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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to provide some guidance to school administrators, school boards, social studies teachers, and others about the key components of citizenship education and its relationship to social studies education. The paper defines citizenship education as the primary purpose of the social studies and provides three key characteristics of the "good citizen" in society, namely, that he/she must: (1) be literate and informed; (2) accept responsibility for self and others; (3) have a commitment to a democratic society. Further, the four essential elements of social studies are identified as knowledge, skills, values, and participation, and philosophical beliefs regarding the necessary components of each of these elements in educating the "good citizen" are outlined. This philosophy provides the basis for the state's common curriculum goals in social studies, and hopefully, will stimulate considerable thought and discussion among Oregonians as they undertake the challenge of educating their children for tomorrow. (DB)

Social Studies Philosophy Statement

# Social Studies Philosophy Statement

*As Oregon educators follow the instructional improvement cycle into the 1990's, social studies once again emerges as an area for review and revision. Noteworthy in this latest cycle (1986-1992) has been the development of the common curriculum goals. Preceding the distribution of the common curriculum goals in other subject areas have been one or more concept papers, which have summarized the research upon which the anticipated common curriculum goals have been based. Unlike these other subject areas, empirical research tends to have less of an impact on the direction of social studies education than individual or group philosophy. With this in mind, the Oregon Department of Education convened a committee of elementary and secondary social studies educators for the purpose of discussing and weighing different philosophical perspectives and arriving at consensus on a set of ideas that would form the basis of the common curriculum goals in social studies. Their ideas, and those of many reviewers, are reflected in the following philosophy statement.*

The greatest challenge any nation ever faces is educating its children for tomorrow. Part of that challenge involves the development of good citizens. Citizenship education is the primary purpose of social studies education.

Social studies is a curriculum designed from kindergarten through high school to help children "understand, analyze, react to, and act upon:

- The relationships of human beings to the world in which they live
- The relationships of human beings to other human beings
- The relationships of human beings to themselves." (Singleton, 1988)

Social studies attempts to achieve these ends through the study of history, geography, government, economics, anthropology, sociology and psychology. It also relies heavily on the humanities—the study of literature, art, music, dance and drama—as a means for giving students a better understanding of the individual human condition, human interactions, and human cultures. New areas of instruction emphasize technology and the natural and physical sciences as they influence human interactions. Social studies, thus, explores human relationships as the basis of contemporary citizenship education.

Citizenship education presumes the education of a "good citizen." But the definition of a "good citizen" is not constant: it is culturally derived from the values and characteristics of the society in which the citizen lives. Thus, a society that highly values loyalty to the state would define the "good citizen" quite differently than a society that values individual rights more highly. In addition, the needs and expectations of "good citizens" in industrialized nations would be different from those in developing countries. With this in mind, then, what are the values and characteristics of our society that affect our definition of a "good citizen"?

## Nature of American Society

Like other societies, our national community is marked by three sets of polarities which frame most of its other characteristics—1) continuity and change, 2) opportunity and obstacle, and 3) commonality and diversity. The components of these polarities interact together and among themselves. For example, change often presents obstacles, and

obstacles often create new opportunities for growth. Within such a framework, what are our national characteristics?

American society has been typified by a sense of optimism and a search for a better life. We have always seen ourselves as a questing people in a land of opportunity, a people in search of new frontiers, moving on and seeking out new land, new work opportunities, new social relationships.

A demand for literacy has been constant in our history. The challenge to provide universal education began early in that history. To a great degree education has fostered our social and occupational mobility and allowed us as wide a variety of interpersonal relationships as any people of any nation have ever known.

And though, as a nation, we have welded a commonality of national identity, a traditional sense of being Americans in a United States of common bond, we have recently begun to value, treasure and attempt to preserve the diversity of cultures that make us up. We find a growing respect for the diverse traditions out of which we welded, and continue to weld, that common stock with which we so proudly identify as Americans. Those diverse cultural identities provide many of us rich outlets for communicating personal and social meaning as Americans.

Our society has also been characterized by a commitment to democratic ideals, especially the rule of law. Although this commitment has existed since the writing of the Constitution in 1787, it has been assumed that change, particularly as evidenced through Supreme Court interpretations of the law, will always be a part of this ideal.

In recent years we have experienced several changes which have and will continue to have a tremendous impact on the way we live and work. One of the most significant has been the tremendous increase in the amount of information. The information explosion and the dizzying rate of technological growth are flip sides of the same coin. Together they have purchased unprecedented influence for the media. We have become a media-dependent society, inundated with information and the technology capable of converting that information into product and action.

Another area of profound change is our place in the global economy. Our mixed market economy must find a proper balance between those industrialized nations with which we compete as freely as possible and those emerging nations on whose successful emergence the economic fate of the world may rest. How to achieve such a balance in a world of finite resources and precarious sustainable physical and social environments is no small feat. It will require enormous flexibility in our economic systems and an educated citizenry capable of adjusting to such change.

Our changing relationship with the global community requires us to be more aware and sensitive to cultural similarities and differences. Respect for global diversity of ideas, opinions and cultures must replace provincial chauvinism if we are to work together to solve global problems. Tomorrow calls out for a new generation of world citizens, a generation for which diversity, change and uncertainty provide welcome challenges.

## Characteristics of the "Good Citizen"

The diverse nature of the elements of today's society call for three characteristics in our citizenry. The *"good citizen"* must:

- **Be literate.** Be informed about world happenings with a sense of historical connections; have knowledge of rights and responsibilities; develop an ability to question and explore alternatives critically; perceive the diversity of the world, its people, cultures and aesthetics; have knowledge of self and society.
- **Accept responsibility for self and others.** Understand the relationship between self and others; apply democratic principles; be ethical and humane; function effectively as an individual and group member; adapt to circumstances, roles and situations; show a willingness to serve; appreciate diversity; recognize the validity and strength of multiple perspectives; recognize the need for national and international citizenship.
- **Have a commitment to a democratic society.** Appreciate the American heritage; have a sense of stewardship for the future; demonstrate respect for law; demonstrate responsible decision making; actively participate in forming public policy and implementing it.

Thus, citizenship education presumes both the caretaking of heritage and the stewardship of

change. It aims at preserving the ideals of society by educating citizens who can perpetuate, adapt and create institutions for doing that.

## Educating the "Good Citizen"

How can schools best educate the "good citizen" in Oregon today? What educational philosophy meets the needs of a people in an information explosion—an era in which total knowledge is doubling every seven years? What are the most effective means for serving the needs of the individual and the welfare of society under such demanding conditions? Which educational approaches can best preserve our heritage and commit us to a future characterized by rapid change?

With over 95% of the information available to human beings stored outside the human mind,we must recognize that many of the traditional approaches to civic education, which emphasize the memorization of facts, no longer adequately produce the citizen we need for our world today or tomorrow. We must come to regard information and facts as data to be used in conceptualizing relationships, examining alternatives and exploring possibilities rather than as isolated bits of knowledge to be memorized solely for the purpose of developing a "common memory." In addition, we must teach young people to retrieve, control and use the ever-expanding networks of information we create. Thus, this philosophy presumes an approach to social studies that is primarily conceptual and skill-oriented, developed from a foundation of core of historical and social science information.

## The Role of Social Studies

Education in the social studies aims to help students develop as rational, humane, and productive citizens in a democratic society. Reasoned responses to public issues require some of the objectivity of the social scientist as well as an informed personal commitment to a common set of civic values. Four elements of social studies education are necessary to help develop such citizens—knowledge, skills, values and participation.

### *Knowledge*

- **Students need to organize knowledge around significant concepts, generalizations and theories.**

Such organization is necessary to make sense of the world by giving students a means by which to appraise subsequent information and compare and contrast it with what they already know. *"Unless relations among facts are grasped, what might become powerful ideas are left as empty verbalization, memorized but inert. Young people need a rich fund of information, but information selected with the intent of developing ideas."* (Michigan State Board of Education, 1987)

- **Social studies should utilize that scholarship deemed important from the social sciences, history and related fields, as well as that from other forms of shared human experience.**

For social studies education, history and geography will probably remain the foremost subjects of study. But all the social scientific disciplines—including anthropology, economics, political science, psychology and sociology—are crucial. And today, biological and environmental sciences play increasingly important roles as we seek answers to such questions as, *"Where does the acid rain come from which is destroying the lakes in Michigan or Canada?" "Is the creation of new jobs through the use of coal-powered industrial plants justified in the light of the environmental consequences of those plants?"*

And, of course, to the degree that film, television, paintings, literature and other forms of art help bring light to essential aspects of human social interactions, they are invaluable to social studies. They allow a wide focus on all forms of interaction in order to arrive at the broadest possible information base for forming concepts, generalizations and theories.

- **Students should come to recognize that knowledge is ever-changing.**

Ideas change with time and with the realities of experience. And as many have pointed out, the information explosion has so accelerated the rate of change that if we are unable to deal with it, we are apt to be overwhelmed by it. Thus, understanding change must be a crucial part of the social studies curriculum today.

- **Students should provide a linkage between the understanding students have about their own immediate social world and that of society at large.**

When students can use information from books to clarify issues in their own lives, they value formal learning more. Conversely, when they can apply understandings from their own lives to the world of academic ideas, they appreciate that intellectual world more. Such links allow greater comprehension of the broader issues and help prepare students to meet present and future needs.

- **Students must learn to see events and conditions from the standpoints of several groups affected by them, whether American or peoples elsewhere.**

Students need to understand that it is possible for people to have several correct but conflicting points of view on certain issues. For example, a new dam on the Columbia River may mean the additional hydroelectric power necessary to support new industrial plants along the river and thereby create new jobs for the region. But to the farmer whose farmstead will be inundated or the fisherman whose fish will be killed, it may mean economic ruin. To the environmentalists it may spell ruin to fish and wildlife habitats and stress the natural ecology of the region. If workable solutions to such problems are to be found, they must be found by people who can see and respect various points of view and seek a common ground somewhere among them.

- **Students must learn to think through controversial issues.**

This is extremely important for responsible citizenship in a democracy filled with people of greatly differing value systems. Democracy benefits from the broadest analysis of controversial issues. In making instructional decisions about controversial issues, however, it may be helpful to view citizenship education in a democracy as consisting of two related but somewhat disparate parts: socialization and countersocialization (Engle and Ochoa, 1988). Socialization aims to transmit a reasoned attitude and an understanding of the democratic culture to students in a relatively unreflective manner. It occurs primarily but not exclusively at the early grades. Countersocialization, which occurs primarily but not exclusively at the higher grades, is concerned with the development of critical thinking and fostering an independent and responsible citizen. The focus of countersocialization is on examining and evaluating alternative truth claims and on resolving social problems. According to this view, then, much of the analyses of controversial issues would be done at the upper grades.

## *Skills*

- **Students need communication skills, both the receptive ones of reading, listening and viewing and the expressive ones of writing, speaking and creating.**

Learning requires the active construction of meaning; that is, the learner must create a personal understanding of experience. Thus, communication is essential to learning in any subject area since it involves the interpretation and creation of meaning (Iowa Department of Education, 1989). In social studies the purpose for teaching communication skills is to prepare students for public participation. This is often best accomplished through instruction in real-use situations. In this context, guidance and support in the communication process are kept incidental to the purpose for using it.

- **Students must learn to be critical and creative thinkers, reflective and capable of gathering, organizing, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating information.**

Being able to think critically and creatively allows students to act more effectively on their convictions. Such thinking is often best developed in the give and take discussion of controversial and/or personally relevant issues. The excitement of honing one's thinking skills in serious discussion provides one of the best examples of participatory democracy students can experience in the classroom.

- **Students must learn to apply critical thinking skills to information presented by the media.**

Audio-visual media are among the most pervasive influences on people today. Television no doubt influences many young people as strongly as all the literary media combined. It is vital to thoughtful democratic processes that students assimilate the visual media with understanding. They should be taught to analyze audio-visual arguments with the same skills they are trained to bring to written ones.

- **Students should learn those skills necessary to manage conflicts.**

Peaceful conflict management is an important model of effective democratic government. Democracy is

strongly premised on the belief that arguments can be settled by reasoned debate. Conflict tests that democratic premise. If force prevails in a conflict, then reason loses, and where reason loses, democracy falters. Few things so undermine democratic principles in the eyes of young people as the conclusion that might prevails over reason, which reduces reason to empty argument.

## *Values and Beliefs*

- **Both the formal and informal curriculum should be based on a reasoned commitment to a core of democratic values, ideas and beliefs.**

Democratic values, such as freedom, equality and due process, are the core of our national experience. They should underlie the decisions we make. They can bolster our resolve to achieve national purpose, and they can help unify us as a people. Students should be encouraged and guided in an examination of those values, and in an analysis of how we as a people, have furthered their expression and where we have faltered.

- **Students must be taught to recognize values as such, their own and others.**

Values are at the heart of decision making, but it is often difficult to distinguish a value from a fact unless one is specifically taught to do so. In analyzing situations or disputes, students must be helped to distinguish between verifiable facts and value claims.

- **Students should be involved in the thoughtful examination of ideas, viewpoints, beliefs and values of others that differ from their own.**

By studying these variant values, students learn part of the reasoning behind the decision making of other people. They come to understand rather than fear multicultural diversity.

- **Students must learn to handle the tensions of competing ideas, values, viewpoints and beliefs because potential for conflict is ever present.**

We must teach students to recognize and accommodate reasonable differences. A good model for doing this is our system of checks and balances in which we see the productive results of conflicting points of view. Studying such models allows us to encourage diversity and sensitivity to the views of others. A just society acknowledges, accommodates and grows from these tensions.

## *Social Participation*

- **Classrooms and schools should be places of active democratic participation.**

The participatory process is a vital part of the end product citizenship education seeks. What students learn formally needs to be reinforced by their own experiences in school. As important as what the students learn is the way in which the student learns. A classroom and school that promote democratic participation, even accept the chaos and inefficiency it sometimes seems to produce, are a classroom and school that reinforce ideas with practice.

- **Participatory experiences foster knowledge, skill and affective goals.**

Of the three previously listed characteristics of a "good citizen" the one that most often eludes us as social studies educators is instilling in students the disposition to accept responsibility for self and others. Projects and activities that model or provide students with firsthand knowledge and experience related to particular issues are often effective in fostering these goals. These experiences allow students to make the personal connections that are more difficult to make in studying people and places "long ago" and "far away." Students of all ages should be encouraged and helped to become involved in community service projects, student exchange programs or other experiential programs.

## *Summary*

The authors of this paper have attempted to provide some guidance to school administrators, school boards, social studies teachers, and others regarding the key components of citizenship education and its relationship to social studies education. They have defined citizenship education as the primary purpose of the social studies and provided three key characteristics of the "good citizen" in our society. They have further identified the four essential elements of social studies as knowledge, skills,

values and participation and have provided their philosophical beliefs regarding the necessary components of each of educating the "good citizen." This philosophy will provide the basis for the state's common curriculum goals in social studies, and hopefully, will stimulate considerable thought and discussion among Oregonians as they undertake the challenge of educating their children for tomorrow.

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**Oregon Department of Education**
**700 Pringle Parkway, SE**
**Salem, OR 97310-0290**

**John W. Erickson**
**State Superintendent**
**of Public Instruction**

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Educators serving on the original philosophy discussion committee were: **Richard Cole** (curriculum director, David Douglas SD), **Judy Doyle** (counsulting teacher, Jefferson High School, Portland SD), **John Gaskill** (Social Studies teacher, Ontario Junior High School), **Eleanor Hardt** (Social Studies specialist, Portland SD), **Bob Kane** (vice principal, West Linn High School), **Mary Klages** (elementary teacher, Lafayette Elementary School, Greater Albany SD), **Dale Kurtz** (Social Studies teacher, Riddle High School), **Andra Makler** (teacher preparation program, Lewis and Clark College ), **Cheryl McAdams** (Social Studies teacher, Pilot Butte Junior High School, Bend), **Dan Meddock** (secondary curriculum corrdinator Beaverton SD), **Marilyn Olson** (curriculum specialist, Lane ESD), **Elaine Rector** (Social Studies resource teacher, Corvallis SD), **Doyle Slater** (College of Education, Eastern Oregon State College), **Bob Staples** (Social Studies specialist, Salem-Keizer SD), **Mike Summers** (Social Studies teacher, South Medford High School), **Diane Tourigny** (elementary teacher, Waldport Elementary School), **Marty Turner** (College of Education, Southern Oregon State College), **Jim Ylvisaker** (director of instructional services, Multnomah ESD).

This paper was prepared by **Dick Sanders**, freelance writer, Portland, Oregon, and edited to reflect comments from Oregon educators and other reviewers.

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