



Chapter 1.

The Nature and Mission of Social Studies

- Ring...Ring...Ring...(The school bell sounds the start of the day. Ms. Tyner's second grade class has already assembled.)
- Ms. Tyner: Okay, it's time for reading.
- Sonja: Ms. T, my mommy had a new baby last night.
- Ms. Tyner: That's nice. Maybe we can talk about it at recess. Group A, you should be on workbook page 47. Group C, you'll need to finish reading the story about Ted.
- Eric: I got a new Halloween costume! I'm going to be a dragon!
- Terrance: I'm gonna get lots of candy this year.
- Ms. Tyner: (ignoring the comment...) Group B, I'll meet you at the reading circle.
- Eric: Will we decorate the room and have a Halloween party?
- Ms. Tyner: The School Board said we can't have Halloween parties. Anyway, Halloween is not a part of the curriculum. We don't test it.
- Principal: (over the intercom) Teachers, remember that the canned food drive ends Friday. If your class is participating, remind the students to get their donations in.
- Sonja: Ms. T., How come we didn't participate? My big sister's fourth grade class did.
- Ms. Tyner: I'd like to, but we have to focus on basic skills in reading, writing, and math. And remember, you all are behind and we have to make good scores this year! Now let's get down to work. I want group B at the reading circle.
- Fade... (Ms. T. moves toward the reading circle.)

1. Introduction

What did you think as you read the opening scenario? Did you think: "Wow! Ms. Tyner is a real drudge!" when you considered the way she focused like a guided missile on the reading work for the day? Did you feel sorry that the children's interests and experiences were put off or ignored?

Unfortunately, the imaginary dialogue that opens this chapter is not far from the reality some students face at the hands of primary grade level teachers who have increasingly been forced to teach only reading and math in order to meet the many demands of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Unwittingly perhaps, this teacher has removed much of what truly interests children from her classroom. In doing so she has disassociated education from the daily social reality the children experience. Further, she has most likely turned schoolwork into a series of disconnected and highly abstract academic exercises.

Of course Ms. Tyner was right in saying that many of the children's interests aren't tested. But she was wrong in assuming that such content wasn't important enough for her consideration or class time. In fact, early childhood content area experts in math and reading would urge Ms. Tyner to recognize and make good instructional use of the children's interests. To accomplish this, social studies topics are frequently used as a context for math, reading, and language arts lessons.

A key point here is that much of what interests children, much of what adds meaning to their lives, is obviously social studies in nature. But even more important, while it is fundamentally correct to capitalize on these interests to support the learning of reading, writing, and arithmetic, it is not enough to use children's social studies interests simply as icing to sugar coat the rather dry substance of the mechanics of reading and the basic operations of math¹. Ms. Tyner, for example, could easily have engaged her class in a short discussion of how exciting it is to have a new baby in the family when Sonja made her comment. An invitation for Sonja to bring in pictures of her new sibling or to have her mother bring in her newborn baby could have served as a memorable event for everyone in the class and could serve well as a springboard² for writing and further reading about babies. Eric's and Terrance's comments about Halloween foreshadow their interest in this holiday and offer a very good opportunity for Ms. Tyner to foster her students' sense of community citizenship by attempting to organize some appropriate and permissible classroom activities centered on topics such as the history of this holiday, its contemporary importance, and safety considerations for children whose parents allow trick or treating. Of course, the

¹ I am not trying to prevent or restrict the use of social studies content as a substantive and high interest context for building reading, writing, and math skills. After all, these areas must make use of social studies (or science) in order to have concrete connections to the real-world.

² A springboard is anything (e.g., an event or a newspaper article) that serves to motivate learning directed toward a particular topic.

Principal's announcement of the canned food drive's culmination reveals that Ms. Tyner's class has not seized this important opportunity to build on her children's natural desire to help others and, just as important, to learn about why hunger still persists in many of our communities. Math concepts and skills could profitably be used to assess the effectiveness of the food drive and more fully grasp the size and nature of the hunger problem that exists in many parts of America. While a teacher cannot be expected to address all of her children's comments and interests, insight into the types real life events depicted in the opening scenario develops best with direct and extended attention to such matters for their own sake, and this focus of learning is properly thought of and included in the school curriculum as social studies.

In this chapter you'll learn about the nature of the social studies curriculum, inspect a rationale for elementary grade level social studies, and briefly view your role as a teacher in this important area of the school curriculum.

2. What Is Social Studies?

The answer to this question is surprisingly complex. Authorities recognize that social studies encompasses a diverse formal curriculum in addition to a powerful set of informal experiences. The formal curriculum is composed of content taken from the social sciences and humanities. The informal curriculum includes naturally arising experiences such as holiday celebrations, current events, and a host of other cultural expectations conveyed to students through what is often termed the "hidden curriculum."

2.1. The Formal Curriculum

The formal curriculum may be thought of as the purposefully taught lessons that students experience in schools. National, state, and local curriculum guides specify the grade-by-grade learning goals children are expected to achieve from this officially endorsed, prescribed instruction. Textbooks and other instructional resources are used to help students learn the prescribed formal curriculum. The formal curriculum is open to public review and it is often tested to provide evidence of students' learning. In the subject area of social studies, the intellectual foundation of the formal curriculum comes from the social sciences and the humanities.

2.1.1. The Social Sciences and Humanities

The subjects that most educators group under the label of social sciences are geography, political science, economics, sociology, anthropology, and psychology. The humanities featured in social studies are history³, philosophy,

³ History may also be considered a social science. More is said about this in Chapter 6.

religion, and aspects of art history and literature. History, geography, economics, and political science (i.e. government and civics) typically get the lion's share of attention in the social studies curriculum and are often referred to as "the core four." Research and writing by the scholars in the social sciences and humanities provides the content that, in a simplified form, gets taught to young children.

Topics or themes are typically used to structure the elementary social studies curriculum. For example, a unit on a specific Native American culture in the early 1800s would integrate content from history, anthropology, government, and geography. Alternatively, a first grade unit on contemporary families would integrate content of sociology, economics, psychology, and perhaps religion.

Occasionally teachers in the elementary school will devote some specific instructional time to a single discipline, such as a unit focusing on one or more concepts from economics, or a week of map skills instruction. But such discipline-focused studies are the exception rather than the rule in most elementary grade level classrooms⁴. The predominant approach to teaching elementary social studies is an integrated disciplines approach and this approach is likely to remain popular in the future (Haas & Laughlin, 2001).

So, to summarize, from the standpoint of the formal curriculum, elementary social studies is the content of the social sciences and certain humanities simplified and applied to themes or topics studied by young children. This curriculum is supposed to be taught to all children. School districts often attempt to adopt grade level specific textbooks that are well aligned to this curriculum and then either the district or the state department of education will often engage in some form of testing to measure how well this content has been mastered.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the benefits of instruction that is focused on a single discipline?
2. What are the benefits of the integrated disciplines approach to social studies?
3. How might knowledge from the social sciences and humanities benefit young children?

2.2. *The Informal Curriculum*

While the formal curriculum is the central focus of official curriculum guides and standardized testing, elementary social studies actually includes many powerful learning experiences in its informal curriculum. Many authors

⁴ National and state curriculum trends are causing elementary grade level teachers to focus more directly on topics or themes that relate to history and geography. History and geography instruction are often integrated and include attention to economics, government, and other social sciences and humanities. In a sense, using history and geography in this way causes them to become an "umbrella" subject that is functionally equivalent to social studies.

refer to the informal curriculum simply as the "hidden curriculum." Calling the entire informal curriculum "hidden," however, is not appropriate. First of all, the meanings associated with the word "hidden" are not typically positive and much of what happens in the informal curriculum exerts a positive influence on children. Second, and more important, is the fact that much of the informal curriculum is not hidden at all! Instead, it is a highly visible, yet unwritten, aspect of schooling. This highly visible yet unwritten aspect of the school experience may be thought of as the natural social studies curriculum.

2.2.1. The Natural Curriculum

Returning to the theme of the opening scenario, attempt to imagine the dullness of a young child's school year in a classroom where the teacher refused to consider the influence of holidays, important current events, and everyday developments happening in the children's own homes. What view of school would children have if they experienced the same routine "3Rs" instruction over and over? The standard school day would involve reading out of the basal, completing reading skills workbooks, doing math worksheets, polishing handwriting skills, and learning spelling words. Each day would repeat in a similar manner; day after day, week after week, all year long. The development of understandings about the world would be completely ignored and/or entirely coincidental.

Quite obviously, an effective early childhood teacher must use the powerful natural curriculum for its motivational value within the "3Rs" curriculum. Beyond this, however, she must also use children's emerging understandings of the natural curriculum to positively influence the citizenship development of her young students. To again use the opening classroom scenario as an example, the teacher might offer lessons on how a family's life is influenced by the arrival of a new child, what the real history of Halloween is, and why some families need food assistance. Accurate, age-appropriate answers to these questions demands knowledge from the social sciences and humanities. Such answers are a legitimate focus of thoughtfully developed early childhood social studies instruction. As your knowledge of early childhood social studies instruction develops, you'll learn how to design lessons that develop citizenship skills, knowledge, and positive attitudes based on the natural curriculum.

2.2.2. The Hidden Curriculum

While the natural curriculum is visible, the hidden curriculum is less so. Tucked down under the daily routines, slipped into the mutually shared understandings of the teacher's gestures and words, and buried between the lines of the school's formal curriculum, are an assortment of unspoken and largely unchallenged beliefs, attitudes, values, and assumptions about the social world.

To illustrate the importance of the hidden cultural knowledge we all typically command, stop for a moment and think about how you might offer your hand in greeting another person. Would you grip the person's hand fully and shake with considerable motion? Or would you offer mainly your fingers and make only the lightest touch? Would you look the person in the eyes and say "How nice to meet you?"

Your answers to these questions clearly show the significance of the "hidden" social knowledge that influences our perceptions of what is correct to do in interactions with other people. You probably found yourself saying *"Well it depends on who I'm meeting! I would shake hands one way if it was the President and I was getting the opportunity to greet her⁵ on the White House lawn. I would shake hands quite another way—or perhaps not at all—if I was meeting my new academic advisor for the first time."*

The factors that could potentially influence the way in which you might shake hands include: the person's age, gender, appearance, social status, the occasion or social setting, and even your own mood. Quite obviously, failing to have such important socio-cultural knowledge could produce disastrous results! Clearly, adequate socialization is essential to the individual and to society.

The hidden curriculum serves as a medium for passing along the implicit cultural and social knowledge we all need in order to function effectively in society. This hidden knowledge is either assumed or purposefully transmitted, but seldom critically analyzed. For example, expectations related to traditional classroom teaching dictate that teachers typically stand, talk, move, and command while students remain seated, silent, stationary, and submissive. Obviously, certain beliefs, attitudes, values, and assumptions have formed such expected behaviors. Thinking about, and sharing with students, the reasons why we behave as we do, is an important part of the social studies learning that teachers must offer. Paying conscious attention to the hidden curriculum is a recommended teaching practice in social studies even though this important content will most likely never be tested.

You may be wondering what all this has to do with social studies. The answer is twofold. First, it is the social sciences and humanities that have systematically studied and expanded our understanding of such cultural and social phenomena. This taken-for-granted aspect of all schooling is a part of every lesson regardless of whether it is social studies, science, math, or reading. However, it is the disciplines of social studies that contain the knowledge needed to examine the hidden curriculum. Second, since schools must function as our society's primary means of socializing the young for citizenship, it is important that teachers be keenly aware of this instructional responsibility and be capable of explaining the reasons for the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and values students must gain. This is an especially important task of elementary grade

⁵ I hope you stumbled momentarily on the image of a female president. I used this on purpose, of course, to help you understand the power of our contextually encrusted cultural expectations.

level teachers since they bear the brunt of such endless questions as: "Does every state have a President?" "Is there really an Easter Bunny?" "How long is a half-hour?" and "Why do I have to share?"

Discussion Questions:

1. How important is the formal social studies curriculum compared to the natural social studies curriculum?
2. What message does it send to a child when a teacher ignores a child's question or provides a flippant or incorrect response?
3. Should the hidden curriculum be openly taught and thoughtfully examined? Why or why not?
4. What are the hidden beliefs, attitudes, values, and assumptions that underlie the stereotypical teacher and student behaviors described above?

3. Why Teach Social Studies?

There are two basic answers to this question. A frequent answer, commonly cited in statements of the National Council for the Social Studies, stems from the need for informed civic participation in a democracy. A second response stresses the importance of social studies for its utility as an aid to understanding the activities of people as they organize their society, evolve culture, and individually/collectively go about the daily business of living.

3.1. Social Studies Is Fundamental to Democratic Citizenship

Preparation for citizenship is often identified as the central mission of social studies. While all areas of the curriculum make important contributions to citizenship preparation (for example, language arts and reading contribute to the future citizen's ability to read and write), social studies focuses the development of the knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills that we would like all citizens to share. The essential role social studies plays in the development of citizens may be illustrated by asking some rhetorical questions such as: Wouldn't you expect all citizens to know something about the geography, government, and history of their country? Wouldn't you hope that all citizens stood up for their legal rights and fulfilled their social responsibilities? Wouldn't you be pleased if all citizens used their literacy skills to stay informed of current events and to participate in civic life?

Of course it is hard to answer "no" to the above questions. We want to do our utmost to form all of the young people in our nation into the best possible citizens. But this task is complex. It clearly involves more than what the individual teacher and school can do. It involves the family, the church, the community, and even such relatively uncontrollable influences as the media. As we shall see in future chapters, social studies should play a role in reinforcing the positive messages of all of these powerful influences. Social studies can also provide children with the knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills needed to

overcome deficits and handicaps associated with limited family, church, community, and media experiences.

3.1.1. Citizenship Attitudes Form Early

It has been shown that many political and social attitudes important to citizenship develop early in the life of a child. For this reason alone, schools must provide young students with positive experiences in these areas. Teachers must show children how to responsibly participate in the many decisions that affect their lives in school. In doing so, schools implant the expectation that citizens must be included in making the governmental decisions of their communities. Examples of this type of experience in the primary grades include involving students in questions about aspects of their daily schedule (*Should we continue working on our projects into the next period and then make up the time tomorrow?*); the method of instruction (*Would you rather work in small groups or alone?*); the organization of the room (*I've been thinking about placing the desks in a different arrangement, but I'd like to know what you think...?*); and even the standards and rewards provided in the room (*How well should a student be able to do this in order to get a satisfactory grade?*).

Experiences such as the ones above show how a teacher might appropriately share the governance of the room with her students in order to build the important democratic citizenship expectation that we all must have a say in governing our communities. Equally important to this democratic ideal is the role that the teacher plays in promoting positive citizenship attitudes and values. For example, the teacher should create a warm, accepting climate and provide experiences that promote dignity and self-respect regardless of a child's level of intelligence, physical appearance, wealth, religion, or other personal characteristics. Lessons that build the knowledge and attitudes required to promote a genuine sense of responsibility and care for others are basic to social studies.

3.1.2. Participatory Citizenship Requires Practice

Why do some individuals rise to community service and leadership? Why are so many other people disengaged, uninformed, and apathetic? Social studies educators contend that an important difference is the kinds of citizenship preparation experiences individuals have during their school years.

People become involved in their communities when they have self-confidence in their ability to contribute, feel a desire to improve their community, and have positive experiences that build the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to succeed. The traits typically associated with these people are: average or higher grades, membership in school clubs and/or athletics, participation in school governance, and involvement in youth service activities. By establishing classrooms and schools that offer a variety of opportunities for participation in voluntary social service and group governance activities, and by

clearly recognizing the desirability of these forms of civic engagement, teachers can do much to increase the chance that students leaving their classrooms will continue to be good citizens. In future chapters we will see how the social studies curriculum may be used to help schools achieve this goal.

Discussion Questions:

1. The school is not the only source of learning directed at good citizenship. What role do families, churches, and youth groups also play?
2. Does the school have a special responsibility or unique role to play in citizenship preparation? If so, what? If not, why?
3. Students have academic and personality traits that vary as widely as their physical appearance. Should the teacher play a role in assuring that all children experience leadership opportunities despite such differences?
4. What is a good citizen? Are certain kinds of knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for good citizenship?

3.2. Social Studies Aids in the Construction of Social Meaning

The second answer to the question of why we teach social studies reflects the roles that the social sciences and humanities play as tools for the construction of social meaning. The meaning that each individual makes of his or her experiences is unique. Yet some portion of that individual meaning must be shared in order for individuals to function collectively in social settings. Social studies plays a role in helping children construct shared cultural meanings out of their experiences (Merryfield, 2004).

Informal learning in the home or preschool may do much that is positive to prepare the child for entry into kindergarten. Available evidence shows, however, that many children enter kindergarten unprepared. The difference between the prepared and unprepared is often the presence of a caring parent—or older sibling—who took the time required to teach basic information and focus the child's mind on the meaning of the life events that he or she experienced. Carefully developed social studies instruction can aid students in developing an improved understanding of their lives. The following example illustrates the significance of this statement. As you read the story, think of the openings in Seth's life for lessons that might improve his understanding and self-esteem.

"Seth"

At the tender age of two Seth had already learned that when the rest of the daycare children were gone it wouldn't be much longer before his own Mom showed up. He clung to Ms. Abercrombie's arm sucking hard on his pacifier as she quietly read "Tawny Scrawny Lion."

By age three Seth had visited his Mother's place of work. He understood that there were other children like him who lived with their grandparents. Mom said it was only "temporary," whatever that meant. To him it meant Grammy's good cooking and games with Granddad.

Taking a bubble bath with Mom in the big claw-foot tub was a nightly treat. After she got out there was always time for water play with his collection of bath toys.

By age four Seth and his Mom had moved to a new town. Daycare changed some. There were more children and the teachers seemed to be less fun. They were always watching, giving orders, and breaking up fights. Seth was anxious to go home each day when his Mother arrived. Mom's cooking just wasn't as good as Grammy's, but there were more snack foods that he really liked. Bath time meant bathing on his own since Mom said he was getting bigger and could handle it by himself.

Seth's fifth year brought him the first father he had ever known. Grammy and Granddad came for the wedding. Seth and his parents moved to a new house, and once again, he changed daycare settings. Life bumped along as the threesome adjusted to each other.

That summer Seth had his sixth birthday. His mother told him that in the fall he would start kindergarten, and she took him to visit the school. It was bigger than he ever imagined. There were lots and lots of children running everywhere. Seth thought this place could be fun, but at the same time he just wanted to stay home and he hoped that summer would never end...

Upon entering kindergarten or first grade, most children have had five or six years of first hand experiential knowledge of their mother. Yet each child bases his or her conception of the nature of a mother only on the example he or she has experienced. The ways in which women—and some men—execute the role of mother vary as greatly as the individuals who fill this important place in childrearing. Yet commonalties exist in the way this role is fulfilled and there are many culturally defined expectations concerning the rights and responsibilities of this role. Children inevitably make informal comparisons with other schoolmates' parents. Most early childhood social studies educators would prefer, however, that some careful attention be directed at helping children understand the diversity in how mothers fulfill their role.

For example, mothers cook, draw the bath, buy the groceries, and go to work. Or do they? Some children's fathers may do all of the cooking and cleaning. Some children may draw their own bath. Grandparents living in the home may do the grocery shopping. What do such differences tell us about our own experiences? What do they tell us about our classmates' experiences?

Classroom activities aimed at informing children about the natural diversity represented in their own families may be a child's first lessons in social studies. Such lessons will naturally involve the collection and examination of information. Children will generalize about what they have found and each child will be able to put his or her own experience in a richer context that builds a deeper understanding of what it means to be human. These are potentially the first experiences a child will have with the methods and content of the social sciences and humanities. In addition, these may well be the first non-commercial glimpses of the larger social world that a child gains. This type of basic cultural learning is just as important as learning to read, write, and calculate and responsibility for it lies squarely within the social studies curriculum⁶.

3.3. *The Formation of Social Knowledge Must Not Be Left to Chance*

You might be thinking that the learning identified above could wait until children are in the 4th, 5th, or 6th grade. Or perhaps you are thinking that such learning occurs naturally; that it is simply unnecessary to involve children in carefully constructed lessons designed to enhance understanding of their everyday lives. Logic and experience, however, suggest otherwise.

First, gaining the important social knowledge we all need to function well within society must not be left to chance. Some children have expert parent-teachers who carefully answer questions about the world. Other children may come from homes where there is a significant lack of such education-oriented parenting. Children coming from such families are likely to have difficulty in school and other areas of life. Society expects the school to develop the common base of knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills that citizens need. When the focus of learning turns to the diverse real world experiences of daily life, children gain social tolerance and self-control, in addition to the knowledge they need to add meaning to their lives.

Beyond the personal knowledge gained when the focus of classroom learning turns to real life, there is the undeniable fact that schooling itself demands more than a little socialization. A large and varied collection of social knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs, and skills are needed to attend school. In fact, skillful teachers deliver some excellent social studies lessons at the start of each year. Typical lessons focus on school rules (*an aspect of political science*),

⁶ I have offered this image of the importance of a child's first social studies learning, in part, to help counter the assertion of some critics that studying the family in the primary grades is trivial and uninformative.

classroom manners (*an aspect of sociology*), the plan of the school building (*an aspect of geography*), and the chronological sequence of events in the day and week (*an aspect of history*). A student's failure to gain this essential information can mean instant trouble! Exhibiting an openly antisocial disregard for this information could result in a trip to the Principal's office or even suspension from school. Such is the essential nature of social studies content.

4. The Role of the Teacher

The teacher is undeniably the central figure in the classroom. She rightfully assumes responsibility for determining what content is most appropriate for individual learners, she works hard to employ engaging methods that will be used to convey the content, and her personality shines through all aspects of the child's classroom experience. Is the teacher autocratic and authoritarian? Is she "hard-nosed" and cold? Does she exude contempt for her young learners' ignorance? Or is the teacher a democratic leader; a person who shows warmth and humor when working with children; an individual who treats children as co-learners on a quest of importance, intrigue, and excitement? The answer depends, at least in part, on how the teacher views herself and her students as decision makers.

4.1. The Teacher and Students as Decision Makers

Decisions about what to learn, when to learn it, and how to go about it are the essence of teaching. Curriculum coordinators, school boards, principals, textbook authors, and teachers typically make such decisions. In some subject areas such as math, there is a restricted body of content and a relatively well-established sequence of instruction. But in social studies, where the body of content knowledge is huge and the skill learning sequence is more arbitrary, decisions about the what, when, and how of teaching are more problematic. In addition, because the content of social studies deals with all aspects of social life, we have the added responsibility to consider what is appropriate for students in regard to family and community values.

As stated earlier, participatory citizenship is a desired outcome of social studies instruction. In addition, social studies plays a key role in helping individuals construct and interpret social meaning. To achieve these two ends teachers must pay attention to the interests of children and give them some say in determining the what, when, and how of their social studies lessons. Children, as well as teachers and parents, should influence decisions about their learning of the social studies curriculum.

4.2. Controlling the Formal Curriculum

The formal curriculum in social studies often becomes, by default, the officially adopted textbook. Research tells us that a high percentage of the elementary social studies lessons experienced by children are textbook-based (Haas & Laughlin, 2001; VanFossen, 2005). If the school's principal tells the teacher to "cover the book," and enforces a rigid daily schedule, then teacher and student decisions concerning the what, when, and how of social studies learning are significantly narrowed. Experience suggests that this is not an effective way to teach social studies. In addition, of course, it is an ineffective way to use a textbook.

Teachers and students must have some say over the what, when, and how of social studies instruction. Parent involvement is important too. Sharing decision making power over the social studies curriculum and consciously addressing students' interests are keys to effective social studies instruction. When the explanatory power of the social sciences and humanities are brought to bear on students' real world interests and when this learning takes place in a cooperative, self-determined manner, meaningful social studies learning is likely to result.

4.3. Using the Informal Curriculum

Shaping the formal social studies curriculum to meet the interests of students requires conscious effort on the part of the teacher. Perhaps even more challenging and rewarding is the opportunity to use aspects of the informal curriculum (both the natural and the hidden curriculum) as a basis for meaningful social studies lessons.

For example, few elementary school teachers allow Thanksgiving to slip past without making a special bulletin board, preparing children for a school program, or using the motivation of the celebration for special projects in art and music. Language arts may feature stories with a Thanksgiving theme and turkey feathers may appear printed on math book pages for addition and subtraction exercises.

Yet, what do students (or teachers) know about the real history of Thanksgiving? For example, how much do they know about the first Thanksgiving feast or the struggle to have Thanksgiving recognized as an official national holiday? In addition, how much thought have they given to what our current Thanksgiving customs imply about us as a society or how our current Thanksgiving celebration might be improved?

Teachers who focus the reflection of the twin mirrors of the social sciences and humanities on our daily activities give children valuable insight into their lives. Deciding to use the natural and hidden curriculum as the focus of social studies is yet another key to effective social studies lessons.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the benefits and drawbacks of teachers sharing power with students over social studies curriculum decisions?
2. How can a teacher make better use of a social studies textbook than simply using it as a text to be read with the whole class or small groups?
3. Could lessons on aspects of the natural and hidden curriculum ever backfire and cause trouble for the teacher? Give an example.

5. Concluding Thoughts

Social studies should be a vibrant part of every child's education from preschool to the end of their formal state-mandated education. As a well-prepared professional educator it is your responsibility to make sure that your everyday classroom practices help meet the real world needs and interests of your children. Doing real justice to these needs and interests undoubtedly means that you will make an honest effort to fulfill the responsibilities you assume as a school district employee. It may also mean that you must do things that go well beyond the requirements of your job such as providing extra resources and lessons that meet children's needs and interests in the formal and informal content of the real world that is framed by the social sciences and humanities.

6. Resources

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) maintains a variety of resources such as articles, policy statements, curriculum standards, lesson plans, and links to many other organizations' websites. The URL for NCSS is: <http://www.socialstudies.org/>

Each state maintains a website where it normally display such things as their curriculum documents and instructional resources designed to fit its curriculum guidelines. There are several gateways to the states' websites. A general gateway to many states' curriculum standards is: <http://www.edstandards.org/StSu/Social.html>.

A good source of quick information about elementary social studies is The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education found at <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>. You can search for Digests as well as journal and non-journal literature at this site.

A major Internet gateway to curriculum resources guides, lesson plans, responses to FAQs, is the Educator's Reference Desk: <http://www.eduref.org/>. You can access the GEM/ERIC database search from this site.

Federal Resources for Educational Excellence, a website also maintained by the U.S. Department of Education was launched in 1998. This site, <http://www.free.ed.gov/>, provides over 1,500 federally supported teaching and

learning resources from 65 federal agencies, with more added regularly. It is one of the most popular websites of the U.S. Department of Education.

7. Selected Readings

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