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In February, 2020, the Journal of Curriculum Studies Research invited scholars and practitioners to contribute articles for a special issue entitled, “The Moral Imperative of Effective Science and Social Studies Teaching.” We hoped to receive a handful of submissions regarding the importance of teaching about political activism in elementary or secondary classrooms; the implications of reduced social studies and science instruction; and classroom examples of thoughtful instruction in either subject, lessons that not only respected the content but placed the learner at the center of the process. We received more than three times as many submissions as we were able to accept—clearly, this was a topic whose time had come.

In “Civility and Shared Fate: Social Studies Education as Teaching for Belonging,” Martha Ritter sets up the issue with a theoretical basis for this kind of teaching. High quality social studies education is about people, conflict, places, interactions, and relationships. She shares a solid framework for understanding the term “civility,” and reminds us that social studies education requires courage.

John H. Bickford and Devanne R. Lawson’s, “Examining Patterns within Challenged or Ford and Lawson have completed a qualitative content analysis of “classic” books for the primary grades. They found particular themes related to the frequency of these challenges, including (but not limited to) sexuality, danger, and racial and religious diversity.

Continuing to another piece addressing the importance of critical conversations in the elementary grades, Laura Darolia shares “‘He’s on Fire for Justice!’: Using Critical Conversations to Explore Sociopolitical Topics in Elementary Classrooms.” Darolia dispenses

with the myth that children are too innocent for certain types of conversations. Sharing a case study of a 2nd grade teacher and her students, Darolia describes “social justice read aloud time,” where the students and teacher engaged in thoughtful discussion about these books that went beyond the grade-level content standards.

Taking the topic of social studies and critical conversations into the secondary classroom, Andrea Watson-Canning shares her story of two teachers who use gender and women’s experiences as regular fodder for classroom discussion in “Gendering Social Studies: Teachers’ Intended and Enacted Curriculum and Student Diffraction.” She found that while her participants—teachers and students alike—respected an approach to social studies teaching that included multiple perspectives, students would at times resist the teachers’ intentions.

To further the exploration of critically oriented social studies, Cassie J. Brownell and Anam Rashid provide their analysis of third-grade children’s sense-making about the U.S. Administration’s proposed border wall with Mexico in, “Building Bridges Instead of Walls: Engaging Young Children in Critical Literacy Read Alouds.” This close analysis of critical literacy read-alouds found the children were capable of complex discussions of the text as well as (im)migration issues.

Then, Brian C. Gibbs applies a socially just, critical lens to methodology as well as the research topic in “Struggles and Testimonios: Critical Teaching in Classrooms of Healing.” Using testimonio research methods and methodology (Beverly, 2003; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012), Gibbs provides an analysis of two Chicana, activist social studies teachers’ use of the classroom as a place for healing and justice.

Annie Noel Wildes argues the ethical implications of legislation related to state standards for science in light of global warming and social justice. Using frameworks of Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006; Ives, 2004; Marx, 1887/2010), Wildes examines the underlying problems with removing language about climate change.

Finally, Cathryn van Kessel wraps up the issue with “Teaching the Climate Crisis: Existential Considerations.” Van Kessel shares with us how talking about climate change is difficult psychologically because it presents an existential threat, reminding us of the inevitability of death. She shares the important elements of *terror management theory*, and how teachers can and should use certain strategies to manage teaching barriers regarding this topic.