The Making of A History Standards Wiki: Covering, Uncovering, and Discovering Curriculum Frameworks Using a Highly Interactive Technology

Robert W. Maloy, Michelle Poirier, Hilary K. Smith, and Sharon A. Edwards
University of Massachusetts Amherst

THIS ARTICLE EXPLORES USING A WIKI, one of the newest forms of interactive computer-based technology, as a resource for teaching the Massachusetts K-12 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework, a set of state-mandated learning standards. Wikis are web pages that can be easily edited by multiple authors. They invite active involvement by teachers and students who collaborate in new roles as authors, editors, and readers of academic content. Given the emergence of wikis in business and communications, history teachers are considering ways to use this technology to engage students, promote history education, and address the demands of curriculum standards and high-stakes achievement tests.

Our wiki is “resourcesforhistoryteachers” (Figure 1), available free online at http://resourcesforhistoryteachers.wikispaces.com.

The resourcesforhistoryteachers wiki is the product of work over the past five years by the authors of this paper with the assistance of college students preparing to become history teachers and by public school teachers and students associated with the History Teacher Education Program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass). Ever expanding, the site now includes:
Summary pages for more than 300 individual Learning Standards from the Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. This includes pages for standards in world history, United States history, and ancient/classical civilizations as well as world geography, American government, and economics.

Web links embedded throughout the pages that connect readers to online academic resources, educational websites, and Internet-based learning experiences.

Copyright-free photographs, pictures, and moving images related to different historical periods and topics.

Web links to important primary source materials, including the required documents listed in the Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework.

Web links to history teaching resources, including the Library of Congress, the American Presidential Libraries, and the National Archives.

Photos and online biographies about notable women in American history.

Multicultural teaching ideas and information to enable teachers to not only cover the frameworks, but to uncover the past.

In telling the story of resourcesforhistoryteachers, we highlight five important decisions that history teachers and their students will face when creating their own wikis as collaboratively constructed webspaces for learning:
1) Using wikis to teach history in a standards-based environment.
2) Differentiating a history wikispace from the online site Wikipedia.
3) Including hyperlinks to increase student learning and understanding.
4) Integrating multicultural history topics within history learning standards.
5) Combining written text with pictures, moving images, and multimedia resources.

These five decisions address crucial demands faced by history teachers in schools today:

- **Covering** required material in a standards-based environment.
- **Uncovering** the hidden histories and untold stories often absent from or downplayed within state curriculum frameworks.
- **Discovering** with students how the choices and complexities of the past connect to the realities of the present and the future.

In this article, we discuss how wiki technology actively supports history teachers in covering, uncovering, and discovering state-mandated curriculum frameworks. In so doing, we share the questions we asked and the answers we discovered in building the resourcesforhistoryteachers wikispace. Our goal is for teachers to discover more ways to use the power and potentials of wiki technology to transform teaching and learning in the history classroom.

**Decision 1: A Standards Wiki**

The first decision we faced was whether or not to incorporate wiki technology as a teaching and learning tool. Wikis are not the only new interactive technology available to history teachers. Blogs, discussion boards, WebQuests, virtual field trips, and digital portfolios are all useful and effective ways to integrate technology into the history of teaching. Moreover, choosing a technology relates, first and foremost, to how that technology supports academic goals and student learning needs.

Our resourcesforhistoryteachers emerged as a tool of choice in response to the pressures and demands created by the Massachusetts K-12 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework. Adopted in 2003, the Massachusetts framework, like curriculum frameworks in most other states, set forth specific historical content at every grade that teachers must teach and students must learn. There are 86 high school-level world history standards (plus 43 more dealing with ancient and classical civilizations for grade seven) and 74 U.S. history standards (plus 35 more focusing on American history before the Civil War for grade five). There are separate sets of standards for world geography (grade six), economics, and American government as well as broader social studies standards for kindergarten to grade four.
As an educational policy, the Massachusetts history and social science framework is both mandatory and discretionary. The framework applies to all public schools, but school districts have flexibility in deciding at which grade level to teach specific topics. Additionally, Massachusetts is planning to require high school students to pass a history knowledge test based on the framework as a condition for high school graduation. Currently, college students preparing to become history teachers must pass a mandatory history knowledge test based on the frameworks as a prerequisite to receiving a license to teach in Massachusetts.

Facing the rigors of the history teacher test, faculty and students in the UMass history teacher education program decided to offer a once-a-year college course reviewing the historical content in the Massachusetts framework. When this course began, students wrote and shared paper study guides for each of the framework’s learning standards. Paper-based materials, while useful in theory, proved inefficient in practice. Pages got lost, materials were difficult to keep organized, and each year, students had to start over in creating study guides for class. It was difficult to share resources beyond the members of the teacher test study class because of the cost of copying and the limited storage space for the previous year’s study guides.

In 2007, we made a wikispace the core technology for our history teacher test study class, establishing wiki pages for each of the world and U.S. history standards. New history teacher candidates could begin authoring content for each standard, in effect creating a “Standards Wiki.” The next year, additional pages were added for the geography, economics, and government learning standards as new groups of history teacher candidates created new pages and revised existing ones. In this way, the work of students from each year is carried on and extended by students of the next year.

Asking new teacher candidates to add to and revise pages written by former students proved to be a significantly positive wiki design decision. Some teachers using wiki technology ask students to create new materials each time they teach a course. Dwight Allen at Old Dominion University, for example, has his students author new wiki pages on educational topics each time he teaches a course in the foundations of education.5 Other teachers use wikis as online meeting places where students create group projects for class presentation.6 Given that history standards are a fixed set of requirements, it made sense to have the writings of new teacher candidates accumulate from year to year to slowly build a collection of constantly edited and improved history teaching and learning resources.

In 2008, with a substantial body of content posted online, we began sharing our materials at conferences and meetings with middle and high
school teachers in schools throughout the Connecticut River valley region of western Massachusetts. Some local teachers began using the site with their secondary school students. One teacher from middle school and another from high school invited students to submit content as part of class assignments. Meanwhile, the availability of the wiki site online led to its discovery by educators in other areas throughout the United States and around the world. In 2009, based on statistics provided by Wikispaces.com, resourcesforhistoryteachers averaged 800 unique visitors per day during the nine months of the public school year.

**Decision 2: A Wikispace, Not Wikipedia**

Our next decision about the wikispace was determined by questions from each new audience who viewed the site. We would say, “resourcesforhistoryteachers is an online wikispace devoted to teaching and learning the state’s history curriculum framework.” Listeners would invariably respond, “A Wikipedia for the framework.”

From the outset, we intended that our site would not be a shadow of Wikipedia, even though both a wikispace and Wikipedia use wiki technology. Given Wikipedia’s high profile presence on the Internet, history teachers using a wiki will need to explain how their wikispace is not necessarily a smaller scale version of Wikipedia. Wikipedia seeks to be encyclopedic in scope, presenting summaries and some detail on as many topics as possible. It assumes that a worldwide collection of authors will produce a constantly improving source of accurate and up-to-date information. By contrast, resourcesforhistoryteachers is not an encyclopedic compendium, but a source of ideas and information for teaching and learning—or covering, uncovering, and discovering—a state K-12 history framework.

In establishing procedures for the wikispace, we decided to review and edit material posted by our authors. Initial drafts of text, ideas, visuals, web resources, links to primary sources, and multimedia suggestions are submitted and then edited by our team of faculty and students editors. The names and web addresses of contributors are contained in their submissions, so users are known, not anonymous. Our assumption is that such a process will produce constantly improving resources to engage and energize teachers and students in the study of history in ways that only an interactive wiki technology can provide.

Next, we had to decide what history information to post online, an issue every history teacher using wiki technology will also face. Since most public school history classes use a history textbook, and many teachers include alternative materials such as Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History*
of the United States (2010) or Chris Harman’s *A People’s History of the World* (2008), there was no need to repeat information on the wiki that is readily available in school textbooks. Furthermore, since history teachers already have access to excellent online teaching resources such as those from Verizon Thinkfinity, the National History Education Clearinghouse, EdSiteMent, and the National Council for the Social Studies, adding more lesson plans to a history wikispace did not seem important either.

What emerged is a hybrid wiki page design featuring a state learning standard, focus questions for discussion, essential understandings that every student should know, and resources for exploring historical topics in depth. At the top of each wiki page is the text of a specific learning standard followed by its rephrasing as a “focus question.” Restating a learning standard as a focus question is intended to help students see history as issues still being researched and debated by historians rather than set-in-stone information that cannot nor does not need to be revised. Questions invite discussion and exploration as teachers and students examine the evidence and draw their own conclusions about the meaning of the past.

Each focus question is followed by information we call “essential understandings.” The idea of essential understandings comes from National History Standards developed by the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA. Those U.S. and world history standards feature short statements of key information and ideas that students should learn about historical topics. For example, when studying Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation, the focus is placed on the document itself as well as its impact and its limitations, including how it freed slaves only in the Confederate states, not states that were still part of the Union. As the National Center for History in the Schools noted, “Emancipation is a major topic to be discussed in any consideration of the Civil War,” including self-liberation by African Americans, the Emancipation Proclamation, the 13th Amendment, and the role of freed slaves as black soldiers in the Union army.

In our case, essential understandings are determined by the content of various learning standards within the state framework. In Massachusetts, U.S. history learning standard 41 is based on the policies and consequences of Reconstruction after the Civil War. It includes specific subheadings for Presidential and Congressional Reconstruction, Andrew Johnson’s impeachment, the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, Radical Reconstruction, the election of 1876, Jim Crow laws, and the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. Figure 2 is an example of an essential understandings summary for Jim Crow laws written by a college history major.
Jim Crow laws were oppressive laws instituted by white Southerners in an attempt to restrict the rights and opportunities of African Americans. Jim Crow started in the late 1800s and focused on segregating blacks and whites, with whites maintaining access to institutions of power and better facilities. Whites in the South were unaccustomed to living side-by-side with African Americans who they could no longer legally enslave. Also, they were not accustomed, nor willing, to compete with them economically. Jim Crow, then, was a way for whites to maintain economic and social control over African Americans despite the abolition of slavery. Jim Crow laws increased after *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896).

**Figure 2:** *Jim Crow Laws: Sample Essential Understandings Summary*

**Decision 3: Covering the Frameworks using Hyperlinks**

Our third decision was how to use Internet links within the `resourcesfor-historyteachers` site. This is a decision history teachers will encounter as they begin building their own wikispaces. Wiki technology allows authors to hyperlink material on every page. A paragraph or even a sentence within a paragraph can contain multiple links, enabling readers to leave the main text and explore additional online material related to a topic. A summary of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, for example, might include links to:

- Text of the *Brown* decision as well as the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision that the *Brown* case overturned; from *Oyez*, the Supreme Court media project.
- A biography of Thurgood Marshall; also from *Oyez*, the Supreme Court media project.
- A biography of Chief Justice Earl Warren; from *Street Law & the Supreme Court Historical Society*.
- A biography of President Dwight Eisenhower; from the White House collection of online presidential biographies.
- An essay on the domestic policies of the Eisenhower administration; from the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia.
- A timeline of the history of the NAACP; from the organization’s website.

From a history teaching and learning perspective, hyperlinks are one of the most powerful components of wiki technology. Paper-based historical information cannot provide instantaneous movement among sources, but web-based materials enable rapid access to an amazing range of documents.
and perspectives. Today’s students, whose media backgrounds include extensive web use and video game play, find hyperlinked information retrieval particularly appealing. They are curious about what happens when they click on a link. Moreover, links invite teachers and students to investigate historical topics in a non-linear manner; not reading line-by-line as in a book, but jumping from link to link as questions and curiosities direct.

In deciding what material to link on a page, we emphasized connections to widely recognized public information sources—governmental agencies, historical organizations, museums and libraries, and educational institutions—and minimized links to Wikipedia and profit-making dot-com sites that feature advertising for commercial products. Many times, there are choices about what sites to link to a topic, and in such cases, we made connections to what generally would be considered as sites providing “objective” primary and secondary historical information. For example, in choosing biographical information about Abraham Lincoln, we established links to the “Abraham Lincoln Historical Digitization Project” at Northern Illinois University; “The American President: An Online Reference Resource” from the Miller Center for Public Affairs at the University of Virginia; and the “Abraham Lincoln” page at the President’s own whitehouse.gov.

At the same time, we are continuing to seek links to less conventional, but useful viewpoints and materials. For example, “The Origins of the Soviet-Afghan War: Revelations from the Soviet Archives” from alternativeinsights.com has sources that include a May 1979 Politburo decision and instruction to the Soviet Ambassador in Afghanistan sending military weapons and money to support the Soviet-backed national leadership group. The site is a dot-com, but its primary sources are directly relevant to current U.S. policy debates. We chose to include it on a wiki page dealing with Cold War.

Every link is an opportunity for teachers to talk with students about the reliability or unreliability of online information, essential elements of what is called “Information Literacy.” Teachers can ask: What links might be added to a topic page? What sources are the best links for a topic? What information or viewpoints are not included that ought to be added? Ensuing discussions may prove to be some of the most useful history learning that a Standards Wiki can provide to history teachers and their students.

**Decision 4: Uncovering the Frameworks with Multicultural Materials**

History education encompasses sharp debates over “whose history” should be taught in public schools. Some historians, educators, and
policymakers want to focus on the founding documents and enduring institutions of American democracy as well as the histories of presidents, generals, and business and social leaders. Other historians and educators emphasize learning the experiences of those individuals often neglected or omitted from textbooks or broad survey courses—women, people of color, workers, and other dispossessed groups. Here, the focus is on “not the doers, but the done to,” in Howard Zinn’s memorable phrase.

While competing visions of history education are not mutually exclusive, they raise questions of how a teacher- and student-created Standards Wiki goes about addressing both the required content of the frameworks while also including the histories of multiple groups. In other words, how can a wiki project cover and uncover the past?

Initially, we addressed multicultural topics as they appeared within the structure of the Massachusetts curriculum framework. Women’s history, for example, is seen in the U.S. history standards under the headings of “rising levels of political participation and the expansion of suffrage in antebellum America” and “roles of women in New England textile factories.” Women resurface in the U.S. history standards under the headings of the “post-Civil War struggles of African Americans and women,” “women in the World War II workforce,” and the “women’s rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s.” A similar pattern exists with African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans as well as workers and unions who make an appearance in one or two standards, and then vanish from the history until they reappear at a later time, only to become absent once again.

Such a structure, as James Loewen has observed about a similar pattern in history textbooks, creates an impression that the stories of diverse groups are important only at certain times in the past where there are social problems that are then solved. For example, during the late 19th and early 20th century, women fought for and earned the right to vote (as identified in the state framework), but once that issue is visited in the curriculum, women vanish from the framework until resurfacing briefly in items on the World War II homefront and the workforce experiences of Rosie the Riveter. But women’s struggles for political voice and economic participation were ongoing—before and after they earned the right to vote—and Rosie had a mother who faced these issues too, as Carrie Brown points out in her fine book, *Rosie’s Mom: Forgotten Women Workers of the First World War*.

Given that the stories of diverse groups permeate every historical time period, but not every history learning standard, we saw a need to expand the multicultural dimensions of our wikispace. Our work is just beginning, but our goal is to complement and extend each learning standard with multicultural teaching resources. We chose two icons (Figure 3)
to highlight the location of multicultural and women’s history resources within the wiki pages.

In many cases, the Massachusetts state framework is very general so teachers and students must determine what to cover and what to uncover in learning about the past. Studying the American Revolution, for instance, the story of George Washington and the Continental Army is an often-covered story. There is the famous crossing of the Delaware River, the hardships of winter encampment, and the defeat of the British forces at the Battle of Yorktown. Less often taught, and not mentioned in the Massachusetts framework, are the experiences of African American soldiers who, according to one recent estimate, comprised nearly one-fifth of Washington’s forces at war’s end. Washington, a slave owner himself, initially opposed black troops, but relinquished his objections when his need for personnel became acute. The story of African Americans in the Revolutionary War is essential multicultural history for students, one that foreshadows the important roles of 180,000 black soldiers in the Civil War (including the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers), the 92nd and 93rd Infantry Divisions in World War I, and the Tuskegee Airmen in World War II.

### Decision 5: Discovering the Frameworks with Words, Pictures, and Moving Images

A fifth decision relates to the use of multimedia—words, pictures, moving images, and interactive websites—within the resourcesforhistoryteachers wikispace. Initially, our wiki pages consisted mainly of lines of written text, arranged with bullet items and short paragraphs to make the information easier for college students to read. High school students, viewing the site for the first time, commented that they liked the summaries, but found pages of densely written text unappealing. Even college students, while preparing for the teacher test, indicated they tended to scan the pages rather than read them thoroughly. These student reviews suggest that we, and other history teachers, must consider how to make wiki page content visually engaging to students.
Our first strategy featured adding pictures and photographs throughout the pages of the wiki. Adding visual material makes great sense given the media-saturated lives of adolescents today. By 2003, nearly all children and adolescents in America (99%) lived in a home with a television, half had a TV in their bedroom, and three out of four (73%) had a computer at home. At the same time, the reading habits of children and adolescents were changing with technology. Youngsters now spend more amounts of time reading online than reading books, while the number of 17-year-olds who say they read for fun declined from 33% in 1984 to 20% in 2004. Today’s students are more likely to connect to wiki pages that feature carefully chosen combinations of written text and multimedia resources.

First, we selected images to highlight key themes from different historical periods. At the top of the U.S. history standards from Reconstruction to the present page, for example, we placed photographs of Abraham Lincoln, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King, Jr. A section on Industrial America has photos of a Lowell Mill girl and immigrant children arriving at Ellis Island. A map of the Qing Dynasty in China and a portrait of Gandhi opens a section on the history of Asia in the 19th and 20th centuries. Pictures of Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler preface a learning standard about the rise of totalitarianism in Russia, Italy, and Germany before World War II.

Next, we placed a picture of an old-time movie camera (Figure 4) next to a variety of other visual learning resources, including:

- **Interactive websites**—such as Picturing the 1930s, from the Smithsonian American Art Museum, http://americanart.si.edu/education/picturing_the_1930s/.
- **Video clips**—such as an overview of the Presidents of the United States from Washington to Eisenhower, made in 1953 by the U.S. War Information Office.
- **Podcasts**—such as the Lincoln-Douglas Debates as recreated by scholars from the Center for Lincoln Studies at Knox College.
- **Audio recordings**—such as Upton Sinclair’s novel, The Jungle, read aloud on Librivox, a site featuring recorded readings of public domain books, poems, and other written texts.
Virtual reality simulations—such as the Virtual Jamestown website that includes 3D recreations of a Native American village and a colonial fort.

Interactive maps and timelines—such as maps from the Library of Congress website, “Immigration,” that shows the settlement patterns of different ethnic groups throughout the United States.

Using pictorial and moving images online requires adherence to copyright. Taking someone’s pictures or information and using them as your own is a violation of United States laws. Information in the “public domain” is usable without infringing copyright laws. Websites listed as “creative commons” allow teachers to freely use the information posted on them. If material is not in the public domain, teachers must request permission from whichever website source has the rights to the information they wish to use.

The following are the websites we used for the images on our site. All of these offer images within the public domain, or they have a creative commons license allowing history teachers to use their images.

- America.gov (from the State Department’s International Information Programs), http://www.america.gov/index.html
- Flickr, http://www.flickr.com/
- University of Texas at Austin Library, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/
- Wikimedia Commons, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page
- University of Texas at Austin’s Portrait Gallery, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/exhibits/portraits/

Other sources of multimedia materials include the Internet Archive, CIA World Factbook, the Open Video Project, and Smithsonian Images on Flickr.

Conclusion

Any technology cannot be understood apart from the patterns of its use. “Constructed complexes of habits, beliefs, and procedures embedded in elaborate codes of communication” is how historian Carolyn Marvin described the telephone and the electric light, two late 19th-century technolo-
gies that profoundly changed how people lived and worked in America.\textsuperscript{17}
At first, people thought only of using these “new” technologies for already well-established social purposes. Soon, the interaction of people and technology created new social practices—the telephone, for example, broke down long-established boundaries between the private world of the family and the public world of the community. Examining that moment in history, as Carolyn Marvin, did, “when old technologies were new” invites us to consider the roles of wiki technologies in public schools today, at a time when digital technologies are still new in teaching and learning and the patterns of their use still tentative and unsettled.

Our \textit{resourcesforhistoryteachers} wikispace is an educational technology in process, continually changing as our understanding of wiki technology evolves. Beginning as a Standards Wiki, an online support for history teacher test takers needing information about the academic content in a state-mandated curriculum framework, this site has expanded into an interactive electronic space for teachers, students, and new teacher candidates learning the histories of America and the world.

As \textit{resourcesforhistoryteachers} has evolved, ways to use a wikispace to \textit{cover}, \textit{uncover}, and \textit{discover} curriculum frameworks has come into sharper focus. \textit{Covering} happens by first reframing curriculum framework learning standards into focus questions, and then by providing teachers and students with written text and live hyperlinks to primary and secondary sources that offer essential understandings about each topic. \textit{Uncovering} happens through the inclusion of multicultural teaching resources that present the hidden histories and untold stories of women, people of color, and other groups often omitted or shortchanged in the textbooks. \textit{Discovering} happens through the use of multimedia resources (photographs, pictures, podcasts, audio books, interactive historical websites, and virtual reality simulations) that offer teachers and students many opportunities for multimodal learning.

Our wikispace development experiences suggest that teachers and students are only beginning to realize how new technologies can transform education. Rapid access to information online creates never-before-possible teaching and learning opportunities. People in every K-12 school can view, hear, and read materials that were previously only available to scholars. Sooner than expected by institutions of schooling, every teacher and student will be able to be an e-teacher and an e-student, learning with combinations of paper and electronic materials. The \textit{resourcesforhistoryteachers} wiki and the decisions we have made creating it offer insights into how new history learning environments will emerge.
Notes

8. Ibid., 113.
A History of Western Society
Since 1300 for Advanced Placement
Tenth Edition
John P. McKay, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Bennett D. Hill, Late of Georgetown University
John Buckler, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Clare Haru Crowston, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
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