

4. Social Studies: Key understandings go beyond culture

[Article 4 of 10: The previous article showed how a sample Social Studies unit indoctrinates students to feel embarrassed for America's history. Those lessons took their lead from framework levels, including the top "Key Understandings" level that this article examines.]

The Social Studies frameworks (SSF) claim, "Meaningful social studies . . . are structured around enduring understandings . . ."[1]

It's circular reasoning to argue understandings are considered enduring because they have been popular and popular because they endure. History is littered with popular bad ideas. "Separate but equal" was once popular. Slavery denounced in lessons today might have been considered an enduring understanding in the 1859 social studies frameworks. Imagine teachers required to use then modern pedagogical techniques to drill slavery into yesteryear's inquiring and eager young minds.

Popularity only means beliefs are well-known. Popularity offers neither validation nor justification. Modern packaging of bad ideas won't make them any more significant.

Unexamined popular traditions imbedded into frameworks don't offer students paths to determine their origin or why they have value. Platitudes aren't principles. Beliefs aren't principles. Clichés aren't principles. What the frameworks assume to

be principles are convenient fictions used to avoid principles. They don't explain why notions matter or justify them with reasoning others could follow and possibly accept as their own.

To earn cachet as principles, ideas with potential grow from wisdom distilled from hard experience. Patterns that appear significant are then projected into hypothetical futures. Some imagined futures would be silly—Utopian models that collapse, unworkable even in dreams. Others show potential. Those that stand up against both the past and future serve as acting principles until fresh experience demonstrates the need to find something better.

Students develop maturity as they revalidate why certain ideas may be principles. As they become confident in their mastery, they can entertain challenges to them, even across cultures. Framework cultural "understandings" can't be expected to transfer across cultural boundaries.[2]

The frameworks fail to establish persuasive connections with other cultures or individuals and visa versa. Students caught in frameworks multi-cultural moral relativism are left unarmed to defend against criticism by other cultures. The frameworks celebrates multicultural differences even as it wrongly presumes cross-cultural experience is uniform and enduring.

Revalidation is the responsibility of every individual. Each gen-

eration is obliged to revalidate the principles accepted as fundamental by previous generations in light of more recent experience. It is too important a task to be assigned to elite experts. The frameworks offer no path other than habit for a student to deduce their value or revalidate for the current generation their importance. Revalidation is not even a consideration.

Any worthwhile framework would teach the principle behind the enduring understanding. Students would revalidate the principle that validates the understanding. The frameworks should ask, "Why are traditional understandings foundational?" That they don't ask sends the message that the framework designers don't know.

[The next article continues to pursue how so-called "key ideas" and "compelling understandings" in the Social Studies Frameworks are unfounded, unprincipled noise.]

[1] <http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/powerful>

[2] The C3 Framework defines culture to be, "a human institution manifested in the learned behavior of people, including their specific belief systems, language(s), social relations, technologies, institutions, organizations, and systems for using and developing resources." C3-framework-for-social-studies.pdf