

# Social Studies in the Primary Program

## Common Understandings

Social studies in the primary program examines people in society as they interact with each other and with their many environments: physical, cultural, political, and socio-economic. Emphasis is placed on developing dispositions, skills, and knowledge through a variety of experiences that engage children in active learning. The introduction of significant and appropriate current events is an integral part of the curriculum at the primary level.

“Social studies themes are identified as the focus of work for extended periods of time. Social studies concepts are learned through a variety of projects and playful activities involving independent research in library books; excursions and interviewing visitors; discussions; the relevant use of language, writing, spelling (invented and teacher-taught), and reading skills; and opportunities to develop social skills such as planning, sharing, taking turns, and working in committees. The classroom is treated as a laboratory of social relations where children explore values and learn rules of social living and respect for individual differences through experience. Relevant art, music, dance, drama, wood working, and games are incorporated in social studies. Multicultural and nonsexist activities and materials are provided to enhance individual children’s self-esteem and to enrich the lives of all children with respectful acceptance and appreciation of differences and similarities” (Bredekamp, 1991).



## Curriculum Focus

The social studies curriculum at the primary level emphasizes:

- Developing attitudes which promote responsible citizenship and an appreciation of American culture, traditions, and heritage.
- A reorganization of the familiar content of self, family, community, and community interactions into three major concepts common to all aspects of the content of social studies curriculum:
  - Change
  - Structure
  - Interdependence

- Processes and skills of problem-solving, decision-making, interpreting maps and globes, and locating, acquiring, organizing, and evaluating information.

Each of these is more fully developed under the dimensions of dispositions, skills, and knowledge.

### ***Integrating Curriculum***

Social studies can be approached by using the familiar content of self, family, community, and interaction of communities to organize thematic learning experiences that include the development of dispositions, skills, and knowledge of the social studies curriculum or the larger concepts of structure, interdependence, and change. The teacher can weave the dispositions, skills, and knowledge of social studies into other thematic studies, language experiences, and the child's daily interactions in school and community.

The family, school, neighborhood, and community are content-rich workshops inviting exploration and inquiry. They invite children to generate, locate, acquire, and organize information through field trips and first hand experiences. They also invite children to represent knowledge in a variety of ways, in addition to communicating and representing orally and in writing. The content of social studies is also a familiar theme in many books and poems for primary children. Through language and literature, this content and the related concepts can also be introduced, developed, or expanded.



## **Learning Dimensions Through Social Studies**

### ***Dispositions***

Learning experiences focusing on primary social studies provide children with opportunities to:

- Develop an interest and curiosity in the world
- Develop dispositions of responsible citizenship
- Value and respect similarities and differences among people
- Value, respect, and appreciate the variety of cultural identities and heritages in America and the world
- Respect and care for the environment

Learning experiences in the primary years provide many opportunities for teachers to help children develop an interest in and curiosity about the world and to demonstrate responsible behavior in the family, classroom, school, and community. Positive attitudes toward individuals, cultures, and the environment contribute to the development of personally and socially responsible people. Such dispositions, while not unique to social studies, are emphasized here because of their importance for the young learner. They also illustrate the integrated nature of curriculum throughout the primary program.



### **Skills**

Many of the skills and processes of social studies are also integral components of other curricular areas. They are outlined here to show the degree of overlap and integration of processes and skills in the total primary program. For example:

- Problem-solving and decision-making are important thinking processes.
- Understanding time and chronology as components of the measurement strand in mathematics.
- Locating, acquiring, and organizing information through reading, listening, viewing, and communicating, both orally and in writing, are all components of language development.
- Citizenship skills, an integral component of the goals of social and emotional development and the development of responsibility, are also emphasized in the Responsible Living curriculum.

Learning experiences which focus on primary social studies provide children with opportunities to:

- Participate in problem-solving activities related to social studies content
- Participate in decision-making activities related to social studies content
- Interpret maps and globes
- Locate, organize, acquire, and evaluate information related to social studies content.

### **Knowledge**

#### **Social Units**

A social unit can be defined as a group with members who have an ongoing relationship to one another. Examples of social units are the family, school, neighborhood, community, state, and nation. Further examples of social units include the classroom, a factory, an ant hill, a club, a political party, a farm, a wolf pack, a zoo, and an orchestra.

All of these social units can be studied in terms of structure, interdependence, and change. These concepts form the major organizing principles of the social studies curriculum. These concepts can be used by the teacher as vehicles to link social studies with other curriculum areas. For example, a

study of the farm could include an investigation of its structure, its interdependence, and change, with these discoveries being related to the children's personal experiences with structure, interdependence, and change within the family, classroom, or community.

The examination of social units in the primary years should include a focus on the family, community, state, and the United States, with all learning continually being related to the child's own experiences.

### **The Importance of Self**

Young children are interested in talking and learning about themselves and their experiences. Through focusing on themselves, children may explore:

- Uniqueness
- Personal needs
- Similarities with others
- Responsibilities
- Personal change

As their social world expands to include other children, young children show more interest in sharing and comparing information with their peers. Content in social studies should always include opportunities for both younger and older primary children to relate what they are learning to themselves and to their peers.

### **Structure of Social Units**

Structure is anything arranged in a definite pattern or organization:

- Families can be studied in terms of their structure, size, and composition.
- Communities have a definite structure:
  - Physical—boundaries, roads, sewer systems, etc.
  - Social—neighborhoods, organizations, friendship patterns
  - Political—government (school, municipal, regional districts).
- America has a structure:
  - Physical-geography, boundaries
  - Social-national emblems such as the flag and anthem
  - Political-capitals, states, territories
- Other social units have a structure (for example, beehive):
  - Physical
  - Social (queen bee, drones, worker bees)

Children's study of the organization of their families, communities, and other social units enable them to recognize similarities and differences while broadening their understanding of these concepts. Through contrast and comparison, children's perspectives for viewing their own familiar social units (family, neighborhood, school, community) are broadened.

The following illustrates how structure might be examined in various social units familiar to the child:

<b>All Families Have Structures</b>			
<i>My Family</i>	<i>Michael's Family</i>	<i>A Bear's Family</i>	<i>Cinderella's Family</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mom</li> <li>▪ Dad</li> <li>▪ 2 brothers</li> <li>▪ 1 sister</li> <li>▪ Grandma</li> <li>▪ Me</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dad</li> <li>▪ 1 sister</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mom</li> <li>▪ 2 cubs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Step mother</li> <li>▪ 2 step sisters</li> <li>▪ Cinderella</li> </ul>

### **The Interdependence of Social Units**

Social units interact with one another, satisfy one another's needs, and have roles and responsibilities.

Families can be studied in terms of the interdependence of their members:

- The needs of family members: food, shelter, clothing, love, safety, and recreation
- The roles and responsibilities of family members
- The interaction of family members: conflict and cooperation, rights and responsibilities, authority, and affection

Communities can be studied in terms of the interdependence of their members within their communities:

- The roles and responsibilities of community members including workers, volunteers, and citizens
- The provision of goods, safety and protection, education, health and social services, recreation, and aesthetic expressions
- Human interaction within the community including rights and responsibilities, friendship and affiliation, authority, cooperation, and conflict

Communities can also be studied in terms of their interaction with other communities and with the environment:

- The interaction of American communities through use of resources, government, transportation and communication, education, health and social services, recreation, and cultural expression

Other social units can be studied in terms of interdependence. For example, bees depend upon the beekeeper and the available flora which in turn is dependent upon climate and soil. These topics can be thoroughly developed and explored in the primary classroom with the study touching on all areas of the curriculum.

**Change in Social Units**

Families may be studied in terms of change in:

- Membership, location, structure, occupation, roles, and responsibilities

Communities may be studied in terms of:

- The changes in a community over time (historical)
- Interaction and, change within the physical environment
- Projected change for the future

Other social units (bees) may be studied in terms of:

- Changes over time (summer/winter)
- Interaction (roles)

**Change in Social Units**

<i>My Community Changes</i>	<i>My Family's Activities Change</i>	<i>A Deer Family Changes</i>
<b>During Fall...</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Corn matures</li> <li>▪ Trees lose leaves</li> <li>▪ Birds, ducks, geese, cranes migrate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Harvest corn</li> <li>▪ Rake leaves</li> <li>▪ Prepare garden for winter</li> <li>▪ Hunt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Eat corn left in fields</li> <li>▪ May be hunted</li> <li>▪ Move to wintering area</li> </ul>
<b>During Winter...</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Snow</li> <li>▪ Ice</li> <li>▪ Cold</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sledding</li> <li>▪ Play indoors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sleep in thick, wooded areas</li> <li>▪ Look for food</li> </ul>
<b>During Spring...</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Warmer weather</li> <li>▪ Rain</li> <li>▪ Wind</li> <li>▪ Plants grow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fly kites</li> <li>▪ Softball/baseball</li> <li>▪ Play outdoors</li> <li>▪ Plant garden</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fawns are born</li> <li>▪ Roam outdoors</li> <li>▪ Food is easier to find</li> </ul>
<b>During Summer...</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Heat</li> <li>▪ No school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Swim</li> <li>▪ Vacation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Eat plants</li> <li>▪ Raise young</li> </ul>

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## Descriptors of Learning in Social Studies

Early Primary	Later Primary
<b>Dispositions</b>	
<p>The child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recognizes the ways in which all people are alike</li> <li>▪ Accepts responsibility for her/his behavior</li> <li>▪ Participates in a wide variety of activities</li> <li>▪ Demonstrates responsible behavior in caring for the school environment</li> <li>▪ Responds with interest to exploration of the school and community environments</li> </ul>	<p>The child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recognizes cultural similarities and differences</li> <li>▪ Understands that differences in people do not change the ways in which we are all alike</li> <li>▪ Accepts responsibility for her/his behavior and anticipates consequences of actions</li> <li>▪ Participates in a wide variety of activities</li> <li>▪ Understands and demonstrates responsible behavior with respect to a healthier environment</li> <li>▪ Demonstrates an interest in and curiosity about an expanding world environment</li> </ul>



## Descriptors of Learning in Social Studies

Early Primary	Later Primary
<b>Skills</b>	
<p>The child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identifies a problem or issue</li>   <li>▪ Locates and acquires information through:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Print sources</li> <li>– Pictorial sources</li> <li>– Real-life interactions</li> </ul> </li>   <li>▪ Organizes information through a variety of concrete presentations</li>   <li>▪ Evaluates whether information is fiction or non-fiction</li>   <li>▪ Compares objects, pictures, and ideas using concrete attributes</li> </ul>	<p>The child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identifies possible solutions or answers</li>   <li>▪ Locates and acquires information through:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Print sources</li> <li>– Pictorial sources</li> <li>– Real-life interactions</li> <li>– Technology and media sources</li> </ul> </li>   <li>▪ Organizes information through a variety of concrete and symbolic representations at increasingly complex levels</li>   <li>▪ Evaluates whether information is fact or opinion</li>   <li>▪ Compares objects, pictures, and ideas using a larger variety of concrete and abstract attributes</li>   <li>▪ Locates and represents specific information on maps and globes</li> </ul>

## Descriptors of Learning in Social Studies

Early Primary	Later Primary
<b>Knowledge</b>	
<b>Self as the Fundamental Social Unit</b>	
<p>The child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identifies own unique characteristics</li> <li>▪ Recognizes own personal needs: physical, emotional, social, and intellectual</li> <li>▪ Accept appropriate responsibility for own actions</li> <li>▪ Identifies important personal changes: physical, emotional, social, and intellectual</li> </ul>	<p>The child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recognizes similarities and differences among people</li> <li>▪ Understands that all people have similar needs</li> <li>▪ Demonstrates ability to interact cooperatively with others</li> <li>▪ Develops the ability to cope with and control personal change</li> </ul>
<b>Structure of Social Units</b>	
<p>The child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Investigates various social units</li> <li>▪ Investigates structure of social units</li> </ul>	<p>The child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Understands connections among various social units</li> <li>▪ Compares and contrasts structures of differing social units</li> </ul>

## Descriptors of Learning in Social Studies

Early Primary	Later Primary
<b>Knowledge</b>	
<b>Interdependence of Social Units</b>	
<p>The child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recognizes that members of a social unit satisfy one another's needs</li> <li>▪ Recognizes that members of a social unit have different roles</li> </ul>	<p>The child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Understands that members of a social unit have different degrees of responsibility for satisfying needs</li> <li>▪ Compares similarities in roles among social units</li> </ul>
<b>Change in Social Units</b>	
<p>The child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recognizes that all social units change over time</li> <li>▪ Recognizes that changes in a social unit affect its members</li> </ul>	<p>The child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Investigates how social units change, makes predictions about change</li> <li>▪ Recognizes that changes in a social unit affects its members in different ways</li> </ul>

