



THE FUTILE QUEST FOR COVERAGE

By Beth Slutsky, CHSSP Academic Program Coordinator

Many teachers like California's new History-Social Science Framework, which is scheduled for adoption by the State Board of Education later this summer. Teachers are also worried that they'll never have enough time to cover the content detailed in each grade-level chapter in the draft. As one teacher asked us last week: "How are we supposed to get through all of this material?" As we've been writing the latest draft of the Framework, we've tried to make course descriptions teachable and manageable, despite the 180-day calendar. While we don't have all the answers to the depth vs. breadth debate, we do have some suggestions for you to consider.

1. Start with the Framing Questions. Teachers who have seen the latest drafts of the Framework have told us how much they like the framing questions – the grade-level and unit-level questions of historical significance that organize and unite content. Questions like "how did the environment affect the expansion of agriculture, population, cities, and empires in Mesoamerica and the Andean region? And why did the Maya civilization, the Aztec Empire and the Inca Empire gain more power over people and territories?" (7th grade) underscore the importance of learning about the past through investigation and learning to build arguments based on multiple sources. Using framing questions cuts time that must be devoted to discrete units of study, creates a meaningful narrative of the past, and allows for connections to come more easily.

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material?"*

2. Take seriously the concept of depth over breadth. History teachers understandably feel stretched between two competing demands: 1) Common Core Standards, English Language Development Standards, and some really wonderful history lessons encouraging depth of study over breadth, and 2) state content standards suggesting breadth of content. Upon first glance, some might look at the volume of the content in the Framework and still feel the tension. However, we firmly come down on the side of depth, especially when there's a big payoff in content themes over time. Imagine an 8th grade classroom teacher that maps her year around the question: What did freedom mean to the nation's founders and how did it change over time? In every unit, whether it's the roots and legacies of the American Revolution, to the Early Republic, to western expansion, to sectionalism – the sources, activities, and comparisons all relate back to a changing concept of freedom. With freedom as the thread that ties together a complex and nuanced 19th century America, teachers can begin to feel more comfortable spending less time on tangentially related material, or focusing that material on the theme. In other words, the significance of something like the emergence of the Republican Party in the 1850s is told through the lens of how it transforms our notions of freedom, so we need not develop and tell students to memorize every available piece of information about it. Thus, the teacher is making choices about depth, and also modeling to students how to select, organize, and prioritize certain sources; these are the same skills that they will also be honing as they move through the curriculum.

3. Stay focused on significance. As teachers map out the year to highlight key themes, one way to avoid getting drawn too deeply into topics they'd rather not is to stay focused on significance. Framing

One good thing about the job of the history teacher these days is that in the absence of a state content assessment, the time is ripe for teachers to use their own expertise and make choices that make sense for their own classrooms. The framework provides the guideposts on how to relate the material, concepts, and skills together, and the teacher can now begin mapping its implementation.

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questions can help with this. Imagine the 10th grade teacher who is trying to move quickly through imperialism, yet who also feels obligated to develop it on nearly every continent. The questions “why did industrialized nations embark on imperial ventures? How did colonization work? And how was imperialism connected with race and religion?” provide teachers with ways to navigate this historically rich yet complicated era and put it in a comparative context. By exploring the desirability of tropical products like rubber and tea, and then tracing how these commodities led to the expansion of empires, which influenced racial and religious justifications for colonization develops large concepts and relationships with case studies without having to cover every topic.

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4. Be selective about coverage; it will help you finish the year. One of our site directors, Stacey Greer, has often responded to teachers who say “I always run out of time at

the end of the year no matter what I do,” with “Even if you run out of time, you’re still making choices.” This is such a simple and smart way to continually remind oneself that rather than passively make the choice to not finish the chronological order in 11th grade, for example, that we need to actively decide how to manage the content (points #1, #2, #3 can help with this). For example, one of my favorite topics in recent history is the 1980s – the political realignment of the New Right and the “Moral Majority,” deindustrialization, “Star Wars” and the end of the Cold War, globalization, and of course Madonna. But to today's students, the 1980s is the distant past, and the relevance of the 1990s and 2000s, especially a contextual understanding of the effects of September 11, 2001, are absolutely essential if we are to prepare them to understand why the world looks the way it does today. I encourage the use of framing questions as a way to be selective about coverage, especially as the school year is coming to an end.