President’s Message

With all of your teaching and other school responsibilities, I hope you are finding time to enjoy the festivities of this busy holiday season with family and friends.

Since the last Yankee Post was published, I’ve enjoyed participating in two important conferences. The CCSS Annual Fall Conference, “C3- Framework for the Future”, featured the introduction of NCSS’s new College, Career and Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards. Dr. Kathy Swan, the document’s lead author and the conference’s keynote speaker, explained the background of the C3, the structure of the document and the Inquiry Arc that overlays the entire document. The inquiry focus has the potential to influence the teaching of social studies throughout the country, encouraging teachers to develop class activities that engage students answering big questions, forming information-based opinions and solving problems.

Many of the conference’s workshops focused on the C3 and/or inquiry related activities. In addition, Secretary of the State Denise Merrill and Dianna Roberge-Wentzell, the Chief Academic Officer of the Connecticut State Department of Education, both strong social studies advocates, participated in a panel discussion about the importance of the social studies in a well-rounded education. NCSS President and West Hartford Social Studies Supervisor, Steve Armstrong, the luncheon speaker, explained how the C3 is designed to be a guide for states as they create their own frameworks. Steve is leading a group of Connecticut educators who are using the C3 to give a fresh look at our state’s framework that has been in draft form for the past five years. Conference chairs John Tully and Gene Stec and the entire committee are to be congratulated for an outstanding conference.

In November I traveled to St. Louis to represent CCSS at the 93rd NCSS Annual Conference, “Social Studies: Gateway to (continued on page 2)

Editor’s Note

We’re comin’ back. For some time it has seemed like social studies has been lost in the educational wilderness of common core, testing, and STEM. Thanks to a confluence of developments both in the state and nationally we appear to have turned a corner. The CCSS fall conference at CCSU in New Britain was something of a blast of fresh air. Sparked by the attendance and participation of Diana Roberge-Wentzell, the Academic Director of the State Department of Education, and Secretary of the State Denise Merrill, one had confidence that people in Hartford in a position to make a difference, cared about social studies and its place in the schools. In addition, Kathy Swan, primary editor of the national C3-Social Studies Framework provided an informative and enthusiastic report on the prospects for the adoption of a framework for social studies in Connecticut.

These are not stand-alone developments. John Tully’s Public Affairs Committee has been building a solid base for a lobbying effort for social studies at the state level. You can find information about their work, as well as how you can participate in making the case for social studies, at the committee’s website www.CCSS PublicAffairs.org. Meanwhile, Steve Armstrong is chairing a committee to incorporate the best elements of the “Draft” Social Studies Framework into the NCSS’ newly released C-3 Framework. This new Connecticut Framework, built on the C-3 format, will stress inquiry learning and provide some direction for making grade-level content decisions. Will “draft” become a distant memory by the fall of 2014? There is reason for optimism. AND (tah-dah) while one ought not hold one’s breath, there exists the possibility that, by the end of 2014, we may have a social studies consultant hired at the SDE: finally a voice for social studies at the State Department of Education.

For these possibilities to be come realities we need responsible, informed advocacy for social studies. Talk to your principal, to a district board member if you know one, to the local newspaper reporter and make the case for history, geography, civics and economics – the core of social studies learning and the core of preparation for citizenship. That Public Affairs Committee website has some useful tips. Let’s practice what we claim to teach: active, informed citizenship - with an emphasis on the active! (continued on page 2)
President’s Message continued

the Core of Learning”. The conference featured many very interesting speakers, workshops on a variety of topics and a huge exhibit hall with the latest materials. President Steve Armstrong seemed to be at every event, either presenting a workshop, speaking on an important topic, chairing the House of Delegates, introducing a speaker or presenting an award. Connecticut should be very proud of Steve’s leadership in the organization. I joined with Sandy Senior-Dauer and Ed Dorgan as Connecticut’s delegation to the House of Delegates.

The HOD discussed and acted on a number of interesting resolutions, including passing a resolution introduced by CCSS supporting the teaching of local history. In addition, I attended a planning meeting for next year’s national conference that will be held in nearby Boston. Mark your calendars now for November 21-23, 2014, “Let Freedom Ring: The Civic Mission of Schools” – a great opportunity for us to attend a national conference.

All of us on the CCSS Board of Directors wish you a joyful and peaceful holiday season and a happy, healthy and rewarding 2014.

Dan Coughlin

Next Year - It’s Boston! November 21-23
NCSS Report

I am happy to report that the National Council for the Social Studies recently held our annual conference in St. Louis, Missouri. A number of Connecticut teachers attended this conference. Speakers included historian Harold Holzer, film director Oliver Stone, and Congressman John Lewis. There were many sessions on social studies and the common core literacy standards and on the new social studies C3 frameworks. Everyone should remember that next fall’s national conference will be in Boston. Plan to attend! Workshop proposal forms for this conference will be available shortly.

National Council for the Social Studies is also continuing its efforts to promote social studies teachers advocating for the discipline of social studies. In the past, many of our advocacy efforts have been at the national level; we are also now encouraging teachers to engage both local and state officials as well. The beginning of “advocacy” is to develop a relationship with a local legislator or elected official: inviting a school board member into your school to judge a History Day competition might be the beginning of advocacy, as you are beginning to develop a relationship with that elected official. There will be more information on this initiative soon.

There is much positive news for social studies in Connecticut. After much effort by a lot of people we may soon have a social studies consultant in Connecticut, something we have not had since Dan Gregg retired. In addition, a dedicated group of Connecticut educators is hard at work creating a new Connecticut social studies framework; this will be replacing the “draft” framework that have been located on the Connecticut Department of Education website for several years. The group creating this new framework is using the new C3 social studies framework as our major resource. Our goal is to have this framework passed by the state Department of Education this academic year, so that teachers can begin to use the document this summer.

Besides our writing group, we have a reviewer group as well; our reviewers will look at the new framework in early January and make comments on the document. If you are interested in being a reviewer, please contact me at Steve_Armstrong@whps.org. In addition, there will be two workshops held this summer that will be sponsored by the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies and focused around the new state framework and the C3 framework. Stay tuned for more information.

I am greatly enjoying my year as president of National Council for the Social Studies. I have been out to see a number of other state conferences, and I will see more of these in the spring. If I can assist you or your social studies colleagues in any way, don’t hesitate to contact me.

Stephen Armstrong, President -National Council for the Social Studies  Steve_Armstrong@whps.org

Political Affairs Committee

As you’ll see in other parts of this Yankee Post, there have been some encouraging signs of progress in our efforts to advocate for social studies in the state.

You can keep up with these developments in a few ways:


Follow us on Twitter @CT_Council for late breaking news and links to articles and opportunities.

Like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ConnCouncil for news right in your Facebook timeline.

Great things are happening, and we need your help!

John Tully

“Most successful careers, including in technology and engineering, do not result simply from technical knowledge. They require leadership skills, social and emotional intelligence, cultural understanding, a capacity for strategic decision-making and a global perspective. Put another way, success in life requires a sensibility about the world and one’s place in it that the humanities seek to cultivate, as well as an understanding of economic and societal context that the social sciences provide.”

Evaluating Historical “Facts”
by Jody Passanisi and Shara Peters

“Was the Revolutionary War justified?”

It’s one of our favorite questions to ask students. This question is usually met by some blank stares and quizzical looks. Students often react suspiciously. Are we trying to trick them into saying something “un-American”? We rephrase: “Were the colonists right in their decision to revolt? Talk with your teams and come up with an answer supported by three pieces of evidence. The only wrong answer is one that you can’t support.”

The students tentatively begin to discuss the motives for revolution that we have covered in our Causes of the Revolutionary War unit, going over the cause and effect relationship between the various events they have learned about. They converse with their peers, form evidence-based opinions, and try to reach a consensus. By the end of this activity, each student will be prepared to defend his or her argument (through a five-paragraph thesis driven essay, a summary statement, a debate, or a structured discussion) that the Revolution either was, or wasn’t, justified.

Why we ask evaluative questions

What were the most influential documents to the U.S. Constitution? Was the expansion of the United States fair? Should the Texans have revolted against Mexico? What was the most significant cause of the Civil War?

We pose all of these questions to students to push them to play a more active role in the processing of their learning. When students evaluate historical events, the actions of historical figures, or the reliability of sources and evidence, they are thinking critically and really combing through and considering the information that they are taking in.

This process of evaluation requires a great deal of analysis and synthesis of information, prior knowledge, self-understanding, ethics, and more. The answer the students come to is not nearly as significant as the quest involved in getting to that answer. Evaluation used to be the highest point on Bloom’s Taxonomy (Creating is now) and like every Bloom’s component, evaluation has an important place. We are not arguing that assessments or activities involving evaluation should replace a project in which students can demonstrate learning in a new way—where they create and re-imagine something using what they have learned. But evaluation does allow for students to develop skills that will help them be more discerning consumers of information.

While we are proponents of having students think critically in this evaluative way, it is not without its drawbacks. At times, the evaluation process can lead to oversimplification of a topic. We have found this to be true especially for debates. When students get heated, they can tend to focus on just what they have decided is the “right” answer—missing the nuance of the activity—which is that there are usually many possible right answers when evaluation is the goal. This tendency toward short-circuiting can be ameliorated in debrief discussions about the process itself and a good meta-cognitive look on how students were affected by the task of evaluating.

Additionally, evaluation can run the risk of chronocentrism (defined by science journalist Tom Standage as "the egotism that one’s own generation is poised on the very cusp of history"). Students often project their current values and expectations on past figures and events. Again, reflection and transparent discussions about this issue go a long way in mitigating it. Indeed, often this impulse arises in the realm of civil rights and equal rights for African Americans, women, and other minorities. It is not always a negative for students to evaluate history in terms of the present.

Developing a complex perspective

Despite some of the drawbacks, evaluation is one of the most important skills that students should be acquiring. Developmentally, students in the middle grades are beginning to gain the ability to look at events and people in a complex way. Evaluation allows them to stretch this skill and to learn about themselves in the process. Students entering adolescence often see history as unequivocal fact. What we do when we ask students to evaluate is give them permission to examine history as a complex narrative. And once students have begun to look at history in this way, they can become more discerning and critical individuals.

How do you use the evaluation process with your students? http://www.middleweb.com/10123/evaluating-historical-facts/

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NCSS Annual Conference
St. Louis

Conference Dates to Remember
April 7-9, 2014 - NERC
Sturbridge, Mass
November 21-23, 2014 - NCSS
Boston, Mass

CT Delegation - Sandy Senior Dauer, Ed Dorgan, and Dan Coughlin with NCSS President Steve Armstrong

Did you miss this on page 2 - Plan to be in Boston in 2014

Oliver Stone (above); John Lewis (below)

Historian Taylor Booth
CCSS
Fall Conference

Diana Roberge-Wentzell, the Academic Director of the Connecticut State Department of Education (l), and Secretary of the State Denise Merrill

Kelly Falvey, Connecticut River Academy

Keynote Speaker Kathy Swan, flanked by Steve Armstrong and Dan Coughlin
The shift in curriculum began in the early years of the Cold War. While U.S. military and technological innovation brought World War II to a close, it was a later use of technology—the Soviet launching of Sputnik in 1957—that historian Thomas A. Bailey called the equivalent of a “psychological Pearl Harbor” for many Americans. It created deep feelings of inadequacy and a belief that the U.S. was falling behind in developing new technology and weapons, which led to the passage of the 1958 National Defense Education Act. This legislation pumped $1 billion over four years into math and science programs in both K-12 schools and universities.

Despite this extra focus on math and science, social studies managed to make it through the end of the Cold War relatively unscathed (in fact, the number of classroom hours dedicated to teaching social studies in grades 1-4 peaked in the 1993-1994 school year at 3 hours a week). But drastic change came a decade later with the passage of President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind legislation. No Child Left Behind was signed into law in an attempt to address the growing achievement gap between affluent and low-income students. It was a controversial piece of legislation from the start, mainly because of its “one size fits all” approach: It uses annual standardized tests to determine how well students are performing in reading and math and then uses those scores to determine the amounts of federal funding schools receive. Besides the obvious criticism that low-performing schools—arguably the ones that need the most increase in funding—are disproportionally punished for their low scores, critics also believe that No Child Left Behind has narrowed the curriculum. Since the standardized tests focus exclusively on English and math, and those scores determine the bulk of a school’s federal funding, schools have been forced to increase time and resources in these subjects at the expense of all others, including social studies.

A 2007 study from the Center of Education Policy supports this allegation: 62 percent of elementary schools, and more than 20 percent of middle schools, increased time for English language arts and/or math since No Child Left Behind passed. At the same time, 36 percent of schools decreased the time allocated to the social studies. According to a study from the National Center for Education Statistics, this adds up to a net loss of four weeks of social studies instruction per academic year.

This devaluation of social studies as a core subject in the K-12 curriculum has troubling economic, political, and social implications. For one, social studies at all grade levels encourage students to develop skills in critical thinking—one of the top traits employers look for in a candidate. It also requires students to become strong written and oral communicators who know how to structure and articulate their opinions. Unfortunately, a survey of employers done by the Chronicle of Higher Education found that these are the exact skills today’s entry-level workers are lacking. Without the skills gained from social studies, students are less attractive to employers.

Perhaps even more troubling, however, is that reducing students’ exposure to a solid curriculum in social studies leads to what a growing number of experts are calling a “civic achievement gap”. Closely related to the general achievement gap between affluent, mostly white students and low-income minority students, the civic achievement gap has made it increasingly difficult for those who grow up in low-income households to participate in civic affairs. According to data from Associate Professor Meira Levinson of Harvard University, people living in families with incomes under $15,000 voted at just over half the rate of those living in families with incomes over $75,000. Many experts agree that a stronger curriculum in social studies could help close this gap. A study from the Carnegie Corporation of New York found that students who receive effective education in social studies are more likely to vote, four times more likely to volunteer and work on community issues, and are generally more confident in their ability to communicate ideas with their elected representatives.

Fortunately, policymakers have begun to acknowledge the shortcomings of the recent decade of educational policy. “President Obama and I reject the notion that the social studies is a peripheral offering that can be cut from schools to meet [Adequate Yearly Progress] or to satisfy those wanting to save money during a fiscal crunch,” wrote U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan in 2011 in Social Education, a journal published by the National Council for Social Studies. “Today more than ever, the social studies are not a luxury, but a necessity. We need to fix [No Child Left Behind] so that school leaders do not feel forced to ignore the vital components of a good education.”

While the Obama Administration has pledged to revisit certain components of No Child Left Behind, it has kept its fundamental model of high-stakes standardized testing with new programs such as Race to the Top and the Common Core State Standard Initiative. Like No Child Left Behind, both of these programs focus primarily on English and math—there are still no Common Core standards for social studies. Unlike No Child Left Behind, however, they are voluntary, giving states and individual schools more flexibility as to how to incorporate them into their curriculums.

It’s clear that something has to change when only one-third of Americans can name all three branches of government; when only 23 percent know the First Amendment supports freedom of religion; and when students think President Abraham Lincoln’s significance can be traced back to his beard. Social studies should reclaim its spot as one of the core subjects in the K-12 curriculum.

Teaching State and Local History: Lessons from Connecticut

By Peter Feinman

Our neighbor state has been trying to promote the teaching of history in the schools. The Connecticut League of History Organizations (CLHO), an organization similar to the Museum Association of New York, sent a notice to its members to take a survey with the message: “We NEED your help to get Connecticut history into the hands of Connecticut teachers and students.”

The goal of this effort was stated as “LET OUR TEACHERS KNOW THAT CONNECTICUT HISTORY IS ALIVE AND WELL.” CLHO asked the question which could be asked in New York as well: “Connecticut’s history rarely ever makes it into the classrooms in our state. Why?”

CLHO was reaching out to its members as the people best poised to take a leadership role in making state history accessible to teachers everywhere, when they wrote: “As a historical society volunteer, a board member, a docent, an archivist, a librarian, or in any other paid or unpaid staff job, there is no one better qualified than you are to identify those local stories that will enthral and excite our Connecticut kids.” CLHO also seeks to use History Day as an opportunity to encourage students to learn about state history: “One of our top goals is to encourage students, parents and teachers to choose topics in Connecticut history for their History Day projects.” New York, of course, is active in History Day as well. It would be interesting to know how many of the topics selected in New York for History Day are about history in New York. Certainly here is an opportunity to promote local history.

CLHO pointed out that the theme for the contest this year – Rights & Responsibilities in History – could be addressed with local incidents and events. The survey therefore asked the CLHO members to identify possible topics based on their local history. A series of specific questions were asked to determine if a certain type of event occurred in each of the state’s towns or regions such as: “Do you have photographs or other archival material which would be of use? Would you be willing to work with teachers and students in preparing their presentations?”

As part of the effort CLHO is hosting a History Day kick-off event. This event will bring together historical re-enactors and the persons they portray. It seems as if they intend to bring together the theatre of storytelling with the scholarship. Considering that we are a storytelling people and I just wrote about using one’s local history as the basis for a play or musical, this effort is welcomed. The different constituencies of the history community that I frequently write about as not working together in New York are all invited to participate in this conference: teachers, students, parents, historical organizations, and two Central Connecticut State University historians. That university has taken it upon itself to be an active leader in the state history programs in Connecticut.

If you have any comments about this effort, you can direct them to Liz Shapiro, Director of the Connecticut League of History Organizations (liz@clho.org or 860-685-7595).

http://newyorkhistoryblog.org/2013/11/07/peter-feinman-lessons-from-connecticut/#more-8252
I applaud the San Diego school board’s decision this summer to promote student discussion about Trayvon Martin in middle and high schools. More districts and schools should follow. As an educator, I know that students need space to voice their opinions. Yet I also know that people often feel uneasy about such dialogues, especially ones with racial overtones. Some may wonder whether schools have the capacity to hold these kinds of tough conversations.

The questions around promoting contentious conversations are messy. We raise schools up as institutions for democracy, even when they have historically fallen short of this ideal when it comes to persistent social ills, such as segregation, student dropout rates, poverty, and school violence. Given this context, many may ask whether schools are proper forums for dialogue on social issues.

Taking these concerns into account, I have come to some firm conclusions.

First, silence is not neutrality. If schools stand silent while whole communities suffer, rage, and protest, then they close themselves off from important democratic topics and leave students underprepared for an increasingly diverse America. Even worse, this position sends the message that the experiences and perceptions of certain groups and students are not important.

For example, ethnographic and interview data from a 2012 study I conducted among 11 black and Latino male teenagers in Boston revealed that many male students cope by talking about their concerns on race and social topics. Yet these kinds of conversations almost always happen with other teens outside of classrooms, reflecting how much male students trusted—or did not trust—their teachers and peers in school. Some male teenagers said, in fact, that they believed their teachers had lower expectations of them because of their race or would negatively judge them if they discussed racial concerns.

This isn’t optimal. Instead, schools should endeavor to be relevant and inclusive of students’ daily lives. Educators and students alike benefit when schools open dialogue on contemporary issues of race and justice. To do this, schools should be deliberative in broaching difficult issues with students, in age-appropriate ways. They should focus on opening up discussions to multiple points of view.

The San Diego district is doing this by carving out space for students to discuss how the social issues surrounding Trayvon Martin’s death and George Zimmerman’s subsequent acquittal on a murder charge in the case are relevant to their lives. A school in the Bronx or the Midwest could approach this conversation differently.

But despite these differences, racial topics are relevant for all students, not just students of color. Although we all view the world through our own experiences, no experience is necessarily more or less authoritative than the next. White teachers need to facilitate these conversations in their classrooms as much as teachers of color do.

Second, students who are able to shift positions and imagine how someone else interprets a social issue gain a more complete understanding of an issue from multiple sides.

Dialogue on the Martin case can refine these skills. Drawing from the San Diego plan, students can consider the social factors and assumptions that contributed to George Zimmerman’s decision to approach Trayvon Martin in the first place. Students can also attempt to imagine the 17-year-old’s reaction to Zimmerman and to share how they react to adults in power, including teachers and police officers. These scenarios invite middle and high school students of all colors and backgrounds to develop the empathic skills that are key to democracy.

If we want future generations to practice democracy better than we do, we must teach them how to participate in open dialogues. They should have the social skills to listen to and reflect on the experience of others—to let another person’s story stand, instead of stifling it. This is where schools can play a role, and this is what democracy is all about.
Bill Gates’ high school class ‘Big History Project’ being tested at Northville High School

By David Jesse Detroit Free Press Education Writer

The future of high school history classes might look a lot like a class being taught right now at Northville High School, at least if Bill Gates has his way. The Microsoft co-founder is the leading backer of a course called the Big History Project that is being developed by education experts, including a professor from the University of Michigan. The course is being tested in a growing number of school districts across the nation, and in 14 schools in Michigan.

The course is breaking ground by wrapping a number of academic subjects — especially science — around a history class that intends to survey the entirety of history, all while using technology to keep the course free.

At first glance, the class meeting in a Northville High School classroom doesn’t seem much different from any of the dozens of classrooms in the building. History teacher Joseph Cislo has his ninth-grade students read a handout, underlining the key points in it. He then walks them through the handout. That’s when things turn a little different. Instead of lecturing, Cislo clicks on his Internet browser, pulling up a website that’s projected in front of the class. A couple of clicks later, and the students are watching a video featuring David Christian, an Australian university professor, sitting in a chair in front of a large window, talking about the conditions necessary for life to start on Earth.

Christian walks through three conditions necessary for life to be formed, a lecture that would be just as home in a science class as in a history class. All the materials for the class, including the videos, are online at www.bighistoryproject.com. The course focuses on eight key turning points in history, which it labels as thresholds. The thresholds are the Big Bang, Stars Light Up, New Chemical Elements, Earth and the Solar System, Life on Earth, Collective Learning, Agriculture and the Modern Revolution.

The approach was put together by Christian. Gates watched a video of the class and decided to fund the development of it with his own money. Together, they got Bob Bain, a University of Michigan School of Education professor, involved to design the curriculum. That curriculum now resides online, including lectures, none more than nine minutes long.

“This does what a good history course should have always been doing,” Bain said. “It presents the opportunity to use the other (academic) disciplines. It’s an on-ramp for students to learning in every subject. It’s hard for students to see how classes in school connect — how what you learned in ninth-grade history ties to what you are learning in chemistry in 12th grade. This can serve as a road map.”

That’s what Cislo likes about the class. “These ninth-graders really get to see how the rest of their high school career will fit together,” he said. “They get to start thinking about: How does science impact history? How does religion impact history? It helps them put things together.”

Gates, Christian and Bain’s goal is to develop and expand the class across the nation. They are working to align it to Common Core curriculum standards. They are in their third year of pilot classes and have gained schools each year. They now have 137 schools and more than 10,000 students in eight countries taking the class. They see the class — which is free, including the web access — as a good option for financially strapped school districts. They’ve also developed a series of shows running on the History Channel. The shows, narrated by “Breaking Bad” star Brian Cranston, outline the class.

http://www.freep.com/article/20131202/NEWS06/312020020/course-mixes-science-and-historyContact David Jesse: 313-222-8851 or djesse@freepress.com
The Common Core National Education Standards are, they say, very interested in having all our students taught the techniques of deeper reading, deeper writing, deeper listening, deeper analysis, and deeper thinking. What they seem to have almost no interest in, is knowledge—for example knowledge of history, especially military history. As far as I can tell at the moment, their view of the history our high school students need to know includes: *The Letter From Birmingham Jail*, *The Gettysburg Address*, and Abraham Lincoln’s *Second Inaugural Address*.

While these are all, of course, worthy objects for deeper reading and the like, they do not, to my mind, fully encompass the knowledge of the *Magna Carta*, the *Constitution of the United States*, the Battle of the Bulge and of Iwo Jima and of Okinawa, or the Women’s Christian Temperance Movement, or the U.S. transcontinental railroad, or the Panama Canal, or woman suffrage or the Great Depression, or a number of other interesting historical circumstances our students perhaps should know about.

Nor does it seem to call for much knowledge about William Penn, or Increase Mather, or George Washington, or Alexander Hamilton, or Robert E. Lee, or Ulysses S. Grant, or Thomas Edison, or Elizabeth Cady Stanton, or Dwight David Eisenhower, or several hundreds of other historical figures who might be not only interesting, but also important for students to be familiar with. In short, from what I have seen, the Common Core Vision of necessary historical knowledge includes what any high school Junior ought to be able to read in one afternoon (i.e. three short “historical documents”).

Ignorance of history has, it may be said, been almost an American tradition, and many Americans have discovered in their travels, and to their embarrassment, that people in other countries may know more about our history than they do. We have, many times in the past, even invaded countries our soldiers knew next to nothing about, and sometimes that has been a disadvantage for us. But if the Common Core doesn’t care if our students know any United States history, they are certainly not going to mind if our students don’t know the history of any other country either.

But even in schools were history is still taught, and where the Common Core has not yet sunk its roots, one area of history is perhaps neglected more than any other. Was it Trotsky who said: “You may not be interested in War, but War is interested in you.”? And Publius Flavius Vegetius argued that: “If you want peace, prepare for war.” In many of our school history departments, military history is regarded as “militaristic,” and the thought, apparently, is that if we tell our students nothing about war, then war will simply go away.

History doesn’t seem to support that notion, and if war does come to us again, it might be useful for students in places other than our Military Academies to know something about military history. In addition, military history tells absorbing stories of some of the most inspiring efforts ever made in the history of mankind. We talk a fair amount these days about our Wounded Warriors and about what we owe to our veterans, past and present, but for some odd reason, that seldom translates into the responsibility to teach military history, at least to some minimal extent, to the students in our public high schools.

It is quite clear to me that ignorance of history does not make history go away, and ignorance of the lessons of history does not make us better prepared to understand the issues of our time. And certainly, in spite of whatever dreams and wishes are out there, ignorance of war has not ever made, and quite probably will not make, war go away. We want to honor our veterans, but we do not do so by erasing knowledge of our wars, past and present, from our high school history curriculum, whatever the pundits who are bringing us the Common Core may think, about and plan for, the teaching of history.

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**YOUNG PEOPLE CAN’T LEARN FROM HISTORY ANY MORE BECAUSE HISTORY IS NO LONGER TAUGHT AS A REQUIRED SUBJECT IN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS.**

Theodore “Dutch” J. Van Kirk was the navigator on the “Enola Gay” when it dropped the bomb at Hiroshima, Japan, and is the last surviving member of the crew. This really happened last week. Dutch was asked to speak at a grammar school this past week. The young teacher introduced him by saying the the speaker was a veteran of World War Eleven.(as in WWII). Dutch stood up and walked out of the school without saying a word.

**Editor’s Note:**
This little item may be unreal; is it reality?
Are Public Schools in Decline? No—Unless You Push Them Downhill

Diane Ravitch, who addressed the NCSS Annual Conference in 2011, has a new book, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools*, published by Knopf. A preeminent education historian, Ravitch is a former assistant secretary of education in the first Bush administration. She spent years advocating for privatization, standardized testing, the charter school movement and federal legislation that implemented those strategies. As she reviewed the data, she had a profound change of mind: “those strategies were not working and were threatening the destruction of the American public school system.” In *Reign of Error*, Ravitch argues that “the crisis in American education is not a crisis of academic achievement but a concerted effort to destroy public schools in this country. “The purpose of the book, she notes, is to answer four questions. First, is American education in crisis? Second, is American education failing and declining? Third, what is the evidence for the reforms now being promoted by the federal government and adopted in many states? Fourth, what should we do to improve our schools and the lives of children?

In a recent interview, Ravitch said, “Let me tell you what I think everyone needs to know: American public education is a huge success. Test scores have never been higher than they are today for white children, black children, Hispanic children and Asian children. High school graduation rates have never been higher than they are today for all of those groups. Our schools are not failing; they are very successful.” In the chapter, “Our Schools are at Risk,” she writes, “Public education is not broken. It is not failing or declining. The diagnosis is wrong, and the solutions of the corporate reformers are wrong. Our urban schools are in trouble because of concentrated poverty and racial segregation.

But public education is not ‘broken.’ Public education is in a crisis only so far as society is and only so far as this new narrative of crisis has destabilized it.”

In his September 26 *New York Times* book review, Jonathon Kozol wrote, “In her zeal to deconstruct that narrative, Ravitch takes on almost all the well-known private-sector leaders and political officials—among them Arne Duncan, Joel Klein, Bill Gates, Wendy Kopp, and Michelle Rhee—who have given their encouragement, or barrels of their money, to the privatizing drive. It isn’t likely they’ll be sending her bouquets. Those, on the other hand, who have grown increasingly alarmed at seeing public education bartered off piece by piece, and seeing schools and teachers thrown into a state of siege, will be grateful for this cri de coeur—a fearless book, a manifesto and a call to battle.’


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**Education Week’s blogs**  **Curriculum Matters**

**New Program Helps Teachers Bring History of World War I to Life**

**By Alyssa Morones on September 23, 2013 4:38 PM**

Teachers and students alike will have the chance to see World War I history in a new light thanks to a new teacher-scholar program aimed at developing engaging and innovative lesson plans to be distributed to classrooms across the nation. The collaboration, called the Transatlantic Teacher Scholars Program: Change over Time and Place in the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery and Memorial, will draw focus to the details of this oft-forgotten war’s rich history. The program, through a partnership that brings together the American Battle Monuments Commission with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Virginia Tech, selected 12 middle and high school teachers from North Carolina and Virginia to participate. The educators will work with education experts from the two universities plus Sweet Briar College to develop a hands-on curriculum based around the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery and Memorial in Verdun, France.

“We have a lot of different teachers from a lot of different backgrounds to help identify the most useful format that other teachers will want,” said Andy Mink, executive director of LEARN NC, which serves as the primary professional development center for the school of education at UNC-Chapel Hill.

The collaboration was made possible through a contract award of over $350,000 from the American Battle Monuments Commission, a federal agency established by Congress to manage the United States’ overseas military cemeteries, memorials, monuments, and markers. The “experiential professional development program” will provide resources and support for the teachers to develop lessons grounded in best practices. Emerging instructional technologies, such as geospatial software and augmented reality, will be incorporated to enhance the interactive curriculum for students that will foster a deeper understanding of historical events.

“It’s different than students seeing [the cemetery] in their imaginations. In those 14,000 headstones, there’s a lot of individual stories,” said Mink. “We can reanimate them through these technologies.”

In addition to two in-person retreats, the teachers will work online remotely throughout the year to take professional development courses focused on content and skills training and to interact with one another. The teachers will visit this site at the end of the collaboration in May to test and tailor the new curriculum. “We want to create a curriculum, but we also want to transform teachers,” said Mink. “We want them to be heard and be a part of these projects, to create a community of people producing innovative new work.”

Global Hot Topics-Teacher Workshops

Today CT’s social studies teachers need information and tools for teaching critical issues in our rapidly changing global environment!

WACCT is partnering with the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies to provide two workshops for middle school and high school teachers on global hot topics. Teacher workshops will be held in conjunction with two of our programs and will feature topic experts, master teachers who will discuss instructional strategies, and educational resources.

February 26th, 2014
Understanding Today’s Muslim Societies: Fact vs. Fiction
Speaker: Ellen Lust, Professor at Yale University
Moderator: Heidi Hadsell, President of Hartford Seminary

April 1, 2014
WikiLeaks, Global Cyber Terrorism and the Rights and Responsibilities of the Individual in the Internet Age
Speaker: Lawrence Husick, Co-Chairman Foreign Policy Research Institute
Moderator: Arthur House, Chairman CT Public Utilities Regulatory Authority

Workshop: 3:30-6:30 p.m. Program: 6:30-7:30 p.m.
$15.00, Snacks and light dinner provided
The Mark Twain House & Museum, 351 Farmington Ave Hartford, CT
Email epech@ctwac.org call 860-241-6118 to register
Validate your scholars’ achievements in a new way…

Start a Rho Kappa Chapter Today!

RHO KAPPA National Social Studies Honor Society is the only national organization for high school juniors and seniors that recognizes excellence in the field of social studies. Membership in RHO KAPPA is an honor bestowed upon students by a local chapter for accomplishments in social studies and overall academic achievement. Any accredited high school can apply to start a chapter, through which students will be inducted into the RHO KAPPA Social Studies Honor Society.

For more information visit rhokappa.socialstudies.org or call 301-588-1800 x 107 or e-mail at rhokappa@ncss.org.

Professional Opportunities

Prepare for College, Career, and Civic Life

Hot Topic

Bitcoin: Funny Money or the Real Deal?

Bitcoin, the virtual currency that was the subject of recent Congressional hearings, has all the makings of a good movie: a mysterious inventor, super-secret cryptography, a roller coaster exchange rate, and even a criminal entrepreneur who calls himself Dread Pirate Roberts after the character in “The Princess Bride.” An added plus? It’s a good way to interest students in the study of how monetary institutions work.

FTE’s latest hot topic, Bitcoin; Funny Money or the Real Deal?, uses the economic way of thinking and a clip from the CBS drama, The Good Wife, to investigate whether bitcoin is “funny money or the real deal.”

To access the student and teacher guide Bitcoin: Funny Money or the Real Deal?, visit “How To Use FTE - Gooru Collections” or the Hot Topics page on the FTE website.

IMPORTANT TEACHER-TRAINING & TRAVEL SUPPORT NEWS:

2014 STUDY CANADA Summer Institute for K-12 Educators – A Capital View of Canada: Nations within a Nation

June 26-July 1, 2014 in Ottawa, ON (3N) and Montréal, QC (2N), Canada

$600 Registration Cost – Travel Support Available Visit: http://www.k12studycanada.org/scsi.htm

Registration is now open to participate in “STUDY CANADA”, a 3 quarter credit/40 clock hour professional development course offered by Western Washington University that provides teachers with an excellent foundation for teaching about our northern neighbor. For the past 35 years, teachers, librarians, social studies supervisors and education faculty from across the U.S. have attended this renowned program to develop a better understanding of Canada, gain global perspectives of civic issues, and receive numerous resources for curriculum development.

The program’s subtitle, “A Capital View of Canada: Nations within a Nation”, reflects the 6-day workshop’s special focus on multiculturalism and its location in Canada’s capital, Ottawa, and the country’s second largest city, Montréal. Participants will not only learn from distinguished faculty and government officials but also experience Canada’s culture, history and environment through unique activities not possible through regular tourism. The registration cost includes tuition for credits/clock hours (if needed), instruction, 5 nights’ hotel accommodation, breakfast daily, most course activities and one-way transportation from Ottawa to Montréal, Quebec.

The draft agenda, a detailed program guide and feedback as well as photos from previous workshops can be viewed online. To register, simply download the registration form and mail it with full payment to Western Washington University as instructed online. Check your eligibility for a $200 travel award as well and, once you have registered, apply separately as instructed.

Contact tina.storer@wwu.edu for a personal response to program and financial support inquiries.
NERC 45 Update
June Coutu, Executive Secretary, MCSS and NERC Conference Coordinator

NERC 45 is well on its way to being reality. The Previews were mailed in October. However, as hard as we try, we know that these books do not reach everyone. So pass the word.

NERC 45, Social Studies in the Balance, will be held April 7-9, 2014 at the Sturbridge Host Hotel in Sturbridge Massachusetts. Monday consists of full day workshops. These include:: Building the Profession: Common Core Materials and Strategies for the New Social Studies Teacher, by Mimi Stephens; Differentiated Instruction in the Social Studies, by Christine Hoyle; The Civil War: Compelling Resources from America’s Library, by Suzanne Judson-Whitehouse; Changes to the Test (US AP), by Tracey Wilson; and Painless: A Survival Guide to the Dreaded History Project, by Annie Davis (presented in Waltham, MA at the National Archives. If you have been in sessions run by these women before, you know that you are in for a fabulous presentation. Monday will also feature a keynote address by Dr. Vernon Domingo of Bridgewater State University entitled “Advocating for the Social Studies.”

Tuesday’s morning speaker will be Jonathan Green, author of “Murder in the High Himalaya.” His topic is “Discussing Human Rights Issues in Social Studies Classes.” At the NEHTA luncheon, Walter Woodward, Kidger Award winner from the University of Connecticut will speak. Later in the day John Knudsen, the recipient of the Teacher/Educator Kidger award will speak at the NEHTA Reception which is open to all conference attendees. And finally, Vernon Domingo will lead a Policy Forum on Geography Education at 7 p.m.

Wednesday offers Ken C. Davis, of “Don’t Know Much About” fame to the conference. This day will offer a special session for supervisors, and the first ever NERC New England Placement Job Fair. And, of course, both Tuesday and Wednesday feature an exhibits hall filled with commercial vendors, not-for-profits, museums, university outreach, and Earth View (the traveling globe).

Three days packed with new ideas, new materials, camaraderie, and networking. What’s not to love about NERC?


This Year’s Theme: Social Studies in the Balance
Gorman Lee, NERC 2014 Chair

The focus of this year’s theme is to investigate how social studies teachers and administrators can balance several educational priorities, including the Common Core State Standards, and yet maintain the importance and value of a rich and rigorous social studies education for all of our students. For the past couple of years, there has been a collective and concerted effort from the national and state departments of education and school districts nationwide to embrace, adopt, and incorporate the Common Core Standards for Literacy in History and Social Studies in grades K through 12.

In recent years we have seen both regional and national social studies conferences offer workshops and informational sessions for social studies teachers and administrators dealing with how the Common Core will impact the social studies curriculum. While it is commendable that such efforts have been made to include history and social studies in the Common Core standards, there is a real concern that the social studies will primarily serve as the contextual backdrop for the subjects of English language arts, mathematics, and science, engineering, and technology.

A primary goal of the 2014 Northeast Regional Conference for the Social Studies is to affirm the social studies as a major academic content area that is equal to English language arts, mathematics, and science, engineering, and technology. We recognize the importance of literacy, math, and science and technology; however, in order to fully nurture the whole child to succeed in the world of work in the twenty-first century, the individual child must acquire, possess, and demonstrate rich knowledge and deep understanding of who he is and how he relates to his community, society, country, and world. Students must demonstrate mastery of their individual rights, roles, and responsibilities as active and productive citizens, and that requires a rich knowledge of their nation’s history.

This year, the Massachusetts Council for the Social Studies and the Northeast Regional Conference for the Social Studies focus on balancing our educational priorities that promote the importance of literacy and learning for understanding and continue to maintain a rich and rigorous social studies education in our K-12 classrooms. The workshops and sessions offered in the 2014 Northeast Regional Conference for the Social Studies help provide the much needed support and resources to enable the social studies classroom teacher to deliver meaningful and effective learning opportunities to all learners.
Membership in CCSS entitles you to:

- Reduced Registration for the CCSS Fall Conference
- Reduced Registration for the Northeast Regional Conference for the Social Studies (NERC)
- Convenient access to the Yankee Post, the CCSS online newsletter
- Opportunity to apply for “mini-grants” of up to $500 for innovative curriculum in social studies and other special projects
- Opportunity to meet colleagues and develop a network of professional friends and associates
- Ability to keep up-to-date with developments in the social studies.

If you have always wanted to become a member of NCSS, now is the time to act. New membership subscriptions to NCSS will also give you membership benefits from Connecticut Council for the Social Studies for one year—a $20 savings. This offer applies to only new NCSS Regular or new Comprehensive members only who send in their form to CCSS. Joint member benefits include:

- All CCSS benefits
- Regular and Comprehensive membership in NCSS includes a subscription to Social Education or Social Studies and the Young Learner
- NCSS Comprehensive membership also includes all bulletins published during the membership year.

Please complete membership form. Make checks payable to CCSS and mail this form to CCSS, P.O. Box 5031, Milford, CT 06460.

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CCSS Membership (July 1- June 30) NEW NCSS Membership
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