

Best Practices In Teaching Social Studies

Inservice Presentation by Eric Hadd - August 2006

Recommendations	Applications
Students of social studies need regular opportunities to investigate topics in depth.	Prioritize items in a larger curriculum rather than teaching the whole thing, in other words, quality over quantity. Spend additional time on topics that engage students.
Students need opportunities to exercise choice and responsibility by choosing their own topics for inquiry.	Give students content essentials and assist them in formulating questions for their own research.
Social studies teaching should involve exploration of open-ended questions that challenge students' thinking.	Model the exploration of ideas and information. Engage students with the essential questions of the unit.
Social studies must involve students in active participation in the classroom and the wider community to make real the concepts being taught.	Participate in community projects or create plans to address community problems. Use community members as a classroom resource for various topics.
Social studies should involve students in both independent inquiry and cooperative learning, to build skills and habits needed for lifelong, responsible learning.	Experiment with student groupings. Teach and reinforce skills and roles for working in groups.
Social studies should involve students in reading, writing, observing, discussing, and debating to ensure their active participation in learning.	Allocate the majority of class time for these activities. Limit lectures and note taking.
Social studies learning should be built on students' prior knowledge of their lives and communities, rather than assuming they know very little about the subject.	Make connections to events in students' lives, current events, and other content areas. Assess prior knowledge of students for each unit.
Social studies should explore a full variety of the cultures found in America, including students' own backgrounds and understanding of other cultures' approaches to various social studies concepts.	Integrate cultural perspectives as often as you can as you move through the curriculum. The concept of culture is of great importance at all levels.
Social studies evaluation must reflect the importance of students' thinking, and their preparation to be lifelong responsible citizens, rather than rewarding memorization of decontextualized facts.	Increase authentic assessment opportunities. Test a student's ability to support or defend a position, analyze information and draw conclusions, create and carry out an action plan, etc.

Best Practice New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools by Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels, Arthur Hyde, 1998.