



## V. Social Studies

### Background and Criteria

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The social studies domain includes a broad array of theoretical ideas from anthropology, sociology, history, political science, geography, economics, and psychology. In early childhood these themes are explored through play, personal interactions, literacy activities, projects, data collection and analysis, and report presentation beginning with the study of self, family, and community. In the primary grades, content areas are broadened to include local and state history, economics, political science, and geography. The exploration of social issues and their underlying theoretical constructs provide young children an opportunity to use meaningful content that helps prepare them as lifelong learners.

The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS, 2010) defines social studies as "...the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence...The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world" Additionally, the revised standards (NCSS, 2010) retain the organizing principle of 10 social studies themes: 1. Culture; 2. Time, Continuity, and Change; 3. People, Places, and Environments; 4. Individual Development and Identity; 5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions; 6. Power, Authority, and Governance; 7. Production, Distribution, and Consumption; 8. Science, Technology, and Society; 9. Global Connections; and 10. Civic Ideals and Practices. As other subject areas create national standards to guide the work of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010), these NCSS standards provide a vision for the future of social studies education in our nation. While different state standards have representation of some or all of these themes, in general, most of these 10 themes are addressed by the state standards (Illinois State Board of Education, 1997; Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Social Studies, 2002; Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies, 2013). The Work

Sampling System, 5th Edition (Dichtelmiller, Jablon, Marsden, & Meisels, 2013) Social Studies domain focuses on four functional components: A. People, Past and Present; B. Human Interdependence; C. Citizenship and Government; and D. People and Where They Live. NCSS themes 1 through 5 are represented in A, themes 7 through 9 are represented in B, themes 6 and 10 are represented in C, and themes 3 and 7 are represented in D.

Note: Preschool-3 performance indicators are noted unless the indicator starts at a higher grade. In those circumstances, the performance indicator is written starting at the lowest grade with the grade level noted in parentheses.

#### A. People, Past and Present

- 1. Begins to recognize their physical characteristics and those of others.**
- 2. Demonstrates beginning awareness of community, city, and state. (Preschool-4)**
- 3. Shows beginning understanding of past and present. (Kindergarten)**

Most state curricula and available child social studies texts draw attention to the broad themes of self in kindergarten, family in first grade, neighborhood in second grade, and community in third grade (Mindes, in press). Thus, prior to elementary school, in the preschool years, the content focus of social studies relies on the concepts of self-understanding with activities to support the development of self-control, feelings of confidence, etc. Teachers emphasize the concept of

“Who am I?” through children’s literature (e.g., using the book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* as a tool to discuss what they see in themselves and others). In childcare and early childhood programs, children begin to modify their views of themselves – who they are in the social world. These experiences influence character – an individual’s approach to ethical issues (e.g., honesty, fairness, and respect for others) (Mindes, in press). They also learn to recognize differences in themselves and others (Minnesota State Board of Education, 2005; Illinois State Board of Education, 2012), and how each person is unique and important (New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council and the New York State Council on Children and Families, 2012; Pennsylvania Department of Education and Department of Public Welfare, 2009). Other typical preschool themes include, “Who is my family? How does my family play? How does my family celebrate?” Teachers can create activities to reflect these themes by having children draw self-portraits, family portraits, family trees, etc. (Mindes, in press).

An awareness of self is a precursor to understanding others and the basis for strong social–emotional skills such as empathy (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2003). As they begin to learn about other families and cultures, they also learn to understand how others think and feel and they can take on perspectives from various vantage points. “Perspective taking, trying to understand what others might think or intend, is important in social and cognitive learning. When we consider and appreciate that other people have similar feelings, needs, and wants, it is possible to develop a sense of caring, fairness, and ethical behavior” (Fromberg, 2012, p.121). In fact, early learning state standards emphasize learning about different cultures and community in preschool and kindergarten (New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council and the New York State Council on Children and Families, 2012; Minnesota State Board of Education, 2005; Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards, 2013; Illinois State Board of Education, 2012). However, these concepts should be taught using children’s familiar, everyday experiences as the foundation for social studies learning, and teachers should plan experiences and use the daily life of the classroom to encourage that learning. Teachers should also build on what children already know and use hands-on activities (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Finally,

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2005) provided recommendations for children’s books that can help children learn about these social studies topics. *Beautiful Blackbird* by Ashley Bryan (2003) is a good starting point for discussion about difference, individuality, and community. *Cleverticks* by Bernard Ashley (1991), *A Letter to Amy* (1998) and *Whistle for Willie* (1964) by Ezra Jack Keats, *My Best Friend* by Pat Hutchins (1993), and *Matthew and Tilly* (1991) by Rebecca Jones, are other stories about understanding self and others.

Keeping with the familiar, once in kindergarten, teachers can help children learn about symbols, songs, and traditions that identify our nation and state and that children see everyday (e.g., American flag, Pledge of Allegiance) (Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards in Social Studies, 2013; Georgia Department of Education, 2011). And while the discussion of holidays (e.g., Memorial Day, Fourth of July) is also pertinent to children’s understanding of their community and country, children learn that not everyone celebrates the same holidays such as Christmas and Kwanza. Good teachers’ instruction of culture should be expressed in an overarching orienting concept for understanding cultural processes as one. That is, the concept lays the mental framework for interpreting culture as not just what other people do, but understanding one’s own cultural heritage, as well as other cultural communities. The approach requires taking the perspective of people of different backgrounds, recognizing that particular cultural practices fit together and are connected. As well, this perspective respects that cultural communities continue to change, as do individuals. It is an approach that operates from respectful interactions among and between children, teachers and families (Gonzalez-Mena, 2013). Once in the primary grades, this approach also lends itself to helping children better explain why individuals, groups, issues, and events are celebrated with local, state or national holidays, or days of recognition (e.g., Lincoln’s Birthday, Martin Luther King’s Birthday, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving) (Illinois State Board of Education, 1997; Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Social Studies, 2002; Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards in Social Studies, 2013).

Understanding the significance of traditions and holidays also lends itself to the teaching of how past events impact the present and future. While there was a time in the 1970s when teachers did not believe young children

had the cognitive ability to understand history, mainly due to Piagetian work, subsequent research led to the consensus that children can understand chronological sequences though perhaps not be able to analyze abstract concepts (Booth, 1993; Crabtree, 1989; Downey & Levstik, 1991; Willig, 1990). Others emphasized that concepts of time should be a major consideration in how historical topics are introduced so that what is said about the past is considered from the standpoint of the child's understanding of the concepts and language relating to time (Thornton & Vukelich, 1988). However, research has shown that while young children (under the age of 6) can talk about events that have happened or will happen, they cannot yet understand them in terms of units of time (days, weeks), or lengths of time between events (e.g., how long the time between snack and outside play will be), however, they can understand a sequence of events (e.g., snack comes after circle time) (Beneke, Ostrosky, & Katz, 2008). As a result, teachers of young children can begin teaching the concept of time and the difference between past, present, and future events in preschool but need to keep the discussion preferably relevant to the child's own life. For example, children can draw a timeline of the first 4 to 5 years of their lives and what key events occurred at different points. They can learn a variety of words that reference time such as yesterday, tomorrow, long ago, before, after, morning, weeks, years, etc. (Minnesota State Board of Education, 2005).

Once in the primary grades, children can learn more about how their own families lived in previous generations, as well as other families. They can interview grandparents and other older adults to see the similarities of life today versus the past. They can also discuss more clearly how the past affects present day living and analyze different accounts of historical events by reviewing historical documents, and identifying key individuals and events in the development of the local community (e.g., Founders days, names of parks, streets, public buildings). (Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards in Social Studies, 2013; Illinois State Board of Education, 1997). Children's literature can also serve as a backbone for teaching children not only about how others lived in the past, but also how the human dilemmas of past and present are often the same. This allows for the past experiences of others to become

more accessible to children and therefore more relatable and understandable (Gunning, 2005). Some examples of good books include *The Flyers* by Allan Drummond (2003) which discusses the Wright brother's flight at Kitty Hawk in 1903 is seen through the eyes of a child. *George Washington's Teeth* by Deborah Chandra and Madeleine Comora (2005) allows for history to come alive through a focus on the first president's teeth, presented in rhyming verse. *Stars and Stripes: The Story of the American Flag* by Sarah L. Thomson (2003) is another history book that brings the revolutionary period to modern times.

## B. Human Interdependence

- 1. Begins to understand different kinds of families.**
- 2. Recognizes that people do different kinds of jobs.**
- 3. Explores technology in their environment.**

Children learn their roles in society through the instruction and modeling of behavior that begins in family life and in activities with families outside the home. Through social studies, young children come to appreciate their own roles in their family and the roles of others within society (Mindes, in press). State early standards suggest that children learn to describe his or her family structure and family roles, describe his or her family structure and family roles, and describe the roles and responsibilities of a variety of occupations (New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council and the New York State Council on Children and Families, 2012; Pennsylvania Department of Education and Department of Public Welfare, 2009; Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards, 2013). They begin to recognize that the roles people play in both the family and community are important in that people rely on people to do different jobs to survive (New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council and the New York State Council on Children and Families, 2012). Teachers can encourage the understanding and appreciation for different types of families and their roles through children's literature. Some excellent books include *Daddy Makes the Best Spaghetti* by Anna Grossnickle Hines (1999), *Lots of Grandparents* by Shelley Rotner and Sheila Kelly (2003), and *Rainy Day* by Emma Haughton (2004). Other activities that encourage young children to learn

more about their community and the different roles people play involve (Geiser, 2009) talking about the community they live in (e.g., asking them, “What is the name of the city you live in? Does your neighborhood have a name? What is your address?”); discussing the community helps the child has a relationship with (doctors, dentists, police officers); and arranging trips to the fire stations, grocery store, dry cleaners, post office, etc., and asking children to discuss the jobs each one person performs at these places (Geiser, 2009).

Children in the primary grades learn about different roles and jobs, and can describe why and how people work. For example, they begin to explore the economics of work, the exchange of goods and services, and the recognition that money and goods are limited and therefore choices need to be made about what they can and cannot purchase (Illinois State Board of Education, 1997; Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Social Studies, 2002; Georgia Department of Education, 2011). Students learn to describe income as the money earned from selling resources and expenditures as the money used to buy goods and services (Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards in Social Studies, 2013). Teachers can encourage understanding of the importance of jobs by providing roles for children in the classroom (e.g., line leader, paper collector, messenger), and have “career days” where parents and community members discuss their occupations) (New York State Education Department, 1996).

Children’s developing understanding of technology and media and how it impacts their lives is also an increasingly important social studies topic (Minnesota State Board of Education, 2005). In fact, the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE, 2012) developed standards “...for evaluating the skills and knowledge students need to learn effectively and live productively in an increasingly global and digital world. Simply being able to use technology is no longer enough.” The site lists multiple examples of experiences with technology and digital resources in which students should engage in during preschool to Grade 2 (ages 4 through 8) such as being able to illustrate and communicate original ideas and stories using digital tools and media-rich resources; identify, research, and collect data on an environmental issue using digital resources and propose a developmentally appropriate solution;

and engage in learning activities with learners from multiple cultures through e-mail and other electronic means, etc. (ISTE, n.d.). Starting in preschool, children can express an understanding of how technology affects them in daily life, and how it can be used to solve problems (e.g., they can identify technology used in daily life like telephones and computers, describe how computers help them find information faster) (New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council and the New York State Council on Children and Families, 2012; Minnesota State Board of Education, 2005). They can also begin to understand the operation of technology systems such as how to use a keyboard, how to use the Internet, etc. (Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards in Social Studies, 2013; Illinois State Board of Education, 1997). Teachers can make thoughtful use of computers and other technology in the classroom, by not replacing children’s experience with objects and materials but expanding the range of tools with which children can seek information, solve problems, and perform transformations, while learning at their own pace. Teachers can encourage children to use technology (e.g., cameras, computers, audio recorders) to document their experiences and work. They invite children’s exploration of the various operations and actions possible with technology, and the program should provide enough equipment that a child can become engaged in a technology project in a sustained, deep way (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

## **C. Citizenship and Government**

### **1. Shows beginning awareness of rules.**

### **2. Shows awareness of what it means to be a leader. (Preschool-4)**

An important part of social studies, even for young children, is an emphasis on social responsibility and civic engagement in a democratic society. Such focus ensures that young citizens learn to appreciate their responsibilities for citizenship. Thus, the curriculum must facilitate the development of attitudes, knowledge, and skills that will enable individuals to function in both their own communities and in those of others (Mindes, in press).

Part of being a good citizen is knowing and following

rules. Etiquette or rules for social engagement, such as saying “please” or “thank you,” can be taught to children indirectly as hints and suggestions (Killen, Ardila-Rey, Barakkatz, & Wang, 2000, p. 74; Feeney, Moravcik, & Nolte, 2013) as well as through modeling. However, etiquette violations are subject to cultural interpretation and teachers need to be aware of the etiquette standards for the cultures represented in the class. At the same time, part of the social studies curriculum is explaining conventional etiquette observed in the U.S. mainstream. “Manners are minor morals. They are the everyday ways we respect other people and facilitate social relations. They make up the moral fabric of our shared lives,” (Lickona, 2004, p. 166). One way to help children learn these conventions is through the explicit description of “school behavioral expectations.” Thus, a teacher may say: “At school we say ‘excuse me’ when we accidentally bump into someone.” Or “When you come to school, it is like going to someone’s home, so you say: ‘Good morning, Ms Adams.’ When you leave, you say ‘See you later, bye” (Lickona, 2004). With this approach, teachers have conveyed that “school” has certain etiquette conventions.

A focus on “at school” can communicate to children that different social settings have different conventions and that children can have a repertoire of social conventions to use in various settings. One way to ensure that children understand both the moral imperative of respect for the human rights of their classmates and others, as well as the etiquette conventions, is to involve the children themselves in identifying rules and standards for behavior. Teachers can work with children to develop rules as convictions about “right” behavior emerge (Mindes, in press).

Early learning state standards also emphasize the ability to identify and follow rules of the classroom community and engage in appropriate behavior as an important first step in teaching children about good citizenship (New York State Early Childhood Advisory Council and the New York State Council on Children and Families, 2012; Pennsylvania Department of Education and Department of Public Welfare, 2009; Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards, 2013). Once they are in the primary grades, children

are expected to more clearly recognize the reasons for rules in the home and classroom as well as the laws in the community. Their awareness of rules expands into understanding government policies and traditions such as democracy, voting rights, individual rights, and the concept of freedom. Being able to identify the concepts of responsible citizenship including respect for the law, patriotism, civility and working with others is also part of learning about rules and citizenship (Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards in Social Studies, 2013; Illinois State Board of Education, 1997). Teachers can foster children’s understanding of democratic processes and attitudes in concrete, experiential ways that young children can understand such as making and discussing rules, solving together the problems that arise in the classroom community, and learning to listen to others’ ideas and perspectives (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Part of citizenship and government involves leadership. Without leadership, governments and systems could not run effectively. Leadership development is essential to providing young children the skills and concepts necessary to make positive changes across peer groups, school, community, state, and the nation. Additionally, the ability to make leadership-based decisions continues to grow in importance (Karnes & Stephens, 1999). Beginning in preschool and kindergarten, students can learn to develop self-understanding, goal-setting, decision-making skills, responsibility, and conflict resolution and problem-solving skills that lead to leadership development. Studying the characteristics of great leaders will help children form the concepts and understanding of how they themselves can become great leaders (Karnes & Stephens, 1999). They also learn about leadership by acting as leaders in the classroom (e.g., leading a line of students, leading classroom cleanup, etc.), and by discussing the roles leaders have in the school (e.g., teachers, principals). This personal experience with leadership allows them to later identify with civic leaders, the role of the president, (Illinois State Board of Education 1997), and the importance of political leadership (Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Social Studies, 2002).

## D. People and Where They Live

### 1. Describes the location of things in the environment. (Preschool-4)

#### 1. Shows beginning awareness of their environment.

#### 3. Shows some awareness of ways people affect their environment. (Preschool-4)

Children's everyday play and experiences give them the basis for the geographic knowledge that they will learn in school. With encouragement and direction, young children will develop the vocabulary, awareness, and curiosity that will help them better understand and learn geography. According to Fromboluti and Seefeldt, (1999) and Hannibal, Vasiliev, and Lin (2002), there are five specific themes that help focus young children's understanding of their environment which paves the way for a deeper and greater understanding of geography. These themes were developed by professional geographers and are now being used in classrooms.

They are:

1. Where are things **located**?
2. What characteristics make a **place** special?
3. What are the **relationships** among people and places?
4. What are the patterns of **movement** of people, products, and information?
5. How can the Earth be divided into **regions** for study?

Very young children will not be able to understand concepts like latitude and longitude or even left and right. However, young children learn body awareness, such as the shape of the body and how much space it takes up, where the different body parts are, how the body moves and rests, etc. (Dill, 1994). This is the beginning of an understanding of location. Young children learn that they relate to other people and physical things. To help young children learn location, they should know the color and style of the building they live in, the name of their town, and their street address. Then, when they talk about other places, they

have something of their own with which to compare.

This is the foundation of personal experience needed to allow children to develop into successful map readers or users when they are older. Personal experience helps children understand maps and how they use symbols, which can be introduced to children when they are quite young (Fromboluti & Seefeldt, 1999). Hannibal et al. (2002) suggest using children's literature as a starting point for teaching maps and geography. For location, they suggest picture books such as *Where Do I Live?* that contains names of places (Chesanow, 1995). The book takes children from their bedrooms to their houses, to their streets, neighborhoods, etc. Other books that teach geography and location include *It's Back to School We Go! First Day Stories From Around the World* by Ellen Jackson (2003) about children's first day of school in 11 countries is presented and includes a world map and fact pages. *Our World: A Child's First Picture Atlas* (National Geographic Society, 2003) is especially good at introducing maps to preschoolers and kindergartners.

Learning that real places (e.g., home, school) can be represented symbolically occurs as children make schematic drawings and maps of real places as well as identify and describe the characteristics of these places (Pennsylvania Department of Education and Department of Public Welfare, 2009; Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards, 2013). Mapmaking is an activity that involves child production of a map. Welton (2005) suggests that mapmaking is a precursor to the understanding and use of maps. He suggests that young children begin with the bird's-eye view of objects that they map and advance to documentation of their environment (e.g., the classroom, their backyard, the playground). Mapmaking involves using symbols, lines, and color to make representational pictures of the child's world. The activity also involves scale—representing a large space on a small piece of paper (Mindes, in press).

Children continue to learn about geography and maps through the use of them at school. Maps in the classroom include relief maps, computer-based maps, satellite maps, wall maps, floor maps, weather maps, and globes (Illinois State Board of Education, 1997). Tourist maps, chamber of commerce maps, local transportation agencies, rental car companies, and walking guides are good sources for these materials (Seefeldt & Galper, 2006). Besides the paper tools in books and in

brochures, Google Maps™ (<https://maps.google.com/>) also shows process as a tool for developing custom maps, as well as developing young children's conceptual understanding (Mindes, in press).

Geography is not simply about maps and where people live. Geographers also examine why people settled in certain places and how they use natural resources. For example, traveling Bushmen in Australia carry water in ostrich eggs because water is so scarce in their environment. In other places we turn up the heat or put on a sweater when it gets cold. All people change something about the way they live in order to adapt to their environment (Fromboluti & Seefeldt, 1999). Throughout early childhood, children become increasingly aware of how people and the earth interact and impact each other, and they learn to participate in efforts to protect the environment (Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards, 2013; Minnesota State Board of Education, 2005). They know and experience how the weather and climate affect their daily lives. Parents often try to teach young children to understand what they need to do to adapt to their surroundings, such as wearing a jacket when it is cold, or taking off their socks when it is hot outside. As they get older, children learn what they can do to adjust, and they begin to see how people change the earth to their own benefit (Fromboluti & Seefeldt, 1999; Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards in Social Studies, 2013). Once in the primary grades, children learn more about the specifics of how people interact with and depend on the environment through farming, fishing, and hydroelectric power. Additionally, they learn the difference between renewable and nonrenewable resources and identify changes in geographic characteristics of a local region (e.g., town, community) (Illinois State Board of Education, 1997).

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