

Research Précis

CONTEXTUALIZED LEARNING: Addressing Standards in History

Contextualized learning offers tremendous opportunities for developing students' appreciation of history and abilities to apply their understandings—to make sense of problems encountered every day. Learning experiences in history provide a natural context for working with students in any grade. No make-believe settings here. It's nice when it just happens... The Bradley Commission on History in Schools and the *National Standards for History* say to use it well.

Here-There-Then

Students should perceive past events and issues as they were experienced by people at the time, and develop historical empathy as opposed to present-mindedness. They should also understand the interplay of change and continuity, how things happen and change, and how to prepare to live with uncertainties and unfinished business. "Here-there-then" studies help students to understand and deal with the enormous changes that will occur over their lifetimes, to identify the continuities that link past and present, and to understand our society in relation to the human condition over time. Through this understanding, students can recognize the importance of individuals who have made a difference in history, and the significance of personal character for both good and ill.

During contextualized instruction...

Showcase the significance of historical events in our country and beyond—in the past, now, and into the future. Expose children to individuals who have made a difference in our present lives.

Historical Thinking

Historical thinking involves the exploration and analysis of historical documents, places, artifacts, and other records from the past. According to both the Bradley Commission on History in Schools and the *National Standards for History*, this requires that children thoughtfully listen to and read well-written historical narratives that reveal conditions, changes, and consequences, and that explain why things happened as they did. Analysis of the events described and the explanations offered, in tandem and in comparison with historical artifacts, records, and the human figures involved, brings a child's ability to "think historically" full circle.

During contextualized instruction...

Feature a variety of source artifacts for student access and exploration. The learning sequence and strategies should be carefully woven to promote parallel exploration and analysis.

Thick Narrative

Whether political, economic, social, or cultural, every form of historical study offers true case studies and serious narrative. Never reduce historical records to thin recitals of successive facts and dates. By its interdisciplinary nature, history connects and can bring alive studies in any other discipline with thick narrative that relates any subject topic with biography, rich storytelling—real significance in human lives, leaders, ordinary folk, and the consequences of our actions and dreams.

During contextualized instruction...

Utilize storytelling, biographies, and other narrative to connect history to any discipline, at every opportunity.

About the Bradley Commission on History in Schools...

The Bradley Commission on History in Schools was formed in 1987 in response to concerns regarding the quality and quantity of the history taught in American classrooms. The Commission focused on curriculum. Later guidelines, including the *National Standards for History*, were based on its work. The Bradley Commission's recommendations were articulated in what is considered by most to be the seminal document in history education: *Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools*, first printed in 1988.

The document sets forth a consensus of perspectives and ways of “historical thinking” that far transcend specific and useful facts. As the Commission words it: “What of it?” is a worthy question and it requires an answer.” To nurture these habits of mind, the Commission established a core set of Vital Themes and Narratives, which formed the foundation for its selection and articulation of three sets of Topics of Study: American History, Western Civilization, and World History. It includes as suggested patterns of study K-12 as well, and discusses a variety of modes of relevant historical study.

Find out more about the Bradley Commission and Building a History Curriculum at:
http://www.designedinstruction.com/reports/about_bradley_commission.html

About the *National Standards for History*...

The *National Standards for History*, revised and updated in 1996 to combine standards for grades K-4 with standards in both United States and World History for grades 5–12, represents the work of more than thirty professional organizations and scores of history teachers from across the nation. These voluntary guidelines reflect the best historical research and the finest teaching practice in history education that this country has to offer.

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Find out more about the *National Standards for History* at:
http://www.designedinstruction.com/reports/about_history_standards.html