Augmenting Novice Teachers’ Social Studies Content Knowledge: An Opportunity to Explore and Align Available Resources

Submitted by Dr. Melissa Parks
Stetson University

Submission Date: March 8, 2017
Submitted To: Florida Council for the Social Studies Trends and Issues E-Journal
Augmenting Novice Teachers’ Social Studies Content Knowledge: An Opportunity to Explore and Align Available Resources

Best practices in elementary school teaching mandate teachers meet the needs of diverse students by creating engaging, challenging and hands-on learning experiences. It is essential students have opportunities to collect experiences and skills that will enable them to become productive members of society. In social studies, when students have opportunities to construct knowledge, to express themselves by explaining their ideas, and to study topics that have some significance beyond the classroom, they are more likely to care about learning which may lead to increased student achievement (King, Newman & Carmichael, 2009).

This type of authentic learning includes a variety of experiences intended to promote student achievement by engaging students in real world tasks related to state standards. Authentic, experiential learning, such as field trips, is beneficial to both students and teachers. Field trips allow students to engage with concepts and activities not readily accessible in the classroom. Students participating in field trips develop positive attitudes toward the content areas on which the trip is based (Benhrendt & Franklin, 2014). Jung & Tonso (2006) suggest teachers, too, benefit from field trips in multiple ways: engaging content knowledge, accessing professionals in the field, correcting of teacher misconceptions, practicing hands-on inquiry-based instruction, and opportunities to learn about collecting classroom resources. Out of classroom experiences stimulate students’ natural curiosity by creating memorable, hands-on learning which is essential to capture and solidify interest in content areas (Bulunuz & Jarrett, 2010).

Alongside authentic, off-campus field trips, it is essential teachers supplement the experience with children’s literature and texts. Children’s literature has long been used in elementary reading class, but with the implementation of Common Core Standards, the alignment of literature and content areas, such as social studies has been on the rise. The standards require students to read stories and literature, as well as more complex texts, that provide facts and background knowledge in content areas and stipulate students use that information to think critically and problem solve scenarios posed by the teacher (Common Core, 2016).

Using a variety of children’s literature has the potential to help children develop important understandings of social studies content and gain enhanced perspectives of their worlds (Crawford & Roberts, 2016). The National Council for the Social Studies implore educators to provide a variety of materials and experiences that create learning experiences that cross subject matter boundaries (2009). As part of the evolving professional identity, it is necessary for novice teachers to understand and experience how to find and evaluate resources that meet the needs of their students as they create authentic, experiential learning opportunities.

The assignment outlined below presents an opportunity for undergraduates to work to integrate literature, social studies content, field trips and supplemental material. The task was created as part of an undergraduate methods course, but could also be used with practicing teachers working in collaboration with experienced teachers to brainstorm, implement and reflect on the experiences to improve, not only quality of instruction, but quality of the learning opportunities created.
The Task

1. Select and read one of the recommended social studies trade book from the National Council for the Social Studies (http://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/notable2015_0.pdf)
2. Create a compelling, entertaining, and informative 15-20-minute presentation of the selected social studies content using the text as the main source of information.

Getting Started:

1. **Choose a content area(s):** Economics, Geography, American History, Florida History, or Geography or Civics & Government. These topics align with Social Studies k-5 Standards and include the ten themes of social studies outlined by the National Council for the Social Studies; Culture and Cultural Diversity, Power, Authority, and Government, Time, Continuity and Change, Production, Distribution, and Consumption, People, Places, and Environment, Science, Technology, and Society, Individual Development and Identity, Global Connections, Individuals, Groups, & Institutions and Civic Ideals and Practices.
2. **Choose a trade book. Read it.** Create a list of 5 social studies facts, focused on your identified standards, drawn from the reading. These will be presented to the group.
3. **Identify applicable standards.** Identify the standard(s) that will be addressed by instruction of text, field trip site, and online resources. Challenge seekers, you may elect to align more standards per content area.
4. **Research and select a field trip site** (real or virtual) that compliments the novel and provides an authentic learning experience.
5. **Identify one online content-based resource** that supports instruction of the topic (select from reputable sources)
6. **Identify differentiation strategy.** Explain how some portion of this book, field trip, or online resource can be differentiated to meet a diverse student population.
7. **Create formative assessment** to be used in conjunction with at least two of the components (book, field trip, or online resource).
8. **Create a presentation** to share outlining your proposed learning experiences. Acceptable ideas include, but are not limited to; graphic organizer, video presentation (Knovio or Powtoon), Glogster, Padlet or traditional paper & pencil poster.

For the Presentation:

1. **Engage the participants with a hook that introduces your topic.** Share your list of 5 facts.
2. **Introduce the book & provide an overview.** Briefly summarize the book show how the facts were extracted from the text.
3. **Explain the chosen field trip site.** Explain how a trip to this site is warranted by the standards and linked to the text you selected.
4. **Explain the chosen supplemental content site (#5 from above).** Explain how this resource supports the standards and linked to the text you selected.
5. **Share the differentiation strategy selected & justify.**
6. **Create formative assessment.** Present the assessment and justify why you created it.
7. **Review & wrap up. Summarize your seminar. Ask for questions.**
Resources


