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Using Technology in a Social Studies Classroom

Cari R. Teske
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Abstract

Technology in education is nothing new. The quality of the type of instruction involving technology is worth analyzing. This review provides insight into implementation strategies and the 'best practices' of the integration of technology. It defines the roles teachers and administrators must play in order to have high-quality instruction. Throughout this review emphasis will be put on the strength that technology can bring to the social studies curriculum. And, how together social studies and technology can bring education to a more balanced approach to instruction. To create a type of instruction that emphasizes the equal support of all areas of the educational curriculum.

Running head: TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL STUDIES

Using Technology in a Social Studies Classroom

Cari R.Teske

University of Northern Iowa

This Review by: Cari R. Teske

Titled: Using Technology in a Social Studies Classroom

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
Degree of Arts in Education.

Lynn E. Nielsen

Sept 1, 2005
Date Approved

Graduate Faculty Reader

Greg P. Stefanich

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Date Approved

Graduate Faculty Reader

Greg P. Stefanich

_9/1/05_
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Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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Introduction

Technology is a vital part of life today. When a person considers how often their life is touched by technology, it is hard to imagine where people would be today without automobiles, microwaves, refrigeration, air-conditioning, online banking, a cellular phone, electronic mail, digital photography, and let us not forget the enormous amount of information at one's fingertips as a person browses the Internet.

Social studies also plays a vital role in life today. It develops character, citizenship, compassion, and empathy. It develops into an understanding of diversity and produces cultural awareness. Other than reading, it is probably seen in more people each day than in any other curriculum area. Notice that the role of social studies I'm discussing is more content based than fact recall. That is a topic that will be addressed later.

The object of this review is to take a closer look at technology and social studies, and to provide reasons why these two areas of learning work so well together. In fact, as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation further changes district curriculums, social studies programs may need to increase the use of technology to 'stay afloat' in a highly-emphasized reading and math era of education.

To begin with, let us take a closer look at technology. The definition of technology can be deceiving in itself. Many Americans view technology narrowly as mostly being computers and the Internet when technology actually encompasses a much broader domain (Lipton, 2005). Technology is defined as "electronic or digital products and systems considered as a group" (Houghton Mifflin, 2000). This definition clearly means that technology also involves many other aspects including digital photography, cellular phones, calculators, etc. The purpose of this

paper is to explore ways to expand the use of technology in social studies classes with the understanding that technology is not limited only to the use of computer sand the Internet.

Amazing as it is, schools are often the last place where current technology makes its appearance. Often, it is the cost of technology that keeps schools from keeping up with the times. Or, could it be due to the lack of resources available to implement proper strategies? Finally, it could be that teachers need more time to learn how to use a piece of equipment. Whatever the reason . . . today's teachers find themselves in a struggle to manage technology in their classrooms (Novak & Berger, 1997).

As technology descends into America's classrooms, will teachers be able to keep up the pace and find the educational benefits of technology? Will American schools keep up with the demands of a global world? How do educators produce productive citizens who are technology literate?

Over a decade of research has documented the effect of appropriate use of technology in educational settings and these studies provide compelling evidence that computer use can have a major, positive impact on children's social, emotional, and cognitive development (Murphy, Richards, Lewis & Carman, 2005). 'Appropriate use' is the key term. How do we define what is the appropriate use of computers? When teachers use computers, students are often more motivated, more interested, and concentrate more on their lessons. It is how computers are used that has the most profound effect. When teachers use computers as a means of presentation their effectiveness is limited. But, when computers are used for interactive learning such as WebQuests, group projects, in learning stations, or as a tool for student presentation the performance of the student increases (Ngan, Lee & Koo, 2003). This use of interactive learning is where the social studies curriculum and technology work best together. And, if classroom

teachers are to meet the need for meaningful integration of technology in educational settings, there must be a restructuring of current classroom practice. (Murphy, Richard, Lewis & Carman, 2005)

The current legislation No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has left a lot of teachers wondering how a social studies program will conform to today's standards and means of high-stakes testing. As Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers, stated, "When tests are allowed to become the be-all and end-all, they deform, not reform, education." (Risinger, 2002) With such a high emphasis on math and reading, teachers frequently mention the lack of priority given to social studies programs in schools as a deterrent from high quality instruction. Many elementary teachers give priority to reading and mathematics, since these content areas receive priority in local and state testing programs; and teachers of elementary social studies schools may not be well grounded in the social science disciplines (Haas & Laughlin, 2001).

Low priority is not the only concern expressed in today's social studies programs. The low quality of textbooks, the lack of funds for acquiring current instructional resources, the lack of adequate time for planning and teaching, and the need to develop improved teaching strategies are also challenges faced by educators (Haas & Laughlin, 2001). What better way to overcome these obstacles than through the use of technology?

Having trouble locating a high, quality social studies textbook? Lack funds for the purchase of social studies materials? Why not turn to the Internet? It provides engaging real-world documents that can bring history to life. Articles from newspapers, magazines, and historical documents are readily available on the free web. There are also endless opportunities to explore current events and view maps of all areas of the world.

Short on time for planning? That can be solved with the help of technology as well.

There are hundreds of websites that offer units and lessons on topics of study involving social studies. They offer opportunities to look for materials without the purchase of teachers' manuals. Those same websites also offer chat rooms where teachers can ask questions and share experiences on their own time and terms. Teachers do not have to wait for the next opportunity to speak to another colleague to receive feedback regarding a lesson. Questions may be asked in confidence and solutions shared together all through the use of the Internet.

This leads us to perhaps the most disturbing fact of all. School districts across the United States include in their mission statements support for civic education in the quest for developing active citizens. This shows a rather large discrepancy in policy and practice. How does one become a better citizen without the proper civic education that social studies programs offer? Possibly through the use of technology, and an 'umbrella' approach for teaching many subject areas through social studies programs, we can see civic education, geography, sociology, and the many other areas of social studies play a more influential role in schools. It's time we 'practice what we preach' and support time spent instructing students in the realm of social studies!

As I reviewed articles several questions passed through my mind. What makes social studies an ideal place to implement technology? What would define technological implementation in social studies? And, what should it look like? What is the best way to integrate technology in an elementary social studies classroom? What role do teachers play in integrating technology? How can administrators support teachers and staff as they use technology? What does the future hold for technology and education? These questions helped provide a base to build from and provide insight on how to get classroom teachers to start using technology, and in the process prove to legislators, administrators, and teachers that an active citizen is one who is informed. Informed in all areas of the curriculum including social studies.

Methodology

The topic of technology is something that is prominent in this review. The interest and support for the incorporation of technology in education should only come from an individual who chooses to use technology in his or her own work. Therefore, the method preferred in locating, identifying, and selecting sources for this project came as the result of searches on the Internet. The access to the Internet provided a wealth of information that wouldn't have been available due to the limited access to resources. The ease of collecting, reviewing, and reading on the Internet allowed for a decrease in time spent looking through library archives, printing material, and coordinating time to visit research facilities.

The main source used while on the Internet was an online library, Questia (www.questia.com). Questia is the first online library that provides access to the world's largest online collection of books and journal articles in humanities and social sciences. The online resource includes accesses to journal articles, books, magazine articles, and newspaper articles for a small monthly fee. The resources available are from over 250 acclaimed publishers. The criteria for which the articles where chosen include the date of publication, type of journal article, publisher, and content related to the topic of study.

The date of publication is an important factor to consider especially when looking at technology. Technology is constantly changing and new ideas become outdated faster than they can be implemented. Therefore, it was important to choose articles that have been published within the last seven years. There is one article that was selected past the seven-year mark. This article was selected because of the amount of information it shared regarding integrating technology and the frustrations teachers face. Those frustrations show a lot of similarity to what we find today.

The sources from which the journal articles come from are equally important. There are a lot of high, quality publishers available. Some frequently used in this review include: *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education, Journal of Research on Technology in Education, The Technology Teacher, Social Education, and The Journal of Instructional Psychology*. These primary sources provide outstanding outlooks into the world of education and technology.

Finding articles that help further the investigation of technology within social studies can be difficult. A lot of the articles currently published relate to technology in the education of preservice teachers, or related to topic areas that are in the high-stakes areas like mathematics, reading, or science. It proved to be quite a challenge to find articles directly related to social studies and technology.

While looking for articles directly related to social studies and technology is important, they are not the only type of articles selected for this review. Articles in the fields of social studies, technology, current teaching practice, NCLB, the Internet, constructivism teaching, and the roles of teachers and administrators were equally important. The articles have been drawn together to show a common reflection on technology and the role it plays in education especially in social studies.

<div align="center">Analysis & Discussions</div>

Why Social Studies?

Technology allows a social studies teacher to reach beyond what lies within a classroom. One tool that has been very effective for teachers is the use of WebQuests through the Internet. A WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented activity in which most or all of the information used by students is online. (www.google.com) By providing links necessary to complete the quest, the student is able to focus on the material rather than to spend time looking for it. The five parts to a

WebQuest (Introduction, Task, Resources, Process, Evaluation, and Conclusion) promote higher-critical thinking skills. WebQuests are a fast growing tool to use to implement technology into the current curriculum. While the use of a WebQuest is appealing, the quality of each individual web page can vary (Dodge, 2001). It is important to check WebQuests for accurate and current information, clear directions, and the inclusion of web pages that are easily accessible and age-appropriate.

Recently, I used a WebQuest to supplement a unit on U.S. Symbols (http://webtech.kennesaw.edu/mburroughs/wquest.htm). As my students and I reached the task of exploring the Statue of Liberty, each student was given an opportunity to take a virtual tour of an actual visit to the statue. The students experienced acrobats performing while waiting in line for the ferry. They viewed the approach to Liberty Island while on the ferry. They entered the museum, walked up all the stairs, and looked out the crown and saw a spectacular view! All the while they were reading facts and finding new information regarding the Statue of Liberty. During this WebQuest each student had to create an individual flipbook with facts written about each U.S. Symbol studied. Together discussions were held regarding the difference between cities and suburbs, using New York City and Lower Manhattan as examples. Students discussed landforms and water formation in relation to the harbor and an island.

There is neither trade book nor textbook that can match the experience of this WebQuest. I could only make the experience better by actually visiting the statue as a field trip. Students from the Midwest experiencing another part of the United States without ever leaving the classroom! Amazing! This is where social studies and technology make a great match.

Past research has shown that social studies instruction has generally relied on teacher talk, memorization of facts, passive learning, and a textbook. (Rice & Wilson, 1999, p. 28) Students

have been faced with the 'drill and skill' model of teaching in social studies for so long that they have been turned off to it.

In a great Calvin and Hobbes cartoon, Calvin's creator, Bill Watterson, shows great insight into the problem with the 'drill and skill' model of teaching. Calvin is taking a history test and is confronted with the question, "When did the Pilgrims land at Plymouth Rock?" Calvin correctly chooses "1620". He then writes on his paper, "As you can see, I've memorized this utterly useless fact long enough to pass a test question. I now intend to forget it forever. You've taught me nothing except how to cynically manipulate the system. Congratulations" (Risinger, 2002).

I can honestly remember experiencing a similar situation in a high school history course where we took notes, memorized facts, and reiterated them in tests or large group discussions. Never did the meaning or the faces of the people involved in history relate to me until I became an adult and started teaching history myself. Why should it take so long for that connection to take place? Isn't it only fair that students feel the connection to the past when they experience the subjects in class? Isn't relating to others what makes students better citizens?

The NCSS Curriculum Standards for Social Studies recommends that teachers build new knowledge through prior knowledge, and do so in a way that builds critical thinking skills (Rice &Wilson, 1999). This can be accomplished through the use of the constructivist model for learning. When students collaborate, work in teams, teach others, and lead in decision-making, the connection between prior knowledge and new knowledge is clearer. Active learning, small group activities, projects, and performance-based assessment are all methods used in constructivist teaching.

Technology can be incorporated to support many aspects of social constructivism by

using collaboration in problem solving, allowing construction of knowledge by students, having learning occur in meaningful contexts, and relating learning to students' own experiences (Rice & Wilson, 1999, p. 29). When students are also allowed to explore freely using technology and have more control of their own learning, they are able to obtain information and experience situations that otherwise would not be possible. In doing so they gain opportunities to examine a variety of viewpoints and are able to construct their own knowledge of various topics.

Using technology in social studies allows for so much information to be revealed in such a short amount of time. What used to take several library trips can now be accessed with a click on the mouse. Documents, archives, photos, and videos can be explored and each child can have equal access without having multiple copies of a single book. It is not surprising that the growth of the Internet will affect Social Studies more than any other subject area (Milson & Downey, 2001).

One example of uses of technology in social studies is through the Internet. The Newspapers in Education website (www.nieonline.com) provides online lesson plans and guides for using newspapers in many subject areas (30,000 lessons just for social studies!). The Paper Boy (www.thepaperboy.com.au/welcome.html) provides 6,000 online newspapers from around the world and can be used to read different perspectives on world events,(Gandy, 2005) not to mention the numerous papers posted online.

These newspapers can be expanded into opportunities for the study of communities or various cultures. Students can search for average daily temperatures, rainfall amounts, or weather for the week. Students can locate the newspapers origination on a world or state map. Research can be done on the people within the city of the selected newspaper. Each group of people in a community can be evaluated for their nationalities, customs, and why they selected to

live in the communities.

The possibilities are as endless as the resources become available through the Internet. This is not to say that we must forget to acknowledge the importance of books. Instead, I like to think of technology as another tool available to make learning meaningful. Small groups of computers may be used as a workstation for group research. Students can rotate through stations in small groups as they review both literature and also Internet sources. This provides multiple resources and outlooks on a given topic.

However, teachers and students must use the Internet with caution. The process through which information is received through books is very different from information accessed through the Internet. Information received from books has been reviewed for accuracy. Internet sites may not have been reviewed by a publisher, therefore they may be subject to opinions rather than facts. Students and teachers need to realize that they must check for accuracy and use critical thinking skills to acknowledge what facts presented are correct or incorrect. (Sharma, 2000) This is especially true for teachers who use the Internet as a main source of information.

What Does Integration Of Technology Look Like?

Does integration of technology mean that a teacher can use a word processing document? A spreadsheet? Does it mean being able to keep grades in an electronic grade book? Maybe it is using the Internet for searching resources or keeping current on an email account? What should technology look like in social studies?

There are many ways technology can be utilized by teachers. A teacher can make a presentation and show it to students on an LCD projector. Teachers can use a CD-ROM for information and exploration. All of these types of technology are important to teachers, but what about the students?

The best type of integration of technology should be supplemental to the current curriculum and should also be inquiry based (Haas & Laughlin, 2001). It should be more than an electronic worksheet or a fancy presentation. It should involve the students as active learners. It should allow students to be in control of their learning. It should build critical thinking skills and be cooperative in nature. Finally, it should not mean creating a new curriculum to fit technology. Technology should lend itself into whatever project or objective you want to reach. The teacher and curriculum together should guide the integration of technology. Technology should not guide the curriculum. This means that a teacher should begin by developing his or her own computer skills (Antifaiff, 2000).

What Is The Best Way To Implement Technology?

Implementing technology is the single most important factor in the successful use of technology (Rice & Wilson, 1999). Technology has no educational benefits alone. It must be utilized effectively or it might as well not even be used at all. Teacher knowledge is where it begins. Teachers must understand what they expect their students to accomplish. They must be given ample time to explore resources that technology provides as well as use those resources to create and learn the steps students must take in a task. Teachers must gain confidence in their teaching to give up 'the lead' and let students lead as the teacher guides. This is very difficult for a lot of teachers.

Teachers have continually been the single source of information for students. We take 'center-stage' and go with it! While in some instances it may be appropriate and even necessary, it does not work for all subjects and at all times. Active approaches to learning, in which students use technology for reading, writing, observing, using primary data, and problem solving, move away from traditional roles for students and teachers and toward a constructivist approach

in which learning is centered on the students in real world contexts (Sunal, Smith, Sunal & Britt, 1988,p.13). This constructivist approach is more student driven and teacher-guided, a 'best practice' skill that all areas of the curriculum could benefit from.

Appropriate training of teachers should include first the ability to use the type of technology for personal use (word processing, electronic slide presentations, digital photography, creation of web pages, etc.) and then develop into uses in the classroom with students. The type of training teachers receive must be ongoing and give opportunity for questions and feedback from other teachers and staff members. It should not involve the type of one-shot workshops where teachers are presented with the skills under the assumption that those skills will be implemented. Research supports the need for more sustained training for teachers that exceeds one-day sessions(Dawson & Rakes, 2003).

While it is important that teachers are allowed time to explore and learn with technology, they also must be given adequate resources and support from administrators. This includes training, peer coaching, funding, and accountability for their own learning. The instructor who learns to integrate technology into existing curricula through ongoing support will teach differently than the instructor who has received little or no support after the initial training. The difference in teacher training will create a more effective classroom technique, and the greater extent of technology use will have a positive effect on teacher and student attitudes toward the use technology (Christensen, 2002).

What Role Do Teachers Play?

There is a new challenge for all teachers in today's schools. That new challenge is to prepare children to become technology literate (Williams & Kingham, 2003). In order for this to happen, teachers they must first become technology literate. To begin this road to literacy,

teachers should start with an area of technology that is of interest for them, whether it is digital photography, electronic slide presentations, building web sites, or researching databases. Then they must take the next step and expand their learning, learn a new software program, or work with another teacher to create a project using digital cameras! It is important to take time to branch out and share their knowledge. And, in the process they will receive new information in return.

Each teacher has a distinct way of teaching that makes their classroom different than any other room. Whatever style it is, it makes teachers appealing to students. My students know that I love teaching African American history. They love to bring me material they find on slavery, the Underground Railroad, or the Civil Rights Movement, not to mention any material found about any other subjects studied in class. What I teach, how I teach, and me as an individual sets me apart from many other teachers in my elementary school. That is part of my role as a teacher. I am an individual. And that is how I embrace learning, especially when the learning involves instructional changes in my classroom.

Being a teacher is a commitment to lifelong learning. Just as we learn new strategies for teaching 'our regular' curriculum, we should continue to grow in our knowledge and skills of technology as well. Too often teachers resist converting from traditional teaching methods to computer-based ones. A degree of teacher resistance is understandable and expected because such a conversion represents change and change is a process that takes time.

As with other changes, teachers experience varying degrees of discomfort and fear as they use technology; therefore, if teachers are to make the necessary adjustments in their teaching methods to accommodate technology, they need patience and support from school administrators and technology coordinators (Dawson & Rakes, 2003). Due to differing degrees of abilities

using technology, teachers will also feel the need to work together to support one another and share personal experiences.

A teacher's attitude reflects directly onto the students in the classroom. Teachers that show a positive attitude toward using technology with students will have a higher rate of successful classroom practice. As the saying goes, "Where there's a will, there's a way". Teachers that resist the idea of change will reflect this negativity in their work and students will sense this lack of enthusiasm (Christensen, 2002).

Accountability is also part of a movement of change. Just as children like to have set guidelines to follow and flourish when rules and order are maintained, teachers do too! Teachers need to keep a record of their progress and routinely monitor how they are progressing. One type of tool is a learning log.

Learning logs can be used to measure the amount of new growth in areas of development. Using a learning log allows teachers to have a better understanding of what types of implementation strategies they have succeeded with, and what areas they may need to spend more time focusing on. It is also a way to compare ideas. Teachers can share ideas from their log with other teachers. Together the teachers can reflect on the steps of implementation and focus clearly on what the next step might be.

As you can see the role a teacher plays in implementing technology is remarkable! The teacher is the key to successful implementation of new ideas. Teachers must be allowed to build on their own experiences with technology before they can further build ideas into their classrooms. Teachers must be given the resources and the time it takes to commit to a change in curriculum. Peers and the administration must provide support. Teachers also need to plan and keep records of their work in order to have a better understanding of the process they are in. And

lastly, teachers need to work together to support and share with others the experiences they have.

What Role Do Administrators Play?

Administrators must juggle many roles when providing for successful implementation of technology. One role is to be an adviser. Administrators must be well informed about what types of technology are available to their staff (Staples & Himes, 2005). Just as they know the curriculum for each grade level, they must be able to support staff and find the resources they need in technology. This often means hiring a technology coordinator. This coordinator must be more than just a technician who works on equipment or a teacher who teaches in the lab. They must be informed of software, knowledgeable with equipment, and have good rapport with the staff. (Not to mention never-ending patience!!)

The administrators must also allow teachers the time they need to learn and explore with technology (Staples, 2005). The importance of technology should be more than teacher driven. It must be driven from the top and the importance stressed to all staff members. The findings showed that schools led by principals who received training that focused on curriculum-specific technology and those who received training that was specific to their individual needs had higher levels of technology integration than other schools (Dawson & Rakes, 2003). This proves that principals, like teachers, have a direct relationship between technology and implementation. It appears that the more specific training received, the more integrated technology becomes in the curriculum. This makes the role of the administration more important than ever.

To stress the importance of the integration of technology, budget changes sometimes need to occur. Data from a 1995 national survey of school district technology budget allocations revealed that approximately 55% of technology money was being spent on hardware and 30% on software. Teacher education accounted for only 15% of the allocated funds (Christensen, 2002).

This research shows how little funds are actually going to programs that provide ongoing support for the implementation of technology. The funds spent on the education of teachers should be increased in order to increase the implementation of technology into classrooms. As stated earlier, technology cannot work alone. Administrators hold the key to changing budgets and monitoring how funds are allocated.

The administrators must also make teachers accountable. If a teacher shows little interest in teaching with technology, then they must be willing to approach that teacher and investigate why there is so little interest (Staples, 2005). They must know what type of technology each teacher has an interest in and build on that to use with other teachers. Finally, the administrators must be leaders who incorporate technology into their own work. They must serve as a model. They must lead by example.

<div align="center">Conclusions & Recommendations</div>

What Does The Future Hold?

Ready or Not! Technology is here to stay! It will continue to be ever changing and fast-paced. Computers and Internet technologies are by no means a magical solution to raising educational achievement in our schools, but they do provide an array of new opportunities for accessing information and promoting significant learning among students (Owens & Teale, 2002). The use of technology builds higher-order thinking skills. Students can be active participants rather than passively receiving information. Proper use of technology can allow students to construct new knowledge from past experiences.

Students using technology may also incorporate high-level skills as they further develop relations with peers while they work in small group environments. This allows opportunity for students to listen and be heard at the same time. In order for this to happen teachers must move

away from the idea of technology as a tool of presentation. They must realize the advantages students have when they use technology as an integrated tool in the curriculum.

Vigorous change continues in the study of technology and the delivery of technology education because of the following factors: the integrating nature of technology, the need to prepare students for our developing technological world to meet changing human needs, input from our educational colleagues, industry, and the general public and, to some degree, through efforts and dedication of outstanding teachers, supervisors, and teacher educators. No other field involving K-12 education has undergone such significant change in the last 25 years. No other group of educators has so assertively risen to the challenge(Lipton, 2005). And, no other group will see so many changes in education in one lifetime.

As educators it is important to not be left behind, but to become active learners in the area of technology. It is time to overcome obstacles and barriers. It is time to come together and remember what our civic responsibilities require us to do. By allowing ourselves time to incorporate technology into our teaching we will not only open the door to numerous opportunities for ourselves, but we will do so for our students as well. It may be the one way to build support for the return of social studies to the classroom, and the return to well-rounded and active citizens to our communities.

Experiences tell us that to obtain higher-levels of thinking in our students we must activate prior knowledge while acquiring new knowledge, allow for inquiry-oriented activities, provide activities that allow for smaller groups of students working together, and build curriculum that promotes a constructivist view of learning. This higher level of thinking will not only provide better classroom instruction by reaching the learning styles of more students, but it is best suited for a classroom that utilizies technology and incorporates a content-based social

studies curriculum. Now is the time to rethink strategies in teaching. Now is the time to step

forward and voice our opinions on the importance of social studies in education. And, now is the

time to move forward in our progress in creating technology literate teachers and students.

Technology will forever have a role in education. Just as history will forever be a part of

social studies. By allowing students to be 'overloaded' in reading and math, we risk losing

students who are active citizens with a solid foundation in decision-making. With the advances

in technology our world has become more global. Let us use those advances to create

educational opportunites for students to be better prepared for the challenges of tomorrow. And,

what better way to accomplish this than through a well, balanced curriculum that embraces the

opportunites that social studies creates in our lives.

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