



## Navigating the National Geographic Standards in the Philippine Social Studies Curriculum

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**Abstract.** *The social studies discipline as a multidisciplinary and integrative curriculum includes geographic literacy and spatial thinking as part of its academic nature in developing young learners to become an informed and reasoned decision-makers in participating in a culturally diverse, democratic, and interdependent society. Geography education has an anticipated space at the heart of the social studies curriculum next to history. In a social studies classroom, geographical skills and knowledge have been used to interpret the past and analyze the future. This exploration navigated and evaluated the alignment of the social studies curriculum standards and competencies to the National Geographic Standards of the NCGE and explored the common teaching approaches in facilitating geographic education in the basic education curriculum. Using qualitative content analysis, the researcher examined the curriculum guide as the main document supplemented with the learner's module and teacher's guide. The findings revealed significant curriculum alignment and learner-centered teaching approaches in geography education.*

**Keywords:** *Geography education, curriculum, and instruction, basic education, social studies, Philippines*

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### A. INTRODUCTION

#### *The National Geography Standards*

The National Geography Standards (NGS) of the National Council for Geography Education (NCGE) contested the significance of being a geographically informed individual. The council maintained that geography education provides critical preparation for civic life and careers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is enjoined with the sweeping positional statement of the National Council for Social studies on the constant marginalization of the discipline amidst the apex of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The NCGE and the Association of American Geographers first published *The Geography for Life* in 1994, making a hallmark of staging geographic

education as part of the core curriculum. It had recommended a *Guidelines* for integrating spatial and ecological thinking in the K to 12 curricula through the articulation of the five themes of geography; location (which refers to the place or position), place (pertains to the physical and human attributes or characteristics of a location), human-environment interaction (refers to the interconnectedness of human acts to the environment and vice-versa), movement (generally refers to migration and distribution), and region (deals with division and unifying attributes of places). The guidelines was written for the general audience to showcase the narrative of geography and it's significance in the changing world. However, it was specifically designed for K to 12 teachers to

suggest content pedagogical knowledge in delivering effective instruction for geographical literacy.

After almost three decades, the NCGE revised the NGS standards to keep abreast with the influx of change in the recommended curriculum. It had presented more exhaustive and powerful geographical standards that will meet the alterations in the world's socio-cultural, economic, political, and environmental spheres. The NCGE enlisted six (6) essential elements with corresponding geographic knowledge standards; (1) The World in Spatial Terms (i. How to use maps and other geographic representation, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective, ii. How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context, iii. How to analyze the spatial organization of the people, places, and environments on Earth's surface) (2) Places and Regions (iv. The physical and human characteristics of places, v. That people create regions to interpret Earth's complexity, vi. How culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions), (3) Physical Systems (vii. The physical processes that shape the patterns of Earth's surface, viii. The characteristics and spatial distribution of ecosystems on Earth's surface), (4) Human Systems (ix. The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface, x. The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics, xi. The patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth's surface, xii The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement, xiii. How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface), (5) Environment and Society (xiv. How human actions modify the physical environment, xv. How physical systems affect human systems, xvi. The changes that

occur in the meaning, use, distribution, and importance of resources), (6) Use of Geography (xvii. How to apply geography to interpret the past, xviii. How to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future). These standards are designed for teachers to employ authentic and experiential teaching strategies in stressing the value and power of geographic education in these changing times. Also, learners are expected to develop their spatial thinking, geographic literacy, and environmental consciousness and utilize navigating tools that are essential in demonstrating understanding of the places and landscape, biodiversity, multiculturalism, and ecological justice. Generally, the NGS was designed to be incorporated in the core curriculum as an integrated discipline under social studies having its specific learning and content standards that are expected to be acquired and present by young learners.

In this age of climate emergency caused by human and physical properties, becoming geographically informed is pivotal. Knowing how and why natural phenomena exist enables learners to assess the potential damage and life risk it would cost, given the geographical characteristic and location. Knowing the geographical landscape of a location challenges the learner's critical thinking and decision-making skills in strategizing human production and distribution, identifying geographic hazards, and understanding human attachment to place. Learning how to maximize the utilization of essential resources such as cultivating lands, building waterways, and extracting oil to fuel machines without overburdening the carrying capacity of resources enhances the quality of life and conditions for the survival of the community. Being able to locate high-risk places and dangerous locations prevents the loss of life and delineate the gnarly character of the life-supporting environment. Understanding human-

environment interaction reveals the umbilical cord that connects human action and its environmental consequences, vice-versa, and the unexplained emotional attachment and personal biases on the place of origin of an individual.

As part of the social studies discipline, geography education is strategically located at the heart of the curriculum, right next to history. When exploring the physical context of wars and livelihood of the past, it is inevitable to tell the story without involving the topographical features of the terrain and its spatial relationship in providing clarity and in-depth analysis. Unveiling the story behind the “Attack on Pearl Harbor” includes the tactical planning of Japanese officers in averting sea patrols in the Pacific that concluded to a great strike in the heart of American troops. The “island hopping” strategy of Uncle Sam to strike back by releasing atomic bombs in Japan's economic urban cities, which resulted in the immediate white flag of Japan. These historical events were augmented to be notable events in the history of humankind through the geographical forces that pump primed these startling attacks. The significant role of geography in understanding human interaction is indisputable. Teachers must instill the skills in “doing geography” for young learners to become more aware of the geographical processes and its impact on their daily living. Likewise, learner's must be engaged in using geographic presentations, tools, and technologies to acquire exceptional experience in discovering local, regional, and world geography. Integrating geography and history in social studies is not a new concept (Rocca, 1994). Parker (1991) asserted that the social studies curriculum would be strengthened by integrating geography concepts within world history studies. Embedded in the official curriculum of social studies in today's milieu, the NCGE

had made remarkable advancements for geographic literacy.

### *The Basic Education Curriculum*

The social studies curriculum content varies from each state in America. Rest on the state education goals. The social studies curriculum is designed to hone the ideal citizen who is an informed and reasoned decision-maker as a responsible citizen who participates in a culturally diverse, democratic society. Though eclectic, the social studies curriculum reserves a curricular space for spatial and ecological skills to be learned. Geography is frequently taught in junior high school and somehow taught as a regular course in secondary schools (Stoltman, 1990). Geography education has been embedded historically in the US basic education curriculum since the early 1900s and has continued to be compelled by state laws to be taught in regular classrooms. There was also an increase in teaching geography in the Philippines; however, it was realized and fully developed later in the late 1900s. Though there were no known studies on the development of geographic education in the basic education curriculum, geography was first introduced as a general course at the tertiary level. It is evident that the Philippine social studies curriculum was anchored on the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies in 1994. Until today, the influence of the NCSS manifests in the established themes of social studies in the Social Studies K to 12 curriculum guide as a foundation for teaching and learning social studies.

The social studies (Araling Panlipunan) has a different time allotment per grade level: 30 minutes per day for Grades 1 and 2, 40 minutes per day for Grades 3 to 6, and 3 hours per week or

Grades 7 to 10. a 180 minutes time allotment per week. This means that the teacher must be able to deliver a lesson effectively and expect learners to achieve the learning competencies as prescribed by the curriculum guide. Learning and content standards for geography are dispersed methodologically and thematically; for example, the first quarter of Grades 4 to 8 is where geography-related standards are facilitated (DepEd, 2016).

Table 1. Social studies curriculum scope and sequence (DepEd, 2016)

Grade Level	Content Sequence
K	Ako at ang Aking Kapwa (Me and My Neighbor)
1	Ako, ang Aking Pamilya at Paaralan (Me and my Parents and School)
2	Ang Aking Komunidad, Ngayon, at Noon (My community from now and then)
3	Ang mga Lalawigan sa Aking Relihiyon (The Provinces and My Region)
4	Ang Bansang Pilipinas (My Country) (Philippine Studies)
5	Pagbuo ng Pilipinas bilang Nasyon (The Birth of the Philippines as a Nation) (Philippine Studies)
6	Mga Hamon at Tugon sa Pagkabansa (Challenges and Responses towards Nationality) (Philippine Studies)
7	Araling Asyano (Asian Studies)
8	Kasaysayan ng Daigdig (World History)
9	Ekonomiks (Economics)
10	Mga Kontemporaryong Isyu (Contemporary Issues)

Each quarter has a corresponding set of content, learning and content standards,

and learning competency to be accomplished by the teacher and students. Framed based on the expanding communities model (Hanna, 1965), traditional chronological approach (Misco & Patterson, 2009), core knowledge (Hirsch,1987), spiral progression approach (Bruner, 2009), and discipline-based approach (Evans, 2006), the social studies curriculum is designed to be a developmentally appropriate, responsive, systematic, and coherent to the needs of the learners and the community as well. Each of these grade levels identifies the critical skills, knowledge, and values that a learner must possess in a typical social studies class. In the primary grades (K to 3), learners are located at the center of the curriculum, expanding their knowledge on their physical and social surroundings while constructing their own definition of becoming a responsible citizen. Intermediate learners (Grades 4-6) are introduced to the study of the Philippines, which includes its topographical features, socio-cultural aspects, history, and early civilization, and government. Due to its broad scope, teaching social studies in the intermediate grades is divided into the three grade levels based on its geographical levels, from local to regional, and finally nationwide and its cultural diversity. The junior high school social studies is theoretically developed on a disciplined-based approach, where Grade 7 examines Asian studies, Grade 8 explores World History, Grade 9 focuses on Economics, and Grade 10 deals with Contemporary Issues which is still interdisciplinary and integrative.

There was an affluent number of pieces of literature on the pedagogy of geography in the basic education curriculum in the past three decades (Biddulph et al., 2015). In the realm of where education capitalizes on knowledge economy (Roberts, 2014)driven by the advancement of ICT, teaching and learning geography has

a reserved space in the official curriculum to capacitate individuals in understanding the relationship of space, place, and environmental impact and sustainability towards the greater understanding of a borderless community. In teaching geography in the primary grades, Catling and Willy (2009) underscored the significance of the interlocking influence of the child's developmental milestone in instilling geographical skills at the

foundational early learning years. The primary teacher of geography must inculcate on the child the values and attitudes in understanding how the world works. Fostering the attitude of interest in their surroundings, sense of wonder, and infusing the values of concern about the quality of the environment and the future and their sense of responsibility for care is vitally important for the child to learn as foundational concepts in appreciating geography for life.

Figure 1. The purpose of primary geography (Catling and Willy, 2009)

In the elementary grades, teaching geography centers on identifying place names, locations, and characteristics through

geographical skills such as observation, classification, organization, and map reading and interpretation (Haas & Laughlin, 1998).

#### *The Purpose of Primary Geography*

1. help children wonder at, make sense of, put into context and develop further their own experience in the world: their everyday geographies;
2. introduce children to the excitement of and extend their awareness, knowledge and appreciation of peoples, cultures, places and environments in the wider world;
3. develop their sense of wonder, their understanding and their critical questioning of what places and environments are like, why they are like they are, how and why they are changing, what processes and patterns shape them, and what impacts there are or might be and why;
4. foster children's critical interest in and valuing of the environment and of the Earth as their home, and help them understand why a sustainable approach to the future is vital but contested;
5. encourage children to be thoughtful as global citizens about the impression or 'footprint' they leave on places and the environment and about making decisions which affect their lives and the lives of others, including those they will never know;
6. develop children's spatial awareness and understanding of distributions and networks and of the representations of places and the environment, through such skills as mapwork, using photographs and making sketches, and through their studies of places and environments;
7. engage them in geographical enquiries about place and environmental matters and issues and about the wider world;
8. foster their fascination with places through fieldwork and the use of new technologies in and beyond the school grounds and the local area;
9. stimulate and develop their locational knowledge and understanding about the world.

In this level of learning, learners are engaged in the physical surroundings as the natural classroom, and outdoor exploration or field trips are first-hand learning experiences. Teachers must unlock the learner's motivation in studying geography for life through "thinking geographically" (Jackson, 2006). With the aid of maps and other geographical representations, tools, and technologies to analyze geospatial features, teachers are able to design lessons in geography that are realistic and accurate as possible.

Formal instruction in secondary grades on geographic knowledge and skills adopts the design for reconstruction of geographical concepts (space, place, scale, interdependence and development, cultural understanding and diversity, and environmental sustainability and future) (Lambert & Morgan, 2010). Still on the support for "thinking geographically" (Jackson, 2006) and "doing geography" (Heffron, 2012), Lambert and Morgan (2010) challenge teachers to teach geography that coincides with the dogmas of post-Fordism economy, the rise of new temples of consumerism, critical geography, social change, and geographies of exclusion and inclusion. In this grade level, learners must be conscious of geography's human and physical attributes and its consequences on environmental sustainability. By presenting climatic issues, visiting distorted landscapes, and environmental laws, learners will be engaged in service-learning such as involving in environmental justice movements, signing up in a clean-up drive, and advocate for environmental protection and awareness, to name a few. The torch of the teaching of spatial skills and knowledge is bestowed upon social studies teachers. And as geography teachers as well, they must be equipped with the content-pedagogical knowledge in geography to present concepts in a comprehensive manner through a variety of approaches and

techniques in maximizing teacher-student-environment interaction towards developing morale of ecological responsibility. This is further lamented by Yeung (2004) where he concluded that the inquiry approach in teaching geography effectively fosters positive environmental attitude and morality.

### *Teaching Approaches in Geography*

Approaches to teaching are the way beliefs and principles are put together for effective classroom instruction. In a restricted classroom set-up, teachers design their lessons based on the textbook that follows the recommended learning standards. Conventional teachers adopt a chalk talk and factual-based learning when teaching geography, where learners become passive recipients of knowledge and restrained from interacting. But through the progress of democratic teaching, teachers and learners work together to construct a meaningful educative process. In the study of Yeung (2004), there is two common approaches to teaching: inquiry (learner-centered) and didactic (teacher-centered) approaches. Teachers who ask convergent and divergent questions allow learners to construct their own meaning, debate issues, and generate solutions adheres to the inquiry approach. Inquiry teaching involves fieldwork method (Kent et al, 1997), problem-based learning (Pawson et al, 2011), data-driven instruction (Bedwell, 2004), and games and simulations (Walford, 1981). In this approach to teaching geography, learners are treated as active contributors of knowledge in a shared learning environment. While the inquiry approach focuses on the learners, didactic learning embraces the role of the teacher as a fountain of knowledge. Yeung (2004) explains that didactic learning is the direct transmission of knowledge, skills, and

values to the learners. In this approach, learners are passive recipients of information in a restrictive environment. This approach put emphasis on the indispensable role of the teacher for transmitting invaluable knowledge and skills for the learners to consume. Considered the most conventional teaching approach, didactic learning lays the foundation for creative and critical thinking skills through rote memorization and comprehension.

Whatever the approach on teaching geography, powerful and effective teaching of geography relies on the instructional decision of the teacher and rigorous planning for lesson implementation.

After almost a decade since the publication of *Geography for Life* by the NCGE, it is imperative to pay a visit to the social studies curriculum in basic education as an initial stage in doing geography and thinking geographically. Thus, this exploration was sought to navigate the National Geography Standards in the social studies curriculum in the basic education curriculum and provide insights on its academic status and common teaching approaches as a basis for improving geographical literacy among learners. Specifically, the researcher conducted a content analysis on the K to 12 curriculum guide, learning modules, teacher's guide for social studies in basic education (elementary and secondary) of the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd). This research was guided with the following questions:

1. How aligned are the content, learning standards, and competencies to the National Geography Standards of the National Council for Geography Education?

2. How are geographical concepts being taught in the elementary and secondary social studies classroom?

Furthermore, in a recent study conducted by Dizon (2021), he failed to navigate and consider the curriculum setting of geography education in the elementary social studies curriculum. In this article, I will justify the integration and location of geography education in both elementary and secondary social studies curriculum.

## **B. METHOD**

This exploration employed qualitative content analysis (QCA) to examine relevant documents that helped answer the research questions. QCA is a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material. It is done by classifying material as instances of the categories of a coding frame (Schreier, 2012). This method improved to angle the research purpose by focusing on the standards and competencies indicated in the curriculum guide and the instructional design developed in the learner's module and teacher's guide. Likewise, it had helped to describe and shed light on the raw data using codes.

The researcher examined the social studies curriculum under the basic education since geography education is incorporated in the said discipline. Each subject is equally divided into four (4) quarters with corresponding interdisciplinary contents. Each quarter was examined side-by-side with the NGS to identify the content and learning standards and competencies to classify its alignment. A cross-examination was conducted to augment the prior findings by analyzing the learner's module and teacher's guide as supplementary documents for curriculum implementation. Also, coding and thematic analysis was initiated to

identify the common teaching approach used in attaining the learning standards and competencies.

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List of Documents subject for Content Analysis per Grade Level

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K - Ako at ang Aking Kapwa (Me and My Neighbor)	K to 12 Social Studies Curriculum Guide, Learner's Module. Teacher's Guide
Grade 1- Ako, ang Aking Pamilya at Paaralan (Me and my Parents and School)	
Grade 2- Ang Aking Komunidad, Ngayon, at Noon (My community from now and then)	
Grade 3- Ang mga Lalawigan sa Aking Relihiyon (The Provinces and My Region)	
Grade 4- Ang Bansang Pilipinas (My Country) (Philippine Studies)	
Grade 5- Pagbuo ng Pilipinas bilang Nasyon (The Birth of the Philippines as a Nation) (Philippine Studies)	
Grade 6- Mga Hamon at Tugon sa Pagkabansa (Challenges and Responses towards Nationality) (Philippine Studies)	
Grade 7- Araling Asyano (Asian Studies)	
Grade 8- Kasaysayan ng Daigdig (World History)	
Grade 9- Ekonomiks (Economics)	
Grade 10- Mga Kontemporaryong Isyu (Contemporary Issues)	

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**Procedure**

The NGS serves as the curriculum standards for geography education to be adapted by curriculum developers in social studies and implemented by schools for learners to acquire geographical knowledge, skills, and values. Thus, the NGS served as the fundamental document in examining the alignment of the relevant curriculum materials used for teaching geography education. The researcher read the NGS comprehensively to gain mastery of the content knowledge. After gaining mastery, the researcher read and analyzed the curriculum guide juxtaposed with the NGS to critically evaluate the standards and competencies on its meaning, relevance, and configuration. Each of the standards and competencies will be categorized based on each of the NGS. A cross-examination had commenced to support or reject the classification. Suppose the standards and competencies will be unparallel with its teaching and learning component in the learner's module and teacher's guide. In that case, it will be realigned based on the findings under the supplementary materials since it is the principal document for curriculum implementation inside the classroom. If a standard and/or competency does not fall under any category under NGS, it will be discarded.

The standards and competencies were scrutinized several times and confirmed its findings with the supplementary document to exhibit accuracy and reliability. After evaluating the alignment of the curriculum per grade level, the researcher generated themes that were used to present significant findings that are critical in the discussion. Generating themes will be done by winnowing the data and focusing on the aggregate data's overarching contents and descriptions (Guest, Macquen, & Namey, 2012) to provide a comprehensive discussion. The researcher used an abbreviation for the standards in

categorizing learning standards and competencies (e.g. NGS1 for Standard 1).

### C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*K - Ako at ang Aking Kapwa (Me and My Neighbor)*

Social studies in kindergarten focus on civic education and ecological learning. Deeply based on Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory, the curriculum follows the expanding community approach in social studies, where the child expands their knowledge about their environment and place through the layers of environment that influences their holistic development. Although the socio-emotional development domain for kindergarten is classified under the social studies learning area, the learning competencies are aimed for learners to develop socio-civic skills. Meanwhile, in the Understanding of the Physical and Natural Environment domain categorized in the science learning area, for the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter the learning content is on life sciences where one learning competency deals with using the body's senses to observe the environment projects NGS3.

*Grade 1- Ako, ang Aking Pamilya at Paaralan (Me and my Parents and School)*

Learners taking up Grade 1 Social Studies are expected to demonstrate awareness and understanding of the self as a member of the family and school, and appreciation of the physical environment using the concept of continuity and change, interaction, distance and direction towards identity as an individual, and as a member of the social group. (DepEd, 2016). Geographical learning standards and competency only appear in the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter of the grade level entitled "Me and my environment." In this quarter, learners are expected to demonstrate understanding of

the concept of distance in describing and conserving the environment. All of the learning competencies in this quarter integrates NGS1, NGS2, and NGS3. However, three (3) learning competencies (4.12, 4.13, and 4.14) also feature NGS16.

*Grade 2- Ang Aking Komunidad, Ngayon, at Noon (My community from now and then)*

The Grade 2 Social Studies learners are expected to demonstrate awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the present and past of the community, using the concept of continuity and change, power, leadership and responsibility, needs and wants, identity, simple geographical concepts such as location and resources and of historical witnesses such as oral tradition and relics of history (DepEd, 2016). Three quarters integrate the NGS. For the first quarter, the learning standard and competencies contained the principles and concepts of NGS1, NGS2, NGS3, NGS4, and NGS14. For the second quarter, it integrates NGS3, NGS4, NGS9, NGS10, and NGS17. While for the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, it includes NGS3, NGS8, NGS11, NGS12, NGS14, and NGS16.

*Grade 3- Ang mga Lalawigan sa Aking Relihiyon (The Provinces and My Region)*

Learners in Grade 3 Social Studies are expected to demonstrate a broad understanding and appreciation of Philippine communities as part of the country's provinces and regions based on (a) physical characteristics, (b) culture, (c) livelihood, and (d) political, using the profound concept of continuity and change, human interaction and physical and social environment (DepEd, 2016). For this grade level, all of the quarters include standards in geography education. The 1<sup>st</sup> quarter includes NGS1, NGS2, NGS3, NGS7, NGS8, NGS9, NGS11, and NGS12. Next, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter involves NGS1, NGS2, NGS3,

NGS16, and NGS17. The 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter integrates NGS1, NGS3, NGS6, NGS7, NGS10, and NGS17. Finally, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter includes NGS3, NGS4, NGS8, NGS11, and NGS13.

*Grade 4- Ang Bansang Pilipinas (My Country) (Philippine Studies)*

To be proud of being a Filipino and the Philippines with an appreciation for the diversity of Filipino cultures based on the use of skills in geography, understanding of culture and livelihood, participation in governance, and appreciation of the country's aspirations are the grade-level standards expected for learners in Grade 4 Social Studies to embody (DepEd, 2016). Only the first and second quarter integrates geographic education. The 1<sup>st</sup> quarter incorporates NGS1, NGS2, NGS3, NGS4, NGS5, and NGS7. Lastly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter includes NGS6, NGS8, NGS10, NGS11, NGS14, and NGS16.

*Grade 5- Pagbuo ng Pilipinas bilang Nasyon (The Birth of the Philippines as a Nation) (Philippine Studies)*

For this grade level, the social studies learners are deemed to demonstrate understanding and appreciation of the formation of the Philippine archipelago and ancient societies up to large economic change and its implications for society at the beginning of the nineteenth century, using basic concepts such as historical significance, continuity and change, cause, and effect relationship to a child's development, critical citizens, reflective, responsible, productive, environmentally friendly, humane (DepEd, 2016). Only the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter values the integration of geographic education, including NGS1, NGS2, NGS3, NGS14, and NGS17.

*Grade 6- Mga Hamon at Tugon sa Pagkabansa (Challenges and Responses towards Nationality) (Philippine Studies)*

The grade-level standard for Grade 6 Social Studies is to demonstrate continued understanding and appreciation of Philippine history from the 20th century to the present towards developing the Filipino identity and being a citizen of the Philippines. Demonstrates a deep understanding of Philippine history based on analysis of excerpts of selected primary written, oral, audio-visual references and combinations thereof, from various periods, towards the formation of a nationalist mentality that will serve as the basis of a broader worldview (DepEd, 2016). Under the grade 6 level, only the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter incorporates geographical standards, which are NGS1, NGS3, NGS4, NGS5, NGS11, and NGS18.

*Grade 7- Araling Asyano (Asian Studies)*

The curricular framework of social studies in the secondary is disciplined-based (Gil, 2021). For grade 7, Asian studies serve as the central focus of learning social studies. Learners are expected to demonstrate a deep understanding and appreciation of the geography, history, culture, society, government, and economy of countries in the region towards forming Asian identity and mutual development and addressing the challenges of Asia (DepEd, 2016). In this grade level, only the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter integrates geographical education through NGS1, NGS2, NGS3, NGS4, NGS5, NGS7, NGS8, NGS10, NGS11, NGS12, NGS13, NGS14, NGS15, NGS16, NGS17, and NGS18.

*Grade 8- Kasaysayan ng Daigdig (World History)*

Social Studies for Grade 8 explores the history of the world. By the end of this grade level, learners are expected to demonstrate deep understanding and appreciation of working together and responding to global challenges to humanity beyond the wide diversity of geography,

history, culture, society, government, and economy towards attaining a peaceful, prosperous, and stable future (DepEd, 2016). Only the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of this social studies curriculum integrates the NGS, including NGS4, NGS6, NGS7, NGS12, and NGS17. This is further supported by the study conducted by Dizon (2021), where it is common among secondary social studies curriculum that geographic literacy is integrated only in the first quarter.

#### *Grade 9- Ekonomiks (Economics)*

The Grade 9 Social Studies deals with learning economic concepts. Learners are expected to demonstrate a deep understanding and appreciation of critical concepts and topical issues in economics using the skills and appreciation of social disciplines towards the formation of a critical, reflective, responsible, environmentally friendly, productive citizen, just, and humane citizens of the country and the world (DepEd, 2016). Geographic competencies are located only in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of the course, which merely NGS14 and NGS17 present in the learning competencies.

#### *Grade 10- Mga Kontemporaryong Isyu(Contemporary Issues)*

The Grade 10 Social Studies curriculum articulates controversial and contemporary issues of the global society. By the end of the academic year, learners are expected to showcase deep understanding and appreciation of contemporary economic, environmental, political issues and challenges, human rights, education, and civic responsibility and citizenship in the face of countries at present using investigative skills, analysis of data and various references, research, critical thinking, effective communication and intelligent decision making (DepEd, 2016). The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter in this grade level

integrates the NGS. For the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter, it includes NGS5, NGS11, NGS12, and NGS13. Lastly, for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, it coalesces on NGS3 and NGS7.

#### **Social Studies Curriculum Alignment with the NGS**

Based on the outcomes of the examination of the curriculum guide, there was a significant alignment of the learning competencies of the social studies curriculum with the National Geography Standards of the NCGE. Each grade level in the basic education tackles geography education in some of its quarterly curriculum. Elementary geography cultivates the learner's skills in using geospatial technologies and map learning (Bernarnz, 2010), place-based learning (Gruenewald and Smith 2008), ecological approach in learning (Senger & Shang, 1975). This stage is the perfect level for learners to see the world through models (globe and maps). Developing basic skills in "doing geography" is the primary goal of social studies teachers at this level. Walther et al. (2015) enlisted the essential geographical skills that teachers must instill in their learners: (1) asking geographic question, (2) acquiring geographic information, (3) organizing geographic information, (4) analyzing geographic information, and (5) Answering geographic questions. Acquiring such skills requires the teacher to continuously present geography through direct experience and various geographic representations. Typical tasks in the elementary levels involve describing their physical and social environment, determining the distance from their homes to school, vice-versa, identifying geographical features that make their region different from the rest, and maintaining ecological balance in their respective communities. Likewise, they are also instructed to draw a

map of their home, school, neighborhood, and community. With this experience, learners are encouraged to organize information about places, locations, and the environment by creating mental maps. It is also in this grade level where the intersection of geography and history is unearthed to be used to interpret and trace historical events through a geographical lens.

As mentioned earlier, secondary social studies are offered as a discipline-based curriculum. Thus, it is expected that there is lesser integration of geographic education in the secondary curriculum than in the elementary. Dizon (2021) further lamented that geography education is primarily located in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter in the secondary social studies curriculum. Nonetheless, there is clear evidence that the geographic learning competencies are aligned with the NGS. Having been presented already with the basic spatial skills, geography in secondary social studies presents the “new geography” (Chapin, 2011). In the New Geography, the learning context is engaged in developing spatial relationships, encourages problem-solving, critical thinking skills, research-based, collaborative learning, depth replaces breadth, adaptable to new technology, observation through fieldwork, emphasis on human/environmental interaction, and learner-centered. Learners are also presented with human-environmental consequences, changing landscapes, and economic resource crises to challenge their geographical skills in problem-solving and critical thinking.

### **Learner-centered Teaching Approaches in Geography Education**

The geographical learning competencies were interpreted for classroom implementation through learning experiences. The learning experiences that

lead to realizing the learning competencies reveal a learner-centered approach in teaching geography. This approach to instructional delivery places the learners at the heart of instructional planning and consider learners as active participants in the teaching-learning process. The following learner-centered teaching approaches are the overarching approaches that best describes the learning activities as illustrated in the learning modules.

#### *Place-based learning*

Smith and Gruenewald (2008) combined the viewpoint of Orr (1992) and Theobald (1997) on an education designed to improved the existing conditions of the community to a new form of community civic engagement strategy called place-based learning. Smith and Gruenewald define place-based learning as having a set of pedagogic practices that make connections with many dimensions of a place, including cultural, economic, political, and ecological systems. It involves exploring out-of-school activities, direct experience, and series of observations on the social and ecological status of the environment. Furthermore, Gruenewald emphasizes a place-based education that advocates orienting and identifying social and ecological injustices brought by human-environmental actions. Place-based learning is evident in elementary social studies, where learners are tasked to identify the natural resources that exist in their locality towards sustainability. Likewise, it is also evident in secondary social studies, especially in Grade 10, where learners are confronted with glocal (global and local) environmental problems such as environmental degradation, climate change, and erosion that urge them to become proactive and foster care for the environment.

#### *Inquiry-based*

This approach to learning throws convergent and divergent questions to ignite learner's interest in thinking critically and creatively. Marsh (1978) discussed several inquiry models that are applicable for teaching geography to different learners. Stimulating the inquiry atmosphere, organizing the set of questions and procedures, and sustaining learner's motivation are key components for a successful inquiry approach in teaching geography. From the dogmas of constructivism, inquiry-based learning allows learners to construct their own meaning on geographical concepts, skills, and values. This approach is the overarching pedagogical practice that encompasses in all grade levels.

#### *Cartographic Learning and Project-based Learning*

In order to nurture the learner's spatial thinking, they must be hands-on in using geographic representations, tools, and technology in describing the physical attributes of the local and global landscape. Through the explosion of the technology revolution, the tools in understanding geography had improved from images and 3D models to accurate computer software and tools such as the Global Information System (GIS) and Global Positioning Device (GPS). These technologies are key for expanding geographic research and knowledge (Bednarz et al., 2006). To simplify, cartographic learning refers to map learning. In this pedagogical practice, teachers are asked to present geographical representation of the local and global regions and apply tools and technologies in describing its topographical features.

On the one hand, learners are given the opportunity to familiarize these new geographical technologies that are computer-based to become independent young navigators. This approach is

incorporated in elementary social studies, particularly on describing their environment, location, place, and space where they are required to design their own authentic map. In secondary social studies, learners are expected to describe the economic resources produced by the agricultural sector which requires spatial thinking used in cartographic learning, produce an illustration of the topographical features of different regions in Asia, and examine the damage of climate change in our forest reserves, agricultural lands, and sea level which involves geographic consciousness.

#### *Fieldwork*

Fieldwork in geography is also an authentic learning experience where learners delve into their physical and social environment. Commonly used as a tool for gathering data in anthropology, when applied to geography, learners can examine the outside environment using geographical tools and skills (Kent et al., 2007). This strategy awakens the learner's sense to collect primary and secondary sources of information through a field and participatory observation, mapping, monitoring, remote sensing, and in-depth interview (Preston, 2016). This pedagogical practice is manifested in elementary social studies, where learners are instructed to gather data on their community's physical features and historical facts. While, intermediate learners are engaged in collecting data through field observation on the land and water forms, structures, and natural resources that are endemic in their local region.

#### *Issue-based teaching*

Although this strategy follows the inquiry model, it is noteworthy to expound this strategy as a controversial problem-based strategy among the pedagogical practices under the umbrella of the inquiry model. Issues-based teaching is considered

capable of enhancing motivation, promoting citizenship, and developing positive attitudes at a faster pace because of the increased opportunities available for reflection on human values (Ranger and Bamber, 1990). This strategy improves learner's reflective and critical thinking skills in articulating issues relevant to the study of geography. This also cultivates the value of environmental empathy and universal understanding among young learners. When properly planned, this strategy will advance learners' communication skills and collaborative skills and build self-esteem in defending their arguments. This strategy is evident among elementary and secondary social studies curricula.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The deliberate examination of the curriculum materials resulted in an exhaustive generalization that geographical standards and competencies correspond to the National Geographic Standards broadly enforced by the NCGE. It is evident from the pre-elementary (K), elementary, and secondary social studies curriculum the embedded context and meaning of the NGS in the learning competencies. The predominant teaching approach adopted in teaching geography based on the learning experiences provided in the curriculum materials all points to a learner-centered approach. Notwithstanding the fact that teachers are curriculum gatekeepers (Thornton, 2005), the official curriculum for social studies suggests facilitating a learner-centered teaching approach in geography education, such as adapting the mentioned themes and innovative strategies that produce direct learning. It is recommended for social studies teachers as geographers to integrate recent technological tools and computer-based software to update and

refresh learner's mental map and improve spatial thinking. As the age of the Anthropocene reaches its zenith, we have already reached the tipping point of ecological degradation. It is crucial and practical for social studies teachers to present ecological imbalances and climate justice to cultivate geographic consciousness on the changing landscape.

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