



how well you and they are learning. They promote a reflective atmosphere in which you and students begin to become more consciously aware of what is being learned and how meaningful it is. (This is known as *metacognition*, or thinking about thinking.) And they help provide a classroom experience that is itself more integrated and seamless. I can tell you this: If you use these strategies faithfully, two things of great and lasting significance will happen. First of all, student achievement will increase. You will definitely see improvement on standardized tests. Second, the social/moral fabric of life in your classroom will be improved. Your classroom will be a better place for you and your students, and citizenship will be something real, not just an academic study.

“I Learned” Statements

This is a simple and durable strategy and one you should use often. At the end of an activity or lesson, ask your students to write down (or tell you if they are too young) something they learned. When you have your students write down what they learned and turn in the paper, you have given each student the opportunity to think about the experience and to reflect on it. You will also notice that the aggregate of what gets turned in is an excellent measure of what your students thought was significant. Don't be disappointed if the first time you try this, many students don't write or say anything. Why should they? No one ever asked them such a question. They will get the idea in time. Use “I learned” statements a couple of times a week—in other words, often enough to keep the students thinking that you just might ask them following any given experience.

Key Idea Identification

At the close of a lesson or activity, ask your students to explain, preferably in writing if they can, what they think was the key idea. The researcher John Goodlad has faulted teachers for failing to teach ideas. That can't happen if you teach your lessons with a key idea in mind, and you ask your students to identify it. Don't worry if they identify something other than you were looking for or if different students identify different key ideas. That becomes the essence of a good discussion. By using this strategy from time to time, you will raise your own level of consciousness about the importance of ideas in learning while you raise your students' consciousness.

The Week in Review

This is a small-group assessment strategy best done on every Friday afternoon. Place students in groups of two or three and challenge them to look back over the week with the idea of identifying some of the most important things the class did and learned. Each group should submit a written statement or should be asked to explain their findings. When the students know that they always reflect back on the week, they begin to think about what they are doing and learning during the week, especially if you remind them that on Friday, they will do the Week in Review. It makes a great way for you to begin on Monday. You start the week by saying, “Well, here were the big stories from last week. Let's see what happens this week.”

Pyramid Discussion

Have you ever thought of class discussion as assessments? Probably not, if for no other reason than that most class discussions involve only the teacher and a handful of more talkative students. But what if you wanted everyone to discuss and reflect? Here's how you can do it. Begin by asking or writing on the board one or two important questions related to what your students should be learning. Place students in groups of two and have them discuss the questions. When the groups of two have had a chance to discuss, place students in groups of four and have them discuss the same questions. Groups of eight come next, discussing the same question. Then we go to the whole class. This accomplishes two things. First of all, everyone has a chance to talk. Second, if the questions are important, then the students should have the chance to consider and reconsider them. By the time you reach whole-class discussion, everyone will have had an opportunity to think through something important.

I Can Teach

We've all heard the expression, "The best way to learn something is to teach it." There is some profound wisdom in the saying, for teaching involves expression and performance, two commodities often sadly lacking in school learning. So, the assignment is for the students to teach an idea, skill, or some content they have learned in social studies to someone else. Typically, you would ask your students to teach one of their parents or a brother or sister. This accomplishes the goal of having your students revisit what you taught them from a different perspective, that of a teacher.

Parents on Board

Social studies is a natural subject area to share with parents. To accomplish this strategy, send a letter home to parents, saying that once a week you would like them to listen while their child tells them about what is being studied at school. It is really very helpful if you are able to suggest an activity that they can do together. For example, if you ask parents to go for a walk with their child and to make a map together, you might be surprised with what you've accomplished as a result.

Search for Meaning

One of the most important assessment strategies you can utilize is to search for meaning in learning. From time to time you need to ask your students to write (or tell) you what they are learning that is meaningful to them. This takes trust on your part and theirs, but I guarantee you that it is rewarding. Ideally, all learning should be meaningful, but we know that is not always the case. However, as a search for meaning becomes a part of the goal structure for you and your students, meaning will begin to develop if for no other reason than that you and they are looking for it.

Thank You

There is a powerful idea known as *serial reciprocity*. Simply put, it means that if someone does something kind, helpful, or thoughtful for you, you need to pass it

along. This is different from merely giving back directly to the person who helped you. It goes around and comes around. This is an assessment technique that will in time make your classroom a truly civil place to be. It is based on the notion that in a classroom everyone is a teacher in one way or another. We can all help each other. Make it part of the routine to encourage students to write or draw thank-you notes and notes of appreciation to each other. You might be surprised how many come your way!

Clear and Unclear Windows

Have you ever tried to look through a window that was dusty, dirty, or foggy? You can't see much, can you? Or have you ever noticed a child whose glasses are so smudged that you wonder how he can see anything? Sometimes social studies can be that way for some students. Why not ask your students now and then how "clear" things are? Give them an opportunity to show you by putting some things that they understand in a clear window and things that are hard for them in an unclear window. Here is an example of Sarah's windows.

Sarah

Clear Window

I loved doing
the rol play,
It was fun
to be a
astonott.

Unclear Window

I hav trubbel
reading the book.
It was to hard
for me.

Choices and Feelings

At the end of a lesson or at the end of a week, give your students a few minutes to reflect on the choices they were able to make in social studies. Did they get to decide anything? What was it? How do they feel about how things are going? Let them express their feelings in a brief note or conversation with you.

Record Keeping

Record keeping uses Skinnerian reinforcement techniques and, at the same time, turns a measure of responsibility over to the student. In order to carry out accurate individualized record keeping, your students will need to record the assignments they have completed, the score or grade they received on each assignment, the pages they have read, the films they have seen, the books they have read, the projects they have participated in, the maps they have made, and so forth. It sounds complicated, doesn't it? It's not, though, if you have your students record each item as soon as they complete it or as soon as you return it to them. I would also encourage you to have your students make a brief notation beside each entry. The notation should include the main idea or most important point of the activity. Here is an example.

Noah M.
Social Studies Record

<i>Date</i>	<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Note</i>
Mon. 6th	Film on traffic safety		Don't just depend on cars to stop for you.
Tue. 7th	Worksheet on traffic safety	100%	Rights and responsibilities of pedestrians
Wed. 8th	Make map of crosswalks by Oak Point School	A	My map shows what the crosswalks look like, only flat.

I guess every teacher wants to teach his or her students ways of becoming more responsible. Record keeping is a tangible way to do that. It is also a kind of metacognitive strategy, because it enables students to increase their awareness of the work being done in social studies.

Self-Reporting

An obvious but often overlooked assessment strategy is to have students assess their own progress. It's their work after all; why not let them help to assess it? Self-reporting gives students an opportunity to be analytical about their own progress. A good self-report should deal with both the strengths and weaknesses of progress as viewed by the student.

Because self-analysis is rarely encouraged in school settings, you will have to be patient at first. In fact, some students may even consider self-reporting inappropriate. But what, after all, is the purpose of learning if it is not to encourage independence on the part of the learner? I think that in time you will be gratified with the ability students develop in this area. Following is an example of a self-report turned in by a fourth-grade student.

February 10
Mark Goldberg

I liked learning about the feudal economy. I'm glad we don't have it anymore though. The best thing I did was when Jason, Maria, and me made the feudal manor out of cardboard. I really did a lot of work and so did everyone. We showed where the lord of the manor lived and where the serfs were. The poor serfs loved holidays. So do I! Do you know where we got most of our information? We got it out of a book called *Life in Medieval Times*. Part of it was hard to understand.

Circle Meetings

The circle meeting is a very helpful way to gauge the class's feelings and thoughts about how things seem to be going. Everyone's seat, including yours, is arranged in a circle. You begin the meeting by telling about what you have been trying to accomplish and how you think it is going. After your introduction, simply go around the circle and give each child an opportunity either to say something or to "pass" if he or she does not wish to talk. Don't be discouraged if, at your first try, the children do not offer up gems of wisdom and insight. They will, in time, if you are

patient and supportive. This technique, which draws on Vygotsky's ideas of social intelligence, is one of the surest ways of getting at the truth of things based on the group's collective perceptions and impressions. Primary school-age children take to this format naturally. By the intermediate grades, some children have become reluctant to speak up in a group setting. Your job is to overcome that unfortunate phenomenon. Circle meetings take anywhere from 10 minutes to an hour, depending on how deeply the class gets into the matters at hand. Once a week is probably a good target for circle meetings.

Question Authoring

This seldom-used strategy can provide brilliant insights to your students' sense of what is important and just how curious they have become about learning. Simply ask the children to write down (orally with young children) any questions they would like to ask about the content and experience in general. This activity provides you with a context for telling the class about higher-level questions. In time, if you are patient, you will see a tremendous improvement in the nature of children's questions. Also, many of the questions they raise will help you with your teaching because the children are, in effect, acting as diagnosticians for you.

Journal Entries

One of the greatest improvements in teaching and learning in the past few years has been the idea of student journals. Although journals serve a variety of purposes, they are quite useful as an assessment tool. Encourage students to make entries about the subject matter they are studying, including their feelings about it as well as their thoughts and ideas. Their entries provide them with an ongoing record of their perceptions of social studies. You should collect student journals periodically and make brief comments of encouragement and support.

Learning Illustrated

At least once a week you should ask your students to draw a picture or make a map of something interesting or important that they have learned recently in social studies. Their drawings and maps make excellent displays, and they should find their way into the students' portfolios in time. It is important to remember that some children who may not be adept verbally are actually learning a lot, and this provides one way for them to show it.

Thinking Aloud

The simple technique of thinking aloud is one of the best ways to prevent the "in one ear and out the other" syndrome that seems to haunt children's learning of social studies (not to mention other subjects!). This should be a 5- to 10-minute activity in which you ask students to talk and listen with a partner about what they are learning. Sometimes you may want to place a question or two on the board for them to discuss. However, if you leave the discussion open, you will find that you get a wider range of student input. It is useful to have a class discussion

following the thinking-aloud session in which students can volunteer aspects of their talk together.

Displays

It has been noted that doing schoolwork is like preparing for an athletic event or a drama production that never happens. You just prepare. Imagine spending time rehearsing a play and never putting it on. Doesn't that strike you as strange? But this is what happens with schoolwork all the time. Perhaps this is one reason it seems unreal to some children. You might be surprised at the number of nursing homes, hospitals, clinics, restaurants, shopping malls, stores, and so on that would welcome the chance to display your students' work. Parents and children alike are proud when they see student work put on public display. By the way, it is very good public relations for the school.

Spot-Check Inventories

The spot-check inventory is a simple strategy that allows you to obtain from your students a brief synthesis about what they think they have learned during a particular amount of time. To do a spot-check inventory, merely stop whatever is going on at a given time (class discussion, group work) and ask each student to list several things that he or she has learned during the activity. Be patient and allow students to become better at this metacognitive strategy over time.

Younger children will simply have to tell you what they have learned as you list their thoughts on the board. Older children can write down their own lists to share with the class. A useful alternative to the listing approach is to have students write a paragraph or essay telling what they have learned. The example in Figure 8.2 was written by a Scottish girl, Diane, age 9, after a discussion about life in America.

Assessing Assessment

Perhaps at this point you are thinking something like, "OK, Arthur, those may be good metacognitive strategies for assessing student learning, but where on earth am I supposed to find the time for them?" I have an answer for you. The saying "Less is more" is really quite profound. It has been attributed to Theodore Sizer, a leader in the school restructuring movement. The idea is actually rather an old one, dating back at least to Jean Rousseau, who wrote in the preface to his book *Emile*, "Teachers, teach less and teach well." A so-called coverage mentality is self-defeating. The more you try to cover, the less your students will learn and retain. The strategies I have presented here are time consuming, but they have several advantages.

First, they will facilitate language development, one of the most important goals of teaching. As Piaget, Vygotsky, and others have pointed out, children need to reflect and talk about about what they are learning. Speech and thought co-develop; they are not separate functions. So, by giving children time to talk about, draw about, and reflect in general on what they are learning, you actually create a more efficient system. Second, one the major goals of social studies is to build opportunities for citizenship. The participating citizen is basic to our democratic way of life. The kinds of activities and conversations you focus on during assessment of learning represent