theory through scientific inquiry to predict student behavior and outcomes in social studies classrooms to those interested in using theory as a lens to interpret observed phenomenon in a naturalistic setting. The epistemological diversity of our field as well as the concomitant range of theoretical frameworks and research methodologies being employed by social studies researchers has enhanced the scope of the "body of knowledge" or "knowledge base for teaching and learning" (Barton, 2006) that defines our field.

This *Wiley Handbook of Social Studies Research* describes contemporary trends in social studies research as well as the epistemological diversity of this work. Similar to the 1991 handbook we wish to raise issues of theory and methodology. The current field of social studies education represents a diverse field with myriad research traditions and trends. This text highlights the richness of our field while providing a reference book to support future research endeavors. The guiding objectives for this text include:

- Provide an accurate accounting of the state of the field of social studies education.
- Explore current theoretical frameworks dominating the field.
- Present an overview of the major research paradigms dominating the field.
- Represent important trends in research in social education.
- Explore areas of need for future research.

1.3   Development of the *Wiley Handbook of Social Studies Research*

This handbook project began with a phone call to James Shaver. He listened to our ideas and encouraged us to consider topics absent in earlier handbooks. Retired now for several years, he graciously answered our call to serve on the advisory board of this text. We are greatly appreciative for his encouragement and insight. Our next step was to convene an advisory board. James Shaver was joined by Patricia Avery, Margaret Crocco, J. B. Mayo, Walter Parker, Cinthia Salinas, and Stephen Thornton (some of whom had served as authors and reviewers for the 1991 and 2008 handbooks). The advisory board informed and guided the development of the handbook; they assisted with the development of a list of topics for the chapters, with suggested authors and reviewers. Once we had a list of topics for chapters, a table of contents was sent to reviewers. After revisions to the table of contents, authors were recruited based on their expertise. They were asked to submit abstracts and tentative outlines for each chapter. These outlines were reviewed by members of the advisory board. After receiving feedback, the authors then developed and submitted drafts of their chapters which were again sent out for blind review to members of the educational research community. Based on feedback they received, the authors submitted revised drafts for final review by the editors and members of the advisory board. This lengthy and iterative process of submission and review ensured that each chapter was thoroughly vetted and met the high standards of the project.

1.4   Scope and Structure

The scope and structure of this *Handbook of Social Studies Research* evolved through deliberations with our advisory board members and based on reviewer feedback. We asked authors to approach the social studies as an interdisciplinary field. As such, we did not include separate chapters for the disciplines that make up the social studies, e.g. history, economics, geography. As Hahn points out in her summative chapter, however, the bulk of current research in our field has focused on history instruction. This handbook reflects that trend. Readers will also note that the majority of the chapters focus primarily on research conducted by social studies educators in the United States. This is due to the publisher's desire to create a handbook that reflects the work of the Social Studies Research Special Interest Group (SIG) of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), as well as was the product of the close affiliation of many of our authors to the College and University Faculty Assembly (CUFA) of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS).

Our text is divided into three sections:

   I. Foundations of social studies research
  II. Frameworks guiding social studies research
 III. Teaching and learning social studies

While there may be some overlap across these sections, we determined to first focus on the history of the field of the social studies, the epistemic diversity within the field, and the methods used by researchers. This introduction provides a necessary foundation for the analysis of contemporary research on social studies teaching and learning. Of course, the chapters in each section and across sections should be viewed as in conversation with each other.

1.4.1   Section I. Foundations of Social Studies Research

The first section begins with two comprehensive overviews of foundational and theoretical work in our field. Using these chapters as a starting point, the section moves on to focus on research methodology. In light of continued concern about the rigor of social studies educational research, we include chapters on quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to continue the conversation about these methodological approaches and the characteristics that define "quality" research in these traditions. Although some might argue that having separate chapters only further bifurcates quantitative and qualitative research, we cannot ignore the real differences in epistemological approaches between the methods, nor the persistent debates in educational research regarding the merit of qualitative research and what constitutes "scientific" educational research (see also Berliner, 2002, Gutiérrez & Penuel, 2014; IES, 2013; Rudolph, 2014; Wieman, 2014).

Looming over current extant research in our field is the age-old question about the disconnect between research and practice (Barton, 2006; Shaver, 1991, 2001; Stanley, 2005; Van Manen, 1975). As such, we include a chapter on practitioner research which represents a relatively new and emerging research domain in our field. Here we trace the increasing interest in the social studies to expand beyond traditional approaches of outside-in research to engage practitioners in sharing their "insider knowledge" to bring about change.

Combined the chapters in this first section, including a discussion of "exemplar" research in our field, offers a common language for evaluating published research. The cumulative effect is to provide a starting point for future research, including the consideration of ways to expand on previous work and to pursue new methodological approaches and topics for study.

1.4.2   Section II. Frameworks for Guiding Social Studies Research

Within the field of the social studies, attention to epistemology has been understood as connecting our field to more general scholarly traditions. Social studies scholars have linked epistemological frameworks to inquiry or methodological frameworks. For example, Van Manen's (1975) three scholarly traditions included the empirical-analytic, interpretive, and critical sciences. Armento (1991) referred to three research traditions: positivist, interpretive, and critical. Similarly Cornbleth (1991) focused on "three research paradigms and their associated conceptualizations and treatment of context" distinguished between the "empirical-analytic; symbolic, or interpretive; and critical" (p. 265). The scholarly traditions of social studies research have been distinguished based on relevant epistemological distinctions as well on theoretical and methodological distinctions (see also Cornbleth, 1986).

In determining the theoretical frameworks to include in the present handbook we evaluated contemporary research to identify the most persistent, as well as emerging, frameworks referenced by social studies researchers. Today the critical tradition has emerged as an important direction in social studies research. In an effort to acknowledge this direction, this handbook includes chapters focused on critical theory, critical race theory, gender and feminist theory, and sexuality and queer theory. It is important to note that we combine some topics and theoretical frameworks, e.g. gender and feminist theory; sexuality and queer theory. This was done to reflect the way in which researchers interested in these topics "pick up" and extend the relevant theories.

There have been persistent calls in social studies education to reform social studies teaching and learning to make it more student-centered and to improve student learning outcomes. Social constructivism has often been use by both empirical-analytic and interpretive researchers in the social studies to guide "best practices" in the classroom. The advisory board and reviewers called for a chapter on social constructivism and student learning to begin to clarify what we mean when researchers reference this framework, as well as to provide guidance about what has come before and how to move forward.

Finally, visions of social studies education as preparation for democratic citizenship remain a key and often stated purpose of the field. While democratic citizenship education may not be considered a theoretical framework such as those mentioned above, it does represent an important conceptual framework that social studies researchers have developed based on several theoretical traditions; democratic citizenship as a conceptual framework appears in empirical-analytic, interpretive, and critical social studies research.

1.4.3 Section III. Teaching and Learning Social Studies

In determining the topics for the final section we worked with our advisory board members as well as reviewed social studies research over the last decades to determine those areas of research on social studies teaching and learning that have had the most salience. In making final determination about the topics we also considered feedback we received from reviewers regarding the table of contents and chapter outlines.

Combined, the chapters in this section trace areas of research that have impacted social studies teaching and learning. There is a considerable body of research and evidentiary base for each of these topics, as well as room for additional work. As is the case for other sections of this handbook, these chapters are included to provide an understanding of what has come before and what must be done in the future. Here too we asked authors to approach the social studies as an interdisciplinary field, rather than include separate chapters focusing on the various disciplines making up the social studies.

The chapters in this section focus on important aspects of social studies teaching and learning, including teaching about controversial issues, engaging students in disciplined inquiry, integrating critical literacy strategies, leveraging contemporary media in instruction, and the diffusion of technology into social studies education. Chapters in this section are concerned not only with *what* to teach, but *how* to teach the social studies. The section focuses on teacher education for social studies and the special needs of young learners and emergent bilinguals. It also includes chapters focused on persistent contemporary issues including assessment and global education. Collectively these chapters illustrate the richness and variation of scholarship within the field of the social studies. They also point to areas of need—for instance, for better measures of student learning outcomes and more consistent research on topics of deep concern.

In the final chapter of this handbook, Carole Hahn summarizes the previous chapters and discusses five issues that will shape the future of social studies scholarship: the implications of globalization; disciplinary balance; evolving theoretical frameworks and research methods; contextual constraints; and scholarly humility. She, like other authors in this review of social studies research, acknowledges the need for future research that is responsive to the contemporary needs of schools and students, while maintaining connections to

and expanding upon previous scholarship in our field. As such, this handbook could be viewed as a guide for social studies researchers, not so much as a prescriptive tool, but to initiate reflection and dialogue about where our field has been and where it is headed.

Our aim is for the *Wiley Handbook of Social Studies Research* to become an essential resource for social studies educational researchers. Berliner (2002) describes educational research as "the hardest science of all" (p. 18) given the conditions in which we work—"We face particular problems and must deal with local conditions that limit generalizations and theory building" (p. 18). Perhaps this task is even more difficult for social studies researchers facing the persistent marginalization of the field both within the K–12 curriculum and among funding agencies. This handbook responds to the contemporary context, including current calls for more rigorous research methods, by providing guiding chapters on both research methodology and theoretical frameworks. It captures what has come before and what seems to be on the horizon in order to inspire the next generation of social studies researchers, ever cognizant that the real aim of our work is to positively impact teachers and their students.

References

Armento, B. (1991). Changing conceptions of research on the teaching of social studies. In J. P. Shaver (Ed.), *Handbook of research on social studies teaching and learning* (pp. 185–196). New York, NY: Macmillan.

Barton, K. C. (2006). Introduction. In K. C. Barton (Ed.), *Research methods in social studies education: Contemporary issues and perspectives* (pp. 1–10). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

Berliner, D. C. (2002). Educational research: The hardest science of all. *Educational Researcher*, *31*(8), 18–20.

Cornbleth, C. (1986). An invitation to research in social education. Bulletin No 77. Washington, DC: National Council for the Social Studies.

Cornbleth, C. (1991). Research on context, research in context. In J. P. Shaver (Ed.), *Handbook of research on social studies teaching and learning* (pp. 265–275). New York, NY: Macmillan.

Gutiérrez, K. D., & Penuel, W. R. (2014). Relevance to practice as a criterion for rigor. *Educational Researcher*, *43*(1), 19–23.

Institute for Education Science. (2013). *Institute for Education Science: Request for applications – Education research grants*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Government Printing Office.

Levstik, L. S., & Tyson, C. A. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook of research in social studies education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Rudolph, J. L. (2014). Why understanding science matters: The IES research guidelines as a case in point. *Educational Researcher*, *43*(1), 15–18.

Shaver, J. P. (Ed.). (1991). *Handbook of research on social studies teaching and learning*. New York, NY: MacMillan.

Shaver, J. P. (2001). The future of research on social studies – For what purpose? In W. Stanley (Ed.), *Critical issues in social studies research for the 21st century* (pp. 231–252). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.

Stanley, W. B. (2005). Social studies and the social order: Transmission or transformation? *Social Education*, *69*(5), 282–287.

Van Manen, M. (1975). An exploration of alternative research orientations in social education. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, *3*(1), 1–28.

Wieman, C. E. (2014). The similarities between research in education and research in the hard sciences. *Educational Researcher*, *43*(1), 12–14.