

Responsible Citizens or Reckless Civilians

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All educators devoted to their profession and their students continually work to attain the lofty goal of perfection in teaching. This goal of developing the best teaching strategy is not impossible; it is, however, quite difficult. With that obvious knowledge, all educators, current and future, should focus on discovering the best strategy and practice for the current subject, the day at hand, and the student or students in need.

As a future history teacher, one would think that my priority would be in creating the best practice for teaching world and regional history. However, that is not the case. My aim will be in attaining and developing the best set of practices for teaching history in relation to all of the other subjects that fall within the broad realm of Social Studies. These subjects include economics, political science, geography, law, and sociology, as well as several more.

According to Santrock's view of best practices, a subject such as history can be taught individually or in combination with other subjects. The examples given in the book, however, strongly lend to the idea that Social Studies subjects overlap in several ways and as such, are best taught in coalition with one another. From Santrock's perspective, the teaching of "Power, authority, and governance" (Santrock, 389) is an essential component of Social Studies education. This one particular objective can, in my opinion, be connected to several different subjects, including history, political science, and law. It is connected to history because every nation, and every political system, has a history on how it came to be. Political science is a related component because politics and the workings of the government should be understood by students so that their competence as an informed citizen is guaranteed. Governance requires a set of regulations, therefore linking itself to the application of law. An example can aid in clarifying

how these are all related. In this example, the history is the United States and its original Articles of Confederation, which were developed prior to the U.S. Constitution. The political science portion would be the examination of the Articles of Confederation versus the U.S. Constitution. Lastly, the subject of law would be applied when the impact of the U.S. Constitution, its Bill of Rights, and its various Amendments are thoroughly studied.

Another best practice given by Santrock applies to a constructivist approach, specifically in helping educators “guide students to consider ethical dimensions of topics and address controversial issues rather than directly telling students what is ethical.” (Santrock, 391). I believe this can be applied to more than just ethical issues, but also in the broader aspect of history. There is a well-supported argument that history is written by the winners, and is therefore quite biased. By guiding students to examine every side of an issue instead of accepting a historical contention at face value, educators may encourage critical thinking and avoid allowing their students to fall prey to the biased and narrow views of historical events and people.

This is a variation from the traditional view of what history is. There is an idea, a misconception, that history is an unchangeable subject composed of facts and names that are meant to be memorized. There is one particular quote in Santrock’s section of best practices in teaching social studies, and particularly history, that sums up the issue of establishing critical thinking skills within students. This quote is from Robert Bain, and states that history requires the “critical weighing of evidence and accounts; suspension of our views to understand those of others” and “changes in our views and judgments.” (Santrock, 393).

This brings me to the second portion of my research, which deals with the crossing of different curriculums within a general history course. The article “Social Education in the History Classroom” was written by James Fiford and focuses on the Australian history curriculum being combined with various subjects that highlight social competency. Even though this article pertains to Australian curriculum, I believe it can be applied to any national curriculum, including that of the United States.

It is a difficult task for educators to implement one specific curriculum in a year. The adding of supplemental curriculum only exacerbates that struggle, but the article by Fiford stresses that it is not impossible and is vital for students. Fiford emphasizes that the additional curriculum taught in history classrooms is to be known as social education because it helps to mold the students into well-rounded citizens, educated and aware of world, religious, and political affairs.

There are three components to Fiford’s study on how to implement this social curriculum. The first of the three components is national history. This step establishes a history of the nation, Australian in this case but American in local scenarios, so that students first gain an understanding of how their nation’s history applies to them. The second level of this three-tiered system calls for the studying of national neighbors. In Australia’s case, the national neighbors would include the various Asian nations. Making connections between local and foreign regions, according to Fiford, “...will develop knowledge, skills and understanding about the histories, geographies, cultures, arts, literatures and languages of our region;” (Fiford, 62). The third and final step of Fiford’s process is called Sustainability. This step builds student knowledge on social values, past and present, as well as general knowledge of the world, such as population growth and trends.

An example of this cross curriculum in an American history classroom would be in teaching United States history, connecting it to our neighbor nations and closest allies, and then evaluating how our country and world has evolved under social values and standards.

Fiford's study was supplemented with optional unit plans for secondary school educators. These unit plans allowed for the steady construction of knowledge as the students progressed in their studies. This is a vital factor since it highlights the fact that knowledge is built upon prior knowledge and assimilated into the existing schemas that students have already assembled. However, the key element of this article that must be recognized is that history education is not as clear-cut as the illusion often holds. There are plenty of opportunities for educators to supplement historical events with knowledge regarding the geographic location of such events and their possible impact on current law systems or political structures.

Ultimately, educators must strive to provide their students with innumerable opportunities and immeasurable knowledge. This knowledge should not, however, be presented in the form of intangible facts meant for memorization. This knowledge should apply to the everyday lives of students and should focus on what the students may encounter in their future lives. A thorough knowledge of history, crossed with additional curriculums, will help to prepare students for those future challenges.

I particularly appreciate the closing statement made in James Fiford's article, which states that social curriculum will help educators in "providing the means for students to both maintain and transform society." (Fiford, 64). The education profession is built upon the premise that education is meant to prepare students for adulthood and I believe preparing them for the future also means preparing them to make their own path in life.

Works Cited

Fiford, James. "Social Education in the History Classroom." *Agora*. 2011: 61-64. Web.

Santrock, John. *Educational Psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011. Print.