

CURRICULUM

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Essential Education
for a Changing World



Edited by

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cut? *What content should be created?* I would simply like to add the following ideas to your curriculum planning table.

Social Studies as Perspectives on Humanity

I have deliberately chosen to begin with social studies, in part because standards for social studies are often one of the last sets of standards approved. The arguments get personal because the discipline is, indeed, social: *Whose history will we leave out? Which communities should we study in depth?* Social studies may have been given short shrift in some of our states, because it is not assessed with regularity or at all. Yet when we look at this century's themes of global awareness, changing economies, communications, shared technologies, and planetary survival, social studies is fundamental. It is ultimately the study of ourselves as human beings that is the basis for addressing contemporary issues.

A critical area for reconsideration is the divisive nature of the traditional social studies model. Too often the discipline has been sharply divided into its subdisciplines: geography, history, anthropology, sociology, economics, and political science. If we combine any of these six subheads into pairs, triads, or combine all of them, the results can be immediately richer, more complex, and relevant. Consider a few of these fusions: political economics, economic anthropology, historical sociology, historical geography, and anthropological politics.

If we go a step further and begin to attach specific and contemporary issues, topics, and problems to these fusions, our learners can start becoming actual social scientists. Consider the possibilities that might emerge from questions such as these: *Is geography inevitably destiny in the political life of the Middle East? How does cultural anthropology shed light on the economy of resource-rich Brazil? How do the limited resources of the island nation of Japan affect its social mores and economic relationships? Why do people in my neighborhood want to buy the things they want to buy?*

Some fundamentals in social studies need reconsideration and replacement. For example, geography should be cut as a snapshot unit and replaced with an integrated approach continuously woven into the academic year. Rather than the token "let's start off the school year

with our classic unit on geography," the curriculum should include an ongoing injection and use of geography and a full range of maps. When schools do not use maps of all kinds with regularity in a range of classes (English, science, art), our students do not get to apply geography in a meaningful way. It is as absurd as a 1st grade teacher saying, "I am posting the alphabet but will take it down after a month." Knowing where places are, where people live, where we are in the solar system, where our neighborhood is—this knowledge is the basis of reality. What is even more alarming is that most of our students are using a 16th century map of the world for the basis of a geographic context.

Maps of the World as Political Statements: Too Much Mercator

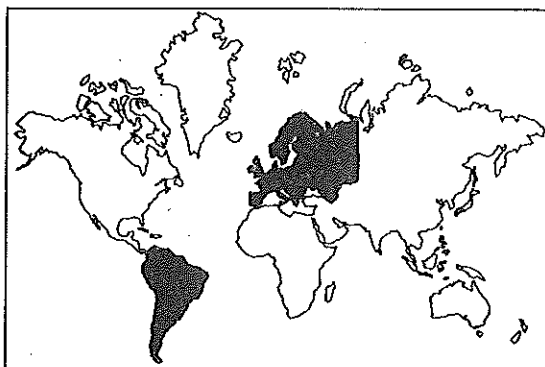
Beyond the need for more constant use of and exposure to geography, students need exposure to multiple maps and projections. Most U.S. students are familiar with the Mercator map (see Figure 3.1) developed in 1569. Unfortunately, the Mercator projection distorts the size and shape of large objects (bodies of water and continents) so that the scale increases from the equator to the poles. When the Gall-Peters Projection map was published in 1974 by Arno Peters, it was a source of controversy. It displays all areas—whether oceans, countries, or continents—according to actual size, making comparisons accurate and possible. Figure 3.2 shows a cylindrical equal-area projection oblique case map.

To be sure, a full range of projections should be compared and considered. Our U.S. Geological Survey (www.usgs.gov) provides a detailed analysis of map projections, as does the Web site at www.progonos.com/furuti/MapProj/Normal/TOC/cartTOC.html. And the Goddard Space Flight Center provides tools for examining global perspectives at its site, www.giss.nasa.gov/tools/gprojector/.

Our students should be examining a myriad of maps to garner information and insight. For example, the projection in Figure 3.2 is used by the CIA in its *World Factbook* (2008). Students of various ages look at this map with utter fascination because it provides another

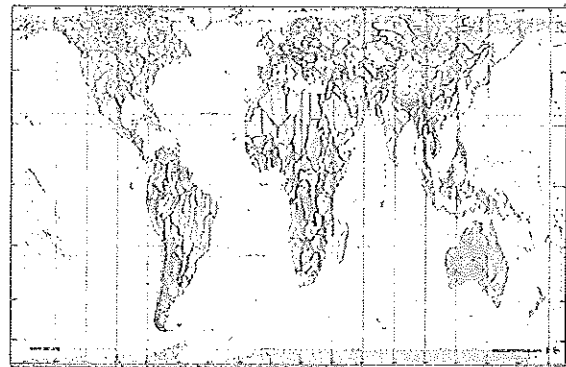
perspective on the size of our oceans and the proximities of the continents to Antarctica.

Figure 3.1 | Comparison of Mercator and Gall-Peters Map Projections



© 2006, www.ODTmaps.com

Mercator Projection



© 2007, Akademische Verlaganstalt

Gall-Peters Projection

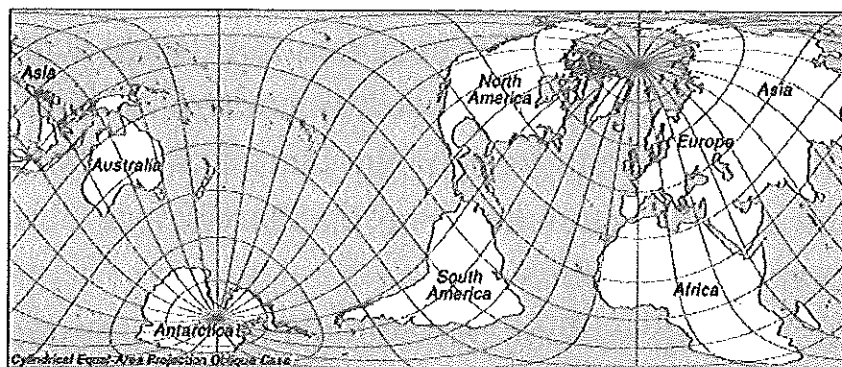
Courtesy of ODTmaps.com

Peters map link: <http://odtmaps.com/peters-equal-area-maps.46.0.0.1.htm>

Mercator map comparisons: http://odtmaps.com/detail.asp?product_id=E_STM-2-BK

Google Earth (www.earth.google.com) also offers students and adults an exceptional roving view of Earth and the relationship between landforms. If we are seeking to globalize the curriculum, as Vivien Stewart

Figure 3.2 | Map Projection from the CIA World Factbook



Source: Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook* [online].

Available: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html>

argues for so elegantly in Chapter 6, it is critical that we actively bring a view of the globe into each subject at every level. Whether it is an English teacher anchoring a plot, a science teacher explaining the movement of landforms and the composition of our planet, or a physical education teacher describing the history of the Olympics, geography is ultimately interdisciplinary.

Not Just Global Studies: The Study of a New World Era

In his brilliant book *The Post-American World* (2008), Fareed Zakaria introduces the reader to a very new time frame as he writes, "This is not a book about the decline of America, but rather about the rise of everyone else" (p. 1). Emerging economies from Brazil to India and from Russia to China are on a steady pace to shift and diversify the full range of economic power points. He points out how the tallest buildings, the largest dams, the most widely seen movies, the most innovative cars, and the latest communication devices are being designed and built outside the United States. The obvious interdependence of global production sites and the ease of communication have moved us rapidly into a new era without the parameters of the past. Zakaria is suggesting that the United States should use its characteristic adaptability and energy to re-create its role in this new time and to thrive. Whether one agrees with Zakaria or not, the fact remains that economic realities are changing. The devastating losses beginning in 2008 due to the floundering economic markets are a case in point. The question is, are we preparing our learners for this time? State and local education standards would do well to take a hard look at the proficiencies and concepts valued in their statements and replace them with an updated set based on contemporary and possible future capacities. Are the students in the United States being prepared for the present and the future or for an Eisenhower-era view of politics and the economy?

A forward-thinking working paper that I have found regarding the shift needed to prepare our learners for their poli-economic future is available through the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (www.acsa.edu.au). The Curriculum Standing Committee of National

Education Professional Associations (CSCNEPA), a group of leaders from a wide range of professional organizations throughout Australia, crafted this progressive and engaging document to provide a basis for reflecting on and generating possible curricular solutions for Australian learners. In particular, I was struck with the openness of the document and the language that was selected to describe the necessary global perspective for all future curriculum planning. The authors use fresh and realistic phrases such as "globalisation of economies ... centred more on China and India"; "insecurity of nations"; "likely environmental degradation"; "internationalisation of employment" (CSCNEPA, 2007, p. 4).

One of the phrases in the text is "school leavers," a powerful phrase evoking the image of the child becoming a young adult. The Australian paper asks if the country's learners are prepared to leave school and function independently in the actual world they will encounter.

America's Story: Replacing Redundancy with the Contemporary

When I consider the traditional social studies curriculum, what strikes me is that it is rare for a high school graduate to have studied the past 50 years of history. Standard upper-elementary curriculums in the United States often allow for a redundant examination of the seeds of U.S. government and the remarkable, tumultuous beginnings of the American Revolution at the expense of studying recent history. I propose that the Revolutionary period become a realistic study of the many conflicting ideas in play for the future of the colonists, which makes the ultimate coalition of strikingly different colonies into a single country all the more remarkable. In short, the question is this: *As historians, what is essential for our learners to know as they look at a range of perspectives on our country's beginnings?* We are who we are because of where we have come from. But it isn't realistic for the social studies curriculum to spend the same amount of time on all 300 years of U.S. history. An introduction to the nation's story can begin as it often does in the upper-elementary grades, but I believe that the next iterations should examine our roots and their relationship to present-day realities.

Moving from State History to Case Studies of the States

Where do we find the time to teach global studies and take a fuller look at contemporary America? We find the time by deemphasizing state history. According to the U.S. Census, not only do we have high numbers of legal immigrants accepted annually into the United States, we also have high rates of domestic migration (2009). Four metropolitan areas added 100,000 to their populations from 2007 to 2008: Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, Phoenix, and Atlanta. This means that there is the real possibility that a student in your district might move to another state. If your student studies Nebraska's history and then moves to Maine, that student would have benefited more from understanding Nebraska's role in the American story within a context for understanding global connections than spending 36 weeks on Nebraska in isolation. I suggest replacing the traditional practice of teaching state history with three curricular practices: (1) focus your state's history on its role in the larger American history narrative; (2) make the state's perspective more personal by using a case-study model and the Internet to interview students in other parts of the state; and (3) keep an ongoing view of global connections and relationships as a constant in both local and national history. Since there is a trend toward urban living, I believe all students should learn about new directions in 21st century cities with resources such as livable streets and streets education; see www.streetseducation.org and www.livablestreets.com.

One upgrade would be a seminar for high school students in which they investigate the state of the world in relation to key events and patterns. Working backward from each news story, they answer the question: How did we get here today? Researcher William Daggett (2005) suggests using rigor and relevance in our curriculum. If we follow his ideas, we'd use rigor to examine varying perspectives on the past and pose critical questions; relevance requires that students study immediate situations anchored in the relevant lessons of the past. New York has made this commitment with a two-year course on global studies for freshmen and sophomores.