

SOCIAL SCIENCE INTRODUCTION

Education in the social science aims to help students develop as rational, humane and productive citizens in a democratic society. Four elements of social studies education are necessary to help develop such citizens--knowledge, skills, values and participation. Although Oregon's content standards limit the domain of measurable proficiency to knowledge and skills, a good social studies program seeks to foster all four elements.

Students need to organize knowledge around significant concepts, generalizations and theories. Such organization is necessary to make sense of the world by giving students a means by which to appraise subsequent information and compare and contrast it with what they already know. Unless relations among facts are grasped, what might become powerful ideas are left as empty verbalizations, memorized but inert. Young people need a rich fund of information, but information selected with the intent of developing ideas.

Students must learn to be critical and creative thinkers, reflective and capable of gathering, organizing, analyzing, and evaluating information. The excitement of honing one's thinking skills in serious discussion provides one of the best examples of participatory democracy students can experience in the classroom.

Both the formal and the informal curriculum should be based on a reasoned commitment to a core of democratic values, ideas, and beliefs. Democratic values, such as freedom, equality and due process, are the core of our national experience. Students should be encouraged and guided in an examination of those values, and in an analysis of how we as a people have furthered their expression and where we have faltered. Students should also be involved in the thoughtful examination of ideas, viewpoints, beliefs and values of others that differ from their own. By studying these variant values, students learn part of the reasoning behind the decision-making of other people. They come to understand rather than fear multicultural diversity.

Finally, classrooms and schools should be places of active democratic participation. The participatory process is a vital part of the end product citizenship education seeks. As important as what the students learn is the way in which the student learns. A classroom and school that promote democratic participation, even accept the chaos and inefficiency it sometimes seems to produce, are a classroom and school that reinforce ideas with practice.

The resource materials are gathered together here to help educators build an environment where:

- ◆ all teachers are informed and committed to improving education in the social science;
- ◆ all teachers are clear about the target -- the social science standards, benchmarks and eligible content;
- ◆ standards, curriculum, and assessment are closely aligned;
- ◆ students are engaged in active learning with teaching that builds upon past experiences and previous knowledge.