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Urban Education at a Crossroads: Changing How We Teach History

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Urban Education in America at a Crossroads
Changing How We Teach History

By

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Introduction

Urban education in the United States of America is at a crossroads. Increased emphasis on the results of high stakes standardized tests in conjunction with higher failure and dropout rates, have placed urban education at the forefront of the national discussion concerning education reform. Like other issues that involve public dollars, the issue of education reform in urban centers has become highly politicized and is featured in political stump speeches from Maine to California.

Discussions of education in the political theatre are nothing new. In his first political speech following his failed run at the Illinois General Assembly in 1823, Abraham Lincoln stated that: "Upon the subject of education, not presuming to dictate any plan or system respecting it, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in." He went on to conclude "For my part, I desire to see the time when education, and by its means, morality, sobriety, enterprise and industry, shall become much more general than at present" (Abraham Lincoln, New Salem, Illinois March 9, 1832). Contemporary politicians echo this sentiment as well. The 2010 State of the Union Address focused on education reform. President Obama stated that: "This year, we have broken through the stalemate between left and right by launching a national competition to improve our schools. The idea here is simple: instead of rewarding failure, we only reward success. Instead of funding the status quo, we

only invest in reform - reform that raises student achievement, inspires students to excel in math and science, and turns around failing schools that steal the future of too many young Americans, from rural communities to inner-cities. In the 21st century, one of the best anti-poverty programs is a world-class education. In this country, the success of our children cannot depend more on where they live than their potential" (Barack Obama, 2010 State of the Union). It is clear that education reform is front and center in the national consciousness. There is no shortage of ideas on what must be done to improve education. What is in question is which plan, or combination of ideas would be most effective in improving the ever devolving system that is currently employed. Charter Schools, Small Learning Communities (SLCs), Schools as Sanctuaries, after school Enrichment programs, privatization and monetary rewards for good grades are some of the concepts that will be discussed here. Nowhere is education reform more necessary than in this county's urban centers. The two focuses of this research review will be first to discuss the current state of research concerning urban education reform, what is being done, what is working, and what is not. The second focus of this review will be to analyze methods that can be introduced into the social studies classroom in order to reduce and or abolish the achievement gap between urban students and their suburban counterparts.

In compiling research for this study, the writer accessed numerous databases such as Education Research Complete, JSTOR, and Academic Search Complete. Multiple keyword combinations were employed, including but not limited to: "Urban Education", "Urban Education Reform", "No Child Left

Behind", "College Preparedness", "Urban Education and College Readiness", "Urban Education and Economic Rewards", "Green for Grades", "Socially Responsive", "Socially Conscious", "Culturally Responsive Teaching" as well as "Teaching History Backwards" and "Reverse History" along with various combinations of each.

The topic of education reform, specifically in urban education is not a new one. Searching the above returned tens of thousands of articles dating back decades. Recent developments in education reform, particularly in the last ten years following the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, made it necessary to limit the search field to 2001 to the present. While researching, the writer was specifically concerned with current trends in education reform, all of which has been impacted by NCLB. The volume of research available contributed to the elimination of pre-2001 research as well. The primarily focus was on the current direction of urban education. Although important to establish a foundation for the state of research on this topic, by limiting the date range, a manageable number of studies were returned. Borderline cases that discussed these topics were readily available. By using the search terms "No Child Left Behind" the writer returned thousands of articles. Choosing to focus not specifically on NCLB, but the ways in which the legislation has directed the decisions being made in the field, the writer eliminated articles whose focus was directed at the legislation itself. Discussions centering on the NCLB legislation have been exhaustive. Such articles are not, however, the focus of this research and therefore have been omitted. When researching

alternative methods in social studies, the writer used key phrases such as "social studies in urban education" and "teaching history backwards". The writer chose articles from a number of journals, including but not limited to *Education, High School Journal, Education & Urban Society*, *District Administration*, and *Educational Evaluation & Policy Analysis*.

As in any other field of research, there are technical terms and phrases that appear throughout the text. The first phrase that must be discussed is "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) which refers to 2001 federal legislation that introduced standards based reform founded on the belief that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education. NCLB requires states to develop assessments in basic skills to be given to all students in specific grades. The outcome of these assessments can have an impact on funding. Another reoccurring phrase is Socio Economic Status (SES) which is often mentioned in conjunction with student who are struggling academically. The terms Poverty, and Extreme Poverty are also used to define what economic status a student's family displays.

A more recent term that has been used in education reform is Small Learning Community (SLC). A Small Learning Community, also referred to as a School-Within-A-School, is a form of school structure that is increasingly common in secondary schools. The goal is to subdivide large school populations into smaller, autonomous groups of students and teachers. The primary purpose of restructuring secondary schools into SLCs is to create a more personalized

learning environment to better meet the needs of students. Each community will often share the same teachers and student members from grade to grade.

Charter School is a term used to define primary or secondary schools that receive public money (and like other schools, may also receive private donations) but are not subject to some of the rules, regulations, and statutes that apply to other public schools. In exchange Charter Schools must produce some form of accountability for producing certain results, which are set forth in each school's charter. Other terms that appear in research articles particular to this topic include Data-in-a-Day, which refers to one researcher's method for obtaining large quantities of data in a timely manner and Table Top Theory which will be discussed in detail in this analysis. A firm understanding of technical jargon is imperative if one is to grasp the concepts that are being discussed in the research.

History

The history of urban education in the United States is as complex as the history of the United States themselves. Urban education reform has been taking place in America's cities as long as they have existed. In its earliest forms, education in America's cities looked little like what is known today. It wasn't until the 20th century that public education and the rapid population explosion in America's oldest urban centers converged to lay the foundation of what is known today as urban education. It is impossible to discuss the history of urban education without commenting on race and class. As Jean Anyon (1997) states:

Central cities now hold only 29% of the nation's population and comprise less than 12% of the national electorate. About 48% of the U.S. population lived in suburbs when the 1990 census was taken.

Most residents of large cities are African American or Latino. Of the nation's eight largest cities with a population of one million or more in 1990, only two, Philadelphia and San Diego, were less than half minority. This political isolation of American cities-and their minority populations-is accompanied by the isolation of poorer urban residents from the economic mainstream of middle-class jobs. (Anyon, 6)

It is this backdrop that frames the current situation in urban education. Political, social and economic pressures have pushed the system to its breaking point. This topic was chosen because this watershed moment is ripe for creative and inventive solutions. A discussion of some of these initiatives will follow. Failing schools and failing students as a result of an economically depressed population, have led to a continued downward trend in the success of urban school districts at large. As one author states: "The diminishing tax base drastically affected education funding in most industrial cities as early as the 1930s. The city property tax base (which provided the major funding for education) continued to deteriorate following the Great Depression and remains low today. (Anyon, 2005).

The last thirty years have seen a dramatic shift in the nature of the dialogue concerning education reform. One author states that: "The Reagan administration-commissioned a report, A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), lamented the nation's schools drowning in a "sea of mediocrity". In its aftermath came a series of state-level reforms aimed at increasing academic standards and implementing more stringent accountability measures" (Scott, Dimartino 435) These sweeping reforms led into systemic privatization and the eventual passage of NCLB. Progressive measures to improve public education in the U.S. date back to the waning years of the 19th century.

Synthesis

The broad changes that have taken place in the last generation have many faces and can be broken down into a number of differentiated categories. This study will focus on five of those areas. The first category that will be explored will be the current movement to small learning communities (SLCs), schools as sanctuaries and charter Schools. The second area of research that will be explored will be parents, peers and environmental factors that influence urban students. The third subset that will be investigated will be the growing trend towards privatization. This will include a discussion of educational management organizations (EMOs) and non-profit charter school management organizations (CMOs). The forth area of focus will be NCLB itself and its impact on the face of education reform currently. The final category that will be discussed will be the success or failure of urban schools in preparing their

students for post-secondary exploration. The purpose of this exercise is to gauge the current state of research on the direction that education reform is taking. There is no assumption that these areas represent an exclusive list. These categories represent the areas that this synthesis has focused on.

Currently there is a shift taking place in large urban districts. Schools are transitioning from large "catch all" schools or neighborhood schools to small learning communities (SLCs). These SLCs or schools within a school are research based transitions focusing on improving student's feelings of being a part of a community (Armstead, Bessell, Sembiante, Pacheco Plaza, 2010) The authors of this article explored why, despite the wide ranging prevalence of SLCs, student voices are largely absent from the discussion on school reform. The researchers investigated how students experience SLCs. The authors employed a participatory research method referred to as data-in-a-day. Utilizing the data-in-a-day process, the researchers had access to a large sample of students and captured a large spectrum of student experiences. According to the authors:

> "The SLC model not only provides a basis for a high-quality
> education as defined in scholarly research but also provides the
> environment desired by students. The SLC concept calls for small,
> interdisciplinary teaching and learning teams; rigorous and relevant
> curriculum and instruction; and a focus on inclusive programming
> and inclusive classroom practices" (Armstead et. al, 365).

The research was conducted in a large urban district in Florida, which had received funds to begin implementing SLCs between the years 2004 and 2008. There were 28 schools in the SLC program in this district. Of the schools in the district, 13 were selected to participate in the study, where the researchers employed the data-in-a-day process. Through the use of focus groups the authors were able to discern student's attitudes towards SLCs. Data-in-a-day is "a quick and efficient way of collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing a broad spectrum of data that can be utilized to evaluate the implementation of reforms in any organization" (Ginsberg, 2001). The researchers found that personalization which is a hallmark of SLCs, was lacking in freshman academies in the district being studied. This lack of personalization led to a general apathy towards the SLC environment. The authors conclude that SLCs are an excellent resource for addressing some of the issues that are prevalent in urban education. The authors go on to state however, that if they are not instituted correctly, SLCs do not work.

The SLC model can be particularly effective for social studies instruction. Patterson (2008) addressed how Small Learning Communities can impact social studies instruction. Patterson investigated how SLCs can impact democratic practices in the social studies classroom. Patterson stated: "In our new capacities as members of a growing SLC, we are curious about how this work might help us create the engaged social studies experiences we believe our students should have" (Patterson 111). As urban districts shift their focus towards the creation of SLCs, social studies teachers must begin to determine how this will impact classroom instruction and its effectiveness.

Antrop-Gonzalez (2006) built a similar case for small learning environments. The author discussed the "school as sanctuary" concept. McLauglin, Irby and Langman (1994) described this notion when they stated that: "Urban sanctuaries are environments in which people care and in which worth is assumed and individuals valued." Antrop-Gonzalez dissects the assumption that small schools/charter schools operate on the premise that culturally relevant pedagogy will lead to higher self esteem. Stating that: "Small schools operate on the notion that meaningful, interpersonal relations between students and teachers establish the necessary culture needed to foment the high academic achievement of urban youth" (Antrop-Gonzalez, 2006). Antrop-Gonzalez conducted a qualitative study of sanctuary schools. By conducting informal interviews and observations of classroom interactions, the author was able to conclude that "small/charter high schools have the potential to become sanctuaries when there are specific components in place, which are tantamount to a successful school culture. These components include the establishment of high-quality, interpersonal relationships between students and teachers, culturally relevant curricula that honor students' first language and culture, and where students can not be subjected to psychological or physical abuse by their peers and/or teachers" (297).

When the Obama administration came into office in 2008-2009, it did so riding a wave of small school/charter school reforms in urban districts. Payne and Knowles (2009) discuss the increased role of charter schools in recent years. The authors focus on the flexibility of charter schools, specifically in staffing,

autonomy as reasons for their effectiveness. The authors state that: "effective charter schools provide new schooling options for children and families who have had, historically, far too few" (228). The authors highlight the flexibility in staffing decisions that the administration of charter schools enjoy. The authors discuss a reorganization of labor, particularly teachers unions to find creative ways to keep the best teachers teaching the neediest students. De Luca, Hinshaw, & Raisch, C. (2009) found that as student need increased, average teacher salary decreased, meaning that the best teachers (in this case "best" meaning highest paid) are not in fact, teaching the neediest students. They employed Pearson's correlation analysis to address this question. The authors used average teacher salary as a means for determining teacher quality. The authors analyzed the percentage of disadvantaged students and the level of student achievement as a way of measuring student need. They conducted their research in the "Big 8" urban districts in the state of Ohio. They found that as the percentage of disadvantaged students increased, average teacher salary decreased. Inversely, as student achievement improved, so did average teacher salary. These finding suggest that the best teachers are not teaching the neediest students. They suggest a system of "Student-Based Funding" that would level the financial playing field in districts, allowing schools to improve teacher quality. As the authors state: "With the staff-based system, if collective bargaining agreements allow teachers, by seniority, to choose the building in which they prefer to teach and if veteran teachers cluster in the schools with the less needy students because they are easier to teach, then more money is allocated to the schools

with student who require less money to educate based on student need characteristics." The authors state that if money were allocated on a student-need basis, schools would have the ability to entice higher paid teachers to work there. Teacher effectiveness plays a key role in student success regardless of the size of the school setting or whether the school is publicly funded, or a charter school.

Teacher effectiveness is not the only factor that has a direct impact on the effectiveness of a school, and following, the success of the student. Somers, Owens & Piliawsky (2008) investigated individual and social factors that impacted urban African American school performance. Their results indicated that social support was mildly correlated with better grades, with parent and peer support the more important forms of support. The authors described urban African-American students as "not only economically poor, but also socially underserved" (2). The authors conducted their research by including 118 African American students (43 male, 75 female) in the 9th grade and employed the Children and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS). They measured five items: parent support, teacher support, classmate support, close friend support and general school support. The authors conclude that parent support is vitally important to student success. They state that: "There is a tendency for lower socio-economic status families to be unaware of their rights and roles in the school for a number of reasons. Oftentimes, lower income parents are reluctant to get involved in their child's education because they may not see themselves as part of their children's educational process" (8). The authors suggest that

legislation be enacted to ensure that school districts engage all families in the process. This plays into how a social studies teacher approaches working in this environment as well. It is the duty of the teacher to engage not only the student but their parent as well. This is especially true in high needs districts where students and their families have an increased need for communication between teachers and school.

Greene and Anyon (2010) built on this research when they discussed the importance of family support in determining student achievement. They emphasized that schools must acknowledge and account for the obstacles students face as a result of their economic situations. To this point, the authors state: "Without addressing the growing economic obstacles faced by students and families in low-income urban schools, goals such as the one in NCLB to have all students reading at grade level by 2014 are not feasible" (224). The authors conclude that improved economic resources would drastically increase the level of support a family could provide a student who hails from difficult economic straits. It is clear from the research that parents, peers and environments play crucial roles in the development of young learners. Any school reform effort that is undertaken must address all of the potential influences on a student's life. This is an area where a social studies teacher can have a massive impact. Social studies curriculums offer so much flexibility in what can be taught, therefore granting the instructor an immense amount of latitude in how they chose to shape instruction.

The third category that the research has been broken down into is the current trend towards privatization in education. Scott and DiMartino (2009) discussed the restructuring of New York City's schools. Privatization of public school is a rapidly growing topic of discussion and research. The authors discuss privatization when they state: "within the last three decades, however, educational privatization has been attached to an ideological argument about the superiority of the private sector over the public" (434). They discuss the slow move towards privatization that social services in the United States have undergone. The authors discuss a number of privatization typologies. The one they find the most instructive for use in the U.S. was described by Feigenbaum and Henig (1994). The authors state that: "Their typology employs three categories: pragmatic, tactical, and systemic" (437). The authors go on to describe the different roles that are played by varying interests in the privatization model. The research goes on to define how this privatization model has played out in practice, where it has been implemented in a number of schools in New York City. The authors conclude:

> Although it is too early to draw final conclusions about privatization restruction in New York City, it is clear that the increasingly privatized leadership and management of the district and many of its schools has raised questions that require closer attention and public deliberation. These include the role of democratic governance, the state of educational leadership, and the implications for racial equity in public education. (446)

The authors conclude that privatization of public education requires a certain degree of blurring of public and private enterprise. The researchers emphasize that how much blurring takes place requires further investigation. Jones (2008) discussed this balance, choosing to implement the "table top theory" to explain the nature of the complex balance between public and private. Jones found that "Increasingly, school boards, with the support of state boards of education and influence from the business and philanthropic sector, are outsourcing curriculum and instructional matters to private for-profit companies and non-profit organizations" (319). The author's table top theory is based on an educational ecosystem, which implies interdependence between parties such and government, community-based organizations, schools and business. When taking stock of this system of relationships, the author states: "Too often educational analysis leaves out a critical understanding of the role of the private sector in education and school reform" (323). The author employed a case-study method when researching the effects of privatization in the St. Louis school district. The author found that the school was in worse shape after private takeover. The author found that too much of urban education reform takes a top-down approach, which does not attend to the importance of relationships between students and teachers.

It is impossible to discuss contemporary urban education reform without analyzing the effects of the No Child Left Behind legislation (2001). Price (2010) investigated whether NCLB standards effectively reflect the quality of a school. The author found that one side effect of NCLB has been school resegregation,

which has resulted from the provisions that allow for the creation of new charter schools. The author investigates internal and external factors that lead to the success or failure of urban schools. The author discusses the impact that the results of standardized tests have on teachers, stating: "None of these qualitative or the quanitative studies directly measures the effects of teacher quality on school success; instead they measure the effects of teacher quality on test performance of individual students then extrapolate those effects, treating them as a direct indicator of school quality" (748) The author goes on to state that there are many factors that impact student success in school, none of which are taken into account by NCLB. The author used data from the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and employs a number of statistical analyses to determine that the labeling formula for NCLB is unfair and biased. The author concludes that: "embedded discrimination revealed here in the labeling of schools needs to capture the attention of the public and legislatures before the renewal of the NCLB Act" (806).

Wallace (2009) explored creative means which school districts are employing to help close the achievement gap and succeed under the guidelines of NCLB. Wallace investigated the impact of financial incentive programs on student success. The article states that today's educators have adopted parents' "stick and carrot" approach to education, where parents would state that if you get good grades you will be rewarded. This concept has been institutionalized in some public schools. "Pay-for-Performance" programs are used to motivate student's academic success. Defenders of these types of programs state that the

costs of education for students are front-loaded, whereas the rewards can be delayed by many years. Pay for performance programs offer immediate, tangible rewards to students who are increasingly disengaged from the education process. Leech and Fulton (2008) investigated the necessity under NCLB for there to be a sense of shared decision making between school leadership and teacher faculty. According to the authors, for change to take place in a school setting, it is necessary for leadership to involve all members of the staff in facilitating that change. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the leadership behaviors of secondary school principals in a large urban district and their perceptions of the level of shared decision making practiced at their schools. Increased involvement of employees and other stakeholders in organizational decision making is a practice that has gained much popularity over the past two decades. The authors highlight the need to treat schools as communities, not as formal organizations. NCLB has placed increased strain on urban districts to creatively and effectively improve student performance. NCLBs focus on standardized test results has created a culture of "teaching to the test".

The final category to be investigated is urban school districts effectiveness at preparing student's for their post-secondary lives. Papay and Willett (2010) discussed the impact that high school exit examinations have on poor-performing urban students. The researchers found that there were specific factors related to an urban environment that influenced the effect of exit examinations on future outcomes for students. In wealthier suburban schools, there was no relationship.

This is significant in that there are socio-environmental factors that influence student success in an urban education environment that do not exist in wealthier suburban districts. The researchers used data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education database to answer three essential questions. The first being, does failing exit exams as 10th graders make students on the margin for passing less likely to graduate from high school. The second question being, does failing the high school exit examination as a 10th grader make students on the margin of passing more likely to be retained in grade or to drop out of high school the year after the test? The final question was, do students who fail the 10th grade mathematics exit examination persist in retaking the examination and succeed in passing these retests? The researchers used a sample of 66,347 eligible students. The researchers found that passing the ELA and mathematics exams had a major impact on long term outcomes for students in urban districts. The authors found that success on exit examinations played a critical role in what students were able to choose to do following high school.

Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca (2009) discussed the role that urban high schools play in preparing students for college. The authors found that high schools are beginning to use student success in college as a measure of their own performance. The authors proposed a system that would create a data collection and tracking system used to chart student progress across schools and districts both have positives and negative side effects. In this article, the authors look at different definitions of college readiness and focus on challenges students

face. They begin with addressing racial, ethnic and income disparities in college readiness. Next they explore the different types of knowledge and skill sets necessary for students to succeed at a post-secondary level. And finally they focus on what changes in education policy are necessary to improve college readiness among urban youth. The authors examine data concerning the percentages of high school graduates who immediately enrolled in college, differentiated by race, income and ethnicity. The research methods used were similar in both studies and were effective in answering the research questions.

There are any number of proposals for how best to deliver instruction in a social studies classroom in urban districts. The writer has presented here a series of issues that currently face urban education. What has been little discussed is what can be done specifically in a content area classroom to address some of the issues that have been presented. In this era of drastic education reforms, something must be done in the classroom to address students diminishing interest in learning about the past. To address this issue, the writer presents the concept of teaching history backwards, from present to past. The pedagogical purpose of this practice is many fold. The concept of "scaffolding" is based on building from a student's prior knowledge. Social studies teachers ignore this process and begin from a place of ignorance. Contemporary students have a very limited knowledge base as it relates to the distant past. The concept of teaching history from present to past would build on student's knowledge of the modern world. The instructor is then able to ask "how did we get here?" Misco and Patterson (2009) explored the concept of teaching

history with a reverse chronology. The authors stated that: "Many teachers still primarily offer textbook-based classroom experiences that focus on recitation with few opportunities for deliberation, while students too often perceive historical content as detached from their interests, concerns, and problems consistently valuing other subjects over social studies" (71). Teaching a reverse chronology of historical events is not a new idea, but one that needs revisiting. The issues that have been presented in this research point to a need for radical changes in how we teach history. According to Misco and Patterson: "The problem of disconnected, meaningless, and boring learning experiences is all too real. Teaching historical content in the social studies from arbitrary beginning and end points may exacerbate student disinterest and engagement in historical content" (87). The authors conclude that: "The reverse chronology method retains historical inquiry as the disciplinary focus of social studies classes, but it seeks to build connections with the meaningful, engaging, and provocative orientation of issues-centered instruction" (87). Teaching history employing this method would also present the instructor with opportunities to expand student's knowledge of current events. It is often difficult to introduce current event fluidly into history instruction. This method of instruction will allow students to grasp complex patterns of causal relationships, which is something that is difficult to attain in traditional past to present instruction. Students are much more likely to ask 'why' when pressed to account for the current state of affairs than they are to ask what is likely to happen in the future. Today's youth feel disconnected from the past. The purpose of teaching history from present to past is to increase that

connection. By beginning with the present, the instructor can start from a place of familiarity and build on events, people and places that students have prior knowledge of. Present to past instruction will provide students with context, which is necessary to increase understanding at a higher level than can be achieved otherwise.

Conclusion

There is no shortage of research in the field of urban education reform. The database searches I conducted returned tens of thousands of articles. The question is what percentage of that research is of high quality, employing quantitative data as a means of analyzing the effectiveness of the vast number of programs and pedagogical practices aimed at improving a system or urban education that could be fairly described as broken. There is little disagreement between researchers about the state of education in America's urban centers. The current system is broken, there is near consensus on this. What is to be done about it is where the debate begins. Presented here is research concerning Small Learning Communities, the role of parents/environment, the privatization of education, No Child Left Behind, and the success urban schools have in preparing their students for life after high school, as well as possible instruction alternatives aimed at addressing the achievement gap. Two areas that require more research are the success of school in preparing students for college, and the efficacy of non-profit enrichment programs in improving student's school experience and improving academic outcomes. Creative instruction methods such as teaching history from present to past and the inclusion of multimedia

instruction are needed to address the issues presented here. It is clear that there are many push and pull factors at play in the lives of young urban students. For education reform to be effective in the lives of students whose lives consist of a complex web of positive and negative influences, it must take into account the time in a student's life that is not spent in the school. The time that students are in classroom must be addressed as well. It is the duty of the classroom instructor to present curriculum materials in ways that are meaningful to students. This can be done in a number of ways, including multimedia based instruction and present to past teaching of history.

Original Component

The crisis in urban education is most clearly apparent in the failure of urban students to succeed in the social studies. 21st century student's myopic worldview causes them to lack an understanding of events, both past and present that shape their worlds. Study after study reveals that the education system has been unsuccessful in addressing the very real problem of student's failing in the social studies. A traditional chronological approach to teaching history is unsuccessful in creating a foundation of knowledge that students are able to build upon. Because contemporary high school students lack foundational knowledge of history, a succession of names, dates and places become nothing more than facts to memorized, but not internalized. Students are unable to make connections to broader historical trends. Much of the negative attitudes that students direct towards historical instruction can be attributed to their inability to

see the importance in their own lives. A traditional chronological progression tends to employ primary documents and artifacts that students cannot connect with because they may lack prior knowledge on a topic. Through comparative analysis, students will be able to make connections between historical events and movements that on the surface may appear unrelated, but in fact are comparable. Students will also have a foundation of knowledge from which to draw upon when presented with primary documents. By applying a reverse-chronology approach to teaching history, students ground their understanding of past events in something concrete from the world around them. The goal of this approach is to make connections between contemporary issues and historical events that are related. Parallels will be drawn between historical and current events in increase student understanding.

Teaching through current events will be one aspect to this approach. Students will gain an understanding of current events and the ways in which they are important both historically and currently. The second feature of this approach will be to connect current events to historical parallels. By connecting well-understood current events to unfamiliar historical events students will have a foundation of knowledge from which to draw upon. Misco and Patterson state that: "Once we move beyond chronological linearity and problemize multiple and varied antecedents, causes, and implications, the ontological unity of past, present and future can become more effectively intermingled" (79). Making connections to prior knowledge will increase student understanding of unfamiliar topics.

The current educational focus on standardized testing as a means of discerning student learning has clouded the issue of what is the true goal of social studies instruction. Contemporary students lack critical thinking skills and the ability to solve real world problems. One of the main reasons for this is that students are not challenged to think creatively about the world around them. The question remains, what is the ultimate goal of social studies instruction? Are we working towards students memorizing and regurgitating facts? Or, are we working towards creating life-long learners who are curious about the world around them and have the tools to understand that world at their disposal? These questions are not simply rhetorical. It is the responsibility of the education system to prepare students for life in a democratic society, where they will be asked to be participatory members in their communities and the nation at large. As Misco and Patterson note: "The reverse chronology approach is also closely aligned with the citizenship-oriented aims of social studies education. Social studies education should ultimately create an expanded view of humanity and an individual's experience as it relates to humanity while grappling with issues of the common good" (82). Through reverse chronology instruction, teachers will have the ability to teach the pertinent facts while also harnessing critical thinking skills and broaden student's scope of understanding of the world around them. Student-centered lesson design will be key, as the students will help guide what current event topics they find most important. The instructor will be charged with connecting those current issues with their historical foundations and or with historical parallels. The instructor will create a web of connected events and

movements from which students will be able to draw understanding and draw their own conclusions about cause and effect and historical causation.

As history progresses, there is more to information to cover. Each year that passes adds additional information to the totality of "history". Because there is more to cover, and the same amount of time to cover it, logically something will be left uncovered. In a traditional historical progression model, teachers start from point A and teach until the time comes to begin exam review. In an American history classroom, this may mean the instructor begins with "Discovery" and progresses until the Vietnam War when they run out of time and must begin exam review. What is lost is everything that has happened in the interceding years. The Cold War, the Gulf War, The Election of 2000, September 11th, 2001, The Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the 2008 Election and many other important historical topics of the last 40 years are left uncovered due to time constraints. In many ways, these events are "more important" to the lives of contemporary students and their understanding of their world than Colonial America. By teaching through reverse chronology, the instructor will have the ability to cover topics both contemporary and historical while drawing connections and parallels between them.

Teaching through reverse chronology is particularly effective in a Global Studies class, where there is just a wide breath of information that needs to be conveyed to the students. One way in which this could be done would be to begin with

- 3-4 weeks on the history of a single civilization (Afghanistan, China, Ghana- representing a specific region). By picking specific civilizations, it gives students a focal point of instruction and study which can be transposed over other civilizations.

- Read a book on the contemporary civilization from that region ("Kite Runner" by: Khaled Hosseini)

- First lecture is used to set up historical circumstances of the last 50 years, followed by the questions: "What do we need to know about the earlier history of this civilization to better understand the present?" Students will bring answers to the next class.

- Each subsequent lesson goes further back until we reach the beginning of the curriculum.

This approach makes sense for students because it starts with something that they know and builds information upon it. By starting with a foundation of knowledge, it gives students something from which to build up. Too often in history classes, we assume that the place to start is with the chronological prior. By seeing themselves and the world that they understand in the history, students become a part of the learning, while developing critical thinking skills. This approach to teaching history through inquiry addresses the disinterest of contemporary high school students and the increased marginalization of the social studies in American schools. The instructor creates meaning by anchoring historical information to student's prior knowledge of the modern world.

Differences in student learning styles will be addressed through multi-modal instruction. Students will obtain information through a variety of methods. The instructor will implement Smart technology into the classroom through the use of the classroom Smart board. Instruction will occasionally be delivered through more traditional means, such as guided notes and PowerPoint. Students will also see a variety of videos and short movie clips based on the content (for example: "Amistad" during discussion of the Columbian Exchange). The instructor will also utilize short review videos such as those available through the Crash Course channel on YouTube (www.youtube.com/crashcourse). All videos, PowerPoints, guided notes, and handouts will be made available on the teacher run class-website (www.mrgilmoresclass.wordpress.com) All classroom materials will be uploaded to Google Drive and made available online for students who miss school or any given assignment. This will be done in an effort to ensure that all students have access to all classroom materials at any given time. A class calendar will also be maintained on the class website.

Introduction to Global History and Geography through Current Events

NYS Standards Addressed:
Standard 1- The History of the United States and New York.
Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and New York.
Standard 2- World History
2.1- …the ways different people view the same event or issue from a variety of perspectives
2.2- …examining themes across time and within cultures…

2.3- Study of the major social, political, cultural, and religious developments in world history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups.

2.4- The skills of historical analysis include the ability to investigate differing and competing interpretations of the theories of history, hypothesize about why interpretations change over time, explain the importance of historical evidence, and understand the concepts of change and continuity over time.

Week 1 schedule of lessons

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Introduction to the social sciences	Introduction to Geography	Geography and Early Civilizations	Cultural Diffusion	Belief Systems of the Ancient World
Essential Question: What does it mean to be a social scientist?	EQ: Why is it important to study geography?	EQ: What impact did geography have on the development of ancient societies?	EQ: How can cultural diffusion impact the development of civilizations?	EQ: How can religion influence a region of people?

Unit 1 will focus on basic historical knowledge, geography, the social sciences, and their application to current events and the world of the 21st century. Each of these historical topics will be addressed in the context of the modern world, anchoring new information about the ancient world, to student prior knowledge of the world they know. One example of this would be discussing the Rochester Puerto Rican Festival in the context of cultural diffusion. This real world example helps students to understand that the process of cultural diffusion (taught in lesson 4) continues to take place in the world that they experience every day.

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