

Melanie Hosbach
TE 804
Final Assignment

1) What is (or are the) social studies and why do/should we teach it/them?

The social studies are based on interactions. This includes human interactions, environmental interactions, societal interactions, etc. There are a number of ways to look at the social studies. These perspectives include geographical, social, historical, psychological, economical, and political. The social studies are about making connections across multiple subjects in an interdisciplinary approach to learning.

I also believe social studies is about rationale. Through the various social studies disciplines, one can find out why things are the way they are. That is what these disciplines are all about. For example, in history, you examine certain events and movements from the past and try to figure out why these events occurred. In geography, you can look at a map of the United States and attempt to discover why the country looks like it does, why are the state boundaries drawn the way they are, what physical attributes create features like the Rocky Mountains or the Great Lakes. In government, you study the political system and the history behind it, determining how and why our system is the way it is.

I believe it is important to teach these subjects because students should be able to know and understand why things are the way they are. The social studies are related to the world around us. Things are happening every day that relate to these various subjects. Students need to learn about social studies as a way of understanding the world around them.

2. What, in your view, are the three main issues facing social studies education in the new millennium? How do you believe those issues should and could be addressed?

Some important issues, in my opinion, facing social studies education today are objectivity, openness, and awareness. Objectivity means the ability to stay neutral and objective. This deals with political issues currently because of how divided and bipartisan the country is. I think it is important that social studies teachers make an effort to remain neutral toward their students so that students do not feel like they are being "brainwashed" into thinking the same way as their teacher. Obviously, in social studies classes, sensitive political issues are going to come into discussion in some way. Teachers should be able to present both viewpoints and argue either side as to stimulate students' critical thinking.

Another issue I believe is important is openness. I believe as a social studies teacher, I need to look at issues from multiple perspectives. For example, in a history class studying World War II I think it is important to examine not only the perspective of the United States and the Allies, but also the perspective of say, Germany. Another example would be in a sociology class that is examining different cultures. When examining different cultures, one should try to look at many different cultures, rather than just focusing on a few.

The third issue I believe is important is awareness of the world around us. History is happening right now. What is going on in our lives will be studied in history books years from now. There are so many issues that will affect the future, like Social Security, that the world has to deal with. Current events are a really important part of any social studies curriculum. Any class can focus on current events as well. It does not just have to happen in American History.

3) Assuming you get your own social studies classroom next year, how would you organize and set it up and WHY?

The way I would set up my classroom next year would somewhat depend on the grade level and course I teach. Older, more mature students in a class that is more discussion based would benefit with a seating chart that had students' desks facing each other somehow. Discussion can be better facilitated with students facing one another. Sometimes, with younger, less mature students, having desks facing each other can be disruptive to class activities. I had a class last semester of tenth graders who were not very mature. Initially, the room was set up with their desks facing each other. While I was lecturing, students would talk, make faces at each other, giggle/laugh, etc. It was very disruptive. I changed the seating chart to even rows with all desks facing the front, and this helped. Since students were not staring directly at one another, there were fewer opportunities for immature behavior.

Depending on the size and format of the room, I would ideally place my desk at the front. I would like to be able to see my students' faces from my desk. For example, if students are taking a test, I would like to be able to sit at my desk grading papers, etc. and still be able to look at my students and make sure they are not cheating.

As far as decorations go, I would like to cover my walls with student work. Also, I would probably have posters with information like the Core Democratic Values, maps, and other social studies related decorations. I have my own personal photographs from historical places like Pearl Harbor that I have visited. I would like students to be able to see relevant information when they look at the walls. Often students just stare at the walls during class, and at least this way they will be looking at something educational.

4) What are your thoughts about the Michigan Standards for social studies? Have you worked to incorporate those in your teaching (if so, how? If not, why)? What are your thoughts about the MEAP? Have you been preparing your students for the MEAP (if so, how? If not, why)?

The Michigan Standards and Benchmarks should be the starting point when lesson planning. I try to keep the standards in mind when creating unit and lesson plans. It is important that my students are receiving the relevant information as outlined by the state so that they are as well educated and prepared as most other students from districts across the state.

I do not believe the MEAP is the best form of a standardized test for students. I especially do not like the way the social studies section is scored. I think it is important to have some kind of standard assessment, I just think the state could do better than the MEAP. My feelings aside, the MEAP is necessary, so I do my best to prepare students. The district requires it. Every year, the Troy School District scores very well on the MEAP and the district takes great pride in that. Also, because of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), Troy's teachers are pressured to keep scores at the high level they are at year after year.

5) Looking back at your internship, are you the kind of teacher you thought you would be? In what ways are you the teacher you thought you would never be? Provide at least three examples that would illustrate what each meant in the classroom.

I always wanted to be that one teacher whose students looked forward to coming to my class and had fun and learned a lot. I want to make a difference in kids' lives. I wanted to be the teacher who has a great relationship with students, but the students know the line between teacher and friend. I wanted to be the teacher who was always prepared and comfortable with the material.

For the most part, I do believe I am the teacher I thought I would be. On most days I can successfully execute a lesson and command and receive my students' respect. I value the good rapport I have with my kids and have enjoyed many of the opportunities to get involved in the building and get to know more students and faculty members.

I have realized that in reality, teachers cannot always be prepared for everything. I can only do so much to prepare myself for day-to-day activities, but life can throw curve balls at times. I have found that how I handle myself and react to those curve balls is more important than preparing for potential ones.

I have also found that I do not know the material as well as I had hoped. This used to frustrate me, but I have realized that it takes time to really master this kind of material. I need to just be patient and understand that after a few years of teaching, it will get easier.

6) If you were not restricted by the particular demands of your mentor/school, an externally-directed social studies curriculum and/or a textbook, what and how would you teach differently (use this answer to imagine the kind of social studies education you would like to pursue with your students but feel you are unable to do so under current conditions)?

If I did not have to worry about the set curriculum, I would probably focus units more on what I feel is relevant. For example, in my Ancient World History classes, I would focus less on the first couple of units dealing with early man, ancient river valley civilizations, and ancient India and China. I would not want to skip over these units entirely, but I think I would focus less time on each. I would also incorporate a unit on early Africa and on Latin America. As far as proximity goes, Latin American history would probably seem more relevant or significant to the students. They may have visited Latin American countries and seen some of the remnants of the past civilizations like the Mayas, Aztecs, Incas, etc. As much as I like the curriculum in Troy, I do not like how there is no focus of Africa or Latin America in World History I. I even had some students ask this year about why were skipping the chapter on Africa. I just tried to explain to them that there is a lot of information to cover in a short amount of time, and unfortunately we cannot cover everything.

Curriculum sets the standard with both American and World History of what time period needs to be reached at the end of the first semester and the beginning of the second. This was a problem for me when I taught American History I. I had to cover through the New Deal before the end of the semester. I think that if I did not feel pressured to get to that certain point, I could have covered certain concepts in a little more depth. Because of my time constraints, I spent one day discussing the New Deal. That is just shameful to me. The New Deal is an important concept to study in American History and I would have liked to have spent a lot more time on it. Without curriculum standards, I would have the freedom to spend as much or as little time as I wanted on different topics.

7) What has been the most important lesson you have learned in your practicum about social studies education?

One important lesson I learned in my practicum is that I do not always have to have the right answer or any answer for that matter. I believe that the issues that social studies teachers deal with are constantly changing. Based on this constant change, I find it hard to always have an answer. When I started my internship year, I had this notion that I had to know everything about everything. I was afraid that if I could not give a student an answer, it would mean I was incompetent as a teacher.

After a year of teaching experience, I no longer feel I should give the students all the answers all the time, even when I do know the answers. If a student asks a question, it might actually benefit him more to look for the answer on his own. I think that, especially at the high school level, it is important to challenge students to think for themselves and acquire the tools with which to find the answers to life's questions. As these students prepare for college, I think it is important I start to treat them like they are in college. By this I do not mean to the serious extent of which college professors interact with their students, but I think there are some issues that students need to learn to handle on their own. When one is in college, he cannot be so dependent on others for what he needs. In college, one needs to be able to know how to find the answers because there will not always be someone around to show him. My goal is to give students the tools necessary to find the answers themselves.

8) What is the most significant lesson you were able to learn from your mentor teacher and why?

The most significant lesson I have learned from my mentor this year is probably one dealing with organization and proper planning. My mentor is a very organized person. He keeps all of his lessons and resources filed very neatly, which makes them easy to access. Through him, I realized how useful organization could be for the future. If I keep all of my lessons and resources neatly organized, I will be able to find and use them more easily in the future. I will not have to dig through piles of old paperwork wondering where a lesson on say, political philosophers. I can just find it in a file.

As far as planning goes, my mentor uses a calendar to map out when certain events are occurring throughout the year. He uses this as a guide when unit planning so that certain assignments will not conflict with certain events. For example, we had a weeklong break in February that I was afraid would really interrupt a unit. It seems that once students go on break, they forget everything they learned prior to leaving. What my mentor showed me though, is to do something like a research project using library time, and to sandwich that library time around the break. In other words, we scheduled students in the library for the couple of days before break, and the couple of days following break. This way, students who want to work on their research can do so over break, and other students who are not as motivated to do this work on their own will still have time to go to the library. This type of planning also helps avoid the common difficulty to keep students focused during a regular classroom lesson on the first day back from break.

9) If I were to ask your mentor teacher what s/he thought was the most significant contribution you made to her/his thinking about teaching social studies, what is it you think s/he would say? That is, how has your being in her/his classroom enabled her/him to think differently about social studies education?

I would think my mentor might respond with an answer dealing with a fresh perspective. Both of my mentors have been teaching social studies for about ten years. They are both extremely intelligent and capable social studies teachers. This is why I think something I might have contributed to their thinking about teaching social studies is something new. I assume I showed them newer ways of thinking and planning. I of course have a slightly different perspective on social studies education since I am in it a decade later than they are. I like to make the classroom environment as enjoyable as possible, while still covering the material. I think maybe sometimes my mentors just focus on getting through the material. I am not saying either one of us is good or bad or right or wrong. Every teacher has his or her own style.

10) If I asked the same question of your students, what do you think they might tell me?

I was not sure how a student would respond to this type of question, so I asked one of my Political Science students who is a senior. This student is very bright and knowledgeable in the field of social studies so I figured he would be a good one to ask. The Political Science class is based more on the foreign perspective of issues dealing with the United States government, as opposed to Government/Civics class that covers the domestic perspective. One thing my student told me he appreciated was how I covered the basics in the beginning of the semester. I taught the students about political philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Machiavelli and what their perspectives and beliefs were. So many of these philosophers' ideas are applicable to modern society and various foreign policy issues. My student told me that going back so many years and covering this basic information helped him understand the topics we covered later in the semester. He told me it was good that I did not just *cover* certain topics, but that I discussed WHY we cover certain topics and the basis of these ideas and where they come from.

11) Tell me about what you consider to be your best lesson or unit and what, in your view, made them the "best"?

One of my favorite units I did this year was one on Human Rights in my Political Science class. My favorite lesson was based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. After reading parts of the declaration together and other parts individually, I asked the students to think about each of the thirty articles, and which are the most "important." I told them I wanted them to come up with the top ten most important articles of the UDHR. I split the class into 3 groups to analyze ten articles each. Each group ranked their ten articles and then shared their top five. Once we had a list of 15 written on the board, I asked each student to vote on which they thought was the most important article. There was a tie for "1st place" between two articles, which spurred a debate among the class. We agreed the two articles were a tie for first and went on trying to rank the rest. The discussion that followed was fascinating. I loved seeing how in depth their thinking was. Some of the issues they brought up as to why certain articles were important were ones I did not even think of.

I think this is one of my best lessons because of the high level of critical thinking that occurred with the students. I have never seen them so intrigued and interested in a discussion. Just about every student was engaged and contributing to the discussion. They seemed to really enjoy the topic, too. This particular lesson made them more aware of who they are as human beings and the rights and privileges they should be thankful to enjoy.

12) Tell me about what you consider to be your worst lesson or unit and what, in your view, made them the "worst"?

I would say my worst unit was probably my unit on ancient India and China in World History. There is not much exciting information in the two chapters the unit covers and the students just do not seem to like or care for it. In the evaluations I gave to students, many even said that India/China was their least favorite. Of course, many students just do not like ancient world history in general, but there are some topics that are more interesting than others. Numerous students seemed to really enjoy studying Greece and Rome the most. There is more of a connection to modern times with those chapters.

Aside from student motivation, one major problem I personally had with this unit was lack of knowledge and understanding. Prior to this year, I did not know much about ancient history in general, particularly ancient India and China. Not only did I not know the information, but I also was not interested. I am interested in Greece and Rome and the Byzantines, but India and China just do not strike me as worth spending a lot of time on. There are even some teachers in my department who skip the unit all together. Without the knowledge or desire to teach this material, I struggled to come up with interesting and worthwhile activities for my students. I shared a lot of resources with my mentor. He gave me some great activities and ideas, but I hated not doing it on my own. I just did not feel very confident about myself or my teaching when covering this unit, which I believe really affected my ability to teach this unit well.

13) Tell me about a time when you and your mentor teacher or field instructor disagreed about whether a lesson went well or not. Where do you think those different perspectives about the same lesson come from? What did they teach you about learning to teach?

One thing that my World History mentor and I disagreed about was the way I reviewed for tests. He gave me a template to create Jeopardy style review games using PowerPoint. Even though he gave me the template, he told me once, "You do not have to play Jeopardy all the time, you should try to review some other way." I have never actually seen him use the template either, I think it was just something he got at a conference. When he reviews for tests, he just discusses or goes over a review sheet. While that can be helpful, I like playing the Jeopardy game. I think it is fun and the kids really enjoy it, too. It encourages a competitive spirit while stimulating learning as well. I did a survey with my classes, actually, in which the first question asked about what their favorite part of the class was. An overwhelming majority of the students answered that playing Jeopardy was their favorite part not only because it is fun, but also because it helped them understand the material better.

I think part of the reason for this different perspective is just simply our teaching styles. I am a little more laid back and enjoy playing games while my mentor is more straightforward, stick-to-the-book. I was not offended by his encouragement not to play the game so much because I realized it is just our difference in style. As a teacher I feel it is my personal choice as to how I teach (to a certain extent, of course!). Every teacher I know has his or her own style and there is nothing wrong with that. It is of course hard sometimes, being a student teacher, if your style conflicts with your mentor's style. Most mentor teachers, however, are experienced enough to know and understand that differences are good.

14) How do you see the role of technology in the social studies classroom? In what ways did you incorporate technology in your teaching and to what ends?

The role of technology is significant in the social studies classroom. There are so many resources available to social studies educators. Various websites, interactive CD-ROMs, DVDs, etc all help increase the amount of learning in the social studies classroom. There are also tools like ELMO projectors, televisions, computers and computer programs like PowerPoint.

Throughout the year, I have created many PowerPoint presentations as a method of giving notes to my students during lectures. Also, in my World History classes, I have created review games like Jeopardy using a template from PowerPoint. Each unit, on the day before a test, we play Jeopardy and it seems to really help the students. They enjoy the competitive atmosphere and the educational value. Whenever I announce a test they always ask, "Can we play Jeopardy?"

The students have also used technology. With research projects, they have used a variety of electronic resources and created PowerPoint presentations also. We have also used an ELMO projector to create larger screen presentations and view movies and videos.

It is hard to imagine how social studies teachers handled things without technology. Everything in school is technology based. Attendance, grades, and curriculum...practically everything is online. One of the best resources I have been given this year was the MI CLIMB website. It makes planning so much easier having examples given to you based on the standards and benchmarks.

15) Tell me how you addressed the issue of ESL students and/or students with disabilities in your social studies classroom?

In my focus class I had two students who were learning disabled and one student who was ESL. Even though their disabilities varied somewhat, they all could benefit from similar accommodations. Occasionally, when needed, I would provide copies of the notes I gave. Also, I would extend deadlines on certain assignments.

My ESL student was also very shy about giving presentations. She did not feel comfortable speaking in front of the class because of her poor English. With certain assignments, I exempted her from the actual presentation or allowed her to read off some sort of script (other students were not allowed to use scripts).

The major accommodation I gave to all three of these students was on their unit tests. Instead of a pool of 25 or so matching terms and definitions, I broke the 25 into smaller groups of 5 or 6. The students therefore only had to figure out the answer based on a smaller number of options. I would also limit the number of choices on multiple-choice questions. With short-answer questions, I reworded them and broke them down so they were easier to figure out. One of the major compliments I received this year was from a special education teacher who told me that my accommodated tests were the best she had ever seen. She said many teachers do not take the time and effort to truly accommodate the students needs that way. She actually asked for copies of all my tests for the future.

16) One of the words often heard in educational discourse is interdisciplinary. Tell me how, if at all, you think that term relates to social studies education and if you think it does, what have you done (or plan to do) to make it more feasible in your social studies classroom?

The term interdisciplinary defines social studies education, in my opinion. All of the various social sciences can be tied together in some way or another. This connection across different subjects can make certain concepts easier to understand. For example, in history classes, the use of maps (geography) is a great visual tool for learning. On the reverse of that, in a geography class, it might help to explain the history behind a certain topic in order to understand why a particular geographic concept is the way it is.

Over the past year, I have realized the importance of using an interdisciplinary approach to my teaching. First of all, in my history classes (both US and World) I have tried to incorporate maps as much as possible. Troy School District does not require any kind of geography course in high school, but I believe it is an important field to study. In World History, I have done a variety of map projects. One project I did was at the beginning of each unit (units include Rome, Greece, India/China, Early Man/Prehistory, Byzantine/Islam, etc). I would distribute outline maps with a series of directions. Students had to use various colors and labels to define the various features on each map. For example, the Greece map included labeling the various seas around Greece and important places like Athens, Sparta, and Troy.

Another type of map project was based on transparency overlays that I found from our textbook distributor. For example, during the Rome unit, I had a map of the various stages of the expansion of the Roman Empire (such as after the Punic Wars, after the death of Julius Caesar, etc). Each transparency overlay was a different stage that would add on to the image of the empire's expansion. With each overlay, there was a series of questions and other activities that students could complete. I liked using these map activities in order to help

improve students' geographic abilities. I am afraid many did not know how to read a map properly, but hopefully this helped a little.

The social studies are such interesting subjects to learn and teach because of the way you can tie together so many concepts. As a teacher, I am able to use different methods of teaching to help make my students into more well rounded learners.

17) What professional organizations, associations, and journals in social studies are available for your continued professional development as a teacher?

As a social studies teacher, there are a variety of different organizations of which to belong. One of the major organizations is the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). A smaller branch of the NCSS is the Michigan Council for the Social Studies (MCSS). Each year both the NCSS and MCSS have multiple conferences that provide social studies educators with various tools, methods, and resources. Membership to the NCSS includes a subscription to the journal *Social Education*.

18) What, if any, is the difference between teaching an elective course and teaching a required course?

This semester of student teaching, I have had the joy of teaching an elective course, Political Science. Last semester I taught World History I and American History I, which are both required in the Troy School District curriculum. Usually, required courses like World and American History do not spark as much interest in students as an elective like Political Science. With required courses, the truly interested students are spread out among multiple sections. When you have one section of an elective course, the vast majority of students are interested in the topic. After all, they CHOSE to take the course. Class discussions are so much more intense, interesting and lasting based on this interest. It is like night and day!! I get so frustrated sometimes trying to have discussions with my World History students because of the high level of apathy. I do not even have to TRY to create a discussion with my Political Science students because they just start it themselves! They want to examine all kinds of world issues and current events. Sometimes they get off track...it is pretty easy for that to happen, but they snap back pretty easily. It is just so refreshing having a group of students who are interested, engaged and willing to participate.

19) So much of social studies education connects to the world around us. How can you, as a teacher, connect your lessons to what is currently going on in the world?

One example of connecting world events to my classroom was on December 7th, the anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Even though neither of the classes I taught was even close to studying Pearl Harbor or World War II, I decided to use part of the hour to talk about the events of that day "which will live in infamy." My entire department actually decided to do something in honor of this special anniversary. The Social Studies club created a poster display a photos and information for students and faculty to see and also made copies of the infamous FDR speech. They also provided a breakfast of bagels, etc. as a thank you to the Social Studies teachers for all their hard work. I was really impressed by this effort by the students to recognize the work we do. Although this was not required, most of us complied when the suggestion was made to all read FDR's speech to our second hour classes one minute into the class period.

I was really excited to do this but as I started reading the speech I realized that my reading does not even come close to FDR's delivery of it. I still continued and read through the end of the speech. In second hour, which is one of my World History classes, we went on with our planned lesson for the day but at the end of the hour I reserved time to discuss Pearl Harbor a little more. In March, I visited Pearl Harbor and the USS Arizona Memorial. I had a bunch of photographs and other memorabilia that I purchased from the gift shop there. I brought these in to share with my classes and they seemed really interested. In my fourth hour World History class, I got a similar reaction. Students were asking questions and pointing to different pictures asking about the significance of what was shown. I do not think I have ever seen the kids so interested in something relating to history!

Like I said, neither my World or American History classes are even close to studying this period, but I am still glad I took the time to include a little tribute. I think as teachers,

especially in social studies and history, it is important to recognize significant dates throughout the year, regardless of curriculum. Even though the students in American History will study Pearl Harbor and World War II at greater depth next semester, I really enjoyed taking the time to honor the heroes lost and those who survived that unforgettable day.

This connection can continue throughout the year. It helps the students get interested in history to point out the significance of certain days. Not only did I honor Pearl Harbor, but I also pointed out December 1st as the day Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus. We talked about it for a few minutes, recognized its importance and moved back to curriculum. It doesn't hurt to take a few minutes each day to honor these important historical events.

20) What difference does students' age make in your classroom environment?

When it comes to the age of students, there is a huge difference in motivation and learning. Generally, the older students are the more mature ones. For the most part, they are the students who know how to behave in a classroom, they know they need to do their homework in order to be successful, and they can see the relevance more often than younger students. Upperclassmen tend to be more motivated because there is concern for their future (like college or just graduation in general). Lower classmen do not usually have that same concern for the future because they know they have three or four more years to fix whatever they screw up. Also, because they are older and more mature, they can grasp certain concepts better than younger students. Generally, older students can be more engaged in the type of issues we discuss because it seems more relevant to them.

On the other hand, motivation can be a difficulty with upperclassmen. I taught a Political Science class to mostly seniors (out of 23 total students, only 4 were juniors), many of who were experiencing the slow downward spiral that most seniors experience known as "senioritis." Although they are good kids, sometimes they get a little hyper and a little off track because they are getting so close to the end. Although "senioritis" can be extreme, students at all levels can experience a similar desire toward the end of the year to finish school so summer vacation can begin.