

## Reflection Narrative

**Significance of the Social Sciences**

The most basic element to a person is their humanity. It is shared with all others around them, and through the collecting of individuals, communities, societies, and nations are formed. Thus is there anything as important as incorporating this connection with the rest of the world around us throughout our lives, especially within education where individuals need not to be limited by the boundaries of their own living situations?

This is where social studies play such a vital role in the lives of students, especially for elementary school children who are just beginning to experience the world beyond their homes, families, and direct communities. If students did not have social studies in school, many would be limited by the breadth of their outside sources to provide them with meaningful experiences in the world. This may be fine for some students whose parents/guardians are in a position to provide that, but, for example, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds would possibly never gain a broader view of the world beyond their communities. Social studies in the classroom allow students of all backgrounds to learn how the world has changed over time, how events in the past influence their current lives, that people just like them have done astounding things, and that cultures and peoples vary but are all equally important and are bonded together by their basic humanity.

However, students do not learn a topic like social studies in isolation. While in school, students investigate other areas including science, reading/language arts, and math. Within each of these subjects there exist important qualities, knowledge, and understanding to be learned. But even in these subjects, social studies can be connected.

The sciences introduce students to an understanding of the things that exist around them. Through investigation and inquiry, elementary students begin to comprehend how living entities around them function, how changes in the environment occur, what composes the objects with which they interact everyday, and so much more. Yet this knowledge can be made even more authentic and meaningful when given a human connection. For example, a teacher can draw social studies into the study of the phases of the moon by incorporating how different peoples have created calendars or created stories about the images they see in the moon. Or a teacher could diversify her students' concept of a "scientist" by including studies of female and minority individuals who have added to our scientific world.

Language arts/reading is the basis of our educational system. The need to be literate to succeed in our culture cannot be understated, as is reflected in the various testing programs throughout our nation. Therefore, many of students' early experiences are in the language arts where, among other things, they learn the skill of reading which opens so many opportunities to them. Once again, social studies provide a rich source of support to this subject. Students can be motivated to read through the biographies of fascinating individuals, the stories and folklore of their own as well as foreign cultures, or informative text which give students a view of life like and unlike their own, to name just a few. But even more simply than that, social studies is connected to language arts through the fact that language is a human creation which connects us. Students can learn about persons as writers and thinkers who share their ideas through shared language.

It is important for students to use their mathematic abilities not only with numbers and computation but also with thinking and problem solving. Students learn new ways of thinking and considering information through math. At first, it might seem like math has

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less of a human element than other subjects, but it too has connections to social studies. Throughout history, people have created many different uses for math and have sought to understand the world through calculations. Students can gain a stronger bond with math through social studies by seeing the human element involved in the math they learn.

**Significance of the Arts**

As is stated in *Self in the World*, “Artistic expression is everywhere” (p.383). The arts allow students to experience a form of expression which is not limited by their academic abilities. For example, they can use their bodies and voices to act out pieces of text in language arts, listen to the beat and tempo of music for calculations in math, and explore the ways in which life has been documented through illustrations in science and then apply it to their own investigations.

But the arts are even more strongly related to social studies. Art is innately human and can be used to draw connections to humanity in social studies instead of limiting the study to dates and events in isolation in history. Sometimes an artwork is connected back to an individual while other times it connects to a culture’s history. As I experienced in developing my group culture kit, the arts can be an affective way to share another culture with students. We incorporated visual art, music, and dance into our unit, which describes the country of Sri Lanka. For example, through Sanni mask art, students were invited not only to express themselves visually and learn about another culture but also to think more deeply about what is personally meaningful to them (namely, their health) and what would drive someone to create art like this. The art allowed this deep thinking to occur.

**E05/L05 in Relation to Conceptual Framework**

The knowledge and skills I have gained through my E05/L05 experiences have helped me to build a base from which to continue developing toward the aspects of the School of Education Conceptual Framework. Collaboration has been a major focus this semester while creating my culture kit with two of my cohorts. We worked in sync with one another to brainstorm ideas for certain lessons and artifacts while others we discussed and divided among ourselves. This allowed us to share the workload, but we could reference each other if we had difficulties and needed assistance.

Similarly, I have done a great deal of reflection. I have reflected upon what I have seen taught in the elementary school settings and sometimes found it lacking the qualities I hope to bring into my classroom one day, such as making geography more meaningful than names of places. However, I have also reflected upon my own performance as a teacher. After teaching my election lesson, I discovered that I need more practice with my classroom management skills as well as further developing guided practice in my lessons.

Through my E05 coursework, I feel I have begun to develop my sense of content expertise. I have become much more aware of what is missing from many social studies curriculums. For example, even within our own class, a lack of international awareness was evident through the Regions of the World pre-assessment data. Likewise, *SITW* made me more aware of ignored groups such as common people, women, and minorities.

Leadership is a vital quality, and I believe that I have developed this attribute through this semester. For example, I took on leadership responsibilities in my group by developing lessons and artifact activities for our culture kit. I also had to act as a leader while teaching my own lesson in the classroom. But perhaps the most meaningful leadership role I had was creating a lesson which other kindergarten teachers at my school chose to use in their classrooms. I was able to act as a resource to these educators.