An Introduction to the Social Studies

Chapter 1  The Past, Present, and Future of Social Studies Teaching and Learning
In a kindergarten classroom, the teacher reads aloud the picture book *A Chair for My Mother*. Afterward, the children discuss how characters in the story cooperated to solve a problem. Then the children help their teacher make a list of ways they can work together to make their classroom a happier, more productive place.

A first-grade teacher wants his students to engage in a simple form of critical thinking, comparing and contrasting, so he has gathered one set of photographs of people doing things in the winter and another set showing people doing things in the summer. His first graders will work in small groups to identify how weather affects the way people live.

In this chapter, you will read about:
- Perspectives that currently define social studies
- Two historical, influential movements that still characterize the discipline of social studies—Progressive Education and the New Social Studies
- The future of social studies, focusing on 21st Century Skills
- Three components that frame a responsible social studies curriculum: content, processes, and values
Twenty-three second graders follow their teacher on a “walking” field trip around the playground of their school and the adjoining streets. They look at signs that state rules people must follow. Afterward, the children will be asked to provide a rationale for each rule they observed. Then a group of five students will devise a set of new signs that will make their school safer. They will present their suggestions to the school principal and the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA).

As part of their yearlong study of their community, six third graders undertake a bold project: to compile an oral history of their school. During this project, they will interview former students, teachers, and community leaders.

In a fourth-grade classroom, one Chinese American girl is working with her mother to learn to write in Chinese. She shares some examples of her writing, and her classmates want to learn more. Her teacher finds an excellent Website developed by “China the Beautiful” to use as a resource (www.chinapage.com). She prepares a 4-day “mini-unit” that will allow all the students in the room to learn about the logographic Chinese system and write a few Chinese characters.

Working in small groups, fifth graders read the first-person narratives of former enslaved people found in the book To Be a Slave and online from “American Slave Narratives: An Online Anthology” (xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/wpa/wpahome.html). Later each group will share what they have learned about American slavery with their classmates.

A sixth-grade classroom is alive with many activities as the children learn about ancient Greece. Some students rehearse a play on the myth of Daedalus that will be videotaped. The students plan to post the video on the Internet site TeacherTube (www.teachertube.com). Others paint a mural of the Acropolis, a third group works on a CD presentation on Athenian democracy, while three students explore an Internet Website with photographs of the Parthenon (www.sacred-destinations.com/greece/parthenon-pictures).

Social studies in the elementary school involves all this and much more. During social studies, children learn about people—those who lived long ago and those who live today. It is when they become more proficient as thinkers, researchers, readers, writers, speakers, listeners, artists, and technologists, and it is the time when students use what they have learned to become good citizens in our democratic society.

Definitions of Social Studies

In 1992, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) adopted the following definition of “social studies”:

Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the
humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. (NCSS Task Force on Standards for Teaching and Learning in the Social Studies, 1993, p. 213)

The NCSS, the professional organization of social studies educators, has played an essential role since 1921 (www.ncss.org). The NCSS definition seems to be a good place to start our discussion of how to teach social studies in an elementary school classroom. The NCSS definition states the topics covered in social studies and clarifies the purposes of social studies teaching and learning. I have a definition, too:

Social studies is the study of people. Social studies should help students acquire knowledge, master the processes of learning, and become active citizens.

A closer look at my definition may help us bring social studies into sharper focus.

**Social Studies Is the Study of People.** People are the domain of social studies. This includes people as nearby as family and as far away as those who live in the most distant nations. It includes people living now, those who lived long ago, and those who will live in the future. Social studies has the potential to be the best part of the school day because it is when children connect with other people. As children learn about others, they will be fascinated by differences among cultural groups, while at the same time they will find the commonalities that create a shared sense of humanity. It is a complex task to teach students about people, and information must come from many fields of study. The NCSS definition points out that it is the various disciplines of the social sciences and humanities that provide the content for what is taught during social studies. While history and geography should serve as the core of social studies, it is imperative that the other social sciences are not neglected; rather, they should be a significant part of every social studies program. The other social sciences are anthropology, economics, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology.

The humanities—literature, the performing arts, and the visual arts—are an important part of social studies, too (Simpson, 2009b). The arts serve two functions. First, they help children better understand the people, places, and ideas they study. Stories, songs, dances, plays, paintings, statues, and other works of art allow students to become acquainted with the people who created them. Second, children can show us what they know by expressing themselves through the arts. Social studies involves integration of the social sciences and the humanities. A good social studies unit of study should pull information and ideas from several different fields.

**Social Studies Should Help Students Acquire Knowledge, Master the Processes of Learning, and Become Active Citizens.** The knowledge children acquire as part of the social studies curriculum tends to be the highest priority for teachers, parents, and children. The common perception is that this is what social studies is all about—knowing
things like the location of the Rocky Mountains, the conditions aboard a slave ship, and the purpose of a mailbox. This is too limited a view because social studies must be a vehicle for children to become better communicators, thinkers, researchers, computer users, and artists. Finally, all three definitions state that the ultimate goal of social studies is active citizenship in our society, as our students use the knowledge they have acquired and the processes they have mastered to make communities, the nation, and the world better places (Golston, 2010; Parker, 2008). This is the position of the NCSS, that the “core mission of social studies education is to help students develop the knowledge, skills, and values that will enable them to become effective citizens” (NCSS Task Force on Revitalizing Citizenship Education, 2001, p. 319).

In the end, there will never be one universally accepted definition of social studies. This lack of consensus reflects fundamental disagreements on the primary purpose of social studies. Some educators think the emphasis should be on teaching the various social sciences, such as economics and anthropology, while others would emphasize a curriculum based on issues relating to social interaction among people. Another view is that social studies should focus on cultural diversity and pluralism. Others argue that social studies should teach the major events and important individuals in American history and seek to transmit to young people the American concepts of liberty and equality. Finally, some educators advocate a social studies curriculum that develops democratic citizens who are more than loyal and patriotic, but also are critics of their government (Levstik & Tyson, 2008; Thornton, 2008).

Perhaps a good way to conclude our discussion of the definition of social studies is through example. At the end of this chapter, you will find the field notes I took while visiting Mrs. Denise Winslow’s sixth-grade classroom one Tuesday afternoon. Her class was studying ancient Greece.

**A Brief History of Social Studies Teaching**

Now that we have some sense of what social studies is, let’s turn to another topic that will help establish a foundation for our teaching. Over the past 150 years, some of the greatest educational thinkers have turned their attention to social studies. Indeed, the history of social studies, in regard to both what should be taught and how to teach it, makes fascinating reading for anyone interested in teaching and learning. This is too large a topic for a thorough discussion in a methods text, however, so I suggest you read other sources for a more comprehensive treatment: Cremin (1961), Douglass (1967, 1998), Evans (2004, 2006), Hertzberg (1981), Lybarger (1991), Saxe (1991, 1992), and Thornton (2008). I first focus briefly on two “educational movements” from which we can learn a great deal: Progressive Education and the New Social Studies. Our discussion of the history of social studies continues by looking at contemporary issues in the field and then concludes by examining what social studies may look like in the future.
The Influence of Progressive Education and the New Social Studies

**Progressive Education.** From colonial times to the end of the 19th century, social studies was a dreary, unimaginative business. The phrase *social studies* was not used regarding what was taught in elementary schools until 1897. In place of the integrated social studies, time was devoted to the separate topics of history, geography, and “civics”—the study of how federal, state, and local governments work. Until the 20th century, students were expected to memorize information in their textbooks and then recite it in front of their classmates. The textbooks were organized around questions, and teachers called on a student who stood and recited the answer (Douglass, 1967).

Fortunately, in the late 19th century great changes occurred in the social studies curriculum and instruction. This was the period of Progressivism, the social and political movement that reformed American life between 1880 and 1920. Profoundly influenced by the educational philosophy of John Dewey (1900, 1902) and the innovations of Francis W. Parker (1883, 1894), social studies was born during this period. Parker boldly
asserted that “we learn to do by doing, to hear by hearing, and to think by thinking” (1883, p. 115). He introduced teacher-made materials, field trips, and what we would call today “hands-on experiences.” Study in geography began with trips to the surrounding countryside. Children observed and described what they saw. Following this firsthand experience, children made maps by molding sand. Later they would draw their own maps. When studying history, Parker believed that students should learn different points of view and not rely on the textbook as the sole source of information. Parker sought to develop each child’s “power of organized inference” (1894, p. 269). Children should compare and contrast, speculate, and find generalizations. Teachers should lead this process by planning activities, asking questions, and suggesting places where answers could be found. Francis Parker’s reforms were among the most significant in the history of American education.

It was John Dewey, however, who gave Progressive Education a unifying, underlying philosophy. One of the key elements of Dewey’s philosophy was the importance of “child-centered” education. Children, he argued, will receive the best education if they are given choices over what they learn and when they learn it. Dewey also stressed the importance of “activity-based” learning, calling for a challenging curriculum that provided children with many opportunities to build things, manipulate things, and create things. During the first 20 years of the 20th century, the influence of Progressive Education was considerable. There were, however, problems with some Progressive ideas. Some Progressive schools were too permissive—any activity children decided to pursue was viewed as worthwhile. Between 1920 and 1960, the influence of the Progressives steadily weakened. Today’s teachers should remember four ideas from Progressive Education:

1. Social studies is more than the memorization of facts. It is a discipline in which students learn to think, to make hypotheses, and to find answers.

2. Social studies should be activity based. Learning requires firsthand experiences. Children need to act, sing, build, dance, take field trips, and have hands-on activities.

3. Social studies requires the use of many instructional materials. Textbooks can play an important role in social studies teaching, but many other learning resources must be used.

4. Social studies instruction should incorporate the interests of children. To put this in practical terms, every instructional unit should be structured so that children select some of their learning activities.

**Bruner and the New Social Studies.** In the 1960s, social studies was reexamined. In 1959, the National Academy of Sciences sponsored a summer study group of scientists, scholars from other fields, and educators. Their purpose was to discuss how the study of science could be improved in elementary and secondary education. The results of this meeting, however, would play an influential role not just in science education but in social studies as well. Jerome Bruner, a psychologist from Harvard, wrote *The Process of Education* (1960), a little book reporting on the conference that sounded the keynote for considerable
reform in elementary education. *The Process of Education* provided the theory for instructional programs that became known as the “New Social Studies” (and the “New Math” as well). The federal government provided millions of dollars for reform-oriented social studies projects during the 1960s (Hertzberg, 1981).

Bruner believed that the subject matter for social studies should be organized around two concepts: the “structure of the disciplines” and “the spiral curriculum.” He thought that what students learn about any subject “should be determined by the most fundamental understanding that can be achieved of the underlying principles that give structure to that subject” (1960, p. 31). Thus, if we wanted elementary students to learn from the field of economics, we would first define the most important principles of economics and then develop materials and activities to teach them. Bruner also asserted the curriculum should “spiral.” That is, these important concepts or principles would be taught at several grade levels; as the children grow older, the principles would be covered with greater sophistication. And Bruner believed *any* concept could be simplified and taught to a child at *any* age. The task for authors of social studies textbooks and curriculum guides and for the teachers who used them was to take big ideas and present them so that small children would understand them.

The instructional programs developed as part of the New Social Studies attempted to teach children the fundamental principles from many social science disciplines, especially anthropology and sociology. Bruner had strong ideas about what learning activities should dominate social studies. He felt social studies should be based on inquiry learning. *Inquiry* is a process of solving problems and answering questions. He wrote that one of the purposes of social studies was “the development of an attitude toward learning and inquiry, toward guessing and hunches, toward the possibility of solving problems on one’s own” (Bruner, 1960, p. 96). He believed the best way for students to learn how to solve problems was for them to do the same type of activities as grown-up practitioners. If children were studying history, they should go about answering questions the same way real historians do. The programs created as part of the New Social Studies were popular during the 1960s and 1970s. For several reasons, however, they were abandoned in favor of traditional, textbook-oriented approaches (Engle, 1986; Evans, 1989; Fenton, 1991). Nonetheless, today’s teachers should remember three ideas from Jerome Bruner and the New Social Studies:

1. Social studies should introduce students to the important principles of several social science disciplines, especially anthropology, economics, and sociology. Teaching these principles requires children to learn more than bits of information. For example, second graders who are learning about how food moves from farms to markets should be introduced to the concept of *economic interdependence*—how people rely on others for their basic needs.

2. Social studies should include the *doing* of social science; that is, children should do the same things that historians, geographers, anthropologists, and political scientists do. For example, children can examine primary sources, such as diary entries and old newspapers, just like historians.
3. Social studies should involve many opportunities for children to solve problems and answer complex questions. This is one factor that distinguishes effective teachers: They challenge their students to use the facts they have learned to complete tasks requiring critical thinking. For example, a group of second graders could use what they have learned about their community to propose a location for a new park.

The Role of History, Standards, Diversity, and Technology

Controversy Over History. During the past 50 years, there has been considerable debate regarding the role of history in elementary social studies. Should it be the dominating center of the curriculum, or should the fields of anthropology, economics, geography, political science, sociology, the arts, and the humanities play significant roles (Brophy & Van Sledright, 1997; Evans, 2004; Evans & Passe, 2007; Levstik, 2008)? Currently, most state social studies curricula emphasize historical content at the expense of the other disciplines. On the other hand, the NCSS standards for social studies have been sharply criticized because of an alleged lack of historical content (Phipps & Adler, 2003). In addition to arguments over the relevant importance of historical study, the historical content students will be expected to learn has also been controversial. Once the decision is made to focus on history, conflicting viewpoints immediately emerge. Whose history will be examined? Which view of the past will be presented? It is impossible to please everyone across the political spectrum, and it seems that any historical scope and sequence becomes a political document, subject to criticism from either the Left or the Right, or both (Grant, 1997; Leming, Ellington, & Porter-Magee; 2003; Nash & Dunn, 1995; Saxe, 1996; Spies et al., 2004; Symcox, 2002). As I was writing this fourth edition, there was considerable controversy about the social studies and history standards adopted in Texas in May of 2010.

Standards and the “Squeezing Out” of Social Studies. Another trend of great importance is the movement to standards-based instructional programs. Standards define what students should know and be able to do, and define at what age those goals should be accomplished. Standards have been created by school districts, by state departments of education, and by national organizations. For you, the standards adopted by your state department of education will determine the social studies curriculum you teach. The George W. Bush administration’s “No Child Left Behind” legislation of January 2002 provided funds for each state to create standards, but only in the areas of reading, math, and science, not in social studies. Nonetheless, almost all states have adopted standards for elementary social studies. To view the social studies standard for any state, go to the NCSS Website (www.ncss.org) and click on “Standards and Position Statements.”

The emphasis on having every child achieve state standards in reading and math has led to less time for teaching and learning social studies in many elementary classrooms (Levstik, 2008). While almost all states have social studies standards, not all states have mandatory assessments of those standards. The No Child Left Behind legislation requires
tests only of math and reading and, as a result, many states have mandated that children be assessed only in reading, writing, and mathematics. Thus, the time devoted to teaching social studies in some elementary schools has shrunk considerably over the past 10 years (Hinde & Ekiss, 2005; Neill & Guisbond, 2005; O’Connor, Heafner, & Groce, 2007). One writer considers this to be a crisis that has created a situation in which “youngsters are growing up with little or no knowledge of their own and their neighbors’ histories, ironically when the nation is debating many foreign policy issues” (Pascopella, 2005, p. 30). Further, fewer and fewer teachers teach social studies during a separate, dedicated part of the day. In a national survey, about half of second- and fifth-grade teachers stated that what little social studies they taught, contained in fewer than 4 hours a week, was taught in an integrated fashion with language arts or science (Leming, Ellington, & Schug, 2006).

Standards in social studies written for national audiences influenced state-adopted standards and are also important because they reflect the perspectives of experts in many different subject areas. The development of national standards started in 1994 when President Clinton signed into law the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which enabled the federal Department of Education to fund the development of curriculum standards in several areas, including the specific social studies disciplines of civics and government, economics, geography, and history. The NCSS created a task force to write national standards for social studies.

All the national standards projects, those funded by Goals 2000 and the independent initiative of the NCSS, have now been in place for over 15 years:

- Standards for geography: Geography for Life (www.ncge.org, Geography Education Standards Project, 1994)
- Standards for history: National Standards for History (www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs, National Center for History in the Schools, 1996)

Again, in your teaching assignment, standards adopted by your state department of education will be the ones you are expected to follow. Because this book is written for a national audience, I will use examples from each of these national sets of standards as the basis for sample lessons and units.

A brief look at the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies would seem to be in order since these standards represent the vision of the NCSS (NCSS, 2010; www.ncss.org). Remember, standards are statements of what students should know and when they should know it. Rather than proposing topics for each grade level, K–12, the NCSS standards are organized under 10 themes. For each theme, there are “learning expectations” for the early grades, the middle grades, and high school. The national social studies
Table 1.1 Ten Organizational Themes for Social Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Theme Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>Culture</em></td>
<td>Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. <em>Time, Continuity, and Change</em></td>
<td>Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. <em>People, Places, and Environments</em></td>
<td>Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. <em>Individual Development and Identity</em></td>
<td>Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <em>Individuals, Groups, and Institutions</em></td>
<td>Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the interactions among individuals and groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <em>Power, Authority, and Governance</em></td>
<td>Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change the structures of power, authority, and governance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. <em>Production, Distribution, and Consumption</em></td>
<td>Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people organize for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. <em>Science, Technology, and Society</em></td>
<td>Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of relationships among science, technology, and society.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. <em>Global Connections</em></td>
<td>Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. <em>Civic Ideals and Practices</em></td>
<td>Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic society.</td>
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standards also include examples of exemplary instructional activities. The 10 themes are shown in Table 1.1.

For example, for the theme of “culture,” there are five knowledge learning expectations for the early grades. Two of them are:

Learners will understand:
“Culture” refers to the behaviors, beliefs, values, traditions, institutions, and ways of living together of a group of people
Concepts such as similarities, differences, beliefs, values, cohesion, and diversity
(NCSS, 2010, p. 68)
**Diversity.** Beyond the controversy over history and the “standards movement,” two other phenomena will shape the future of social studies: diversity and technology. In the 21st century, teachers will work with students who are highly diverse, especially regarding language, culture, and exceptionality (Banks & Nguyen, 2008). As this book was being written, data collection for the 2010 census was just beginning, leaving us to rely on the data from the 2000 census. The results of the 2000 census confirmed a trend that has been constant for the past four decades (www.census.gov). The percentage of Americans who identify themselves as “white” is steadily decreasing, as the percentage who are either African American, Asian American, or Hispanic American is steadily on the rise. In 2000, the non-Hispanic, white population was 69% of the total; projections are that this percentage will shrink to 63% in 2020 and to 52% in 2050. In California, by far the most populous state, the 2000 census revealed that “minorities” are now the majority! There, the non-Hispanic, white population is just 46.7%.

There are two paramount issues regarding diversity. First, more and more of our students are acquiring English as a second language and in this book they will be called “English learners,” or “ELs.” These children face the challenge of learning social studies content at the same time they are learning English. Effective teachers must know how to “shelter” instruction so that English learners acquire the same content as their English-only peers (Cruz & Thornton, 2009; Echevarria & Graves, 2010; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2003). Second, teachers face the challenge of educating their students about different cultural groups, including, of course, those who make up an increasingly large percentage of the U.S. population. All this requires considerable skill as we seek to provide information that is at the same time comprehensible and free of bias (Alvi, 2001; Au, 2009; Seikaly, 2001). Finally, almost every classroom will include students with special needs, and good teachers will successfully “differentiate” or modify how they teach to meet the needs of both students with learning disabilities and those who are gifted (Tomlinson, 2001; 2003).

**Technology.** Technology has transformed all aspects of contemporary life, and the elementary classroom is no exception. The explosion of easily available information has resulted in new challenges for both students and teachers (Swan & Hofer, 2008; VanFossen & Berson, 2008). Ten years ago, Fitzpatrick (2000) made a point that is valid today—the irony that students born and raised in the era of the computer and the Internet are better prepared to work in information-age classrooms than their teachers, many of whom are more comfortable with television, newspapers, and encyclopedias. He concluded that “the greatest challenge of the new millennium is therefore not the one facing students, but the one facing teachers as they work to help fresh, young minds grow toward their fullest potential” (p. 33, emphasis added). While only 35% of schools had Internet access in 1994, now all public schools are connected (Swan & Hofer, 2008). Computer-based resources are replacing more traditional, hard-copy sources, such as pull-down classroom maps, multivolume encyclopedias, and films. The NCSS journals *Social Education* and *Social Studies and the Young Learner* regularly publish articles about the advantages and potential problems with Internet resources. Also, the computer allows students to reveal
what they have learned in exciting new ways as children create digital products stored in a
variety of formats: on CDs, school Websites, or on Internet sites like TeacherTube and
VoiceThread (www.teachertube.com; www.voicethread.com; Nabel, Jamison, & Bennett,
2009; Simpson, 2009a).

21st Century Skills

While staying true to the goals of promoting democratic citizenship and teaching content
in several social sciences, the future social studies curricula should help children achieve
“21st century skills” (Partnership for 21st Century Skills & NCSS, 2008; Yell, 2008; Yell &
Box, 2008; www.21stcenturyskills.org). There seems to a growing consensus that our ele-
mentary school students must be adaptable to change. They must be both critical thinkers
and effective communicators. The social studies curriculum should have a global focus,
stressing the interconnectivity of people who share a planet. The Partnership for 21st Cen-
tury Skills, a unique collaborative effort among business leaders, educators, and policy
makers, has taken the lead in defining what skills our children need to acquire to thrive in
the future. The Partnership defined three categories of 21st century skills: (1) Learning and
Innovation Skills; (2) Information, Media and Technology Skills; and (3) Life and Career
Skills. The specific skills within each category are:

Learning and Innovation Skills
  Creativity and Innovation
  Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
  Communication
  Collaboration

Information, Media and Technology Skills
  Information Literacy
  Media Literacy
  Information, Communication, Technology (ICT) Literacy

Life and Career Skills
  Flexibility and Adaptability
  Initiative and Self Direction
  Social and Cross-Cultural Skills
  Productivity and Accountability
  Leadership and Responsibility

The NCSS began working with the Partnership in 2007 to define how these 21st cen-
tury skills could be integrated into the social studies curriculum. The result was a “Skills
Map” that provides specific illustrations of the intersection of 21st century skills and social
studies (Partnership for 21st Century Skills & NCSS, 2008). The *21st Century Skills Social Studies Map* offers a vision of what elementary social studies teaching and learning should look like to prepare our children for the challenges they will face in the near future. The map provides social studies learning outcomes and learning experiences for each skill at grades four, eight, and twelve. Let's look at three fourth-grade learning outcomes and their corresponding learning activities for the skill of Information Literacy, in the category of Information, Media and Technology Skills:

**Examples of Student Learning Outcomes and Learning Experiences from the 21st Century Skills Social Studies Map.** The first outcome is that fourth graders “access information about communities around the world from a variety of information sources” (Partnership for 21st Century Skills & NCSS, 2008, p. 8). The learning activity proposed is that fourth graders are organized in small groups. Each group selects a nation and focuses on daily life in that nation. The students use online encyclopedias, electronic databases, and other Websites. They organize the information they have gathered and share what they have learned with their classmates using presentation software. Later, the children create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast daily life in two geographically diverse communities.

The second outcome is that fourth graders “access information from the expertise of people inside or outside of their own community” (p. 8). Students would participate in an online discussion or videoconference with a local museum director in the local community. They would then analyze an artifact from the local community and speculate on the owner and purpose of the object.

The third outcome is that fourth graders “gather original data from various information sources and create graphs or charts to display the information” (p. 8). For this outcome, students would use an online survey tool to determine what local attractions their families prefer to visit. The data would be organized in a spreadsheet. Their findings would ultimately be displayed with some graphing tool.

These examples are typical of the 26 learning outcomes and corresponding learning experiences in the Skills Map. The content is both local and global—and this is rare in elementary social studies curricula—as you will see in the next section. Currently, at different grade levels, the curriculum tends to focus on the local community, the state, the United States, or some part of the rest of world. Rarely is there a mixture, as there is in the Skills Map. And, of course, there is the emphasis on the use of technology to gather, analyze, and share information. In the three examples I selected, students gather information by using online encyclopedias, online databases, online discussions, videoconferences, and online survey tools. The information the fourth graders gather is shared through presentation software, spreadsheets, and computer-based graphing tools.

### Social Studies: The Curriculum

Whatever set of standards you follow as a teacher, the structure of the social studies curriculum will have three organizational components: content, processes, and values.
Content
Scope and Sequence. Given the domain of social studies—the study of people—there is far more content than can be presented in the elementary grades. Therefore, anyone planning a social studies curriculum must design a scope and sequence. A scope and sequence is an outline of the content studied at each grade level. Scope refers to the topics covered, and sequence to the order of their presentation. The scope and sequence of any curriculum is organized around grade levels. The topics chosen and the concepts related to those topics should be dependent on the developmental level of students. Thus, simpler concepts are usually chosen for earlier grade levels.

One scope and sequence has dominated elementary social studies, namely, the expanding environments approach (also called expanding communities or expanding horizons). Some authorities question when this framework was first implemented; social studies programs from as far back as 1900 in some ways resemble it (LeRiche, 1987). Paul Hanna (1963, 1987a, 1987b) first advocated it as a distinct theory in 1956. The essence of expanding environments is that children should learn about what is nearest to them first and then,
as they grow older, about people and places progressively more remote. A scope and sequence following the expanding environments model would be as follows:

- Kindergarten: Self, Family, School
- First Grade: Family and School
- Second Grade: Neighborhood and Community
- Third Grade: Our Community and Other Communities
- Fourth Grade: Our State
- Fifth Grade: United States History
- Sixth Grade: World Studies

The expanding environments scope and sequence has been criticized for its lack of substance in the primary grades and for its narrow scope (Akenson, 1989; Duplass, 2007; Larkins & Hawkins, 1990). The NCSS position statement titled “Powerful and Purposeful Teaching and Learning in Elementary School Social Studies” went so far as to state “The ‘expanding horizons’ curriculum model of self, family, community, state, and nation is insufficient for today’s young learners” (NCSS, 2009, p. 31). Opponents of the model claim that devoting four grades to family, school, and community provides children with too limited a view. Certainly, in a time of increased cultural diversity in the United States and of interdependence internationally, the expanding environments concept needs to include cross-cultural and global perspectives whenever possible. On the other hand, Brophy and Alleman (2008) argue that the expanding environments curriculum can be as effective as any other framework. They note this scope and sequence is a way of allowing children to analyze topics that they call “cultural universals,” such as food, clothing, shelter, communication, transportation, and government (Alleman & Brophy, 2001b, 2002b, 2002c). If young children are going to learn about government, then it seems to make sense to have them learn about how rules are made and enforced in the contexts they know best—family, school, and community. As children grow older, they can study rule making and governing in the broader contexts of states, the nation, and the world. In this sense, the expanded environments model provides a means for the “spiral curriculum” proposed by Bruner.

The expanding environments concept remains a strong influence on curriculum planners. Alternative outlines, while emphasizing other themes and presenting new topics, generally reflect the self–family–school–neighborhood–community–state–nation–world sequence of expanding environments. For example, California’s content standards for history and social science introduced new topics in the primary grades. Otherwise, planners followed the expanded environments scope and sequence, especially in the upper grades with study of the local community in grade 3, state history in grade 4, U.S. history in grade 5, and world history in grade 6 (California Department of Education, 1998; www.cde.ca.gov). I took a quick look at 15 state social studies curriculum standards while writing this edition, and all that I looked at conformed to a large degree to the expanding environments scope and sequence. To see the social studies standards for any state, go to the NCSS Website (www.ncss.org) and click on “Standards and Position Statements.”
In most schools, teachers are expected to follow the scope and sequence adopted by the school district, and in almost every case that scope and sequence has been established by the state social studies standards. You may have a personal interest in the American Civil War, for example, but that does not mean you are free to make it a part of your social studies curriculum unless, of course, the standards you are following make it a topic you are supposed to teach. At the same time, teachers and students should have the freedom to pursue topics of interest within their grade-level curriculum. For example, a third-grade class is studying community workers. A child who shows a keen interest in firefighters should be encouraged to complete unique activities relating to fighting fires while other students do other things.

Another point related to scope and sequence: The elementary school is the ideal place for teachers to plan cross-curricular units of instruction (NCSS, 2008a, 2009). These units combine one or more of the following: social studies, science, math, literature, language arts, the performing arts, and the visual arts. One factor that has stimulated the development of cross-curricular units of study has been the reorganization of junior high schools into middle schools, where sixth and seventh graders frequently are taught in “humanities blocks,” or 2-hour periods with an integrated curriculum of social studies and language arts (Field et al., 2001; Kellough, 1995; Young, 1994).

Concepts, Generalizations, and Facts. A scope and sequence will define what is to be covered, though there still remains the large question of what specific content children will be expected to acquire. If fourth graders study their state, what should they learn about it? Again, the relevant set of standards your school district has adopted will determine the content your children are expected to master. The content students learn should consist of concepts, generalizations, and facts. This three-level categorization of the content component of social studies is based on the work of Hilda Taba (Bernard-Powers, 2002; Fraenkel, 1992; Taba, 1967). Note that other authorities in the social studies offer different definitions for generalizations and concepts. Here, though, we will use Taba’s system:

- **Concepts** are ideas. They may be stated in a variety of ways. They tend to be broad and somewhat fuzzy. Conflict, justice, and family are all concepts. Perhaps the easiest way to think of concepts is as the big ideas that we want students to understand.

- **Generalizations** are content-specific statements. They are more specific than concepts and are based on the factual content of the social studies curriculum.

- **Facts** support concepts and generalizations.

It is essential that we understand the relationship between concepts, generalizations, and facts. Children learn facts so they can make generalizations. Several generalizations, when understood in concert, explain a concept. Generalizations and concepts enable children to make sense of what they study because facts, if unconnected to larger ideas, are of little value. Taba (1967) points out that the purpose of teaching facts “is to explain, illustrate, and develop main ideas” (p. 19). Figure 1.1 shows the hierarchical relationship among concepts, generalizations, and facts for one part of a third-grade social studies curriculum.
Figure 1.1

Concepts, Generalizations, and Facts for “Coming to Our City” in a Third-Grade Curriculum

**Concept:** Movement: A geographic concept—that people, products, and ideas move across political and natural borders.

**Generalization:** People have come to our city throughout its history.

**Facts:**
- In about A.D. 1000, Native Americans first settled in what was to become our city.
- In 1792, the Franciscan missionaries built a mission near our city.
- During the 10 years after World War II (1945–1955), the population of our city doubled, from 40,000 to 80,000 people.
- From 1975 to 1990, 9,500 immigrants from Southeast Asia moved to our city.

**Processes**

In addition to teaching children concepts, generalizations, and facts, social studies programs also should improve students’ ability in several processes. A process involves doing—it usually can be stated in a single word ending with -ing. Sets of social studies standards, whether produced at the national, state, or local level, will have a list of the processes students should master as they learn the content of the curriculum. The processes related to social studies can be categorized as follows:

- **Inquiry processes,** in which children formulate questions, gather data, analyze what they have found, and share what they learned
- **Thinking processes,** in which children develop the ability to apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information
- **Language arts processes,** especially as they relate to the social science disciplines, as students read, write, speak, and listen
- **Visual and performing arts processes,** which are of two kinds, as students learn to appreciate the arts and learn to use the arts for expression
- **Technology processes,** in which children manipulate computer-based resources
- **Participation processes,** as children express personal views, work cooperatively with others toward common goals, and become active citizens

**Values**

Content is the what of social studies, and processes are the how to. That is not all there is to social studies. Recall from the definitions of the first part of this chapter that an
important part of social studies is teaching values. The NCSS provided this definition of values:

Values constitute the standards or criteria against which individual behavior and group behavior are judged. Beliefs represent commitments to those values. (NCSS Task Force on Scope and Sequence, 1989, p. 378)

Honesty, for example, is a value. If we are honest, then we will adopt a certain way of living and expect others to behave in a way that reflects that value. The set of values social studies emphasizes involves civic values, beliefs that lead to active citizenship. It is not enough that students acquire content and become skillful in a variety of processes. Children should use what they know to make their family, school, community, state, nation, and world a better place. This part of the elementary curriculum has existed since colonial times and is fundamental to public schooling in a democratic society. Democracies must have citizens who are knowledgeable and active. Other than civic values, social studies should teach children to value themselves by nurturing positive self-concepts. Along with the rest of the elementary curriculum, social studies programs should help children adopt healthy values toward school and learning (NCSS, 2008b; NCSS Task Force on Early Childhood/Elementary Social Studies, 1989).

It should be stressed, however, that values education should not be a process of indoctrination. Rather, children should adopt civic values because they understand the importance of them in a free society. As children learn to treasure our democratic system, they must concurrently learn of the differences in all aspects of life in a democratic society. In other words, diversity is inevitable in a democracy. The values component of the social studies curriculum can be difficult to teach, but we should not shy away from it. Engle and Ochoa (1988) stated it nicely:

It is much easier and more straightforward to ask what are the facts than to ask what value or values should we subscribe to in a given instance. Despite the difficulty, a social studies program that neglects to deal with value problems stops far short of teaching students how to think intelligently about the real world. (p. 120)

At the end of this chapter, there is a lesson plan for a kindergarten classroom that is standards based and has objectives from each component of the social studies curriculum: content, processes, and values.

Summary of Key Points

- Social studies is integrated and interdisciplinary in that ideas and information come from many fields of study.
- Social studies goes beyond the textbook and rote memorization of facts.
- Social studies adopts the best ideas from the period of Progressive Education, including hands-on experiences, student selection of activities, thematic units, and the integration of social studies with the arts.
Social studies continues the innovations of the New Social Studies, such as teaching children the fundamental concepts of the social sciences through inquiry learning.

Social studies teaching and learning has become standards based.

The NCSS/Partnership for 21st Century Skills Map defines skills that our students will need to acquire to be successful in the future.

Social studies content includes concepts, generalizations, and facts.

Social studies processes fall under the following categories: inquiry, thinking, language arts, visual arts, performing arts, technology, and participatory.

Social studies emphasizes acquisition of civic values, the set of beliefs that leads to active citizenship.

Lesson Plans and Instructional Activities

At the end of each chapter you will find sample instructional plans in several formats. Most will be lesson plans, a teacher’s written plan for a social studies lesson of 20 to 40 minutes. Others will be mini-units, a series of three or four lessons on a single topic. Some will be projects, an activity that takes more than 1 day to complete. Finally, at the end of Chapter 2, you will find a fully developed unit of study, a set of lesson plans and instructional activities, all related to a single topic, spanning several days. Each chapter will begin with a vignette, a description of a social studies activity in an elementary classroom. At the end of this chapter you will find: (a) a classroom vignette describing a sixth-grade class immersed in a unit on ancient Greece; and (b) a lesson plan for a kindergarten activity on cooperation.

Classroom Vignette/Grade Six: Multiple Activities During a Unit on Ancient Greece

There is a lot going on here! Some students rehearse a play they have written on the myth of Daedalus. This group is excited because a video of their play will be posted on the Internet site, TeacherTube (www.teachertube.com). Another group is busy painting the Acropolis for a large mural on the ancient Greeks. Some kids are in their seats reading books. Mrs. Winslow has brought several books to class from the local library. Matt reads Margaret Hodges’s The Arrow and the Lamp, a retelling of the myth of Eros and Psyche. Julie examines an information book, The Parthenon: The Height of Greek Civilization. Ricardo and Thuy, working on a computer, are looking at photographs of the Parthenon through an Internet Website (www.sacred-destinations.com/greece/parthenon-pictures). Mrs. Winslow works with a group of students who are producing a CD on ancient Greece. This electronic encyclopedia will have
photographs, maps, charts, and written text. Ouch! The students know much more about this technology than I do!

I also copied a page from Mrs. Winslow’s plan book. This is what she wrote for the day I observed:

1:05–2:00 Social Studies

**Ancient Greek unit, Day 10, Multiple Activities:**
1. “Daedalus” play group—read through second part of script—first walkthrough tomorrow
2. Mural group—paint Acropolis
3. CD encyclopedia group—I will spend most of my time with this group—edit rough drafts of text, answer questions
4. Computer/Internet—view photographs of the Parthenon available on the Web
5. Other students—read independently

Let’s consider these activities in the context of the definitions presented earlier. Both the NCSS definition and Barth’s definition stress that social studies must integrate the social sciences and humanities. The focus of the unit was historical, but Mrs. Winslow did a good job of integrating the arts with the historical content of the unit. The play on Daedalus and books such as *The Arrow and the Lamp* were just a few of the ways she introduced her students to the Greek myths. Development of the mural helped students understand Greek architecture and would be followed with lessons showing the Greek influence on American architecture. The arts were also a means for student expression. Rather than limit her students to written assignments, Mrs. Winslow provided opportunities for expression through both the visual and performing arts. My definition stresses that social studies should help students master several processes; in this one day, I saw students reading, writing, acting, talking, cooperating, drawing, painting, and using the computer to gather and present information. Remember, too, that each definition stated that the ultimate purpose of social studies is good citizenship. Mrs. Winslow’s unit on the ancient Greeks provided her students with knowledge of the link between ancient Greece and contemporary America and the influence of their democratic governments on society.

**Effective Teaching in Today’s Diverse Classroom:** It is important to note that the multiple-activity approach used by Mrs. Winslow is essential in a classroom with diverse students. While engaging in different types of experiences, each student in her room was learning more about the ancient Greeks. Some students will learn more through the visual arts, others through reading and writing, and others through the performing arts. Howard Gardner (2006) describes the “multiple intelligences” that people possess, and our teaching should allow children to learn social studies content in a variety of ways. This is especially important for children with learning disabilities. Also, the multiple activities Mrs. Winslow planned provided for both group and individual work. Even though all students need to work with their classmates in small-group formats, it was good to see that she provided an opportunity for students to choose to work individually or with their peers.
Lesson Plan
Kindergarten: Cooperation and A Chair for My Mother

Overview: This is a lesson for kindergarten. It is part of a unit titled “Happy Together—Family and Friends.” It is planned for 25 students.

Resources and Materials: (a) One copy of A Chair for My Mother by Vera B. Williams, (b) paint and paper for bulletin board illustrations, (c) 25 sheets of primary-level drawing/writing paper.

Standard: One of the themes in the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies is “Individuals, Groups, and Institutions.” One learning expectation for the early grades is that learners will be able to “show how groups and institutions work to meet individual needs, and promote or fail to promote the common good” (NCSS, 2010, p. 78).

Content Objectives: This lesson will help children see how members of a family and their friends help each other in a time of need. They will consider how they can cooperate in our classroom. It will help children build their understanding of the concepts of cooperation and family.

Process Objectives: The students will (a) listen to the book read aloud, (b) respond orally to the teacher’s questions, (c) identify how several characters help Rosa and her family, and (d) complete one of three postreading optional activities.

Value Objectives: This activity should help students acquire the value of “Consideration for Others”—that we should help people who have suffered from an unforeseen circumstance.

Teaching Sequence:

1. Before the lesson begins, be sure all materials and resources are ready; on the blackboard, write the names of the following characters: Rosa, Grandmother, Aunt Ida and Uncle Sandy, neighbors.

2. On a sheet of chart paper, write the following postreading options: (a) Go with Ms. Sanchez (the instructional aide). Draw pictures for A Chair for My Mother section of “Our Favorite Books” bulletin board. (b) Go to your seat. Draw and write anything you want about A Chair for My Mother. (c) Stay with Mr. Wong (the teacher). Talk about what makes working together difficult and what makes it easy.
3. Ask the children to sit on the carpet and read aloud *A Chair for My Mother*.

4. Ask the children if there is anything they would like to say about the book (use what the children say as a basis for further discussion).

5. Discuss with the children how Rosa, Grandmother, Aunt Ida and Uncle Sandy, and the neighbors helped. Refer back to illustrations in the book.

6. Lead a discussion on how class members can work together and help each other. Begin by making a list of all the classroom chores that are easier to complete if members of the class work together. Other than classroom tasks, ask what other things members of the class can do for each other (many things should come to mind, such as sharing supplies or cheering up classmates who are sad). Use a piece of chart paper to record the ideas of the students.

7. Explain the options to the children (see item 2).

8. Be sure all the children are either working with Ms. Sanchez, in their seats, or are still on the carpet.

9. Later, bring the group together. Have the children share their pictures, dictated narratives, and the results of the discussion.

**Evaluation:** At the kindergarten level, evaluation is often informal. The pictures the children draw and the texts they write or dictate can be saved in student portfolios.

**Effective Teaching in Today's Diverse Classroom:** Mr. Wong's class included several Spanish-speaking English learners. These children spoke some English. The excellent illustrations in the book allowed the English learners to understand the story, even though they did not know the meaning of every word in the text. Like most kindergarten teachers, Mr. Wong modified his speech when talking to his 5-year-old students. He slowed down, repeated things, and avoided large words. This, too, helped the English learners understand what he was saying. If the class had included English learners who spoke almost no English, then the activity would need the assistance of a bilingual person (the teacher, an instructional aide, a parent volunteer, or an older student). Each of the following adjustments could be added: (a) Someone should explain the plot of the story in the native language of the English learners (in this case, Spanish), and (b) the postreading discussion could be conducted in the English learners' native language. We want children to understand the concepts of cooperation and to see their importance in the story and in the classroom. To achieve this objective, it might be necessary to conduct all or part of the lesson in a language other than English.