

**ADDRESSING SOCIAL PARTICIPATION
AS A MAJOR GOAL IN SOCIAL STUDIES:
A Case Study of a Fifth-Form Group
Pursuing the CXC/CSEC Social Studies Programme
in a Barbadian School**

Anthony D. Griffith and Sonia St. Hill

This paper, in the form of an exploratory case study of a select group of fifth-form students, employs triangulation techniques to (a) examine the extent to which the Caribbean Examinations Council's Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) programme addresses social participation, and (b) explore the students' responses to opportunities to engage in active involvement in the social issues and affairs of their community. The findings revealed that, at the school involved, social participation is one of the goals least emphasized during the teaching of social studies. There is also a general heavy emphasis on traditional modes of instruction such as reading and notetaking. After the use of more participatory activities introduced during the unit, there were some noticeable behavioural and attitudinal changes among the participating students. The students themselves also expressed a preference for more active learning tasks and for activities that directly involve them in examining social issues in their own local community. The findings of the study could have implications for addressing what is perceived as varying levels of alienation and social disaffection among Barbadian and Caribbean youth.

Introduction

The consensus that emerges from the literature is that citizenship education is the primary, overarching goal of Social Studies, and that social participation is one of the major goals of the subject (Parker, 2005; Wraga, 1993), and the key to testing how effective social studies learning has been. Social participation is defined as active involvement by students in investigating social issues, performing certain social tasks and

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activities, and in demonstrating certain pro-social capabilities and dispositions both in and out of school (Griffith, 1995, p. 55).

In Social Studies, therefore, it is important that students are given the opportunity to actively participate in classroom learning activities that encourage students to think critically as they read newspapers and magazines, watch television, or monitor political or policy debates in their community. Students would thus be engaged in reflecting thoughtfully on what they are learning, in asking questions, sharing opinions, and participating in public discourse about important social issues and concerns. Social participation also engages students in the process of confronting ethical and value-based dilemmas, and encourages them to think critically and creatively, and to make personal and civic decisions based on information derived from a variety of sources.

In order to achieve this vision, what takes place in the classroom must go beyond the teaching of content only. Education is not simply about preparing students to pass examinations; it is about preparing them to be active participants in their society. The nation depends on a well-informed and civic-minded citizenry to sustain its democratic traditions, especially now as it adjusts to its own heterogeneous society and its shifting roles in an increasingly interdependent and changing world. (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 1993, p. 213). Students thus need to be provided with opportunities to actively participate in social roles and practices—practices that promote growth and development, and enhance civic mindedness (Barber, 1989; Conrad, 1991; Newmann, 1989; Thornton, 2004). Social Studies, therefore, should be viewed more in terms of its meaning as an active verb—that is, something one does—rather than as a noun, or as content to be studied.

Social participation also serves the purpose of preparing students to function effectively as citizens. It is a vehicle for engaging students, at the classroom level, in social criticism and authentic deliberation on issues of public import. According to Janzen (1995, p. 135), students do not really understand the notion of citizenship unless they become actively involved in the social and political affairs of the local community, since democratic theory is tested and understood by students only as they become active participants in civic endeavours.

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This form of authentic instruction (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993), where students are engaged in significant and meaningful learning activities, and which directly links the school and the community, is an effective strategy for increasing their competence to think critically and to function as citizens in a democratic environment. These activities help to produce participating citizens who play their role as voters, taxpayers, and members and leaders of social groups within their community (Griffith, 2006; Morris, Morrissey, & King, 1996).

Exemplary social studies programmes, therefore, seek to develop social and civic participation skills that engage students in working effectively in groups to address problems by examining alternative strategies, making decisions, and taking action on them. They also involve students in negotiation and compromise, as well as active participation in civic affairs. Participation in informed public discussion of policy issues is direct preparation for active citizenship—especially when it culminates in decisions and actions that have real consequences (NCSS, 1993, p. 215)—that students themselves can experience and observe. This, according to the NCSS (p. 213), is the essence of social understanding and civic efficacy. However, if the classroom is to become meaningful to students, it must function as a laboratory for students to engage in social and authentic activities (Boyle-Baise, 2003). Therefore, the purpose of social studies—and more particularly of social participation—becomes critical if students are to understand and contribute to the society in which they live.

Context of the Issue

Given the nature and purpose of Social Studies, it is relevant here to offer a word on the social and institutional context of the problem under examination. Social Studies is taught in all primary schools in Barbados and throughout the Caribbean, as well as in most secondary schools. However, there is evidence that students in our schools are not displaying the level or type of participation and involvement associated with exemplary Social Studies.

Recently, a number of disturbing behaviours have been observed among some of our school-age children. In its White Paper on Education, the Barbados Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Culture [MOE],

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1995) has expressed concerns about evidence of a general decline in youth behaviour in terms of values, positive attitudes, and appreciation for existing social services and amenities. Social commentators and media reports have also highlighted a sense of apathy and disenchantment among Barbadian and Caribbean youth, with both political and social institutions. Reports in the newspaper and on radio indicate that there is a lack of respect for law, authority, property, and people in general. Students are also accused of displaying a lack of self-esteem, motivation, and a general sense of belonging to family, community, and nation (MOE, 1995, p. 18). Recently, there has also been a public outcry about the level of violence in our schools, especially violence against teachers (Rising violence, 2005, p. 6A).

This outcry is a continuation of what the literature attributes to the failure of the educational system to address the actual and felt needs of children and society, instead of placing the emphasis on transmitting fixed bodies of knowledge that allow students to pass an examination. This growing level of violence in schools may thus relate to the high level of frustration experienced by children as a result of what they perceive as a dysfunctional curriculum and of their failure to succeed in the school system (Rising violence, 2005, p. 6A).

An approach to the teaching of Social Studies that is sensitive to, and informed by, the social participation paradigm outlined earlier, it is argued, can perhaps help to address some of these concerns.

Further, with respect to the secondary schools in Barbados, there seems to be a lack of coherent policy or practice in terms of the place of Social Studies in the school curriculum. Though Social Studies is taught in most secondary schools, the Form levels at which it is offered vary widely between schools (Pennegan, 2006). In most of the schools (52%), the subject is taught from Forms 1 to 5; but in some (21%), it is taught in Forms 4 and 5 only; and in others (9%), in Form 1 only. In other schools (9%), Social Studies is taught only from Forms 1 to 3; and it is not taught at all in 9% of the schools (St Hill, 2005).

There is also a perception, both among the public and among some officials in education, that Social Studies is intended for the weaker students, and that anyone can teach it (Griffith, 1995). One thus finds the

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subject, on occasion, timetabled for one or two periods per week, and often during the last period of the day. Such practices exist in spite of the view recently expressed in the Barbados policy document entitled *Curriculum 2000: Rationale and Guidelines for Curriculum Reform in Barbados* (MOE, 2000) to the effect that:

The revised curricula at the primary and secondary levels seek to ensure that all students receive quality education which will enable them to be productive citizens capable of creative and critical thinking, and of applying the problem-solving skills relevant to the complex challenges of our modern society. (p. 3)

The evidence also suggests that some secondary school principals have a very positive perception of the value of Social Studies and its contribution to student development—particularly with respect to developing their critical thinking skills and to understanding their culture and heritage (Pennegan, 2006). These principals are, however, often constrained in fully offering the subject on the curriculum, due partly to the competing demands of, and for, other more traditional subjects such as geography and history, or newer subjects such as computer studies and business studies.

The Caribbean Examination Council (CXC), which came into being in 1973, was established to examine and certificate students at the secondary level in Caribbean schools. Social Studies was first examined in 1981, and currently has the third highest number of candidate entries of all subjects (CXC, 2005). The most recent Social Studies syllabus (CXC, 2002) rationalizes the inclusion of the subject in the secondary school curriculum on the premise that adequate provision should be made for enabling students to gain the knowledge and skills that will prepare them to be effective citizens. The syllabus further specifically mentions effective social participation, which it notes as integral to the learning and teaching of Social Studies, and should “be informed by a sense of commitment to the development of the community” (CXC, 2002, p. 1).

Unfortunately, however, the teaching of Social Studies seems to be heavily content-oriented and teacher-centred, rather than activity-oriented and learner-centred. One notes, for example, the frequency with

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which objectives in the CXC and local syllabi are prefaced with lower-level cognitive terms such as: define, state, describe, identify, and list. This contrasts with the relative paucity of higher-level cognitive terms such as, for example: account for, justify, evaluate, assess, propose a plan for .., present a case for (or against) ..., evaluate your experience as a member of ... [a named community organization].

Brophy and Alleman (1993) have emphasized the use of activities as a critical means of complementing what is taught in schools, through participation in the community and the use of its resources and environment. Instead of engaging students in these types of activities, however, the local Social Studies syllabus, as taught, seems to focus more on the acquisition of factual information rather than on engaging students in practices that reflect social participation and enable them to develop meaningful and fulfilling ties within their communities (Griffith, 1999). Such an approach may be described as being grounded more on “passivities” rather than on “activities.” The emphasis is therefore more on the passive acquisition of knowledge, and on lower-level forms of knowledge intake such as reading, listening to lectures, and notetaking.

A possible consequence of this is that students are not adequately aware of what citizenship is about. However, if our students are expected to become strong leaders and decision makers of the future, then their classroom experiences should provide them with opportunities to think critically, make decisions, solve problems without violence, and actively participate in and outside of the classroom. This paper raises the hitherto unexplored instructional approach of teaching Social Studies to specifically address the goal of active social participation and social involvement. It thus examines the extent to which the CXC/CSEC Social Studies programme can, in fact, promote/provide students with opportunities for such social participation.

Purpose of the Study

In spite of the many efforts by the Ministry of Education in Barbados to upgrade the social studies syllabi at both primary and secondary level, as well as the training of social studies teachers, many teachers continue to experience great difficulties in conceptualizing and teaching social studies as it ought to be taught. Though social participation is often

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explicitly stated in the local Social Studies syllabus, this is apparently just as often not reflected in most Social Studies classes. This paper will analyse the response of a selected group of fifth form students, at a secondary school in Barbados, to the infusion or use of social participation activities in their Social Studies class.

This paper will attempt to examine (a) the types of activities that these students undertake in the CXC/CSEC Social Studies programme which promote social participation; (b) the views of the Social Studies teachers at the school on promoting social participation activities in the CSEC Social Studies programme; (c) the views of the students in the group on incorporating social participation activities in the CSEC Social Studies programme; and (d) whether the students exhibit any greater interest or sense of involvement in social participation activities **after** these have been introduced in this particular CSEC Social Studies class.

Methodology

This study utilizes a case study design that involves the observation and study of an individual or bounded unit (Gay & Airasian, 2003)—in this case, a select class of students who were preparing for the CXC examination in Social Studies. As such, the study is also essentially exploratory in nature.

The Participants in the Case Study

The student body of the Barbadian secondary school in question totalled 965 students (410 males and 555 females). The teaching staff of 64 teachers is 55% female and 45% male. At this institution, all the students in Forms 1 and 2 are required to take Social Studies, whereas the choice is optional in Forms 3 to 5.

The selected group was identified on the basis of the following criteria (Burns, 2000, p. 465). The unit consisted of one group of Form 5 students who were following the CXC/CSEC Social Studies syllabus. Based on their academic history, this group of students was classified as “under-performers” who displayed a lack of interest in school. They were also often absent from school and were frequently cited for disciplinary problems. This class was made up of 10 male students

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between the ages of 15 and 17, all of whom had taken social studies prior to Form 4. Another criterion used in selecting this class was the fact that the Social Studies teacher was, at the time, pursuing a postgraduate degree in Social Studies education at The University of the West Indies. Eighty percent (80%) of the students in the class indicated that they had last taken social studies in Form 2, whereas 20% stated that they had last taken the subject in Form 3.

Five teachers participated in the study. They all teach Social Studies throughout the school and are familiar with the CSEC Social Studies syllabus. All of the teachers hold graduate degrees from approved universities and four of the five are trained teachers.

As a case study, and given both the nature and the size of the unit, it is recognized that there are clearly certain inherent constraints on the extent to which any findings or conclusions can be generalized to the school or the country as a whole.

Instruments

Five instruments were used to collect data for this study: (1) a Pre-Test and Post-Test, (2) a Teaching Unit, (3) a Student Questionnaire, (4) a Teacher Questionnaire, and (5) a Classroom Observation Schedule. The student questionnaire was administered both before and after the unit was taught.

The test was based on the unit topic, “The Family,” and was designed to evaluate not merely the students’ knowledge about the topic but, even more importantly, their attitudes, interest, and response with respect to the use of participatory activities in Social Studies lessons. The test also required them to articulate their feelings on an issue related to the family.

The Teaching Unit

The unit, of six weeks duration, was based on the CSEC Social Studies Syllabus 2002, and focused on the use and promotion of social participation activities among students, through engaging them in both out-of-class and out-of-school learning experiences. These experiences involved the use of a variety of “participating” activities such as debates,

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social investigations, projects, community activities, and class presentations; as well as a variety of media such as local music, newspapers, magazines, and news reports. For the purpose of the study, the teaching of the unit thus moved away from the more content-oriented, teacher-centred approach, and adopted a more activity-oriented, learner-centred paradigm.

The Findings

The major findings of the study suggested that:

1. Social participation, as a major goal of Social Studies, was hardly addressed, much less emphasized, by the teachers who took part in the study.
2. The selected group of students seemed to prefer to be more actively involved in their Social Studies classes, and to have a positive attitude towards activities such as fieldtrips, project work and class presentations.
3. After these students were exposed to classroom activities that required more active participation, they showed greater willingness to become involved in issues relating to their local group and community.

Discussion of Findings

1. Teaching for Social Participation in the Social Studies Class

One of the findings of this research clearly indicates that, even though the teachers and administrator are aware that social participation is one of the major goals of social studies, there seemed to be no correlation between this perception and the actual incorporation of this goal into the teaching of the CSEC social studies syllabus. The social studies classroom in the case study initially exhibited rather limited evidence of participatory activities. Students were mostly engaged in passive forms of knowledge intake, such as notetaking, question-and-answer, and reading. Table 1 indicates that these activities were rated, by both teachers at the school (4.0, 3.8, and 3.4 respectively) and by students in the study (5.0, 4.1, and 4.0 respectively), as those most frequently

engaged in. These passivities offered little or no active participation and were also only marginally connected to the world beyond the school. Lessons that have little or no value beyond the classroom are geared only for success within school, since the students' work would serve only to certify their level of compliance with the norms of formal schooling (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993, p. 10).

Table 1. Frequency and Ranking by Teachers and Students of Instructional Techniques Used by Teachers (Pre-Unit)

Instructional Techniques	By Teachers		By Students	
	X	Rank	X	Rank
Field Trip	2.4	8	1.2	9
Lectures	4.2	1	1.7	4
Notetaking	4.0	2	5.0	1
Discussion	3.8	3	4.1	2
Reading	3.4	4	4.0	3
Sociodrama	1.8	10	1.3	7
Debates	2.0	9	1.3	7
Class Presentation	3.2	5	1.5	6
Group Work	3.2	5	1.6	5
Projects	3.0	7	1.1	10

X = Mean Frequency

Thus, the evidence collected did not reveal any high levels of either active or reflective participation by students. Active participation requires students to be actively involved and participating in social organizations such as groups, in investigating social issues, and participating in community service work (Griffith, 1995, p. 56). This was, however, not reflected in the pre-unit data collected from both students and teachers. In fact, as indicated above, the type of participation observed was more passive in nature; and Table 1 reveals rather low ratings given by both teachers and students to such real "classroom activities" as group work, field trips, projects, and debates. The more traditional teaching strategies, such as "chalk and talk," were more commonly in evidence, and these did not provide opportunities for

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students to communicate with each other or to become actively involved in their community.

Further, few examples of reflective participation or civic mindedness were observed from the pre-unit data. There was, in fact, very little evidence of students being placed in settings and roles that require them to think critically and participate in public processes which influence and guide decision making on public issues. According to Griffith (1995, p. 58), this type of participation is an effective and meaningful strategy for not only increasing the competence of students to think critically, and to function and participate as citizens, but also for equipping them with adequate knowledge of their own social, legal, political, and economic subsystems.

The data from the teacher's and students' questionnaire, therefore, suggest that social participation was definitely one of the goals least emphasized during the teaching of Social Studies at the school. This conclusion is reflected in the literature, which posits that social studies instruction in the Caribbean has traditionally focused almost exclusively on the first three goals of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, to the exclusion of the higher goals of social participation and citizenship education (Griffith, 1995, p. 52). Griffith goes on to state that, even with respect to these latter goals, these are mainly addressed in an academic/intellectual sense and almost exclusively within the artificial confines of the classroom.

Howe and Marshall (1999, p. 15) further note that many of the social studies syllabi in the Caribbean focus on "intake activities," or low-level, "passive type" activities such as reading and notetaking. The bigger goals of social participation and citizenship education, even though mentioned in the national statements on education, have been studiously neglected, in any explicit form, in social studies curricula and instructional practices (Griffith, 1995). Activities to promote social participation and citizenship education, therefore, are clearly not deliberately articulated in the syllabus.

In relation to the CSEC Social Studies syllabus (2002), most (some 60%) of the teachers at the school stated that there were no participatory activities written into the objectives of the syllabus, even though there

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are topics that provide opportunities for such activities. The data from the teachers' pre-unit questionnaire showed that most (60%) of the teachers were also cognizant of the opportunities available through the CSEC syllabus for introducing some participatory activities in the classroom. Some examples given of these were: (a) visiting homes for the elderly and children, (b) organizing a family day for problem students and parents, and (c) organizing a clean-up campaign within the school and the community. However, in spite of these examples, the teachers appear to have done little to encourage or introduce such activities in the classroom.

The teachers were, in fact, portrayed as the traditional instructors who dominated the classroom, keeping students quiet and passive. Various explanations were given for this. Some teachers observed that participatory activities would take up too much valuable teaching time and would therefore prevent them from completing the requirements of the CSEC syllabus. The teachers also felt that the syllabus was too broad for students to complete if they were to be engaged in such activities. Another issue mentioned was the fear of students being injured while taking part in participatory activities, and the consequent issue of liability. Teachers noted, for example, that on field trips the legal requirement is for one teacher to supervise each group of 20 students; and, with the generally large size of classes this was often not possible. Field work, however, can be readily planned and executed on the school compound, or in the immediate vicinity of the school; and the debate on "depth" versus "breadth" of coverage (Olsen, 1995) offers teachers some guidance in maintaining a balance in their approach. Opportunities for such active involvement in the local community are critical in the development of social understanding and civic efficacy, including such critical learnings as values, and social and interpersonal skills.

2. Student Response to More "Active" Participation

The second finding suggests that these students prefer, and were requesting, more participatory activities in their social studies lessons. Table 2(a), for example, indicates that prior to the unit being taught, reading was highly rated (4.0) by students as a preferred learning activity, and was followed at some distance by group work (1.6), and dramatizations and debates (1.3). After the unit was introduced, however,

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field trips (4.8), group work (4.5), and dramatizations (3.8) emerged as the preferred learning activities among the students—and all with markedly increased ratings. Clearly, the students were asking for classroom activities that place them directly in the community and directly address social issues. The students therefore seemed to be asking educators to, in fact, fulfil the initial purpose for the introduction of social studies to the Caribbean classroom.

Table 2. Students’ Preference for the Use of (a) Activities and (b) Media in Their Social Studies Classroom (Pre- and Post-Unit Data)

(a) Activities	Pre-Unit		Post-Unit	
	X	Rank	X	Rank
Field Trips	1.2	5	4.8	1
Reading	4.0	1	3.6	4
Dramatizations	1.3	3	3.8	3
Project Work	1.1	6	3.5	5
Debates	1.3	3	3.1	6
Group Work	1.6	2	4.5	2
(b) Media				
Newspapers	1.8	2	3.5	3
Magazines	1.6	3	4.4	1
Local Music	1.3	5	4.3	2
Textbooks	4.7	1	3.5	3
News Broadcasts	1.6	3	2.9	5

While the teaching of social studies is conceptually linked to life beyond the classroom, it did not seem to be effectively taught in order to provide students with the practical application and experience necessary for fulfilling the stated rationale of the CSEC Social Studies syllabus. The pre-unit data, from both the teachers and students, support this conclusion. While the teachers maintained that the topics on the syllabus offered opportunities for active social participation, the data show that there was little evidence of such opportunities being provided in practice.

In order for social studies to deliver its goals effectively, it is not only the curriculum that matters, but also the teaching and learning strategies employed. This was noted by Brophy and Alleman (1993), who state that:

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A curriculum is not an end in itself but a means, a tool for accomplishing educational goals...the ways that content is represented and explicated to students, the questions that will be asked, the types of teacher-student and student-student discourse that will occur, the activities and assignments, and the methods that will be used to assess progress and grade performance – will be included because they are believed to be necessary for moving students towards accomplishment of the major goals. (p. 27)

Even more importantly, at the heart of social participation is the meaningful contribution that students can make to their society through the resolution of social problems, decision making, and problem solving. These cannot be effectively achieved if students are kept in the sterile environment of the classroom, learning and regurgitating facts, as needed to pass an examination.

The role of the teacher in all of this is critical. Griffith (1999, p. 13) notes that a number of theorists have identified teacher attitude as a critical variable in both the teaching and the learning of social studies. The teacher's love and enthusiasm for the subject and his/her effort to make it interesting, alive, and exciting can be transferred to students. Students, it would seem, are somewhat more sensitive to the value and benefits of "activities" and active participation in the Social Studies classroom than teachers may realize.

At the moment, however, it appears that it is only in respect of the school-based assignment, which is compulsory for passing the CXC examinations, that teachers encourage students to engage in any meaningful participatory activities. This project is intended to be a research paper done by students on a designated area of the syllabus. Through this project, students would not only be exposed to skills in collecting and processing data, but would have the opportunity to use the higher-order skills of data analysis, synthesis, and problem solving. The NCSS (1993, p. 213) argues that teaching social studies is powerful when it is meaningful, active, challenging, value-based, and integrated. However, the strategies and techniques used by the Social Studies teachers at the school were largely traditional, with very little emphasis

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being placed on meaningful activities such as community involvement and out-of-class field work.

This finding further suggests that there was a noticeable absence of opportunities for students to develop their communication skills and public speaking abilities. None of the students in the group had, prior to the unit, participated in public speaking or in activities that allowed them to develop their communication skills. The teaching and learning of social studies, however, require that students be exposed to co-curricular activities such as student government, peer leadership programmes, the school newspaper, and the debating society (Wraga, 1993). These activities promote student-to-student interaction as well as opportunities for engaging students in public speaking and in other forms of communicating their own views and ideas. Ferguson (1991) found, for example, that a positive correlation exists between involvement in school activities such as governance and other co-curricular activities, on the one hand, and later involvement in civic and community affairs. These activities can also provide valuable sources of information about the world beyond the school.

The heavy reliance on traditional ways of teaching also demonstrates some deficiency in the skills exhibited by these teachers. The teachers in this population, for example, did not utilize a variety of media in their classroom on a regular basis, but rather relied heavily on the textbook and accompanying notes as major teaching techniques. This deficiency was highlighted in the teachers' and students' responses to items on the questionnaire about the use of various media in the classroom. According to Table 2(b), prior to the unit being taught, students indicated a clear preference for the use of textbooks (4.7) as, by far, the major form of teaching media, with lowest ratings given to local music and magazines—perhaps reflecting their own classroom experiences. After the unit, however, local magazines (4.4), and music and newspapers (3.5) were the most highly rated forms of media. Though the textbook remained fairly highly rated, it was the only media to have received a lower frequency rating than it did prior to the unit.

The suggestion, therefore, seems to be that after students have been introduced to the active and meaningful use of a variety of local

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instructional media, other than the textbook, they seemed to better appreciate the relevance and value of these media to the study and understanding of local issues and concerns, and to making Social Studies more alive, interesting, and authentic.

Activities that involve the use of a variety of resource materials and local media help to motivate students and provide opportunities for them to interact with curricular content and accomplish curricular goals (Brophy & Alleman, 1993). The use of various media and resources, for example, the overhead projector and local newspapers as utilized during the unit, allows students to interact with each other and use higher-order thinking skills, as opposed to the more passive traditional approach of relying on textbooks and worksheets. Dependence on the traditional approach to teaching places the students in a passive role and makes social studies content remote. Brophy and Alleman also argue that hands-on inquiry and discovery approaches to social studies encourage children to be active learners. The NCSS (1993, p. 218) states that powerful social studies requires the use of a variety of instructional materials such as photographs, maps, illustrations, and videos. Through using these resources and media, students learn by doing, and both their attention to the subject matter and their retention of the material being studied increases.

3. Students' Attitude to Social Participation After the Unit Was Taught

The post-unit questionnaire and the observation schedule were designed to observe which, if any, indicators of social participation occurred during the teaching unit, and whether there were any changes in students' active participation and interest in the Social Studies lessons. The third finding, according to both instruments, shows that the students' responses and attitudes to the unit exhibited active enthusiasm and interest. The students participated willingly in all activities and indicated that they particularly liked the (to them) "new" activities such as role play and community field work, or out-of-class activities that were introduced in their classes.

Whereas prior to the unit, a number of passive, non-participatory activities and behaviours were evident, the activities in the unit involved

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students in very little “seat work,” based on reading and written assignments. Rather, the unit promoted student involvement in both the school and the wider society, through activities that fostered creativity, active participation, and problem solving. Students were exposed primarily to behaviours such as communicating with each other, investigating social issues, public speaking, and policy formulation—both within the school and in relation to the local community. Instead of merely compiling notes on social issues, students were involved in actually investigating and analysing these issues through projects and field activities. The focus therefore shifted from learning facts to be regurgitated for tests—as evident at the beginning of the unit—to questioning these facts (Evans, Newmann, & Saxe, 1996), and analysing and applying information from newspaper articles and other relevant sources to current social issues. In addition to the above activities, as the unit progressed, students were also exposed to different instructional techniques, such as group work and sociodrama, which stimulated their interest and strengthened their desire to participate. These teaching techniques were complimented by the use of media such as the computer and the Internet.

After the unit, the students exhibited more interest in local social issues and were more willing to discuss these in class. They also displayed a growing level of creativity in the form of the poems, songs, group work, and debating skills displayed during class presentations. Students further indicated that they (a) socialized more with their schoolmates outside of the classroom than they did prior to the unit (100% after the unit as opposed to 70% before); (b) had greater opportunities to engage in public speaking (80% vs nil) and to develop their communication skills (90% vs 30%); and (c) engaged in more Social Studies lessons that involved activities in the community (80% vs 10%). In addition, the students in the group performed significantly better ($p < 0.01$) on the post-test (mean score 14.3) than they did on the pre-test (mean score 10.6); and this was especially so in the cases where their written responses to items that required extended answers were more detailed, better developed, and more fluently written. The community activity undertaken by the class, where students engaged in setting up a family life booth to distribute information on family planning, was also indicative of their interest in active social participation at both the school and community level. Through such activities, it has been noted, students develop new

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understandings through the process of active construction of knowledge (NCSS, 1993; Sunal & Haas, 2007).

During the initial period of the unit, the researcher had difficulty in eliciting student involvement or interest in the political affairs of their country. In most cases, students indicated that they were disenchanted with the governing of the country and therefore were not interested in taking part in the process of choosing parliamentary representatives. By the end of the unit, however, students were exhibiting a greater interest in political affairs and a slightly greater willingness to vote, if given the opportunity (40% as opposed to 30% before the unit).

The literature reveals, in fact, that traditionally taught civics and government classes are sterile. These classes are associated with diagrams of “How a bill becomes a law,” and with details on the three branches of government. In these classrooms, democratic values are discussed in the abstract, conflict is absent, and participation invisible. As a result, rather than promote active political involvement, the traditional civics curriculum portrays government as a complex entity quite removed from students’ lives (Avery, Sullivan, Smith, & Sandell, 1996, p. 22). When participation is discussed, it is usually linked to the conventional forms of participation such as voting and letter writing. Students therefore tend to view their political role as that of a passive bystander. This assessment was also noted by Griffith (1995, p. 10), who stated that these participation activities tend to focus on things such as the election of class prefects, some involvement in school clubs, and a few cases of student societies. These activities and groups, however, tend to be under the direct supervision of teachers, and therefore offer students very little in terms of autonomy or involvement in decision making or the formulation of policy. Thus, students are rarely given the opportunity to engage in authentic participatory activities that promote the acquisition and construction of knowledge, or in the process of governing. Guttman (1987), for example, argues that deliberation about public issues is essential to democratic education. Secondly, students also need to become familiar with a repertoire of strategies for meaningful participation in the democratic process (Evans et al., 1993).

All social studies classes should therefore include community service activities that would engage students in making meaningful choices in

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relation to issues that affect their community. Such activities have been also proposed by Griffith (1995), who notes that these and other civic educational activities must be more specifically and deliberately written into curriculum practice. Thus, provision for such social action, together with linkages to relevant social organizations, should be tied to the curriculum in such a way as to meaningfully engage the students in direct involvement in, and reflection on, the functions, activities, and processes of the various organizations and institutions in their society.

Conclusion

This study sought to address the notion that, in the teaching and learning of Social Studies, social participatory activities are necessary to engage students in meaningful learning activities, which would not only increase the competence of students to think critically, but would also enable them to function and participate as citizens in a democratic environment. At the same time, such activities would equip students with an in-depth knowledge of their own social, legal, political, and economic subsystems.

Evidence from this research suggests that the teaching unit, which employed a variety of activity-based and authentic learning exercises, appeared to be related to a greater willingness by students to participate and become involved in the affairs of their community. After the unit, the students in the group also seemed to have improved their communication skills and appeared more willing to vote and to be involved in the governance of their country.

Given that these improvements seem to have occurred within a small group of academically underachieving students at one school, this certainly raises intriguing questions about the potential outcomes of such an approach with a larger, more representative group of students.

In a recent newspaper article (Comments reported, 2005), Rosina Wiltshire, Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme, in responding to points raised about the need to put curricula in place to respond to the social problems within the Caribbean, stated that:

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the educational process has to determine whether the goal is to pass exams or shape the human being for life,... from the time we determined that the whole purpose of education was simply to pass exams, we lost our footing. (p. 3)

According to Newmann and Wehlage (1993, p. 8), reflective participation is equated with authentic instruction and with the NCSS position statement (1993, p. 213), that “powerful social studies teaching... enables students to... develop social understanding and civic efficacy.” This type of participation is also both constructivist and transformative.

The growing problems among our youth suggest that more should be done with them during their formative years. If one is to address the general decline in the behaviour of our youth, as alluded to earlier, all stakeholders in education must address the relevance, need, and worthwhileness of a curriculum infused with social participatory activities. Already in Barbados, under Curriculum 2000, Social Studies has been identified as one of the core subjects required by all students at the secondary level. The CSEC Social Studies syllabus has the ability to address this issue, if the higher goals of social participation and citizenship education are seen as an integral and central purpose in the teaching and learning of Social Studies.

It is acknowledged that the nature and size of the selected group for this case study clearly limit any generalizations on the teaching of Social Studies and on the implications of introducing more social participation activities in the Social Studies classroom in Caribbean schools. The study, nevertheless, offers a new and intriguing line of research that illuminates the importance of teaching Social Studies more, or even essentially, for social investigation and for active social involvement and participation, rather than for mere knowledge and factual information.

Further research, using a larger, more representative sample of students and Social Studies teachers, would certainly provide another layer of understanding with respect to these initial, tentative conclusions.

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