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The state of the world is difficult to define. I believe that I can offer my best analysis at a local and global level. The social studies education can be looked at from a national perspective and a district level. My role with state of the world and social studies education is multifaceted. My relationship with the world is one of interaction and empowerment on a professional level - on a personal level it is one of environmental stewardship. Social studies need to be able to critically look at bias within texts, technology, diverse citizenship, critical geography, and global issues. It is through careful examination of these specific issues that the instructor brings to teach a diverse student body.

At the local level Grand Rapids, Michigan has persevered despite the economic downturn that happened throughout the rest of the state. The immergence of a strong medical field sector as well as diversity of other businesses has lead to a lower unemployment level than the state figures. The Grand Rapids Press wrote, “The Grand Rapids-Wyoming area dropped to a 10.5 percent unemployment rate, down from 11.3; Holland-Grand Haven dropped to 11.5 percent from 12.6; and Muskegon-Norton Shores went down to 14.2 percent from 14.9.They were among 16 of the state's 17 major labor market areas that saw a rate drop in April, according to the state Department of Labor, Energy & Economic Growth.”¹ While a healthy economy is not the end all of analysis,

¹ “Unemployment drops to 10.5 percent in Apri. The Grand Rapids Press. May 24, 2010. < http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2009/05/grand_rapidsarea_unemployment.html>

a healthy economy impacts the quality of life for the residents of the area. The Grand Rapids area boasts a number of high education facilities such as Grand Valley State, Grand Rapids Community College, Davenport University, Kendal College of Art and Design, Western Michigan University Extension campuses, and Aquinas College. The arts are doing well in the area as well. The recent success of ArtPrize this last fall put Grand Rapids on the map as well as helped the local economy. Mark Sanchez wrote, “The inaugural ArtPrize drew as many as 200,000 visitors to Grand Rapids last September, generating an estimated economic impact of \$5 million to \$7.6 million across Kent County, according to a new analysis by Grand Valley State University economics students.” The economy, art, and higher education are doing very well at a local level.

Despite all of the recent success at the local level, I am extremely concerned with the future of the city in terms of the quality of elementary and secondary education that is being offered in the public schools system. While I work for Kentwood Public, a city slightly south of Grand Rapids, I still am concerned for the metropolitan areas future. The “H” grade, or hold grades which were designed to improve failing report cards showed little initiative by the students. The Grand Rapids Press wrote, “A district report showed that of the 2,866 "H" grades issued during the first and second trimesters, 472 were converted, The Press reported. In 68 percent of the cases, students made no effort to convert the grade, while 15 percent of retakes ended in a second failure, according to the

article.”² While MEAP scores have improved the last three years, they are still well below the scores from districts outside of Grand Rapids. While the business sector of Grand Rapids prospers it seems that the education transpiring in the public school is wilting. It would be unfortunate to see this trend continue.

At the national and global level, social issues abound like never before. Conflict, war, genocide, disease, poverty, and discrimination are never more known about or familiar with due to the internet and streaming media. At the same time these critical issues are greeted with such indifference. The origins of each problem are rooted in the most basic law of economics – the law of scarcity. The law holds that humans being have unlimited want in a limited world therefore people will always act in their own best interest. War is nothing more than one person, or a collection of powerful persons, bannng together to take natural resources, infrastructure, or land by force. Poverty in any society, capitalistic or communist, is reserved for those who are not able to wage a battle for possessions. While the link between poverty and mental illness is become clearer, it is the lack of support for the local, national, and international poverty that is most disheartening. In a world in which developed nations have a surplus of food but still have a larger percent of people who die due to starvation is a maddening equation until you think back to the law of scarcity – people always act in their own best interest. It seems that a large portion of people in this country are saddening watching a tsunami

² Dave Murray “Grand Rapids Public Schools staff under more scrutiny as administrators try to boost student performance” Grand Rapids Press. April, 21, 2009. < http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-Rapids/index.ssf/2009/04/grand_rapids_public_schools_st_1.html>

rip through Indonesia in 2004, were crushed to hear about genocide in Sudan in 2003, and recently it was the devastating earthquake in Haiti in 2010 but as wealthy as American are, a large majority offered little financial help. For those who have the best intentions to help the news soon reports that funding is often times mismanaged or even worse, we hear stories of how people look to profit off the disaster – the attempted child abduction by “Christian” relief workers in Haiti is all to real.

Despite my pragmatic look at the national and global world, I believe a small group of people who buck the trend and are quiet happy helping others and the environment. It seems that some people do live in stark contrast to the law of scarcity. Organic farmers, who create food without using genetically modified plant seeds and refuse to spray pesticides, are acting with best interest of others in mind. Maria Rodale quoted Rattan Lai, director of Ohio State University Carbon Management, in the *The Organic Manifesto* when he said, “We are dealing with 10 global issues at the moment: food security, availability of water, climate change, energy demand, waste disposal, extension of biodiversity, soil degradation and desertification, poverty, political and ethnic instability, and rapid population increase. The solution to all of these lies in soil management.”³ To Rodale and Lai, the solution to the problem is a paradigm shift away from personal exploitation to collective stewardship. While Rodale and Lai’s focus on soil management and organic farming methods their shift in thinking is the important catalyst for change. Indeed many people and professions are starting to embrace

³ Rodale, Maria. (2009) *Organic Manifesto* New York, NY. Role Press

stewardship of others and the environment. I believe that social studies can be a catalyst for such change.

Social studies education is an invitation to a diverse audience of students into the American mosaic. One paradigm shift within social studies thinking has been the new emphasis on teaching history in a post-modern approach. The post-modern approach emphasizes multipoint vantage approach. Once various texts are introduced, social studies can help those groups who have been discriminated, stereotyped, or mistreated in the past identify with one another as well as offer a trajectory for change in the future. As a teacher who works in a district that is diverse in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic status, undoubtedly certain groups will resonate with past historical mistreatment. The critical question then becomes, “how does one facilitate the multipoint vantage approach despite bias and limitations that are built into textbooks or state standards and strands?” The first step is identifying the bias.

Bias is found in variety of social studies discipline. Cultural superiority, the lack of acknowledgement from women and minorities, Eurocentric models of history are just a few examples found in textbooks, historical texts, and are also written into many state standards. The recent trend in social studies has been to break from the book and embrace other texts but a teacher needs to also screen these texts as well. When I introduce texts I have to be careful that the text allows the reader to have an “open” opinion and does not lead to a “closed” interpretation. Werner wrote, “an example of text where the artist or the author gives the reader less room to interpret the text on their own,” (Werner, pg. 406). The “closed” interpretation model also applies to the digital

media. Most of the media I show in my classroom (online clips) comes from what Noam Chomsky called “elite media” such as CNN, NBC, or CBS which have a distinct message that is far from neutral or bias. Chomsky wrote, “Their audience is mostly privileged people. The people who read the *New York Times*—people who are wealthy or part of what is sometimes called the political class—they are actually involved in the political system in an ongoing fashion.”⁴ The audience for which it is intended (upper-class) is not a good reflection of the audience in my classroom. Media has a distinct message and it the duty of the teacher to screen the values and messages that will be sent to the students. Therefore the emphasis of a social studies teacher should be to present a multipoint vantage of texts & media so that students can make open interpretations on their own.

A social studies teacher needs infuse various disciplines of social studies into their classroom. While many teachers often time over look the importance of geography in their classroom, a new movement is changing the way geography and social studies can be taught. The critical geography movement is a critical component in the social studies classroom. The movement examines how to overcome cultural elitism, capitalism, class structure, and social power by focusing on new approaches based on students interest. Geography, much like other disciplines in the past, has not resonated with a diverse student population which has different values and interests. The movement focuses on conservation, ones own connection to the larger world, and “how” they fit into their own community. John Huckle wrote, “[C]ritical theory and pedagogy to help young people

⁴ Chomsky, Noah. (October 17, 1997) What Makes Mainstream Media Mainstream. Z Magazine. August 6, 2010. https://angel.msu.edu/section/content/default.asp?WCI=pgDisplay&WCU=CRSCNT&ENTRY_ID=2FD04019B8D04ADBB0C07FC2B0462404

find their identity and place in the world – to find out how, why, with what, and where they belong”⁵ Modern social studies need to be relevant to a diverse audience and it should be filled with enthusiasm from the teacher. Along with enthusiasm and synergy from the teacher, this is the best way to get students excited, involved, active, and have increased awareness for global issues.

The last area concerning social studies is the emergence of technology into the classroom. Indeed students like never before are wired to use technology and are willingly engage in a digital format. Social studies teachers need to fuse the use of technology in their classroom but they must be aware that it has its limitations. The Segall article discussed how many teachers assume that active learning is transpiring while teacher show media. Segall wrote, “The secure belief that I was engaged in good teaching had led me to naively accept that learning must therefore be taking place”⁶ Segall correctly argues that it is not “what” we show; rather it is “how” we engage our students afterward to avoid passive learning. As long as teacher can engage the student in meaningful dialogue or critical analysis afterward, they can use technology to its fullest. Programs like Google Earth, Google Lit Trips, YouTube, TeacherTube, and streaming media news sites such as CNN, CBS, AC, or NBC are wonderful additions to a teacher’s instruction.

⁵ Huckle, John. Towards a Critical School Geography. **Teaching Geography in Secondary Schools.**

⁶ Segall, Avner. “De-transparent-izing” Media Texts in the Social Studies Classroom. **Media Education as Historical/Social Education.**

One of the last areas that social studies need to address is global issues. The unit examining HIV/Aids opened my eyes to the importance that global issues have on our students and their future. As much as history teachers tend to focus on past issues that have shaped the direction of civilizations and cultures, we often times fail to identify the great question of our own time and give them subsequent “legs” in which to run. I might spend two weeks covering the bubonic plague and the crusades but I might run out of time to cover pertinent issues that are transpiring around the globe today. Perhaps like never before have issues such as race, gender, class, and sexuality are at a cross roads in terms of social education. These major global issues need to be taught to our future citizens. By failing to address these critical issues they will “swept under the rug” and no solutions will be presented let alone addressed.

Active citizenship is the ultimate goal of any social studies teacher. If a social studies teacher can provide diverse unbiased texts, relevant lessons, and present them in a format that resonate with the student then we have helped facilitate another step towards participation in our pluralist citizenship. However, it is important to note that participation in American citizenship is and has always been about diversity of thought, expression, and participation. There is not one way to participate in American citizenship or show patriotism. Marvin Gaye’s singing of the national anthem at the 1983 NBA all-star game, Jimmy Hendrix’s version of the Star Spangled Banner at Woodstock, or the Chain-rule at Yankee Stadium showed a diversity of patriotism and involvement in citizenship. Nonetheless, as a social studies teacher I have to be aware that the movement of globalization will bring citizens of different countries into increased

communication and collaboration. Therefore, while I strive to teach an informed citizenship for this country, but I need to start developing global citizens who will hopefully be able to discuss race, gender, class, economics, and sexuality in a responsible manner.