

Preparing Students for Life in a Digital Age: A Challenge for Social Studies  
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**Preparing Students for Life in a Digital Age: A Challenge for Social Studies**

As I instruct pre-service teachers and talk with educators around the country, I am frequently asked, “What is NCSS doing to prepare teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> century? One of our challenges, as educators, is to help all students function effectively as future citizens in a world of accelerating change, exponential information growth, and evolving technologies.

The question came up again this summer when I participated in the Ackerman Colloquium on Technology and Citizenship Education at Purdue University. I was intrigued by one presenter’s use of Marc Prensky’s metaphor of “**digital natives**,” describing students born since 1980, for whom technology is ubiquitous and whose lives have been shaped by nearly instant and interactive access to the world; and “**digital immigrants**,” describing teachers, who have adapted to technology but not entirely embraced it. Prensky asserts “Today’s students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach.” (1) So what is NCSS doing to help those of us who are digital immigrants prepare digital natives for citizenship?

**Revising the NCSS Standards:**

In 1994, when NCSS published *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (2), one of the ten themes addressed “Science, Technology, and Society.” The NCSS Curriculum Standards Task Force is currently reviewing and revising those standards with an eye to the changing role of technology for curriculum and instruction. It is no longer sufficient for students to learn about technology; they must also learn how to use multiple technologies as tools for learning, communication, and participation, both locally and globally. The NCSS Curriculum Standards Task Force will be seeking input at an Open Hearing at the San Diego Conference on Friday, November 30 at 9:00 A.M. I encourage you to attend.

**Technology Guidelines:**

The *NCSS Technology Position Statement and Guidelines* (3) provides a rationale for integrating technology with social studies. It was written by the NCSS Technology Community, incorporating earlier guidelines for teacher educators. (4) The position statement raises important questions about how to prepare students for life in a “technologically-oriented civic society,” how to address the digital divide, and how to navigate the rocky shoals of the standards and accountability movement. The guidelines are both self-evident (e.g., “extend learning beyond what can be done without technology... introduce technology in context... foster the development of the skills, knowledge, and participation as citizens...”) and extremely challenging.

**Technology-Infused Lessons:**

The latest NCSS Bulletin, *Digital Age* (5), features thirty exemplary technology-infused social studies lessons appropriate for elementary, middle, or high school classrooms.

These lessons were written by teachers for teachers and represent the rich variety of technologies that promote learning from electronic “big books”, class websites, online simulations, multimedia projects, digital timelines, and concept mapping to electronic discussion boards, internet research, geographic information systems (GIS), webquests, and digital videos.

### **Collaboration with Technology Consortia:**

NCSS collaborates with two technology consortia, the International Society for Technology Education (ISTE) and the Partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (P21). Our representatives advised ISTE in developing its next generation *National Educational Technology Standards for Students* (6). These standards reflect a growing consensus that the digital world requires students who can use technology to think creatively and construct knowledge; communicate and work collaboratively; and access information to solve problems and make decisions. Applying technology operations and concepts, which continues to challenge many educators, is no longer seen as groundbreaking; it is a prerequisite skill for students.

We are also working closely with the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (P21), an organization of business and education leaders and policy makers, advocating the infusion of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills into education. The P21 Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning includes interdisciplinary themes of global awareness; financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy; civic literacy; and health literacy. The P21 Framework Task Force is creating grade level outcomes and examples for each of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and will be seeking input in a session in San Diego on Friday, November 30 at 11:30 A.M. Stop by to learn more about this exciting project.

### **Technology at the Annual Conference:**

Technology is a special focus of over fifty sessions at the NCSS conference in San Diego. You will be able to spot them easily using the tech icon in the conference program book. Technology critic Jamie McKenzie will present Friday’s keynote address as well as a free ticketed workshop. Up to 750 conference attendees will be able to log onto the Internet at any one time in the Convention Center meeting rooms and lobbies.

NCSS is seeking to make extensive use of emerging information and communications technologies to better serve our membership. Look for interactive webpages for each Operations Committee and Community to support ongoing communication and collaboration. There is no shortage of creative, talented, technology-savvy teachers within NCSS. Some of them represent the first generation of digital natives who are now beginning to teach. Our challenge is to continue supporting and communicating their exemplary work, as we encourage our members to embrace technology and prepare their students for life in a digital age.

### **References:**

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3. <http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/technology>
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5. Bennett, L. & Berson, M. J. (2007). *Digital age: Technology-based K-12 lesson plans for social studies*. Bulletin 105. Silver Spring, MD: NCSS
6. [http://www.iste.org/inhouse/nets/cnets/students/pdf/NETS\\_for\\_Students\\_2007.pdf](http://www.iste.org/inhouse/nets/cnets/students/pdf/NETS_for_Students_2007.pdf)
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