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SOCIAL STUDIES: THE ART FORM & FORGOTTEN GEM OF THE CLASSROOM

Miah Prescod

May 2024

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Art of Teaching
Sarah Lawrence College

Abstract

The marginalization of Social Studies is not a new phenomenon. As it is slowly being squeezed out of our children's classrooms, it prompts us to look at the current state of Social Studies in the world and question how we've arrived there. This thesis defines Social Studies through multiple perspectives and examines what has influenced it over the years while simultaneously reminding us of both the values and consequences of removing it from the classroom. I propose a solution to our current problem of the decline in Social Studies– the creation of a child-centered, interactive, and inquiry-based curriculum; applying the six following approaches to Social Studies: multiculturalism, interdisciplinary connections, play-based opportunities for students, social issues & civic engagement connections, literature as Social Studies resources, and multi-modal learning opportunities. This thesis also draws forth the ideas of researchers and educators actively working to solve this problem. Finally, reflections from New York City elementary students and my time spent in both a progressive public and charter school helped to develop *Wisdom Over the Bridge*, a K-6 Curriculum I've created to reinstall Social Studies back into the classroom as a core subject.

Key Words: Social Studies, Curriculum Development, Inquiry, Child-Centered, Interdisciplinary, Multicultural, Multimodal Learning

Dedication

Dedicated to the children at Sarah Lawrence's Early Childhood Center, who are figuring out the world, one day at a time, through the radical and liberating act that is, play; To my Harlem babies at Central Park East II, and the West Indian fourth graders at Merrick Academy, all of whom whose questions continue to challenge me as an educator, because without them, this thesis would not be possible. Their questions gave birth to this curriculum—Wisdom Over the Bridge.

Acknowledgments

I first want to thank God for seeing me through this process because at times I didn't think I would finish. I'm thankful for my family because I wouldn't be here today without them.

To Zenzile Keith, Orinthia Swindell, and Dani Clarke, the educators who inspire daily. To Marilyn Welch, my third-turned-fifth-grade teacher, who's always rooting for me, no matter how many miles apart we are. To Lorayne Carbon, who introduced me to the power of play and the magic of the Early Childhood Center. To Pam Tanenbaum, and our shared affinity for discovering new books. To Denisha Jones and Genny Ward-Wernet, and their emergent curriculum class which nurtured my passion for creation and curriculum development. To my teaching cohort, if I had to relive these past two years, I wouldn't want anyone else by my side. To Rue Beckerman and Emily Cullen-Dunn, I am indebted to your wisdom, your grace, and your caring spirits. To my host teachers, Jessica Lawrence and Juanita Tolbert, I've learned so much from you both, especially what it means to build a community with our students.

And finally, to all the children I have been fortunate enough to experience and exist in their world if only for a brief moment, I am and will always be grateful.

Annotated Outline

INTRODUCTION

- Recollection: My Early Memories of Social Studies
 - Weekly Current Event Assignments
 - Multiple Project-based Opportunities: Multicultural Day Projects; Family Tree and Timeline Project
 - Social Studies also intertwined with writing-based activities
- Notice & Wonder
 - Notice: There's a lack of Social Studies instruction in my student teaching placements.
 - CPE 2 Reflection: Set time for Social Studies on the schedule but no formal curriculum
 - Merrick Academy Reflection: Digital Social Studies program that the students used infrequently, where they were learning about New York City
 - Wonder: The beginning of an inquiry into Social Studies and the lack of it in NYC classrooms or rather the decline.
 - Are we slowly letting Social Studies die? Why is Social Studies not a priority anymore? Has this been happening right in front of us or are we complicit in it? Are there no consequences to removing it from our classrooms? What is to happen to our students down the line as they progress in their schooling? What is the value of Social Studies in today's world?

- Thesis Statement
 - This project argues for the reinstallation of Social Studies back into the classroom, as a core subject, once again, reinstating to its former glory. Such a task must be done through an interactive, multi-modal, inquiry, and child-centered approach. The creation of *Wisdom over the Bridge*, a developing Social Studies curriculum and guide for teachers seeks to do exactly that—remind us of the values of the art form and forgotten gem that is Social Studies.
- Key Questions
 - How can I push social studies back into the classroom, not as an elective but as something necessary? How can I use Social Studies to access the child? Or even in reverse, how can I use the child’s interests to shape how I frame Social Studies in my classroom? How can I use Social Studies as a means of forming a bridge between my student's world and the world around them?
- Goal: Building the School for Tomorrow
 - Quote: “...we may build more nearly the ‘School for Tomorrow,’” (Morrison, 1946, p. 31).
 - A school for tomorrow necessitates the inclusion of Social Studies.

SOCIAL STUDIES, ITS CURRENT STATE & WHY IT MATTERS

- What is Social Studies?
 - Quote: “The goal of social studies is to develop responsible citizens who understand their interdependence with others and can make reasoned and informed decisions for the good of a diverse public,” (Jones, Pang & Rodriguez, 2001, p. 35).

- Traditional Function & Purpose – Promoting democratic ideals and creating democratic citizens; A model of citizenship education to further civic competence (Saxe, 1992)
- NCSS Definition
 - “Social studies is the study of individuals, communities, systems, and their interactions across time and place that prepares students for local, national, and global civic life,” (NCSS).
 - Core Disciplines of Social Studies
- NYC Social Studies Framework
 - A representation of what Social Studies looks like in NYC schools
 - Social Studies content varies state by state, especially given the difference in legislation.
- Students & Their Understanding of Social Studies
 - Merrick Academy Reflection: Student responses from a Social Studies survey they took in January.
- My Understanding of Social Studies as a Future Educator (Personal Definition)
 - Quote: “Social studies is not simply about names, dates, and facts,” (Eckers, 2021).
 - A social art form; an exploration of the world around us and our connections to it; more than just history; more than a tool for creating democratic citizens
- A Disappearing Subject – Past, Present, Future of Social Studies

- An overview of all the barriers and roadblocks that have affected Social Studies content and instruction over the years
 - Legislation Affecting Social Studies
 - No Child Left Behind Aftermath
 - Testing & Prioritization of Other Subjects → Restructuring of Academics in Schools
 - Political Influences: Book Bannings (Alleyne, 2022) & Divisive Content (NCSS, 2021)
- Benefits of Social Studies
 - Cross Cultural Awareness
 - Exposure to new information, current events, new histories, and cultures around the world
 - Students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and their education.
 - Engaging in an Anti-bias curriculum
 - Naturally Interdisciplinary
 - Cross-Curricular Learning
 - Improves Reading Comprehension & Literacy skills
 - Development of Critical Thinking Skills
 - Embraces Inquiry & Builds Student's Prior Knowledge
 - CPE 2 Reflection: School Community Study with my second graders allowed them to build on their definition of community while also leaving room for students to develop their own interview questions for this study.
- Consequences of Removing Social Studies From the Classroom

- Students' Right to Academic Freedom at Stake
 - Censorship of people's stories and histories
- Misconceptions, Misinformation & Confusion (NCSS, 2021)
 - Merrick Academy Reflection: A reading conference with a student, Marquis, revealed a lack of knowledge about how many U.S states there are & A conversation with another student, Milan... "MLK is a white man."
- Missed Opportunities & Connections with Students
- Forced Restructuring of Social Studies Curriculum Post-Elementary
 - Civic Achievement Gap
 - "Closely related to the general achievement gap between affluent, mostly white students and low-income minority students, the civic achievement gap has made it increasingly difficult for those who grow up in low-income households to participate in civic affairs," (Kalaidis, 2013).

MY FUTURE CLASSROOM

- Classroom Statement
 - Opposing the idea that agency and education need to be earned
 - Creating a safe space where students feel comfortable enough to be themselves; comfortable enough to take risks
 - Communal embracing and invitation (Rose, 1989)
 - Quote: "From a sociocultural perspective, development and learning do not occur in a static environment. Instead, they occur within a dynamic and ever-changing

sociocultural context. It is the social interaction among individuals that continuously transforms the sociocultural context of the classroom,” (Jones, Pang & Rodriguez, 2001, p. 38).

- Pillar 1: A Social Hub for Learning
 - Quote: “...social studies classrooms are laboratories of culture,” (Jones, Pang & Rodriguez, 2002, p. 40).
 - Collaboration & Social Interaction
 - Embracing the Child as a Learner & Expert
 - Constructivist Approach
 - Embracing the Child as an Expert
 - Quote: “...children bring to school values that they have learned at home, at church, from peers, and in the larger society,” (Cogan & Litcher, 1974, pp. 58-59).
 - Creating & Maintaining a Culture of Belonging
 - CPE 2 Reflection: Using my host teachers’ model of creating classroom expectations with my future students
- Pillar 2: Relationship Building
 - Importance of Conversation
 - CPE 2 Reflection: Thiage and her interest in TikTok, is what led to me to add a digital component to our School Community Study.
 - Teacher Immersion into the Child’s Community
 - Child Agency
 - Quote: “Agency ... [has] a very specific purpose: to expand the capabilities of children,” (Adair & Colegrove, 2021, p. 78).

- Decentralized authority and increased responsibility on the learner
(Cogan & Litcher, 1974)
- Merrick Academy Reflection: Brayden & His Genius Hour Project
taught me how to place trust in my students.
- Pilar 3: A Communal Reframing of Social Studies
 - Me: What's important to me as the teacher?
 - Becoming "...practitioners of social studies," (Saxe, 1992)
 - 6 Inviting Approaches to Social Studies: Multicultural Approach;
Interdisciplinary Approach; Play-Based Approach; Social Issues & Civic
Engagement Approach; Literature & Storytelling Approach; Multi-Modal
Learning Approach
 - You: What's important to my students?
 - Embracing the Child as an Inquirer
 - Ownership of their learning (Wells, 1995); Valuing student voices,
and passions, and nurturing their curiosity; ownership of their
learning
 - Quote: "At the heart of the inquiry-based curriculum are the
questions that individuals or small groups of students choose to
investigate," (Wells, 1995, p. 242).
 - Merrick Academy Reflection: Genius Hour Projects as a form of
embracing student inquiry
 - Us: What's important for us?

- Quote: “The goals of education, I am convinced, whether in university or kindergarten, are not achieved by the one-way transmission of knowledge, be it ever so cogently expressed, but through a dialogue between teacher and learner that has as its aim the co-construction of meaning, in relation to tasks and topics that are of mutual interest and concern,” (Wells, 1995, pp. 234-235)
- Creating a Social Studies curriculum together

WISDOM OVER THE BRIDGE: A DEVELOPING SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

- Purpose
 - Creating an emergent Social Studies curriculum inspired by the students at the ECC, Merrick Academy, & CPE 2
 - Reflects the “touchstones of their identity,” (Jones, Pang, & Rodriguez, 2001)
- Website Exploration: <https://sites.google.com/gm.slc.edu/wisdom-over-the-bridge/home>
 - Analogy of the Bridge
 - Think of Social Studies as a connection between the past, present, and future; think of it as a connection to our world and the worlds around us; then imagine Social Studies as a bridge—that carries you over and takes you from place to place.
 - Encouraging students to explore the world around them
 - The classroom is not the only place where learning occurs, that wisdom, and knowledge can be found anywhere, over the bridge, if you will.
 - Wisdom Over The Bridge Approach

■ Multicultural Connections in Social Studies

- Exposure to the cultural and value systems that are different than their own (Cogan & Litcher, 1974)
- Creating cultural bridges and culturally respectful students
- Value in having multiple perspectives
 - CPE 2 Reflection: Social Studies lesson with students about Thanksgiving and understanding multiple perspectives; consider how we celebrate this holiday and what happened historically.

■ Interdisciplinary Connections

- Merrick Academy Reflection: ELA was framed as Humanities with the goal of Social Studies being integrated but it fell short. How can we make integration more explicit?

■ Play as a Gateway to Social Studies

- Play in the Younger Years
 - CPE 2 Reflection: Observing Numa & Jeremih during work time allowed me to think of possible Social Studies connections, influenced by their interests.
- Play in the Older Years
 - “Social studies was taught by capitalizing on the child’s desire to imitate and dramatize adult life,” (McKinney & Golden, 1973, p. 172).
 - Structured dramatic play (McKinney & Golden, 1973)

- Reframing structured dramatic play to older children (grades 3-5)
- Merrick Academy Reflection: Witnessing structured dramatic play during an ELA lesson
- Social Issues & Civic Engagement
 - Making Social Studies Meaningful for Students
 - Quote: Social issues include the unsolved problems, the unanswered questions in human affairs, and the situations of conflict in society. ... Social issues indicate the potential and actual changes that are occurring in the social world,” (McLendon, 1953, p. 60).
 - Merrick Academy Reflection: Peyton asked “Why has the government not been very active? Why do they create laws for good reasons but then when something else happens, they don’t make one?”
 - Reimagining Current Events to Embrace Student Discourse
- Literature Resources for Social Studies
 - Books as Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors (Bishop, 1990)
 - Creating a Diverse Social Studies Library
 - Picture Books & The ECC: My host teacher’s intentional selection of picture books to read during story time as they relate to the child

- Historical Fiction
 - Quote: “...can be used as a source of historical data, as supplementary reading, as reference material for additional study, and as an introduction to a unit or lesson. ... More than any of these, however, historical fiction connects students with the human implications of historical events, providing young readers with the seeds for later, more mature historical understanding,” (Freeman & Levstik, 1988, p. 332).
- Graphic Novels
- Embracing Multiple Modes of Learning
 - Project Based Learning
 - PBL Framework (Revelle, Wise, Duke, & Halvorsen, 2020)
 - CPE 2 Reflection: School community study and the total immersion of students in the process.
 - Field Trips
 - Quote: “Learning is not limited to the artificial confines of the classroom,” (Ochoa & Manson, 1972, p. 236).
 - Exposure to other forms of Social Studies Resources
 - Gregory Rohlf Field Trip Pedagogy (Rohlf, 2015)

CONCLUSION

- Reflection of what it meant to create this curriculum
- Teaching does not mean you stop being a student.

Process Paper

I'd like to tell you that I have no clue as to where the idea for this Masters Oral came from, but that would be a lie. The truth is, as I'm slowly learning, *Social Studies: The Art Form & Forgotten Gem of the Classroom* has been brewing in my spirit for a while, even if I didn't have all the pieces together or yet have the vocabulary to verbalize it.

Preparing for this Masters Oral first, began with a question of what I want to do. What do I want to produce that reflects who I am as a future educator while also summarizing the two years spent in the Art of Teaching Program? What started out as a "brain dump" of ideas, ranging from the effects of socio-economic impacts on children of color learning math to curating joy in the classroom to exploring the adultification of Black girls in academic settings to teaching social studies through poetry, one thing remained the same throughout this all, I wanted to create something that reflected the child. Or as we say here in the Art of Teaching program, how can we center the child?

Creation is at the center of who I am, not just as a future educator but as a writer, and there is nothing that can describe the essence of curriculum development better than the act of creating. No matter what my final topic would be, I knew curriculum development would be the end goal. I wanted to create something that could access the child, something that they could connect to, something that could grab their attention and hold it.

I arrived at this forgotten subject of Social Studies when I began my student teaching at Central Park East II when I noticed Social Studies wasn't on the schedule. I arrived at it again when I found myself in conversation with a family friend whose daughter mentioned that she only had Social Studies for one part of the semester. I arrived at it once more when I started student teaching at Merrick Academy and asked a co-worker why they didn't teach Social

Studies. She gave me a silent answer, that the focus was on the more important subjects, Math and ELA, the ones students were *actually* tested on. The idea of Social Studies not being as important as Math and ELA was a foreign concept for me. The third time is the charm, I guess because one simple word sparked a revolution of questions: why? Why is Social Studies slowly dying out? And the next question, how did we arrive here? A couple of questions later and here I was.

Working on this thesis allowed me to see the UBD (Understanding by Design) framework in action. While I knew my end goal was to create a Social Studies curriculum, I knew I had to get a clearer picture of what exactly was going on. I couldn't create a curriculum if I didn't understand the lay of the land.

My first thought was why not start with a definition, asking myself and my students what social studies is? I created a short survey for my students that asked the following questions: (1) In your own words, what do you think Social Studies is? (2) What are some things you would like to learn more about in school? (3) What would you teach your classmates about if you could be the teacher for a day? (4) What are some activities you like to do outside of school? (5) What is your favorite subject or activity in school? Why? (6) What is your least favorite subject or activity in school? Why? These six questions helped me to get to know my students a little better, even though at first they kept giving me answers they thought I wanted to hear. However, their answers, as enlightening as they were, only proved that there were consequences to this decline in Social Studies. According to one of my students, the United States has 101 states. Another said that Social Studies was boring as hell and a waste of her time, and the next believed it was a learning app for kids ages eight and above. The consensus, I've gathered is that a new approach to Social Studies was needed, and fast.

My research then shifted focus, as I began to explore the roadblocks and barriers that continue to contribute to Social Studies being pushed out of the classroom. Legislation that went into effect such as the No Child Left Behind Act, along with book bannings, and state-wide review of curriculums, altered academics in school, so much so, that Math and ELA became the priority, and test-based curriculums took over the classroom. Even more interesting, it seemed that Social Studies was a privilege, something I had no clue about until I started this process. It never occurred to me that Social Studies was being squeezed primarily out of schools that were considered to have high levels of poverty and focused on math and literacy (McGuire, 2007), whereas “...schools with children of middle-and-upper class families offer a much broader range of subjects, including social studies,” (McGuire, 2007). In the midst of learning this, a new question emerged, one I didn’t think about before. How can I make Social Studies accessible to all students?

This thesis became about more than Social Studies for me. It was about creating a curriculum where test scores did not represent students. It also was for the teachers—to remind them of the values of Social Studies, that it could be a bridge connecting us all. Moreover, this thesis morphed into a vision board for the future classroom I hope to cultivate. Once I had an idea of what was affecting Social Studies, I had an idea of what I didn’t want this curriculum to be.

As I reflect on what matters most to me as an educator, I keep circling back to this idea of mattering. How can I show these children that they matter, that their teachers are invested in them? If we truly believe that the youth—that children are the future, then we owe it to them, to give them a comprehensive education. And how can we do that without Social Studies?

In all three of my student teaching placements, the Early Childhood Center, Central Park East II, and Merrick Academy, the one unmovable constant was the ten million my students asked me. Their questions never stopped, even when I didn't have answers, and for that I am grateful because their questions inspired my own. Can I take children's questions and craft a curriculum? Can I truly listen to my students, without judgment, or the urge to correct them? Can I find a way to create a bridge between their interests and Social Studies? The creation of *Wisdom Over the Bridge*, a K-6 Social Studies curriculum, and the second half of this thesis was both a labor of love and inquiry.

At times when I felt like the research was becoming overwhelming, I remembered something I read in the process: "Melvin Tumin wrote "What do we want our children to become? ... What do we want our children to come to value? What do we want them to be able to feel and see and hear and smell and touch? From what do we want them to learn to get pleasure? What do we want them to understand about themselves and the world of nature and man? How do we want them to behave toward other human beings? To what do we want them to be inclined to commit themselves? What technical abilities do we wish to cultivate in them?" (Cogan & Litcher, 1974, p. 56). And the answer—I want my students to become *practitioners of Social Studies*, (Saxe, 1992). Those three words became my North Star.

Given the fact that some Social Studies curriculums are often focused on, memorization I wanted to frame this one in a way that made Social Studies inviting, so I identified six themes that could support this: the importance of multicultural and interdisciplinary connections; play-based learning which I learned at the Early Childhood Center; the importance of civic engagement and identifying the social issues that matter to my students; the importance of alternative to styles of literature for Social Studies resources; finally, multi-modal learning as a

means of embracing the various learning styles in my classroom. I realized that I didn't have to do much additional research because the two years spent in this program had provided me with a plethora of first-hand experiences and all the research I could ever need. The six approaches mentioned above all provide an entry point into Social Studies. More importantly, they reflect the heart of everything I've learned in this program, centering the child in my teaching practice does not have to look one particular way.

While creating this curriculum, I found myself in agreement with U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan when he says "Today more than ever, the social studies are not a luxury, but a necessity," (2011). As I mention in this thesis, there are three questions that ground me in this work of becoming a teacher: First, what's important to me? Second, what's important to my students? Finally, what's important to us, as a class? What I've learned from this process, is that we all enter the classroom with our own perspectives that shape our beliefs, and teaching Social Studies is about embracing multiple perspectives. Teaching, like Social Studies, as I have come to understand them both, is a bridge, a connection between students, their families, teachers, and the community. As I close this chapter, I leave with a deeper understanding of the liberating concept of inquiry but also a renewed dedication to centering Social Studies in schools, as one of my core teaching values. And if it isn't clear by now, this project is full of questions, because the very act of asking questions is how we learn. And what is teaching, if not a commitment to learning alongside my students?

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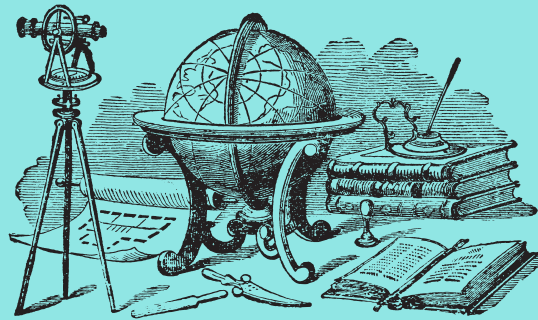
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Hello Everyone, I want to begin by saying that this is a project of redefining and reframing Social Studies. It is a project of inquiry and curiosity. Whatever your relationship with Social Studies is, my only ask is that you immerse yourself in this exploration of it with me. My hope is that by the end of this presentation, you all will leave with a deeper understanding of social studies and the magic of inquiry.

Note: All names of children and adults here are confidential.



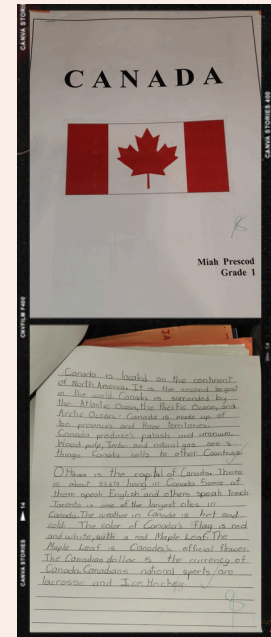
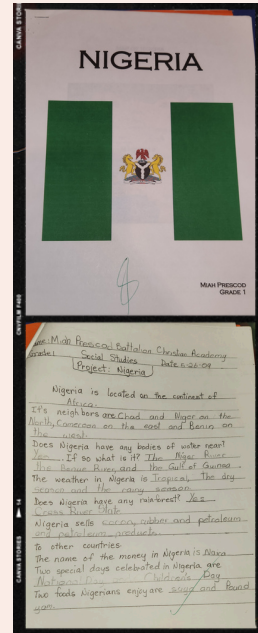
WHY SOCIAL STUDIES

Why social studies? If you asked high school Miah, 6 years ago, if I would be standing here giving a presentation on social studies I would've told you no in a heartbeat. Because the dominant years of my education—that is middle and high school years, social studies was not something I was good at. It wasn't boring per se but it felt like an endless memorization of historical facts that never stuck. It was all geared to the Global History & US History Regents that I had to take in 7th and 8th grade. However, the process of reflecting on Social Studies throughout made my schooling made me realize that, my elementary memories of Social Studies were totally different.

MY EARLY MEMORIES OF SOCIAL STUDIES



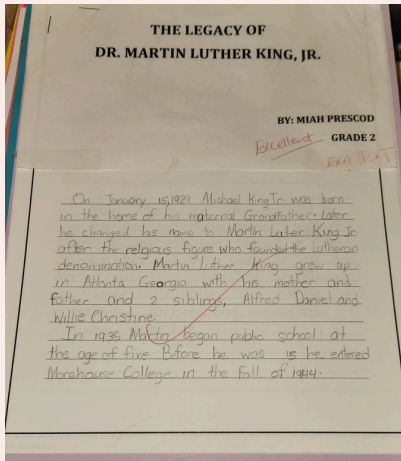
Kindergarten



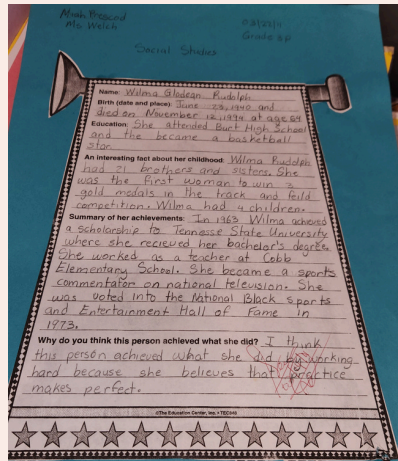
First Grade

For context, my elementary school was a private, predominantly black, Caribbean, and Christian school. A mouthful, I know. And even though I probably would not relieve that experience, I am grateful for the variety of subjects I was able to experience, the main one being social studies. Social Studies instruction generally included project-based assignments, which were followed up with writing components.

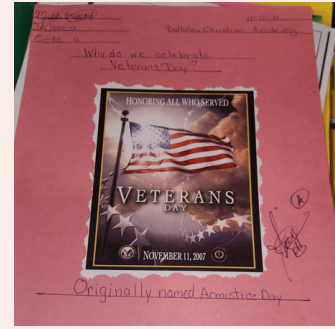
MY EARLY MEMORIES OF SOCIAL STUDIES



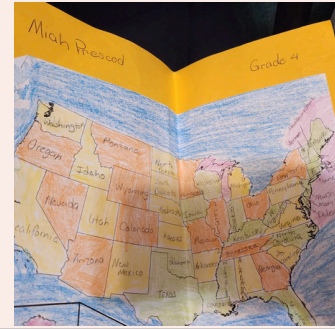
Second Grade



Third Grade



Fourth Grade



Social Studies for me in elementary school was a total immersion experience which brings me to some of the noticeable differences in my student teaching placements.

NOTICE

A lack of Social Studies Instruction In My Student Teaching Placements

Central Park East 2

Merrick Academy

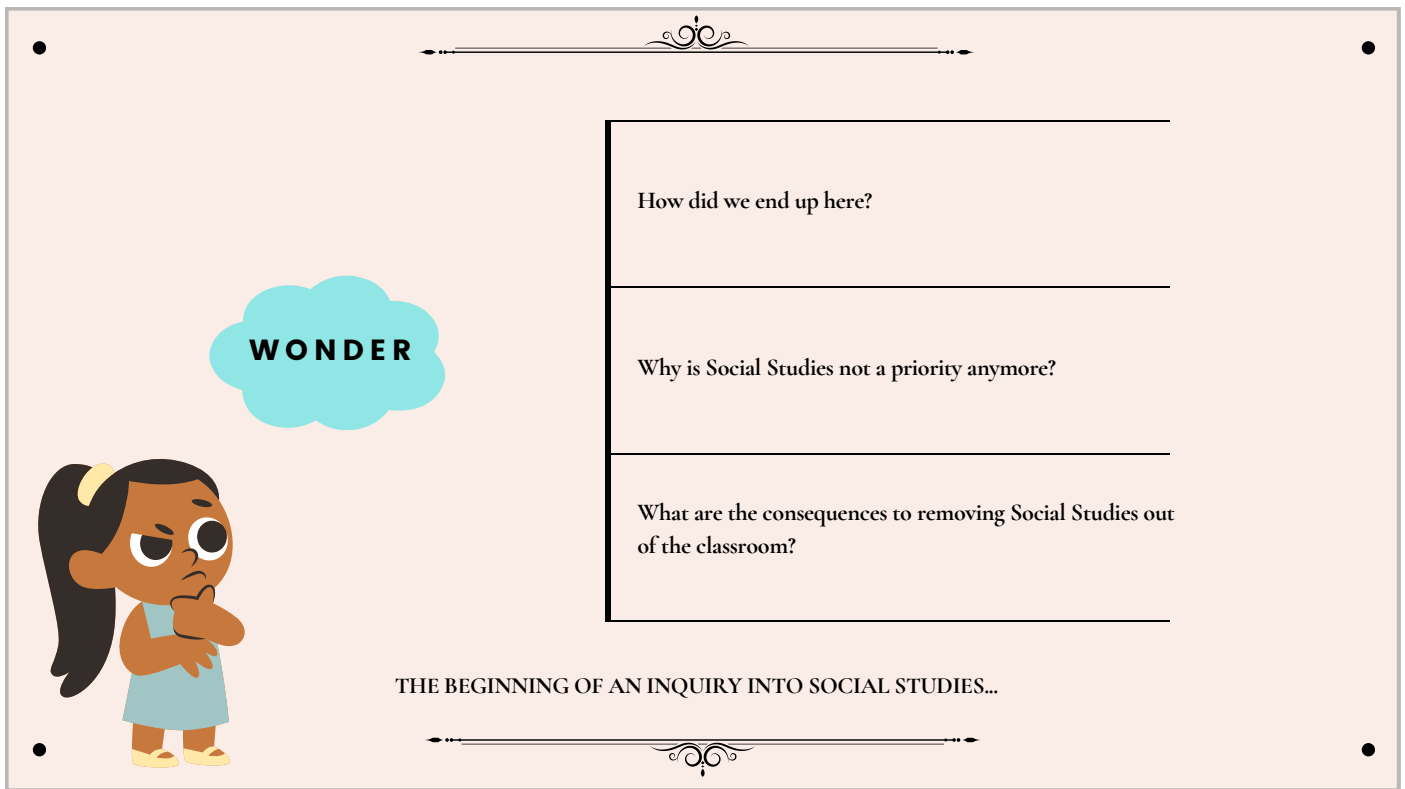
Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00-8:30	Morning Work	Morning Work	Morning Work	Morning Work	Morning Work
8:30-8:45	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting	Morning Meeting
8:45-9:00	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
9:00-9:15	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
9:15-9:30	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
9:30-9:45	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
9:45-10:00	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
10:00-10:15	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
10:15-10:30	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
10:30-10:45	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
10:45-11:00	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
11:00-11:15	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
11:15-11:30	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
11:30-11:45	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
11:45-12:00	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
12:00-12:15	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
12:15-12:30	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
12:30-12:45	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
12:45-1:00	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
1:00-1:15	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
1:15-1:30	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
1:30-1:45	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
1:45-2:00	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
2:00-2:15	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
2:15-2:30	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
2:30-2:45	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
2:45-3:00	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
3:00-3:15	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
3:15-3:30	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
3:30-3:45	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math
3:45-4:00	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math

Time	Activity
7:45-8:00	Arrival
8:00-8:15	Morning Meeting
8:15-8:40	Foreign Language
8:40-9:15	Robotics/Dance
9:15-9:45	Math Inquiry
9:45-10:15	Math Small Group
10:15-10:45	Math Small Group
10:45-11:15	Math Small Group
11:15-11:45	Math Small Group
11:45-12:15	Math Small Group
12:15-12:45	Math Small Group
12:45-1:15	Math Small Group
1:15-1:45	Math Small Group
1:45-2:15	Math Small Group
2:15-2:45	Math Small Group
2:45-3:15	Math Small Group
3:15-3:40	Math Small Group

Charter school

CPE 2 Reflection: In my second-grade classroom, there was time allocated in the schedule for Social Studies, but it wasn't as frequent as Math or Writing. My host teacher mentioned that there was no formal curriculum like there is for Math for instance. While they did make an effort to incorporate it into the classroom, using resources like BrainPop, I couldn't help but wonder what it would be like if they had additional support, a formal curriculum, or even more resources. The theme for Social Studies was community this year and teachers were free to pull from that what they wanted to teach their students

Charter School Reflection: In the charter school, social studies was a digital program students did on their computers where they were learning about NYC though it was very infrequent. So infrequent, that when I asked my students about it they couldn't really give me a straight answer. Social Studies was a foreign subject to them, so much so that a student told me they didn't know anything about NY. One of my host teachers, Ms. Krtuzler, who is also the Social Studies point person for the grade mentioned that they're supposed to teach it twice a week but it's not really a priority right now.

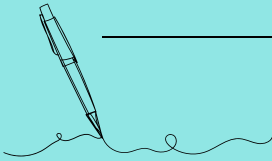


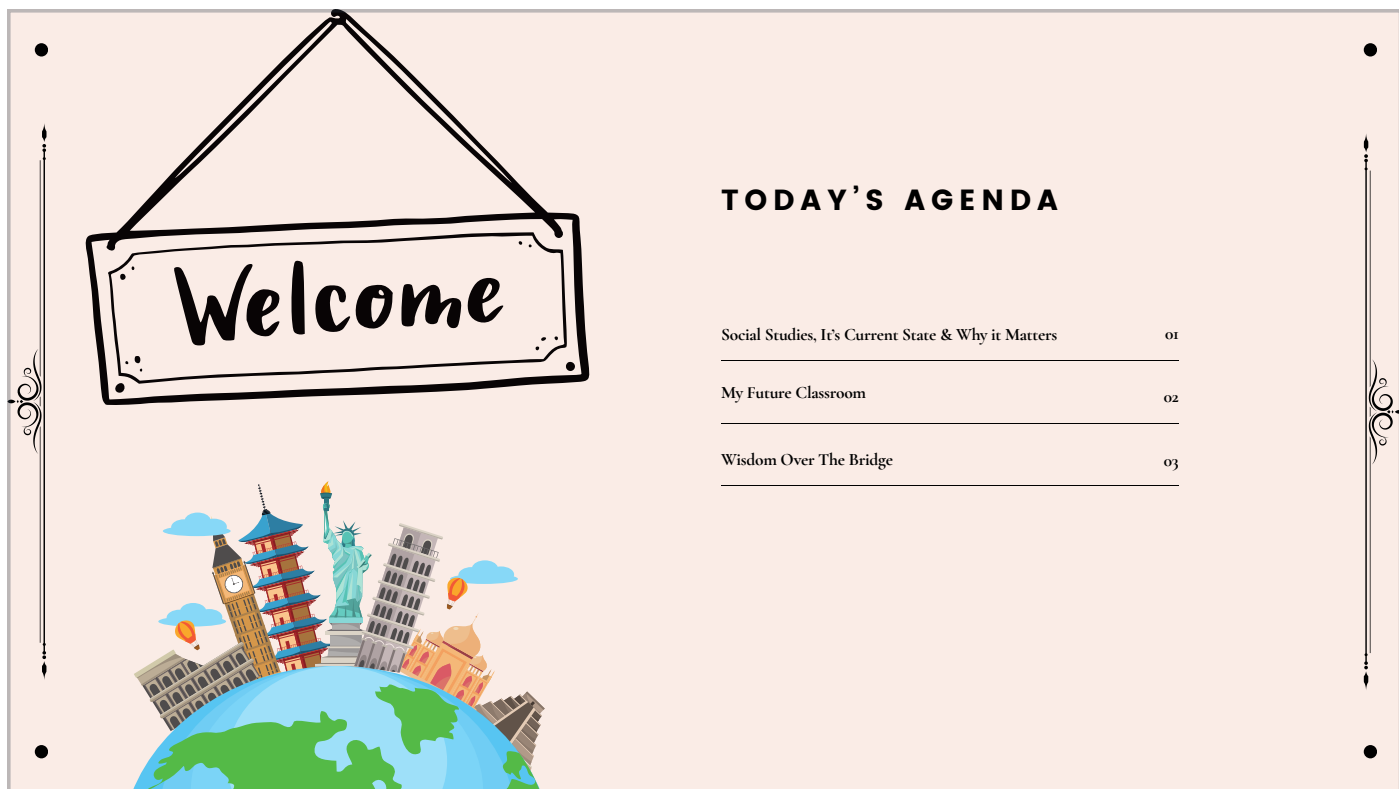
My immediate thought was that is crazy. I truly couldn't fathom Social Studies not being a vital part of children's schooling. This was the beginning of an inquiry into social studies. I wanted to know how we ended up here. With social studies slowly dying out? Are we complicit in it? Why is this happening? Do our students even know what social studies are anymore? Are there no consequences to us removing it from the classroom? Which brings me to my thesis and the purpose of this project



THESIS STATEMENT

This project argues for the reinstallation of Social Studies back into the classroom, as a core subject, reinstating to its former glory. Such a task must be done through an interactive, multi-modal, inquiry, and child-centered approach. The creation of *Wisdom over the Bridge*, a developing Social Studies curriculum and guide for teachers seeks to do exactly that—remind us of the values of the art form and forgotten gem that is Social Studies.





TODAY'S AGENDA

Social Studies, It's Current State & Why it Matters	01
My Future Classroom	02
Wisdom Over The Bridge	03

Today, I'll briefly guide you through the current state of social studies in our schools, and use that information to build a foundation for my future classroom while simultaneously developing a Social Studies curriculum.

FOCUS QUESTIONS



How can I push social studies back into the classroom, not as an elective but as something necessary?



How can I use Social Studies to access the child? Or even in reverse, how can I use the child's interests to shape how I frame Social Studies in my classroom?



How can I use Social Studies as a means of forming a bridge between my student's world and the world around them?

These key questions help to frame this project onwards.



BUILDING THE SCHOOL FOR TOMORROW

“...we may build more nearly the ‘School for Tomorrow,’ ”

MORRISON, 1946, P. 31

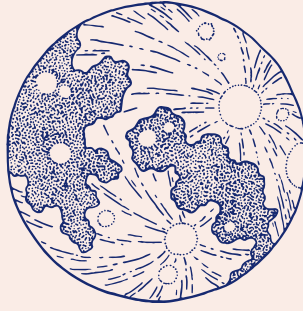
And the school for tomorrow absolutely demands the inclusion of Social Studies.

SOCIAL STUDIES IT'S CURRENT STATE & WHY IT MATTERS



WHAT IS SOCIAL STUDIES?

Before I can even begin creating an Social Studies curriculum, I have to have an understanding of what I'm working with which brings me to the question – what is social studies? I ask this question because we all hold different definitions of social studies and that coincidentally means that how we teach Social Studied is influenced by these definitions.



GOAL OF SOCIAL STUDIES

“The goal of social studies is to develop responsible citizens who understand their interdependence with others and can make reasoned and informed decisions for the good of a diverse public,”

JONES, PANG & RODRIGUEZ, 2001

Taking this a step further, according to Saxe (1992), Social studies in the past, has also been viewed as he puts it, as this ideal model of citizenship education to further civic competence.

TRADITIONAL FUNCTION & PURPOSE



Essentially the purpose of Social Studies traditionally has been to promote democratic ideals and create democratic citizens who will eventually come to serve the public will. As we begin to craft this definition of Social Studies, there is a developing understanding of the “why” behind Social Studies.

**NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES
EST. 1921**



How does the NCSS define Social Studies?

Moving on to the “what” of Social Studies, I turn your attention to the National Council of Social Studies which was established in 1921, a US-based organization dedicated to Social Studies education.

They define Social Studies as “the study of individuals, communities, systems, and their interactions across time and place that prepares students for local, national, and global civic life. ... Social studies centers knowledge of human rights and local, national, and global responsibilities so that learners can work together to create a just world in which they want to live.”

NCSS CORE DISCIPLINES OF SOCIAL STUDIES



The NCSS also goes on to identify the core disciplines shown above which exemplifies how they are working to expand the definition of Social Studies, making it more versatile, a testament to the multidimensionality of Social Studies.

SOCIAL STUDIES IN NYC



THE NYC SOCIAL STUDIES FRAMEWORK



We're going to pivot for a moment here, as I turn your attention to the NYC Social Studies Framework. Given the fact that Social Studies content and instruction vary state by state due to legislation and restrictions, this Framework which was published in 2014, and then revised in 2016, was "designed to prepare students for college, careers, and civic life with courses that are rigorous and aligned to the New York State Learning Standards for Social Studies." The five standards are as follows: (1) History of the United States and New York (2) World History (3) Geography (4) Economics (5) Civics, Citizenship, and Government

While we're still having this discussion about Social Studies in New York, I think it's time we hear from some New York City elementary students.



CLASS 4-3

STUDENTS & THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL STUDIES

What do students know about social studies? How do they define it?



In the heart of Laurelton Queens, I had the privilege of spending the past semester with 28 4th graders in an ICT classroom. In January, I gave a survey out to my fourth graders, and while not everyone was able to fill it out, the ones who did, their answers were enlightening, to say the least.

1. In your own words, what do you think Social Studies is?

New York

1. In your own words, what do you think Social Studies is?

ugh something that i don't like hell.

1. In your own words, what do you think Social Studies is?

Geography, history

1. In your own words, what do you think Social Studies is?

I think social studies is a subject that gives you lots of information about the history back then and now.

1. In your own words, what do you think Social Studies is?

A. Bad because it's not fun

1. In your own words, what do you think Social Studies is?

I think social studies is a class that teaches me how to break down words into simpler meanings.

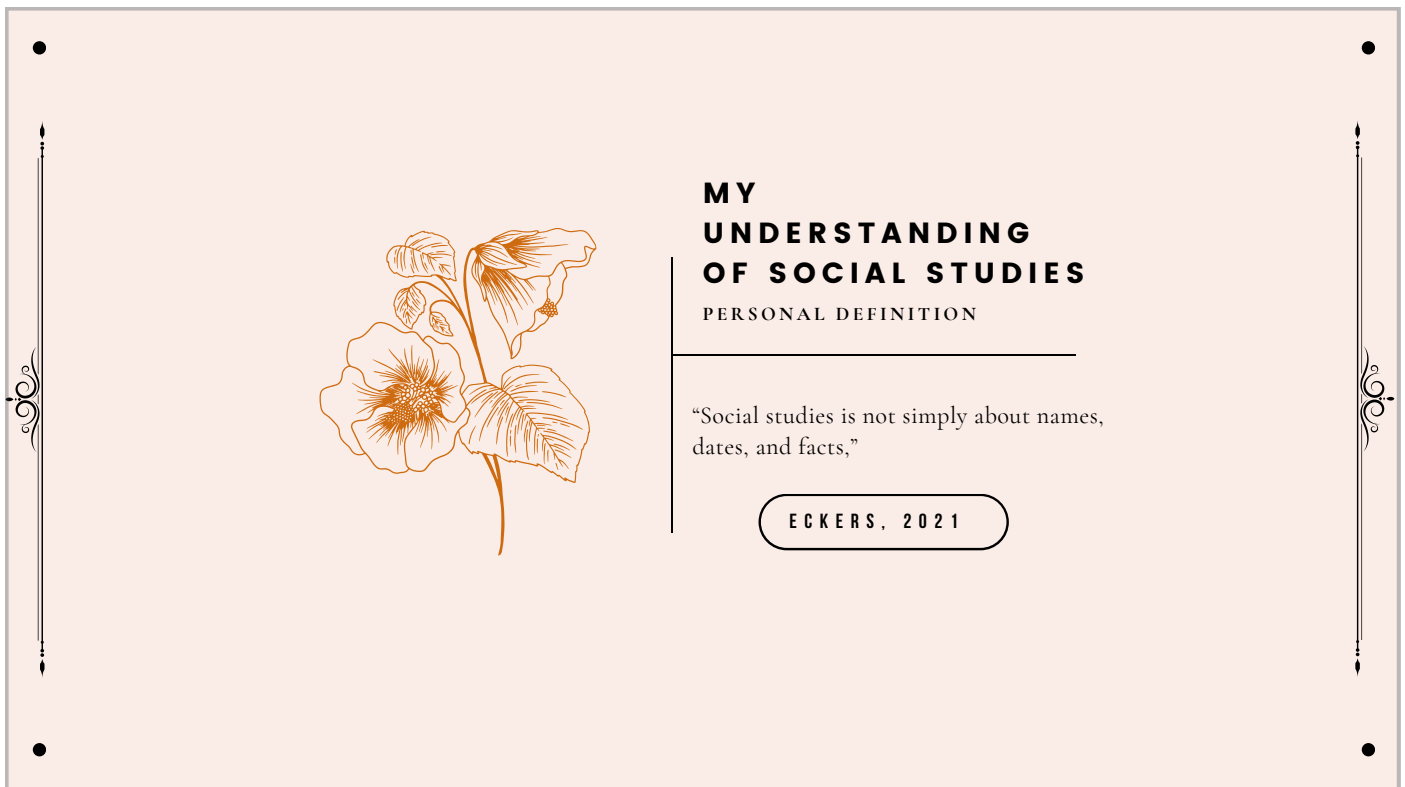
1. In your own words, what do you think Social Studies is?

I think social studies is a learning app for kids 8-above.

1. In your own words, what do you think Social Studies is?

If I were to describe social studies, I think it is a website that educates us about articles, reading and short responses.

Some of their response reflect the fact that Social Studies was a digital program that the students did. Some of the other responses also highlight the fact that the culture of this classroom was centred around test prep.



Now, what is my definition of Social Studies? As an educator, we have to be able to define things for ourselves, before we can even attempt to teach it to our students. At Merrick Academy, their assistant principal calls it internalization.

Social studies is not about the memorization of these facts either. The title of this thesis is Social Studies the Art Form & Forgotten Gem of the Classroom. When I think of art, I think of the impact it has on individuals—on its audience, but more importantly how art connects us to something—evokes an emotional response out of us. And it is in this same context that I view social studies as an art form with the sole purpose of people forming and creating connections.

I now move us out of the what is social studies conversation and into the why is social studies disappearing?

WHY IS SOCIAL STUDIES DISAPPEARING SUBJECT

PAST | PRESENT | FUTURE

LEGISLATION
AFFECTING
SOCIAL STUDIES

NO CHILD LEFT
BEHIND
AFTERMATH



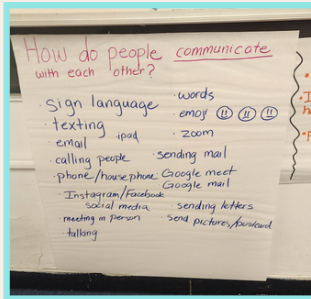
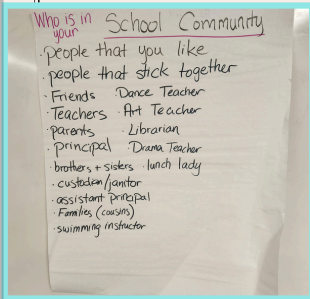
POLITICAL
INFLUENCES

Throughout the years there have been multiple conversations of social studies reform, long before the NCSS was formed in 1921. These conversations led to a restructuring of the standards. However, that wasn't enough. The main thing of importance to note here is that legislation is one of the major reasons why there is a decline in SS instruction being taught in schools.

- When No Child Left Behind was introduced, the aftermath of it resulted in an increase in testing and prioritization of Math and ELA. What that meant was academics had to be restructured and little to no time was dedicated to social studies instruction in the classroom—falling to the wayside. Teachers are now forced to focus on other subjects and as a result, they might not have such a strong foundation. However, McGuire (2007) noticed that the exclusion of social studies was found in schools with high levels of poverty and focused on literacy and math compared to other more affluent schools where those students have greater access to a wider variety of subjects.

- The current state of social studies is also very much a political conversation, as there have been other legislation that has sought to ban specific books, the teaching of race, and racism, amongst other topics, which is referred to as divisive content. As we head to the future social studies is more at risk than ever. Because of this, I want to remind us of the values of social studies.

BENEFITS OF SOCIAL STUDIES



Raises Cross Cultural Awareness



Engaging in Anti-bias Curriculum



Naturally Interdisciplinary



Embraces Inquiry & Builds on Student's Prior Knowledge

1. Cross-Cultural Awareness: It exposes students to new information, new histories, and cultures around the world. Students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and their education.

2. Students engage in an anti-bias curriculum and come to understand the value of mutual respect.

3. Naturally Interdisciplinary which invites learning across subjects (cross-curricular learning). It also improves reading comprehension & literacy skills and develops critical thinking skills.

4. Embraces Inquiry & Builds on Student's Prior Knowledge

CPE 2 Reflection: In this photo here, Blaze and Sara are working on their school community study, which I introduced to the students last Fall. In this study, my second graders were able to build on their definition of community and I was also intentional with leaving enough room for my students to develop their own interview questions for this study.

CONSEQUENCES OF REMOVING SOCIAL STUDIES FROM THE CLASSROOM



- ★ Students' Right to Academic Freedom at Risk
- ★ Misconceptions, Misinformation, and Confusion
- ★ Missed Opportunities and Connections with Students
- ★ Forced Restructuring of Social Studies Curriculum Post-Elementary

1. Students' Right to Academic Freedom at Stake which leads us to a censorship of people's stories and histories

2. Misconceptions, Misinformation & Confusion

Charter School Reflection: A conversation with a student, Milan. She said "Ms. Miah, I want to learn more about why they killed the man who liked Black people." I said "Milan, that's vague. Who is the "they" you are referring to and which Black Man?" Another student jumped in and asked if she was talking about MLK, to which Milan said "No, MLK is a white man." ... This serves as proof to the consequences of what happens when Social studies is removed from our classrooms.

3. Missed Opportunities & Connections with Students: Educators lose out on the opportunity to make connections across the subjects with their students, as well as the chance to show our students how social studies can connect to the other things in their lives.

4. Forced Restructuring of Social Studies Curriculum Post-Elementary: Civic Achievement Gap

"Closely related to the general achievement gap between affluent, mostly white students and low-income minority students, the civic achievement gap has made it increasingly difficult for those who grow up in low-income households to participate in civic affairs," (Kalaidis, 2013).

These consequences which will only continue to grow prompt me to think about how I can combat such notions in my future classroom.

MY FUTURE SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM



From the very beginning, students are taught that they have no rights and no say. We police the way they speak and the way they act, denying them agency over their bodies and consequently, their education. My future classroom works in opposition to these ideals. My goal is to create a safe space where my students feel comfortable enough to show up as themselves, in their full authenticity, and comfortable enough to take risks. To do so, the classroom must be framed as an invitation, and as Mike Rose (1989) says, it must be a communal embrace, to which I have created three pillars for my classroom.



THE CLASSROOM AS AN INVITATION

“From a sociocultural perspective, development and learning do not occur in a static environment. Instead, they occur within a dynamic and ever-changing sociocultural contexts. It is the social interaction among individuals that continuously transforms the sociocultural context of the classroom.”

JONES, PANG & RODRIGUEZ, 2001

PILLAR 1

A SOCIAL HUB FOR LEARNING

“

*...social studies classrooms are
laboratories of culture.*

Jones, Pang & Rodriguez, 2002

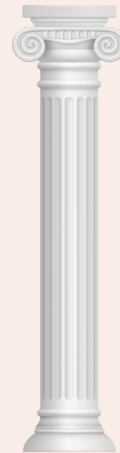
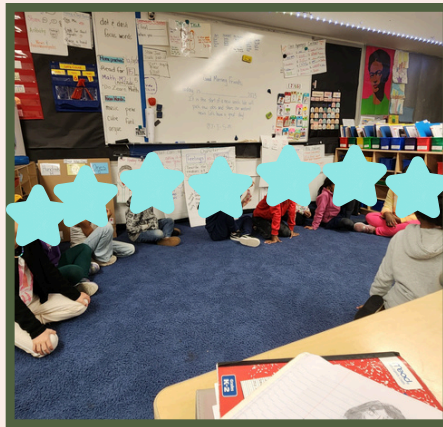
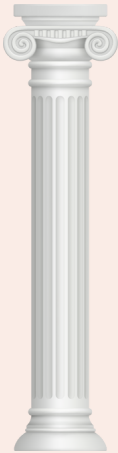
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This social hub that I hope to build is community-based, drawing on the knowledge of teachers, students, families, the neighborhood and more working together in harmony. Part of this also calls for me as the teacher to embrace the child as both a learner and expert, so giving my students room to construct their own meaning of the content they are learning but also acknowledging the values they bring with them into the classroom. As Cogan & Litcher (1974) mention, these are the values “they have learned at home, at church, from peers, and in the larger society,” (p.58-59). These same values can be used as a starting point for their social studies learning.

PILLAR 1

A SOCIAL HUB FOR LEARNING



While on the topic of values, and the knowledge systems these children bring in from all walks of life, it's important that the classroom culture must be one belonging. As such, it's vital to create classroom expectations. This is something I saw my host teachers do at CPE 2, during morning meetings. Being intentional about what the expectations are for students. Taking this even further, the students helped to construct these expectations and also signed it before it went up on the classroom wall. Students having ownership over these expectations so they know they are also responsible.

From a Social Studies standpoint, I want us to create the expectation that every voice matters. Even if we're learning about something that might not be important to one student. It's important to someone else in the classroom. It's one thing to create a community. It's an entirely different thing to maintain that community. This classroom will be our mini version of society, of the real world.

PILLAR 2

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING



The very essence of teaching is relationship-building with your students. It's how we center the child in our teaching practice. It's a commitment to welcoming all student identities into your classroom, a commitment to seeing the whole child, their background, and their story. Think about all the ecosystems that they exist in and how it shows up alongside them in the classroom. ... All of which cannot happen unless you actually talk to the child. I deeply treasure all the conversations I've had with my students for the mere fact that I got to experience them, exist in their orbit, if only for a brief period. But in doing so, I've learned so much about my students, not just academically, but culturally and socially as well.

CPE 2 Reflection: Relationship building helped to shape social studies Thiage and her interest in TikTok, is what led me to add a digital component to our School Community Study.

PILLAR 2

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

“

*Agency ... [has] a very specific purpose:
to expand the capabilities of children...*

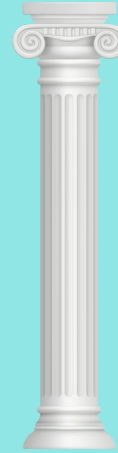
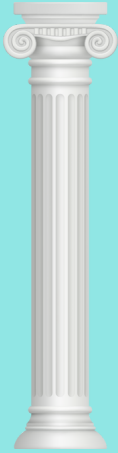
Adair & Colegrove, 2021

”

I want to expand this idea of relationship building to include children's agency. I see my students as empowered learners with the right to academic and creative freedom which means at times decentralizing my authority and restoring my faith in my students while also giving them increased responsibility over their learning.

PILLAR 2

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING



Brayden & His Genius Hour Project – “All About DD Osama”

- My host teacher had her own prejudices about rap and didn't feel it was appropriate or educational. I tried to advocate for it but eventually told Brayden that his teachers felt he needed a different topic.
- When I checked in again, he had already done a lot of research and I asked him about alternative topics. Peyton asked why he couldn't do his genius hour project which really made me think. I didn't have an answer.
- I relinquished control and told him to continue and instead helped him frame some more questions.

What I've learned from Brayden:

- Child agency/autonomy is not a threat to the teacher's authority in the classroom.
- How to expand on a child's interest and find interdisciplinary connections. At the end, his project had the early makings of an autobiography, thus a potential entry point in ELA.

PILLAR 3

COMMUNAL REFRAMING OF SOCIAL STUDIES



Under this communal reframing of social studies, I pose three questions.

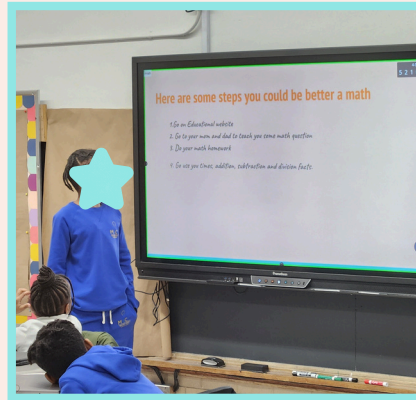
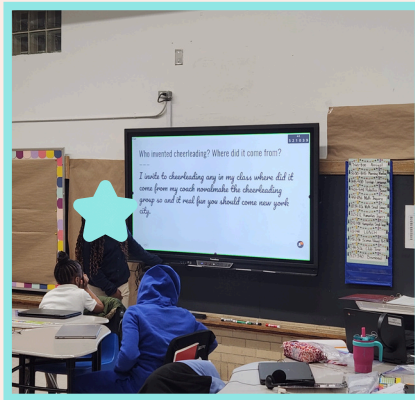
Q1: what's important to me as the teacher?

In the words of Saxe (1992), I want my students to become “practitioners of social studies.” I take heed of these words while also understanding that for some students, this may be their introduction to Social Studies, whereas for others it may not, which is why it is important to frame social studies together as a class and frame it in a way that makes it accessible for all students. Social Studies has to be inviting and there are 6 ways to do this (that I find important)...

- Multicultural approach
- Interdisciplinary approach
- Play-based approach
- Social issues & civic engagement approach
- Literature-based approach
- Magic of a multimodal approach.

PILLAR 3

COMMUNAL REFRAMING OF SOCIAL STUDIES



Q2: What's important to my students?

Thinking of the child as an inquirer which will allow this curriculum to truly reflect student's voices. As Wells so eloquently puts it: "At the heart of the inquiry-based curriculum are the questions that individuals or small groups of students choose to investigate," (Wells, 1995, p. 242).

Genius Hour Projects

Left Image: Chastity's project was focused on the history of cheerleading and how to become better at cheer.

Right Image: Markel's project presented students with advice on how to get better at math. He also wanted to know why math gets harder as you get older and move up through school.

Embracing the child as an inquirer calls forth their passions, and their burning questions, and provides them with opportunities and ownership over their learning, which can't always be found in scripted curriculums.

PILLAR 3

COMMUNAL REFRAMING OF SOCIAL STUDIES

“

The goals of education, I am convinced, whether in university or kindergarten, are not achieved by the one-way transmission of knowledge, be it ever so cogently expressed, but through a dialogue between teacher and learner that has as its aim the co-construction of meaning, in relation to tasks and topics that are of mutual interest and concern.

Wells, 1995

”

Q3: What's important to us, teachers and students?

How can we create a plan for social studies together? Co-construction is key. Together, we'll create a curriculum that has both parties' interests at the forefront. These three questions have essentially created a plan for our social studies curriculum.

DEVELOPING A SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

*created for the students at Merrick Academy & CPE 2 who continue to
inspire me and*



WHO?



WHY?

Creation is at the center of who I am, not just as a future educator but as a writer, and there is nothing that can describe the essence of curriculum development better than the act of creating. I made this curriculum with my students, even if they didn't know they were helping construct it.

- It's for Chad and Omari, their obsession with paleontology and the prehistoric era.
- It's for Thiage who told me Christopher Columbus is going to hell after learning about Indigenous People's Day.
- For Tacko, who reminds everyone about where she got her name (from her grandma) and of her family's Senegalese heritage.
- For Brynn, whose imagination and word building remind me that Social Studies can be found anywhere, even on the playground.

This emergent curriculum, which can be adapted and varies class by class takes into consideration how students learn, and what they're interested in, and most importantly, it is one that reflects the "touchstones of their identity," (Jones, Pang, & Rodriguez, 2001). It's quite literally for the students and by the students.



