

A Personalized Simulation Learning Process  
for Elementary or Diversified  
Ability Students

by

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Attention to special education has become one of the most significant and widespread movements in American education in the seventies. Most of the recent research and literature in special education has been almost totally devoted to language and physical skills. Because of this, there have been areas of the curriculum that have been almost totally ignored. Social studies is one of these areas. By ignoring social studies a teacher is excluding an activity that is naturally designed to develop the learner's appreciation of his heritage and surroundings.

A major reason why social studies has been ignored in special education classes is probably that in traditional social studies programs the readability of materials is geared to the average child, and children who are in special education classes have difficulty in relating to the material and often get frustrated. This can also reflect on the teacher who in turn will not devote much time to social studies. It seems that many educators have put the sole blame on the content of textbooks, but we feel that the blame should not be placed there alone, but also in the misinterpretation by teachers of the content of such textbooks.

Social studies should be a favorite subject for teacher and student; this is the subject matter which covers the areas that have the greatest effect on our lives. Social studies deals with ideas about people and their problems both in the past and present

and can provide an appreciation of and/or respect for persons with differing abilities and cultures. It is the area of study which should give the most opportunity for looking at the world and its problems in new and creative ways. Often times children who have a hard time expressing themselves seem to get discouraged easily in social studies as well as other subjects. However, too often social studies lessons become bogged down in the accumulation of descriptive facts which have no relevance to these children. Knowing that social studies can be conducted at varying ability levels should be partial encouragement and should give the student a better opportunity to learn to like the subject.

An alternative approach that can create a more positive atmosphere for social studies education for special education programs are simulations and games. Simulation games can be defined as an activity in which participants, who are attempting to achieve specific goals, interact within an artificially produced environment which recreates some aspect of social reality. For the purpose of reality, players assume the roles of individuals or groups who exist in the particular social system being simulated. Social studies teachers have shown a growing interest in simulation games for classroom use. This is in part because teachers are constantly searching for ways to make their classes more interesting and realistic. Simulation games are potentially an effective aid to social studies teachers and can be successfully incorporated into most curricula if used properly and intelligently. However, it should be emphasized that using simulation as a technique in the classroom is not an "easy way out." It is a skill which requires