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## A CRITICAL LOOK AT STUDIES WEEKLY'S PENNSYLVANIA KINDERGARTEN MATERIALS

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Studies Weekly is a Utah-based publishing company that creates curriculum materials for elementary- and middle-level science and social studies classrooms. According to the company's website (<https://www.studiesweekly.com/about-us/>), Studies Weekly was founded in 1984 by a fourth-grade teacher named Paul Thompson and as of December 2019 there were 6,050 school districts, 13,479 schools, and 4,341,719 students "using Studies Weekly." In 2017, California and Florida, two of the three states in the U.S. with the highest public-school student populations, became the seventh and eighth states to adopt the company's social studies materials (Mogilevsky, 2017). Noted prominently at the top of the website, the company's mission reads: "Studies Weekly is a **customized, standards-based** curriculum founded on **deep learning strategies** designed to increase **student knowledge, skills, and dispositions for well-being**" (emphasis original). Given that Studies Weekly has become more prominent in classrooms across the United States, this article explores the Pennsylvania Studies Weekly kindergarten curriculum, seeking to understand its content, structure, and pedagogical underpinnings.

Studies Weekly is a highly visible component of National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) annual meetings. At the 2018 gathering in Chicago, attendees who wore their name badges implicitly endorsed the company as the top of the NCSS-issued badges read, "StudiesWeekly®," next to the company's partial-apple logo. Underneath, it read, "STANDARDS-BASED CURRICULUM." On the attached blue lanyard, the same messaging repeated with one addition: "Learn to live!™" No other messaging—from

another conference sponsor or about anything else—was visible on the badge and lanyard. At the 2017 NCSS annual meeting in San Francisco, attendees wore the exact same badge and lanyard. At the 2015 meeting in New Orleans, there was a slight modification: the top of the badge had the company's full-apple logo next to "StudiesWeekly®" and underneath, it read, "America's New Textbook." The lanyard had the repeated messaging of the apple logo and the statement "LET FREEDOM RING!" From these badges, it is clear that Studies Weekly has been a major sponsor of NCSS annual meetings; this makes sense as meeting attendees are a prime audience for Studies Weekly.

Studies Weekly has also moved into the spotlight of the popular press. In 2018, a school district in Indiana "officially severed ties with the Studies Weekly materials vendor" (Kruse, 2018, para. 6) after parents complained that the materials asked their children to simulate slavery. These complaints led to the company conducting an internal review of its materials, which "found more than 400 examples of racial or ethnic bias, historical inaccuracies, age-inappropriate content, and other errors in the materials" (Schwartz, 2019, para. 5). The review prompted the company to form a "diversity board" that Studies Weekly CEO John McCurdy said was charged "to help us find these problems, fix them and better serve students and teachers across the nation" (Studies Weekly, 2019, para. 3).

Despite this recent controversial history of the company as well as its prominence at NCSS annual meetings and in U.S. classrooms, we are aware of no independent, published research regarding the content or use of Studies Weekly.

Therefore, in this article, we examine the content and presentation of the kindergarten series of Studies Weekly materials created for Pennsylvania schools and how the content, structure, and pedagogical underpinnings fit within prominent approaches to social studies education. We focus our research on the Pennsylvania materials because Studies Weekly contends that it “writes its curriculum to align with the standards of each state it services” (Studies Weekly, 2019, para. 2). We are Pennsylvania residents and work closely with students, in-service teachers, and pre-service teachers across the state. This is also why we have sought to publish this research in *Social Studies Journal*, the journal of the Pennsylvania Council for the Social Studies. We focus on kindergarten because it is the introductory grade level for most Pennsylvania elementary schools as well as the beginning point of Studies Weekly’s curriculum sequence. Further, in the limited reporting that we have found related to parent criticisms of Studies Weekly’s materials (e.g., Kruse, 2018; Schwartz, 2019), there has been no mention of kindergarten.

We begin the following section by reviewing prominent approaches to social studies education: powerful teaching and learning in social studies as outlined by NCSS, inquiry-based instruction as represented in the College, Career, and Civic Life Framework (C3 Framework), as well as Freire’s banking concept of education (1970/2005), which we found to be an important theoretical construct as we carried out this work. We then turn to our “manifest analysis” of the Studies Weekly materials, in which, as Bengtsson (2016) notes, the researcher “stays very close to the text, uses the words themselves, and describes the visible and obvious in the text” (p. 10).<sup>11</sup> We

conclude with a discussion of our central finding that Studies Weekly’s materials promote a haphazard, banking-style approach to education while failing to connect with Pennsylvania-specific standards.

### **Powerful, Inquiry-Based Social Studies**

Over the past decade, the National Council for the Social Studies has made clear its stance on the characteristics of high-quality social studies curriculum. In 2017, NCSS released a position statement entitled “Powerful, Purposeful Pedagogy in Elementary School Social Studies” that laid out five essential characteristics of elementary social studies curriculum: meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging and active. We see these characteristics as critical components of excellent social studies instruction at the elementary level. According to NCSS, *meaningful* social studies is organized around students’ interests, is culturally relevant, and is differentiated. It is also coherent and comprehensive. In an apparent effort to push back against a heroes-and-holidays approach to elementary social studies, NCSS (2017) asserts, “Exclusive focus on food, fun, festivals, flags, and films is not an effective framework for social studies teaching and learning” (p. 187). *Integrative* social studies focuses on important social issues, requiring teachers and students to cross “disciplinary boundaries to address topics in ways that promote understanding and civic efficacy” (p. 187). Integrative social studies units incorporate standards from across the disciplines, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the social world. Students engage in “authentic action,” which inevitably leads to interaction with other content areas and is not “a grab bag of

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<sup>11</sup> In conducting this qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; White & Marsh, 2006), we work within a long history of textbook critique (e.g., Anyon,

1979; Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991; Kissling, 2015; Loewen, 2007).

random social studies experiences” (p. 187). *Value-based* social studies acknowledges that young students must “make daily decisions about democratic concepts and principles that are respectful of the dignity and rights of individuals and the common good” (p. 187). Democracy and its values must be taught, and learning experiences that engage students in democracy must be provided. This includes engaging with controversial issues, critical thinking, and the analysis of multiple perspectives. *Challenging* social studies asks students to engage in “research, debates, discussions, projects...and simulations that require application of critical thinking skills” (p. 188). Young children can and should grapple with compelling questions that have no easy answers. This challenging curriculum is inevitably *active*, engaging students in discovery learning where they must think critically. Teachers of active social studies “guide and facilitate rather than dictate learning” (p. 188). The elementary position statement encourages deep engagement with relevant social studies material. It builds on the NCSS vision laid out in the Early Childhood in the Social Studies Context position statement, which states that social studies is “best presented as part of inquiry-based learning experiences that put children’s interests at the heart of learning” (NCSS, 2019, para. 7),

The vision of social studies instruction described above aligns with NCSS’ College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework (2013). The C3 Framework follows an inquiry arc that allows students to pursue answers to compelling or enduring questions through varying disciplinary lenses and careful analysis of primary and secondary sources. The inquiry arc of the C3 Framework is a planning framework for the teaching of social studies and includes four dimensions: 1) the development of questions, 2) the application of social studies disciplinary skills, 3) the evaluation of sources and usage of evidence,

and 4) the communication of conclusions (Grant, 2013). Made up of these components, the framework supports “students as they develop the capacity to know, analyze, explain, and argue about interdisciplinary challenges in our social world” (p. 6). As Grant (2013), an author of the C3 Framework, writes, the C3 Framework’s “inquiry arc...offers teachers multiple opportunities to involve students in powerful learning opportunities and to develop as thoughtful, engaged citizens” (p. 325). This kind of inquiry-based teaching invites curiosity and “divergent thinking” as students seek to understand the world around them through enduring questions designed by teachers and students (Marston & Handler, 2016, p. 365).

The C3 Framework is meant to be used across all grade-levels and corresponds with the meaningful, integrative, values-based, challenging, and active curriculum outlined in the NCSS elementary social studies position statement. Compelling questions in the C3 Framework, which are meant to guide the trajectory of the inquiry arc, are written around big ideas that ideally make the content being studied meaningful to students. Inquiry units integrate social studies with other subject areas, not only with language arts and literacy skills, but with relevant, real-world experiences. Values of critical democracy are embedded within the C3 Framework, as the inquiry arc concludes with students taking informed action. Finally, the acts of engaging in inquiry, investigating questions, and analyzing primary sources to find textual evidence to support arguments and action are all challenging and active endeavors. NCSS, then, clearly advocates for an active and engaged social studies.

**Banking education.** Grant (2013) notes that “the Inquiry Arc challenges some basic and long-held instructional practices” (p. 325). Indeed, the powerful, inquiry-based social studies for which NCSS advocates is at odds with a transmission, or “banking,”

method of education, wherein the teacher simply transfers “knowledge into the head of the students” (Veugelers, 2017, p. 414). In this model of education, “the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 72). Darder (2012) notes that this type of pedagogy is a “domesticating pedagogy” (p. 423), in which people are asked to “uncritically adopt the hegemonic language and cultural system imposed upon them by the dominant culture of the school” (2013, p. 26). Thus, humans become objects, not subjects, and only “have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store” (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 72). Banking education bypasses student choice, problem-posing, or other inquiry-oriented methods of instruction, wherein students grapple with critical questions related to their social worlds. This authoritarian style of education is at odds with NCSS’ social studies vision.

Despite numerous calls for powerful, inquiry-based, and justice-oriented approaches to social studies (Agarwal-Rangnath, Dover, & Henning, 2016; Busey & Waters, 2016; Castro, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2003; NCSS, 2013, 2017; Sibbett & Au, 2018), elementary educators find teaching social studies in robust ways—or teaching social studies at all—to be a challenge (Boyle-Baise, Hsu, Johnson, Serriere, & Stewart, 2008; Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014; Heafner, 2018; VanFossen, 2005). Due to the limited time available to teach social studies in an elementary school day that is dominated by reading and math instruction (Ollila & Macy, 2018; VanFossen, 2005), social studies has been integrated into language arts by “happenstance” (Boyle-Baise et al., 2008, p. 233) or reduced to a focus on the stereotypical great figures of American history and national and religious holidays (Bolgatz, 2007; Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 2006). The introduction of the C3 Framework is one

attempt from the social studies field to challenge these troubling approaches to the subject area. Still, readymade curriculum materials abound. Boasting total alignment to each state’s individual state standards and integration with English Language Arts standards, *Studies Weekly* represents one way that districts can attempt to ensure that social studies will be taught, even if through time meant for the teaching of English Language Arts.

### **Studies Weekly’s 2018-2019 Pennsylvania Kindergarten Materials**

**Newspaper structure.** The curriculum comprises 24 weekly newspapers for students and one 48-page “Teacher Resource” booklet for teachers. The newspapers are organized into four quarters with six newspapers in each quarter. According to the “Weekly Curriculum Map” in the teacher booklet (pp. 2-3), the first quarter is meant for August-September; the second, October-December; the third, January-February; and the fourth, March-May. Each newspaper is four pages in length, resulting in 96 total pages across the series. As the teacher booklet makes clear, the structure of the four pages in each newspaper is the same: “Cover Story” (first page), “Look & Learn” (second and third pages), and “Fun And Games” (fourth page).

At the top of each first page, a banner reads “Kindergarten Studies Weekly” and notes the quarter and week number. Beneath the banner, each newspaper features a unique title as well as a related, brief textual passage. The title and textual passage typically overlay a picture or series of pictures possessing some relation to the title. For example, in the Week 1 newspaper, “Fun at School” (the title) and “We have fun at school. We like to learn!” (textual passage) are juxtaposed with a large picture of a smiling student sitting at a table holding scissors and paper while looking at the camera. On each first page is also a small

graphic that directs the reader to “Primary-Source Related Media” on a specified website (though none of the provided links went to actual websites). Much of the newspaper is graphic, but there are also many text features, which is a concern for kindergarten students, many of whom likely do not enter the grade with the ability to read such text.

The “Look & Learn” pages contain an assortment of pictures and texts that are ostensibly related to the theme of the newspaper. The newspaper’s title reappears at the top of each second page, and a small box at the bottom of that same page pertains to content standards. Common language at the top of this box reads,

These standards are representative of common kindergarten social studies curriculum standards. Please use them as a guideline to determine which of your state’s standards are addressed. You may view a detailed correlation of your state’s social studies standards with this publication at [studiesweekly.com](http://studiesweekly.com).

Beneath this common language is a bulleted list of standards related to that week’s topical focus. However, it is not clear from where these standards are derived. When we attempted to access the standards correlation for Pennsylvania noted in the common language, we found an empty page for kindergarten.<sup>12</sup>

A box with a line for students to write their names accompanies the title on all of the “Fun And Games” pages. Beneath this heading, a variety of activities across the 24 newspapers involve circling, coloring, drawing, matching, ordering, etc. In four of the newspapers—Weeks 1, 4, 10, 18—in the

bottom righthand corner of the page, there is a recurring section titled “American Stories,” printed over a wavy U.S. flag. The section is introduced in Week 1:

Hi! This year Studies Weekly will tell you the story of our amazing country—the United States of America. You will learn about some American heroes and how they helped America become a great country. We hope you enjoy reading our “American Stories.”<sup>13</sup>

The three ensuing stories of the section are about the historical figures George Washington (W4), William Bradford (W10), and Salem Poor (W18). Additionally, one advertisement is printed on this back page of the newspaper, from Week 7, encouraging students to visit Studies Weekly’s website to “see cool videos, play fun games and earn reward points for reading articles online...”

**Across the newspapers.** Considering the 24 newspapers as a whole, there is no clear logic to the content progression. In the first quarter, the topical focus moves from “Fun at School” (W1) to “Where Are You?” (W2) to “Follow the Rules” (W3) to “Responsibility” (W4) to “Time” (W5) to “What is History?” (W6). While most of these topics are understandable as introductory to school and the subject of social studies, there is no apparent coherence in their progression. Rather, it is scattershot. The second quarter is similarly haphazard. The history focus at the end of the first quarter quickly shifts to geography (“Where Do You Live,” W7) but then moves back toward history (“Timelines,” W8). Then comes “Needs and Wants” (W9) before returning to history (“The First Thanksgiving,” W10). “The Earth” (W11) harkens back to Week 7, as does

<sup>12</sup> There were also empty webpages for first grade and second grade in Pennsylvania; third grade and fourth grade did have Pennsylvania-related standards-correlation pages.

<sup>13</sup> This pronouncement about learning “the story of our amazing country” is reminiscent of Harold Rugg and Louise Krueger’s prominent, then-controversial elementary- and middle-school textbooks of the 1930s (see Kissling, 2015).

“Seasons” (W12). The third quarter begins topically where the second left off, with “Weather” (W13), but then the following week’s focus is “Good Citizens” (W14) before returning to geography (“Maps and Globes,” W15; “Which Way?,” W16; “Holidays Around the World,” W17). After this three-week geography sequence—that is not explicitly named as a progression for students nor teachers—six of the final seven weeks focus overtly on the United States, across topics such as famous leaders, holidays, consumption, work, and money. Therefore, across the 24 newspapers, many weeks see topics unrelated to the prior week, and, for weeks when there is some semblance of continuity, there is no explicit connection building on what had come before. Conceptual coherence simply is not a priority.

Despite the company’s motto “STANDARDS-BASED CURRICULUM,” the weekly progression does not correspond to a curricular logic that is specific to the state or another organizing feature. The standards listed on the second page of each newspaper do not correspond to Pennsylvania standards, nor any explicit scope and sequence organization. With respect to the four main disciplines of social studies— civics, economics, geography, history—the progression jumps back and forth (See Table 1). In sum, eight newspapers focus primarily on geography, six on civics, six on history, and four on economics.

**Table 1: Disciplinary Focus of the Newspapers Within Each Quarter**

	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Total
<b>Civics</b>	3	0	1	2	6
<b>Economics</b>	0	1	0	3	4
<b>Geography</b>	1	3	4	0	8
<b>History</b>	2	2	1	1	6
<b>Total</b>	6	6	6	6	24

While haphazard, the progression does revisit disciplines and topics, which suggests that the curriculum authors may be following

Bruner’s (1960) spiral curriculum, returning multiple times to similar content (e.g., kindergarten students are asked four times over the year to find their state on the map and color it). Yet it appears that the writers might most value the curriculum’s relevance to holidays and the United States over coherence. Columbus Day, Thanksgiving, winter holidays (including the celebrations of Christian, Jewish, and Hindu religions), Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Black History Month, Valentine’s Day, and President’s Day are represented in some form. The newspaper weeks in which these holidays are presented do not necessarily correspond to when the holidays take place during the year as the newspaper weeks are not explicitly aligned with actual weeks of the year. Perhaps this is caused by the curriculum’s attempt to apply to students across Pennsylvania and its 500 unified school districts, but the result is incoherence. With respect to an overt focus on the United States, 17 of the 24 newspapers explicitly attend to U.S.-related topics (See Table 2).

**Table 2: U.S. Focus Within Disciplines in the Newspapers Each Quarter**

	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Total
<b>Civics</b>	2	0	0	2	4
<b>Economics</b>	0	0	0	2	2
<b>Geography</b>	1	2	3	0	6
<b>History</b>	1	2	1	1	5
<b>Total</b>	4	4	4	5	17

In comparison to the overwhelming focus on the national scale, not one of the newspapers is specific to Pennsylvania, even though the company touts its materials as state-specific.

**Within individual newspapers.** In some of the newspapers, the listed standards and content are unrelated to the week’s topical focus. For example, the first newspaper, titled “Fun at School,” with a first-page textual passage of “We have fun at school. We like to learn!”, presents somewhat-related statements on the second

page—e.g., “Our teachers help us learn new things every day” and “Friends share. Friends care. Friends take turns. Friends are fair.”—alongside photos of happy, interested students. The third page, though, shows a full-page photo of children crossing their hearts with their hands while silently staring at a foregrounded U.S. flag. The words of the Pledge of Allegiance are printed at the top of the page. The fourth page, then, asks students to match pictures from different places of a school, including a flag detached from its classroom flagpole, as well as to color “the hidden picture” (a U.S. flag) with numbered directions for where red, white, and blue go. The final part of the page is the introduction to the “American Stories” section mentioned above. For these four pages, the listed standards on the bottom of the second page read:

- Recognize the importance of U.S. symbols.
- Describe the relative location of people, places and things by using positional words.
- Describe the different kinds of jobs that people do and the tools or equipment used.
- Demonstrate the characteristics of being a good citizen.

The only listed standard that applies to the content of the newspaper is the first one, as the U.S. flag is presented as a symbol (although there is nothing that explains what a symbol is or why the flag qualifies as one). None of these standards has any connection to the “Fun At School” title, showing how there is a lack of coherence—and alignment with stated standards—in individual newspapers as well as across the entire set of newspapers.

**Pedagogical presentation.** Looking across all 96 pages of the newspapers, it is clear that the curriculum is scripted. That is, it is pre-planned and packaged, with the entire set of materials shipped off to teachers prior

to the start of the school year. This orientation, then, is a curriculum focused foremost on particular subject matter—what Aoki (1991/2005) called “curriculum-as-plan” (p. 159)—and not a curriculum focused foremost on students and their unfolding experiences—what Aoki called “curriculum-as-lived-experience” (p. 160). It is difficult for any scripted curriculum to be attuned to specific children’s interests. Mass produced and created for state-wide audiences (or nation-wide audiences, as appears to be the case with the kindergarten newspapers), *Studies Weekly* on its own is not culturally relevant nor suited to individual students’ interests. Although it is replete with text-to-self connections and activities meant for students to connect content with their prior knowledge (e.g., the second page of Week 4’s newspaper asks, “What responsibilities do you have at home?” and “What responsibilities do you have at school?”), true culturally relevant curriculum develops in students a critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995) of the world around them and connects meaningfully with children’s lives. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), critical consciousness is the “broader sociopolitical consciousness” that enables students “to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (p. 162). These *Studies Weekly* materials do no such thing.

Throughout the newspapers, there is an obscured-yet-commanding, seemingly-omniscient, authorial voice. It is an authoritative voice that declares “We have fun at school” (W1) and “A citizen is someone who lives in a city, town or country” (W3) and “Patriots are people who love their country” (W18). The voice is never named or contextualized; it just *is*. What this means, then, is that the content is presented as Truth with a capital T—fixed, certain, unquestionable—even though, for example, not everyone has fun at school and citizens



and patriots can be – and are – conceived of in many different ways.

Resulting from this authorial voice, social studies is implicitly framed akin to the banking concept of education, in which there is set content to be dumped into students' empty-receptacle brains. It is merely acquisition of uncomplicated knowledge. There is no critical inquiry nor concern for higher-order thinking. For example, the Week 6 newspaper celebrates Christopher Columbus in five simple sentences:

Christopher Columbus was a famous explorer. An explorer is someone who looks for new places. On Columbus Day, Americans honor Christopher Columbus. Columbus Day is the second Monday in October. Christopher Columbus was born in Italy.

There is no acknowledgment or question-raising about the injustices of colonialism, the brutality of Columbus and his men toward Indigenous peoples, and the present-day resistance by many U.S. citizens, cities, and states to Columbus Day. This presentation of Columbus and other topics (e.g., Pilgrims, W10; "Presidents and Patriots," W18; "Money," W24) is what Seixas (2000) names as the "best-story approach," in which a grand narrative washes away complexity in favor of a simplistic, moralizing, mythologizing lesson that students are not asked to question or explore but to accept as Truth.

Another off-shoot of the authorial voice's banking approach involves the ways in which students are directed to complete work on the "Fun And Games" page of each newspaper. All tasks are framed through imperatives. For example, in the Week 14 newspaper about "Good Citizens," students are asked to "listen and follow along while your teacher reads each sentence," then "Circle **yes** if the sentence is correct. Circle **no** if the sentence is not correct" (emphasis original). The three sentences are: "Good

citizens obey the laws," "Voting is a fair way to decide," and "Good citizens are not kind and helpful." The authorial voice laying out these commands is one that most students likely know well. We contend that there is a host of implicit messaging in such commands, as well as in the larger presentation of content in the newspapers.

### **Critically Considering the Studies Weekly Materials**

Mindful of calls for powerful, inquiry-based, active, and challenging social studies curricula, we are concerned that Studies Weekly's Pennsylvania kindergarten materials fail to meet the aims of a rigorous elementary social studies experience or even to meet content standards to which they claim to be aligned. The curriculum does not correspond to the powerful and purposeful approaches to elementary social studies as outlined by NCSS (2017) or inquiry-based teaching as outlined in the C3 Framework and instead is more reminiscent of a banking style of education. We found no signs of the five criteria for powerful and purposeful social studies, as the meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active characteristics are absent in the kindergarten materials. For instance, NCSS promotes curricula that are meaningful and relevant to students, while Studies Weekly is difficult to make relevant because of its one-size-fits-all design. Moreover, the kindergarten curriculum of Studies Weekly appears as more of "a grab bag" (NCSS, 2017, p. 187) of social studies than an integrated and thoughtful approach to social or classroom issues. NCSS (2017) promotes curricula that engage young people in "frequent opportunities to make daily decisions about democratic concepts and principles" (p. 187) and "transcends the simplistic 'character virtues' approach to values education in elementary schools" (p. 188). Yet Studies Weekly offers students no

opportunities to engage in decision-making, instead using an authoritarian pedagogical voice to tell students what to think and believe rather than to ask them to co-construct knowledge. Lastly, NCSS encourages an active and diverse pedagogy but Studies Weekly is designed for banking-style education. If conceived of as discrete activities, no activity in any Studies Weekly newspaper fits NCSS's definition of challenging or active social studies. Indeed, the curriculum is devoid of controversy, simulation, multiple perspectives, or project-based learning.

Moreover, many social studies teacher educators who advocate for inquiry-based teaching in their pre-service education classes and professional learning experiences already find it difficult to cultivate inquiry-oriented thinking and teaching in pre-service teachers who have been socialized into more didactic, authoritarian modes of teaching. Field experiences do little to cultivate such teaching, as "all too often field placements do not provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice what they have been taught in methods classes" (Crocco & Marino, 2017, p. 3). Santau and Ritter (2013) also explain that because social studies is dominated by "student memorization of a seemingly endless number of disconnected facts" (pp. 255-6), it can be difficult to shift teachers' understandings of the subject. As a result, "much of what actually happens in classrooms is influenced by such traditional understandings" (p. 258). Studies Weekly, neatly packaged for a teacher to hand out and use immediately with students with minimal preparation, encourages traditional ways of teaching—like the banking-style of education—that NCSS wishes to leave behind. Further, we see Studies Weekly's own claim that it is a "**customized, standards-based curriculum founded on deep learning strategies designed to increase student knowledge, skills, and dispositions for well-**

**being**" (emphasis original) as a falsehood. The curriculum is instead one-size-fits all, and aligned to a generalized set of standards that does not align with Pennsylvania's state standards specifically. The deep learning strategies defined by NCSS as ideal are also not present. Thus, we posit that a field dedicated to transforming traditional modes of teaching should find Studies Weekly and its popularity across the United States concerning.

Ultimately, social studies educators must question if Studies Weekly's curricular materials are an appropriate way for young students to be introduced to social studies and learn to become effective citizens. As entire states and individual schools continue to adopt these materials, we must question how teachers, schools, teacher educators, curriculum developers, and researchers can work alongside each other to more fully understand this curriculum, to challenge decision-makers to seek out powerful alternatives, and, when those actions fail, teach pre-service teachers how to use ready-made curriculum materials in ways that are in alignment with the powerful, inquiry-oriented goals of the social studies field.

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