

Preparing Student Teachers for a World History Curriculum in New York

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IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION, American education remains committed to the idea that all citizens can and should be educated, though this goal may be more comforting than practical. But today's task lies in reaching for the quality standards that made American education the envy and model of the world. This challenge faces every discipline struggling to find relevance to popular education while keeping in line with the values of reflection and knowledge. What role do professional organizations play in defining curriculum in a period of declining funds and influence? Are there lessons to be gained from the earlier periods when American money and power were on the rise? New York, as an educational reform leader, is a blueprint for current reform initiatives, and a guide to what we face next. New York's teacher preparation and world history teaching models are recognized for their quality, but are also notable for their deficiencies, particularly in issues left unaddressed. The changes of the last decade offer an opportunity to assess both successes and potential fissures, most especially in relation to world history and the education of world history teachers. New York's example identifies issues that are rising over the horizon and are likely to affect a number of other states over the upcoming decade.

Nearly two decades ago, concerns with the historical literacy of Americans led to the establishment of the Bradley Commission on History in

Schools. Its members included seventeen professors, education leaders, and classroom teachers of unusual distinction. Their project highlighted the need to improve history teaching in the classroom. The commission stated, “the case for the importance of history has not been cogently and powerfully made since 1892, when the National Education Association appointed a distinguished Committee of Ten to examine the entire high school experience.” The 1892 body established uniform curriculum standards and helped create an examination system that led to the college entrance examination board. The leaders of that movement believed that excellence and opportunity were best served by setting standards common to all students and increasing the likelihood that all citizens could obtain an education. History was a central factor in the definition of intellectual and educational attainment.

The recent Bradley Commission reprised that argument, stating that history was the only subject that allows students to study change, and that in our day and age, managing change was essential for the student, for the country, and for the future of democracy. History was not meant to be an accumulation of facts, but an introduction to “habits of the mind:” modes of thoughtful judgment and a “historical perspective.” Fostering these habits should be the principal aim of instruction in history, enabling students to “distinguish between the important and the inconsequential, to develop the ‘discriminating memory’ needed for a discerning judgment in public and personal life.”

The Bradley Commission, noting the increasing importance of global connections to our civic society, firmly recommended a two-year sequence for world and European history in all high schools to cultivate global understanding and knowledge:

World history is inadequate when it consists only of European history plus imperialism, just as it is inadequate when it slights European history itself. It is imperative that more time, and better ways of preparing teachers to illuminate both European and non-European history, be found if students are to emerge with an intelligent global perspective ...

We cannot over-emphasize our belief that history departments fail their students—whether as citizens or as prospective teachers, or both—and they fail themselves no less when they neglect wide-ranging interpretative courses, when they do not concern themselves with the quality of school books and materials, and when they isolate themselves from the teachers and the very schools from which they must draw their future students.¹

The commission concluded with three recommendations: better education for history teachers, in both historical content and appreciation of aforementioned mental habits; a reform of the college curriculum; and the development of more innovative methods for teaching.² In the immediate

aftermath of the report, college surveys were revitalized; many colleges introduced a methods course to “do history;” and teacher education gained prominence in professional organizations, as reflected in the American Historical Association’s publications and initiatives and the creation of the National Council for History Education.

The national discussion following the Bradley Commission influenced the standards conversation that dominated the early 1990s, and resulted in the adoption of all or portions of the recommendations as the history standards. New York State adopted a set of standards in 1995—centered on social studies, not history—and applied them to the state curriculum.

In New York, the curricular reform occurred in conjunction with a state policy to raise overall academic standards to ensure students would be both workforce- and college-ready at high school graduation. New York re-energized the Regents’ diploma and required college preparatory tracks for all students. It also enabled greater curriculum standardization across the state. The third recommendation of the Bradley Commission, teacher education, has also been the subject of vigorous discussion and led to new certification guidelines. New York State has encouraged public colleges to obtain National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accreditation, and instituted common general education coursework between two-year and four-year institutions. These reforms, instituted over the last decade, are currently assessed in national reports.

Assessing New York’s Policy

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (NCPPE), a non-profit organization that works to highlight policy questions to public organizations, compares the quality and standards of U.S. education state by state. In its 2004 report, NCPPE states that New York is doing a better job of preparing students for college, reflected in the growing number of students taking science and math courses in high school. This advance is attributable to the adoption of a two-year world history curriculum and a two-year U.S. history and civics courses in high school. However, the same report points out that New York has made no real progress in adding to their enrollment in higher education, and that the likelihood for citizens to enroll in college by age nineteen had dropped by 23%—one of the steepest declines in the nation. In 2006, this number had deepened to 27%. A second statistic from the 2006 report highlights the growing separation between haves and have nots in New York: the graduating rate for high income students is 96%, while the graduating rate for low income students is 72%. Additionally, New York, like many states in the Northeast, does not offer affordable college options.³

“Closing the Expectations Gap,” a 2006 report by Achieve, a business and government coalition focused on workforce preparation and college readiness, confirms that New York is one of five pioneer states to reform its high school graduation standards, raising its expectations that high school graduates will be prepared for college and work. However, it also confirms that timely high school graduation rates are low, ranking New York 46th in the nation.⁴ Only 57% of high school students graduate within four years, 41% enroll directly in college, 31% remain in college as sophomores, and only 19% complete college in four years. The lowest comparative statistic is the high school graduation rate, but college enrollment, retention, and graduation are only middling. A cynic might make the point that education standards have improved in advance of educational effect.

In sharp contrast, the July 2005 Advanced Placement (AP) report to the nation is very complimentary to the state, presenting evidence that more than 20% of the class of 2004 demonstrated college level achievement in high school, taking at least one AP course.⁵ The AP report highlights the increase in the number of students who took and passed AP courses, but does not address the majority who did not. Students in the public high school class of 2004 in New York numbered 146,000; of those, 47,000 or 32% took an AP exam in high school, and 31,000 or 21% demonstrated college level mastery of an AP course.⁶ The New York Regents in World History Exam, required for graduation, was administered to 205,867 in 2004. Only one-quarter of New York students participated in AP courses, while only one-seventh demonstrated the characteristics of students prepared to meet the rigors of college.⁷

All in all, these public reports depict New York as a solid front-runner in the national contest to improve public education at the elementary and secondary level. They also indicate, but do not discuss, a new political and social embarrassment: the documented divide in skill acquisition occurring between high socio-economic status high schools and the rest of the public system. Elite, well-financed public schools offer many AP courses; poor ones do not, or only offer one or two, resulting in large segments of the high school population unable to document their college preparatory skills.

Professional Organizations

As the Bradley Commission was discussing the need for strengthening the history curriculum, a coalition of two-year and four-year college and high school teachers founded the World History Association (WHA), organized with the mission to “promote studies of world history through the encouragement of research, teaching and publication ... The Association will provide help to the teachers of world history and venues for the

discussion of both theories of history and methods of study and teaching.”⁸ One of the aims of the new association, in line with the Bradley Commission, was to create collaborations for the purpose of bringing together the insights of both college and high school teachers to develop a curriculum that brought world history research into the classroom and to help students make the connections between the past and the world they are now in. This professional collaboration was a result of its era and marks a first effort in professionalizing the study of world history. Just as the history curriculum was being revitalized, the WHA began competing for a say in high school world history curriculum. As a small, diverse mix of educators, the organization was only minimally effective across the states and their curriculum; but one area of active partnership occurred with the College Board to establish the new AP world history.⁹

The success of the AP courses highlights what solid curriculum development could look like in a public school forum. AP has managed to define a structure and narrative; it also offers professional collaborative training for world history teachers. The WHA has taken a leadership role in that process, as a partner working to identify the curriculum, offering venues to discuss world history research and taking responsibility for the quality and integrity of the AP world history test. Does the WHA, the professional world history association, have a responsibility to play a collaborative role with the public schools in each state? Can it do so in each state?

The 2005 AP report statistics highlight the amount of the student body who do not participate in a world history structured curriculum. Those numbers confirm that there are two very separate populations in New York: one that takes AP tests and appears, by that standard, to be very capable of attending and finishing college; and a second that encounters generic world history in public high school, and is encountering greater difficulty in passing the Regents’ exams for world history. This division creates problems which will influence college policy over the next decade: a differentiation of the educational experience and opportunity, from the earliest years through college; and the tendency of those with a superior background to go on to the best colleges leaves others clearly behind. It is the size of the failing cohort, potentially two-thirds of the New York population, that creates concern. Neither parents nor local government will tolerate such a high failure rate without taking action that would reduce standards. The consequences include erosion of support for public higher education at the state level, the slow and steady destruction of the economic viability of the state as critical skills are not developed in the work force, and a real failure to connect to the global issues that informed the creation of the curriculum.¹⁰ How can teacher education aid in solving the problem?

The issue of teacher education is a professional and civic concern to

the state and the WHA. It is only natural that each state will develop and adapt the national standards to its local situation, but the general knowledge and pedagogical structure of the curriculum at the college level needs to be articulated, at least as a general philosophy by a professional organization. New York used the national history standards as its model, adapting them to its local concept of social studies. The social studies base for curriculum development creates a more interdisciplinary course organization and content, with a greater coverage of the modern period.¹¹ Teachers are responsible for global coverage distributed around eight historical eras or themes: introduction to the social sciences of geography, economics, political science; culture and comparison; ancient world (4000 B.C.E.–500 C.E.); expanding zones of exchange and encounter (500–1200); global interactions (1200–1650); first global age (1450–1770); age of revolution (1750–1914); crisis and achievement; and the twentieth century (1900–1945). The standards recommend further subjects and emphases that should be taught over two years. The larger categories include political and physical geography, economic function, tools and technology, world religions, analysis of documents, and use of primary and secondary sources. The actual historical content is specified through knowledge of distinctive features of individual civilizations: Ottoman, Chinese, Russian, and Islamic. The development of an analytical outlook is also a criterion; teachers are asked to ensure that students “understand that the encounters between peoples in the 15th and early 16th centuries had a tremendous impact upon the worldwide exchange of flora, fauna, and diseases” or “be able to compare social and economic revolutions with political revolutions” or “contrast the social, political, and economic dimensions of the Japanese and European feudal systems.”¹²

The present standards propose broad coverage, the opportunity to compare societies, and a basic introduction to political science, geography, economics, government, and sociology because social studies develop critical thinking and analysis. This is an ambitious program that relies on the high school teacher’s four years of preparation to structure, organize, and develop the skills their students will need to acquire. These skills are more than accumulation of historical facts; they include reading, reasoning, writing, analysis, critical thinking, and historical thinking. Where does the student-teacher obtain this training? This is not simply a set of specific themes or content units, but rather a broad and coherent curriculum that relies on the understanding of complex historical processes and comparative methodologies to enable students to reason through their coursework.

The present standards, tested by multiple choice and brief essays, focus on fact accumulation rather than, in the Bradley Commission’s words, to “distinguish between the important and the inconsequential, to develop the

discriminating memory needed for a discerning judgment in public and personal life.” The present results ignore how much synthesis and critical thinking skills are required to make the course a worthwhile component in the high school curriculum. Additionally, students, teachers, schools, and superintendents face the pressure of the Regents’ test results at the end of their two-year sequence. This test is meant to indicate how well-prepared students are for college and work force preparation, yet is not aligned with the skills developed in world history. Failing to address this disconnect, which is growing as the gulf between AP and public schools expands, may doom world history in New York State to a failed experiment for both students and educators.

Over the last two decades, world history has successfully competed for place in the classroom, but if we wish it to be a serious curricular innovation, we need to better define it as a sub-field within history. Why do we believe world history should be a part of our high school curriculum? What skills does it impart to our 9th and 10th graders? What do our teachers need to know, not in terms of comprehensive lists of content, but skills they need to have before they leave college so they will in turn nurture learning in high school students? What skills do they need to develop in their students? How does this fit with an overall history or social science-based degree?

Present Situation in New York State Teacher Preparation

Presently, New York has 41 public colleges, 26 of which have initial teacher certification programs, and 6 have A.A. or A.S. degrees leading to transfer into teacher education programs.¹³ The social studies teacher preparatory program offers a broad social studies curriculum (political science, economics, history, psychology, sociology) making it less than ideal for ownership by any one department. The two departments most frequently associated with social studies teacher training are education and history. Naturally, education departments emphasize education courses, practicum, and student teaching, but the discipline content is organized by the history department (or in one case, political science) and rarely reflects an awareness of world history as a sub-field.

In 2005, of the 26 teacher certification schools, thirteen required a minimum of six credits in a non-western category to ensure coverage in non-western history. Eleven schools required six credits in one region or topic; however, perspectives varied regarding the definition of the theme. In some cases, references to themes indicated a choice between history or geography, a choice between Asian or Jewish studies, or a more comparative approach by taking two courses in different regions from similar

periods. Overall, most programs simply required six credits outside of European and U.S. history. A student could choose to take more through electives, but not because the departments visualized an essential connection to the classroom. There is a real need to establish cohesion between teacher preparation content and high school world history curriculum by articulating the reasons for defining the curriculum along specific tracks.

In 2008, twenty-four schools offered teacher certification; ten required six or fewer credits in non-western courses; four more suggested an optional track with six or more credits in non-western or comparative. Six schools required more than six credits, and two required a track in non-western. Three schools did not address non-western courses specifically. The differentiation of requirements demonstrates the growing awareness of the need for non-western or comparative approaches in the history or social studies curriculum.

Another strategy for preparing high school social studies teachers might focus on developing historical habits of the mind through emphasis on methodology. Yet, departments, in 2005, did not appear particularly willing to pursue this track: of the 26 programs, only four offered introductions to history methodology, two offered historiography courses, and thirteen offered capstone seminars. Only one program required history majors to develop a nine-credit historical thinking and philosophy track with a twenty-four-credit content track. By 2008 catalogs, the introduction to methodology was required in seven schools, historiographic courses offered in nine schools, and a disciplinary capstone required in twelve, recommended in two others. In four schools, research is part of the major, and in five schools, the capstone is a social science course. Eleven schools now have an incremental program that reflects a skill development philosophy. This is a change from 2005 catalogs, when only four schools had this purpose. Skill definition and acquisition is now the primary focus of history departments. Less clear is whether these skills are connected to history, social studies or education, and how appropriate the balance of skills to content has become. Missing is the articulation of the program and skills needed to make world history teacher-education effective for the secondary classroom.

At this point, teacher-training programs do not take responsibility for inculcating a world historical outlook. Too many students still leave college believing that teaching European civilization with the addition of two-non-western regions is a world history education. Essentially, colleges focus on the content and do not discuss how world history adds to historical skills and analysis. Although the high school curriculum is set, the standards for the education of teachers are still under development, and world history policy has been constructed according to local concep-

tions. By 2008, teacher training has evolved from those early efforts to articulating skill sets. Colleges are choosing to train for skill sets across the sub-disciplines of history, using American, European, and non-western as the sub-disciplines. The focus is on reading and analyzing primary and secondary sources, demonstrating the understanding of historiography, and developing the skills needed for conceptualizing and writing research papers. The content of history is acquired either in tracks of six or nine credits, but the emphasis on historical content has shifted towards historical skills—world history is but one of many options.

Public colleges in New York State do not spend a great deal of time developing a world history track for their teacher candidates. There is a growing list of courses offered for the purpose of introducing non-western sources, narratives, and comparative analysis, but there is very little that actually requires or ensures that teacher candidates are aware and trained to integrate the wide variety of information that they are expected to pull together in the classroom. As states develop standards inclusive of one criterion after another, to avoid even the perception of prejudice, they have created a mountain of content that lacks coherence and is unlikely to be absorbed by the average undergraduate mind within a four-year program. By 2008, professionals have not resolved the level of content needed; but they have chosen to create skill sets that can be used across the regional histories. It is time to return the content to the professionals who work in the field to develop a knowledge base that includes the 68% of New York's population that do not participate in the AP world history course. This will permit world history secondary teachers to become aware of the skills and methods needed to teach world history, and a life-long commitment to acquiring more knowledge to build into that original framework.

Conclusion

The greatest achievement of American education in the twentieth century has been open access and commitment to educational opportunity for all. This modern aspiration created a constant tension between ensuring access for every citizen-child and maintaining high quality standards. The great story of the past century was the successful establishment of educational institutions and cultures that met that purpose and built the great diversity of American higher education. Every period of social dislocation leads American educators to shape and redirect content or access to education in order to make that promise more effective. This goal is both an ideal for the progressive development of humankind and a civic value for the continuance of democracy. Allowing a growing fissure to continue in the dissemination of a world history curriculum only reinforces the already

existing gap of life experiences and expectations. Affecting not only the nation as a whole, but citizens as individuals, such an imbalance bodes ill for a democracy and perpetuates a lack of skills and understanding in the 60% of our population most at risk in our globalizing economy.

Notes

1. "Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools," *The History Teacher* 23, no. 1 (November 1989): 7-35.
2. Kenneth T. Jackson, "The Bradley Commission on History in Schools: A Retrospective View," *The History Teacher* 23, no. 1 (November 1989): 73-78.
3. National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, "Measuring Up 2004: State Report Card, New York," NCPPHE, <http://measuringup.highereducation.org/_docs/2004/statereports/NY04.pdf>; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, "Measuring Up 2006: State Report Card, New York," NCPPHE, <http://measuringup.highereducation.org/_docs/2006/statereports/NY06.pdf>.
4. "Closing the Expectations Gap, 2006: An Annual 50 State Progress Report on the Alignment of High School Policies with the Demands of College and Work," Achieve, Inc., <<http://www.achieve.org/files/50-state-06-Final.pdf>>.
5. This proposition is based on AP studies that indicate taking and passing an AP course is better evidence of ability to finish college than other indicators.
6. "AP Report to the Nation 2005," College Board, <<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/ap/nation/2005>>; "AP Report to the Nation 2006," College Board, <<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/ap/nation/2006>>; "AP Report to the Nation 2007," College Board, <<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/ap/nation/2007>>; "AP Report to the Nation 2008," College Board, <<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/ap/nation/2008>>. Counts are rounded to nearest 1000; percents to nearest whole point.
7. Defined by the College Board as students who passed with a 3, 4, or 5. "AP Report to the Nation," College Board, <<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/ap/nation>>.
8. Judith P. Zinsser, "The World History Association: Teaching as an International Movement," *The History Teacher* 31, no. 2 (February 1998): 259-263.
9. "AP World History National Training Workshop," *World History Bulletin* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 7-8.
10. Jennifer Sloan McCombs and Stephen J. Carroll, "Ultimate Test: Who is Accountable for Education if Everybody Fails?" *Rand Review* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 10-16.
11. Thomas Monkhall, "New York State World History Regents content analysis," Teacher workshop, World History Annual Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, June 2003.
12. "Social Studies Resource Guide," The University of the State of New York Education Department, <<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/guides/social/part12.pdf>>.
13. The program descriptions and numbers used in these next few paragraphs are based on school catalogues of the public higher education colleges and universities in New York.