

Revised Code of Ethics for the Social Studies Profession



A Position Statement of National Council for the Social Studies Prepared by Professional Ethics Committee

Approved by NCSS Board of Directors, 1990, 2003, 2016

These revisions are the result of public hearings scheduled by the Professional Ethics Advisory Committee at the 68th (1988) and 69th (1989) Annual Meetings of the Council, and an early 1989 article in *The Social Studies Professional* soliciting input from members on proposed revisions to the Code, originally adopted and published in the October 1981 issue of *Social Education*.

Principle One

It is the ethical responsibility of social studies professionals to set forth, maintain, model, and safeguard standards of instructional competence suited to the achievement of the broad goals of the social studies.

A. A basic tenet of the profession's responsibility is that every student in our society should be taught by a qualified and professionally competent social studies teacher. It is the responsibility of the organized profession to articulate standards of adequate instructional performance and to urge and seek compliance therewith.

B. The continuing strength of the profession depends on the careful selection and preparation of those entering the field. Social studies professionals as well as the organized profession should assist willingly in the setting of criteria for certification and in the continued improvement of all phases of preparation for and practice of social studies instruction.

C. Social studies is a broad field that utilizes knowledge and processes from the

social science disciplines. But social studies is something more than the sum of the social sciences; it includes other sources of knowledge as well. Because of the ever-changing nature of knowledge in general and in the social studies in particular, the professional should engage in continued study of the changing world scene and remain an active student of and a critical participant in society. The professional should acquire additional education as required by his or her teaching responsibilities and, if given an assignment for which he or she feels less than well-prepared, should ask for and insist on such assistance as he or she deems necessary to provide students with competent instruction.

D. The social studies professional should willingly serve on and assist committees, groups, and persons having specifically designated responsibilities for upholding the ethical standards and integrity of the profession.

E. The social studies professional should provide opportunities for students and responsible professionals to evaluate his or her own effectiveness as a teacher. He or she should welcome dialogue and seek constructive criticism as an important means for furthering his or her own growth. In this process, the social studies professional has the right to expect and insist that the assessment process will be a fair one.

F. Social studies professionals should assume responsibility for personal growth, expanding their knowledge and sharing that knowledge with peers.

Principle Two

It is the ethical responsibility of social studies professionals to provide to every student the knowledge, skills, experiences, and attitudes necessary to function as an effective participant in a democratic system.

A. Social studies professionals have an obligation to provide instruction which instills commitment to democratic values and faith **in the dignity and worth of the individual**. Social studies professionals should respect the dignity and integrity of every student regardless of color, race, creed, sex, sexual orientation, ethnic background, disability, or socioeconomic level, and should aspire to help each student to achieve effective citizenship.

B. Social studies professionals should strive to achieve the full range of instructional goals recognized by National Council for the Social Studies. They should make every effort to use and develop the use of: (1) rational processes in

analyzing social situations; (2) consideration of alternatives; (3) processes of rational valuing; and (4) active social participation.

C. Social studies professionals should use a system of evaluation that enables students to assess more accurately both their strengths and weaknesses, thereby fostering the kind of self-knowledge requisite to effective citizenship. The evaluation process should be broadly based, encompass all of the recognized

Teachers should treat students as individuals, not as members of race/gender groups, and should not disparage the race ("white privilege/fragility") or sex ("toxic masculinity"/ "mansplaining") of students.

goals of the social studies, and provide useful, systematic, and comprehensive assessment of student performance while **affirming the worth and dignity of each individual**. The purposes and uses of the evaluation processes, the instruments, and the results obtained should be clarified and explained to students and to their parents or guardians.

Again, treat students as individuals, not members of race/gender groups and don't disparage their races or genders.

Principle Three

It is the ethical responsibility of social studies professionals to **foster the understanding and exercise of the rights guaranteed under the Constitution of the United States and of the responsibilities implicit in those rights** in an increasingly interdependent world.

Should teach understanding of and respect for U.S. Constitution.

A. Social studies professionals have a special obligation to make students aware of the nature and extent of their rights and responsibilities as citizens of the United States. Social studies instruction should provide opportunities for students to examine and assess critically those principles and assumptions that provide the theoretical and legal bases of citizenship under the Constitution of the United States.

B. Social studies professionals have the obligation of assuring that students will receive the benefits and bear the burdens of citizenship within the individual classroom, the school as a whole, and the society at large in accordance with their level of social and intellectual maturity. Within the social studies classroom, fundamental constitutional rights should be protected and their exercise encouraged. Likewise, similar opportunities for the acceptance and discharge of citizenship responsibilities should be emphasized.

C. **Social studies professionals have the obligation to recognize, and to foster respect for, the diversity of cultures represented by their students**, and by the myriad of cultures in an increasingly interdependent world.

Teachers should not disparage or undermine individual students' cultures, such as criticizing races, religions, or ethnicities.

Principle Four

It is the ethical responsibility of social studies professionals to cultivate and maintain an instructional environment in which the **free contest of ideas is prized**.

A. Effective social studies instruction necessitates an environment in which social studies professionals and students are free to study, investigate, present, interpret, and discuss relevant facts and ideas. Those engaged in social studies instruction have a responsibility to accept and practice the democratic commitment to open inquiry and to approach controversial issues in a spirit of inquiry rather than advocacy.

Supporting academic freedom. Views should not be silenced.

B. Social studies professionals have an obligation to **exercise and maintain academic freedom in the classroom** and to abide by such reasonable considerations as the intent of the course and the age and sophistication of

students.

C. The social studies professional **should acknowledge the worth and tentativeness of knowledge**. He or she should engage in a continuous search for new knowledge, retaining both the right and the obligation as a student scholar **to doubt**, to inquire freely, and to raise searching questions. The social studies professional has an **obligation to distinguish between personal opinion and beliefs that can be supported by verified facts** and to impart the knowledge of these differences to his or her students.

Various statements supporting open intellectual inquiry and academic freedom

D. Social studies professionals have an obligation to establish classroom climates that support **student rights to know, to doubt, to inquire freely, to think critically, and to express openly**.

Principle Five

It is the ethical responsibility of social studies professionals to adhere to the highest standards of scholarship in the development, production, distribution, or use of social studies materials.

A. **Social studies professionals should not develop or use materials that oversimplify, distort, or otherwise manipulate the truth, except as these materials may be used to illustrate distortions, propaganda, inadequate logic, and the like**. It is unethical for any social studies professional to foster the use of materials in ways that do not meet accepted standards of scholarship.

Statements supporting educational balance and quality of academic materials

B. Freedom to learn and freedom to teach are dependent on the unrestricted access to works of knowledge. Social studies professionals have an obligation to defend the rights of students and colleagues to such access and should strive to **make available a balanced variety of educationally significant materials** from which students of all ages and backgrounds can learn.

C. Social studies professionals have a responsibility to respect and adhere to the traditions and laws governing the reproduction and use of learning materials.

Principle Six

It is the ethical responsibility of social studies professionals to concern themselves with the conditions of the school and community with which they are associated.

A. By reason of their training, experience, and unique educational function, social studies professionals should participate in school and community life, and are obligated to express concerns when school and community conditions conflict with essential ethical or professional standards.

B. Social studies instruction in effective democratic citizenship requires that democratic practices be part of the school environment itself. The social studies professional has a **special responsibility to take steps to ensure that the school**

Schools operating according to democratic principles allow open expression and intellectual debate.

system operates according to democratic principles.

C. National Council for the Social Studies, as the organized voice of the social studies profession, has a special obligation to provide appropriate leadership, significant influence, and necessary support of efforts that seek the establishment and maintenance of the requisites necessary to permit social studies educators to discharge faithfully their professional and ethical responsibilities.

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