The Untapped Subject

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In the field of social studies, teaching focuses around the world and how it is always changing and the people that fill it with their actions and consequences. The goal for these classes is to teach kids how to learn from the past and present and to make informed decisions for the greater good of man. There are some great ways to do that too, the first example having to do with time, change, and continuity. What this means is that students need to know about where they are in history and learn from what has come before them. Rather than simply teaching history as lists of facts to be memorized, expert history teachers guide students in analyzing and reflecting about historical events (Santrock 2011 P. 389). Teachers can use this to tap into student’s higher order thinking by having them thinking about what else could have happened and how people can see it in different lights. When studying time and continuity, you can also tap into other subjects because you can see how other fields of study have evolved into what they are today.

When you are looking at time you can also look at people and their environment. This means that you look at areas on the globe and you see what they have come compared to what they used to be. For example, Russia used to be the Soviet Union and it included countries like Ukraine, Georgia and Estonia. However now it has broken up because of economic collapse and is now the Russia Federation. History and social studies can be used to tie so many subjects together because everything has a history and can be studied. This also leads to an area where students can look at their own personal cultures and where they are in it. People can have a sense of who they are and where they came from. Classes like psychology and anthropology look at the person and how the mind forms from their surroundings and nurturing.

Understanding the development of power, authority, and governance in the United States and other parts of the world is essential for developing civil competence (Santrock P. 389). Students can look at bodies like a government and ask what power means and what forms it can take all throughout the world. Students can also debate and discuss what powers are good and which ones are bad. In classes like political science, government, and history, students can look at what makes a government tick and how it can be changed by the people to make it a better society for everyone. These classes are great because the go into great depth about all the types of government and how each one had their strengths and weaknesses. Classes can also build and create their own societies and governments to see what would actually work in a perfect society and what would fail in the end.

One thing about this field is that it has had huge changes over the years in how it is taught. Until recent years it has always been taught with one textbook and the teacher instigating discussion and learning. Even though this can be good in some cases, so many opportunities to learn out in the real world are spoiled because students are kept in the classroom. Project based learning flourishes in history classes because social studies have to do with the real world and learning it. What better way to do it than go out and tackle problems that are out in it? Constructivists focus on deepening the thought process and for students to think and come up with their own conclusions. In the constructivist view, students should form their own interpretation of evidence and submit it for review (Santrock P. 391).

One practice that can really help in this field is starting young and getting kids to get used to liking social studies classes. A lot of times in class students dread history classes because they think it is boring. The funny thing about this is history can actually be very hands on and full of a lot of information; you just need to have a teacher that will tap into that stuff. Help elementary students build on their prior knowledge from their experiences, television and the internet by providing content moving beyond the traditional curriculum focus on family, neighborhood, and community (Palkowski 2012). Students in lower grades have so much brain to tap into and this is usually when teachers will not put a lot of emphasis on history. The bad thing about that is that history can be gate that can lead to so much personal growth in social skills. This does not mean that you have to give them historical information up to the ears, it just means that you give them a taste of it to get them familiar and used to it so they will like it.

Another thing that history teachers do is teach the same things over and over again as students get older. Increase the in depth study of topics or content in each social studies discipline and decrease cursory coverage of a lock step curriculum. Deeper understandings help student learn, retain, and apply skills and knowledge (Palkowski 2012). Lock step curriculum is when teachers will just teach the same things with no depth. It is when a teach will teach you some facts about a topic in history in 9th grade, and then when a student moves up to 10th or 11th grade they will just get the same dose of that subject. Some teachers fail to scratch the surface of some areas and that leaves kids bored when they get into class. Teachers need to find a way to get kids to get the gears moving in the heads and to break some mental sweat. Kids want to learn and teachers need to feed that flame or else it will die out right in front of them. The biggest disservice a teacher can do is make kids too bored to learn.

One thing that social studies class teaches us is that we live in a big world and there are a lot of different people in it. However textbooks will only teach to the group that will read it the most. For example, a history textbook will teach the perspective of the “white man” during the Indian wars. The textbook will say that the Indians were savages and needed to be rounded up and sent to one area so they did not disturb anyone. However the real story was the white man uprooting ethnic groups that had been here for hundreds of thousands of years using guns and force. Social studies classes should Increase knowledge and awareness of global issues, ethnic groups and religious groups to help students understand the environment that surrounds them locally, nationally and internationally (Palkowski 2012). All classes, not even social studies classes, should teach cultural diversity and human relations. There is so much racism in this world and that just leads to wars and deaths. People are all good and look for peace and harmony, and kids are not born racists. They are raised that way by multiple sources, and schools are one of them. Teachers need to start to raise a culture in classrooms to accept everyone for who they are and where they come from.

This subject, the “untapped” subject, has so much potential to teach kids so much. It is so untapped by teachers because they just like to get the facts and dates learned without using them for deeper meaning. This subject is so great because you learn from real people and their real choices they made in the past. Use it to get kids thinking and putting themselves into history’s shoes and you will get them to critically think about what they would do if they were given the same scenario. This subject is so vital and important and teachers do not even know it is right there in front of them for the taking. Hopefully some of these practices will be put to good use to find that potential.

Works Cited

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