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Drawing on contemporary research literature, recently developed curriculum guides, and blue-ribbon reports, this Digest reviews ten contemporary trends in K-12 social studies in the United States.

TREND 1: HISTORY, HISTORY, AND MORE HISTORY

Every major curriculum report in recent years has called for more emphasis on history. Some argue that history is the single discipline that unites all the fields within social studies. Others point out that the humanities--including art, music, and philosophy--can also be taught through historical study.

Instead of focusing almost completely on political, military, and diplomatic events, there is much more concern with social history--how average people lived, worked, and played. Religion, ideas, art and music, entertainment and sports are important aspects of human life and should be included in the study of any historical period. Moreover, history has become more inclusive. Students are learning about all peoples and cultures who have preceded us on this planet. The history of civilizations in Africa, Asia, and the Americas has been combined with the traditional coverage of Western Europe to attempt a true "world" history. U.S. history now includes the contributions of all groups who have built this nation.

Finally, there is an emphasis on genuine understanding of historical events, not just acquisition and memorization of facts. Today's students are learning about broad themes and ideas that have been pervasive throughout history. They are taught to analyze cause and effect, distinguish between fact and opinion, and view historical events from multiple perspectives.

TREND 2: MORE GEOGRAPHY, TOO

Along with history, geography has become a primary foundation of the social studies curriculum. The subject almost disappeared from the K-12 curriculum in the 1960s and 1970s, but has had an amazing resurgence in the past decade--as a separate course and integrated into history and other social studies courses. Geographers and educators have agreed upon the five themes of geography that serve as a framework for geographic understanding and illustrate the relationship between human history and the earth, between time and place. These themes are (1) developing a sense of place; (2) developing locational skills and understanding the significance of location; (3) understanding the interaction between humans and the natural environment through time; (4) understanding the reasons for and the importance of human migration; and (5) understanding world regions and the interrelated impact of cultural and global interdependence. As history has changed to focus more on social history, geography has gone beyond mere memorization of capitals and national resources to become "human geography."

TREND 3: USING LITERATURE TO TEACH SOCIAL STUDIES

This trend has particular implications for elementary social studies, but secondary teachers also are finding that they can enrich their courses with appropriate fiction and non-fiction literature. Student interest is heightened when literature is used as an integral part of a social studies program. Literature includes fiction, biography and autobiography, speeches, diaries, poetry, myths and legends, plays, and even religious literature. Carefully selected literature can make historical periods come to life and provide a flavor of the thoughts and feelings surrounding an historical event. Excerpts from SARAH PLAIN AND TALL can give young students an accurate and dramatic picture of life on the prairie during the mid-1800's. Mary Antin's THE PROMISED LAND,

with its inspiring lines about "...America, America!," can convey the sense of excitement, anticipation, and challenge that faced immigrants to the U.S. And Joseph Logsdon's *THE DIARY OF A SLAVE* provides a chilling portrait of the impact of the Civil War on African American slaves in Louisiana.

TREND 4: FOCUS ON THE MULTICULTURAL NATURE OF AMERICAN SOCIETY

The United States has been called a "nation of nations." More immigrants are coming to this nation today than in the great period of immigration in the late 1800s and early 1900s. But today's new Americans are coming from every nation and cultural region in the world. All Americans, both old and new, belong in the history of this nation. Recognition of this diverse and changing society is associated with the term "multiculturalism." The effective social studies curriculum highlights and celebrates the diversity of our society. A true multicultural perspective presents an accurate picture of all the different groups that comprise our pluralistic society. Students learn about the beliefs and goals that bind us together as a nation. The motto "e pluribus unum" (from many, one) forms the basis of a realistic and beneficial multicultural education.

TREND 5: RENEWED ATTENTION TO WESTERN CIVILIZATION

One of the most difficult tasks facing teachers and curriculum developers today is balancing multiculturalism with the appropriate focus on America's heritage from western Europe, which is also marked by diversity. While it is essential that students should learn about the contributions and heritage of all Americans, they should also learn about the origins of many of the beliefs and principles that have made the United States unique among nations. Without neglecting the important ideas and technological advances of peoples in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas, students are learning about the growth of political and economic freedom that had its roots primarily in western Europe. Moreover, these ideals have become a model for governments throughout the world. Recognizing that the underlying principles of our political system have a western European base is just as important as, for example, giving credit to the Chinese for inventing paper or to the people of India for developing zero in arithmetic. The new social studies curriculum seems to be heading for a blend of global multiculturalism, including emphasis on western civilization.

TREND 6: RENEWED ATTENTION TO ETHICS AND VALUES

Until the late 1950s and early 1960s, many social studies textbooks had chapters where values such as honesty or punctuality were emphasized. This attention to values changed during the late 1960s and 1970s to one of values clarification or even "value-free" social studies, where students were encouraged to examine their beliefs, but no attempt was made to guide them toward a predetermined set of values. Today's social studies programs are beginning to encourage students to examine the role of the individual in society and the responsibilities and behaviors that lead to a just and fair

nation. Sometimes referred to as "civic virtue," these qualities include a sense of fair play, a respect for minority rights, tolerance of other beliefs, and a desire to actively participate in a democratic society. These values are embedded in the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

TREND 7: INCREASED ATTENTION TO THE ROLE OF RELIGION

Like ethics and values, religion almost disappeared from the social studies curriculum in the past 25 years. Ignoring the role and significance of religion throughout history and in the contemporary world leaves a massive gap that prevents students from fully understanding the past or present. Many major historical events or issues such as the Crusades, the half-century of struggle and war between India and Pakistan, and today's bitter conflicts in the former Yugoslavia are based on religion.

In today's classrooms, students learn about the origins and growth of the Muslim faith and its close relationship to both Judaism and Christianity. They learn that, while the Pilgrims fled religious persecution, they were just as intolerant of other beliefs in New England. Teaching about the impact of religion in history and contemporary society is closely linked to multicultural and ethical education. Knowing about, comparing, and understanding religious beliefs is a key element in developing tolerance and a comprehension of one of the primary motivating factors in human affairs.

TREND 8: ATTENTION TO CONTEMPORARY AND CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

As with religion, many textbook publishers and curriculum developers have avoided controversial issues. This is a barrier to the development of critical thinking and decision making necessary for effective participation in a democratic society. The HISTORY-SOCIAL SCIENCE FRAMEWORK FOR CALIFORNIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS says: "History without controversy is not good history."

One way to help students deal with controversial topics is to examine an issue through the eyes of all individuals or groups who were involved. Seeing the arrival of Columbus or the arrival of Spanish or English settlers through the eyes of indigenous peoples of the Americas is an example. Examining the controversial decision to colonize the Philippines and comparing the protests that erupted in the streets with those related to opposition to America's role in Vietnam can help students understand contemporary events in the U.S. and other nations. An excellent approach is to use primary documents such as newspaper accounts, speeches, diaries, and autobiographies.

TREND 9: COVERING ISSUES IN DEPTH

If students are to acquire the understanding and skills necessary for effective participation as citizens, they must explore topics in depth. Trying to teach all of world or U.S. history in a single year is both impossible and ineffective. The perspective and thoughtful judgment that should be a primary goal of social studies requires sufficient

time for students to explore topics in depth, analyze a variety of literature and other sources of information, and discuss issue-oriented questions with other students and the teacher. Students who are taught the in-depth approach learn more information, enhance their ability to relate knowledge to other situations, and enjoy their social studies classes more. More important, they perform well on standardized tests. Many states and local districts are dividing their U.S. and world history classes into two- or three-year courses, providing more time for student and teachers to concentrate on fewer topics. Others concentrate on major themes or issues in building their courses and units.

TREND 10: WRITING, WRITING, AND MORE WRITING

Student writing is the most effective way to improve general student achievement. Quite simply, students who write more learn more. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the social studies, where the thoughtful deliberation involved in writing leads to enhanced creativity and helps students connect reading, writing, and other subject areas.

Writing is one of the best ways to utilize the in-depth approach to social studies. Effective writing assignments require sufficient time to both explore a topic prior to writing and discuss it with classmates and teachers as part of the evaluation process. Group writing assignments have been effectively used as part of social studies. Many teachers keep "portfolios" of student writing to help expand assessment techniques.

REFERENCES AND ERIC RESOURCES

The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are in the ERIC system and are available in microfiche and paper copy from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, VA 22153-2852. Telephone numbers are 800-443-3742 and 703-404-1400. Entries followed by an EJ number are annotated monthly in CIJE (CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION), which is available in most libraries. EJ documents are not available through EDRS; however, they can be located in the journal section of many libraries by using the bibliographic information provided below.

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