

# Interview and standards investigation

[Family](#), [Teenage Pregnancy](#)



For many years students have been forced to learn low cognitive level information that lacks meaning and fails to transfer to real life situations. For these reasons Social Studies is the subject that students love to hate (Hope, 1996). Rather than dwelling on what has gone wrong in the past, it is best to look to the future and learn from past pedagogic mistakes to determine what can be done to energize social studies instruction in order to restore respect by students and teachers alike for such an important field (Hope, 1996).

The implementation of state and national standards has been an important step in making this happen. This assessment will evaluate the state of Arizona's Social Studies Standards for sixth grade for thoroughness, clarity, user friendliness, and comprehensiveness. It will go on to provide a well-supported, objective, academic response to the interview conducted with Ms. Traci Smith, a sixth grade social studies teacher at Will Rogers Junior High in Claremore, OK, and the standards investigation by analyzing how social studies is taught today.

The Arizona Department of Education website contains five sixth grade history strands that emphasize World history from its earliest cultures through Enlightenment, including the early cultures of the Americas. The Arizona State Standards for sixth grade are extremely thorough containing strands for American History, World History, Civics/Government, Geography, and Economics each with well-defined concepts and performance objectives for students at the sixth grade level.

According to the NCSS definition of Social studies, each of these topics plays a vital role in social studies education. The thoroughness of these standards helps guide lesson planning and learning because teachers know exactly what they are supposed to teach and students know exactly what they are supposed to learn in order to achieve mastery. The Arizona State Standards for Social Studies are very clearly defined by topic. This makes them easy to read and understand. This reduces confusion and frustration and promotes integration with other subject areas.

Each strand is broken down further into concepts that explicitly say, where applicable, which other strand(s) they connect with in order to further student understanding. This characteristic makes the Arizona State Standards for Social Studies extremely user friendly. Finally, the Arizona State Standards for Social studies are very comprehensive. They cover a large scope of information in order to help Arizona students develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world (NCSS, 1993).

According to Ms. Smith, social studies instruction has come a long way since she began teaching fifteen years ago. When she started it was common practice for students to read the sections in the social studies textbook, answer the questions at the end, and then take a test to demonstrate what they learned. This seemingly meaningless busy work compounded by the implementation of NCLB led to a dramatic reduction in social studies content

as teachers became more concerned with high stakes testing in the primary subject areas.

High stakes testing has contributed to the trend of moving away from constructivist learning and student centered teaching approaches such as discussions, role-playing, research papers, and cooperative learning (Vogler & Virtue, 2007). This is in dramatic contrast to what new teacher education programs are teaching which may be setting new teachers up for failure once they reach the classroom. In spite of the demands of high stakes testing, when Ms.

Smith realized that social studies was beginning to slowly disappear from the curriculum altogether she decided to take a stand. Ms. Smith is now the sixth grade English and World History Department Head at Claremore Public Schools. Although she does teach from a textbook, Ms. Smith employs numerous hands on activities to convey subject matter to the students. For each section the students must create a project that coincides with the lesson.

Her favorite section is on the Middle Ages in Europe. During this lesson the entire sixth grade participates in meaningful learning activities such as making head gear and shields, memorizing poems from this era that they must recite to their classmates, and learning the requirements for becoming a knight or a lady. Students earn certificates for acts of chivalry and the individuals who have the most certificates at the end of the unit are awarded a crown as 6th grade King and Queen.

The unit culminates with a field trip to the Renaissance Festival and the Castle of Muskogee, a landmark in Oklahoma, which is where the Renaissance Festival is held (Personal Communication, T. Smith, December 12, 2011). These activities are much more meaningful than simply reading the text and completing the section review. This allows students to practice their literacy and public speaking skills which, according to Wineburg (2005), are crucially relevant for schools because it provides a way of thinking about text that allows students to find truth in the cacophony of voices that confront them in the social world.

Social studies instruction is heavily influenced by teacher preparation programs. These programs are meant to teach future teachers how to teach social studies effectively. Historically these programs have had to respond quickly to social issues and events by developing courses in social sciences and education that address the concerns of minority groups.

For example, a recent increase in the numbers of English Language Learners in the nation's schools has led to added pressure to prepare teachers to work effectively with students from diverse backgrounds. For the most part these influences have had a positive impact on the preparation of social studies teachers; however in some cases the creation of new classes and requirements for pre-service teachers has led to a bloated curricula and programs that lack clear purpose (Adler, Dougan, & Garcia, 2006).

The NCATE standards embolden pre-service teachers to refine their focus to prevent overlap and redundancy. Most teacher preparation programs are aligned to professional teacher standards such as this. This helps to

adequately prepare teachers to facilitate learning for today's students so that they are informed, knowledgeable, and eventually able to compete in a global society. Standards based instruction has been a double edged sword for social studies instruction.

On the one hand it has led to the reduction in social studies content as a result of high stakes testing since social studies is not one of the subjects covered under NCLB, but on the other hand social studies standards have revitalized social studies instruction to help make learning fun, meaningful, and relevant for students increasing the chances that they will be able to transfer the concepts learned in the classroom to real world scenarios.

If social studies teachers can continue to resist the urge to teach to the test and do everything they can to employ effective teaching strategies then hopefully everyone will realize how important social studies content is for students at all grade levels. This will ultimately result in civic minded individuals who are understanding, knowledgeable, and tolerant of other cultures which will serve them well into adulthood. References: NCSS. (1988, June). Social studies for early childhood and elementary school children: Preparing for the 21st Century. Retrieved from <http://www.ncss.org/positions/elementary>. Hope, W. 1996). It's time to transform social studies teaching.

### **Social Studies Interview Questions:**

- Do you use a textbook? If so, do you like the content? Do the students have workbooks or activity sheets to accompany the textbook? Yes, we use Glencoe's textbook, World History: Journey Across Time - The Early

Ages The students have 2 workbooks: A note-taking guide which we use from time to time, and a Guided Reading book which we do not use very often. There are teacher resources for each of the units which include vocabulary practice and guided reading activities. There are also other resources for mapping, cause-and-effect, and comparing the past to the present.

- What is your favorite Social Studies lesson to teach? What sort of hands on, meaningful activities or innovative teaching methods do you use when teaching this lesson? My favorite unit to teach is the Middle Ages of Europe. The entire 6th grade participates in making head gear, shields, memorizing and reciting poems, and learning about the requirements for becoming a knight or a lady. This unit culminates with a field trip to The Castle of Muskogee where they hold the Renaissance Festival. This unit is taught at the end of the year and is a highlight for the 6th grade.
- We award those who have shown chivalry and crown a 6th grade King and Queen. In 1992 the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) adopted the following definition of the field of social studies: Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, politicalscience, psychology, religion, andsociology, as well as appropriate ontent from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people

develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. How does social studies instruction at Will Rogers Junior High relate to this definition of social studies? At the junior high, we not only teach how our ancestors affected future generations and the things we have learned from them, but we also have an Advisory hour for 6th grade. During this advisory hour we teacher character development and teach the students how to apply what they learn in their everyday lives.

- Do you believe that values should be part of the social studies curriculum? If so, what values do you feel are most important for today's students? Yes, I do. The values of integrity, compassion, and respect; these values can be taught throughout the social studies curriculum. When I teach the religions of the world, I talk to the students about having respect for others and their beliefs. We talk about how some of the heroes of ancient history showed integrity and compassion. This is also carried over into our Advisory hour.
- Does the State of Oklahoma have state standards for social studies? If so, what is your reaction to Oklahoma State's Social Studies Standards? If not, do you think that Oklahoma could benefit from a set of state standards? Yes. I believe they should be more detailed.
- What do you feel are important benchmarks for students at the 6th grade level? English and Math; the reading skills learned in social studies and science trickle over into the English curriculum. The same goes for Math and Science.



- How much time per day does each student spend on Social Studies content? 2 hours per day – World History and Advisory
- How do you rank the importance of social studies in the elementary curriculum? Please rank the following subjects in the elementary curriculum in order of importance to you.
- How do you integrate technology into the Social Studies curriculum? I use power points.
- Do you believe that the social studies curriculum should be narrowed