

## Using Artifacts to Support Social Studies Understandings in the Early Childhood Classroom

**Ethel King McKenzie**

**Douglas Bell**

Kennesaw State University  
585 Cobb Ave NW  
Room 3115, MD 0121  
Kennesaw, GA 30144, USA.

### **Abstract**

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*Social studies concepts are very abstract and sometimes challenging for young children to understand. This article presents ways for the preschool teacher to use artifacts as an opportunity to teach social studies to demystify what may otherwise be abstract. It uses diverse types of artifacts that can be introduced to children as well as those already present in the preschool classroom. The article explores how the use of artifacts aligns with the development of young children and supplies examples for teaching social studies concepts.*

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**Keywords:** Artifacts, Social Studies, Preschool, Child development, Early childhood education

### **Social studies today**

This article's purpose is to share how artifacts can be used to support the teaching of social studies understandings and developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) in the early childhood classroom. It is important that early childhood educators make social studies understandable and interesting so children can take part in meaningful education which is the foundation for all future endeavors. According to the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS), early childhood is the time for educators to capitalize on children's interests through exploratory learning, recognized as developmentally proper. Social Studies is a vital part of the early childhood curriculum since formative experiences shape children's attitudes as citizens in the classroom, the school and wider community (Mardell & Carpenter, 2012). Using artifacts in the teaching of social studies is one way in creating learning environments that will foster these early developmental skills which will last a lifetime.

### **What is Social Studies?**

The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS), the largest professional association for social studies educators in the nation, defines social studies as:

“...the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world (p.1.).

Early childhood educators are responsible and important in creating learning experiences and environments that foster young children's skills as active citizens committed to equity and inclusion and therefore, pedagogical practices that support these children's progression of social studies (NCSS, 2019). Because of the nature and design of social studies education the subject caters to children from an early age. It is through social studies that children are taught interpersonal, social and critical thinking skills and many of the skills they need to develop along the way to adulthood and as citizens of the democracy. They learn these skills through play and/or in natural ways. When they play, they explore, and exploratory learning is recognized as a developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood (Evangelou, et al 2010). Epstein 2014, Gronlund & Rendon, 2017, concur that learning through play is proper and natural in young children. If this is so, then structured free play should be encouraged in the early childhood classroom as this helps students to develop, physically, linguistically, socially and emotionally. What better outlet for these developments than using artifacts in social studies in the preschool classroom?

Preschool is a safe, caring community with an orderly routine, and each child is valued as an individual (Bartlett & Smith, 2019). When children play pretend games, use building blocks, and work together in small groups on class projects, they learn to accept differences, deal with their emotions, and practice conflict resolution (Hymel & Katz, 2019). These skills can be enhanced using artifacts (King-McKenzie, 2016 and Rachwani, et al 2021).

### **What are artifacts?**

Artifacts are things or objects that stand for or represent some historical or personal stories (Sanders, et al 2019). They are physical objects created and used by humans. Students can touch, feel, move, and examine these in real time in the social studies classroom. These can be primary and secondary sources, diaries, passports, photographs, letters, map jewelry, speeches, maps, books, journals, or items of clothing, eating utensils, coins, items that were touched by historians, replicas or recreated to pass on stories of the past (Marsh, 2006). Artifacts can also refer to the remains of objects such as shard from broken pottery or glassware. The list of what constitutes an artifact is infinite. When written records are scarce, these artifacts help researchers discover how people lived, however, some artifacts do not have an accompanying context, so it is important to build a solid understanding of the historical period in which it was produced.

An artifact remains almost meaningless when taken out of context. When working with artifacts one should ask probing questions as would be asked when working with any other type of primary source documents. In addition to telling us something about its creator, an artifact supplies insight into customs, styles, preferences, special occasions, work and play of the culture in which it was created (Barnatt, et al 2014). Students can be taught to be historians or historical detectives by asking questions about artifacts. Artifacts are clues to historical investigations and students must go back into a world and time from which these came to get an understanding of what was happening then (Farr-Darling, 2008). For students to grasp an understanding of social studies they must be able to place themselves on the continuum of time and artifacts help them to do that (Morris, 2000).

Artifacts help students to compare how times have changed, and what developments and innovations have taken place (Hyysalo, et al 2019). Students can be asked to bring artifacts relating to the topics being taught to school. This is like show and tell that students are asked to do. They bring mementos from home that talk about themselves and family. In this way they can see that they, too, are historians and social beings, thus making learning less mysterious and more acceptable. As children learn about the different things that people used before the onset of modern technology, they can recreate some of these items and use them. For example, they can create pens, from feathers and ink from food colors or paints and use them to write something just as early ancestors did. This gives them a good sense of what it was like for children their own age to use feather or stick pens that were dipped in ink as opposed to the pens in use today. Activities like these give students a chance to "walk in the shoes" of people from long ago and imagine or visualize how they existed without modern technology which we take for granted today. Students can also see the progressions and inventions of items like computers, laptops, kindles, cellphones, electric irons, electricity, thumb drive, and others. In today's technological world many artifacts can be 3-D printed replicas (Malik, et al 2021).

Artifacts are viewed as toys by preschoolers and motivate children to explore (King-McKenzie, 2016). They have been playing with toys in the classroom for years. The teacher can bring early toys into the classroom, for example cloth dolls. Children can see what early dolls look like compared to the ones they have today. Every young child likes to dress up, pretend and tell

### **Young children as learners of social studies**

Young children are a unique population of learners. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is the leading organization for helping us understand the teaching and learning needs of young children. NAEYC uses a construct called Developmentally Appropriate Practices, (DAP) to ensure our teaching practices match the developmental needs of young learners (NAEYC, 2020). DAP is necessary to ensure that children receive help from the learning experiences. While DAP applies to all content being taught, they are also applicable and important when teaching social studies. The benefits of using DAP are social and academic. Young children who use DAP have stronger social emotional outcomes (Jones & Gullo, 1999) They are less dependent on adults and exhibit less stress and worry (Shiakou & Belsky, 2009). Additionally, young children experiencing developmentally appropriate practices have their content delivered in ways which match the way they learn. Conversely, if developmentally inappropriate practices are used, learning can be affected negatively. Teachers of young children must be intentional and thoughtful to ensure social studies lessons match how young children develop and learn so they receive help from the lessons. This can be done through aspects of DAP described below.

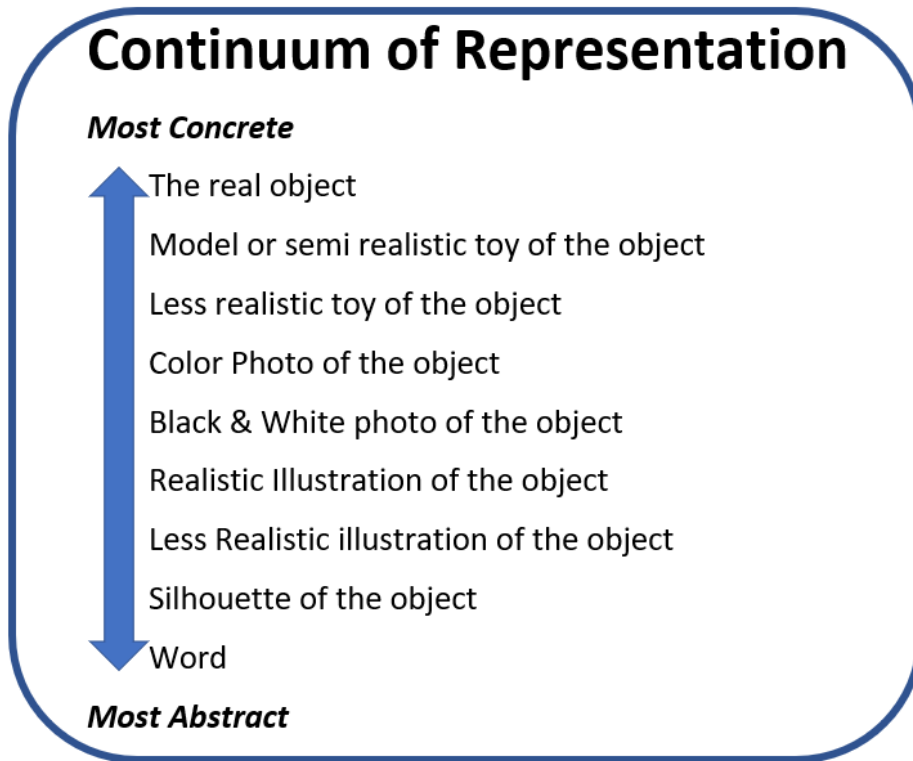
***Play or play like.*** Play has long been an indicator of DAP for young children (NAEYC, 2020). Embedding a social studies lesson in play makes it more meaningful and memorable to young children. Play is an activity in which children show their ability to explore, imagine and make decisions while enjoying themselves. Play comes naturally to children and seldom needs to be directed by an adult. It allows young children to dream and enjoy whatever they are doing. This play should be part of our classroom practices as children will learn more easily because we have tapped in on their natural curiosity. Play supports development and learning in children. It supplies ways for the child to develop at the cognitive, literacy and numeracy, social and emotional development levels. Artifacts use provide this outlet.

***Multimodal.*** When instructing young children, it is pertinent to tap into as many senses as possible. Young children process information and make sense of their world through the senses. Including multiple senses in a learning experience and directly support the learning goal, young children are more likely to remember and understand the concepts being taught (Neumann, et al 2012 and Broadbent, et al 2016). Using teaching strategies including multiple senses when teaching social studies will increase the chances of the child understanding abstract social studies concept. Multiple senses in teaching go beyond the simple view of, they can see the worksheet, hear the teacher telling them what to do, and feel the pencil with which they are writing. Instead, young learners require multiple senses to be activated in an intentional way by the social studies concept itself. This means it is coupled with the remaining characteristics of developmentally proper teaching approaches described next.

***Concrete.*** The developmental value of concrete objects has been proven from a cognitive perspective; starting in infancy, exploration and interaction with such objects contribute to the development of means-end behavior (Lobo & Galloway, 2012). Evangelou et al (2010) remind us that the concreteness of artifacts and various manipulative objects commonly found in early childhood classrooms make them good learning devices because they can be used to instantiate and exemplify more abstract notions. The term hands-on is often used when referring to learning experiences with young children. This term is really referring to the concrete ways that young children understand concepts. For young children, hands on learning does not simply mean their hands are on the pencil. Instead, they are getting a chance to work in a manipulative fashion with materials that help them have a working understanding of the concepts being taught by representations that give them a clear picture of a concept. Representations of concepts work on a continuum from concrete to abstract (see image 1 below). This continuum moves from the real thing all the way to the printed word to stand for an artifact or concept. Young children need as much concrete representation as possible. As they gain experience with a concept, then they can eventually mentally manipulate the object or concept without representation. The young child needs the actual object or as close to the real thing as possible. Later after exploration of the real thing and familiarity is strong, one can say the word and the child understands what it truly is. For example, if we want a young child to understand what a hard hat is, we must let them explore hard hats, then give them model or toy representations of hard hats, then pictures of hard hats, and then finally when we say the word hard hat, they know what we really mean. This is explained further on the chart below.

Figure 1:

*Continuum of Representation*



**Active.** A key characteristic of the nature and needs of young learners is the need for active learning. In early childhood education, the term “active learning” is meant to refer to engagement with content and concepts in a way that supports the young child’s need to move. Young children need more large body movements in their learning experiences; however, active learning may also include the use of movement through use of manipulation of materials or working with peers in a way that promotes movement. The key to supporting active learning is to thoughtfully and intentionally include artifacts and manipulatives in social studies learning experiences. According to Epstein, et al (2008) active learning has five ingredients: materials, manipulation, choice, language, and adult scaffolding. When young children engage with social studies content in active ways, using artifacts, they are more likely to understand and remember the concepts.

**Meaningful and Authentic.** Young children need content to be delivered in meaningful and authentic ways. This means that children experience social studies content in ways that matter to them and in ways that are real for them. Children apply their schema to the content and process the content in ways that are valid to them. For example, instead of learning about goods and services by showing pictures of goods and pictures of services, they can play grocery store and apply understanding of goods and services in a realistic context they understand. In the same way they can learn about community helpers through role play. They can become the police officer, postal service worker, firefighter (live artifacts), and the this becomes a more meaningful and authentic approach to teaching about these community helpers. When the content is relevant to the learners and matches things, children already understand in a way that can connect to their lives, they are more likely able to learn and keep the content. Using authentic tools and experiences helps children construct a mental image (Al Darwish, 2014).

When teachers of preschoolers include as many of the characteristics described above in a social studies lesson, they must assure that the lesson is age appropriate and a good match for their learners. Live artifacts can help meet several of these developmentally proper characteristics (NAEYC, 2020).

### **Artifacts, social studies and the young learner**

According to Morris (2000), “Social Studies can be abstract, remote, and complex, often presenting information about people, places and events that are baffling to students.” Evangelou et al (2010) believe that “the concreteness of artifacts and various manipulative objects commonly found in early childhood education classrooms make them good learning devices because they can be used to start and exemplify more abstract notions,” (p.2). They add that, “concrete objects—often called manipulatives—have long been accepted as part of the curricular infrastructure of a preschool classroom and are good learning devices,” (p.2).

Artifacts provide exploratory learning recognized as developmentally proper practice in the education of preschoolers. The concreteness of artifacts and various manipulative objects commonly found in early childhood education classrooms make them good learning devices because they can be used to instantiate and exemplify more abstract notions (Saracho, & Spodek, 2008). Teachers can find interesting ways to teach social studies to young children using artifacts in novel ways. Commonly used for historical evidence, but artifacts but can be used across all social science disciplines. Artifacts help the teacher to integrate and teach across the school curriculum. Performing arts, visual arts, music, science, mathematics, literature all find their places and ways in the classroom using artifacts as students act, draw, create, analyze, think, show, and imagine (King-McKenzie, 2016). Evangelou et al (2010) reveal that from their study they found that children spent more time with tangible objects/artifacts than they do with pictures in a book. Another perspective is given by (Deloache & Marzolf, 1992) who believe that perhaps some artifacts are not familiar to the children, making it difficult for them to associate a pictorial representation with a real artifact and construct inferences about them. Children like to explore artifacts and build understanding of real objects (Yee, 2019).

In addition to telling us something about its creator, an artifact supplies insight into customs, styles, preferences, special occasion, work and play of the culture in which it was created. Teachers can use artifacts for the historical or social period under review to instruct students. Students can be taught to be historians or historical detectives by asking questions about artifacts. Artifacts are clues to historical investigations and students must go back into a world and time from which these came to get an understanding of what was happening then. Artifacts engage students and supply an outlet for playing with and learning about events and people they might find uninteresting or do not understand, if they just sit to listen to their teacher talk about it. These tactile representations/objects/artifacts add life to those stories that would have been uninteresting and abstract. There myraids ways and types of artifacts to use and present in the pre-school classroom.

### **Behaving or Living Artifacts**

Young children often enjoy pretending. A behaving artifact is when a person becomes a representation for the social studies concept being taught. This can happen through dramatic play or pretending. Dramatic play is a natural and important form of play for preschool children (Karabon, 2017). Pretending helps children connect learning concepts to their lives and engage with them in meaningful ways and learning is escalated when the teacher is there to scaffold that play (Kalkusch, et al 2021). Through pretending, children themselves become artifacts. Preschoolers learn about and experience concepts firsthand by taking on the role of the person related to the social studies concept. For example, by pretending to be a postal worker, young children understand duties and activities related to career.

When children themselves are behaving artifacts, prop boxes and supplemental artifacts can make the experience more meaningful (Hubbard, et al 2021). Prop boxes are small kits with related props and artifacts to extend play. The artifacts in the prop box are specifically intended to be played with while carrying out a pretend role. In the example of a postal worker, a prop box may have letters, rubber stamps and ink pads, a sorting tray, a delivery bag, several small mailboxes, and a hat. With these props, the child may sort the mail and deliver the letters to friends. Every young child in the preschool classroom likes to dress up and role play or be part of stories using clothes as props as they learn about others and events and weave stories through play (Smolucha & Smolucha, 2022). They become the people or person they are learning about and are living artifacts. Their interest and motivation for pretend makes it a meaningful way to teach them about historical figures and events and other social science disciplines than giving them the chance to dress up and role play and bring those historical characters to life (Kalkusch, et al 2021). They become historians, and events and historical moments are brought to life in their imaginations, in the classroom and they play a part.

Depending on the topic both students and teacher can become living artifacts or live museums as they dress in costumes of historical figures, community helpers, and/or the era under study. Teachers can use these live artifacts to teach historical, economic and geographical events and lessons from the social studies curriculum standards (Eaton, 2020).

Clothes and costumes for these artifacts can be found and bought from thrift stores, garage sales, flea markets, Halloween stores, Goodwill Stores, Salvation Army, Amazon and found in grandparents' attics and many other places or teachers can ask colleagues, parents and friends for help to gather these artifacts. One man's trash is the innovative social studies teacher's treasure. Children can dress up at the end of studying a unit or during the teaching of these figures, so those actors come to life in that museum. Teachers should keep these costumes (artifacts) in the classroom where they are accessible for the young child to peruse sometimes.

### ***Artifact box***

There are myriads ways to store these artifacts, example as in an artifact box, a trunk, journey box, object box or bag, primary source enhancement kits, economic, geographical, historical process kit, talking pieces, a museum corner or whatever way the teacher finds makes them accessible to the children. It does not matter about the name given to the storage container, what is important is that artifacts are in the classroom of these young children, and they are allowed to play with, and explore them and learn (McDonald al 2005 and Rachwani, 2021). Apart from having a museum corner in the classroom where the children can explore on their own, teachers must use items in their instructions so children can make connections, past with present, then and now and develop their understanding of social studies topics and events.

The artifact box is one way of keeping mementos in one place. It holds artifacts and bridges the gap between visits to museums and schools by creating a more hands-on approach to learning (King-McKenzie, 2016). Often, when students go on field trips to museums, they are not allowed to touch or handle the exhibits/artifacts. The artifact box brings the museum to the classroom, albeit on a smaller, and less overwhelming scale for the little ones but they can use all the senses to interact with the objects (King-McKenzie, 2016). Children can unpack the artifact box and have fun with the artifacts while learning at the same time. Young children like to ask questions like: What is this? For what is it used? They like to examine and improvise use for objects to which they are unaccustomed. Artifacts are developmentally significant in promoting cognition through exploration and supply an easy, and accessible way for children to explore the world around them (Gelman and Bloom, 2000).

### **Ways to use the artifact box**

It is important that all items in the box or container relate to the topic being taught and that there is an item for each child in the class during the teaching period. The artifact box/container can be used in several ways. Suggestions for using the artifact box/container are:

- At the beginning of a lesson the teacher can have students pull an artifact from the container and share what they know about the item. (This helps the teacher to assess a student's background knowledge or funds of knowledge of the topic that will be taught). The teacher must be sure that all artifacts in the box/container relate to the lesson being taught and there is at least one artifact for every child in the class.
- Artifacts may also be used in the middle of a lesson to review what students are learning or to keep them focused.
- Besides pulling the artifact from the receptacle, the teacher can hide items around the classroom for students to do a scavenger hunt (look for, find and report) to class about what they know about the object they found. Again, there should be at least one item hidden for each child to find.
- The items in the container can be used at the end of a lesson to assess what students learned about the topics discussed.

### **Archeological digs and artifacts**

One fascinating way to let children become historians is by exposing them to archaeological digs. The teacher might not be able to take the class to a real digging site where they can unearth artifacts but can bring the midden or site to the classroom by using clay. The teacher supplies the clay, so the children use their little hands and fingers instead of shovels and spades as excavators to create, instead of finding, artifacts in the soil. Every child likes to play in the dirt and get their hands dirty. It is important that the teacher sets the scene by telling the story of the visit to the "archaeological site" the children will be excavating that day (King-McKenzie 2016).

Context is important. Are they going to “dig” or excavate a site where Native Americans or Indigenous people lived or where the Pilgrims landed and lived when they first came to colonies? The teacher must prepare the students for what to look to excavate, and show them how to create items from clay, pretending that they are unearthing the items that these people used in early times. The clay, therefore, serves twofold. It becomes the site where the “dig” is being done and to create artifacts. The little one's fingers become the tools/utensils (shovels, forks) to excavate and create artifacts and as their imaginations are awakened.

Archaeologists excavate areas in which ancient cultures lived and use the artifacts found there, to help children to learn about the past. Many ancient cultures did not have written records, nor did they actively record their history so artifacts can supply clues to how these people lived (*National Geographic*, 2021). Students can be asked to create items and artifacts they believe would be found in the soil if they took a journey back in time to a place where the people, they are learning about lived. What kinds of things would they find? What part would culture, religion and time play in the find? In what conditions would the “finds” be in? Broken? Cracked? Fossils? This gives students the opportunity to process how time and technology have changed, which helps them to think critically about what they would unearth from these sites/middens and what the finds tell about life then. For example, students would not unearth computers or cellphones as those were not yet invented. As suggested before, children can become historians by creating their own artifacts.

Following are some ways the creative teachers can adapt the artifact box to be used by preschoolers in ways that enhance their understanding, offer opportunities to manipulate artifacts, and engage the children in the content in a playful way. The following activities are variations that can be used with the artifact box or the artifacts they hold. It is important to note that the artifacts used with young children should be safe for them to manipulate and be supervised in their use. The following descriptions are variations of play experiences which use an artifact box with preschool children. Each play experience can be reused with any social studies theme or concept by changing out the artifacts. It is important for teachers to set up clear behavioral expectations for use of the artifacts and boxes.

***Feel and Find - Guess.*** Teachers can put artifacts in a box and cut a hole just large enough for the child’s hand and the artifact. The artifacts can match a particular social studies topic. The children in a center or small group can take turns reaching in and without looking, select an artifact. The children then describe what they feel and guess the artifact they are holding. Next, the child takes the artifact out to see if they guessed right. When the children take the artifact out, the teacher can discuss the artifact briefly. For example, when learning a unit on geography of the continent of Africa, the teacher can put in some cultural artifacts and toy animals native to Africa. The children take turns feeling in the box and guessing. When the child pulls out their object, the teacher can explain what it is and how it matches the culture of people or the environment living in a particular African country.

***Feel and Find – Match.*** Teacher supplies pictures of the artifacts or tangible artifacts in the artifact box. For this experience, the version of the artifact box is with a hole cut out so children can reach in but not see what is inside. The teacher or the child in centers or small group can select a picture off the table, then reach in and try to find that artifact by touch. The teacher discusses with the children about the artifact and its significance before they find the object or after they find it and take it out of the box. For example, if teaching about community helpers, the box can be loaded with tools a chef uses. There will be pictures of the tools on the table and the teacher discusses with the children what each tool is and how a chef uses each. The child chooses one picture, reaches into the artifact box and finds that object. There can be a brief follow-up discussion about how the tool is used.

***Come and Get It.*** Teacher places artifacts in the artifact box related to the specific social studies concept being taught. This version of the artifact box is not the feel and find version, but instead just a container of some sort. It is important to decorate the box/container attractively and it will always be the receptacle in the classroom for artifact play experiences which are not felt and found in nature. The artifact box can even be a treasure chest, or a trunk. In this experience, the teacher uses the artifact box to invite children to come and get an artifact that stands for a concept in a specific way. This can be done with whole groups or small groups of children. The children then bring their artifact back to where they are sitting and do turn and talk about their artifact and how it matches the social studies concept being taught. For example, in teaching the social studies theme **Individual Development and Identity**, the teacher may wish to help young children explore feelings. Some children will come and choose something from the box that represents different feelings such as happiness, sadness, anger, or fear. The teacher invites this by saying, Jason, come choose something that reminds you of being happy and go back to your seat. The children then go back to their seats and share their thoughts with their friends on how their object stands for their assigned emotion.



**Which One?** Teacher places artifacts in the artifact box related to the intended social studies concept or theme. The teacher chooses three to five objects from the box and describes how they match the concept or theme. Selected objects are then passed around for the children to manipulate. The adult then places the objects in a line in front of him/her. Next, the children are asked to tell the object being described. The teacher gives hints about the object in relation to the social studies concept or theme for the lesson. A child, or all children, is requested to tell what object is being described. Another variation is to invite a child to come and hand the object being described to the teacher. For example, the teacher may have objects related to how we communicate now and how we did a long time ago. There may be a cell phone, a corded or rotary telephone, a handheld wireless telephone, and a small computer device. The teacher passes each item around and discusses specific features of each and how they are used. Next, he or she lines the objects up and asks *which communication device can send text messages to someone?* Children shout *cell phone*, and the teacher invites Wanda up to show the cell phone. The teacher picks up the cell phone and has Wanda pass it around the group again.

**What Did You Hear?** Another variation of this experience can be with sound making tools. The teacher discusses and passes around the props in a comparable way but instead of just putting the tools in a line, he or she can cover the artifacts with a small blanket and make a sound with one and have the children guess which one it made the sound. This is especially useful for cultural instruments or artifacts, the different sounds animals make from geographical areas—like lions, tigers, elephants, cheetah, giraffe, and wilder beast. An extension of this experience is having the children get an artifact that stands for a sound, and the teacher plays a recording of the sound, the child who has that artifact shows it and passes it around for all to manipulate. For example, the children may be learning about a variety of transportation vehicles. The teacher includes a toy car, truck, jet, and helicopter and children choose their artifact from the artifact box. The teacher then plays a recording of the helicopter's sound. Lingbo has a helicopter. She holds up the helicopter and then passes it around while the teacher describes how the helicopter works and how it is used.

**Where Did it Go?** The teacher selects some artifacts related to a specific social studies concept or theme and puts them in the artifact box and allows the children to choose some of the artifacts, pass them around, and discuss how they relate to the concept or theme. After discussion, the children pass the artifacts to the teacher and line them up in front. Children are then told to close their eyes or look away or the teacher covers the objects with a blanket, box, or partition of some kind. An object is removed and hidden, and children are invited to look now. The teacher then asks the children which one is missing and gives context clues to help them guess or have the children tell they know which one is missing by giving context clues. The teacher then shows the object and has a brief discussion on how the artifact matches the social studies concept being taught.

### **Technological Artifacts**

Today, our world and classrooms are inundated with technology and the role it plays in the early childhood education years can be an asset to the child's education. These technological gadgets or artifacts are especially important to the young child's learning and development. Technology is being emphasized as important in the early childhood curriculum as children must be able to use technology. Technological artifacts include, but are not limited to computers, laptops, kindle, tablets, digital camera and all the modern ways of keeping socially connected. Sundquist and Nilsson (2016) believe that using technological artifacts is central to the education of preschoolers and is also part of the National Curriculum for Preschool. Technology artifacts help with problem-solving; creativity, divergent thinking, and collaboration and develop techniques and fine motor skills in preschool children.

### **Conclusion**

Intentionally addressing Social Studies with preschool age children lays a foundation for learning carried through the rest of schooling and life. Often teachers push social studies aside for other subjects considered critical by stakeholders. When this happens, Social Studies gets treated as an afterthought and important conceptual understandings are lost. If young learners of this nation are to become effective and active participants in a democratic society Social Studies must be an essential part of the early childhood curriculum. The early years are the sounding board for later life and using artifacts in Social Studies teaching is not only smart but pays dividends. The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) affirms pedagogic practices in the early years that support children's progression in social studies in the early childhood setting and because of the importance of this, encourages educators in creating learning environments and experiences that foster the development of young children's skills as critical, inquisitive, exploratory thinkers, and active citizens (NCSS, 2019) and using artifacts help to impart social studies knowledge, skills, and understanding is crucial.



Teachers of young children can focus on social studies in meaningful ways without losing ground in other disciplines. Social studies is to be taught as an integrated discipline at the early childhood level. Artifacts are springboards or launchpads for clearing up misunderstandings in the subject and for integrating it with other subjects.

Artifacts become the instruments, the waltz, the interplay that connect the preschool child in a harmonious way to social studies themes, understandings, learning experiences and social and emotional development as musical instruments do in a symphony (King-McKenzie, 2016). Artifacts easily support the charge issued by the NCSS to ensure using social studies pedagogical practices that develop critical and exploratory thinkers. These teaching tools supply meaningful and authentic ways to explore social studies concepts.

In this article, the use of artifacts as a social studies pedagogical tool has been defined and described and multiple options for using artifacts with preschool age children are offered. Teachers of young children can use these ideas as a springboard to vary teaching, and to design their own experiences to ensure high quality social studies learning are intentionally addressed in the preschool classroom and curriculum.

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