

# TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

ESOC 3420 / FALL SEMESTER, 2006

Thursdays, 1:00—4:15 pm, Aderhold G5

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This course is designed to provide you with an introduction to social studies teaching in K-5 classroom environments. It is also designed to help you frame your thinking about issues related to both curriculum and instruction and to make the case for including social studies as a major component of the enacted curriculum of elementary school teachers. Many teachers see emphasis on social studies as unnecessary and frivolous, especially in today's educational climate. Here we will build the case not only for social studies but for a certain *kind* of social studies: instruction centered on the concept of democratic education. In general, our work this semester will be driven by four broad goals:

- (1) Developing a deep understanding of the goals and purposes of social studies education, with special emphasis placed on theories of educating young people about social living;
- (2) Reaching a coherent understanding of the unique developmental issues that children face and how those issues—cognitive, social, cultural, and otherwise—affect us as teachers in the classroom;
- (3) Developing a thorough understanding of the difference that social studies teachers can make in their students' lives, positive and negative; in particular, we will focus on ways of improving the social skills of students through democratic classrooms centered on goals related to improved participatory citizenship;
- (4) Developing and articulating a workable rationale for teaching social studies to young children that reflects an enlightened view of democratic social living as well as an acknowledgement of the importance of teaching Georgia's GPS curriculum.

In addressing these objectives, we will split the course roughly in two, with the first part dedicated to helping you develop a rationale for teaching social studies in your classroom. Our discussion will center on questions such as these: What is social studies? What is democratic education? What is the relationship between social studies as a school subject and social education as a broader concern? In the second part of the course, after you have completed your field experiences, we will turn to more "practical" considerations: How should teachers use the Georgia Performance Standards in elementary classrooms? Are the GPS standards reconcilable with democratic teaching practices? How can social studies be integrated with other subjects to raise the profile of social education in your students' educational experiences?

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## COURSE THEMES

**(1) Rationale-Based Practice.** Decisions about what and how to teach—and about how you carry out your role as a social studies teacher—ought to be based on an understanding of what you hope to accomplish as a teacher (i.e. your rationale). Rationales not only address what you do and want to do in your school, but also how your work relates to the broader social conditions of schooling, and the contributions your work makes to society at large. Pulling these complicated ideas together is more difficult than it may seem to be at first and, as such, we will spend a great deal of our time together exploring ways to effectively develop a coherent and valuable rationale for teaching.

**(2) Reflective Teaching.** Being a reflective teacher involves constant questioning: questioning of yourself, of your motives for teaching the way you do, questioning other people (including colleagues, students, parents, and others), questioning the conditions in which schooling occurs, and even questioning social relationships as a whole. Reflective teachers are mindful of and aware of the complexity of teaching. A reflective teacher consumes herself with the important questions of practice that all teachers should be aware of. To some extent, a *reflective* teacher is an *effective* one; by asking lots of questions, teachers open the door to improved practice and markedly better classroom experiences. Remember, of course, that not all questions are created equal. In this course we will be less concerned with finding the “right” answers to problems of practice than we will be with asking the right kinds of questions.

**(3) What is “good teaching”?** Good teaching is defined in this course as teaching that leads to active student engagement in worthwhile learning. Your success in this course will be directly tied to your ability to develop an understanding of what these two concepts mean and how they can, and will, impact your practice as a teacher. We will also focus on the definition of “powerful” social studies advanced by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) in 1994; according to NCSS, social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are *meaningful, integrative, value-based, challenging, and active.*

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#### REQUIRED TEXTS AND RESOURCES

There is only one text that you will be required to purchase for this course; it is available on CD-ROM and can be purchased by visiting <http://www.digitaltextbooks.biz>. It is:

Hoge, J.D. (2005). *Effective elementary social studies*. Athens, GA: Digitaltextbooks.biz

In addition to the Hoge text, you’ll need to download the Georgia Performance Standards for social studies in grades K-5. The good news is that this download is free. You can claim your copy by visiting the link below and clicking on “Grades K-5 Social Studies Standards.”

[<http://www.georgiastandards.org/socialstudies.aspx>]

Finally, you’ll be assigned a number of course readings, all of which will be made available to you via our course website on WebCT. You can access these readings by clicking on our course name after logging on to WebCT and then following the link to “Course Materials.”

[<http://webct.uga.edu>]

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#### COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

**Field experience.** A major requirement of this course is your active participation in a supervised field experience that should enable you to “test” some of your assumptions and expectations about teaching by visiting actual elementary classrooms in the Athens area. More details on this experience will be distributed in class.

**Reaction Papers.** Reading and writing assignments will be made throughout the semester. Most weeks you can expect to have a reaction paper to write; these will sometimes be open-ended responses to reading assignments and at other times will be guided by questions posed in class to direct your responses. Reaction papers account for 35% of your final grade for the course.

**Midterm Paper.** At the midpoint of the term, you will be expected to write an in-class essay in response to prompts provided to you. We will discuss this assignment in more detail as the time draws closer. The midterm essay will account for 20% of your final grade for the course.

**Attendance and Participation.** This course is based on the thoughtful contributions of every class member. Thus, your punctual attendance is required at each class meeting, as is responsible class participation. Please notify the instructor, via phone or email, if conditions arise that prevent you from being able to meet these expectations. Participation is expected in seminar meetings and also via a minimum of four postings to class discussions on WebCT. Your attendance and participation grade will be determined at the end of the semester based on my assessment of the frequency, nature, and quality of your contributions to the course. This requirement accounts for 25% of the final grade.

**Unit Plan.** The culminating project for the course will be construction and presentation of a unit plan that details a unit of study in social studies that you might use in your classroom. You are encouraged to seek feedback from me regarding your project throughout the semester and you are also encouraged to seek the advice and support of your classmates and the teachers you work with in your field experience. The unit plan project will account for 20% of your final grade.

**University of Georgia Grade Scale.** Your final grade will be calculated based on the percentages described above and converted to a letter grade using UGA's approved scale:

**A (100—90) / B (89—80) / C (79—70) / D (69—60) / F (59—0)**

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#### ACADEMIC HONESTY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

The University of Georgia seeks to promote and ensure academic honesty and personal integrity among students and other members of the University community. A policy on academic honesty (and procedural guidelines for adjudication of alleged violations of academic honesty) has been developed to serve these goals.



Academic honesty means performing all academic work without plagiarizing, cheating, lying, tampering, stealing, receiving assistance from any other person or using any source of information that is not common knowledge (unless that assistance or use is authorized by the person responsible for supervising that academic work or fairly attributed to the source of assistance or information).

Academic honesty is vital to the very fabric and integrity of the University of Georgia. All students must comply with an appropriate and sound academic honesty policy and code of honest behavior. All members of the University community are responsible for and involved in bringing about an honest University and all must work together to ensure the success of the policy and code of behavior.

**The Student Honor Code.** All students agree to abide by the honor code when they sign the application for admission to the University. A full rendering of the University's statement on academic honesty, entitled "A Culture of Honesty—UGA's Academic Honesty System," can be found at <http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/acadhon.htm>.

Students and faculty who suspect that an act of academic dishonesty has taken place should contact the Office of the Vice President for Instruction in Old College at 706.542.0432.

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## ESOC 3420 TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

*Please note that deviations from the course schedule may be made by the instructor and will be announced in class should they become necessary.*

### **Aug 17            Is social studies just a school subject?**

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Review course expectations and syllabus; what are the boundaries of social education?

### **Aug 24            What is social studies...**

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**Read** (1) Goodlad, (2) Barr, Barth, and Shermis, (3) NCSS

**Write** your response to the children's programming you watched and **write** a response to this prompt: Which of the "three traditions" described by Barr, Barth, and Shermis best describes the position you would like to take as a teacher of social studies? Taking this a step further, what purpose will drive your work as a teacher, and particularly as a *social studies* teacher?

### **Aug 31            ...and what's wrong with it?**

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**Read** (4) One of the "contrarians" and (5) Loewen

**Write** a response to this prompt: Where did social studies "go wrong"? Do you agree that it has, in fact, "gone wrong"? Talk about your own experiences as a student in social studies classes. What made social studies interesting to you? What made it less-than-interesting?

### **Sep 7              Teaching for democracy**

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**Read** (6) Dewey, (7) Parker, and (8) Beane and Apple

**Write** a response to this prompt: What do you think it means to "teach for democracy"? Can it be done? Is it important to "teach for democracy" in elementary classrooms?

### **Sep 14            'You can't say you can't play': the elementary democratic classroom in action**

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**Read** (9) Paley and (10) Goodman

**Write** a reaction to Paley, focusing on whether or not you believe that Paley's proposed solution to the "play" problem in her classroom amounts to "democratic reform."

### **Sep 21            Multiple perspectives in classroom practice**

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**Read** (11) Paley, (12) Ladson-Billings, and (13) Delpit

**Write** a reaction to any of the three readings and put it in the context of your emerging thinking about the importance of teaching democratically.

**Sep 28            The “heart” of social studies? Teaching history to elementary students**

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**Read** (14) Barton and (15) Hoge, Ch 6, (16) Georgia Performance Standards for K-5  
**Write** a response to this prompt: Do you think the GPS will help or hinder your efforts to teach social studies in accordance with your rationale?

**Oct 5            The “other” social studies**

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**Read** (17) Hoge, Chs 7-13 (only your assigned chapter)  
**Write** a brief outline of the curriculum unit plan you are working on and bring it to class.

**Oct 12            Midterm Essay**

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No assignments due.

**FIELD EXPERIENCE, OCT 16—NOV 14; NO CLASS MEETINGS**

**Nov 16            Debriefing the field experience**

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**Write** a personal account of your experience in the field. Alternative formats are suggested, if not recommended. Bring it to class with you.

**THANKSGIVING BREAK, NOV 22—24; NO CLASS NOV 23**

**Nov 30            Making good pedagogical choices**

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**Read** (18) Hoge, Ch 14, (19) Hoge, Ch 17, and (20) Hoge, Ch 19  
No writing assignment.

**Dec 6            Final thoughts and course presentations**

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Bring your completed unit plan to class with you.