Two-and-a-half years ago, the State Board of Education adopted one of the most ambitious History-Social Science Frameworks of any state. Its adoption certainly had an impact – it highlighted California as a bellwether in history education; it earned the accolades of historians; and where it matters most, it challenged educators far-and-wide to implement it. Over the past few years, educators have embarked on efforts to digest this material through holding reading groups, convening workshops, writing curriculum maps and pacing guides, engaging in lesson study, and adopting instructional materials aligned to it. This blog post aims to reflect on Framework implementation and to announce a new series of conferences that will begin in September 2019.

 Nearly three years ago when the Framework appeared poised for adoption, I wrote a blog post called “The Futile Quest for Coverage” hoping to introduce the document and alleviate educators’ concerns about implementing something that seemingly expanded the stuff that they needed teach. That blog post continues to be one of the most remarked upon documents we’ve posted. I think it’s resonated because it says out loud what so many of us have puzzled over: how in the world am I supposed to get through all of this material? The short answer that it offered was that you can’t do all of it, so stop trying, and be strategic about how you invest your days. Of course, it’s easier to say that than to do it. Implementing that plan – and the Framework itself – has required re-imagining course content, sequencing, pacing, and goals. Least of all, this takes time and practice. But, this is precisely what’s been happening around the state over the past few years:

“...be strategic about how you invest your days.”
1. **Use the Questions:** The first iteration of this blog post recommended that teachers start with the Framing Questions – those grade-level and unit-level questions of significance that organize and unite content. The logic behind these questions is highlighted in ways big and small by our regional sites in grade-level institutes that start with slides called “Cascading Questions” or “A Question for Every Occasion.” In these workshops, teachers select a year-long thematic investigative question, they proceed to connect it to their unit level questions, and then they link those broader questions to smaller lesson based questions. Thus, they front-load inquiry-based learning by centering their curriculum on open-ended historically-significant questions that strategically connects their content.

I’ve observed how some teachers place the year-long questions on the wall, and as they move through the chronology, topics, and geography, they chart how the question has been addressed. An eighth-grade class that considers “How did freedom change over time?” adds different pieces of evidence to this question as the students move from the founding of the republic (when students study the debate over apportioning representatives); to its colonization of the west (when students learn about the expansion of the franchise to un-propertied white men); to its justification of slavery (as students read the pro-slavery arguments of moral defenders like George Fitzhugh); to its adoption of a market-based economy (when students learn about the Lowell Mill factories that employed young women). This kind of strategy conveys to students a coherent constructed narrative, but one that also highlights the interpretive nature of the discipline.

2. **Depth over breadth:** Teachers in the Kern High School District have been working in professional learning communities to determine the content areas that should be covered in depth in order to have the weightiest impact upon their students. Some teachers in Kern have chosen certain topics to study in depth that cut across the 160 years of the course. Focusing on local history as a case study to ground U.S. history students in their own communities has worked well with some. For example, a group of 11th-grade teachers focuses on the resources, people, economy, politics, social protest movements, and culture of Bakersfield throughout the 20th and 21st centuries as a way to have students understand how their local region connects to broader national trends.

3. **Stay focused on significance:** As teachers struggle to have students learn a certain number of topics in depth, there is still the need to step back and ask the “so what” or “why does this matter” kind of questions. As a teacher, I am biased. I think that most topics are super interesting, and I want my job to be conveying that sense of intrigue to my students. Trying to move away from my self-indulgent tendencies, lately I’ve been pushing myself to internally answer the question, “why am I having my students do this?” Take for example, the recently added topic of Comfort Women: the inclusion of Comfort Women in 10th grade helps students learn about the reality of war for a broader group of people; it teaches about human trafficking; and it addresses the continued relevance and politicization of history and memory. These are all historically significant reasons to connect to one new dimension of the content. Moreover, the intellectual exercise of connecting the material together helps me keep historical significance in mind on a daily basis.

4. **Be selective about coverage, it will help you finish the year:** Choosing, organizing, and pacing content is the topic that seems to take the most time to refine within and between years. I’ve spoken with fourth grade teachers in Sacramento who felt they cut too much from the early part of the year in order to cover topics that impact their students’ lives, which for them was Disneyland. But last summer, these thoughtful teachers reflected on some of the rich 19th-century primary source material that their students missed in pursuit of getting to Disneyland. This year, the teachers elected to alter their pacing again, hoping to still get to Disneyland, but also to cover 19th century topics with a bit more depth. This gradual and consistent recalibration of curriculum and sequencing speaks to the importance of approaching material with intentionality.

Bearing in mind that Framework implementation is a multi-year diverse experience, we invite you to continue this discussion with us in person at our continued series of Framework Conferences. For more information, visit our website: https://chssp.ucdavis.edu/

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