



Ready-to-Teach Feature

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Feature Editor's Notes:

With ever-present pressures to “cover more content” and prepare students for standardized test mastery, elementary teachers are often encouraged to integrate social studies content into their reading, writing, and math lessons. Yet, unless teachers receive specific instruction on how to do this, the results (for teachers and students) can be disappointing. In the following feature article, "Social Studies and Literacy Integration: Making the Most of Our Teaching," authors Andrea M. Kent and Jennifer L. Simpson identify key literacy concepts that social studies teachers should understand, and offer two “ready-to-teach” lessons to improve students' literacy skills and social studies content comprehension.

Social Studies and Literacy Integration:

Making the Most of Our Teaching

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Abstract

Increasing reading achievement has become a nationwide priority resulting from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2005 (Dole, 2004). Due to this emphasis, coupled with the fact that an elementary school's success is generally not correlated with test scores in social studies, teachers of the elementary grades find limited time to teach the social studies curriculum. However, in effort to combat this tragedy, elementary educators should be taught and encouraged to integrate content area teaching with literacy strategies. Using the appropriate

tools, teachers can meet both social studies standards and reading standards while engaging students in meaningful ways.

Introduction

There has been a steady reduction in the amount of time teachers spend teaching social studies since the revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2000 (NCSS, 2007). This decline is most profoundly noticed at the elementary level, as teachers are forced to spend much of their instructional time teaching literacy skills and strategies. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) (2007) has stated its concerns on the lack of social studies being taught. While elementary educators face this challenge, it is important that the teaching of social studies does not get overlooked or ignored. Rather, it is imperative that teachers integrate the teaching of reading with content area text, so students are provided with quality instruction in both areas.

Given the definition published by the NCSS, teaching social studies in elementary schools is arguably essential to the elementary curriculum. However, the emphasis placed on reading instruction has impacted the amount of time teachers have to devote to content area teaching, specifically the teaching of social studies (McCall, 2006; Olwell & Raphael, 2006). Many states do not include social studies as part of the “high-stakes testing,” and if they do, teachers tend to simply drill the content in order to save time (Brewer, 2006; McCall, 2006). The pressure on schools to improve reading scores is so great that many lose sight of meaningful content area teaching. However, it is possible to integrate both literacy and social studies instruction in meaningful ways in order to meet the challenge of increasing both reading achievement and content knowledge.

Identifying the Challenges

When integrating literacy and social studies, there are several challenges that must be addressed. To begin with, many elementary teachers are not prepared to take on the methodological challenges of teaching social studies (Olwell & Raphael, 2006). To integrate literacy instruction with social studies requires more than simply giving teachers content area literacy materials such as trade books and activities. Professional development must be incorporated in order to increase teachers’ knowledge of the content and help them learn to use resources to meet literacy goals and social studies goals simultaneously. This professional development must focus on making teachers feel competent to integrate their teaching in this way.

Additionally, teachers should follow the NCSS components of powerful teaching. According to *The Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (1994), teaching that is meaningful to students should include teaching that (a) integrates concepts into practical action, (b) is value-based, (c) challenges student thinking, and (d) promotes active thinking by encouraging the construction of new understanding. Teachers should be conscious of these characteristics in order to integrate them into lessons to improve the quality of social studies teaching.

Teachers must also be aware of the challenges that arise as students attempt to read and understand content area text. These challenges include (a) obtaining knowledge of specialized

vocabulary, (b) assessing students' wide range of background knowledge, (c) implementing study and memory techniques, (d) possessing strategies needed for reading expository texts, (e) assessing students' abilities to read varying readability levels within a single text, (f) understanding the necessary level of self-monitoring, (g) holding multiple concepts in memory while evaluating for importance, (h) knowing sources and their reliability, and (i) having the necessary motivation in reading and writing to learn (Allen, 2004; Busch & Espin, 2003; Harmon, Hendrick, & Wood, 2005; Massey & Heafner, 2004).

The National Reading Panel Report and Social Studies

In 1997, the National Reading Panel was convened and charged with providing a report to facilitate effective reading instruction in schools (NIFL, 2000). This panel researched five areas of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. Educators of the elementary grades must be acutely aware of these five components and should not only teach them during time designated for reading instruction but should also integrate them into content area teaching, specifically the teaching of social studies.

Phonemic Awareness

Using social studies text as a vehicle to teach phonemic awareness allows for incorporating the teaching of content knowledge with phonemic awareness activities.

“Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with individual sounds in spoken words” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 2). Because phonemic awareness is the strongest predictor of success in learning to read, it is an essential component of reading instruction in the early grades (Adams, 1990). As oral language plays a major role in phonemic awareness, it is imperative that students are given ample opportunity to converse with their peers as well as adults (Barone, Hardman, & Taylor, 2006). The social studies curriculum makes this conversation a natural part of the early childhood classroom. Using social studies themes and topics, students also need to be engaged in the singing of songs, chanting of rhymes, and word play. In addition, providing students with meaningful reading and writing activities regarding social studies content are also essential.

Phonics

Carefully selecting literacy materials to teach social studies standards, while providing phonics instruction, can be both engaging and powerful. Phonics is the relationship between letters and sounds. Students need to know and understand the systematic relationships between the written letters and spoken sounds (Armbruster et al., 2001). For example, social studies trade books that have a repetitive initial sound or vowel pattern may be used to teach both content and letter sounds. Along with decoding strategies, phonics instruction includes systematic and explicit instruction in consonant letters and sounds, vowel letters and sounds, consonant blends, vowel and consonant digraphs, and phonograms (Barone et al., 2006). Poetry related to the content area can be a powerful source for teaching both content and phonics. Because this instruction is imperative in early readers and with older struggling readers, selecting text based on social studies standards and noticing the relevant phonics principals that can be emphasized makes social studies instruction doubly powerful.

Vocabulary

Learning social studies vocabulary is critically linked to comprehending social studies content. Vocabulary refers to words that one must know in order to communicate effectively. Oral Vocabulary refers to words one uses when speaking or listening. Reading vocabulary refers to words one recognizes or uses in print. In order to discuss specific social studies topics, students must be able to use the vocabulary correctly and have an understanding of the terms.

When reading social studies texts, vocabulary is critical to comprehending. Therefore, as part of social studies vocabulary instruction, teachers must provide meaningful opportunities for students to learn and use the words they are studying. Journaling about social studies content, having a social studies word wall, and implementing the technique of readers' theater are all meaningful activities that enhance the use of social studies vocabulary. Ultimately, a reader will not truly understand the social studies content without knowing the meaning of most of the words in the text (Armbruster et al., 2001; Blachowicz & Fischer, 2002).

Effective social studies vocabulary instruction offers rich information about words and their usage; it also provides many varied opportunities for students to think about and use words as well as further develops students' language comprehension and production (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). Students can learn social studies vocabulary indirectly by engaging in oral language activities related to social studies standards such as a reenactment of the Civil War, by participating in read alouds in which the teacher reads trade books or textbook material out loud and the students engage in meaningful conversations about the content, and by reading extensively a variety of genre related to social studies topics on their own. Direct vocabulary word instruction should include providing students with specific word instruction and also teaching word-learning strategies (Armbruster et al., 2001). When teaching social studies vocabulary, students must be directly and explicitly taught content area words coupled with opportunities to integrate the new vocabulary in daily life. For example, when studying a unit on patriotism, the teacher focuses on word parts in order to uncover the meaning of words in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Fluency

Social studies text can be used to enhance students' abilities to read accurately, quickly, and fluently. Being able to read fluently is important because it provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. If a student does not have to concentrate on decoding the words, he can focus attention on the text's meaning (Armbruster et al., 2001; Rasinski, 2003).

Several instructional approaches are related to fluency including repeated oral, shared, independent, and small group reading. Repeated readings can be implemented with poetry that is centered on social studies content. Teachers can utilize Reader's Theater that correlates with social studies standards to implement repeated reading to promote fluency as well. As fluency improves, content knowledge should also improve due to the repetition of material. Shared reading of text with social studies content is another effective teaching strategy for allowing students the opportunities to repeatedly read a text. In shared reading, the teacher models the fluent reading of an enlarged text and gradually encourages the students to practice fluent reading. This gradual release allows the students several opportunities to read the text with teacher support. Repeated reading should take place often in elementary classrooms so that

students can receive feedback and/or guidance from the teacher, develop fluency, and learn content (Armbruster et al., 2001; Rasinski, 2003).

Increasing the amount of independent reading students engage in can also further develop fluency (Armbruster et al., 2001; Allington, 2001). This includes reading a variety of genre related to social studies themes. For students to benefit from independent readings, teachers must provide texts at their independent reading level and assist during independent reading times. Therefore, careful selection of social studies texts is essential.

Providing small group guided readings using social studies related materials is an appropriate instructional method for teaching reading strategies and enhancing content learning. Meeting with students individually in reading conferences is also effective (Allington, 2001; Mere, 2005; Miller, 2002; Taberski, 2002). To increase fluency, social studies texts, such as poems and trade-books, are the appropriate instructional vehicle.

Comprehension

Essential comprehension strategies. Comprehension is one of the major challenges to understanding content area text. To effectively comprehend social studies texts, one must acquire and utilize interrelated strategies while reading (Alabama Department of Education, 1998a; Alabama Department of Education, 1998b; Beck & McKeown, 1999; Cooper, Lipson, & Pikulski, 2001; Fielding & Pearson, 1994; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Goudvis & Harvey, 2000). Strategies are specific procedures that guide students to become aware of how well they comprehend as they read (Dole, Duffy, Pearson, & Roehler, 1990).

As reading is the ongoing process of evolving thinking, Keene and Zimmerman (1997) identified comprehension strategies that should be modeled and practiced with students from kindergarten and through twelfth grade using a variety of texts, including those related to content. These comprehension strategies include (a) making connections, (b) asking questions, (c) visualizing, (d) inferring, (e) determining importance, and (f) synthesizing. Making connections occurs when students bridge their schema regarding their lives, other texts, and the world with what they are reading. Questioning takes place as the reader engages in making predictions, then clarifying and confirming their thinking. Visualizing happens as a reader creates mental pictures based on what is being read. Inferring requires that a reader combine elements from the text and engage in forward thinking to make a judgment, discern a theme, or make a prediction. A reader determines what is important when he or she is reading, especially nonfiction, as the reader differentiates between the key ideas and less important information. Synthesizing is the process of combining new information with existing knowledge to form an original idea or interpretation. Proficient readers use these strategies simultaneously, automatically, and flexibly as they are applicable in a variety of reading situations, including reading social studies text (Routman, 2003).

The Real World

The following scenarios illustrate powerful social studies and literacy teaching that meets the challenges of teaching content and standards simultaneously. For a list of literature resources that can be used in integrating read-alouds in social studies, see the website [National Council for Social Studies list of Notable Trade Books for Young People](#) for additional information.

First-Grade Social Studies Lesson (Phonics, Phonemic Awareness, Vocabulary, & Comprehension)

Planning the Lesson

Mrs. Smith, a first-grade teacher, planned to use the book *F is for Flag* by Wendy C. Lewison during a unit on patriotism to help her students learn about the United States, the American flag, and U.S. citizenship. Knowing the importance of reading aloud across the curriculum, she chose this book as a read aloud to teach the social studies content to develop the students' literacy skills and to emphasize the five essential components of reading instruction identified by the No Child Left Behind Act 2000, (Armbruster et al., 2001) Mrs. Smith wanted to use this book to teach the social studies content, along with reinforcing as many of the essential components of reading as well.

As Mrs. Smith planned her lesson, she first determined which vocabulary terms were essential to the understanding of the text. She identified the following key words: pledge, country, flag, and states, which led to the concept of using the context within the text to gain meaning of a word with the word. Teaching students to use the context to determine word meaning is an important strategy for vocabulary development, and Mrs. Smith wanted to introduce students to the four categories of natural contexts (Beck et al., 2002). She then decided that the comprehension strategy of determining importance was a perfect fit for this text and chose a simple graphic organizer (web) to chart concepts about the American Flag. She decided to have the following categories on the web to help the students organize the new information: (a) places we see it, (b) nicknames, (c) what it stands for, (d) features, and (e) when we see it. These categories would stem from the center of the web entitled The American Flag.

Mrs. Smith extended the lesson emphasizing critical literary skills. She directed students to orally segment the vocabulary words from the lesson and print the alphabet on a sheet of paper with a blank for each letter. She let the students work in groups and instructed them to think of a word from their unit on patriotism that began with each letter of the alphabet. The purpose of this activity was to reinforce beginning sounds while reviewing the content.

Teaching the Lesson

To begin the lesson, Mrs. Smith activated students' prior knowledge about flags. She asked questions like (a) What is a flag? (b) What are flags used for? (c) Where do we see flags? After a brief discussion, she told the students that they would be learning about our country's flag as they began their study on patriotism. She then introduced the title and illustrations to the students. She asked the students to listen for words that described the flag. As she read the story aloud, she stopped to discuss specific vocabulary—flag, country, state, pledge, and United States of America—and wrote words on their class chart labeled “patriotism.” She explained that a pledge was a promise and that many times context clues in the text reveal the meaning of words. Next, Mrs. Smith and the students discussed what they had learned about the flag to determine what information was most important. She showed the class the web chart, the web title, and subcategories and asked them to focus on the important details as she re-read the book. She stopped to model her thinking about the facts, to add the facts to the chart, and then to guide students to identify important information through the rest of the text. Mrs. Smith then read over the words listed on their word chart and asked students to orally segment the words as she read

them. She then explained the follow-up activity by identifying words from their unit and putting students in groups to find words with the same beginning sounds. After checking their words, she closed the lesson by bringing them back as a whole group, asking what they had learned about patriotism and how the flag hanging in their classroom could help remind them to be good citizens.

Follow-Up Activity

As a follow-up activity, the students will participate in a shared reading lesson using the song *Grand Old Flag*. The teacher will write the song on a large piece of chart paper so that all students can clearly see the text and read through it—first to model fluent reading and then to teach the song’s words. The teacher and students will then read the song together several times to practice reading fluently and discuss the meaning of the song and how it relates to what they have learned previously about the American flag.

Throughout this discussion, the teacher will make connections with the texts they have read in their unit on patriotism. After their discussion, the teacher and students will review phonics/word study elements previously studied by highlighting high-frequency words as well as words with the short and long *a* vowel sounds. This follow-up activity will allow the students more practice with fluency, comprehension, and phonics skills as they develop social studies content.

Third-Grade Social Studies (Vocabulary, Comprehension, & Fluency)

Planning the Lesson

Mrs. Jones wanted her third-grade students to understand the Civil Rights Movement and felt that it was important for students to understand the struggles many people faced years ago. She planned on celebrating Black History Month in her classroom by using several read alouds and shared reading materials to aid students’ understanding of important historical events and focus on literacy development. Her goal was to develop the five essential components of reading instruction identified by the No Child Left Behind Act 2000, (Armbruster et al., 2001). Mrs. Jones began with the book *Almost to Freedom* by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson and identified these vocabulary words: scurries, slaves, overseer, and freedom. She wrote the words and definitions for “scurries,” “slaves,” and “freedom” on index cards and then wrote a sentence on the back of the card using each word. She skipped the word “overseer” because she wanted to teach this word within the context of the story. After reading through the story, she went through the text and created questions on sticky notes to model the strategy and placed them on the appropriate pages of the text so that she could use them while modeling the questioning strategy.

Some of the questions written were (a) Who is the little girl? (b) Is she afraid? (c) Is she going for a boat ride? (d) Who is telling this story? (e) What is an overseer? (f) Why is he so mean? (g) Why does the little girl have to work so hard? (h) Are they slaves? (i) Can they buy their freedom? (j) Why did she get in trouble for asking how to spell her name? (j) Is Miz Rachel her mother? (k) Will she be sold? She decided that she would allow the students to generate questions through the remainder of the text to allow guided practice with the comprehension strategy.

Since the language in the story was different from what the students were accustomed to hearing in other texts, Mrs. Jones pointed this out, explaining that the author used a strong Southern dialect. She practiced reading the text a few times to make sure that she modeled fluent reading.

Teaching the Lesson

To begin the lesson, Mrs. Jones told the students that they would be learning more about the struggles of Black people in America long ago and that the lesson would also allow them more practice using the questioning strategy for comprehension. Mrs. Jones introduced the lesson vocabulary by showing the students the index cards she had prepared, one at a time. She read the word to the students, had them repeat the word, gave them the definition of the word, and she used it in a sentence. They had a brief discussion of the words, and a few students created and read aloud a sentence using one of the vocabulary words.

Mrs. Jones then told the students that the story words had a very strong Southern dialect and gave examples of words such as “havin’,” “bein’,” “pickin’,” “massas (masters),” and “‘cept.” She told the students that the text was difficult to read but modeled fluent reading for them. Mrs. Jones then showed the students the cover of the book and used the think-aloud strategy to model the questions as she looked at the picture, read the title, and recorded her questions on a chart. The chart had the word “Questioning” written across the top and “We read the story *Almost to Freedom* by V.M. Nelson.” The chart was divided into three sections labeled before, during, and after. Mrs. Jones recorded questions from the cover and title of the book under the section labeled before. She then continued reading pages one through eight, stopping at predetermined points to record the questions under the section of the chart labeled “during.”

As she continued reading the story, she guided students by stopping every few pages for students to share their thoughts and questions. At the end of the story, Mrs. Jones asked the students if they had questions and these were recorded under the section labeled “after.” They reread their questions and put an “a” after the question if it was answered in the story and an “i” after the question if they inferred the answer. Mrs. Jones told the students that many times they would have questions not answered directly from the story. They discussed doing further research on the author, subject, and ways that characters were treated unfairly. She told the students that understanding slavery and the struggles of African Americans is very important to the history of our country and read the author’s note at the end of the book on the *Underground Railroad*.

Mrs. Jones closed the lesson by reviewing vocabulary words and telling the students that they would continue to learn more about slavery and the struggles of African Americans throughout the month. She reminded them to use the questioning strategy as they read independently to help them better comprehend the text.

Follow-Up Activity

As a follow up activity, the students will participate in a shared reading lesson of the poem *Harriet Tubman* by Eloise Greenfield. They will read the poem several times after the teacher has modeled fluent reading of the poem; the teacher will also make connections to the text read the previous day. This will allow students more fluency and comprehension practice and extend teaching important social studies concepts.

Meeting the Challenge

The emphasis on reading achievement in national, state, and local school districts has become a high priority as evidenced by the revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2000 (Dole, 2004). Meeting the challenge of integrating content instruction with literacy can be overwhelming for teachers and students. However, teachers must incorporate reading strategy instruction in content area teaching to meet the standards in both areas. Students must learn techniques to read and comprehend through content area text. Integrated content instruction and literacy strategies can build students' ability to assess existing content knowledge, support and monitor comprehension, and evaluate, extend, and transfer content knowledge (Allen, 2004). Through these efforts, teachers can develop future leaders who are both literate and good citizens.

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