

History in A New Age: The Curriculum and Theory Behind How History⁶ is Taught

The theoretical foundations for History⁶ are rooted in the belief that history education has, by educational necessity, shifted from a chronological approach towards a constructivist one. Key details of dates, times and events are vital and necessary components but how students deal with that information influences their level of true understanding and how the class is structured. “Significant learning is more than an accumulation of facts. It is learning which makes a difference—in the individual’s behavior, in the course of action that he chooses in the future, in his attitudes and in his personality. It is pervasive learning which not just an accretion of knowledge, but which penetrates every portion of his existence.” (Carl Rogers 1958)

Here in History⁶, constructivist theory guides the way to make learning personally meaningful. Great stress is placed on the “sharing, constructing, and reconstructing of their ideas and beliefs. Social interaction provides the necessary language skills and understanding of cultural norms that facilitate learning. Social interactions with the teacher and other students are a significant part of the learning process.” (Jadallah 2000) Translated, that means it is my charge to set up the class and the content so that your child can explore, test and form given key curricular content into a personalized, robust mental framework. Working with others exposes and explores all the hidden assumptions, understandings and beliefs which block true understanding.

Civilization and their societies change. The amount of information now available to your children is so great, grappling with it all by facts alone, is near impossible. “As societies evolve, the education needed to participate successfully in them, changes. To become *lifelong learners*, students need to *learn how to learn*.” (Jadallah,2000) Your children now have a structure to help them understand any society they are introduced to, not only in this class, all through middle school. With each exposure their mental structure should modify and deepen while understanding intensifies.

Starting with the concrete and moving to abstraction grounds learning. Like riding with training wheels, revisiting similar things but talking about them in a different way, builds the skills the children need with support. This year started with a society of one, the student, viewed through the lens of individual identity as that leads to group identity, the foundation for any society. The characteristics of culture and group identity were the focus of the second unit. Based on the National Council for Social Studies educational standards, these characteristics are applicable to any civilization both past and present. By comparing two known societies, Graded and Brazil, the children learned the various processes without the added burden of dealing with wildly unfamiliar content as well. By doing so, however, the students gained a mental structure to use when they study the abstractions of ancient cultures.

All civilizations visited the rest of the year will be analyzed by these same twelve elements: Government and Organizations; Quality of Life and Status; Geography, Crops and Food; Family and Education; Religion, Values, Taboos; Holidays, Festivals and Ceremonies; Movement, Transportation, and Migration; Language and Communication; Leisure Activities and Arts; Housing and City Systems; Science, Mathematics and

Technologies; Icons and Symbols. Each unit, after getting a broad overview of the society using all twelve, a particular class will focus specifically on two or three of the elements. Guiding questions will help the children see how those aspects manifest into the larger culture.

For example, the sub-questions for the Government and Organization element are:

- Who has the power? How is it organized?
- What are the most powerful organizations (both formal and informal) in this society?

Collaborative groupings are key for every student. The discussion needed to analyze and dissect the content occurs there. The wiki is a communication tool by which your children collaborate and exchange ideas outside of the classroom. Being able to do so at a time convenient for them, and accessible from any computer, adds a level of flexibility. It creates a classroom environment without time and space constraints.

By the end of the year, each class will have delved through all of the elements as they have surveyed the key ancient civilizations of the past. The final products for each unit will be published in a web site named *Our Life Times*. The growth they show in content knowledge, effective communication and ability to work in groups should be quite noticeable.

- If you would like further information about specific topics discussed in this paper, here is a list of resources that are on both in the parent page of my web site and the History6 course web at Graded.
www.bfincher.net/sixth/parent_communication/parent.htm
- An educational article, by Professor Edward Jadallah of the University of which deftly explains the rationale behind how information and learning in the History6 classroom is done by comparing the constructivist approach to the more traditional chronological one. "Constructivist Learning Experiences for Social Studies Education". Edward, Jadallah. The Social Studies. 2000. 2006.
<http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home>
- For more information concerning the wiki technology, please visit this site. "Wiki" Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 2006.
2006.<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki>
- For a description of the core thematic strands from the National Council for the Social Studies, click here. Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: II. Thematic Strands" The National Council for the Social Studies. 2006.2006.
www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/

