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Balance, Inject, React: How High School U.S. History Teachers Adapt Under National Curriculum Standards

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Balance, Inject, React: How High School U.S. History Teachers Adapt Under National
Curriculum Standards

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the History Faculty
of Dominican University of California
In Candidacy for a Bachelor of Arts Degree

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History teachers across the United States are constantly shaping the minds of their students, yet the historical content they teach is based on broad, national standards. Since the establishment of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) in 1994, a dynamic process of adaptation to standards has been credited to high school history teachers across the nation. Each teacher has a unique relationship with their class, which generate signature teaching objectives and prompt teachers to reexamine and adapt what parts of curriculum they choose to share with their students. Expectations, context, and experience all play into the relationship between secondary educators and their curriculum, each playing an equally important role in finding the correct selections of information to be taught. Through a classic historiographical analysis and a series of interviews with local high school United States history teachers in Petaluma, California, a clear picture of how these adaptations take place in the classroom is revealed. Ultimately, this paper concludes there are three categories of teacher curriculum adaptation: *balance*, *injection*, and *reaction*. Education professionals who analyze curriculum for *balance* show their readers how students might benefit by learning transnational history, or how cherry picking certain elements of historical content might have politically fueled ulterior motives. Other educators might *inject* their own elements into curriculum: this can be seen in many forms, including comparing global perceptions of United States history, incorporating music as historical artifact, or even integrating personal experiences into lesson plans. Finally, there are educators who use the previous standards to *react* on what they admire or see needs adapting. A *reaction* approach is more based on individual theory, which typically results in a more narrowly focused adaptation to standards.

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Introduction

As time passes, history curriculum only grows. Of that ever - expanding history curriculum, the content teachers choose to include in their classroom is largely based off of national and state standards, adjusted every year to include a more diverse range of topics. As time passes, the amount of U.S. history to learn becomes greater; for every decade that passes, new history texts are created to add to the new major events that occurred, as well as new research that has shifted the range of information in the history field. Standards work in correlation to these trends: new cultural or academic priorities, such as a focus on diversity, may dictate what is added or subtracted from U.S. history curriculum. Some teachers have a difficult time keeping up with the ever-changing curriculum, however teachers have to adapt and anticipate to new standards on a regular basis.

The changing curriculum requires teachers to adapt to evolving standards, which is just one part of the chain reaction that occurs when trends go from the mandated state level or suggested national levels (government or private organization), albeit a crucial one. How a teacher adapts their given curriculum, whichever level it is developed from, is traditionally determined by their own time management and expertise as an educator. Teachers, as the direct line to students, acclimate to the flow of information developed at a national, state, and departmental level. Sometimes these steps are simple, other times they are not. For example, in order for a teacher to understand the needs of their class, they need to understand their students, and each section they teach could be at different academic levels.

The U.S. Department of Education was established in 1980 through the combining of a number of federal agencies, making it a larger, unified, government department.¹ Currently, there

¹ "About ED." U.S. Department of Education, 2018, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/landing.jhtml?src=ft>.

are no mandated national history standards designed by the U.S. Department of Education. Instead, the nation relies on state mandated curriculum that corresponds to a more local, democratic, and inclusive understanding of what history curriculum should consist of. History is an often politicized subject, therefore any nationally mandated curriculum on history content has the potential to create tensions over what is the correct way to approach history. This was the case when in 1994 the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) caused controversy over questions of political influences in curriculum. If teachers used the NCSS frameworks for history education, any bias from the top would inevitably trickle down to the bottom. To avoid the possibility of skewed history standards, the U.S. Department of Education has given states direct control over their own standards rather than adhering to mandates from the top down.² The NCSS and American Historical Association (AHA) are two examples of separate organizations that have influence over curriculum. The U.S. Department of Education categorize these two groups as national professional organizations, whose roles are to suggest standards or curricula, even though states have the ultimate authority over standards and curriculum.³

Studies that deal with adapting or building upon history standards can be separated into three categories: *balance*, *injection*, and *reaction*. Individual teachers deal firsthand with the standards, therefore their presentation and implementation of information into the classroom may take many forms. *Balanced* adaptations to history curriculum tend to be weary of inclusivity and representations. This could be in the form of a passionate educator that strives to ensure the cultural makeup of their students is represented in their curriculum or teachers that *balance* their historical content around time constraints. Scholar Mae Ngai is one historians who values transnational history, which is, “the movement or reach of people, ideas, and/or things across

² Saxe, David Warren. “The National History Standards: Time for Common Sense.” *Social Education* 10, (January 1996): 44-48.

³ “Education Standards and Curriculum.” U.S. Department of Education. 2018, <https://www.ed.gov/answers/>.

national or other defined borders ... it involved empirical research in more than one nation's archives."⁴ A transnational history approach in a classroom would mean that there is a more balanced, global perspective in a history class. Fritz Fischer and Bill Saxe are examples of *balance* historians that criticize the political motives of new curriculum are posed with; they both argue that there is a liberal agenda that supports minority voice over what was perhaps the most relevant history.⁵ Regardless of motivation, a teacher who adapts their curriculum for *balance* is categorized by the intentionality and organization of their historical content. For this reason, teachers that seek balance in a curriculum are most often coming from an objective mindset. U.S. history teachers that fall into the *injection* category of curriculum adaptation is more specific to teacher's interests or specialties. Mark Wallace's journal article in *The History Teacher* concludes that he is able to use a "teacher driven" approach to insert global perspective on U.S. history through the use of primary sources in high school classrooms.⁶ Another key scholar in the *injection* category is Michael Romanowski, who wrote about how teachers' lives and beliefs are injected into U.S. history classrooms in order to help students internalize and interpret the meanings of U.S. history they learn.⁷ Educators who use the *injection* method to adapt curriculum often build upon curriculum that is already established, expanding the range of topics covered in a U.S. history class. The third and final category, *reaction*, is another example of when teachers remove or add (which is more common), dependant on the standards in place at the time and what historical or cultural context the students and teacher are living in. A *reaction* approach most often can advocate for certain controversial issues in the classroom to alleviate

⁴ Ngai, Mae, "Promises and Perils of Transnational History," *American Historical Association*, (December 2012).

⁵ Fischer, Friz, *The Memory Hole: The U.S. History Curriculum Under Siege*. (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing 2014).

⁶ Wallace, Mark, "Integrating United States and World History in the High School Curriculum: The Trials and Tribulations of a Good Idea." *The History Teacher*, no. 4 (2000): 483.

⁷ Romanowski, Michael H, "Teachers' Lives and Beliefs: Influences that Shape the U.S. History Curriculum," (Ohio Northern University:1997).

stress between students and better prepare them for critical thought after high school. While these categories make a clear map of these possibilities of teacher adaptations, it is also clear that not all teachers (if not most) adapt their curriculum in different ways, permitting them to be considered in multiple categories of curriculum adaptations. For example, a balance oriented educator might also inject their own experiences when appropriate, or a reaction oriented educator might also be reacting to the lack of balance they see in standards. In many cases, when teachers add to curriculum in order balance their lessons and represent a more complete history, it can be considered both reactionary because they are reacting to an absence of data or injection because they are adding to the curriculum already there. Depending on how a reader interprets the actions of the researchers and scholars, there are many ways to analyze how teachers are able to individualize their curriculum. This complication's sole purpose is to show the complexity of how teachers interact with their curriculum. Since most of these assertions of published scholars are based on their own educated opinions, there is a wide array of areas to expand upon or interconnect. Teaching has become a mainly universal practice, which is a function of content standards and teacher credentialing, yet when teachers enter their own classroom, they are able to individualize and adapt their lessons in order to create meaningful and representative history curriculum for their students. The benefit of learning these complex categories is to better understand the thoughts and motivations of educators who all seem to have the same goal: making United States history curriculum the best it can be for their students.

Alongside research done by scholars covering U.S. history curriculum and classroom experience, this research employs case studies from Petaluma, California high school history teachers to show the three categories of curriculum adaptation and how local teachers use resources and standards in the classroom. Interviews with the three educators, Paula Biancalana,

Michael O'Toole, and Andrew Cochrane provides insight into day-to-day in class functions, while maintaining a connection between standards and responsibility to prepare students for their future. The questions asked during the interviews ranged in topics beginning with who the teacher is, what specific interests they have in U.S. history, difficulty adapting to new standards, and most importantly, how curriculum impacts their teaching experience directly. Essentially, the interviews were reflections by experienced educators and a contemporary example of how teachers interact and adapt curriculum currently.

This paper concludes that there are three main categories of teacher curriculum adaptation: *balance*, *injection*, and *reaction*. Each of these approaches can be used simultaneously or separately, and are affected by subjective judgment by the educators who are the medium between standards and students; as evidenced by history curriculum scholarship and interviews by experienced educators from Petaluma, California.

Curriculum and State Standards

New York Times Education Editor Edward B. Fiske calls Ronald Reagan's "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform," "35 pages that shook the US education world [and became] one of the most significant documents in the history of American public education."⁸ The report was drafted by Ronald Reagan and his commission in 1983, and seems to be the marker for modern education reform. The document called for high educational standards and ways to monitor these changes. Within this agenda there were what were called the "three C's of content, character, and choice"⁹ Out of the three C's, content is at the center of educational policy discussion when noting what curriculum and standards educators follow.

⁸ Manno, Bruno V. "Remembering "A Nation At Risk": Reflections on Politics and Policy." *Education Next*, 2018, <https://www.educationnext.org/remembering-nation-risk-reflections-politics-policy/>.

⁹ Ibid.

While acknowledging that federal government had little control over curriculum, President Reagan's agenda pushed for the format we more or less use today in schools, "4 years of English, 3 years of mathematics, 3 years of science, 3 years of social studies, and one half year of computer science. (Two years of language were strongly recommended for college bound students.)," referred to as the "five new basics."¹⁰ President Reagan's call for educational excellence came as a precursor for the way educational policy has transformed over time, especially since it elevated the importance of content standards.

After this initiative, states stepped up to the plate to focus on the importance of content and educational excellence. In more recent years, monitoring success and asserting clear curriculum standards was seen in the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program. The STAR program was developed in 1998 and put into place with the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) of 1999.¹¹ The purpose of the PSAA and the STAR program was to increase academic achievement and did so by administering the California Standards Test (CSTs) along with four other exams, however the CSTs were the only exams that affected the social sciences.

In California, STAR testing lasted until 2013, when it was replaced by the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). The main difference between the two, from Andrew Cochrane's perspective, was that "STAR tests were more content based, whereas CAASP tests were more skilled based."¹² The exams administered in the CAASP program are commonly referred to as the Smarter Balance tests, which have an emphasis on English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, not social sciences.¹³ According to the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ California Department of Education, "Standardized Testing and Reporting," last modified 2019, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/pr/star.asp>.

¹² Andrew Cochrane, interview by Andriana Stenros, February 25, 2019.

¹³ California Department of Education, "California Assessment of Student Performances and Progress (CAASPP)," last accessed May 2019, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/TA/tg/ca/>.

California Department of Education, this switch occurred while also incorporating the Common Core standards, implemented in 2010, which have a larger focus on writing skills and using documents or specific information to argue a point, as seen in the eleventh grade content standards.¹⁴ The standards listed in the packet are still a revised edition of the standards developed for the STAR program, since the Common Core Standards packet refers to the content as adopted by the California Department of Education in October 1998.¹⁵ This packet of standards lays out the content needed to be taught by instructors. The eleventh grade United States history section ranges from the Enlightenment to the Clinton Administration, which is approximately three hundred years of content, with a range of subcategories and detailed information to follow.

As recent events continue to become history, content standards will require updates such as the inclusion of the presidencies of President George W. Bush and President Obama. Using the timeline of when the last content standards were developed, it would be necessary to even include President Trump in any new standards. In more recent iterations, traditional histories have been updated to include subjects such as LGBT and Latinx history. These fields have more thoroughly been explored by historians, and are considered to be legitimate and necessary narratives in history classrooms as well. Certain legislators and interest groups made this a focal point of political agenda, such as the FAIR Education Act enacted in 2012. The FAIR Education Act's main goal was to be more representative of LGBT, disabled, and other minority groups in

¹⁴ California State Board of Education. *History - Social Science Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten through Grade Twelve*, edited by Bob Klingensmith, (Sacramento: California Department of Education 2010).

¹⁵ Ibid.

history and social studies classes, as they are part of the United States population and have been for many years.¹⁶

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) is one of the national organizations that provide foundations for state standards. Founded in 1921, the core members came from all over the United States, and worked together to develop their own standards which were first published in 2010.¹⁷ According to their mission statement, their purpose is to provide support of social studies educators, but they were also the organization to establish the ten key themes of social studies: culture; time, continuity & change; people, places, and environments; individual development and identity; individuals, groups, and institutions; power, authority, and governance; production, distribution, and consumption; science, technology, and society; global connections; civic ideals and practices.¹⁸ The establishment of the NCSS remained significant because it produced a guide for teachers at a national level, and allowed for slightly varying information that teachers could use to supplement their state content standards or use thematic organization in their classes.

These changes in educational policies are just some of the examples of how quickly education has developed over a short amount of time. There is complicated interaction between policy, educators, and the larger United States population that has impacted the way curriculum has been made up. The foundation of these developments have had a longstanding hold in United States history, however the modern education system has been impacted by President Reagan's educational excellence idea.

¹⁶ Our Family Coalition, "The FAIR Education Act," last modified 2011, <http://www.faireducationact.com/about-fair/>.

¹⁷ National Council for the Social Studies, "About National Council for the Social Studies," 2019, <https://www.socialstudies.org/about>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Teachers Who Seek Balance

Education professionals who analyze and adapt curriculum for the purpose of *balance* include Fritz Fischer, William Gaudelli, David Saxe, and Ricardo Iglesias et al. Throughout their writing, the reader finds that the goals either orient towards conservation of classic content or adding perspectives to better represent history. Balance, in this way, is a very open ended and subjective category; it can hold many opinions and hold differing and even opposite approaches to what balance looks like in history curriculum.

Beginning with Fischer's book, *The Memory Hole: The U.S. History Curriculum Under Siege*, the argument is made against the liberalization of history curriculum. In his introduction, he lays out his argument that if history is being rewritten by a biased body, important historical facts will be lost in a "memory hole," a play on George Orwell's concept in the novel *1984*.¹⁹ His call to action in order to create the correct balance in curriculum is to use historical thinking and base history lessons on historical facts. He states, "Historians need to concentrate on chronology and cause and effect. Historians need to be attentive to the authorship of sources and the intent and motivation behind the creation of sources."²⁰ From this, his argument broadens to what should be considered "truth" and how teachers should choose to include this information. In his eyes, a balanced curriculum would be one without political agenda and values historical fact and truth over sensationalized stories of the past.

In a similar field of thought as Fischer, David Saxe warns about some of the downfalls of catering to non - mainstream history. As the chair of the Social Sciences in the College of Education at Pennsylvania State University, he discusses the impact of a national social studies

¹⁹ Fischer, Fritz, *The Memory Hole: The U.S. History Curriculum Under Siege*. (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing 2014).

²⁰ Ibid.

curriculum, referencing the 1994 volumes of national standards released from University of California Los Angeles' (UCLA) National Center for History in the Schools.²¹ His conservative take on modern history curriculum comes as no surprise, since he is an advocate for the teachers' voices, saying, "teachers must also be able to recognize that the standards are good. The term "good history" is no semantic or ideological trap here. Most teachers can pragmatically cut quickly through stuffy arguments over what academics tell them is or is not good history"²² In stating the outside voice that determines what is considered to be good history, Saxe argues that history is easily taken over and drafted by political ideology. He urges that only the people who can help the balance of historical fact should be involved with the NCSS, so long as they defend historical fact when other history standard authors have made bias driven mistakes.²³ This is a bold criticism of how Saxe sees modern history curriculum shifting towards, however it is a representative voice of educators who might seek balance of historical fact in U.S. history curriculum. From his perspective, history curriculum that is drafted by people with politically fueled bias is unbalanced and ineffective, and even harmful to the broader history field.

From another perspective, Ricardo Iglesias, David Aceituno and Maria Isabel Toledo write on how controversial issues and perspectives learned in history impact different cultures, suggesting a multicultural approach for a balanced history curriculum.²⁴ While this article is not specific to United States history content in particular, it provides a good example of what should be included in a modern, balanced, curriculum. Topics that were once considered inappropriate to discuss in a youth educational setting, such as Communism, the Cuban Revolution, Human

²¹ Saxe, David Warren. "The National History Standards: Time for Common Sense." *Social Education* 10, (January 1996): 44-48.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Iglesias, Ricardo, David Aceituno, and María Isabel Toledo, "Student Teachers' Understandings and Practices for Teaching "Controversial Issues" in the High School History Curriculum," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 237 (2017): 452-457.

Rights Violations, and more, began to peak student interest. In the study by Iglesias et al., data showed that students unanimously agreed that controversial issues should be taught by teachers, some even stating that teachers should give their own opinion on them as well.²⁵ Based on the results recorded in their article, “Student Teachers’ Understandings and Practices for Teaching ‘Controversial Issues’ in the High School History Curriculum,” student teacher researchers asserted that if developing students into active citizens through learning history is the goal of the educator, these controversial topics should be part of what would be considered a balanced curriculum.²⁶

William Gaudelli brings another fresh perspective on balance by acknowledging the impacts of globalization on United States history curriculum. Studying three high schools, Gaudelli finds that students are interested in learning global perspectives, yet they are not always enhanced in the education system.²⁷ He says, “The world is not something outside ourselves, a distant place far removed from our everyday lives; indeed, we are integrally connected to the global village. Students helped me to realize that I would be more effective if I tried to understand their thoughts and experiences and show how these apparently unique insights have a global dimension.”²⁸ From this quote, readers can see that global perspectives when teaching even United States history can be used when discussing politics, U.S. involvement overseas, and more. Gaudelli’s writing is unique in that his approach to altering curriculum is not about content, rather it is about perspectives. A more global perspective in United States history, while it is not a world history class, can offer a new balance of how we understand United States history today. Using Gaudelli’s thought process, it would be more balanced to assume a

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Gaudelli, William, *World Class : Teaching and Learning in Global Times*. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Routledge 2003).

²⁸ Ibid.

transnational approach in United States history education, because American history is not separate from the rest of the globe.

All of these perspectives make up the category of adaptations for *balance*, whether it is based on depoliticizing United States history content, including controversial topics, or including global understandings and perspectives to better understand what the impact of United States history is.

Teachers Who Inject

Rather than ensuring there is balance in a curriculum, some educators choose to enrich history curriculum by *injecting* information into the history content standards already in place. This can be beneficial, because when this happens it is typically done in order to make students more engaged with United States history or emphasize an educator's expertise in the field. *Injection* implies that curriculum is added to and would not necessarily need to completely replace or remove another aspect of curriculum. Examples of scholars who are considered in this category are Jon Austin, Michael Romanowski, and Mark Wallace. Among these sources, the main course of action is for instructors is to integrate, or inject, information into to content.

Jon Austin's research is an excellent starting place to understand how history *injection* can take many forms. In his book, *Spinning Popular Culture As Public Pedagogy: Critical Reflections and Transformative Possibilities*, Austin's research focuses on music as a main transformative force in history.²⁹ While his study has little to do with interacting with United States history curriculum specifically, he injects music into the curriculum as a tool for education. Austin argues that people learn from listening to music through the power of nostalgia, which he refers to as the "public pedagogical," however this theory can be applied in

²⁹ Austin, Jon. *Spinning Popular Culture as Public Pedagogy : Critical Reflections and Transformative Possibilities*. (Dordrecht: Sense Publishers, 2016).

the classroom for broader function of teaching historical context.³⁰ He sections his book into eras of music, highlighting that music is directly tied to the times, where there are changes in society there is music to match it, and people use music as a way to learn about the time they are living in.³¹ If this idea is applied to the average eleventh grade United States history class, teachers would be able to evoke nostalgia and learning by playing records of music from modern United States history.³² Austin's theory on the learning value of music could run parallel to what war reenactment experiences attempt to capture: though students did not live through the time period themselves, having a sensory experience might engage a better learning outcome. Many history teachers use some sort of musical approach when teaching the 1960s, using popular artists such as Bob Dylan to represent the changing times and racial injustices in the South. Austin's research, if applied to a classroom setting, is an *injection* to high school United States history curriculum.

Michael Romanowski, in his investigation of how personal beliefs affect curriculum in classrooms, provides another important aspect of injection to curriculum. As any educator and historian knows, it is perhaps impossible to reach a perfect level of objectivity when choosing what information to include; this is especially challenging on tight schedule high school history teachers have when teaching three hundred years of U.S. history in two semesters. Through his research, Romanowski emphasizes that teachers need to understand the political and socio-cultural aspects of who they are as an educator, because this is part of the teaching experience.³³ Where this is the most important for teaching history is in the political and moral sense. Teachers should be relayers of important and meaningful information that help students continue to live

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Romanowski, Michael H, "Teachers' Lives and Beliefs: Influences that Shape the U.S. History Curriculum," (Ohio Northern University:1997).

their lives in the future, so this form of injection has a lot of potential for good classroom practices, as Romanowski observed when a student teacher used open discussions of controversial political issues such as abortion and gun control.³⁴ During this discussion, the teacher asked students questions and gave her own input in the form of a personal experience; while this is a powerful tool, it exposes the teacher's own views on the subject, moving away from objectivity.³⁵ This is not a bad practice, however Romanowski's point is that it should be acknowledged as part of what makes a teacher teach the way they do. Romanowski even includes a history section that states, "It is apparent that the impressions created by university U. S. history classes and professors not only remain with these teachers but play an active role in their current teaching, thus shaping the U. S. history curriculum"³⁶ That being said there is a delicate balance, it seems, between teacher's need to story-tell and inspire students using injection to include their own bias into their curriculum, yet there are also people who would oppose these practices because too much subjectivity can shape the curriculum in a way that is not representative of history standards.

Mark Wallace is a third example of how injection and personal experience with history curriculum can be used to inject new concepts and approaches into U.S. history curriculum. In his research, he critiques the U.S. history curriculum for leaving students ignorant of the rest of the world; he notes that while curriculum might appear to be strong because it is introduced throughout elementary and secondary education, the only perspective we know U.S. history from is our own.³⁷ After assembling a board of elementary and secondary educators and having heated discussions, they came up with an entirely new plan for history education that would impact

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Wallace, Mark, "Integrating United States and World History in the High School Curriculum: The Trials and Tribulations of a Good Idea." *The History Teacher*, no. 4 (2000): 483.

standards in a drastic way, most notably by teaching U.S. history as we know it today in both fifth and sixth grade, then again in tenth and eleventh grade.³⁸ Rather than repeating the same lessons from elementary in high school however, they were now going to be titled “United States and World History (Colonization 1500 to Imperialism 1900)” in 10th grade, and “United States and World History (Impact of Industrialization 1900 to present).”³⁹ After years of planning, this approach was passed by the school board and Wallace noted that, “in order for any major curriculum change to be successful, it must be teacher-driven.”⁴⁰ In this example, *injection* took a larger role in shaping greater policies, however it began as idea of injecting global perspectives and impacts of United States history by one teacher.

Understanding *injection* as a way that history teachers interact with curriculum is important in order to understand why standards are needed to support teachers’ choices when building their curriculum. When wanting to make greater changes, there needs to be a baseline of what teachers are obligated to teach. Even in Wallace’s example, all the same information was covered, which an added element for secondary education. While education has a universal baseline thanks to institutions such as the NCSS or Common Core Standards, which many states have adopted, injecting personal experience, global narratives, and popular culture are a way to demonstrate the impact history can have on students’ lives and how teachers are ultimately the curators of their own classroom.

Teachers Who React

Changing curriculum because of a *reaction* to what is already in place is one of the most widespread cases when analyzing teachers’ relationships to standards. Rather than looking at

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

what teachers have done to standards like in balance and injection, *react* is answering the question, “Why do teachers make these changes?” What makes this category complex are the answers, the wide variety of reasons that teachers alter their standards. Most often, reactionary changes are made due to political views, socio-cultural changes in society, or new findings that reshape the way we understand history. Some historical examples of reaction adaptations to curriculum is the Ethnic studies movements of the 1960s, which emphasized African American and Chicano studies that began at the universities and later became part of high school standards as well. Among the adherents to of the *reaction* category are Marcus Gillespie, Iftikhar Ahmad, and Meenakshi Chhabra.

Meenakshi Chhabra’s article on teaching historical events on mass violence is a prime example of how teachers are able to take new information and change curriculum in order to better serve their students during their own historical context. Because of Chhabra’s personal belief of the importance in teaching students about the 1947 British India Partition, there were valuable approaches found regarding the discussion of violent histories in the classroom.⁴¹ Part *injection* for this process includes the use of human rights and morals as a way to understand historical context.⁴² Where this came together was first in Holocaust education in Europe, however, educators can use this approach to discuss violence and race in U.S. history. The elements of Chhabra’s work can be applied into wider history curriculum, especially considering major violent historic United States history events such as Native American relations with settlers, African American slavery, and the Civil War. It is important for history teachers to inject a human rights approach if there is an assumption that teachers are preparing the students for life outside of high school and independent thought. By providing objective history, even when the

⁴¹ Chhabra, Meenakshi, "A Human Rights and History Education Model for Teaching about Historical Events of Mass Violence: The 1947 British India Partition," *Prospects* 47 (January 2017): 150.

⁴² *Ibid.*

subject is brutal, as Chhabra suggests, students are able to use their critical thinking skills and understand history with a moral stance.

On a similar note, Iftikhar Ahmad discusses how controversial histories such as the Cold War should be thought about from multiple perspectives.⁴³ Because of the diverse cultures in America and the widespread effects of the Cold War, developing world countries should also be represented in the curriculum.⁴⁴ This form of *injection* is common among history teachers who have a specialization in specific history topics or are adapting to include new historical research. Assuming that curriculum has some sort of political motivation, there is also the fact that politics change over time, as Ahmad's study highlights. Early inclusions of Cold War history curriculum depicted it as patriotic feats against the Communists, whereas now it is part of the past that is known more for its global impact rather than a self-centered event in history.

To prove Ahmad's urgency to include developing world perspectives which was published in 2017, there is an article written by T. Marcus Gillespie in 1962 that warns educators of the disadvantages of students not understanding communism.⁴⁵ The benefit, in his perspective, would be that high schoolers would be able to compare communism and democracy and see for themselves the benefits of living in a democratic country.⁴⁶ Similar to Chhabra, Gillespie seems to emphasize the importance of objective history in order for students to properly assess the moral implications and values of their own history.

⁴³ Ahmad, Iftikhar, "The Third World Perspective on the Cold War: Making Curriculum and Pedagogy Relevant in History Classrooms," *Journal of International Social Studies* 7 (February 2017): 121-135.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Gillespie, T. Marcus, "Teaching about Communism in the High School," *The High School Journal* 45 (June 1962): 241-244.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Teacher Case Study in Petaluma, California

The three interviewed educators, Michael O'Toole, Paula Biancalana, and Andrew Cochrane exemplified the three types of curriculum adaptations. During their interviews, it was clear that working with curriculum was not only a large part of their experience teaching history, but also posed problems in time management for the relatively short amount of time they had with their students. All of the interviewees were passionate on their roles as educators and how their guidance will further impact students as they enter the adult world.

Michael O'Toole, United States History instructor at Saint Vincent's High School, was the first of the three interviews, and offered a unique perspective on working with curriculum, mainly because he was teaching only Advanced Placement U.S. history students at the time. The difference between an Advanced Placement course and a regular history class is that it is typically more fast paced in order to complete all the required information needed for the Advanced Placement exam. For him, a large part of his role was to ensure that the students were able to completely learn all of the curriculum content in order to pass their exam at the end of the year. A common joke in the classroom is that he, "has to kill Lincoln by Thanksgiving," which hints as his pressing timeline during the school year.⁴⁷ Asking what level of difficulty it was to cover so much history curriculum in such short time span efficiently, he answered that he felt it was difficult mainly because he was not able to focus on some of the specific student interests; on a more positive note, he mentioned that the more exposure to a broad range of topics could show students the vast number of research opportunities they will be able to pursue themselves.⁴⁸ I consider O'Toole to be an example of a primarily *balance* aimed educator, but what made him unique in this was that he did not necessarily do this by choice, but by necessity of preparing his

⁴⁷ O'Toole, Michael, interview by Andriana Stenros, November 29, 2019.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

students for the Advanced Placement exam at the end of the year. AP exam results directly reflects how well he teaches his students; his main job in that case is to get his students to pass the exam.

Another part of the interview covered the differences between private and public schools regarding content standards, in which he acknowledged that there are both similarities and differences. The main difference is that St. Vincent's High School places U.S. history in their students' sophomore year of high, rather than the standards junior year.⁴⁹ Besides timing, he seemed to feel that many of the educational aspects comparing private and public schools' U.S. history education remained the same; the reason for this lies in the textbooks used. While private schools are not forced to use any sort of Common Core standards, they do use textbooks that are approved by the California Department of Education: in other words, the state curriculum still finds its way into the private school setting.⁵⁰

The concept of an end of the year test dictating how teachers spent their time on United States history curriculum seemed similar to how the public school system worked under the STAR tests, which used many of the content standards as what is being used today; the main difference is in how that motivation affects an educator: do they wish to spend time on content that is meaningful to students or are they simply completing a checklist of information? Both of these results have negative and positive consequences, however the qualitative versus quantitative debate is important in determining how history curriculum will be modified as it continues to grow.

Paula Biancalana, U.S. history teacher at Casa Grande High School had a lot to discuss in terms of her own passions of education, speaking about how she is an advocate for her students

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

and has been since she arrived at the school. When asked about the sociopolitical climate when she began teaching, she reminisced about racism towards Hispanic students in her class and how she would continuously ensure they were represented and had voices in her classroom. As her primary classification, Biancalana could be considered as a teacher who *injects* information to supplement her curriculum already in place, however, she could also be seen as an instructor who takes a *reactive* approach based on external factors such as racial tensions.

Something somewhat unique from a local outlook is that Casa Grande High School has a number of Smaller Learning Communities students can choose to be in, depending on their interests or career goals. Among the three listed on the Casa Grande website (Health Career Pathways, iHouse, and Innovation), Biancalana is considered part of the Health Career Pathways (HCP) learning community.⁵¹ Being part of the HCP community means that Biancalana can inject other current events into her curriculum, focusing largely on significant events in history that impacted public health. She does this in two ways: by integrating them within her lessons or through current event journaling.⁵²

Another unique aspect of her adaptations to curriculum was that she chooses to incorporate local history, which is plentiful when sought out. She talks about local historical sites, such as the Washoe House and Adobe Mission which are both just minutes away from campus. According to Biancalana, it is important for students to get directly involved with their local history for them to become more interested and invested in history.⁵³ Her use of injection in adapting the standards has had a positive impact of supplementing the Common Core content

⁵¹ Casa Grande High School, "Smaller Learning Communities At Casa Grande," 2018, <https://www.petalumacityschools.org/domain/419>.

⁵² Biancalana, Paula, interview by Andriana Stenros, February 8, 2019.

⁵³ Ibid.

standards with information her students find meaningful and interest, aligning with what most teachers hope to do in their career.

Andrew Cochran, U.S. History teacher at Petaluma High School is another unique case in that he fits best in the *injection* category, but also may classify as *balanced* because of the value he puts on objectivity when teaching history. Cochran prides himself with holding a politically neutral classroom and promotes civic engagement, befitting his central themes of "American Institutions" and "Democracy."⁵⁴ In the interview, he stated that his or any teacher's role is to get students prepared for citizenship; students will one day become voters and taxpayers, so because of this, he incorporates article annotations and offers extra credit to watch Presidential debates, state of the union addresses, and registering to vote.⁵⁵ His reoccurring themes of institutions and democracy in his United States history classes are covered in content standards, however, Cochran takes a further approach by getting his students involved with these themes on a day-to-day basis.⁵⁶ While this is not uncommon in history classes, his emphasis on discussing political topics with open voices is important to how he adapts curriculum to his classes as he sees fit.

All together, these three teachers in Petaluma seem to be united in three aspects: they want to prepare their students for the future, they hope to make the material they teach meaningful and valuable. They are able to attain both of those goals through adapting the content standards and curriculum already in place to create a more specialized program at their corresponding schools.

⁵⁴ Andrew Cochran, interview by Andriana Stenros, February 25, 2019.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Roles of Materials

I asked the instructors what textbooks they used, and they unanimously agreed that for the most part, the textbooks they used were good backbones to support the Common Core content standards and give students an overview of United States history. Andrew Cochrane, in particular was a huge supporter of the textbook he uses. He stated that the textbook used in his classroom, McDougal Littell's *The Americans*, is "good and fair."⁵⁷ He mentioned that the political climate today and years leading up to now have caused distrust in institutions, linking back to the political climate when he first began teaching as a time that was still feeling the effects of the Cold War and turmoil over foreign affairs and America's ability to provide for its citizens.⁵⁸ Biancalana, who also uses the McDougal Littell text, also noted the shift in textbook content from the ones she uses now compared to what she began teaching with in the eighties:

Now I can say that [Langston Hughes was gay] without having to worry about the backlash ... the idea of being able to talk about historical figures that were gay, or this was LGBT history, or whatever it is; now being able to put that in and talk about the Stonewall Riots, which is something that when I went to school, was so not in the textbooks In the textbooks you can see a shift: if you look at a textbook now, even though they're not the most updated, they do talk about things like the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement, where if you pull a book from when I first started teaching like in the eighties, there is very little of that in there...

All in all, however, the textbooks were adapted and revised during the same time content standards were, therefore they portray the information called for in the standards. There are even instances where public school history textbooks have content standards directly labeled on the inside covers of the book, meaning that content is on history textbook author's agenda.⁵⁹

More recently however, the 2010 Texas textbook controversy made national news and caused debate because it highlighted the Christian history of the United States, valued

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Biancalana, Paula, interview by Andriana Stenros, February 8, 2019.

conservative themes over liberal ones, and was adopted by a majority Christian Republican state school board.⁶⁰ This caused outrage among many people across the United States and added to the already seeded distrust of textbooks based on the board who creates and approves them. Since this event in 2010, more students have been cautioned to second guess what is in their textbooks. According to Petaluma teachers, however, this should not be the case. Contrary to popular belief, some of the teachers stated, the textbook is not the end-all-be-all of history education. This is where the adaptations to curriculum are so important: teachers adapting curriculum adds more importance to history education, rather than simply relying on textbooks and content standards to guide the course. If a teacher were to only use standards and textbook exercises, classes would be lacking spirit, purpose, and individuality.

Another important part of the teaching experience is what certain teachers use to supplement their teaching, which is usually a form of *injection* in curriculum. Michael O'Toole uses AP United States history exam tools to get his students ready, such as documents to answer essay questions, usually referred to as Data Based Questions (DBQs). He also implements reading circles in his classes, creating small communities of students who are able to team up and understand primary documents on a deeper level.⁶¹ In Paula Biancalana's case, she uses newspaper articles, class trips, and journal questions to get students to understand the relevance of the history topic they are discussing that day.⁶² Andrew Cochrane, as previously mentioned, uses civic engagement and debates to get students interested and invested in the materials they are learning.⁶³ What continues to persist is the urgency of time restraints in the classroom.

⁶⁰ PBS. "Texas School Board Approves Controversial Textbook Changes." Last modified May 23, 2010, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/culture/texas-school-board-approves-controversial-textbook-changes/954/>.

⁶¹ O'Toole, Michael, interview by Andriana Stenros, November 29, 2019.

⁶² Biancalana, Paula, interview by Andriana Stenros, February 8, 2019.

⁶³ Andrew Cochrane, interview by Andriana Stenros, February 25, 2019.

Teachers should not have to choose between covering all the content versus using their supplemental tools to make the material more meaningful as they often do.

While all teachers hold their own approach to using outside sources to supplement their teaching, it is important to recognize how important this practice is for preparing students for their lives outside of high school. The ELA writing skills that Common Core supports are all developed through these practices the Petaluma teachers and other education professionals developed in their own classrooms. Adding extra materials supports the impact educational policy makers and teachers hope to achieve on a day to day basis.

Teachers do not always have to learn these tools on their own, assuming the case study of Petaluma is representative of other school districts across America. The importance of workshops prove to be important for teachers to seek out, and are usually offered as faculty development opportunities depending on school funding. During the interviews with the Petaluma educators, I asked each individual if they were encouraged or supported if they attended various workshops that focused on curriculum; all of the teachers answered positively. Biancalana talked about her experience at conferences with other teachers and how educational professionals present on ways to better use time in the classroom while covering more historical content over time.⁶⁴ How much districts and individual schools push teachers to go through this training is largely based on money availability and time to find and coordinate for the events. Teachers always have the option to approach their district and ask for money for school improvement money in order to register for events, but mainly it was out of teachers' pocket to go to workshops specifically on curriculum.⁶⁵ According to Biancalana, there are numerous branches of administration who are able to extend workshop opportunities in order to help

⁶⁴ Biancalana, Paula, interview by Andriana Stenros, February 8, 2019.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

teachers streamline their curriculum for teaching exactly what teachers want their students to know.⁶⁶

The role of materials for educators provides a wide range of tools that teachers are able to use in order to adapt curriculum to how they choose. Textbooks are mainly standards driven, however the other supplemental tools given to teachers encourage more dynamic interactions with curriculum. Altogether, textbooks, articles, and workshops are simple solutions to help teachers shift their teaching approach in order to better serve their students and achieve the Common Core standards while also using their own individualized content that fits within the broader picture.

Conclusion

High school U.S. history curriculum has experienced massive changes in a short period of time. In order to fully understand the development of U.S. history education over time, is important to look back at STAR testing and the more recently established Common Core Standards supported by the California Department of Education. These changes were mostly brought forth on the basis of testing, in order to ensure the level of education students are getting on a state by state basis. STAR testing had an emphasis on reporting the data, versus the more analytical and language skills exams in California's Common Core Smarter Balance tests. Teachers had to adapt to these changes in the form of teaching style, however what is important to note is that many of the standards have remained the same since 1998, when the STAR tests were first developed and administered. For the most part, it seems policy makers feel that the materials covered have a solid backbone. The state standards have held the same content plus or minus details such as LGBT and indigenous histories to align with equal representation of the

⁶⁶ Ibid.

population, which is a much more modern trend. Inclusiveness in U.S. history curriculum is pushed by political interests, in many cases.

These sociological changes show the broader impact of the population on state standards. Broader issues, such as representation and equity in history, are some of the things that state and national curriculum attempts to address, therefore bettering the education experience for all public school students. Overall, these changes are important because they affect future education protocols and the future generations of America.

It is important to consider state by state curriculum, because its structure indicates there is no cohesive goal between the entirety of the United States. Implementing some sort of national curriculum would be beneficial for the equity of education in all states, however criticism over who is making the decisions for the national standards could still result, as seen in some of the controversy about the National Council for the Social Studies. Regardless of the outcome, it is important to understand the implications curriculum and standards have on a teacher and respectively their students. The set curriculum is the route that educators have to take in the classroom, and with support of textbooks, they manage their time spent from topic to topic. Assuming there are ten months in an academic year, teachers are assumed to cover thirty years per month. This creates a sense of urgency for educators to complete the standards in time for the second semester of finals. We see from the time restriction there must be some form of structure, however how that structure developed is the main focus to this day. The changes from STAR, to CASP, and now to Common Core show there have been different goals on how to measure the success of these standards, which have relatively remained the same for just over 20 years. To a certain extent, the curriculum is subjectively set by a number of people and groups, but what teachers do with it varies greatly from classroom to classroom.

What educators and policy makers need to consider, however, is if a one year U.S. history allowance is forcing an information dump that is not conducive to the learning they wish to achieve. While it is good to continue pursuing historical research and share new findings at the secondary level, there seems to be a continued tension because the lack of timing and ability to include all materials. Further, if the oral histories the Petaluma teachers shared are indicative of a more widespread group, that means that social studies educators are having a difficult time finding which information to incorporate when time is limited and there are more years to learn. If there is a choice between covering more of early United States history versus later, it seems that there is a larger focus on early rather than modern history. Whether it is a bad thing or not, the interviewed teachers generally acknowledged that getting as far into modern history as possible at the end of the year is an important part of preparing their students for the outside world. I believe this is where teachers' perspectives in the classroom adapts curriculum in a negative way: simply because the history does not seem that far in the past to them, for their young students this may be the first place they learn about the recent presidents. How teachers adapt their curriculum, using *balance*, *injection*, and *reaction*, relies heavily on exterior factors such as sociocultural impacts and timing. Education reform directly impacts teachers, therefore any external factors that political or private interest groups apply to educational policy at the top level will be felt in the classroom at some point. These changes are inevitable, yet the way educators adapt to fit all the necessary information for the students will remain part of what makes a teacher's' job the important position it is. Because there is so much pressure on U.S. history teachers to balance the scale between historical development, educational policy, and the objective and subjective natures of teaching history, there needs to be both national curriculum and teacher adaptation. A national curriculum that is federally mandated would create a

framework for teachers to use and be held accountable for, which ensures all students are receiving a similar standard of U.S. history education, yet the freedom for teachers to adapt their curriculum plays a crucial role in understanding the individuality of students and flexibility of teaching all levels of students.

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