

From Common Core to Curriculum Development

In the early 1990s, the American states began to adopt learning standards that explained in detail what kindergarten through twelfth grade students should be able to do. Because the states lacked an agreed upon definition of competency, it was decided in 2009 to develop the Common Core State Standards. Benchmarks were developed to assist state policymakers in identifying the attributes of education systems that most effectively equipped students to succeed in the world’s marketplace. While public school districts and states relied heavily on the results of tests to judge their schools, missing was a careful study of what happens in classrooms to meet state standards. In the following article, Professors Abreu-Ellis and Ellis describe what occurs in a restored, one-room country schoolhouse where students reenact curricular activities from the nineteenth century. The professors connect these “authentic learning” experiences to Ohio’s standards in social studies, mathematics, geography, and language arts. Such an approach to curriculum design is especially useful to country school educators who want to teach the values and subject matter of an earlier era while also using the activities to meet their states’ curriculum standards.

—Ed.

Using Primary Sources and Artifacts

To Align Instructional Activities to Curriculum Standards

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Introduction

The issue of standards and which ones to abide by is largely debated by professionals in both business and education. State and federal administrators are preoccupied by how student achievement is measured against rigorous standards. They expect teachers, curriculum developers, and school administrators to implement state educational standards and show evidence that students have met them during their course of study.¹ A

national movement to establish a common set of core standards has attempted to create a national guide for the content and skills that every kindergarten through twelfth grade student should master. The Common Core initiative embraces the idea that learning activities should be both robust and relevant to the “real” world. In other words, students should be equipped for college, careers, and adult life.² An obstacle in this process is the difficulty students have applying knowledge learned in one context (e.g., the classroom) in another (e.g., the office, home, or community).³

Meeting content standards through what is called “authentic learning” is a possible strategy to circumvent this barrier. The theory of authentic learning centers around the idea that in the world outside the classroom, people develop solutions to problems; and in the process, they learn new strategies by utilizing their existing knowledge as well as the resources and means available to them at that moment. Through this approach, students drive the decision making. They approach a problem, are allowed multiple attempts using different strategies, and are allowed to fail while using these attempts until they arrive most often “collaboratively in the creation of genuine, worthwhile and meaningful artifacts.”⁴

In alignment with the concept of authentic learning is the current educational call to use primary sources. Michael Eamon defined primary sources as “original, first-hand accounts as building blocks to create stories from the past.”⁵ Primary sources are created at the time of an event or soon after something has happened. Further, Yaron Vansover observed that there is a need to improve the status of history in the classroom by eliminating the division between history in school and in academia, and to emphasize the importance of using primary sources as teaching tools.⁶

There has also been a call for the implementation of primary sources in other curricular areas such as mathematics and language arts. For instance, Barnett et al. proposed that mathematics instruction move away from rote memorization and foster a deeper understanding of concepts by “reading the original work of the pioneers, studying the problems behind modern streamlined definitions, and, together with the instructor, arrive at an understanding of the mathematical concepts and methods that have taken shape over the centuries.”⁷

According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative, “students need to be able to analyze, evaluate, and differentiate primary and secondary sources.”⁸ This content is provided in subjects ranging from literacy, history and social studies, science, and technology in sixth through twelfth grades. The Ohio New Learning Standards for social studies and history require kindergarten through eighth grade students to locate, research, interpret, and analyze primary and secondary sources to understand relationships among events.⁹ By the end of their high school careers, students are expected to be proficient 1) in determining the central idea of primary and secondary sources; 2) analyzing, citing, and integrating diverse primary and secondary sources into a coherent understanding of an idea or event; and 3) noting discrepancies among sources.¹⁰ In essence, students must be able to distinguish between primary and secondary sources and use them effectively in performing academic work.

The Anderson Schoolhouse Curriculum

This article demonstrates how, in building the curriculum offered by the restored Anderson Schoolhouse in Milton Township, Ashland County, Ohio, the authors aligned the Ohio State Department of Education’s Common Core Standards and provided authentic learning experiences for fourth grade students. The living history program was designed for local fourth graders who visit the school for a total of four hours. During this time, students reenact schooling in the 1890s and complete a series of activities and lessons, including orthography (spelling), arithmetic, reading, recitation, and penmanship.

Activities at the schoolhouse utilize primary sources and artifacts (both reproduced materials and objects from the 1890s) as the focus of both group and individual instruction. The schoolhouse represents a historical context (a time and place) where past events occurred. The intent is to provide students with authentic engagement within a specific historical context. Some sources have been selected as curricular foundational materials (e.g., a page from the 1900 U.S. Federal Census for the township) because they provided a local historical context. Other materials have been selected because they are specific to the time period being represented through the living history experience. Still others are germane to the target standards for fourth grade students.

The current Anderson Schoolhouse was rebuilt after a fire in 1899 and remained open until school consolidation occurred in 1939.¹¹ This country school served students in the rural community of Ashland County. Research indicates that various instructional methods were employed and materials used by teachers in country schools during the nineteenth century. For example, G. Dallas Lind, who published a number of pedagogical books, observed that, in teaching reading, groups were small in country schools, and teachers could easily “assign a lesson from a newspaper, a Sunday-school paper, a juvenile magazine, or any book in which [they] may find stories or descriptive sketches suited to the wants of [a] particular class.”¹² According to Lind, teachers used materials to which they had access. For example, math manipulatives could easily be anything from corn kernels to chalk marks on a blackboard.¹³ Geography as taught in many schools in the latter half of the nineteenth century was by question and answer, with a few map drills.¹⁴ Transportation and geography were taught through a collective discussion. Since the distribution of natural resources and production of different industries in different parts of America were key, railroad maps were very adequate as resources.¹⁵

Activities can be hands-on in learning history, not just through memorization. As a processing activity after studying events, teachers write two columns of dates on the blackboard, and students are directed to associate events with the dates, very much like a timeline.¹⁶ Lind noted, “I would not be understood in taking [students] through the history as through a chronological table, getting only the dry bones, but I would clothe these with living, breathing flesh as I went along.”¹⁷ This statement attests to the importance of rich description in the teacher’s delivery of content to help students remember important events. What follows are examples of activities developed to meet the current content standards that are in line with methods recommended for country schools in the nineteenth century.

Tales of Peter Parley About America

According to the Ohio standards, fourth grade students are required to be able to determine the theme of a story or poem, make inferences, and summarize a text.¹⁸ Fourth grade students at the Anderson Schoolhouse are required to read a chapter from the *Tales of Peter Parley About America*.¹⁹ The book, written as if it were a first-hand account, was

composed by an influential and prolific writer, Samuel Griswold Goodrich, and is both a primary and secondary source. Griswold described many first-hand accounts from his childhood in New England, but he also addressed history much before his birth in 1793. The chapter “Story of America in Verse” describes the arrival of Columbus to North America, and the wars and other conflicts between Europeans and Native Americans in North, South, and Central America. It also traces the colonization of America to the end of the Revolutionary War. Griswold, being a fantastic storyteller, included vivid scenes such as the following:

The fields are strewed with dead and dying,
And o'er them troops of horse axe flying,
Trampling beneath their bloody tread
The mangled forms of hurt and dead.²⁰

To complete a hands-on history activity, a small group of students is directed to the recitation bench to read and discuss the poem with a teacher. Then they are required to place events on a timeline using pieces of parchment paper with pre-written events typed on them. A formative evaluation (an indication of how the work can be improved to reach the required standard)²¹ is performed by analyzing the events and determining the sequence in which they occurred in the story. Students are then directed to place the parchment pieces over a wire strung under the windows at one side of the room (Figure 1).

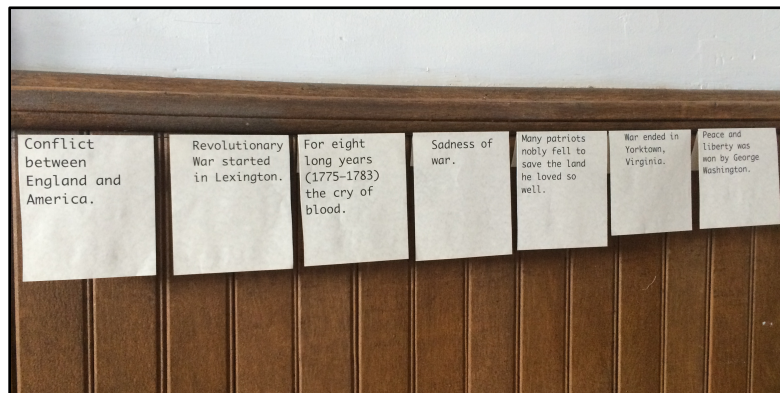


Figure 1: Timeline activity tied to *Tales of Peter Parley about America*. Photo courtesy of Anderson Schoolhouse, Limited Liability Company, 2014.

According to the standards, fourth grade students are required to place significant events in Ohio and the United States on a timeline in correct order.²² Corrective feedback

is provided by teacher observation and active questioning. For example, a teacher might ask probing questions such as, what do you think comes next, or was that item before or after another event in sequence? This small group interaction allows for full participation of all students in the discussion of the verse and represents social learning among group members as they interact with each other to construct the timeline.

The reading of the *Tales of Peter Parley About America* and the assembly of a timeline require students to read a document with antiquated language structure and a vocabulary that is unfamiliar to them. Scaffolding the activity through social engagement among peers and the teacher, the latter of whom serves as a facilitator, allows students to socially construct knowledge by relying on each other to examine the story, build meaning for the unfamiliar vocabulary, and allow for comprehension. As social learning theorist L. S. Vygotsky observed, “What children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone.”²³

1900 U.S. Federal Census

Another set of activities challenges students to use a federal census to analyze data, speculate on reasons for migration patterns, develop a bar graph about their county, and develop an understanding of immigrant assimilation in country schools. Each student receives a 2' x 3' copy of the original 1900 U.S. Federal Census.²⁴ When working on immigration patterns of Milton Township, Ashland County, Ohio, students work individually or in pairs. They scan through the *birthplace* column on the census and identify all the countries mentioned. As a class, students create a list of countries and the number of people born in those countries. Then they place the list on the blackboard using chalk marks. Students are called to the front of the room to help build a bar graph including countries and number of people. This activity requires developing a scale to represent the data. A discussion on the number of immigrants in this township and why people may have decided to move to this area follows. The activity allows the students to identify immigration patterns of the local area in which the schoolhouse is located. It also allows the group to develop the mathematical skill of analyzing data to build a bar graph with a scale.

In a subsequent activity, students work individually using a slate and the same census record sheet; but this time, they must analyze the *birthplace* of the mothers listed in the census and create a bar graph, including the number of mothers born outside of the State of Ohio. Thus, they learn that people may move from one region to another (state or country) for a variety of reasons and practice the data analysis and graphing skill once again. As students complete the activity, their work is checked before they can move on to the next activity. If incorrect, they are sent back to their seats and asked to recount.

The Ohio Department of Education's History Strand–Heritage notes that fourth grade students should become familiar with the idea that “Various groups of people have lived in Ohio over time including prehistoric and historic American Indians, migrating settlers, and immigrants. Interactions among these groups have resulted in both cooperation and conflict.”²⁵ The activity designed to meet this objective requires students to understand migration by country and region in a very authentic manner by looking at the census records for the region in which they live.

Furthermore, the Geography Strand–Human Systems Standard requires that students identify how the population of the United States has changed over time “becoming more diverse” (e.g., racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious). Ohio’s population has become increasingly reflective of the cultural diversity of the United States.”²⁶ After analyzing the census records, students are led into a discussion about how teachers in the 1890s dealt with students who did not speak English and are asked to reflect on how teachers today work with English language learners. This activity also engages students in the process of immigrant assimilation in country schools. “Assimilation proved difficult for those who spoke a different language, ate strange food, wore unusual clothing, and did not understand the American legal and monetary system,” observed historian Andrew Gulliford. “Many groups stayed in close-knit colonies, to provide support to each other and maintain their traditions.”²⁷

Mathematics outcomes are also used in this activity in that students must build a scale to represent the data both in the group activity at the blackboard and on individual slates at their desks. This activity aligns with the Ohio Department of Education Mathematics Standard for fourth grade, which requires students to “express measurements in a larger unit in terms of a smaller unit.”²⁸

When analyzing the 1900 U.S. Census records, students are involved in identifying countries and states other than Ohio, and they are also able to identify surnames shared by their classmates. Since the census records are intentionally local and visiting fourth grade classes ~~were~~ are from the region, it is not surprising that some surnames have continued to be common locally. Grace Storm observed, in her discussion about doing a hands-on, project-based geography activity with a fifth grade class that seemed to run parallel in relevance to the census activity, “Another important outcome of this work was the spirit of investigation and research which it fostered: the children saw the necessity of careful study and of testing the results of that study.” She continued, “They had a reason for finding out facts and a real use to make of them.”²⁹ Similarly, in doing the census activity, students at the schoolhouse investigated facts beyond what they were required to do in the task. Not only did they locate and account for the birthplaces of individuals outside of Ohio, but they took careful account of age, school attendance, and professions of those enumerated. This is a clear example of authentic learning.

A Primary History of the United States

The Ohio Department of Education’s Geography Strand–Human Systems notes that fourth grade students should be required to explain “both positive and negative consequences for modifying the environment in Ohio and the United States.”³⁰ To meet this standard, students at the Anderson Schoolhouse are provided with the following passage from *A Primary History of the United States*, which describes the completion of the Union Pacific Railroad under President Ulysses Grant’s administration:

The Pacific Railroad (1869)—General Grant took his seat as President, in March 1869. During the first year of his term, the railroad across the continent, which had been a great while in process of construction, was finished. For six years, two companies had been building this road, one working from the east and the other from the west. In May 1869, they met at Ogden, Utah, and the last spike was driven between two locomotives, one headed toward the east and the other the west. The great Pacific Railroad was at last finished, and lines of rails, stretching without a break all the way across the continent, realized Columbus’ dream of a short route to India.³¹

Students are asked to read the passage and answer the following questions: (a) what great enterprise reached completion in 1869 and (b) whose dream did the Union Pacific realize? Upon answering these questions, students are asked to use a Union Pacific Railroad map from 1892 (Figure 2) to find the meeting point between the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroads in Ogden, Utah. This is followed by asking students to use a globe to analyze whether it would be easier to get to India from Sacramento, California, or from the Eastern Seaboard of the United States. Students explain their answers and are asked why they think Columbus wanted to reach India.



Figure 2: 1892 map of the overland route of the Union Pacific Railroad.³²

In this case, modification of the environment includes the completion of a transportation system. Through discussion, the students realize that the railroad allowed for the transportation of goods within the continent and opened easier access to trade with the East. Then students read the passage in *A Primary History of the United States* describing the completion of the Union Pacific Railroad. Next, they are asked to make inferences from the text and extrapolate them to visual references in the form of the Union Pacific Railroad map from 1892 and a globe. In this sense they take an abstract

concept and make it concrete through the use of primary sources (i.e., period-correct reproductions of artifacts).

Stereoscopic Cards as Moral Stories

According to the standards, fourth grade students are required to “determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; that is, they are to summarize the text.”³³ Students are provided with a stereoscope and stereoscopic or 3D image cards. A sequence of two or three cards tells a story. For example, the cards teach about the consequences of playing with fireworks on the Fourth of July. On the back of the card is a text explaining the story. Students are asked to look at the images (Figures 3 and 4) using the stereoscope. Then they read the stories on the back of the cards to determine the moral of the story. Students must write in their notebooks what they believe to be the moral and also the evidence to substantiate their statements. They work closely with a teacher in order to complete this activity, which allows for immediate feedback.



Figure 3: The front of stereoscopic card “No. 26 Celebrating the Great and Glorious Fourth of July” features a girl holding her ears to block the noise of a small cannon a boy is ready to set off. On the back, a rhyme offers four possible ways to interpret the front of the card. Truman Ward Ingersoll, publisher and photographer, © 1898-1902.



Figure 4: The front of card “No. 27: The Day After the Fourth of July Celebration” depicts a girl helping a boy who has bandages on his head and leg, and a black mark on his cheek. On the back is a warning to avoid engaging in dangerous behavior. Truman Ward Ingersoll, publisher and photographer, © 1898-1902.

In an attempt to use artifacts in the lesson and incorporate moral lessons that endure over time, students use stereoscopes and original stereoscopic cards from the turn of the century to identify the moral of the story. This activity, as Veronica I. Ent observed, provides an opportunity to interject “visually-rich settings encouraging pupils to reflect on and investigate concepts.”³⁴ Once again, the knowledge is socially constructed by a small group with the teacher guiding the discussion. Feedback from the students on using an artifact (stereoscope) from a prior century to fulfill its educational purpose is authentic and engaging.

The Ashland Gazette Newspaper

According to the standards, fourth grade students are required to “refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.”³⁵ To meet this standard, students are provided with an enlarged copy of a page of a local newspaper in Ashland County, circa 1892. Students are expected to scan the newspaper for local, state, and international news. Upon identifying possible news items, they write in their notebooks a news summary for each category. Students must pay attention to details to determine if the article is considered local, state,

or international news, and provide enough information to support the inferences in their summaries.

In analyzing an enlarged copy of an Ashland County newspaper from 1892, students build new vocabulary and identify news at the local, state, and international levels. They are encouraged to consult an 1892 version of Webster's dictionary³⁶ to look up definitions of unfamiliar words. The activity contributes significantly to a curricular outcome in that students make sense of what they are reading, summarize content, and build period vocabulary. Such an activity also empowers students who indicated that they felt as if they were grown-ups reading the newspaper by themselves. The activity also helped ground students in the community because the paper is local and some businesses and family names have remained familiar 123 years after the newspaper's publication.

Conclusion

Karen Dutt-Doner, Catherine Cook-Cottone, and Susan Allen state that “engaging students with primary source documents exercises the critical-thinking skills needed to analyze and interpret historical documents.”³⁷ As this paper indicates, fourth grade students can develop competencies related to curricular content standards through activities that are hands-on, centered on authentic real-world tasks, and include components of social learning in small groups,.

Authentic learning has its roots in the pedagogy of the country school. G. Dallas Lind described methods to teach history in which students were each assigned a topic for investigation and report, and other students were encouraged to criticize and add to student reports, if possible.³⁸ These activities offer the core components of authentic learning: social learning and problem-based inquiry, as well as student engagement with a tolerance for errors and failure.



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Notes

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