

# A Sequencing Framework for Middle Grades Social Studies Instructional Units

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*In working with pre-service and beginning middle grades social studies teachers, the authors have found that those teachers often struggle to organize and sequence content in meaningful ways. Although many national and state curriculum writing bodies have provided organizational frameworks to guide teachers in designing instruction for middle grades social studies, those same bodies have failed to assist teachers in the task of sequencing instruction in ways that assure learning. This article provides a practical sequencing framework that assists middle grades social studies teachers in designing effective instructional units that connect and integrate all of the social studies disciplines.*

*Key words: beginning teachers, middle grades, organizational framework, sequencing framework, social studies, units*

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## Introduction

Despite the importance of an effectively sequenced unit and lesson, sequencing content is one of the most difficult tasks for teachers to master. It is especially problematic for middle grades social studies teachers who must often integrate geography, history, culture, government, and economics in one unit. This is further complicated by the reality that teaching social studies in the middle school requires not only knowledge of young adolescent's capabilities as learners, but also an understanding of how to translate social studies content to middle grades students (Conklin, 2007). State departments of education often provide the sequencing among standards, but rarely if ever, provide specific principles and practices for sequencing content within units or lessons. In this article, the authors present a framework for novice middle grades social studies teachers that will aid them in sequencing content for meaningful

learning by providing a logical link between each of the disciplines included in the social studies.

## Research Problem

The tendency for novice teachers to teach without an organizational structure is perhaps a result of the broad scope of goals in the social studies curriculum that make it difficult to sequence content. For example, in the North Carolina middle grades social studies curriculum (North Carolina Standard Course of Study 2009), competency goals are commonly expansive in their wording. Table 1 provides the 13 competency goals used to guide social studies teaching in the sixth grade in North Carolina. It is worth noting that these competency goals are representative of goals for seventh grade in North Carolina as well. Competency goals for seventh grade are almost identical in wording with only a change in focus to geographic areas to Africa, Asia, and Australia.

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Table 1 North Carolina Social Studies Competency Goals for Sixth Grade

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Competency Goal 1	The learner will use the five themes of geography and geographic tools to answer geographic questions and analyze geographic concepts.
Competency Goal 2	The learner will assess the relationship between physical environment and cultural characteristics of selected societies and regions of South America and Europe.
Competency Goal 3	The learner will analyze the impact of interactions between humans and their physical environments in South America and Europe.
Competency Goal 4	The learner will identify significant patterns in the movement of people, goods, and ideas over time and place in South America and Europe.
Competency Goal 5	The learner will evaluate the ways people of South America and Europe make decisions about the allocation and use of economic resources.
Competency Goal 6	The learner will recognize the relationship between economic activity and the quality of life in South America and Europe.
Competency Goal 7	The learner will assess connections between historical events and contemporary issues.
Competency Goal 8	The learner will assess the influence and contributions of individuals and cultural groups in South America and Europe.
Competency Goal 9	The learner will analyze the different forms of government developed in South America and Europe.
Competency Goal 10	The learner will compare the rights and civic responsibilities of individuals in political structures in South America and Europe.
Competency Goal 11	The learner will recognize the common characteristics of different cultures in South America and Europe.
Competency Goal 12	The learner will assess the influence of major religions, ethical beliefs, and values on cultures in South America and Europe.
Competency Goal 13	The learner will describe the historic, economic, and cultural connections among North Carolina, the United States, South America, and Europe.

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As evidenced in the table, these goals not only combine distinctly different geographic regions (South America and Europe), they also mingle varying social science disciplines. Organizing and sequencing social studies content can be challenging enough for a veteran teacher with years of experience, but is nearly unmanageable for the preservice or novice social studies teacher.

State courses of study and related curriculum provide general organizational frameworks for arranging curricular content in middle grades social studies, but they fail to provide a sequencing framework that assists teachers in ordering the content at the unit and lesson level (American Federation of Teachers, 2008). Likewise, national organizations like National Council for the Social Studies have introduced organizational frameworks for informing curricula and guiding instruction in middle school social studies, but have not included sequencing frameworks to aid teachers in designing holistic social studies instructional units (Levy, Nickell, Altoff, Hannum, Haskvitz, Miller, & Moulden, 1991). These shortfalls suggest that the task has been only half-completed. In order to provide a real guide to middle grades social studies teachers, both organizational and sequencing frameworks are needed to help teachers traverse sprawling social studies curricula.

Several researchers have also expressed dissatisfaction with the inherent sequence problems in state social studies curriculums. Virginia Wilson & James Litle (1992) argue that more cohesiveness in the social studies curriculum is needed. They say, "Social studies educators realize that they need a clearly sequenced program that takes into account what research now indicates about how students learn" (p. 1). James Duplass (2007) also believes that, "Social studies disciplines are cumulative disciplines requiring a tiered building block approach... both within and between grades" (p. 141). Robert Marzano has similarly argued that it is the responsibility of the

classroom teacher to negotiate the curricular ambiguity posed by broad-reaching standards and to sort out and order what should be taught and in what progression (2006). Yet, preservice and beginning teachers often lack the experiential knowledge required to fulfill such responsibilities. A framework is needed to help them negotiate and order such a complex discipline for such a complex group of students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that supports the particular sequence of information suggested in this article draws in part from the research on the hierarchical nature of knowledge. The research indicates that students learn better when facts, concepts, principles, and theories are structured or sequenced in a hierarchical way. For example, David Ausubel (1960, 1968) who invented advance organizers in the 1960's, found that integrating new material with prior knowledge aids learning. His advance organizer provides learners with the organizing structure they need to understand the material about to be taught.

Research on content analysis within an instructional design model also suggests that hierarchical structures aid learning (Gagne 1985; Jonassen, Hannum, & Tessmer, 1989). Content analysis entails breaking a concept or body of knowledge down into its parts and visually representing them in a manner that communicates the parts relationship to one another. Lisa VanDamme (2006) calls this the principle of the hierarchy of knowledge. She says:

All abstract knowledge depends, for its meaning and validity, on other knowledge that sets the context for it. For example, algebra depends on addition, and calculus depends on algebra... abstract knowledge depends on less abstract knowledge. This is the principle of the hierarchy of knowledge (p. 58).

Yet while all subjects seem to have an inherent structure, sequencing content does not seem to be as problematic in all subject areas. Teachers of math, science, and language arts, for example, do not seem to struggle with how to organize their content in a meaningful way quite as much as social studies teachers do.

Math obviously has an inherently hierarchical sequence, which makes it easier to know what to teach and in what order. As Van-Damme describes above, algebra depends on first knowing basic arithmetic. Furthermore, Aristotelian logic, which is still the most popular form of logic used today, is said to be based entirely on mathematical principles. The point is that math has an inherently logical structure.

Likewise, scientific concepts are relatively straightforward to sequence as long as prior knowledge is identified. The concept animal subsumes the concept dog, which subsumes actual dogs. That is, a young child would need to first experience his or her dog or an actual dog before forming the concept dog. Then the child would need to experience other animals, say a cat, before forming the concept mammal. Then he or she would need to discover many mammals or reptiles and other animals before forming the concept animal.

Literary concepts are also hierarchical. To understand theme, one must first know the plot of the story. But to understand plot, one must first know what a conflict is. And finally, to understand conflict one must be aware of characters (e.g., protagonists and antagonists).

Even history, as a distinct discipline, is somewhat easier to order because of its inherent chronological nature. Obviously a history lesson and unit is probably more successful if it is taught chronologically than if the teacher moves from event to event without a purposeful chronological sense underlying the information.

The social studies, however, provide a much broader span of academic disciplines that

the classroom teacher must confront simultaneously, including geography (both physical and human), political science and government, sociology, and economics. Because of this breadth of varied academic content, teaching social studies is simply not as algorithmic as other disciplines. This makes a teacher's task of both effectively organizing and sequencing content more difficult.

What often results is that, "content selection and sequencing in social studies is often arbitrary and aimless" (Parker, 1989 p 39). From the authors' experience in working with both preservice teachers and teachers in the field, many beginning middle school social studies teachers have been trained in fields other than the social studies discipline they are primarily teaching. Similarly, those teachers have had in-depth exposure to only a limited number of social science disciplines. Furthermore, James Leming, Lucien Ellington, and Mark Schug (2006) found that elementary and middle school social studies teachers indicate that (a) their content preparation was less than top quality and (b) they rated subject matter knowledge as a top staff development priority. The result is often that preservice and beginning teachers are overly reliant on the textbook in their instruction (Burstein, 2009). Social studies instruction, in turn, begins to focus on stockpiling facts rather than a "progressive construction of understandings" (Parker, 1989 p 41). This often leads to didactic instruction with passive learning (Olwell & Raphael, 2006; Wineburg, 2005). Evidence of this can again be found within Leming, Ellington, and Schug's (2006) study as teachers cited presenting content effectively as another top concern.

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One would think that this difficulty in providing active and effective learning opportunities would be particularly evident in the more strategies-oriented segments of lesson planning (guided practice and independent practice), however, based on the authors' experiences with pre-service and beginning teachers, the organization of teacher input is where most middle school social studies teachers struggle. This is often in spite of the fact that they have been expertly trained (more for some than others) to deal with that segment of instruction. This is especially difficult in middle grades because social studies teachers must negotiate multiple social science disciplines at once.

As noted previously, there have been efforts to assist middle grades social studies teachers in managing the breadth of content that the discipline demands. In 2000, for instance, California took strides to organize the content of the social studies for its teachers by providing the *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools; Kindergarten through Grade Twelve* (2005). Through this framework, social studies teachers at all grade levels were provided an organizing tool with three goals divided into 12 strands. Nine of these strands were social studies content specific and included: historical literacy; ethical literacy; cultural literacy; geographic literacy; economic literacy; socio-political literacy; national identity; Constitutional heritage; and civic values, rights, and responsibilities. This framework is representative of the efforts by school leadership across the nation to assist teachers in managing the vast and diverse body of content that makes up the social studies. The *History Social-Science Framework* is also representative of current practice and curriculum design in that it leaves out one vital com-

ponent needed by social studies teachers struggling to avoid curricular sprawl --- ordering or sequencing of this organized content. As Daniel Fasko (2001) and Joseph Renzulli (1992) have argued, in order to facilitate students' thinking within a discipline, or in the case of the social studies multiple disciplines, the curriculum should emphasize the structure of the discipline.

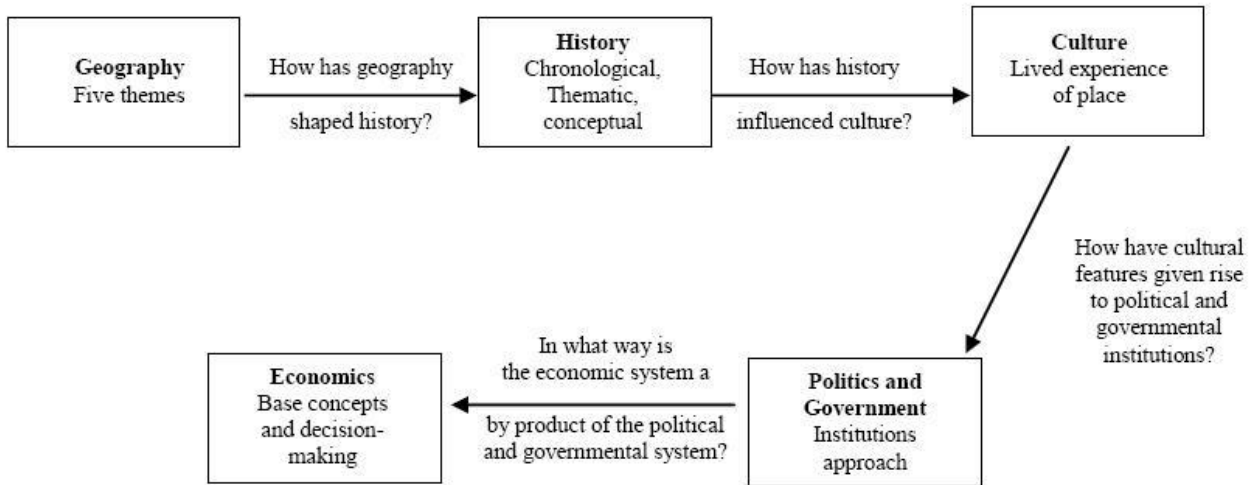
### Middle School Social Studies Sequencing Framework

Figure 1 represents a framework for organizing and sequencing middle school social studies content. The framework, although suitable for use in conjunction with most social studies curricula, is primarily intended for those curricula, like that in sixth and seventh grade in North Carolina, that have a geographic and cultural focus. The design of the organizing and sequencing framework is intended to assist middle school social studies teachers in developing instructional units that incorporate all of the varied disciplines within the social studies while at the same time ordering the content in a way that is logical and meaningful for students. Also, the framework is aimed at helping beginning teachers learn to use the textbook as a teaching resource and not as the primary curriculum organizational tool. Existence of frameworks like that of the *History-Social Science Framework* (2005) and the work of researchers and theorists in the field of social studies education, support this interrelatedness of the strands or disciplines of the social studies (Backler, 1988; Thornton, 2007; Wilson & Litle, 1992).

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Figure 1 Middle School Social Studies Sequencing Framework



### Geography

The framework supports starting each social studies unit with geography and teaching geography using the five themes as the guiding framework. This is supported by many on both theoretical (Backler, 1988; Thornton, 2007) and practical grounds for “To understand human events, students must first understand the characteristics of the places in which those events occurred” (History-Social Science Framework and Criteria Committee, 2005). By using location, place, region, movement, and human-environment interaction (in that order) as a guide for instructional design and delivery, teachers can carry students through a logical investigation of a given “place” in an increasingly complex way. A “place’s” location (both absolute and relative) helps determine its defining characteristics (sense of place). This sense of place, in turn, helps define that place in the context of its region. This regional context drives the need, or lack thereof, for the movement of people, goods, and ideas, which

helps in shaping the interaction that man has with his physical environment. Each step on the ladder leads to the next step and opens the door for an investigation of historical trends, political conflict, and economic decision-making.

### History

Once students have grasped the characteristics of a place, it then becomes prudent to look at human events over time in that place. Teaching a place’s history in close proximity to a discussion of its geographic characteristics is advisable because history becomes more meaningful and memorable when viewed in light of its geographic features (Thornton, 2007). Thus, as Figure 1 illustrates, it is necessary to move to the history of that place. Through using the tools of history, students can investigate historical trends that have arisen out of the geographic features of a “place.” History is used next because a historical foundation is needed to help better under-

stand the context and bases of the more contemporary social science investigations to take place later in the instructional unit.

History, as a social science discipline, however, can be difficult for the preservice or beginning teacher to organize and sequence because there are a number of ways to approach its teaching. It is commonly accepted that there are three basic ways to approach the teaching of history: (1) chronological teaching; (2) thematic teaching; and (3) conceptual teaching. Take, for instance, a historical topic like the Progressive Movement in the United States. One can teach the Progressive Movement as a movement in time (namely the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) where a sequence of events happened or better, layered, to cause change in our time today. Likewise, one can teach progressivism as a theme that undercuts many time periods and view multiple periods at once. In this case, one could look at the theme of progressivism in American History and investigate it deductively as a theme that spans the entirety of our nation's history to this day. Finally, one could have students define progressivism by providing examples, looking for commonalities in the events, and coming to some conclusion as to what progressivism is as a concept in history. This would require inductive processing and would lead students toward some definition of progressivism.

As most social studies curricula are written for middle grades right now, it is advisable to take either a thematic or conceptual approach in grades where the focus is more on geography and social systems because of the lack of a clear chronology. These geographic-centered curricula often take on a regional nature and necessitate this type of teaching. Conversely, in grades where the curricular structure of the social studies course is more historical (for instance in North Carolina eighth grade students study North Carolina History), it is better to structure teaching more chronologically. This is not to say that thematic or conceptual teaching approaches are not strong ways to present

historical content in those classes as well, it is simply a bit easier for teachers to teach chronologically in classes that are structured historically. Furthermore, thematic, conceptual, and chronological teaching of history can and should be integrated within the context of single instructional units because all three are absolutely necessary for effective teaching and learning in history. For beginning teachers with limited experience in organizing and sequencing curriculum content and with limited content knowledge, chronological teaching is often easier to conceptualize and implement in an instructional unit.

### *Cultural Studies*

It can be said that history and culture are intertwined, so the middle school social studies sequencing framework, represented in Figure 1, illustrates the need to move to a study of culture next. History and culture are closely connected to the shared, lived experiences among and between people. As both distinct and integrated disciplines, history and cultural studies (including human geography, sociology, and anthropology) are a way to put a "face" on a given place being studied. It has been widely documented that students learn better when: (1) a personal connection is made to a place; and (2) when middle school students are engaged in developmentally appropriate, active learning experiences where they are allowed to practice their knowledge and not just receive it (Blair & Freeman, 2000; California Department of Education, 1987; Manning, 2000; and Mraz, 2008). Therefore, at this point in the sequencing framework, it is advisable to take an experiential approach that will help students truly connect on a personal level with the content in the unit. In this segment of the instructional sequence, the teacher's job is to help the students live the experiences of the culture being studied as closely as possible. By doing so, true inquiry learning can take place and pedagogy can be interactive, hands-on, and

relevant. By putting students in another's shoes, or getting as close as feasibly possible to that, teachers can help students internalize the sense of place, the influence of the past, and the reality of life (religion, food, music, beliefs and social norms, etc.) in that culture. Also, opportunities are provided to use simulations and/or cooperative learning groups where students work to share an experience through roles that help make the cultural experience genuine.

#### *Civics and Government*

Once a student understands the cultural features of a given place, they are then ready to explore the institutions that those people have and use to provide freedom and/or order in their society. This leads to questions like how does the "place" look today and how does this "place" operate? Therefore, the organizing and sequencing framework presented in Figure 1 suggests teaching political science and government next. In the context of the model forwarded here, it is advantageous to teach political science and government from an institutional vantage point. In political science (not often a part of many middle grade curriculums) those institutions will be interest groups and political parties; in government (very much a part of most middle grade curriculums) those institutions will be the legislative, executive, and judicial branches (or their institutional equivalents). An institutional approach would suggest in government, for instance, that any nation must negotiate those three branches in order to operate. They will look differently from nation to nation, but all in all every civil society must have an outlet for making laws, enforcing laws, and interpreting the fairness of application of those laws. Some governments, upon investigation, will of course have a system where one or a handful of individuals control those processes while others will leave that control up to the populace, but by using the institutions as a guiding force of investigation,

teachers can help students explore the nature and degree of those differences.

#### *Economics*

Finally, as economics is closely entangled with, if not often a by-product of the political and governmental system of a nation, the organizing and sequencing framework advocated here suggests moving to a study of economic systems in the place. This should be the most simplistic of all of the approaches, particularly for the middle grades social studies teacher. One simple rule can be adhered to at this point, start, return constantly to, and end with the concept of scarcity. Guiding documents in economic education have for years stressed that scarcity is a fundamental idea in economics. *A Framework for Teaching the Basic Concepts* published in 1984 by the Joint Council on Economic Education, stressed the concept of scarcity. The current Council for Economic Education standards also stress the idea of scarcity and place it front and center in the standards (2009). Within those new standards, the first content standard states: "Productive resources are limited. Therefore, people cannot have all the goods and services they want; as a result they must choose some things and give up others" (2009, p. 1). Said differently, as economic decision makers, all people confront scarcity and, as a result, there are no cost-free decisions.

By using scarcity as a starting point, teachers are able to take advantage of the simplicity and common sense nature of the basic dilemma of economics. All economic decisions center on the idea that we are trying to meet unlimited needs and wants with limited resources. Because of this "dismal" problem individuals are forced to make trade-offs. Everything else stems from that premise, but if students do not understand that premise, then nothing else can fit into place.



### The Framework in Action

So, what would an instructional unit using this sequencing framework look like for a unit taken from, say, the North Carolina Sixth Grade Social Studies Standard Course of study documented in Table 1? Take, for instance, Brazil - the largest country in South America, which is one of the continents to be explored by sixth grade students in North Carolina. Using the framework forwarded in Figure 1, a

ten-day instructional unit might look like the following (see Table 2). It should be noted that the ten-day timeframe provided here is for illustration purposes only. As teachers design units using this framework, they will certainly extend conversations related to certain topics and aspects of those topics based on the curriculum, desired learning outcomes, and their developing level of content and pedagogical expertise.

*Table 2 Sample Instructional Plan  
Using Middle School Social Studies Organizational Framework*

Day	Content and/or activity
1	Introduce the country or region (basic geographic features).
2	Complete geographic investigation by exploring five themes of geography as it relates to country/region.
3	Provide historical overview of country or region. Be sure to connect historical development to geographic characteristics.
4	Complete historical investigation of country or region. Be sure to address the historical factors that laid the cultural, political, and economic foundations of the country/region.
5	Introduce the cultural characteristics of the country/region. Be sure to reiterate the geographic and historical factors that have influenced the culture of the country/region.
6	Experiential day. Have students, through some activity, problem-based learning scenario, or simulation, attempt to experience life in the country or region. Use this content to attempt to address ethical issues and/or dilemmas related to life in the country or region.
7	Investigation of governmental and political institutions (political groups and/or issues) in the country/region. Again, tie this investigation in with earlier investigations of geography, history, and culture (how have geography, history, and culture influenced the type of governmental and political institutions that prevail in this country/region?).
8	Investigation of economic systems. This investigation should be rooted in two elements: (1) understanding of base economic questions/problems through the lens of this country/region and (2) from where culturally, historically, governmentally, and politically has the economic system evolved.
9	Review. Use sequencing framework flow map in Figure 1 as basis for review.
10	Assessment

On day one the teacher would introduce Brazil's physical features. Lesson one would include a look at Brazil's topography --- flat lowlands in the north, a narrow coastal belt, inland hills and plateaus --- as well as its mostly tropical or subtropical climate. Lesson one could close with a discussion of how physical geography affects a nation or region's history, culture, government, and economic system.

Lesson two would engage students in a more thorough investigation of Brazil's geography using the five themes of geography (location, place, region, movement, and human-environment interaction) as a guide. Brazil's absolute location (latitude and longitude) would be determined as well as its relative location along the eastern coast of South America bordering the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. Brazil's religious characteristics, major languages, and racial and ethnic make-up would next be explored as an investigation of Brazil as a geographic place. Students could then be provided an opportunity to delve into the five regions within Brazil and discover what physical, cultural, and/or human characteristics set those regions apart. Closer investigation could take place where students look at, say, Brazil's Northeast region, where they would unearth how cultural diversity and overwhelming poverty define the region. As they explore these diverse regions and their characteristics, students could then be provided with an opportunity to see why people have chosen to move to the Southeast region, making it the most densely populated region in the country. Finally, students could then ascertain what problems have arisen from the regional characteristics and issues related to movement and how humans and their interaction with the environment have caused problems like air and water pollution, deforestation, and land degradation.

Once students have a firm grasp of Brazil's geographic characteristics, they are now ready

to move to the history of the nation and its regions. Day three, then, would see the teacher providing a general overview of Brazil's history. This historical investigation would chronicle Brazil's history from the movement of nomadic peoples from Siberia to the arrival of Portuguese settlers in 1500 to the inclusion of Brazil in the Portuguese Empire to the Revolution of 1964 to the restoration of democracy through the Federal Constitution of 1988. In this chronological examination of Brazil, the teacher would want to explore the role of Brazil's coastal location and its resources (i.e. geographic qualities) as key features in the nation's historical progression. For instance, the teacher may scrutinize the dominant role of Sao Paulo during the republican period from 1889-1930 and bring forward how wealth of resources in the region played a role in the region's political domination for a time.

Day four's lesson would take this general overview and extend it to more defining and/or influential events or periods in the nation's history. In this lesson, the teacher would want to detail particular historic events like the development of the sugar industry in the colonial period, or the events that transpired to precipitate the Revolution of 1964. The teacher could also take a more conceptual slant at this point in the unit as well by exploring the concept of slavery. Using the rise of slavery as a parallel event to the rise of the sugar industry, the teacher could use slavery in Brazil as an example of the broader concept of slavery by illustrating how the sugar industry led to the profitability of slavery in the Portuguese colony, and how the institution of slavery eventually led to the slave rebellion of 1835, the abolition of the slave trade in 1850, the abolition of slavery in 1888, and the current status of both blacks and mixed race citizens today.

Lesson five would see the teacher using the events detailed in the previous two day's historical investigation of Brazil to open an inquiry into the nation's cultural characteristics.

Through inquiry techniques, like problem based learning for instance, the teacher could have students explore reasons behind the high percentage of mixed race peoples in Brazil. This could lead to a discussion or further inquiry using social data into the status of blacks, Indians, and mixed race peoples in Brazil today and the influence they have had and are having in the culture of the nation today.

This cultural exploration could be extended even further in the day six lesson, if the teacher were to find some way to get the students to see life in Brazil through the eyes of citizens of the nation. The teacher could perhaps divide the class into various groups representing people within various regions or from certain racial or ethnic groups in Brazil. The students could be given a prompt like, "If you were in this person's shoes, what position would you take on the 1964 revolution?" Students could then examine primary sources or existing data sets to inform their position. The teacher could then have the students design a propaganda poster illustrating their position and attempting to influence others to support their position.

With such a massive amount of information covered in the previous days' lessons, it might be advisable for the teacher, on day seven, to recap and review the geographic characteristics of Brazil, the historical trends that have defined the nation, and the cultural features that have arisen over time. This review could then be used as a backdrop for why Brazil has moved to a federal republic form of government after years of military rule. Again, the purpose of the framework is to provide an outlet for teachers to connect geography to history, history to culture, and now, culture to governmental and political systems. In this next lesson, the teacher might ask students why true popular elections were not held until Fernando Collor de Mello's election in 1990 as a way to get the students to connect the history and culture of Brazil with the governmental system it has chosen. The teacher might then choose to examine Brazil's four or five major

political parties or the six fundamental principles of the Brazilian federation. Also, the teacher might prefer to have students research the interrelationship and union of the three autonomous political entities in Brazilian government. All of these topics would depend upon the students' prior knowledge of government and would be suitable for inclusion in lesson seven in the framework.

Using all previous lessons as a backdrop, lesson eight would then connect all prior understanding of Brazil's geography, history, culture, and governmental/political systems to economic principles as they relate to Brazil's economic development. Brazil's massive inflation problem of the 1990s, could be used as an opening dialogue to expose the central economic principle of scarcity. From that point, dependent upon their exposure and understanding of subsequent economic principles, the students could perhaps evaluate the rationale for why Brazil is regarded as one of the four emerging economies in the world (along with Russia, India, and China). Again, given their prerequisite knowledge derived from earlier lessons in previous units, students could also analyze the factors contributing to the boom in imports or growth of the banking industry in recent years in Brazil. Regardless of economic principles explored, what is important with this lesson is to situate Brazil's economy within students' developmental understanding of economic principles and within the broader context of the other social studies disciplines (i.e. they see the interconnectedness of geography, history, culture, government and politics, and economics).

*"As teachers design units using this framework, they will certainly extend conversations related to certain topics and aspects of those topics based on the curriculum, desired learning outcomes, and their developing level of content and pedagogical expertise."*

From this point, the role of the teacher within the instructional unit model becomes one of consolidation and assessment. In other words, the teacher's job is to help the students fit the pieces together and then assess what they have learned. Lesson nine, then, should be a review lesson where the teacher guides the students through an exercise where they connect all unit material. A helpful tool for this is the flow map used as the framework organizer in Figure 1. This flow map could be used by the teacher to (a) review all of the content pieces by using each block as a separate bubble map and (b) show the interrelatedness of each major discipline by reviewing the rationale behind the sequence (i.e. why was geography first, history second, etc.). By looking at both the content and the interrelatedness of that content, it is believed that students will show positive signs of learning in the assessment given in lesson ten.

### **Conclusions**

There are a number of benefits of using such a framework to organize and sequence middle grades social studies instruction. First, the framework fills in the existing sequencing gap that has been left by current frameworks. National organizations and most states have done an admirable job of organizing content to assist social studies teachers in approaching their diverse and broad discipline, but none have presented a sequencing model to help teachers effectively connect one content point to another. By having a logical and algorithmic sequence to guide them in designing instructional units, middle grades social studies teachers can effectively and efficiently provide instruction that develops hierarchical structures and that subsequently leads to both content coverage and student learning (Gagne 1985; Jonassen, Hannum, & Tessmer, 1989; Van-Damme, 2006). The framework provided here, therefore, addresses concerns of teachers (particularly preservice and beginning teachers)

seeking a practical framework for delivering social studies instruction.

Second, this organizing and sequencing framework eases the planning burden on middle grades social studies teachers. Because the framework provides an easy way to implement template format, teachers can focus on identifying unit topics, developing lesson objectives and essential questions, and gathering resources to facilitate inquiry. Once they have fulfilled these responsibilities, middle grades social studies teachers can then use the unit template to guide instruction over a ten-day period. This allows planning time to: (a) strengthen content expertise; (b) search for resources to make learning activities meaningful; and (c) design creative tasks, activities, and experiences to engage and motivate students. Less time is spent determining what to teach and more time can be spent ascertaining how to teach it more effectively.

Finally, content is presented to students in a way that allows them to see not only the interconnectedness of social studies disciplines, but also in a manner that allows them to integrate new material with prior knowledge. As noted previously, by facilitating such a process, teachers are increasing opportunities for students to learn (Ausubel, 1960, 1968). Furthermore, through use of the sequencing framework to guide instruction before, during, and after instruction, students are enabled to go beyond merely what has just been taught, and are supported in their need to understand the material about to be taught (Ausubel 1960, 1968). In sum, through not only organizing, but also carefully and systematically sequencing middle grades social studies content, teachers are able to provide a valuable tool that assures that students have more and better opportunities to learn.



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