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EDUC 327

December 14, 2010

Social Studies Philosophy

In today's schools, the focus is on teaching mathematics and reading. This focus is a result to high stakes testing, and the emphasis it has on these two content areas. While mathematics and reading are both very important to teach young learners, the remaining content areas must not be dismissed from the everyday curriculum. Social studies, science, and all other remaining content areas play a huge role in the development of academically successful students. I believe that teaching social studies is essential in the everyday curriculum of students, and I will make sure to incorporate social studies into my everyday lessons.

By learning about social studies and history, one is engaging in learning valuable information on what events took place in the past, and what events may take place in the future. Today's society has changed dramatically because of events, relationships with other countries, and yes, even mistakes made in the past. By teaching students about the past, they will learn how the world has gotten to where it is today, and where society could be heading. If students do not have social studies included in their academics, how will they learn about the past and how things have changed over time? The answer to this is simple. Most students will never know what events took place, what mistakes were made, and how far we have come. This is why social studies education is essential to include in the everyday curriculums of schools.

The National Council for Social Studies outlines ten social studies themes that should be addressed in the classroom. These ten themes are: Culture, Time, continuity, and change,

People, places and environments, Individual development and identity, Individual groups and institutions, Power, authority, and governance, Production, distribution, and consumption, Science, technology, and society, Global ideas, and Civic ideals and practices. All ten of these themes are important to the social studies curriculum according to the NCSS (NCSS, 1994).

These ten themes relate to the Indiana state academic standards as each standard reflects one or more of these themes (IDOE, 2009). Because each of these themes is important according to the NCSS and IDOE, I will implement each into my social studies curriculum and emphasize those in which I find match the grade level standards in which I will teach most importantly.

A position statement found in *General Guidelines for Social Studies Teaching and Learning* states that “social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active” (NCSS, 2008). Being a firm believer in inquiry learning, I will strive to meet the given academic standards through inquiry lessons for students to participate in. According to *Social Studies Strategies for K-8 Classrooms* by Kathryn Obenchain and Ronald Morris, “inquiry empowers students to direct their own learning; they work with their teacher to develop academically rigorous projects that promote ownership of their social studies education” (pg. 23) I envision my students learning social studies through inquiry learning and through other integrated content areas. Because there is so little time to fit in all content areas, I will incorporate social studies into my reading and math lessons to make sure that the students are not missing this valuable content area.

As I work towards creating a successful social studies curriculum for my students, I will incorporate methods based on best practices. I will include best practices in my classroom by selecting the most important content and concepts to focus on, by using inquiry based activities, integrating social studies in other content areas, building on students prior knowledge by making

lessons relative to all students, and by using multiple kinds of assessment tools to help determine what the students have learned (WDPI, 2010). In order to use these best practices, I will use a variety of teaching methods to incorporate social studies into my classroom.

As I envision a first grade classroom, the first method that I will use to teach social studies is through a method called Think Pair Share to focus on multiple perspectives. First, I will have students think about a topic. After giving them time to think, I will have them write about what they thought about. Next, I will have them share their thoughts with a partner. Lastly, the class will form a sharing circle and a grand discussion will take place over what was thought about, what was learned, and what questions are still unanswered. By using this method, I could include any of the ten social studies themes given by NCSS. This method allows students to hear their classmates' perspectives and ideas on given topics. Students will be working cooperatively with others, and will gain new insights, ideas, and questions on the social studies topic of discussion. This is a great practice for introducing a topic to students as part of a unit or theme.

A second method that I will use with my first graders to teach social studies is by including a traveling ambassador in our classroom. A traveling ambassador is a cutout figure that will travel through mail to other areas around the school, community, state, or world. By using a traveling ambassador, I will engage my students in all ten of the social studies themes given by NCSS, and in the academic standards given by the Indiana Department of Education. The traveling ambassador will take questions that the students have and ask for answers in return. This will allow the students to participate in inquiry-based learning, gain new diverse insights, and increase their knowledge of the world around them. This method demonstrates best practices through meeting in depth study of topics, engaging inquiry based learning, and increasing knowledge and awareness of students.

The third method that I will use to teach social studies is to use the method of using a mini economy. According to the Indiana Department of Education, first grade social studies standards focus on economy. When using a mini economy, I will give each student a job to do as a good citizen of the classroom. The students will fulfill their classroom jobs, follow the rules of the classroom community, and be good citizens by doing what is right. By having a mini economy in the classroom, students will be able to see how societies work, what good citizenship is, and the importance of each individual in a community. This method of teaching social studies reaches five NCSS themes: IV. Individual Development and Identity, V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions, VI. Power, Authority, and Governance VII. Production, Distribution, Consumption, and X. Civic Ideals and Practices (Obenchain & Morris p. 136). Students will not only be reaching these NCSS themes, but a wide variety of academic standards will be incorporated into the mini economy. First graders will love having responsibilities, working together, and learning without knowing it through mini economies. This is a fun engaging method that will benefit students as they grow together in their learning community.

Social studies is very important to the everyday lives of students. As a teacher, I will use the NCSS ten social studies themes, Indiana academic standards, and best practices and methods to include social studies in my daily lessons. It is important that students know how the world used to be, how it is today, and what changes have occurred over time. Students can learn about the past, present, and future through the social studies. The three methods that I have discussed are only a few of the many I will use with my future students. If learning is fun and engaging for students, they will be motivated to learn. It is my goal to integrate social studies into other content areas, create engaging units, and make learning fun and engaging for students. As a

lifelong learning, I will continue to research best practices and methods to ensure that my students receive the best education possible.

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