

## Social Studies Learning Activity Types<sup>1,2</sup>

Of the forty-four social studies learning activity types that have been identified to date, seventeen are focused upon helping students build their knowledge of social studies content, concepts, and processes. Twenty-seven provide students with opportunities to express their understanding in a variety of ways. Six of these knowledge expression activity types emphasize *convergent* learning and twenty-one of these activity types offer students opportunities to express their understanding in *divergent* ways. The three sets of activity types (knowledge building, convergent knowledge expression, and divergent knowledge expression) are presented in the tables that follow, including compatible technologies that may be used to support each type of learning activity. Specific software titles and Web sites listed in the Possible Technologies column are meant to be illustrative, and are not necessarily endorsed by the taxonomy authors.

### Knowledge Building Activity Types

As the table of activity types below shows, teachers have a variety of options available to assist students in building social studies content and process knowledge.

**Table 1:** Knowledge Building Activity Types

| Activity Type                | Brief Description  | Possible Technologies  |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Read Text                    | Students extract information from textbooks, historical documents, census data, etc.; both print-based and digital formats | Digital archives, Web sites, electronic books, audiobooks  |
| Read Maps, Charts and Tables | Students extract and/or synthesize information from maps, charts and/or tables   | Textbook supplements, Web-based datasets (e.g., CIA World Factbook)  |
| View Presentation            | Students gain information from teachers, guest speakers, and peers; synchronous/asynchronous, oral or multimedia           | Presentation software, videoconferencing, video creation software (e.g. Movie Maker, iMovie), concept mapping software           |
| View Images                  | Students examine both still and moving (video, animations) images; print-based or digital format                           | Presentation software, word processor, video creation software (e.g. Movie Maker, iMovie), image sharing sites (e.g. Flickr.com) |

<sup>1</sup> Suggested citation (APA format, 6<sup>th</sup> ed.):  
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<http://activitytypes.wmwikis.net/file/view/SocialStudiesLearningATs-Feb2011.pdf>

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|                                  |   |   |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Listen to Audio                  | Students listen to audiorecordings of speeches, music, radio broadcasts, oral histories, and lectures; digital or non-digital           | Digital audio archives, podcasts (e.g., “Great Speeches in History,” etc.), audiobooks  |
| Take Notes                       | Students record information from lecture, presentation, and/or group work   | Word processor, wiki, concept mapping software  |
| Discuss                          | In small to large groups, students engage in dialogue with their peers; synchronous/asynchronous, structured or unstructured            | Discussion fora, discussion in wikis and blogs  |
| Debate                           | Students discuss opposing viewpoints; formal/informal; structured/unstructured; synchronous/asynchronous                                | Discussion fora, discussion or commenting in blogs and wikis  |
| Experience a Field Trip          | Students travel to physical or virtual sites; synchronous/asynchronous  | Virtual fieldtrips, presentation, video creation software and/or Google Earth to develop their own virtual tours                |
| Sequence Information             | Students sequence information, data and/or documents in chronological order   | Timeline creation software, video creation software (e.g. Movie Maker, iMovie)  |
| Consider Evidence                | Students explore a variety of types of evidence (e.g., historical documents, photographs, data) related to a topic or question          | Digital archives, extant data sets (e.g., U.S. Census data), Historical Scene Investigation (HSI)                               |
| Compare/Contrast                 | Students interrogate information to understand multiple characteristics, evidence, and/or perspectives on a topic                       | Concept mapping software, word processor, spreadsheet, digital archives   |
| Engage in a Simulation           | Students engage in paper-based or digital experiences focused on a content topic which mirror the complexity of the real world          | Content-specific simulation (e.g. Fantasy Congress, Stock Market Game)  |
| Conduct an Interview             | Face to face, via audio/videoconference, or via email students question someone on a chosen topic; may be digitally recorded and shared | Video creation software (e.g. Movie Maker, iMovie), audiorecorder, digital camera   |
| Research                         | Students gather, analyze, and synthesize information using print-based and/or digital sources   | Digital archives, word processor, concept mapping software to structure   |
| Engage in Artifact-Based Inquiry | Students explore a topic using physical or virtual artifacts, including data, text, images, etc.  | Digital archives  |
| Engage in Data-Based Inquiry     | Using student-generated data or print-based and digital data available online, students pursue original lines of inquiry                | Digital archives, extant data sets (e.g., C.I.A. World Factbook, U.S. Census data, Thomas), student-collected data, spreadsheet |

### ***Knowledge Expression Activity Types***

Teachers are able to determine what students have learned by reviewing their “performances of understanding” (Wiske, 1998) -- students’ expressions of knowledge related to the learning goals targeted. Opportunities for students to express their knowledge can be incorporated during a unit of study (as part of formative assessment) or at the conclusion of a unit (as a summative assessment). At times, social studies teachers deem it appropriate for all students to come to a similar understanding of a course topic. This kind of understanding is expressed by engaging in *convergent knowledge expression activities*, as detailed in the table below.

**Table 2:** Convergent Knowledge Expression Activity Types

| <b>Activity Type</b>       | <b>Brief Description</b>   | <b>Possible Technologies</b>   |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Answer Questions           | Students respond to questions using traditional question sets or worksheets, or through the use of an electronic discussion board, email or chat | Word processor, concept mapping software, discussion fora, student response systems (SRS)          |
| Create a Timeline          | Students sequence events on a printed or electronic timeline or through a Web page or multimedia presentation                                    | Timeline creation software, presentation software, concept mapping software, word processor        |
| Create a Map               | Students label existing maps or produce their own; print-based materials or digitally  | Scanner, outline maps available online, Google Earth, presentation software                        |
| Complete Charts/Tables     | Students fill in teacher-created charts and tables or create their own in traditional ways or using digital tools                                | Word processor, concept mapping software   |
| Complete a Review Activity | Students engage in some form of question and answer to review content; paper-based to game-show format using multimedia presentation tools       | Student response systems (SRS), interactive whiteboard review games (e.g., Jeopardy), survey tools |
| Take a Quiz/Test           | Students demonstrate their knowledge through paper-based, traditional format to computer-generated and scored assessments                        | Online quizzes   |

While in many cases teachers may want their students to express similar understandings of course content, at other times they will want to encourage students to develop and express their own understandings of a given topic. The following 21 *divergent knowledge expression activity types* afford students opportunities to each share their unique understanding of a topic or concept. They are subdivided into learning activities that are written, visual, conceptual, product-oriented, and participatory.

**Table 3:** Written Divergent Knowledge Expression Activity Types

| Activity Type        | Brief Description  | Possible Technologies   |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Write an Essay       | Students compose a structured written response to a prompt; paper and pencil or word processed; text-based or multimedia | Word, concept mapping software, wiki (to track contributions from multiple authors)                       |
| Write a Report       | Students author a report on a topic in traditional or more creative format using text or multimedia elements             | Word processor, presentation software, Web authoring software, wikis                                      |
| Generate a Narrative | Using primary documents and secondary source information, students develop their own story of the past                   | Word processor, wiki or collaborative word processor (to track contributions from multiple authors), blog |
| Craft a Poem         | Students create poetry; paper and pencil or word processed, text-based or multimedia                                     | Video creation software (e.g., Movie Maker, iMovie), presentation software                                |
| Create a Diary       | Students write from a first-hand perspective about an event from the past; paper and pencil or digital format            | Blog, word processor  |

**Table 4:** Visual Divergent Knowledge Expression Activity Types

| Activity Type             | Brief Description  | Possible Technologies   |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Create an Illustrated Map | Students use pictures, symbols, and/or graphics to highlight key features to creating an illustrated map | Outline maps available online, Google Earth, presentation software, scanner |
| Create a Picture/Mural    | Students create a physical or virtual image or mural   | Drawing software, scanner   |
| Draw a Cartoon            | Students create a drawing or caricature using a paper and pencil or digital format                       | Comic creation software, drawing software, scanner                          |

**Table 5:** Conceptual Divergent Knowledge Expression Activity Types

| Activity Type           | Brief Description  | Possible Technologies   |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Develop a Knowledge Web | Using teacher or student created webs, students organize information in a visual/spatial manner; written or digital format | Concept mapping software, presentation software, word processor |
| Generate Questions      | Students develop questions related to course material/concepts   | Word processor, wiki  |
| Develop a Metaphor      | Students devise a metaphorical representation of a course topic/idea   | Word processor, concept mapping software, drawing software      |

**Table 6:** Product-Oriented Divergent Knowledge Expression Activity Types

| <b>Activity Type</b>             | <b>Brief Description</b>  | <b>Possible Technologies</b>  |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Produce an Artifact              | Students create a 3-D or virtual artifact   | Imaging tools, drawing software   |
| Build a Model                    | Students develop a written or digital mental model of a course concept/process                              | Concept mapping software, presentation software, spreadsheets                         |
| Design an Exhibit                | Students synthesize key elements of a topic in a physical or virtual exhibit                                | Wikis, presentation software, video creation software (e.g., Movie Maker, iMovie)     |
| Create a Newspaper/News Magazine | Students synthesize course information in the form of a periodical; print-based or electronic               | Word processor, wiki, Web authoring software  |
| Create a Game                    | Students develop a game, in paper or digital form, to help other students learn content                     | Puzzlemaker, interactive presentation software, imaging tools, Web authoring software |
| Create a Film                    | Using some combination of still images, motion video, music and narration students produce their own movies | Video creation software (e.g., Movie Maker, iMovie), digital video camera             |

**Table 7:** Participatory Divergent Knowledge Expression Activity Types

| <b>Activity Type</b>   | <b>Brief Description</b>   | <b>Possible Technologies</b>   |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Present                | Students share their understanding with others; oral or multimedia approach, synchronous or asynchronous                           | Presentation software, video creation software (e.g., Movie Maker, iMovie), digital video camera |
| Roleplay               | Students take on a character, role, or persona to experience or experiment with a concept or event, live, video-taped, or recorded | Video creation software (Movie Maker, iMovie), digital video camera                              |
| Perform                | Students develop a live or recorded performance (oral, music, drama, etc.)   | Video creation software (e.g., Movie Maker, iMovie), digital video camera                        |
| Engage in Civic Action | Students write government representatives or engage in some other form of civic action   | Blog, email, videoconferencing, ThinkQuest   |