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***IMPLEMENTING ILLINOIS & NATIONAL SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS ~
Organizing Lessons & Programs for Researching Global Issues, Events, and Connections***

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As this exciting American Election Year 2020 continues to proceed, this “ephemeral moment in time” greatly influences public thoughts about the vital significance for supporting outstanding school Social Studies programs! Besides “taking political sides,” many Illinois teachers are now trying to effectively address their students’ ongoing questions about “so many” provincial, national, and Global issues/events which also require significant amounts of classroom attention and time. In fact, the recent edition of *TIME Magazine* shares “how the young are questioning their school’s inattention to this year’s election” and the resultant problems with information reliability, “fake news,” and the limited scope of their school’s Social Studies programs, i.e., academic opportunities to adequately prepare each child for the responsibilities of citizenship in today’s American democracy. Accordingly, in “*YOUTHQUAKE; How the World Will Change When a New Generation Leads,*” it paraphrases news journalists like *George F. Will* who share comments like “if citizens here in the United States do not wish to be part of these civic discussions, they’re in the wrong country!” It’s Election Time! It’s time for all citizens to assess and evaluate our human condition, make decisions about our country’s future, and vote! With this civic charge, there is additional work for schools to reorganize and update our Social Studies!

Can the Social Studies “be improved” by addressing our educational standards? Can the Illinois and NCSS National Standards seriously address each child’s ability to grasp their world’s heritage and “to be adequately informed of today’s current events and issues?” Obviously, there are multiple academic challenges which “lie ahead” for all Social Studies programs! Generally, school administrators, board members, and professional educators are required to provide effective instruction and to teach from their school district’s established curriculum, i.e., a published textbook series, an online program, an I.E.P., or a “mixed bag” of teaching and learning experiences that address clearly stated, grade-level, goals and objectives. For the Social Studies, most educators employ *Paul Hanna’s “Expanding Environmental Themes”* and follow their required “traditional scripts of grade-level syllabi, lesson plans and course expectations.” As teachers continue with their instruction, questions “still remain” about each student’s “understanding of the world,” and their ability to understand “active citizenship in a free democracy.” Can Social Studies standards handle these responsibilities while also addressing other subject-area competencies to handle daily assignments and standardized tests. Obviously, the overall viability of a school’s curriculum rests with questions about “whether or not” its program and teachers are appropriately applying Illinois State and National Professional Education Standards.

Are there problems with teaching today’s Social Studies? Overarching concerns have been publicly articulated about the significance of any school Social Studies experience, its lack of meeting evaluation and testing requirements, its lack of “instructional time,” its lack of educational resources, its lack of value against other tested subject areas like “math, science, reading, STEM, etc.,” its lack of curricular integration with other subject-area topics, its lack of

practical connections to student research/technical skills, et al. During last year's NCSS National Conference, teachers at the House of Delegates discussed how the Social Studies can address "everything about our human heritage and universe" by including: (1.) the overall welfare of our local communities, the State, the Nation and the World; (2.) the ramifications of today's 2020 democratically based political elections; (3.) the salient issues of "Global Warming and Changing Environmental Conditions," the Coronavirus, and so many other concerns facing today's world; (4.) the role of Social Studies education in a school's curriculum and its impact on our democracy; and finally, (5.) its lack of priority given to many school academic programs (*By the way, this university supervisor has acknowledged our student-teachers' clinical commentaries for years and they still ask questions like "Does a Social Studies education really exist in our schools anymore?").

When there are many ongoing and newsworthy discussions about the challenges to our Economy, Justice, Human Rights & Welfare, Global and Medical Health, this election year has forced children to note during the Social Studies about "what they hear" from their parents, neighbors, church, and "media experts." Additionally, students have now taken valuable class time online to research civic topics like "emerging trends in technology," artificial intelligence and virtual reality, wars and tariffs, sustainability and extinction, the CORONAVIRUS, space advancements, this year's Tokyo Olympics, the sensibility of the 2020 Census, Political Extremism, et al. These "up-to-date perspectives" also incite inquiries at school from students because they now realize how so many issues and events are directly impacting their lives and can only be honorably addressed with "well-planned," standards-based, Social Studies classroom experiences. Significantly associated to these academic trends and concerns is "a new

generation” of Social Studies professional educators “coming aboard” that have the wonderful potential to provide multiple rationales for updating their school curriculums!

Where should Social Studies educators start their discussion of “building new academic programs?” If school curriculums really need help “updating” their present-day programs, how can new initiatives be “effectively organized and administrated” using Illinois State and NCSS National Social Studies Standards? Additionally, if new programs should include “each teacher’s creative freedom” of designing their own stimulating learning experiences in the classroom, must they be primarily focused on productive student test scores? If standardized assessment results like those that immerge from the Iowa Basics (and even daily assignments, quizzes and Social Studies unit tests), truly measure each child’s overall academic growth and development while also evaluating their school program’s success, then the inclusion of “highly integrated” standard-based frameworks should be enthusiastically endorsed!

Additionally, is there “ongoing class time” for professional Social Studies educators to handle and effectively address “the scope of all civic issues” and “all of the global events” that students generally ask questions about? Understandably, is there enough school time to effectively address student conjectures about today’s changing realities? According to former professor at the *University of Chicago and Northern Illinois University, Dr. Claude Vedder*, this very interesting audience question was handled at a National Conference presentation with the quip “Yes! God invented the Social Studies so that it can successfully respond to all providential and universal questions about our human and global existence!” With this overwhelming charge of confidence, please note the adjoining example Global Connections, Events, and Issues Social

Studies Standard lesson plan asks each student to “pick and research” their own Civic Issue interest (please note that this standard is one of ten NCSS National Standards).

What motivates students to learn about the Social Studies? Since this Social Studies standard initiative is based on each child’s internal desire to research, learn and explore civic answers that will address their own specific inquiries, new studies have recognized how “doing online research” has also provided a profound impact on building academic skills and an enjoyment of Social Studies education. When students research their own Global research topics such as “The Extinction of Songbirds” or “How Does Pollution Impact Wildlife?” or “Can our CORONAVIRUS be contained like other Pandemics?,” et al., teachers have noted the benefit of these standard-based lessons and how their students have positively responded to resultant “open-ended-discussions-and-debates,” and stimulating discussions with their colleagues, teachers, and parents! They also enjoy the additional research help from others using the classroom *Johnson & Johnson “Cooperative Learning” Instructional Method* and other related educational paradigms.

What does this Social Studies standard experience look like? As one “field-tested” example study of our supplementary lesson plan, a nearby elementary school classroom had twenty students each “picking” individually chosen research topics (*see supplemental Social Studies Global Connections Standard lesson “Topics List”) and used their school’s operational online resources, art and library materials, etc. After addressing the requirements of each activity, each child shared their research data and findings with others, including classmates, other grade-level classrooms, senior citizens, School “Open House” programs, and also, at a competitive Social Studies Fair (*To see a glimpse of these and other example student research

projects, please link your computer's search-engine to Google "Student Social Studies Projects" and also to the "Image" link to see those that are posted).

As a professional educator, it was quite stimulating to witness and judge first-hand these wonderful student research projects and presentations and to hear subsequent civic responses from community members, parents, and other educators! Besides witnessing each child's "burning desire and curiosity" to "know all of the related facts" about their chosen global research topic, students noted later about how they were impassioned about exploring the many exciting values that the Social Studies had to offer and how they were fostering a new awareness of civic opportunities and responsibility!

To share one final and "illuminating example" of this standard lesson's influence impacted one child, a nearby Social Studies educator cited the case of a sixth-grade student who chose to do a research investigation of why there were "so many wildlife songbirds going extinct." The immediate source of her Global Issues Standard research project came from a recent thematic publication of a National Geographic Journal that addressed human threats to environmental conditions and focused attention to the question about why so many animals around the world were "losing their numbers in the wild." This student initiated her study with online websites which included a link that reported a Texas Cattlemen's Conference citing the problems of rain and how changing economic markets influenced many Lone Star farms and ranches to compromise their "wild and untilled" land areas in favor of new crop and cattle production. Since this also reduced habitat for wildlife and obviously, songbirds, she took notice! With the help of her school librarian, she found additional information about wildlife extinction which included *Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring"* that discussed the detrimental

influences of pesticides on environmental food-chains, plant growth, and the overall human condition. After completing her standards-based research study, this intermediate student found that there were multiple human factors significantly harming the general health and life of songbirds and all in all, she became “quite an activist and discussant!” After presenting her data and findings, she recommended political steps to help protect the health and life of all songbirds and that citizens everywhere should band together and the range of possibilities to effectively address significant Global Issues, such as the “loss of our songbirds,” that are influencing the health of our planet!

To answer those who ask “value-added” questions about the overall academic worth of this Social Studies standard research experience, this *Illinois State & NCSS National Global Connections, Issues & Events* supplemental example lesson integrates multiple subject-area skills and academic abilities to critically think and problem solve. The “*connective idea*” of utilizing internet research data with the onset of asking significant research questions, to the task of finding key library and resource information on a specific topic (including illustrative pictures, artwork, statistics, graphs, etc.), to the work of establishing collaborations with teachers and others, to the endeavor of fostering writing and word processing skills, to the creation and execution of effective power-point presentations, to the artistry of designing an effective “Social Studies Display Booth,” et al., is quite challenging for students! This is where a successful instructional framework should be routinely employed by the Social Studies teacher!

Besides realizing gains in all areas of academic assessment, this type of Social Studies standard lesson will also promote each child’s overall affective growth and development and other affective dimensions like “self-confidence,” “work ethics,” excitement, and curiosity.

Educational efforts to update school curriculums with standards-based instruction will also share the overwhelming support of valued-added research data and the integrity of the Social Studies. In toto, students love this kind of “happy Social Studies classroom experience” and have noted how they enjoy collaborating with fellow classmates while also securing help from family members, and teachers, and other significant adults.

Can Social Studies standards secure a quality-based educational experience for all teachers and students? When Global Scholars like *Fareed Zaharia and Thomas Friedman*, whose recent work “*The World is Flat*,” encouraged new educational perspectives and the changing of Social Studies education towards standard-based mission statements, they also urged today’s students to realize that “*their new world of the 21st Century is getting smaller!*” With the advent of cell phones, computers, world trade and travel, pandemics, international business, et al., teachers and students need to updated and well-versed! By inviting educators to successfully address Illinois and NCSS National Social Studies Standards in their school curriculums, they will also find students “paying close attention to the 2020 Elections and to those Global Connections which bind civic values with ongoing changes, issues, and current events.” Additionally, students and teachers will also find that they have been influenced to foster the assessment and evaluation of their own opinions, their “overall growth and development,” their own educational values, their own critical thinking and problem-solving skills, their own abilities to make and formulate justified opinions, and their own responsibility to “know themselves!” Along their way through these elementary, middle and high school Social Studies endeavors, all children should the wonderful opportunities to identify the influences that have shaped their identities and clarify “how and why they think!”

Finally, as seen from today's CORONAVIRUS pandemic concern, Global Connection standard lessons are vital in not only the Social Studies but in all school curriculums.

Our new world's 21st Century realities of Global Connections, Dependence and Interdependence require all citizens and school programs to take very serious sacrifices and undertakings to update their Social Studies teaching and learning experiences towards "an understanding and an appreciation" of our new era. Rather than feeling overwhelmed with these new challenges, a "new generation" of students and teachers should be allowed to have multiple academic opportunities to explore the range and scope of today's Global Events and Issues together. At a time when our elections are proceeding, citizens also need to make decisions about the quality of their school's Social Studies education and consider the significant influences of the day. By researching questions about our future welfare and survival, culture, and welfare, school children can confront the array of philosophic, theological, economic, and political positions needing to be effectively addressed.

What are the most serious Global Issues & Events of today? How should Social Studies programs be effectively organized and administrated? How can educators offer "the proper time and study" for students to examine their world? Hopefully, this adjoining "Global Connections, Events & Issues" Standard Social Studies lesson example is one outstanding academic contribution.

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