

# **The Iowa Council for the Social Studies Journal**

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# FORWARD

The 21<sup>st</sup> edition of the Iowa Council for the Social Studies Journal focuses on the theme: "SOCIAL STUDIES ALWAYS AT THE CORE." This is a particularly timely theme given two current and very important initiatives.

First, the federal reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind will be addressed in the coming months. When the new administration is in place in Washington, members of Congress are likely to focus attention on the future of the nation's schools and the many ambitious initiatives and goals put forward in the NCLB legislation. Change is in the wind. However, how this change will shape the place social studies holds in the curriculum will depend on the degree to which members of Congress and other legislative leaders recognize the importance of teaching citizenship and social studies. Under the NCLB legislation the teaching of social studies has been left behind in many school districts and many classrooms. While this condition is one of the regretful and unintended outcomes of the NCLB legislation, it is nonetheless a well documented phenomenon. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that political leaders address thoughtfully the place social studies should hold in the curriculum. This edition of the ICSS Journal is but one means by which ICSS and social studies teachers of the state of Iowa can value and support social studies teaching in Iowa's and America's schools.

Second, the state of Iowa is currently in the process of developing the Iowa Core Curriculum. In the development process social studies is clearly included. It appears that the Iowa Core Curriculum initiative will result in the development of educational standards for Iowa schools. In April of 2008 The Iowa legislature approved mandating "the Iowa Core Curriculum for all students in grades 9-12 by 2012 and grades K-8 by 2014. The Iowa Core Curriculum (also known as Model Core Curriculum) provides local school districts and nonpublic schools a guide to delivering instruction based on consistent, challenging and meaningful content to students. The curriculum identifies the essential concepts and skill sets for literacy, mathematics, science and social studies, as well as 21st century learning skills (civic literacy, financial literacy, technology literacy, health literacy, and employability skills)." <http://www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/674/1249/> This ambitious and far-reaching state initiative holds the potential for placing social studies education on firm footing in the schools of Iowa. Again, how this initiative is shaped will depend upon the degree to which Iowa's educational leaders and social studies professionals thoughtfully and reflectively advocate for the place of social studies in the core curriculum. The articles found in this edition of the ICSS Journal are an expression of that reflection.

We begin with Cheryl Mullenbach's look at the enduring place of social studies in the curriculum. Starting with the work of the 1892 Committee of Ten, Cheryl walks us through the evolving process whereby social studies emerged from such curricular staples as history, civil government, political economy and geography. She reminds us that many of the daunting questions facing educators in 1892 still challenge educators today.

Next, David Johns provides a grassroots review of the process the Des Moines School District employed when reinventing the district's approach to elementary social studies. Finding new horizons in a conceptual approach to the curriculum, David describes the curricular processes and products developed as a result of this initiative.

Jill Nooren provides the reader with a review of the important place children's literature holds in the development of the social studies curriculum. Using literature to teach social studies is an effective strategy for mediating the unintended consequences of NCLB—leaving social studies behind.

Next, Curt Nielsen introduces us to the most current technological developments in geography education. Geospatial technologies (GST) hold promise for the future of geographic education as technological advances provide unprecedented opportunities for student learning.

Finally, we include three personal narratives on the importance of social studies education in the curriculum. First, Hou Chun Kuong of Hong Kong, articulates her commitment to cultural sensitivity by highlighting the importance of cultural and contextual understanding. Khalfan Alharrasi of Oman, shares his challenging and daunting experience learning American culture. Having been raised in the Middle East he relates how perceptions, customs, values and ideas shape the character of a culture. Former Iowan, Darren Kieschnick shares his experience teaching social studies to elementary students in Texas where testing looms large on the curricular horizon. He advocates for conscious restoration of social studies in the elementary curriculum.

Lynn E. Nielsen, Editor  
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