

Title of Session: SS Forum - New Trends, Ideas, and Resources in Teaching Social Studies

Moderator: Michael Hutchison

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BJ: Welcome to tonight's Social Studies Forum

MichaelH: Hi, everyone

BJ: our discussion leader is Michael Hutchison

MichaelH: As BJ said, Welcome to tonight's social studies forum

BJ hands the virtual floor over to Michael

MichaelH: We usually start out with introductions, and tonight's topic is very special...

KathyMP: Hi Michael

MichaelH: so, would everyone like to tell us who you are, where you're located, and what you teach?

MeridithE: Meridith, Houston Tx, Pre-Service teacher at University of Houston

BJ: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania and a helpdesk volunteer for Tapped In

MichaelH is a technology facilitator in southwestern Indiana

KathyMP: Kathy, Frederick Maryland, World History 7th grade

JeniG: I am a pre-service teacher in the PUMA program at University of Houston. I am working at South Houston Elementary in Houston, Texas.

CindyBl: Good evening everyone, I am a British elementary teacher working in Mexico City

KyteriaR: Preservice teacher at the University of Houston

TylerP: I'm a full-time graduate student at Gannon Univ. in Erie, PA working toward my degree in Ed.Comp.Tech. I have a secondary ed. Social studies PA Cert.

MichaelH . o O (Tyler is one of the "chosen ones"... social studies AND technology... !)

TylerP laughs out loud

MichaelH: Tyler, I started as a social studies teacher, too... 25 years... and went to the technology end of things

TylerP: very interesting

MichaelH: Everyone ready to hear about tonight's topic....

KathyMP: I'm working on my masters in technology too. So there is hope to get out of teaching!

MichaelH: ???

MichaelH: Tonight's topic is "near and dear" to my heart...

MichaelH: we're going to look at new trends, ideas, and resources in teaching social studies...

MichaelH: and it's great we have so many pre-service teachers with us tonight...

JeniG: thank you

MichaelH: because we're going to learn a lot from what they know

MichaelH: first, I wondered what you guys... especially you pre-service teachers... see as some of the major challenges and issues you face in the classroom,

MichaelH: you know, making lessons, working in the classroom, that sort of thing...

JeniG: I worry most about time constraints

MichaelH: Jeni do you mean as far as the amount of time in a period, school day, teaching experience?

MeridithE: I worry about losing engagement from the students and being marked as "boring"

MichaelH agrees

CindyBl: time too, as in fitting in all the requirements of the curriculum

MichaelH: Let's look at Jen's issues, first...

MichaelH: Jen, did you mean time as far as the period you teach?

KathyMP: I worry about trying to make sure students see the whole picture, the relevance

MichaelH: Kathy, that 's a good point, also

JeniG: All of the above...no really, mostly getting all the curriculum fulfilled in a memorable way.

KyteriaR: well, although I have not started teaching yet I have heard a lot about making lesson plans and planning. I think technology is really making life in the classroom much easier. In addition, I was also concerned about creating lessons that were interesting to the students

JeniG: You should probably know that I'm EC-4 which is almost always interdisciplinary

MichaelH: Ok, Jen, what sorts of things are they teaching you to prepare for teaching to combat those problems

MichaelH: Kyteria, do your supervising teacher/school require you to show them lessons prior to you actually teaching them?

JeniG: They teach us to be flexible, to keep a sense of humor, to get as much done as humanly possible and to collaborate.

MichaelH: that makes sense, Jen

MichaelH: how about state standards

KyteriaR: yes, we are required to write detailed lesson plans. Most of our lesson plans are 2 pages long.

JeniG: They are also teaching us many organization methods and how to manage the standards within them

KathyMP: Getting it all done is a major problem because everything keeps getting shoved into social studies but they take nothing away. Our curriculums are huge

MichaelH: Kyteria, do the lesson plans go to your supervising teacher? University supervisor?

MeridithE: The standards that we have to go by are the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

MichaelH knows a little about that...

JeniG smiles at Michael

KyteriaR: yes every thing must be submitted to my teacher

MichaelH: Ok, you guys have identified a lot of good problems. As you know, I'm a veteran teacher... how do you plan to solve the challenges you mention?

MeridithE: here is a link for the Social Studies TEKS to look at when you have a chance
<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter113/index.html>

MichaelH: Thanks, Meridith

MeridithE: welcome

CindyBl: I think Jen's comment about collaboration is key

MichaelH: Meridith, how do you show you're aligning your lessons the TEKS standards

CindyBl: working as a team with other teachers

CindyBl: in the same area

MeridithE: align the TEKS into our lesson plans through the objectives

MichaelH wonders about collaboration across the curriculum....

MichaelH: and then the result is that the success/failure of your objectives is measured by state standardized testing?

BJ . o O (in an ideal world)

KathyMP: I think it's important to narrow the curriculum down, If we try to teach it all, we just confuse the students and leave them with nothing

MichaelH: ok, Kathy, let's talk about how we might "narrow" the curriculum

JeniG: In our PUMA program, collaboration has become key to success. If you're not in constant touch with classmates, you are probably lost.

MichaelH: and in the classroom you teach in?

MeridithE: yes, the test is named the TAKS

MichaelH: Meridith... if the students don't score well on the TAKS, how are teachers dealt with?

KathyMP: Well a lot of time our standards all come from a few basic standards. If we teach the basics well sometimes we have chance to get to the more specifics

KyteriaR: I agree with you Kathy. It is soooooo much on the TEKS curriculum. It is hard to cover everything, Often times you have to integrate several teks into one lesson.

MichaelH: is that fair?

KathyMP: to who the students or to us?

MichaelH: or realistic

MichaelH: both

MeridithE: if the students do not pass the TAKS, they will have to stay back a year and not move on with their classmates... as far as the teachers go... I bet it depends on how many students do not pass as to what happens

MichaelH: in other words... ok... you guys who are in Texas, how about this...

MichaelH: what if the standards fairly well ignore the Alamo?

KathyMP: It depends on the standards, I have never spent one class period just on one standard, I may teach them over a few days but always more than one

JeniG: It's really not that difficult to cover all the TEKS if you use integrated lessons that include TEKS from many different disciplines, especially in Elementary.

MichaelH: or for my friend from Maryland, if they ignore Ft. McHenry....

MeridithE: I don't think that they ignore the Alamo at all....

KathyMP: ahh you can always find ways to throw in that stuff that is important to your specific area

CindyBl: think how many wars we have to cover in the British curriculum!

MichaelH: Meridith... just curious, how do the standards address it?

KathyMP: we teach a timeline, or using historical resources to teach it

JeniG: The TEKS are pretty broad and leave room for interpretation. Thus, if you want to focus on the Alamo or Ft McHenry, just find a TEKS that supports the lesson that you're planning. Then cross it off of your list.

KyteriaR: That's right Jen, a lot of the TEKS can be integrated together.

MeridithE: let me check

SusanR joined the room.

KathyMP: I cover, political systems, econ systems, geography, Greece through the renaissance and the Latin America past and present

CindyBl: do your schools have pre-set units with the standards already allocated

KathyMP: in a semester

MichaelH waves to Susan

CindyBl: otherwise we as teachers are reinventing the wheel all the time

SusanR waves back

KyteriaR: I noticed how broad the TEKS was. I guess we can pick topics of choice to teach in our classroom, as long as it fits under a specific TEKS objective.

MeridithE: this is what the TEK says for the Alamo 3) History. The student understands the causes and effects of the Texas Revolution, the Republic of Texas, and the annexation of Texas to the United States. The student is expected to:

MeridithE: (A) analyze the causes, major events, and effects of the Texas Revolution, including the battles of the Alamo and San Jacinto;

MichaelH: that's pretty broad

JeniG: Exactly!

MichaelH: Meridith, how do you cover the Alamo in the classroom?

MeridithE: well, Texas History is dealt with in the 4th grade primarily

MichaelH: and what grade are you teaching?

KathyMP: but being broad is also part of the problem, it allows for soooo much teacher discretion there is no saying what the students learn, or what we "narrow" down for them

MeridithE: the teacher has the ability of presenting the information as he/she wants as long as their is a TEK to match the information being presented

MeridithE: very true

MeridithE: I am thinking about kindergarten

MichaelH: do you all feel that your ability to teach is being somewhat constricted by state/local standards?

MeridithE: yes

KyteriaR: I enjoy teaching first and second grade social studies

MichaelH: is that correct or fair... (about the standards constricting you..)

KathyMP: I don't I just think they could be more practical and more beneficial if the were realistic to our time frame

JeniG: I feel that the TEKS help to guide curriculum. They are restricting in some ways, because it's required. But mostly, they give a teacher fuel for lessons.

MichaelH: why can't you provide your own fuel?

MichaelH is not a fan of standards

KathyMP: Because I would spend all my time talking about things that are just cool to me but might miss major key points the student need to understand future lessons

JeniG: That's a fair question. I could provide my own. But isn't it nice that someone else sat down and mapped that out for us so that we can focus our energy on preparing students to compete in the world of knowledge?

KathyMP: laughs out loud, I can tell Michael

KyteriaR: I think that we could provide our own fuel for lessons, at least for social studies. When ever I think of a lesson for social studies, I pick topics that are meaning to the students.

KathyMP: I take the standard and make my own lesson and how I think I can explain it to the students best so I don't feel restricted at all

MichaelH: Kyteria, can you give us an example of something like that you've done recently...

KyteriaR: well I just started in the teacher prep program. I have not taught a social studies lesson yet. However, I am required to teach a social studies lesson this semester for second grade.

JeniG: I can give you an example

MichaelH: ok, what would you like to develop a lesson on... maybe we can consider that...

MichaelH: go ahead Jen

JeniG: I am helping my site-based teacher improve her students understanding of summarizing a story

KyteriaR: I would like to probably focus a lesson on historical people.

JeniG: I came up with a standards based lesson plan in which I simply support my objectives for the lesson as something they need to learn then write the lesson as I see best.

KathyMP: Here is another example

MichaelH: Jen, what area of social studies is your lesson about?

MichaelH: go ahead Kathy...

KathyMP: Its an anniversary 9/11 you want to talk about it with your students

KyteriaR: I also love to incorporate literature in my lessons. I thought about reading a book to the students that was related to the topic.

KathyMP: so you plan a lesson on something that is meaningful but find standards to match with your lesson

JeniG: For example, I chose a TEKS that specifically says the student should be familiar with such tall tale celebrities as Pecos Bill and Paul Bunyan

KathyMP: maybe cause and effect

KathyMP: or reading primary sources

MeridithE: Yes Kathy that is what we do

MeridithE: we make our curriculum match the standards

JeniG: So, I make a cool lesson integrating literature about the characters, the importance of folktales in culture and the history of the story.

KathyMP: yes Meredith that is what I was trying to say

KathyMP: say

JeniG: In doing this lesson I have covered 3 TEKS objectives and the kids have a great time! I might even let them watch a movie about the characters if there's time.

KyteriaR: I like that idea Jen.

KathyMP: I have yet to want to teach something and couldn't fit in under the standards, and with social studies you always have good ole current events to fall under

JeniG: The standards really aren't as restrictive as some think

JeniG winks at Michael

MichaelH winks at Jen

MichaelH: However, I think that pre-service teachers would be better served being taught how to deal in the "real world of teaching"...

KathyMP: Michael did you start out teaching with standards or is it a new concept, I've been teaching for 4 years

MichaelH: rather than in standards, etc., that may not be as relevant as discipline, class management, etc.

KathyMP: I agree, the content part is rarely the problem for new teachers

MichaelH: Kathy, standards are a "new thing"... we did objectives in undergrad school, but I have never had a principal or superintendent who has asked me to align a lesson to standards.

JeniG: We are actually based in the school working alongside a site-based teacher. 3 days a week for an entire semester we are in the school and attending methods classes 2 days a week

MichaelH: my view is that the standards are frequently written or at least proposed by those who aren't in the trenches as classroom teachers

KyteriaR: Really Michael? You did not have standards??

MichaelH ducks in case anyone from the Indiana Department of Education is listening in...

MichaelH: nope

KathyMP: I currently have a student in my class for 2 hours everyday and she is in her first phase of education classes

MeridithE: former teachers are making the standards

MichaelH: how come CURRENT teachers aren't?

JeniG: Actually, some of our methods instructors were on the boards that created some of the TEKS standards

MeridithE: I am about to graduate with my teaching certificate in May

CindyBl: but politicians test them

CindyBl: and us

KathyMP: see we do write our own curriculum

MichaelH: Cindy, I don't tell politicians how to make laws, how come they tell me how to teach?

CindyBl: exactly

KathyMP: it's just that as stubborn unchanging social studies teachers, we don't agree often

CindyBl: we have just completed a two year project

CindyBl: creating units for Social studies

CindyBl: 6 per year for elementary

KyteriaR: that's so true Michael. How can someone tell teachers how to teach, if they don't teach themselves,

CindyBl: and allocating all the standards within them

KathyMP: clearing throat tell that to the federal gov't more than the state

MichaelH: and I think university instructors need to prepare their preservice teachers for the "real world", and less on teaching standards...

JeniG: No one is telling how to teach, only what to teach.

KathyMP: Maryland must be different

MichaelH: I don't think it is, Kathy

KathyMP: we have a state guide and then each county writes our curriculum to fit the guides. Most counties have teachers write the curriculum

MeridithE: in Texas, you can not get by with "real-world" teaching without knowing the standards because let's face it.... the standards are the "real-world"

MichaelH: do they teach you classroom management?

MeridithE: yes

MichaelH: example?

MeridithE: we have several courses in classroom management

KyteriaR: I agree Michael. All the stuff I learned in my education classes is not what I am really seeing in the schools

MichaelH: that's not standards....

KathyMP: How can you really teach classroom management, it is trial and error and you don't understand till you get your own classroom

MichaelH: hmmm... wonder what our schools of ed think about that?

JeniG: We learn much about Behaviorism, Constructivism. These are theory of course, but they give you a plan of sorts so you don't go in completely unprepared.

MeridithE: well if that is true.. how can you teach that to a pre-service teacher... you have to make mistakes in order to learn the best way to teach for yourself

KyteriaR: Yes, at UH we had to take this classroom management class. We were required to write a 10 page paper on classroom management strategies.

KathyMP: I have switched counties twice so gone through the new teacher ritual twice

KathyMP: Its always the same classroom management is the hardest

CindyBl: classroom management is quite an intuitive thing

MichaelH: but, hey, let's face it.... the same is true with standards... who knows the subject better than the teacher who has taken the classes and has the degree...

MichaelH: and that CAN'T be legislated state, nationally, or even locally.

KathyMP: and you learn more from talking to fellow teachers in your building because each school and admin is different, you try fail try again till you get it down

CindyBl: the children are different

JeniG: Again, no one is saying HOW to teach, only WHAT to teach

KathyMP: exactly

KathyMP: but it is

MichaelH: and frankly, schools of ed should work more toward making teachers more subject oriented by letting them take more classes in their major area... and perhaps increasing the student teaching experience timewise

KathyMP: our school hates to suspend because it looks bad so we get no backing as teachers

KathyMP: right on Michael

MichaelH: and, of course, that has nothing to do with standards at all... it's a management issue

MichaelH: that's what the state SHOULD be dealing with...

JeniG: By the time we graduate, we have logged many hours of actual classroom time.

KathyMP: but it shows that we are a safe school if we don't suspend, laugh out loud

MichaelH: and same with education programs... how do you deal with a kid who is a discipline problem? or on drugs? or with a learning disability?

CindyBl: what percentage of your course is 'in class time'?

KathyMP: I agree Jen but just be ready for your first year to be nothing like those hours you've spent in someone else's class, but never fear it will get better

MeridithE: standards and behavior are two separate issues

KathyMP: ignore,

KyteriaR: Now a lot of the classtime is me observing in the classroom.

KathyMP: unless parent complain then they do something

JeniG: I look forward to the challenge!!!

MeridithE: and we are taught to deal with learning disabilities and ARDS and behavior management in the classroom

MichaelH: Kathy, you're right, they're separate, but are we spending too much time on standards and not enough on the real important issue....

MichaelH: we're teachers...

KathyMP: Jen, you go girl:) I wish you good luck and keep the great attitude:)

MichaelH: it would be cool to get some of the school of ed people here to discuss standards-based instruction...

MichaelH: I'd like to know their view....

MichaelH: any chance of getting anyone to discuss that?

KathyMP: can't help you sorry

MeridithE: they don't like the TEKS either but the state of TX has made it a law that we have to meet them

KyteriaR: I agree, if our job consisted of us just teaching academics and going home to grade papers and write lessons, our job would be easy, we have soo much more to deal with,.

MichaelH: it's easy for us to talk... we aren't involved in making policy... we're just forced to carry it out

JeniG: Do you mean the instructors or the administrators?

MichaelH: well, I have a feeling it's the higher educators who are involved in making the standards...\

KathyMP: really, I wouldn't have thought that at all?

CindyBl: Oxford and Cambridge professors wrote the British ones

MichaelH: Kathy, have you ever been invited to help make standards?

MichaelH: and of course, we have to consider how we might integrate technology in an age of standards...

KathyMP: well like I said, we make the standards for our county so yes there, they also did ask for teacher input on our state "voluntary curriculum" I do know some teachers that went but don't know how much power they had

MichaelH: So, they may have had a lot of input, or they may not have?

KathyMP: yes, I never really asked that

MichaelH has taught for 25 years... has won five state and national awards for using classroom technology, and he's NEVER been approached for anything re: standards

KathyMP: move

MichaelH: and of course, a lot is regional too... are the teachers making the standards urban teachers? rural? do they teach in fairly homogeneous or heterogeneous districts?

KathyMP: I have to admit that I have been cursing the state dept. all days since we are in the middle of our state testing but feel better about good ole Maryland now:)

MeridithE: it is taught all over the state

KathyMP: well Baltimore city is a wreck right now so no idea what they've been doing, but I've been all over the state and it seems to be the same everywhere, teachers write county curriculum which is based on a meager state outline of standards

MeridithE: the test goes through all of the state

MichaelH: I guess the big issue is that I sort of infer at times that the state thinks I can't teach, and that the government can dictate what I do in the classroom. If they have college degrees and are classroom teachers, that's ok... however, they've never been in my classroom

KathyMP: yes every 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 grader is being tested

JeniG: What is it about being told WHAT to teach that bothers you? They're just trying to make sure that everyone is learning the same thing.

CindyBl: equality of opportunity?

MeridithE: in order to graduate from high school, each student has to pass

MichaelH: and my question there is are the schools punished? classroom teacher? students? what about the parents... what's their responsibility if the students do poorly?

KathyMP: I think it's a professional issue, we are so often treated as dummies and not the professionals we are

MeridithE: plus, we have the No Child Left Behind Act that is breathing down our necks and the TEKS are the way that Texas implements that law into our curriculum

CindyBl: do they need someone to blame for social issues - it's always the teachers fault

KathyMP: teachers, can lose jobs and be transferred, schools loose money, student get scores put in lower classes if don't do well, parents zippo, that's the real problem

KathyMP: need to have parenting license, sorry communist attitude coming out will hide it again

KyteriaR: I think that the state focuses too much on test scores

MichaelH agrees

CindyBl: In the UK it's the same thing, increase class sizes, cut support for special needs and expect the same results

KathyMP: agree

JeniG: overpopulation might be an interesting topic

KathyMP: it is a split second of time that the student have to show all we've taught them if they choose to show it

KathyMP: it

MichaelH: and, of course, that makes it tough on the teacher, who still gets the blame

KathyMP: amen Cindy

CindyBl: then they publish the results in the press so everyone can see there are 'good' schools and 'bad' schools

KathyMP: exactly

MichaelH: yep

MichaelH: same here

KyteriaR: yes

CindyBl: so its not their fault

CindyBl: it must be us

VickiAB: Sorry I thought this was a Social Studies forum

MichaelH: I don't agree, Cindy... it isn't always us...

MichaelH: it is

CindyBl: we know that....

KathyMP: it seems like it is, the buck stops with us

MichaelH: we started at 8 eastern, Vicki

VickiAB: yes I realize that but it seems like it is more about faults of standards and testing than social studies

VickiAB: thank you though

MichaelH: standards and testing affect social studies

MichaelH: they affect us all...

CindyBl: what about differentiation in Social studies

CindyBl: are your classes ability leveled

KathyMP: mine aren't

MichaelH: no

MichaelH: I should qualify that... I am not in the classroom any longer, but the schools I deal with are heterogeneous

MeridithE: we are taught to make lesson extensions

MeridithE: very extensively taught might I add

KathyMP: my school only social studies and science is heterogeneous

VickiAB: lesson extensions are a must because of the diversity on the classroom

VickiAB: in the classroom

MichaelH: Meridith are you taught by teachers who are currently teaching in a diverse classroom?

MeridithE: any classroom will be diverse

KathyMP: it would be nice if I had time to plan those extensions though

MeridithE: no classroom will have each and every student on the exact same level in all subjects

CindyBl: extensions in both directions too

CindyBl: special needs are included in that?

MeridithE: yes

VickiAB: I should clarify that I mean the diversity of learners...everyone has a different learning style

MichaelH: so you have to prepare for middle kids, GT, and lower ability?

MeridithE: yes

KathyMP: yes

VickiAB: yes

MeridithE: as well as English language learners

KathyMP: don't forget the legality of meeting IEP's

MeridithE: children with disabilities

MichaelH: does anyone have time to sleep, take care of their own children, or watch West Wing?

KathyMP: NO

KyteriaR: yes, I agree. Teachers must consider special need students.

JeniG: Thank you for a stimulating discussion. I must go now.

MeridithE: what does that have to do with social studies?

MichaelH: Kyteria are they prepared to take care of special needs kids?

MichaelH: Meridith did you mean my comment, or something else?

MeridithE: teachers do not go into this profession to watch the west wing on a leisurely basis

MichaelH: didn't say that, but you deserve a life as well as a career

KathyMP: We like to work for free, we didn't do this to make a living either

KathyMP smiles

MichaelH: at least, I think you do

CindyBl: burn out - beware

VickiAB: I agree but students deserve the best that we can give them

MeridithE: yes but as teachers we have certain luxuries we have to give up for the love of our students and knowing that they will receive the best education possible

CindyBl: the average newly qualified teacher in the UK leaves the profession after two years

MichaelH: and if you are so burned out, you don't care about the kids... that's not the best

KathyMP: I agree and I think we all try but get beat many times by the system

MichaelH: so you would give up having a family life to prepare lessons?

KathyMP: 5 years in the US

VickiAB: I guess that is what is so great about our education program here

KyteriaR: I would never give up a family to prepare lessons.

CindyBl: it does get easier and faster

VickiAB: it prepares us for everything in the classroom

MichaelH: I didn't get into the profession thinking I'd be a millionaire, but I don't think the job should rule your life

CindyBl: two page lesson plans soon disappear

KathyMP: Good point Cindy

MichaelH: ah, but if you have to prepare for child a, and child b, and child c, when you have time for your kids, your relaxation, your life?

KyteriaR: I agree, no career should rule your life.

CindyBl: and you accumulate material

MeridithE: you make time

KathyMP: but we still find something else to take the time up to improve our lessons

MichaelH: just in time for them to change the standards and you throw all that out...

CindyBl: team work has saved me

KathyMP: laugh out loud, excellent point

MeridithE: all right thanks for a lovely discussion. every one have a great night

KathyMP: my roommate has been teaching 6 years and has to redo at least one subject every year because they change the curriculum

CindyBl: I work in a team of three and we share the planning by subjects

KathyMP: still plans for hours

KathyMP: I do the same but we prepare more in depth lessons than I could on my own taking just as much time

CindyBl: Good night - everyone and good luck with the courses

KathyMP: sorry couldn't plan on my own

MichaelH: hey guys, it's time to wrap up...

MichaelH: maybe someday we can have some state legislatures, university faculty, etc. talk with us about standards

KathyMP: thanks for the chat,

KyteriaR: ok, I enjoyed talking with everyone tonight!!

CindyBl: thank you

MichaelH: you're welcome

KathyMP: bye

TylerP: I really enjoyed sitting in on this meeting....sorry I didn't participate but I was taking it all in and hearing everyone's fine insight....

TylerP: Quite a lively and well-educated bunch it seems

MichaelH: I think so...

TylerP: Thank you Michael, I'll be sure to be more active next time.

MichaelH: glad you could join us, Tyler

TylerP: It was my pleasure.

MichaelH is going to log off ... to watch West Wing

TylerP Waves good night

MichaelH smiles