

A Vision for the Teaching of  
History-Social Science:  
Lessons from the  
California History-Social Science Project

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*What gets historians out of bed in the morning is not being able to name all of the U.S. presidents. What gets them out of bed in the morning is the question that is burning in their mind that they want to find an answer to. That is the dynamic of history, and most history teachers in their history courses don't have a chance to experience that.*

– Professor of Education

*We have unwittingly prevented kids from recognizing the real richness and the deep excitement that comes from studying history firsthand for themselves.*

– Former high school history teacher and  
graduate student in education

*The California History-Social Science Project is an intellectual and collegial home for me ...It is where I found confidence in being a real amateur historian. I realized that I could use historical thinking and do what historians did, and also get my students to do it.*

– Middle school teacher

How should history be taught? That simple question is the subject of this monograph.

This seemingly straightforward question has in fact given rise to a national debate involving educators and non-educators alike.<sup>1</sup> The question of how history<sup>2</sup> should be taught leads inexorably to additional questions – all of which are problematic: What comprises the essential elements of the discipline of history? Which of those essential elements are critical in the teaching of history at the elementary, middle, and high school levels? What is the role of history in the development of civic literacy and in sustaining a democracy? Whose version of history should be taught, and who decides this? To what extent can and should history be learned through an inquiry approach? What is the relationship between history and the social sciences and other disciplines? What knowledge, skills and experiences must teachers have in order to teach history well?

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<sup>1</sup> See policy documents that call for improvement of history teaching, such as *Schoolhouse Politics: Lessons from the Sputnik Era*, by Peter Dow. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1991); and *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past*, by Gary Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn. New York: Alfred A. Knopf (1997).

Such questions are difficult to address and even more challenging to answer. There has been strong agreement that history is often not taught well, but there is far less agreement about what would constitute improvement. There is not even consensus about the fundamental purposes for teaching history to school children. And yet finding answers to these and other questions lies at the heart of any systematic effort of reform.

In this monograph we present in distilled form the ideas and work of history and social science educators who have been at the leading edge of reform in the past decade and more. In effect their answers to these questions contribute to the building of a *shared vision* for a new way to teach history. A shared vision is critical to any effort that seeks to reform educational practice; without it, attempts to improve education are likely to be fragmented and incoherent and may even exacerbate the confusion in the field. A clear and explicit vision both defines and motivates the reform effort. Peter Senge, in his book *The Fifth Discipline*<sup>3</sup> points out the critical importance of having a shared vision as a motivating force:

*A shared vision is not an idea. It is not even an important idea such as freedom. It is, rather, a force in people's hearts, a force of impressive power. It may be inspired by an idea; but once it goes further – if it is compelling enough to acquire the support of more than one person – then it is no longer an abstraction. It is palpable. People begin to see it as if it exists. Few, if any, forces in human affairs are as powerful as shared vision... (p. 206)*

In this monograph we explicate a “shared vision” of what history looks like when it is taught well, as well as a shared vision about the essential elements of reform.

Much of what we discuss is compatible with the ideals set forth in the National Standards and the California State *Framework*,<sup>4</sup> but the shared vision we portray is different from those documents

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<sup>2</sup> When we refer to “history” in this document we almost always mean the broader teaching of history and the related social sciences.

<sup>3</sup> Senge, Peter. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday (1990).

<sup>4</sup> *The National Standards for History for Grades K-4: Expanding Children's World in Time and Space; National Standards for US History: Exploring the American Experience (Grades 5-12, Expanded Edition); and National Standards for World History: Exploring Paths to the Present (Grades 5-12)*. National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA (1994). *The History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools – Kindergarten*

in critically important ways. The purpose of the standards and frameworks is to serve as the foundation and reference point for assessment and accountability systems by establishing what “students should know and be able to do.” As such, standards and frameworks are essentially political documents that reflect a consensus of ideas advocated by a very wide range of stakeholders.

The vision of history teaching in this monograph also talks about what students should know and be able to do – but the source of this vision is quite different. In contrast to standards and frameworks, what we have written is essentially a research-based essay. It is derived from our study of people and projects who have been heavily involved in the reform effort in history and social sciences. More specifically, the vision of history teaching and reform presents our distillation of the thinking of leading reformers as well as our observations of classrooms. It is not a vision without ambiguity, nor is it a vision that has universal consensus. But it is the vision that we believe guides the current efforts of many history educators to improve the teaching of history and social sciences.

In our research for this monograph, we asked historians to explain to us their ideas about the fundamental nature of their discipline – what the “doing” of history really consists of – and about what of the discipline is essential to the teaching of history in schools. We also watched and talked with the leaders of professional development projects that are attempting to help teachers achieve a new vision and practice of history teaching. Similarly, expert teachers working at all levels explained to us what they were aspiring to as they taught history and the social sciences to their students in their own classrooms. Our task was to distill out and synthesize the ideas that motivated these educators.

Hence, the vision we present here is one that is grounded in – and directly derives from – the words and actions of leading educators. It includes ideas about the nature of the discipline, about teaching, and about professional development. In our meetings with diverse educators at both the

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*through Grade 12*. California Department of Education; created in 1996-97 and re-adopted with minor changes in 1998.

pre-college and college levels, we sometimes heard hot debates about the defining elements of a vision for reform. Consequently, the vision we present here is one that is strongly shared and yet still reflects some aspects of a “live” debate in the field.

Efforts on the part of different groups to initiate reform in history-social science have stirred up considerable controversy at times over the past two decades. We do not wish to over-simplify the terms of this debate, nor do we mean to add fuel to the fire of competing reform agenda and policies. Rather, we aim to illuminate and clarify the vision – and the logic and rationale underlying it – that has been the driving force for leaders in history-social science reform in California (as well as much of the nation) for the past two decades. Through this explication, we hope to deepen the understanding that is available to the field about the ideas and practices that frame and guide these educators’ work.

It is important to state up-front that the vision we present here does not come from or represent our own particular point of view (we are not historians or even primarily involved in the field of history).<sup>5</sup> Rather, we have from an outside perspective tried to listen and observe carefully, and to render the ideas and arguments that are essential in framing a clear vision of and rationale for the history reform effort. If we are successful in this endeavor, we will have acted more as documenters and translators than as proponents of educational reform.

### **The origin of this monograph**

As part of a federally funded special project,<sup>6</sup> the California History-Social Science Project<sup>7</sup> (CHSSP) asked us (Inverness Research Associates) to document and study their work. When we began that study, it became apparent to us that a monograph such as this would be more useful,

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<sup>5</sup> Inverness Research is a small research firm that is involved in policy analysis and reform work, largely in the area of science and mathematics education.

<sup>6</sup> The Beginning Teacher Institute (BTI), funded by U.S. Department of Education Eisenhower funds. This project represents the first grant given by the National Eisenhower Project to a discipline other than Math, Science and the Foreign Languages.

<sup>7</sup> The CHSSP is one of the California Subject Matter Projects. Funded by the State, these projects consist of professional development sites located in universities around the state, and adhere at least roughly to the model developed by the National Writing Project.

and would reflect the Project more accurately, than a standard evaluation report. We have looked at reform efforts in many different disciplines and, in our judgment, the effort in history/social science is at a point where it is necessary to become very explicit and concrete about the nature and types of changes that are needed.

Our hope is that this monograph will fulfill an evaluative role for the CHSSP both by reflecting the thinking and activities that were part of the Project, and at the same time by creating a product of value for the broader field. Hence, we offer this monograph to history-social science educators both within and beyond the CHSSP to use as a basis for discussions, for shaping further thinking about reform, and for helping to convey the need for and the nature of improved instruction in history-social sciences.

### **The audiences for this monograph**

We write the monograph with multiple purposes and audiences in mind.

**Funders.** We hope that funders of educational reform (government agencies and private foundations) can use this document to inform themselves about the goals and defining characteristics of the current history-social science reform effort. For them we offer insights into the current thinking and major debates in the field, and into what the leaders in the disciplines are trying to accomplish. This kind of background information and understanding of the current context is important, we believe, in designing funding initiatives that are of value to the field. We also think that the monograph can illuminate for funders the qualities and features of effective professional development in history-social science.<sup>8</sup>

**History and Social Science Educators.** This monograph is also intended for those involved in reform, including professional developers and curriculum developers. We believe the key

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<sup>8</sup> For example, an essential component of professional development that is consistent with the vision we portray in this document is to offer teachers the time, resources and opportunities to conduct their own historical investigations because those experiences are antecedent to teachers' providing similar experiences for their students.



concepts underlying the vision, along with the examples from real classrooms and professional development, will suggest guiding principles as well as clarify controversies. We hope this will help these groups extend their thinking. Reform advocates may also find it useful to share this document with others when making the case for a more powerful, richer approach to the teaching of history-social science.

**Teachers.** We also hope this monograph will be of value to K-12 teachers, including the broader community of pre-service teachers. The monograph includes vivid examples and wonderful quotations that can help teachers working at all levels gain a “big picture” of the national history-social science reform effort. More practically, we believe the monograph can help teachers think about their own vision for the teaching of history and ultimately be of help as they make history-social science come alive in their own classrooms.

### **The research for this monograph**

Our research took place over a nine-month period in 1997-98 and consisted of three strands of activity: 1) interviews with educators involved in improving the teaching and learning of history-social science; 2) observations of history-social science teaching in elementary and middle school classrooms; and 3) observations of professional development events designed to support teachers' movement toward a new and powerful vision of history-social science. (For more details about the research methods see Appendix A.)

### **The organization of this monograph**

This monograph addresses three aspects of a unified vision for teaching history-social science in California's K-12 schools.

***The nature of historical inquiry.*** In Section II below, we portray the thinking of history-social science educators at all levels as they describe the “true” nature of inquiry, learning, and

knowledge within their discipline. It is these ideas that form the basis for their vision of how to improve history-social science teaching and learning in K-12 classrooms.

***Classroom practice.*** In Section III, we provide examples and vignettes from real classrooms as a way to provide a more grounded picture of the current state-of-the-art in history-social science teaching in K-8 schools. These classroom images provide some understanding of the reform vision in practice.

***Professional development design.*** In Section IV, we focus on the professional development designs and experiences that may enable more teachers to bring this vision to life in their classrooms. We draw from our observations of CHSSP activities for this section.

***Challenges.*** In the concluding section, we identify a number of challenges that history educators described to us from their experiences in working for reform. We discuss the ways in which these challenges are related to the educational system in which this vision is embedded and are also related to ongoing debates in other disciplines.

## II. THE DISCIPLINE OF HISTORY-SOCIAL SCIENCE AND ITS TEACHING

### **The rationale for teaching history-social science**

We asked those who study and who teach history about the purposes of learning history. Not surprisingly, the educators and historians we interviewed made quite strong and compelling arguments for the place of history in the curriculum, from early elementary education through high school. One obvious line of argument is that the study of history makes a unique contribution to K-12 education by offering students the opportunity to learn about the past, as well as to make connections between past events and present conditions. From the study of history, some argue, students gain a sense of their own place in the vast span of history. Other reformers claim that the content of history, when taught through investigation, teaches important thinking skills that students need to be critical consumers of information and thoughtful citizens in a multicultural democracy. Many we spoke with agree with both claims, as reflected in the following comment:

*History is a way to develop analytic skills and to do it in a way that ought to be relevant to the students' lives. They should come to like history, enjoy it and profit from it because they can see that it helps them understand the world they live in, the problems we have, the opportunities we have and so on. They should begin to see that the past and the present are connected. So I think the best teachers see the learning of history as the acquiring of a valuable tool, both on the critical skills development side and on the practical side of helping to understand today's society and where we all fit in the long course of history.<sup>10</sup>*

– International history educator

Some educators make a more complex claim about the discipline-specific nature of the thinking that is taught through history:

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<sup>10</sup> For the sake of clarity, we have edited and/or reconstructed quotations in this report, while maintaining as faithfully as possible the intended meaning of the speaker.

*I think teaching critical thinking is a very weak rationale for teaching history and there are all other kinds of ways to teach critical thinking or higher order thinking. I don't think that rationale gets at the importance of historical understanding.... There are a number of things that really only history provides – such as giving us an orientation in time, giving us access to and helping us understand people who lived in entirely different circumstances, giving us an understanding of the origins and antecedents of our civilization ...and an understanding of the possibilities and the constraints on change. That is not generic critical thinking; rather this is better described as historical understandings.*

– Professor of Education

Educators espousing this view argue that history-social science's contribution is that students learn *particular* thinking skills and historical knowledge simultaneously and symbiotically:

*Historical content provides the context for thinking, and higher levels of thinking depend upon richer levels of understanding specific historical facts... It is a symbiotic relationship and so what is so essential is that in the teaching of any of these disciplines, in history particularly, it is important that youngsters from the very early stages are actively involved in thinking, inquiring into the content that they are exploring. And that there is not a gradual progression from mastery of facts first and then a progression up to higher levels of thinking. Rather it needs to be cyclical... In other words, the content grows in complexity with age and the levels of discourse and the analysis grows with age, but all of it is there in early form, even in kindergarten.*

– Professor of Education

These historians and educators argue, therefore, that the subject of history-social science is an essential part of the K-12 curriculum because it is through the learning of historical knowledge that students develop thinking skills and simultaneously gain increasingly more sophisticated historical understandings of the world and their place in it. This rationale for the learning of history is central to the vision for improving the teaching of history as described in what follows.

### **The rationale for improving the teaching and learning of history**

Having claimed a place for history in the K-12 curriculum, the issue the field then faces is how best to teach it. Proponents offer several arguments in support of changing the way it has been taught. One line of reasoning is that students have not generally performed well when asked to demonstrate their historical knowledge on standardized tests. But those in the field have a deeper

concern, which is that in many if not most K-12 classrooms, the discipline of history has been portrayed as a sort of monochromatic, factually based endeavor. Those who love history, and who love the teaching of history, are very disturbed to find that *the teaching of their discipline in the K-12 setting is a mere shadow of the discipline itself*. One educator describes the problem of teaching and learning that do not reflect the richness of the subject:

*History has a bit of a bad rap amongst students – it is perceived as being somewhat dry. The learning involves rote recall of disconnected facts, and that really is a terrible disturbance to the field. Those of us who study history know it is anything but that... We have unwittingly prevented kids from recognizing the real richness and the deep excitement that comes from studying history firsthand for themselves.*

– Former high school history teacher and  
graduate student in education

As history is typically taught, in other words, there has been a serious disjuncture between the discipline of history as historians practice it and the subject of history as students experience it. One goal for improvements in history teaching is to create student learning experiences that are more faithful to the discipline and that engage students in different modes of historical work.

Those who advocate these improvements make quite strong and careful claims about the place of “facts.” These educators do not argue against the learning of historical facts; rather, they claim that by engaging students in the process of understanding (even creating) historical narratives, students’ relationship with the discipline alters. The result is that students learn historical thinking skills, interpretation, and perspective, *as well as* facts. One historian said it this way:

*When I talk about exemplary history and social science teaching, I think sometimes people get the impression that our approach almost denies the importance of the facts and I think in some ways, the emphasis on exploration and discovery has been overstated... because, of course, the point of the exploration or the discovery is learning. Exploration is not an end in itself. The kids come out of their investigations understanding more about the cultures they have been studying than they would if they had been doing the worksheets and memorizing the answers. But the point is ultimately that they will have not just critical thinking skills, but real knowledge.*

– Historian

In addition to shifts in pedagogical practices, proponents for improving the teaching of the discipline argue for changes in the content of what is taught. Their rationale is that not only do individual students often find the discipline colorless and irrelevant, but larger social movements are also pressuring the schools to teach a history that is more inclusive of the stories of the diverse people in this country.

*There has been pressure on both ends. At the lower grade levels there is pressure from students who are turned off by former views of history that are very static and represent a very linear kind of national record... because it lacks relevance for them... There is also the pressure of social movements where groups of people are complaining that 'we are not included in history; this isn't our history' and so forth. And then at the university level, that pressure has been translated into pretty sophisticated scholarship that re-examines a lot of the ways that we view the past. So there is public and social pressure on both levels that has changed the way we think about history.*

– Professional developer

Just as history-social science reformers envision a pedagogy of history teaching that is more consistent with the practices of historical investigation, they also envision the subject matter of history as being more consistent with and reflective of the deep changes in historical knowledge that historians are constructing.

In sum, the foundational idea in the guiding vision of history reform is this: that the teaching and learning of history in schools should become considerably more consistent with the investigative practices and subjects of history that are reflected in the real work of historians. That is, the *learning* of history should be closer to the *doing* of history.

In many ways, what history educators say about their vision to improve the teaching of history-social science resonates with current reforms in other disciplines, in that the core experience of “doing” the discipline should be an essential part of the K-12 learning experience. It is widely accepted, for example, that in science, scientific investigations are essential components of the discipline. In mathematics, similarly, problem solving is at the core of the discipline and at the heart of the learning of mathematical thinking. Critical to learning the arts, reformers argue, is the

personal experience of artistic expression in multiple forms, including visual arts, music, and dance. Perhaps because history has not been taught well, most people do not think immediately that it is a discipline of investigation and inquiry. To do science without doing investigations is not possible. To do history without investigation is equally unacceptable – even though this perspective is a new one for many educators and non-educators alike.

This notion – that investigation is a core experience of history as a discipline – is at the heart of the vision for improvement that guides most of the leading educators we interviewed:

*I would say, ultimately, what really good teaching of history does is that it involves students in doing the kind of work that historians do.*

– Graduate student in education and former high school history teacher

*Let's go back to the primary sources of history as a way to engage students in the way that the scholars are engaged.*

– Historian and Professor of Education

### **Dimensions of a new classroom practice**

In this section we expand upon this foundational idea by discussing in more detail three key components of the guiding vision: 1) the processes of learning involved in history-social science; 2) the nature of the content of the disciplines; and 3) dilemmas involved with linking history education to the development of an informed citizenry. These more concrete elements of the vision have strong implications for professional development as well as classroom practice.

The guiding vision we discuss in this monograph is congruent with many of the ideas presented in the California *Framework* and the national standards for history<sup>11</sup> but the vision is also a response to educators' knowledge of field realities. The key components of this vision and the classroom images we portray below are what we heard from those working in history-social science –

historians, professors of education, professional developers, and accomplished classroom teachers. Thus, while the vision we portray resonates with policy documents (such as the *Framework*), it is much more a “working person’s” vision for improving history-social science education as seen and internalized through the minds and eyes of educators who are in the field, working for change in the discipline. In contrast to a policy-oriented vision, what we portray should be viewed as dynamic and ever-evolving as the disciplines themselves.

### *Historical investigation as a process of learning*

Those we spoke with agree that the experience of historical investigation lies at the heart of their vision for teaching and learning – both for teachers and for students. Through historical investigation, teachers and students alike discover for themselves the complexities of narrative construction and the richness of historical understanding rather than primarily the “rote recall of disconnected facts.”

The pivotal professional development experience which exemplifies this vision is for K-12 teachers themselves to do their own historical inquiries and construct their own narratives. In this way they experience the “habits of mind” of historians. Teachers tell us that they can then translate that experience into their teaching by designing lessons in which their students can engage in their own historical investigations. For example, the teacher in one third grade class we observed invited her students to investigate the history of their own local community – what it once was and how it had changed. The students’ research included taking a walking tour of the neighborhood and mapping the streets, public buildings, shopping areas, homes, and their school. They investigated their community’s development by getting old photographs from the local library and tracking its growth over the years. They interviewed elderly inhabitants of the neighborhood about why they came there and what it was like when they arrived, and wrote an account of the history of their school. Historians as well as teachers who have had the experience of doing historical investigations agree that it is experiences such as these that “bring history to

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<sup>11</sup> Although the National Standards were not adopted, many of those who were involved in writing them have also influenced the California *Framework* and are actively involved in the crafting of a vision of history-social science reform for the field.



life.” It also illustrates very clearly to both teacher and students alike that history doesn’t have to be about Egypt or the Revolutionary War; rather it can be quite local, both in temporal and spatial terms.

A vision of classrooms where students can conduct authentic historical investigations is clearly ambitious in nature. For many people, it is difficult to imagine a third grade student having an experience similar to that of an historian, given the developmental level of the student and his or her accumulated knowledge. However, proponents of the vision say that it is precisely the difficult experience of historical interpretation that is valuable to students – at all grade levels.

One historian put it this way:

*There are lots of arguments that I have heard about why we shouldn’t treat students as little historians – that it seems sort of loony to get students involved in actually doing history... that historians are able to do history because they know a lot, they have an enormous amount of background knowledge out of which they operate and they have knowledge of the context in which events that they are looking at have occurred. And they argue that it is that sophisticated contextual knowledge that is the very fabric out of which the skilled historians weave interpretations. To me, that is a very good argument. But at the same time, it doesn’t seem to me that that is an adequate argument against getting kids involved in actually doing some history on their own, because it seems that in the process of doing their own history, students come to understand the difficulty of interpretation. They come to understand that we have imperfect knowledge of the past, and that how we read the past depends a whole lot on the questions that we take to it. And the questions that we ask of the past have a lot to do with the present circumstances in which we live. So perhaps the experience of doing history and interpretation does not necessarily make students into historians, but perhaps the experience will make them more informed and skeptical consumers of other people’s historical accounts.*

– Professor of History, Education

### ***Historical narrative as the content of history***

The content of history – the body of knowledge that students come to learn – is most often encapsulated in the form of narratives. These are essentially stories that have been constructed by historians investigating historical questions and following rigorous methods of historical research. To understand history, it is important to understand that the quality of historical narratives

depends to considerable extent on the degree to which they are grounded in evidence, and on the nature and quality of that evidence.

Proponents for change in the teaching of the discipline have two goals in mind for students in relation to historical narrative. One is that students need to understand that narratives are constructions by historians and that they are based in evidence. A second is that students should be exposed to rich, diverse narratives from multiple perspectives, making history more multifaceted and global (for example, teaching the histories of Asia, Africa, and South America as well as those of the western world and the U.S.). The long-term goal of those who make these assertions is to help students become critical consumers of narrative via their personal experience with and understanding of the construction of historical narrative. We discuss each of the two goals in more detail below.

*a) Students learn that historical narrative is constructed and based in evidence*

Proponents of a reformed vision of history teaching say that it is important for students to construct historical understanding based on their own investigations. As a professor of education said, “Otherwise all they are taking are the dead products from the work that other people have done.” Once again, an analogy with science may be helpful here. Students of science learn that scientific theory is a construction that results from carrying out inquiries – looking at natural phenomena, writing down their findings, and making interpretations. Quite similarly, historical narrative is the product of historical research. Students learn this by doing historical investigation – looking at artifacts and primary sources, making judgments about the quality of the evidence, and creating historical narratives based on their inquiry and interpretations. Experiencing this process not only helps students become better inquirers, but it also deepens the student’s understanding of the nature of history. More specifically, it can take students to a new level in their ability to be thoughtfully critical of existing historical narratives. They begin to understand the nature of historical narrative as a constructed, imperfect interpretation based on the best available evidence.

The process of doing history (i.e., historical investigation and narrative construction) and the historical narratives that result (the content of history) are thus both inseparable. As one historian said,

*It is not a question of either the process of historians or the product of historians, it is both of those [that] have to be wound together, but that makes it very, very complex.*

This dimension of the discipline of history – the intertwining of process and product – suggests a pedagogy for teaching history that presents a significant challenge to teachers. In translating this ambitious vision into classroom practice, teachers face both unfamiliarity with the approach as well as serious practical constraints that come in the form of time, resources and logistics. The educators we spoke with argued for the value of depth over breadth when teachers find they have little time for teaching history-social science. One historian provided this rationale:

*In my thinking, sometimes it is better to get students very familiar with one particular topic, and really get something out of it. Quite honestly, how much do any of us remember of what we learned in history in high school? I think people tend to remember the things that really grabbed their attention, that made them excited about history... and I would rather kids have that experience about a few topics than have tons of information crammed into their heads about a lot of topics that they valued only because they were needed for the final exam. I think once people have done history, and through that experience become interested in history, they absorb more – and then they are likely to absorb more through their whole lives.*

Some reformers suggested a more specific strategy for “balancing the need to cover many topics and yet be able to go into some topics at great depth.” They pointed out how teachers and students together could follow a stream of narrative and pause for deeper investigations as time allows and as “investigable” moments arise:

*There is a way around that problem... You run the narrative of history and then you stop at critical junctures in the narrative and, at those key points, you ask the students to engage in the deeper analyses. The way we talked about it in the California Framework meeting is that following an historical narrative is like taking your boat downstream: you follow the stream of the narrative and then you pull up at the shore at interesting moments and go ashore and then explore whatever you find on the beach – some idea or question – in depth. And then*

*get back aboard and continue the narrative. The narrative carries the story so children have the sense of context and continuity, but then by pulling up at the shore as frequently as their curricular time will allow, then you can all do the analyses together. And you can do historical analysis, you can do economic analysis, you can do geographical analysis of the event that has just come to light in the narrative sequence.*

– Professor of Education

*b) Broadened content for history-social science*

Not only should students' relationships with historical narrative change, according to proponents of the vision, but so too should the content of the curriculum. Advocates contend that geography and other social sciences such as economics and political science should be included in the curriculum more than they typically are. Similarly, they argue that most narratives are too flat and one dimensional; the narratives studied in school, they say, need to be enriched – broadened to include multiple perspectives and deepened to offer accounts of daily life. This enrichment provides opportunities for students to learn history through the eyes of the diverse people living in a particular time, place and culture. A rich narrative also allows students to develop a multi-layered understanding of daily life alongside the “big events.” One historian gave us this example:

*If you just go through the President and the Constitution and the big events, you haven't really been through the past. You haven't done it until you have seen what it would be like to live there, asking yourself 'what did people care about, what were their passions, what were their religious beliefs? What was it like to be there?'... For example, it is possible to study the house plans of the ancient Egyptians. Now most history courses don't often deal with house plans when they are looking at ancient Egypt. It is usually pyramids and mummies, but I'm suggesting having them look at some aspect of the culture which tells them more about what it was like to live there... For instance, asking: 'What was the procedure for having a garden in a house?' Maybe students could also look at some more mundane primary sources that are not always about the myths and the legends. For example, they could look at a text called 'A Sapphire on the Tree' in which a scribe talks about how fabulous it is to be a scribe and how lousy it is to be a brick maker.*

There is also widespread agreement among those we spoke with that learning the content of historical narratives is important, but at a deeper level, the cumulative study of narratives leads to the development of a more general “historical understanding.” In other words, the narrative is the vehicle for teaching historical thinking skills (such as chronological thinking) and historical

comprehension (such as who the characters are, why the story unfolded as it did, what the motivations were, and what the consequences were):

*While the narrative flow is going on, you still do some very important kinds of historical inquiry around specific chronology. What happened first? What were the consequences and what are the linkages between the 'before and after? In this way you get a map of time, of unfolding events, and you realize that chronology is one of the key tools for historical understanding. You deeply come to understand that things happen in a certain order and you can't engage in causal thinking if you don't know which was the antecedent and which was the consequence. So that is a very important kind of critical thinking that comes out of close work with historical narratives. You can also engage students in historical comprehension. Who were the actors and what were their apparent motivations? How did these things unfold, why did certain responses come forward when they did? What were the likely motivations of the people involved?*

– Professor of Education

In their argument to enrich historical narrative, advocates of the vision also reiterate the essential role of narratives in teaching students how to judge the validity of historical accounts by looking at the quality of evidence and the grounds for the knowledge presented. It is through analysis of many diverse narratives that students learn to judge the validity of historical accounts. In the following, a history educator explains the links between examining evidence and historical knowledge:

*Building a conception of historical knowledge means helping students understand what evidence is, what a valid historical account looks like, what it is based on. Giving students a conception of what historical knowledge is has to be built into the history curriculum in order for them to come out with something that we would call knowledge. Because in order to really know something, you also have to have some sense of the grounds for that knowledge. Now, that whole process of understanding what historical knowledge is can't be done without also teaching them a lot of history. That is, they have to know something in order to examine questions, evidence and historical accounts with any validity.*

– Professor of Education

The teaching of multiple narratives from diverse perspectives is a distinguishing characteristic of the reform vision for history. Reformers argue that teaching diverse narratives means going beyond the historical record of those in positions of power to include meaningful narratives

related to the daily lives and practices of people in sub-cultures within the U.S. (for example, a discussion of slavery would include the perspectives of African Americans) and other world cultures throughout history. Educators believe that studying many narratives gives students the tools they need to assess different historical accounts of the same time or event. It also helps them gain the critical ability to define themselves and the other, and it situates U.S. and others' histories in a broader, global context. Proponents believe that all of these are necessary for preparing students for life in a global society:

*A lot of our discussions about the curriculum and a lot of the debate about the national standards have been debates about which story it is we are going to tell students in the classroom. The problem with that whole set of debates and that whole approach is that the students today do live in a larger and more complex world, and confront contending stories of what happened in the past (once they get out of the history class). This is more so now than ever. A very, very central part of history education has to be giving them the tools to assess different accounts of the past.*

– Professor of Education

Finally, there is considerable agreement among those we spoke to that enriching the narrative (and the discipline as a whole) should go beyond the teaching of pure history to include geography and other social sciences such as political science and economics.

While those we spoke to share the beliefs and ideas that form this vision of the content of history-social science teaching, there are some elements of it that remain unresolved. For example, there is fairly widespread acceptance that literature should be included in the history-social science curriculum. However, views tend to vary on the extent to which other humanities, such as music and the visual arts, can be effectively integrated into the history-social science curriculum. The concern is that the integrity of the disciplines may be compromised if a teacher is not highly skilled in all disciplines being taught, and that the history-social science curriculum could be watered down if other discipline processes and content impinge on it.

Furthermore – and more controversially – while there is general agreement on the value of learning multiple perspectives, there is no real consensus on *which* stories and versions of history

should be taught. This is an instance in which the abstract element of the vision is quite robust (the notion that multiple narratives are important) but the more concrete manifestations and interpretations of it are not (which stories to select, given constraints). The vision for reform in the teaching of history-social science thus remains dynamic and evolving, which is in great part a reflection of the current status of debate within the larger discipline community.

*The dilemmas involved in education for citizenship*

Within the U.S., the teaching of history-social science in the public schools plays the primary role of education for citizenship. But here again there is considerable room for controversy between the abstraction of that goal and the realities of deciding exactly what “education for citizenship” means to those involved in improving the teaching of history. Up to this point, our discussion has focused on the value of providing students classroom learning experiences that center on doing historical research and understanding the nature of historical narrative. We have drawn parallels between the improvements in history-social science and other subjects, including science, because investigation – where students inquire into phenomena and construct theoretical explanations and interpretations – is the core experience of both disciplines. However, the question of how to educate for citizenship places history-social science educators on very sensitive cultural and political terrain.

In the U.S. we hold a cultural ideal that our nation’s history provides a shared set of stories about our past and where we came from, stories that, through education, can create a common bond among Americans. Our culturally shaped vision of history goes far in affirming and re-defining who we are, creating our identity as citizens of the same country. At the same time, progressive history educators – following the footsteps of practicing historians who are creating new and more diverse historical narratives – have reason to question some of the historical archetypes that have produced the American cultural ideal of what our history is and even of what enlightened citizenry means. Because of the power of existing ideals of American (and others’) history and of the role of education in promoting good citizenship, the proponents of the vision we discuss in

this monograph know full well that proposing changes to the standard archetype of American history stimulates confusion and controversy in the schools.

Below, we portray some of the issues we heard as we listened to historians and history educators talk about the vision of history as education for citizenship and the terms of the debate about it.

A basic area of confusion is how to balance the transmission of sufficient information to students to create “loyal citizens” while providing the opportunities and skills students need to also be “knowledgeable citizens” capable of inquiring critically into issues of civic life and social policy.

*I think there have been educators who thought that the role of history and social studies was to help students become not only knowledgeable citizens, but also citizens who had certain skills, certain dispositions to inquire into matters of social and public policy. And then there have been other groups whose view is that the role of history and social studies is to ensure*

*that students know certain stories and facts about America...and knowing that information will make them better citizens. This all raises a much bigger question: What is the role of school in this whole business of trying to create a unified country out of people who come here from lots of different traditions, lots of different values? My sense is that this is an old debate that takes on new forms, as different kinds of policies are proposed, and I can't imagine that we will ever reach consensus. At the same time I don't think the tension is a bad thing.*

– Professor of Education

In the eyes of those working to improve the discipline, teaching students a stereotypical or monochromatic view of government is not sufficient or even appropriate. Traditionally history teaching has developed civic-mindedness based on the transmission of facts about American government history, structures, processes and functions – facts aimed at creating a shared historical narrative, set of values and beliefs. The vision for improving history teaching moves beyond this by advocating that students become critical consumers of numerous historical accounts of the actual operations of the government and of local and world events – learning a cultural and political history told from multiple perspectives.



Earlier in this account we described a rationale for giving students access to historical narratives that reflect different points of view. We also described how the critical study of multiple narratives can be used in building skills of inquiry and questioning. Proponents of the reform vision say that these elements – inquiry and multiple perspectives – are not only essential in doing historical research but they are also crucial to development of educated citizens. They argue that the reality students need to learn is that our nation and the world are composed of many different groups and thus that no single voice or story is “correct.” Responsible citizenship means understanding that reality, and it means developing the skills and knowledge to make informed judgments about historical events and governmental policies. The role of history education in the creation of good citizens, within this vision, is to prepare students who can make informed judgments about social policy:

*What we studied history for, and I think you could apply this more broadly to the other social sciences as well, is to develop the kind of judgment people need to be in a sense “worthy” citizens . . . When we are looking at the past, we are looking at decisions about public policy that were made, decisions about social policy and so forth and... in the process of examining those, we can come to understand something of the political, social and cultural dynamics behind them as well as looking at what happens subsequently. We then make some judgments about whether those were good policies or not. That is difficult to do in the present moment, right? We don't know, for example, what the impact of current welfare reforms will be, because it hasn't really played out, and it is easier to evaluate that in hindsight, so I guess a primary part of what instruction should be about is to create situations in schools... and classrooms in which students can begin to develop that kind of judgment that is so critical to being a citizen in a democracy. It seems to me that studying the past with that kind of perspective, from an inquiry point of view and not just from an information-gathering point of view, is very critical if the study of history is really to help develop good citizens.*

– Professor of History, Education

## **Summary**

In this section, we have portrayed the underlying rationale for and foundational elements of the vision of history-social science teaching and learning that guides and reflects the reform work of those we spoke with and observed.

The core idea is that the teaching of history in K-12 should change so that it more closely reflects the “true” nature of the processes and the content of the disciplines themselves. In this vision, students learn about the investigations of historians and encounter multiple historical narratives, and students also carry out their own investigations into events and generate evidence-based historical narratives. The rationale is that students who learn how historians “do” history, and who learn to make history themselves, will be much more deeply engaged in the excitement of learning history (and the companion social sciences); and further, that students will develop the thinking and critical skills needed to formulate their own historical knowledge and to make informed judgments as citizens in a country and world populated by groups with both shared and very diverse experiences and interests.

Although there is a great deal of agreement among history educators about these foundational ideas, this vision of teaching and learning history remains dynamic, even volatile, in the concrete details. This is the case because of the debates that are occurring – both in K-12 education and among historians – about such questions as whether and how to give more or less privilege to some versions of history, and how to conceptualize and actually address the educational purpose of developing both loyal and critical citizens in the American democracy.

### III. BRINGING THE VISION TO LIFE IN THE CLASSROOM

In this section we move from a discussion of the vision as a set of ideas into a portrayal of the vision in terms of concrete classroom images, and we address some of the challenges of translating these images into classroom realities.

Put into concrete terms, this vision of classroom learning in history-social science involves creation of “rich” learning environments, complete with an assortment of tools for giving students access to the world of history, economics, geography, anthropology and other social sciences. In these rich classrooms, proponents argue, students should be able to conduct historical inquiry and investigations and develop the habits of mind of historians. Students should study geography and literature as an integral part of the discipline. In their research they should use timelines, a wide range of primary and secondary resources from multiple perspectives (e.g., photo-analysis, original letters and other documents as well as textbook accounts), the internet and other technology, and a good curriculum that is aligned with the *California Framework*. Students should gain historical understanding through the use of historical thinking skills (i.e., chronological thinking; historical comprehension, analysis and interpretation; historical research capabilities; and historical issues-analysis and decision-making). They should become critical consumers of our government and world events, and should develop a sense of what it means to be an historian.

In order to develop some grounding in the current status of history-social science teaching, we observed a range of K-8 classes. We present some examples below in order to give the reader some sense of the current reality of history-social science teaching and of the extent to which the vision is, in fact, becoming part of the reality of classroom practice.

We conducted 13 observations in middle and elementary school classrooms. We selected examples of lessons that would give us a balanced picture of a range of classes. Our sample included teachers who had had professional development and leadership opportunities in the discipline that were consistent with this vision and who could thus provide glimpses of instruction

that exemplified it. We also observed teachers who had not had equivalent professional development opportunities and whose teaching was probably less likely to reflect the vision. The teachers we observed spoke of many factors as being important influences in their history-social science curriculum, ranging from Integrated Thematic Instruction (ITI), to the Houghton Mifflin textbooks and TCI, to professional development in the discipline.

### **Third Grade Lessons**

#### ***Vignette I—Third Grade: Building a Community***

We selected the first vignette because, of the seven third-grade classes we observed, this one most clearly exemplified practices reflecting important aspects of the vision for improving of history-social science teaching. The teacher, who had eight years of teaching experience, had participated in and played leadership roles in professional development in history-social science. For example, she had been a facilitator in California History-Social Science Project institutes, and a teaching assistant and instructor of a university methods class for pre-service teachers. She was piloting for the first time a course model created by experienced teachers in the CHSSP. As specified in the California *Framework* for third grade, the theme of this lesson (and across the year) was “Continuity and Change” with a focus on community.

This lesson was part of a longer sequence of research on the students’ community. The students had already learned how to read maps and use geographical terms. They had learned about the founder of their town and names of some of the streets, and had taken tours of the playground and the neighborhood in which the school lay. They had investigated, and posted their findings in the classroom and school, their own families’ migration to the community including “the date my family came, where they came from, the route taken, and the reasons for migration.” They had plotted their findings on a timeline, created a Venn diagram about the reasons why families came there, and had made physical maps of their community, their school, and their classroom. As a joint project, the class had made a “geography dictionary” illustrating terms related to land forms as well as to their city, county, state, country and hemisphere. Prior to our observation the class

had read *Roxa Boxen*, a book about a group of people who built their community out of rocks and boxes.

### ***Third Grade – Building Community***

Students were in the middle of a multiple-day culminating activity in which pairs of students built their own community out of materials gathered by the teacher (rocks, paper, AstroTurf, markers, cotton swabs, sand, etc.). Each pair of students had to create a name for the founder of their community, describe how it developed over time, and label each part of their model. The activity on our observation day was for students to add to or refine their already constructed communities. During the 45-minute class period, the teacher walked around the room questioning students about their communities (e.g., “how did you come up with that name for your community?”) and also offered procedural suggestions to pairs as they built and added and labeled. Towards the end of the period the teacher asked each pair to explain how their communities were named and how the communities had changed over time. A brief group discussion ensued. Following this the teacher asked students to continue to write about these and other elements of their communities. The students found some of this analysis of their creations difficult, especially in their writing about change because they could not immediately see how their communities had changed.

The individual lesson was coherent and tied to the larger theme. The larger sequence in which the teacher embedded the lesson exemplified the design of a unit aligned with the vision, and it followed the recommendations of the *Framework* closely. The content was relevant to students’ lives and the unit introduced historical thinking skills such as research capabilities (investigating the migration of their own families) and chronological thinking (placing their families’ migration on a timeline). The teacher wove local geography and literature into the lesson.

In its execution, the lesson was a bit “flat” in some areas: for example, students had no records or documents to refer to about the growth of their communities, and the teacher’s interactions with students fell short of getting them to reflect on what they were changing and why. Although the teacher did not take the discussion to a deeper level during our observation, the substance was there for analysis and interpretation of migrations, trends, and how and why communities change. She laid the groundwork for learning how to value different narratives told by diverse voices by having students construct and share their own families’ stories of migration.

In sum, while the lesson was missing some qualities needed to be truly exemplary of the richness of the vision, we attribute this in part to the fact that the teacher had not had the opportunity to reflect on the lesson and make these connections herself.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Vignette II—Third Grade: Beethoven Biography***

The next classroom vignette is illustrative of what are probably more typical classrooms. This was a teacher with just a few year's experience. A strong influence in his practice was Integrated Thematic Instruction (ITI), which emphasizes the importance of engaging multiple intelligences in students and in developing specified "life skills" (for example, "doing your best"). The other strong influence was the Houghton Mifflin textbook. The Houghton Mifflin text is closely aligned with the *California Framework*, and, as a result, its approach reflects some aspects of the vision for improvement we are discussing. The textbook was this teacher's primary resource for teaching history-social science; he had had no professional development in the discipline.

The pedagogical and behavioral goals of ITI provided an overlay for the instruction in this classroom. In its history-social science curriculum, the class had just completed a unit on Native Americans from the textbook. The lesson we observed, though, was a biography unit on Beethoven. The teacher indicated that ITI "life skills" had influenced this lesson, explaining that he selected biographies that could provide students with good examples of people "overcoming adversity and doing their best." The source of the lesson was the students' literature text.

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<sup>12</sup> We have seen similar results in elementary science lessons when a teacher teaches a science kit for the first time. They often "teach by the recipe," missing some opportunities to delve deeply into teachable moments and make richer connections between specific activities to larger purposes and themes.

***Third Grade – Beethoven Biography***

The teacher began the lesson by playing *Claire de la Lune* for the class and asking who composed it. Some students indicated that they knew. He then showed them a picture of Beethoven that he had found on the internet. With that introduction, the class settled into taking turns reading Beethoven's biography from their reading textbook. As they read the story, the class also filled in significant dates on a timeline posted on the board (an activity suggested in the reader). At the end of the lesson, the teacher distributed a worksheet which asked students to transfer what was on the board onto a worksheet and to answer the question, "Why was Beethoven an amazing person?" They had a few minutes to complete this task. Then the teacher segued into explaining that Beethoven had a disability and asked the students to identify it. The teacher then asked them to pretend that they had a disability – an inability to speak – and to express their feelings through drawing about the piece of Beethoven's music they heard at the beginning of class. Most students drew a conductor with a raised baton. The teacher planned to follow this lesson with other biographies of various historical figures.

This lesson was a good example of an ITI-influenced history-social science lesson in the service of character-building. It also followed the *Framework's* recommendation that students learn about heroes through biographies to gain understanding of "common memories that create a sense of community and continuity" among people. However, the lesson did not make connections with the larger theme and purpose of learning about the lives of our nation's (and world's) leaders. The teacher seemed to serve two masters in designing this lesson, both the curriculum suggested by the text and the goals of ITI; but the lesson did not seem to take place within a larger conceptual framework of a unified history-social science curriculum. As a result, history in this classroom lacked a cohesion, or "stream of narrative," that the vision and the *Framework* espouse.

This lesson illustrates what we call the "trickle down" influence of the *Framework* as it takes concrete shape in a published textbook. A textbook interprets and thus sometime waters down or smooths out the conceptual rigor of the ideas outlined in the *Framework*. This, combined with the teacher's inexperience with situating lessons in a conceptual framework of history, diluted the overall power, authenticity and quality of the learning experience that took place in this

classroom. This is not an unfamiliar phenomenon to other history educators. One history leader explained that when teachers do not have the opportunity to develop a deep understanding of the inquiry approach and similar deep knowledge of the content, they really struggle to transcend the normal traditional approach to learning history:

*Even when our textbooks include an historical photograph or an excerpt from the historical document, or painting or whatever, the kinds of questions that teachers ask of it are not systematically developed so that students can start to work with historical evidence.*

– Professor of Education

### **Seventh Grade Lessons**

The seventh grade classes differed significantly from those of the third grade for a number of reasons. In seventh grade, history-social science is considered part of the core curriculum, and a block of time is often allocated for literature and history-social science to be taught together. Second, as the students become more cognitively developed, the content appropriately becomes more demanding. The *Framework* specifies that in seventh grade students learn about medieval and early modern world cultures (the fall of Rome, Islam, Africa, the Americas, China, Japan, and Europe), about which many teachers know very little themselves. Teacher's Curriculum Institute (TCI) materials (in addition to the Houghton Mifflin texts) were prevalent in a number of classrooms we observed and seemed to help teachers meet the demands of the curriculum.

#### ***Vignette I—Seventh Grade: Barbarians and Vikings***

This teacher works in a suburban school with very ethnically diverse lower-middle to middle class students. She has been teaching for approximately 25 years, and considers her teaching specialty to be art history and history-social science. She had participated in CHSSP professional development and had taken leadership roles. She had received a Fulbright award to go to China and, when she returned, had used the CHSSP summer institute as an opportunity to design a unit around a *Ching Ming* scroll. Standard components of her classes each semester included a major



research project called the “I Search” and interactive journals called “Time Travelers,” which students kept across the semester.<sup>13</sup> In the interactive journals, students record information almost daily about each culture or country they study, including what they learn about its history, geography, political structure, religion, education and communication, economics and technology, and entertainment. The teacher explained that these journals are part of the regular routine and referred to them as the students’ “most important resource.” She had six computers in her classroom which offered her students limited access to the internet for research purposes. She also used TCI curriculum as “supplementary” but this lesson did not draw heavily on it.

For this lesson on barbarians and Vikings, the reading materials that students used were small booklets the teacher had compiled from old textbooks. This unit was integrated into the study of a modern English version of *Beowulf* which the class was also reading.

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<sup>13</sup> The “I Search” is an historical research project broken down into manageable pieces across the semester and compiled into a document at the end. Students interview their parents about their lives when the parents were in seventh grade, write to someone who knew them then, and use a wealth of resources to investigate historical facts, fashions, prices, trends, etc. during that time. The students compile all of their work into a book at the end of the semester which includes an introduction to and a transcript of the interview with their parent, a poem they wrote themselves, comparisons and contrasts of themselves and their parent using their research data, reflections on the process of doing their research and their relationship with their parent, and a bibliography.

***Seventh Grade – Barbarians and Vikings***

The lesson began with the class reviewing what they had read in *Beowulf* the previous night, guided by questions from the teacher. The teacher and a student read aloud from the next chapter with the class following along in the book. Students then drew a picture with a few select words to remind them of the chapters they had just read.

In the next portion of the class, student groups made presentations on different barbarian groups. Before the presentations, the teacher gave each student two rating sheets and told them that they should take notes on each presentation. She reviewed the evaluation sheets on the overhead projector reminding the students of note-taking and behavioral expectations during the group presentations. Each presentation followed a similar format. Each student took a different role from whose perspective s/he reported – a poet, a peasant/serf, a political leader, an historian, and a cartographer. The presentation began with the group defining words, names, and dates which the class might not know, like ‘Irish,’ ‘Anglo-Saxon,’ or ‘Queen Bertha.’ Then each person made his/her contribution. The poet read a poem the group wrote about something from that time period and culture; the historian presented a timeline of major historical events; the cartographer pointed out the location of the region on a map; the political leader explained the political structure of the region; and the peasant explained something about daily life. During our observation, two groups presented their regions (the Anglo-Saxons and the Franks). The history-social science portion of the class concluded with a general critique of the process and presentations led by the teacher. The remaining groups said they would be ready to present the following day.

In this classroom, we saw a lot of influence from the vision of teaching that we discuss in this monograph as well as a great deal of congruence with the *Framework*. We saw students encountering and developing a broadened historical narrative which included the voices of people at different levels of the society with different experiences in the social, economic and political structure of the time. We also saw students learning accounts of daily life as well as the “big” events. From the materials at hand, they extracted information that was pertinent to their different roles and synthesized it into a coherent narrative to present to the class. These tasks called into play critical thinking skills and also developed the specific historical thinking skills of chronological thinking and comprehension. The teacher designed the lesson to integrate both geography and literature with historical content. Finally, the semester research project gave students the experience of “doing” history and constructing narratives.

*Vignette II—Seventh Grade: Crusades*

This second vignette of a seventh grade class illustrates a lesson derived for the most part from TCI materials. This third-year teacher in a diverse, lower-middle class suburb teaches at a school that had adopted TCI and had a strong literacy focus. Although she was a history minor in college, the teacher had no additional preparation to teach history-social science. The lesson on the Crusades that we observed came directly from TCI, which she used in conjunction with the text. It was the first of a two-day culminating lesson on the unit for her two-hour core class. Books about the Crusades lined shelves around the room, and a large mural of a medieval town and student-produced displays on the Seven Pillars of Islam and on Islamic geometric patterns provided an indication of the class' sustained focus on the period.

*Seventh Grade – Crusades*

Students smiled and chatted in high spirits when they saw that they would be working in groups rather than individually. At the bell, their attention shifted quickly to the teacher, who set the stage for two days of activities. “Today we’ll get ready, study and talk. Tomorrow someone at your table will be a character from the Crusades and someone will be his or her press secretary [at a press conference for all the characters].” Today everyone in the group will work to make sure they do a stellar job.” Each table received a character profile along with a description of other historical figures who would take part in the “historical symposium” the following day. As the teacher distributed materials, she asked, “Why are we going to pretend to be these people instead of just reading?” Students replied, “To make learning fun.” “It is easier to remember if we interact.” Each group selected one “actor,” a “coach,” and two people whose role it was to prepare the actor for a panel the following day. Students independently read “their” profile, highlighting and taking notes; then they discussed them at their tables using prompts provided in the printed materials. As they worked, the teacher made frequent comments to encourage them to use effective reading strategies and later to formulate thoughtful questions. The teacher told the class she wanted them to develop an understanding of why people would hold different points of view about the Crusades. “What kinds of questions could you ask this person in order to understand why they did what they did?” Students slowly, and then with growing confidence, practiced asking questions and answering them. One girl’s first question of her table’s character was “What are the names of your sons?” Toward the end of the class, she asked, “Why did you go on the Crusade? Did you feel satisfied with how it turned out?” In another group, when the teacher asked if a character wanted to fight, and the group replied that he did, she reminded them that this was only their own opinion, unsupported by the materials they had been provided. Later, in character, a student responded more accurately and empathetically to a tablemate’s question about how he felt when the Torah was laughed at. “I was deeply hurt. Everybody has their religion. They had no right to stomp on the Torah.” Several students consulted relevant books displayed around the room. As the class ended, the teacher reviewed what would happen the following day and had students complete a “Groupwork Brag Sheet” to evaluate their work.

While not perfect, this lesson demonstrates the potential of a good lesson not only to ground students in a particular time and place, but also to encourage them to develop an historian’s habits of mind. Asking such thoughtful questions of historical characters was a stretch for the students, but was one they were able to make with the support of this well-structured lesson and the facilitation of the teacher. Moreover, the teacher framed the entire lesson with questions that called for a high level of reflectivity by the students: “Why do you think we are covering this content?” and “Are these quick or think-about-it questions?”

## Summary

We saw lessons in numerous classrooms, some taught by teachers who were involved in the reforms we refer to in this monograph, and some not. Across these classrooms we saw a developmental spectrum in terms of the extent to which components of the vision came to life. We saw some examples of local historical investigations, investigations of families, and practice formulating “good” questions for investigation. We saw some examples of students learning narratives from multiple perspectives and accounts of daily life along with the “big events.” We also saw teachers integrating geography and literature into the history-social science curriculum.

At the same time, we saw teachers picking and choosing from the text in ways that suggested there was not a strong underpinning of this vision guiding them. We did not see many examples of students being critical of evidence. It was also unclear from our observations whether students were developing an understanding of historical narrative as construction. Overall, however, we saw enough evidence to be able to say that the vision is being brought to life in some classrooms, and that teachers are working toward creating new and richer learning experiences for students in their study of history-social science.

#### IV. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT REFLECTS AND CONTRIBUTES TO THIS VISION

In this section, we add another facet to the vision we have been constructing. Thus far, we have discussed the nature of the disciplines of history-social science and the ways in which classroom teaching and student experiences should more closely reflect the processes and content of the discipline. Below, we focus on the approach to teacher learning that is a part of this vision and that is critical if teachers are to have the knowledge and abilities they will need to make this vision real for students.

##### **The rationale for investing in teacher development**

To have classrooms rich in history-social science, we need skillful teachers, good curriculum and materials, well-conceived standards, appropriate assessments, and schools and districts that make history-social science a priority. To realize just the first of these – skillful teachers – calls for opportunities for high quality professional development; that is, providing both the time and the right kind of learning opportunities for teachers to develop a more accurate conceptualization of the discipline and new approaches to the teaching of it. Specifically, teachers need opportunities to learn about teaching strategies and tools that will help them in bringing this new vision to life in their classrooms.

One of the rationales for a heavy investment in teacher development is that, in the absence of opportunities to learn new approaches, teachers generally teach in the same way they themselves were taught. A major challenge in making this new vision real, therefore, is to help teachers “unlearn” the notions of history-social studies that they internalized through their own experiences in school. One classroom teacher put it this way:

*Most people are teaching history in the traditional way... I can speak for myself about what that looks like – I think it looks like what I know. I teach the history that I know, and I'm not a history major. I didn't have a big history background...I took one Western Civilization class that I can remember and so I'm sure I passed on exactly that to my students... So that's the first thing that I think you would see. The second thing is that teaching is driven very*

*much by the textbook, because that's the resource teachers are given. And the textbook is supposed to function as their canon so that's what they use. People probably try to go beyond simply reading and answering questions; they try to do projects. But again, the question is, what are the resources available to them? We're still working with old content... and with old perspectives.*

– Teacher

Implicit in this teacher's comment is the reality that most history teachers did not learn history themselves in a way that reflects the vision for reform. Very few teachers have had opportunities as undergraduate students or in their teacher preparation courses to conduct historical investigations or in any other way to get a sense of what it means to “do” history as an inquiry process:

*What gets historians out of bed in the morning is not being able to name all of the U.S. presidents. What gets them out of bed in the morning is the question that is burning in their mind that they want to find an answer to. That is the dynamic of history, and most history teachers in their history courses don't have a chance to experience that. When is it going to happen? Few history courses offer pre-service teachers an opportunity for real study, for real inquiry. Even when they do research papers, it is about questions that aren't real questions.*

– Professor of Education

Given the nature of their own educational experience, teachers need new professional development opportunities that will give them the time and opportunity to reconsider and reshape their knowledge of the discipline.

Below, we portray a vision for improving teacher development based on what we heard from those in the field who are working with K-12 teachers. In order to ground the ideas in actual practice, we include illustrative examples of professional development offerings that can move teachers towards realizing the vision.

### **Dimensions of professional development as part of the vision**

High quality professional development is a major undertaking, one that entails preparing teachers to teach – and supporting them in teaching – unfamiliar content in the form of expanded historical narratives (with the *Framework* defining areas of study beginning in kindergarten), and to use these narratives skillfully to teach historical thinking. Teachers must become able to design learning experiences for their students that include historical investigations, construction of their own historical narratives, and critical judgment of the narratives constructed by others.

#### *The content of teacher learning as a “three-legged stool”*

Those we spoke with share the view that this vision of the teaching of history-social science demands that teachers have three kinds of learning opportunities. 1) Teachers must do their own **historical investigations**, that is, they must experience the processes of inquiry and construction of historical narratives that reflect the practices of the discipline. 2) Teachers must acquire new **content knowledge** appropriate for their grade-level, as spelled out in the *Framework* (such as California history in 4<sup>th</sup> grade; ancient and medieval history in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades). 3) Teachers must develop the **pedagogical tools** of their craft that will enable them to translate their own learning into their teaching practice – such as building into their lessons the uses of multiple perspectives, photo-analysis, artifacts, and primary and secondary sources.

Imagining these dimensions as legs of a three-legged stool helps show how the three components – historical investigation, content knowledge, and pedagogical tools – ideally work together. An effective professional development program treats all three of these together without placing too much weight on, or ignoring, any one of the legs. For instance, a professional development activity consistent with this vision would not devote three weeks solely to content acquisition or historical investigations without application to the classroom; nor would it foster generic inquiry skills separate from construction of meaningful historical content. This characteristic of balanced and blended learning experiences distinguishes “vision-aligned” professional development in



history-social science from many college and university history courses or professional development offerings sponsored by school districts.

Although balance among the three legs is key, those in the field also agree that of the three foci the “hook” on which all else hangs is what we described as the first leg – that is, the teacher’s own experience doing historical investigation. This experience has a primacy that gives real meaning and depth to the other two kinds of learning:

*Our answer to the question: ‘how do you make a more effective teacher?’ is, you put them in a rich learning environment with a variety of people, from scholars to teacher facilitators, in a supportive atmosphere where they feel empowered to do research themselves and have the time to do it.*

– Professional developer

The idea that “doing research themselves” serves as the pivotal experience of teacher learning represents a shift in thinking that has taken place as this vision for history-social science has evolved. In earlier years of the CHSSP the goal of teachers’ history-related research was the production of curriculum, perhaps even publishable units. Now the goal is to give teachers a personal experience of formulating “investigable” questions and then pursuing their own inquiries. As one historian said, the experience is about:

*...exploring what sources are available, what biographies relate to that topic, what letters there are that they didn’t know existed, a map from that period. To create that moment of ‘Ah-ha, this is what history is about!’*

– Professor of History, Education

This experience of learning about what the discipline of history consists of and how history is made is what enables teachers to develop firsthand understanding of how this approach differs from one in which we blindly adopt someone else’s version of history. The firsthand experience helps teachers grasp “the notion of history as not being written down by somebody else in an encyclopedia, but rather as something I write down based on my interpretation and analysis from my interaction with the phenomenon.” When teachers have this kind of personal engagement with

their own burning questions about historical events, they can gain a perspective enabling them to create richer and more authentic classroom lessons and projects – for example, to transform a traditional “term paper” into an investigation that has the flavor of historical research.

### **Key components of a design for professional development**

Proponents of this vision agree that a discipline-based model for professional development should be intensive, long-term, and developmental. Ideally, teachers would follow career-long pathways through professional development beginning with an intensive summer institute experience and multiple follow-up opportunities across the years. When teachers are ready, they would move gradually into leadership roles through a graded series of facilitation, presentation, curriculum development, and other opportunities.

There is also widespread agreement that the design and content of professional development should be informed by the teachers it serves and should embrace the notion that expert practitioners can be one another’s best teachers. Teachers can learn from their experienced peers and through reflection on their own classroom practice and student work. Furthermore, working historians also play an important role within this vision of professional development. Those we spoke with have identified multiple roles for historians: guiding teachers in learning to formulate historically significant, “investigable” questions; helping teachers acquire and master content; modeling what it means to “do” history and creating a sense of what history is as a discipline in terms of both process and content; and sharing primary resources with teachers as they conduct their own historical inquiries.

There are also some areas about which there is little agreement. With regard to the details of designing institutes and other professional development activities, for example, people disagree about how much weight should be assigned to the roles that teachers and historians should play, and about the specific ways they each play their roles. Also, even though there is conceptual agreement about the notion of the balanced “three-legged stool” of what teachers need to learn, the problem of actually designing experiences brings to the surface questions about how best to

move teachers toward the vision. For example, those in the field continue to vary in their judgments about how much content teachers need to know to pursue their own historical inquiries and then to foster their students' inquiry processes.

There are also deep and important questions about how professional developers can best structure an historical inquiry experience for teachers. How do they design experiences so that they offer teachers an authentic experience of "doing history," foster teachers' knowledge of historical facts and understanding, and also provide models for teachers to use in structuring similar experiences for their students? When the "three-legged stool" takes shape in actual professional development designs and practices, therefore, there are in reality differences in the weight, sequencing, and priority given to these different domains of teacher learning. This has led to some variation in the specific approaches to (and even goals for) professional development among those who otherwise share an overall vision for history-social science education.

As we have discussed earlier in this monograph, there is generally very strong agreement about the vision at the purely conceptual level, and when it comes down to actual designs and practices, "the devil is in the details." Again, it is in this sense that the vision we are portraying is continually evolving – not only the vision of student learning but also the vision of teacher development that can lead to new student experiences.

### **Illustrations of professional development**

The California History-Social Science Project is the primary provider of discipline-based professional development aligned with the vision we portray here. The examples we present below are drawn from our observations of the Eisenhower-funded Beginning Teachers' Institutes (BTI) and other CHSSP professional development activities. The BTI and other institutes all included the three components we discussed above, though the actual designs varied depending on the sequencing and priority given to the different learning strands. These strands included the following kinds of activities:

- *Historical Investigation*

- Research time, including time for discussion with peers and mentors doing related investigations
- *Learning Content*
  - Lectures and presentations by historians
- *Translation to Classroom Practice*
  - Pedagogy sessions led by teacher “facilitators” using model lessons and student work
  - Exposure to resources and materials (e.g., historians, grade-level discussion groups, field trips to local museums and libraries, primary and secondary sources, artifacts)
  - Exposure to the California *Framework*
  - Presentation of lessons resulting from participants’ research for critique and discussion

Below, we present examples of each of these professional development components. First we portray two teachers engaged in their own historical investigation. Second, we show one example of teachers learning content through an historian’s lecture. Third, we provide an example of teachers learning classroom applications through an experienced teacher’s presentation of a model lesson.

### ***Historical Investigation***

As we explained earlier, historical investigation is the most fundamental building block for teachers in their professional development; it also happens to be the most difficult to capture and depict. Because teachers usually pursue their path of inquiry either individually or in pairs, and the work takes place in libraries and other archival places, and in conversations with historians and mentors, it is difficult to document. Typically in intensive institutes, a block of time is allotted each day for participants to pursue their own investigations. On selected afternoons in the BTI, for example, participants and “mentors” (more experienced teachers participating in the standard CHSSP summer institute) who had similar research interests met in pairs or small groups to share primary sources and other resources they had found. Historians were also available as resources to participants during this time. After brief conversations, most participants left the room to spend time on their individual research, going to the university library, the public library or

elsewhere. In the examples we present below, we asked teachers to reflect on their research experiences and to recount them as best they could remember.

### Vignette I: Persian Miniatures

The middle school teacher (then teaching 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade) who described the following research experience attended a CHSSP summer institute in the early 1990s. She was a practiced teacher at the time with close to ten years of teaching experience. She found the institute to be a “mind-blowing, career-changing, transforming experience” in her professional life, largely because she engaged deeply in historical research for the first time. As she noted, “We were given time to wallow around in a history topic of our own choosing.”

#### ***Historical Investigation – Persian Miniatures***

Under the guidance of CHSSP staff, one teacher and her partner (teaching 6th and 7th grade history), embarked on expanding their knowledge of Persian miniatures, a topic which they had taught before but not with much depth. (The topic was part of the 7th grade curriculum but through their research at the institute the teachers traced the roots of the Persian miniatures to India and thus ended up teaching it to sixth graders, as it was more appropriate for their curriculum.) The two teachers researched the topic using the resources available to them at the institute and the university library and also were able to talk with visiting experts. As important as this investigative research was, they equally valued the opportunity to reflect upon their findings with others. Throughout the institute participants regularly shared their intellectual pursuits with each other, “put them out for critique” and helped one another deepen their ideas.

*We really worked hard to make it historically correct... I just remember the power of that; we really knew what we were talking about. And then after the institute, we took it on the road, presenting at a few places... We talked to people about the fact that it was a work in progress... Instead of saying, ‘hi, here’s what we do,’ we’d say, ‘well, we’re thinking about this’ or ‘what do you think of this?’ and we’d get such great feedback from these audiences. They still thought we had a good piece of work, but we opened up the dialogue with them and it would go back and forth. I think that was a real influence of the Project – that when you present your work you get critiqued, but you also get feedback, and have a real dialogue with your colleagues.*

Engaging in her own historical inquiry changed this teacher's practice in a way that nothing else did.

*The Project was an intellectual and collegial home...where I found confidence in being a real amateur historian. I realized that I could use historical thinking and do what historians did, and also get my students to do it.*

#### Vignette II: The Eastern Cherokee

The next vignette depicts the research experience of a beginning teacher. This fifth grade teacher was in her third year of teaching when she attended the BTI. In the institute she was given the task of inquiring into an historical person who would be part of the eras studied in her fifth grade class, e.g., someone related to the American Revolution, the Civil War, Native Americans or the Westward Movement.

***Historical Investigation – The Eastern Cherokee***

This teacher had been inspired by an historical lecture on a fairly obscure African American woman. She wanted to investigate “a person I could bring to life but who was not well known.” She narrowed down the possibilities by deciding to investigate a woman and acknowledged that her own expertise was with Native Americans. She decided more specifically to investigate a Cherokee woman because she had prior knowledge of Eastern Cherokees, but did not know if she could find one who would meet all of her criteria. After some cross referencing and a search on the university computer, she saw a reference to a woman, Nancy Ward, who was Cherokee. She asked the resident historians for help, and one of them was able to give her the name of an historian who had written about Nancy Ward:

*It was really exciting. I had the time to do it. This was what I was being paid to do, told to do!*

This teacher looked at everything she could find by the author/historian mentioned by the resident historian. She also found a few references on her own. She figured out how to use the inter-library loan system and requested books and materials from other campuses as well as used the reference materials available to her there. She continued her pursuit into another library where she found books written by James Mooney who wrote about Nancy Ward in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. He identified her as a “beloved” woman, a woman of honor to the Cherokee who participated in treaty signings and had a public voice. This teacher found a legend around Nancy Ward about saving the life of a white woman who was condemned to be burned at the stake.

As she continued in her learning and research, the teacher began to critique the perspective of some of the writings she had found as resources, realizing that their views were strongly influenced by their time and circumstances. She also found an old children’s book that made reference to Nancy Ward. She found it interesting to check the facts given in the children’s book against the ones she had uncovered from other sources. She said,

*You get in deeper and deeper... I never would have done any of this on my own. Even if I don’t use her in my teaching, I have a whole different view of women and Native Americans.*

For this teacher the experience of pursuing her own historical inquiry was a unique professional development experience:

*We were treated like we were intelligent, like we were capable of adding to the body of knowledge. We weren’t there just to take it away; we were there to forge new roads. I can share this with someone someday!*

This teacher acknowledged that she had not finished her study of Nancy Ward and would like the time and space to continue her inquiry.

### ***Learning Content***

The Beginning Teachers Institute also provided teachers with opportunities to learn content. At the institute we observed, the theme was “Types of Conflict and Responses to Conflict.” In the lecture we summarize below, the historian presented the discipline of history through film, literature and music, selecting film clips, songs and literature to demonstrate how the meaning we as a nation attach to war changed through World Wars I and II, the Korean War and into the Vietnam War.

#### ***Content: Historian lecture on portrayals of “the enemy”***

Beginning with clips from *Birth of a Nation* and continuing through Vietnam War movies such as *Apocalypse Now*, the historian focused the teachers’ attention on how “the enemy” is portrayed in films. He raised the question of what these images of the enemy say about the United States at different time periods. He guided the group in looking at racial stereotypes perpetuated by films and songs such as *Der Fuhrer’s Face* and *Goodbye, Mama (I’m Off to Yokohama)*. He referred to the change from vilification of whole nations such as Japan in earlier American films to the portrayal of war as an internalized, individual struggle between good and evil in films such as *Apocalypse Now*. He also used film to track a shift in the depiction of the Vietnam War as a patriotic crusade early on (*The Green Berets*) to an abstract conflict where the forces of good and evil became blurred. He demonstrated through his presentation how film-makers interpret history and how teachers might use film as a resource to teach a society’s changing perspective on big historical events such as war. Toward the end of the lecture he handed out the words to some 1970’s era Vietnam War songs and the group sang along enthusiastically with a tape he played – “1, 2, 3 what’re we fighting for...” Each person received a bibliography of films, songs and literature as resources.

#### ***Translation to Classroom Practice***

In the BTI, a session on pedagogy led by a CHSSP teacher-facilitator often followed a lecture in order to demonstrate how an experienced teacher has translated new historical content into a lesson for her students. These presentations serve several purposes. They provide participants with models of real teachers’ translations of what they are learning into classroom practice. In



addition to providing these “living” models of the history-social science vision in action, pedagogy sessions often demonstrate strategies and practices for adapting lessons for English language learners, ways of integrating history-social science with literature or language arts, and different ways to use student work for assessment and reflection. For the presenters, these sessions also serve as one of a variety of leadership opportunities available through the Project.

The model lesson we portray below was presented by a CHSSP teacher-facilitator who teaches seventh grade. The topic of the lesson was Eleanor of Aquitaine, and the session followed a lecture on women in history – “When Women Lead: Case Studies of National Leaders in the Twentieth Century.” One of this teacher’s goals was to illustrate how language arts could be integrated into history-social science lessons. As is often the case, this presenter included student work in her presentation. However, rather than using it to demonstrate student learning or as a model for teacher reflection and assessment, she used it to show how projects can integrate language development with history-social science.

***Model Lesson – 7<sup>th</sup> grade: Eleanor of Aquitaine***

The presenter began by demonstrating how viewing historical characters from different perspectives results in varying interpretations of their place in history. She first showed the group a chart of the power structure at the time of Eleanor of Aquitaine which illustrated the absence of women in positions of power. She contrasted this with a family tree which she said showed Eleanor as quite a central and powerful character, especially as the mother of ten children including Richard the Lionhearted. In the next activity, the group read a biographical sketch of Eleanor (from *A Proud Taste for Scarlet and Miniver*, by E.L. Konigsbury), and the presenter gave them three tasks to complete: 1) to make a list of ten facts from the reading related to power and conflict, 2) to list character-describing adjectives they saw in the text, and 3) to pose questions they had. Individuals, playing the role of students, then shared their lists and the facilitator wrote them on a flip chart. She shared several ideas on how the lists might be used further to develop language. Then members of the group read aloud a play about Eleanor. The play was written with 25 speaking parts so almost an entire class could participate. After the reading of the play, the facilitator showed the group three samples of student work: a “bio” poem, a parallel timeline, and a poster with quotes and drawings characterizing two different perspectives on Eleanor, one as the “beloved queen” and the other as “traitor.” The session ended with questions and discussion of the lesson.

**Providing for career-long learning in the discipline**

Part of the professional development component of the overall vision for improving the teaching and learning of history-social science is to offer teachers “career-long learning” in the discipline. The educators we spoke with, including members of the CHSSP who design professional development that supports the vision we outline in this monograph, agree that teachers need a developmental sequence of supports and opportunities to meet their needs at different stages of their careers, from the time they enter a teacher preparation program and throughout their growth as increasingly experienced and expert teachers.

For prospective teachers who are just entering the field, there are pre-service courses at universities affiliated with CHSSP sites such as those at the California State University (CSU) campuses at Dominguez Hills and San Jose. These courses introduce new teachers to the vision of history-social science teaching that we discuss here and that also underlies the *Framework*. Such courses also connect teacher candidates at their induction stage to a range of other discipline-based professional development opportunities offered by the CHSSP, such as the

Beginning Teacher Institutes (BTI), the Professional Development Project (PDP), and a variety of mini-institutes.

These programs then can support novice teachers as they enter the profession. As teachers gain experience and feel the need to take another step in refining and expanding their teaching repertoires, they have access to an array of intensive summer institutes with follow-up sessions across the academic year. These activities, which are designed for more experienced teachers, are offered at a network of CHSSP sites located around the state. As teachers gain confidence and become more accomplished in the teaching of the discipline, the CHSSP offers a pathway toward a variety of leadership roles, such as being a presenter, lead teacher-facilitator, coach, visiting expert or teaching assistant in pre-service methods classes, assistant director and director of CHSSP institutes, and curriculum developer. These professional development roles offer structured opportunities for teachers to share their expertise with others.

Teachers also have other opportunities for professional growth that are reasonably consistent with this vision of history-social science reform. Professional organizations bring educators together to learn and share current practice and research at the regional, state and national levels. These include California Council of Social Studies, National Council of Social Studies, Organization of American Historians, American Historical Association, and National Council of History Education. The Teachers Curriculum Institute also offers professional development for teachers when they or their schools adopt its curriculum; additionally, the Galef Institute and educators at Colonial Williamsburg offer history-social science professional development experiences to California teachers.

### **Summary**

Teachers are the foundation upon which realization of the vision for history-social science teaching depends. Without teacher understanding none of the other components of systemic reform – like strong curriculum and well-conceived standards – can contribute to improved teaching in schools. To support teachers in gaining that understanding, professional development

opportunities must be available throughout teachers' careers. It is important that the design of that professional development is informed by and consistent with the vision for teaching and learning of the discipline. Specifically, this means that teachers should have learning experiences of their own that are consistent with the nature and practices of the disciplines of history-social science, i.e., doing their own historical investigations. This helps them construct a deeper and more accurate conception of the kind of learning experiences their students should have. Teachers' learning should also include a balance of two other components – content knowledge and teaching strategies. All of these together help teachers develop both the knowledge *and* technical skills to bring this vision of teaching and learning to life in their classroom practice.

## V. CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN ACHIEVING THE VISION

Much work has been done in the last decade and more to change the perception of and improve the teaching of history-social science in California's K-12 classrooms. As the reform effort has moved forward, questions and dilemmas have arisen, many having to do with the challenges of fostering discipline-based reform in the context of a very complex educational system. In this concluding section we place the vision we have portrayed thus far, and the efforts to make it real in classrooms, in the context of a system. We discuss the extent to which various components of the educational system are consistent with the vision and on their apparent capacity to support this vision of history-social science teaching. Finally, we discuss the fact that the vision itself remains incomplete – probably by necessity – because it reflects the ever-emerging ideas and ongoing controversies taking place within the disciplines themselves.

These issues arose in our interviews with people in the field. Most of the issues are not unique to history-social science; other disciplines in the midst of reform, particularly mathematics and science, face similar challenges.

### **Necessary elements of a reforming system**

As the vision for improvement has crystallized and more educators have become convinced of its value, the need for system-wide reform has become more evident and pressing. Providing high quality, long-term, intensive, developmental professional support for teachers is essential but not sufficient to realize such large-scale change. Below, we discuss several additional system elements that are necessary to the reform vision we have outlined: first, the need for K-12 schools and districts to place high priority on history-social science (while simultaneously supporting professional development); second, good curriculum and support for teachers in making good judgments about that curriculum; third, an infrastructure that creates ready access to high quality materials and resources; and fourth, well-conceived and useful assessments. In addition, we discuss the ways in which students themselves are an influential context for teachers' practice.

***The priority of history-social science in schools and districts***

The educators we spoke with are concerned that school and district-level priorities in mathematics and language arts education often impinge on the amount of time teachers feel they can spend teaching other disciplines, particularly history-social science. At the early elementary grades, there is an initial hurdle of getting history-social science into the curriculum at all. Although the *Framework* defines themes and approaches for the early elementary grades (e.g., students investigating their family histories and the history of their schools and communities), teachers often view the subject area as secondary and expendable.

*In the elementary schools, the teachers have spoken up fairly consistently about the squeeze. I don't know if this is something new; it is probably ongoing. But with the new focus on literacy and math skills... and with the increase of high-stakes testing in those areas – social studies and history just gets squeezed out and... they articulate that lack of priority as being increasingly problematic.*

– Professor of Education

There are conceivable ways individual teachers can work around this constraint, including the integration of history-social studies investigations with development of reading and writing skills. However, from a system perspective, the fact that policy and administrative priorities work against a focus on history-social studies represents a real challenge to the reform effort.

***The challenges of selectivity, strength and coherence of curriculum***

The California *Framework* for K-12 history-social science outlines the periods and broad content of American and world history which teachers should address at each grade level. However, its recommendations are voluminous and leave a great deal of room for local and individual determination of specific content. As a result, questions persist in a number of areas – around teacher capacity to teach all content areas equally well, academic freedom to select one topic and not others, breadth vs. depth in coverage, and coherency in the curriculum. Added to the issues associated with the *Framework* are the other influences that shape teachers' decisions about whether and how topics are taught – influences such as the adopted textbooks and other

packaged curricula, school priorities, teachers' own preferences and knowledge backgrounds with topics, and access to high quality resources. The reality is that the curriculum that is actually taught is highly variable, even given the comprehensiveness of the *Framework* and the presence of specific curricula.

Curricula such as those spelled out in Houghton Mifflin textbooks or Teachers Curriculum Institute often end up providing the focus, schedule and content for history-social studies classes. This can be both a curse and a blessing. Both are aligned with the *Framework* and embody much of the vision for improving the discipline, but they alone do not provide teachers with the fundamental conceptual understanding needed to create a coherent curriculum. Even with these materials, teachers must understand when and how to guide students in working with historical evidence and creating historical narrative. Teachers still need to have the key experience of “doing” history themselves, so that they can use the texts (and other materials) as the tools of teaching history, rather than being driven by them. A history educator discusses the way in which a teacher's own knowledge is crucial to making good use of what is contained in textbooks:

*Developing the vision is one step for the teacher, either from print materials or from ongoing professional development groups. Teachers need curriculum materials; they don't have the time by and large to assemble the kinds of materials that are necessary to teach this way. You can't do this on the basis simply of a textbook that tells just one story, no matter how good a story. I hope that publishers will eventually get onto this vision. Even when our textbooks include an historical photograph or an excerpt from the historical document or painting or whatever, the kinds of questions that they ask of it are not systematically developed so that students can start to work with historical evidence.*

– Professor of Education

A number of forces influence how teachers select and organize curriculum. When there is a conflict between the *Framework* recommendations and the content offered by the text, for example, the text often wins out because it is the more immediate and available resource for the teacher. For instance, the third grade curriculum centers around the history of local community including Native America tribes that were originally in the local area. Because they lack resources and materials on their local tribes, teachers often teach only the tribes covered in the text, which

may not be local. Variation also depends on teachers' personal decisions about what is important and the supplemental resources available to them. Generally, in the absence of other resources, we observed that the Houghton Mifflin text and the TCI curriculum are determining much of what is taught because those materials are simply most prevalent.

Additionally, both the content and approach to teaching history can vary according to how a teacher's school as a whole views the nature and purpose of the subject matter. We saw considerable variation along these lines in the classrooms we observed, especially at the early elementary level. For example, history-social science looks different in schools that adopt Integrated Thematic Instruction, where there is a school-wide conflict resolution program, or where a school has placed emphasis on African heritage.

Even more fundamentally, individual teachers are selective about what they teach because there is not time to teach it all and they must make their own judgments. As one historian acknowledged,

*You can't get to every single topic. You just have to say, 'okay, that is the way it is going to be'... You have to make decisions about what is important, and that is a hard thing because the Framework is huge.*

One teacher's criteria for selection often varies quite a lot from another's. For example, one teacher we observed said that he chose to teach topics that he thought would not be taught in later grades; another taught from a course model aligned with the *Framework* and content standards; and a third said that she followed what she thought was a "natural" geographic and historic progression of cultures. Even this latter teacher is making many decisions about what to include or omit and feeling the frustration of being unable to teach all that she would like:

*I have my curriculum set up so that it's more of a natural progression. We start with Islam, and then go to Africa (and I only do northwest Africa, not Zimbabwe and southern Africa, I don't have time). Islam moved into northern Africa so that made sense to me. Then I go to China and Japan and then go back to fall of Rome, and we review because they had it in 6th grade...so that we can understand what the conditions were for the Middle Ages. At that point we talk about the Byzantine Empire and other things...I almost*



*never get to Aztecs, Mayas and Incas. I just never get there. I think it's important but I don't know how to get to it!*

– Teacher

Making difficult decisions about what to include and what to leave out is not a new problem nor is it unique to this new vision of teaching and learning. As an historian pointed out, there has always been more to teach than there is time:

*Even when we did narrow male-oriented, Protestant political history, there wasn't enough time. Teachers always said 'I can do it', but they can't get past World War II in a U.S. History course.*

– Historian and national leader in history education

Indeed, a dilemma and joy inherent to educational practice is that even in a perfected “system,” teaching would remain an art and craft dependent on teacher judgment. In some cases we observed, teachers were making important curricular decisions based on very limited knowledge and idiosyncratic preferences. In the best cases, however, decisions about grade-level curriculum and major content focuses had been made collaboratively by groups of teachers in conjunction with the *Framework* and standards – that is, through collective professional judgment deriving out of both progressive policy and practice.

### ***Infrastructure to provide materials and resources***

The practical issues and logistics involved with designing classroom investigations in history-social science often stand in the way of teachers actually including these approaches in their curriculum. The same has been true for hands-on, inquiry-based teaching in science. Teachers are faced with making inquiry and historical investigation manageable by finding primary sources and other materials, and then previewing and selecting relevant and appropriate information for their students to use in their investigations. Part of this process involves limiting student access to unacceptable materials such as racist or pornographic material on the internet. Designing lessons for historical investigation in the classroom puts tremendous demands on teachers and thus places real constraints on teachers' ability to put into place investigation-based courses. K-12 teachers

are at a greater disadvantage than university professors because there is no infrastructure in the schools that makes high quality resources readily available to teachers:

*Historians have huge amounts of primary sources, and a great deal of time to go through those sources and look for patterns, and ideas emerge and they write about them. I want my students to experience and learn those 'habits of mind' that a historian uses, but I have way less time, and almost no resources. My job then is to find approximately 5-10 primary sources on a concept or topic, and then create a lesson where students can use those 'habits of mind' and to get to some kind of pre-determined goal. So it's my job to create 'pseudo investigations.' It's not exactly what historians do – I have certain content prescriptions and a limited amount of time. I'm still trying to create an experience that allows for discovery and learning but my goals and needs are really different than those of a historian.*

– Teacher

In the area of science instruction, the National Science Foundation has invested quite heavily in the creation of materials and kits teachers can use to teach science content using hands-on inquiry approaches, and they have also invested in professional development related to those materials. Some schools and districts that are participating in science reform have created resource centers that serve the function of adopting, maintaining, and circulating kits and other necessary materials for each grade level. Creation of this infrastructure for development and distribution of materials that reflect a discipline-based vision of teaching and learning helps minimize barriers related to logistics and curriculum design. In elementary science education this has resulted in more science being taught. There is currently no analogous infrastructure associated with the teaching of history-social science. Providing schools and districts with these kinds of supports for teachers – good curriculum, including materials, artifacts, and primary and secondary sources – is probably necessary to increased (and improved) teaching of the discipline.

### ***Well-conceived assessments***

Assessments in history-social science have been the subject of much discussion and debate dating back to the publication of the *National Standards* and to the CLAS (California Learning Assessment System) test in California. As a result, for a number of years there were no statewide assessments. The absence of assessments weakened the impetus within schools for including

history-social science in the curriculum and for having a state-of-the-art instructional program. In 1997-98 California introduced the STAR test as a standardized assessment given in grades 4, 8, and 10. Proponents of the vision we discuss in this monograph generally agree that the current STAR test is highly irrelevant to what is actually going on in classrooms (and what they would like to see going on in them) because it is not aligned with the general vision for improvement, nor with the *Framework*, nor the Houghton Mifflin texts that so many schools use.

History educators we talked with would like to see large-scale assessments that are consistent with their view of good teaching and learning in the discipline and also that would show what students know and can do at each grade level. They emphasize the importance of developing assessments that track both the growth of students' historical thinking skills as well as the development of their historical knowledge. Along with educators in other reforming curriculum areas, however, they also acknowledge the difficulty of that task.

### *The expectations of students*

Students are an additional influential element of the educational system; in fact, from teachers' perspective, students are the context that affects their teaching most strongly.<sup>14</sup> As products of the very educational system that is in need of reform, students are often not accustomed to authentic and sustained investigation because that is not how they have been socialized into their role as students. Thus they are sometimes most reluctant to change their ways of learning:

*For kids, I think a disadvantage is that first of all, they have a hard time doing things differently. We teach them to be a certain kind of people in school, and then a teacher comes along and expects them to be different, and it is very, very hard, once they have developed a particular kind of mental model of school . . . so I think the disadvantage for kids is, that the kind of learning that would ultimately benefit them the most is uncomfortable for them; it is out of the zone of what is typically expected of them.*

– Professor of History, Education

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<sup>14</sup> See McLaughlin, M., "What matters most in teachers' workplace context?" and Metz, M., "Teachers' ultimate dependence on their students" in Little and McLaughlin, *Teachers' Work* (1993), Teachers College Press.

Making the vision real in classrooms may present challenges not only for teachers, but also for students – at least initially – because students must actively construct their own understandings rather than reading and remembering someone else’s account. However, when we observed students in exemplary history-social science classes, we could see that they were engaged, interested, and learning in ways that would commit knowledge to long-term memory; and those benefits far outweigh the initial disadvantage of student reluctance or confusion.

### **The contested and evolving nature of the disciplines themselves**

In section II above we discuss the importance of teachers acquainting their students with historical narratives that reflect the multitude of voices and experiences that comprise a history, and discuss the value of teaching students both the processes and content of the disciplines. However, what those ideas mean in reality is contested by the very historians who, through their own work over time, define the practices and standards of their disciplines. One challenge teachers have, then, is to “implement” a discipline-based vision of history-social science within a discipline that is ever-evolving.

#### ***Refining “multi-cultural” history***

A major element in this contested space is the definition and practice of “multi-cultural” history. Those we spoke with acknowledge that the field itself is in an early evolutionary stage in relation to this challenge, and that they still have a lot to learn about designing and implementing a truly multi-cultural history as part of their vision.

*I think another area for refinement is figuring out what we mean when we talk about multi-cultural history. . . I don’t think that the proponents of multicultural history have made quite the right argument and they certainly haven’t created curricula that makes me think that we are on the right track. I think the idea of doing one culture a day – ‘we are going to do a Japanese tea ceremony approach’ – again trivializes something that is absolutely critical. There are other ways of going about this...going back to thinking*

*about approaching this as an issue, rather than a series of topics. How it is that we go about defining who the other is, and how that has changed over time and what it changes in response to, are questions at the very heart of understanding anything about U.S. history, and yet that is not the approach that is usually taken, and multicultural history has certainly been trivialized in textbooks.*

– Professor of History, Education

In terms of intellectual interest, defining “multicultural history” can be a dynamic process that keeps the discipline alive and exciting – both for historians and for the teachers who have the opportunity to engage with such questions as part of their own learning opportunities. But on a practical level, the fact that those in the disciplines themselves are working out their own thinking creates even greater ambiguity for classroom teachers.

***Balancing history as interpretation with history as fact***

Some educators fear that the new notion of history as a body of knowledge to investigate, discover and interpret dilutes the integrity of the discipline itself. They wonder how, in such an environment, students will ever learn the “basic facts” and develop a coherent, shared conception of national and world history.

Part of this controversy is based on the problem of figuring out how much and what kind of factual knowledge is necessary to the construction of defensible interpretations of historical events – that is, how much and what do students need to know as the basis for good investigation? The other aspect is determining the level of factual knowledge that is needed to be historically literate enough to understand the workings of the country and its democratic institutions. The educators we spoke to are struggling to balance the importance of interpretation with the necessity and relevance of facts. One historian put it this way:

*There is a 2-tiered structure: first, there is the need for basic facts and skills, second, there is higher and deeper level thinking. The relationship between those two is hard to define. The vision is about enabling teachers to go beyond that first tier to inquiry. The problem is that you need that 1<sup>st</sup> tier, that foundation to do real inquiry. And most*

*teachers don't go beyond the first tier. But knowing the facts is not the same as grasping history. To grasp history you need a good understanding of the historical method. That involves providing some information at first, but then the person needs to be active in the process, needs to learn what's important and what's not, and to make sense of an enormous amount of data. The issue or danger is... without the first knowledge base, the frame of reference is limited, and making connections or interpretations becomes more difficult.*

– Professor of Education and History

Much of the impetus for the overall vision we portray in this monograph arose from a concern that over-emphasis on memorization of facts perpetuates a misconception of what history is and causes students to lose interest in studying it. However, there is also concern about an over-emphasis on student interpretation in the absence of factual knowledge. As the professor above noted: “It is possible to overdo history as interpretation and this can breed cynicism. Because if none of it is ever ‘true,’ why bother?”

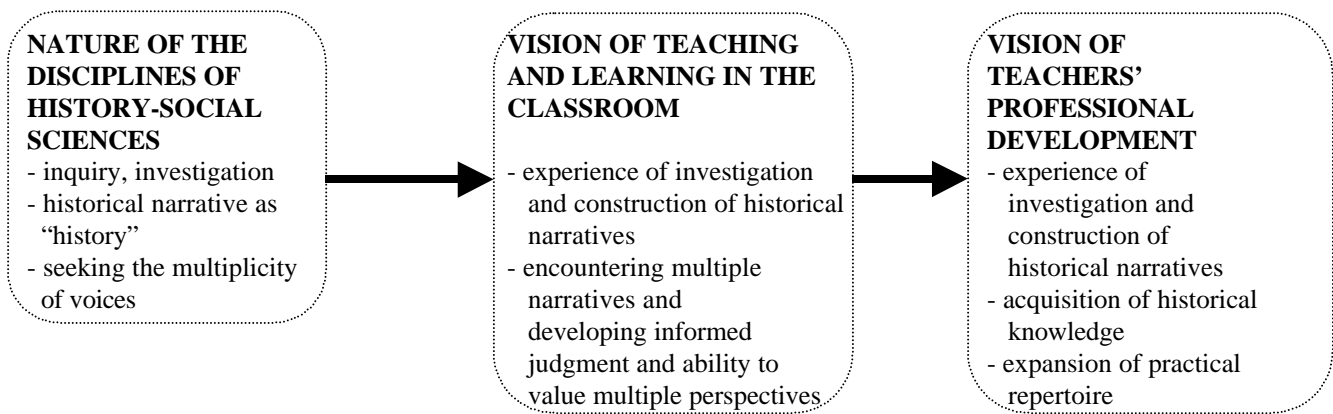
Most educators agree that students will really “grasp” history when they have access to a balanced approach in which teachers provide information and also create good opportunities for interpretation that is grounded in evidence and historical understanding.

**VI. SUMMARY:  
A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL VISION FOR THE TEACHING AND LEARNING  
OF HISTORY-SOCIAL SCIENCE IN CALIFORNIA'S SCHOOLS**

Educators involved in the reform of K-12 history-social science education are concerned that the quality of teaching that predominates in history classrooms is problematic because the curriculum and instructional strategies neither reflect the nature of discipline practices and discipline knowledge nor do they excite students. In this monograph we attempt to contribute to the ongoing conversation among history-social science educators by portraying in some depth, and with some grounding in real practice, the vision that is driving current reforms.

At the core of this reform work is the idea that the teaching and learning of history in K-12 should reflect the processes and content of the disciplines much more closely than it currently does. Students should learn both to carry out historical investigations and produce historical narratives, and they should also learn about historical investigations and encounter multiple and varied historical narratives. The aim is to produce students who are knowledgeable about history (the habits of mind and the “facts” about events) and who also are informed consumers of history and informed creators and critics of social policy. Further, teachers need high quality, ongoing professional development that is designed around a vision of teacher learning that is symmetrical with the vision of the discipline and of the student learning experience. Proponents of this overall vision of reform believe that only when teachers experience certain kinds of learning in the discipline can they begin to re-conceptualize and re-tool their instruction so that it becomes more consistent with the vision for student learning.

The diagram below portrays this unified vision for reform:



### Existing policy support for the vision

In the previous section we discussed many of the system elements that represent challenges to achievement of the vision. But in California there are some elements of the system that provide support, in particular, the state *Framework* and the CHSSP. Some of the educators we spoke with had a hand in the development of the *Framework*, and it is to teachers’ advantage that such a major policy document is consistent with the best thinking of those in the disciplines and others involved in reform. This is the case even when the construction and interpretation of the *Framework* give rise to controversies about, for example, “whose history” students should learn or what it means to teach students to become “good citizens.” These controversies mirror and derive from those that are taking place among historians themselves.

The existence of the CHSSP means that teachers at all stages of their careers can have some access to learning opportunities that will support them in the continual process of developing the knowledge and skills that will enrich their teaching. Again it is to teachers’ advantage that a professional development system exists that is consistent with – in fact, helps to generate – the best and most current thinking in the field. Finally, the direct participation of practicing historians and other university educators means that teachers have ongoing contact with the people who “do” history, and have access to the libraries, archives, and other resources they can use to do history themselves.



**A final thought**

Although we conclude our discussion with an emphasis on challenges that history-social science educators face as they work to achieve their vision within a complex educational system, it would be a mistake to see these challenges as insurmountable barriers to change. In fact, the many educators we spoke to are working for the improvement of teaching and learning with real energy and a lack of cynicism about “resistance.” Even as they are chipping away at the larger system by voicing advocacy for their vision and contributing to the development of educational policy, they are not waiting for the system to change. Rather, they are busy “doing” history, teaching history in new ways, and creating new professional development opportunities for teachers of history. Increasingly, the effort to improve history teaching is going beyond a simplistic polarized debate. As we have tried to illuminate here, the reform effort involves looking at the whole enterprise – including issues and challenges – with open eyes and mind. Hence the improvement of history teaching, when done well, is itself an ongoing inquiry.

## **APPENDIX: RESEARCH METHODS**

### **The research for this monograph**

Our research took place over a nine month period in 1997-98 and consisted of three strands of activity: 1) interviews with educators involved in improving the teaching and learning of history-social science; 2) observations of history-social science teaching in elementary and middle school classrooms; and 3) observations of professional development events designed to support teachers' movement toward a new and powerful vision of history-social science.

#### *Interviews*

We interviewed a range of national and state-level educators knowledgeable about and involved in efforts to improve the teaching and learning of history-social science. This group included historians, professors of education, professional developers, and teachers. We asked them to share with us their thinking on the history and current status of a new and better vision for improving history-social science education, on barriers and obstacles to reform efforts, and on emerging issues and next steps.

#### *Classroom Observations*

We observed history-social science lessons in thirteen classrooms – seven were third grade classrooms and six were seventh grade classes. We chose third grade because it represents the early elementary years where history-social science is often not considered part of the core curriculum, and consequently, if it is taught at all it plays, at best, a distant second to reading and mathematics. We selected seventh grade because the seventh grade curriculum laid out in the state *Framework* (“World History and Geography: Medieval and Early Modern Times”) is unfamiliar to many teachers, and lack of high quality resources presents a significant challenge.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> We did not observe high school history classes for several reasons. Because we were constrained by resources and time to complete the study, we had to limit our sample of classrooms. Additionally, the CH-SSP and BTI tend to serve greater numbers of K-8 teachers than high school, and high school teachers housed in discipline-based departments face quite different issues than K-8 teachers. Therefore, we decided to focus solely on K-8 classrooms.

Our goal in selecting the sample of classrooms we visited was to observe a spectrum of instructional approaches. In order to see elements of the vision exemplified in practice, we observed classrooms taught by teachers who had had professional development that was aligned with the vision. We also observed classrooms of teachers who had not had these professional development opportunities in order to get a feel for more typical approaches.

### *Professional Development Observations*

We observed a variety of discipline-based professional development events and interviewed participants. We observed pre-service classes taught by professors of education and professional development providers that introduced prospective teachers to a new way of conceptualizing the teaching and learning of the discipline. We also observed introductory-level professional development institutes (e.g., the California History-Social Science Project's Beginning Teachers Institute and Professional Development Program) designed for teachers in their first years of teaching, as well as institutes for more experienced teachers. We attended "mini-conferences" where practicing teachers made presentations to their peers using lessons from their own classroom practice. We also attended professional conferences. The purpose of these observations was to gain insight into the experience of the participants and to learn about the design components of professional development aligned with the vision we discuss.