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ABSTRACT

Results on content-oriented national assessment tests have demonstrated that many secondary school students in the United States are culturally illiterate. E. D. Hirsch has compiled a list of 4,500 terms, dates, phrases, and sayings that he argues represents the broad knowledge base that culturally literate U.S. citizens should possess. Twelve historical sayings, speeches, and addresses containing cherished values and beliefs that transcend the time in which they were uttered or written, and which scholars consider worthy of student attention were chosen from that list. Fourteen junior high and senior high school social studies textbooks were examined to determine to what extent these speeches and sayings were depicted, whether they were merely mentioned or given sufficient contextual material to provide a better understanding of their importance, and whether there was a substantive difference in the coverage between junior high and senior high school texts. Analysis of data demonstrated that there was not much agreement between Hirsch's condensed list and textbook authors as to what information comprised a culturally literate person's vocabulary. Only 58 percent of the sayings and speeches were depicted by texts in both groups, with only half being covered by the junior high texts. There also was great variation within each group as to which items were covered. Many texts failed to provide information that would further the understanding of the speeches and sayings and their original contexts. Questions were raised concerning how educators could attain the goal of a culturally literate citizenry. Two tables of statistical data and a 7-item bibliography are included. (JB)

CULTURAL LITERACY AND AMERICAN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

BY

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The problem of educating a multiethnic population to successfully function in an increasingly complex society continues to plague the American educational system. More than 20 million Americans are unable to read, write or reason beyond the most elementary of levels (Lapointe 1987, Larrick 1987). Results on content oriented national assessment tests have also demonstrated many secondary school students to be culturally illiterate. On 29 assessment tests in history and literature administered to more than 8000 public and private school 17 year olds, students failed 20 of them, averaging about 50 percent, which certainly does not bode well for producing a desired literate citizenry (Ravitch and Finn Jr. 1987).

A prominent educational critic, E.D. Hirsch, attributes this poor showing of youngsters to the "soft" secondary school curriculum which he partially blames for producing culturally illiterate citizens. With the assistance of subject area specialists in science and history, Hirsch compiled a list of 4500 items comprised of terms, dates, phrases, and sayings which he argues represents the broad knowledge base culturally literate Americans should possess (Hirsch 1987). This common vocabulary, drawn from all disciplines and collaborated by more than 100 scholars in all fields, contains hundreds of historical terms, phrases, and dates.

Hirsh's literacy list has aroused much controversy and interest in educational circles. Some educators have

criticized the list as being merely an advanced form of Trivial Pursuit that unduly emphasizes for retention purposes isolated bits of information. Skills for learning, attitude formation and multicultural education rather than universal knowledge absorption from a list should be stressed in the schools according to these critics (Tucker 1988). Others have argued that a cultural literacy list, even in an embryonic state, is an important beginning in reaching a meaningful common ground regarding what knowledge and cultural traditions need to be transfered to youngsters to become active, participating citizens. In examining these arguments, the writer believed it would be fruitful to examine to what extent secondary school students indeed are taught the items on Hirsch's list.

Since in a limited study it would prove impossible to examine coverage of all items on Hirsch's list, attention was focused upon historical sayings, speeches, and addresses throughout American history. Two colleagues verified the process of identifying all items that fit this category. The items used in the study are:

A. "Give me liberty or give me death"
B. "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes"
C. "Regret that I have but one life to lose for my country, I only"
D. Farewell Address of Washington
E. "Don't give up the ship"
F. Gettysburg Address
G. Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address
H. "World must be made safe for democracy, The
I. "Fear itself, Nothing to..."
J. "Buck stops here, The"
K. "Ask not what your country can do for you..."
L. I Have a Dream (speech)

(The letters in front of the items are used on subsequent tables)

Sayings, speeches and addresses in American history were chosen because they help to illuminate many civic traits and values cherished by Americans such as sacrifice, determination, justice and equality. These ideals are eloquently expressed in the words of Lincoln, Kennedy and Dr. King Jr. Although it may be argued that more weight should be attached to some items on the list, in totality the sayings, speeches, and addresses provide a manageable collection of historical occurrences containing values and beliefs cherished by Americans that transcend the time in which they were uttered or written and which scholars consider worthy of student attention and retention.

Studying about noteworthy sayings and speeches is also vital in an age when students are too often influenced by television, with its appeal to the visual senses, glib expressions, and conveniently time controlled solutions to usually complex problems. Youngsters are not often presented with opportunities to experience the inspirational impact oral and written words can have in effectuating change, precipitating decisive action, and expressing valued American beliefs. Memorable speeches and sayings provide an opportunity for youngsters to recognize and understand that effort, struggle and sacrifice are often required to achieve one's goals and to contribute to a better America and world to live in. In today's world, where "heros" are

too often ephemeral media events, students should appreciate statements uttered by individuals many consider to be timeless heros in words as well as deeds.

In ascertaining the degree to which students are learning about these sayings and addresses, nationwide surveys reveal that between 80 to 90 percent of social studies instructional time is devoted to students interacting in some fashion with their texts (Komoski 1985). Too often, it is found, the text and related materials dictate the scope and sequence of what is taught in the social studies classroom.

In this regard, unlike other countries with centralized boards of education or state produced texts, America's decentralized school system, with over 16,000 autonomous units of varying sizes, leads to development and implemenation of a wide variety of social studies curricula that reflect unique needs and priorities within the various districts. State departments of education can mandate basic curricula or graduation requirements but the specific implementation of many of these guidelines falls within the purview of the local school districts. Within this structure, local interest groups, parochial concerns and priorities, and differing community and socioeconomic populations all influence the educational goals set, the nature of the curriculum, and the texts selected.

Caught in this dilemma of incongruous goals and differing social studies curricula and emphasis are the

textbook publishers who cannot look to one source or nationally established subject area curricula as a guideline to select the content to include or emphasize in their social studies textbooks. The nature of America's educational system leads to the production of social studies texts that must be, to win widespread adoption, "all things to all people" or at least be superficially acceptable to diverse school districts and state boards of education (Bernstein 1985).

In this confusing inchoate educational environment, a study was undertaken to examine in what manner junior and senior high school texts depicted some of the sayings, speeches and addresses in American history that Hirsch argues comprise part of a literate citizen's vocabulary. Some questions examined in this study include:

> To what extent do secondary school American history texts depict these speeches and sayings within the space constraints all text publishers must deal with?
>
> Are all the items merely "mentioned," or do the texts also provide sufficient contextual material to offer students a richer structure to understand their importance?
>
> Are there substantive differences in coverage of these speeches and addresses between junior high and high school American history texts?

With regard to the texts used, publishers at New York State and local social studies conferences sent to the writer examination copies of their junior high and high school American history texts. A similar request was made to publishers not at the conferences who advertised

instructional materials in the recent social studies journals *Social Education* and *The Social Studies*. The fourteen texts received were divided, according to publishers recommendations, into the following two groups:

LIST 2

HIGH SCHOOL TEXTS

1. History of the United States - Daniel J. Boorstin and Brooks M. Kelley, 1986
2. Exploring United States History - John R. O'Connor, Sidney Schwartz and Leslie A. Wheeler, 1986
3. History of the United States(2V.) - Norman Risjord and Terry Haywoode, 1985
4. Triumph of the American Nation - Lewis Paul Todd and Merle Curti, 1986
5. Land of Promise: A History - Carol Berkin and Leonard Wood, 1986
6. United States History - David C. King, Mariah Marvin, David Weitzman and Toni Dwiggins, 1986
7. America: The Glorious Republic- Henry F. Graff, 1988

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL TEXTS

1. America Is - Henry N. Drewry, Thomas O'Connor and Frank Friedel, 1985
2. America's Heritage - Margaret Branson, 1986
3. One Flag, One Land - Richard C. Brown and Herbert J. Bass, 1985
4. Proud Nation - Ernest R. May, 1985
5. History of the American Nation(2V.) - John Patrick and Carol Berkin, 1986
6. America: Its People and Values - Leonard C. Wood, Ralph H. Gabriel, and Edward L. Biller, 1985
7. Exploring American History - Melvin Schwartz and John R. O'Connor, 1987

(The subsequent tables comparing text coverage use the numbers next to each text)

Analyzing the Data

In examining the data on Table 1 on page 7A, one finds that the sayings, speeches and addresses are depicted by only 64 percent of the high school texts and only half of the

junior high school books. Some sayings such as Israel Putnam's "Don't fire until you see the white of their eyes," uttered at Bunker Hill, and James Lawrence's utterance "Don't give up the ship," during the War of 1812, are covered, respectively, by only 14 percent and 29 percent of the high schools texts, and only 14 percent and zero percent by the junior high books. As an exception, the saying by Nathan Hale is depicted by more junior high texts, 3 of 7 or 43 percent of them, than high school books in which only 2 of 7 or 29 percent of them mention the item. The only item depicted by all texts in both groups is Dr. King Jr's. "I have a Dream" speech.

The high school texts, in part due to their greater size, also devote a greater average number of words to the topics they covered, 135 words to 98 words for the junior high books. The greater word allocation by the high school texts is also due to their more frequent highlighting of portions or the entire text of important speeches on the list, such as Washington's Farewell Address and the Gettysburg Address. Intragroup variation of word allocation is also great, with the greatest number of words devoted to King's speech by the high school books, and the Gettysburg Address receiving the greatest spatial attention by the junior high texts. Overall, not surprisingly, the greatest amount of space in both groups is devoted to the speeches and addresses rather than the sayings or one line utterances of famous Americans.

TABLE 1 - SUMMARY OF COVERAGE OF SAYINGS AND SPEECHES GIVEN BY EACH TEXT GROUP

SAYINGS AND SPEECHES[1]	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	SUMMARY
HIGH SCHOOL TEXTS	3	1	2	7	2	6	4	7	7	2	6	7	54\84
#/% of texts that cover speech	43%	14%	29%	100%	29%	86%	57%	100%	100%	29%	86%	100%	64%
Average # of words given to speech	91w	18w	119w	293w	43w	236w	126w	165w	83w	45w	180w	239w	135 words
items given with background material	2	1	2	6	1	5	4	7	3	1	4	6	79%
	67%	100%	100%	86%	50%	83%	100%	100%	43%	50%	83%	83%	
items given with explanations	2	0	1	6	1	4	3	7	5	2	1	3	60%
	67%	0%	50%	86%	50%	66%	75%	100%	71%	100%	17%	43%	
items highlighted by text	2	0	0	4	0	5	1	1	2	0	2	3	37%
	67%	0%	0%	57%	0%	83%	25%	14%	29%	0%	33%	43%	

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL TEXTS SPEECHES AND SAYINGS[1]	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	SUMMARY
#\% of texts that cover speech	6	1	3	5	0	4	2	6	4	2	3	7	43\84
	86%	14%	43%	71%	0%	57%	29%	86%	57%	29%	43%	100%	51%
Average # of words given to speech	61w	28w	105w	124w	0	186w	84w	85w	58w	36w	109w	160w	98 words
items given with background material	3	0	3	4	0	3	1	4	2	2	1	5	65%
	50%	0%	100%	80%	0%	75%	50%	67%	50%	100%	33%	71%	
items given with explanations	3	0	1	3	0	3	1	0	1	2	1	1	37%
	50%	0%	33%	60%	0%	75%	50%	0%	25%	100%	33%	14%	
items highlighted by text	1	0	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	19%
	17%	0%	0%	20%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	29%	

1 - refer to list 1 on page 2 of document for specific sayings, speeches and addresses represented by each letter on table 1

TABLE 2

COVERAGE OF SAYINGS AND SPEECHES BY EACH TEXT
NUMBER OF WORDS DEVOTED(W), BACKGROUND INFORMATION(BG), AND EXPLANATIONS OFFERED(E)

SAYINGS AND SPEECHES[1]	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
HIGH SCHOOL TEXTS[2]												
1	0	18W,BG,E	104W,BG,E	0	17W	0	203W,BG,E	39W,BG,E	39W	0	36W	80W,BG,E
2	58W,BG,E	0	162W,BG,E	99W	0	249W,BG,E	79W,BG,E	76W,BG,E	50W,BG,E	41W,E	78W,BG,E	105W,BG,E
3	0	0	0	735W,BG,E	68W,BG,E	348W,BG,E	0	198W,BG,E	76W,BG,E	0	762W,BG	605W,BG,E
4	101W	0	0	207W,BG,E	0	254W	114W,BG	330W,BG,E	25W,E	0	0	125W
5	112W	0	0	469W,BG,E	0	274W,BG	0	224W,BG,E	193W	50W,BG,E	112W,BG	196W,BG
6	0	0	0	84W,BG,E	0	116W,BG,E	0	108W,BG,E	33W,E	0	40W,BG	301W,BG
7	0	0	76W,BG,E	359W,BG,E	0	364W,BG,E	108W,BG,E	156W,BG,E	233W,BG,E	0	56W	221W,BG

SAYINGS AND SPEECHES[1]	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
JR.HIGH SCHOOL TEXTS[2]												
1	18W	0	0	107W,BG,E	0	334W,E	107W,BG	88W	0	0	98W	200W,BG,E
2	45W,BG,E	28W	0	0	0	0	0	26W	84W	0	0	107W,BG
3	26W	0	86W,BG	17W	0	254W,BG	0	66W,BG	72W,BG,E	26W,BG,E	0	106W,BG
4	0	0	0	94W,BG	0	0	0	0	28W	0	0	145W
5	190W,E	0	117W,BG,E	304W,BG,E	0	307W,BG,E	60W,E	48W,BG	48W,BG	0	148W,BG,E	300W,BG
6	60W,BG,E	0	112W,BG	98W,BG,E	0	375W,BG,E	0	90W,BG	0	45W,BG,E	82W	115W,BG
7	119W,BG	0	0	0	0	0	0	48W,BG	0	0	0	48W

1 - Refer to List 1 on page 2 of the document for the specific sayings, speeches and addresses represented by each of the letters

2 - Refer to List 2 on page 6 of the document for the specific names of the texts represented by each of the numbers

Besides just "mentioning" the items, also important is the breadth of coverage given by each of the texts in both groups. One kind of depiction offers background information that provides an historical context to better understand the reasons for the utterance of the saying or the issuance of the speech or address. For example in the junior high text, America People and Values, the authors write as an introduction to discussing the Gettysburg Address, "...at the cemetery to be dedicated for Union soldiers, Lincoln gleamed sadly at the fresh graves just beyond the audience to offer his moving thoughts." This background material offers a richer historical and social framework to help students to place the saying or speech into a more understandable perspective than merely mentioning the item.

In addition to including background material, whether or not authors present explanations to help students to understand the meaning of the speeches or sayings depicted is also important. In Exploring United States History, the authors, in presenting Wilson's speech urging Congress for a declaration of war, assert, "Finally Germany was a warlike, undemocratic nation. Its victory would be a threat to democratic governments almost everywhere. America had to fight to "make the world safe for democracy." Unlike background material which attempts to give the antecedent conditions or context why a speech was given or saying was uttered, the explanatory material clarifies the meaning of the words or phrases within the document or statement.

Overall about two thirds of the high school texts that depict the items provide both background information and explanations for the topics. In comparison, about half the junior high books offer both types of information. Some speeches such as Washington's Farewell Address and the Gettysburg Address are provided with much more of both kinds of information than the other items on Hirsch's list.

In examining solely the background coverage given by texts, 79 percent of the high school texts that depict the items offer background information, compared to 65 percent of the junior high texts. Many high school texts such as Exploring United States History and The Glorious Republic provide considerable background material for the sayings and speeches they cover, while a number of junior high school texts such as The Proud Nation and Exploring American History, the latter a text designed for poor readers, not only do not depict most of the items, but also fail to offer much background material for the ones that they do cover (See Table 2, page 7B).

With respect to the degree of explanatory material accompanying the sayings and speeches, about 60 percent of the high school texts offer such information while only about a third of the junior high books provide such clarifying material. The greatest percentage of explanations for items most often depicted by the high school texts are for Washington's Farewell Address and Wilson's speech while the smallest percentage is provided for Kennedy's clarion for

public sacrifice in his inaugural address and Dr. King's "I have a Dream" speech. The junior high school texts offer the greatest number of explanations for Hale's words, Washington's Farewell Address and the Gettysburg Address, and similar to the high school texts, almost no explanations are given for the meaning of King's speech. In the high school group, Exploring United States History is the only text to cover 10 of the 12 sayings and speeches cited on Hirsch's list and to provide explanatory notes for 90 percent of them. In the junior high group, both History of the American Nation and America: Its People and Values provide the greatest percentage of items with explanations.

Finally, one finds that about a third of the high school texts that cover the items highlight either a major portion or the entirety of speeches and addresses on Hirsch's list. In contrast, only 19 percent of the junior high texts provide similar coverage. Some high school texts such as History of the United States, in its "Documents" section, highlight with analysis five speeches and addresses while only the Gettysburg Address receives special attention in any of the junior high school books.

ANALYSIS

The analysis of data demonstrates that, with respect to so-called famous speeches and sayings by prominent Americans, there is not much agreement between Hirsch's list and

textbook authors as to what information comprises a culturally literate person's vocabulary. Not all the historical sayings and speeches cited by Hirsch on his list are even "mentioned" by the text authors. Overall, only 58 percent of all the sayings and speeches are depicted by texts in both groups, with only half being covered by the junior high texts. Also, there is great variation within each group as to whether particular items are even covered, demonstrating that texts, despite their need to appeal to broad school populations and geographical areas, are not truly alike with respect at least to coverage of the items in this study.

Furthermore, many texts in both groups fail to provide information that would help students to better understand the meaning of the sayings or speeches as well as the context in which they were uttered or written. About half of all texts that do cover the items offer any explanations of the speeches, addresses or sayings. In both cases, junior high school texts fare far worse. Excerpts or major portions of the text of speeches and addresses are highlighted by only one quarter of the texts that cover these topics. Text variation within each group is also great in providing this information.

In retrospect, one is presented with an educational dilemma since not all of the items of Hirsch's culturally literacy list that scholars deem important for students to know are given coverage and analysis by text authors.

Obviously, one cannot generalize or assume from this limited study that a comparison of other items on the list will bear the same results. However, it does raise serious questions and issues that must be dealt with by educators.

Educational decision and policy makers on the national and local levels are faced with a number of difficult choices with respect to producing the desired goal of educating a literate citizenry body. Who should educators turn to for guidance in deciding the curriculum and content needed for students to not only appreciate the past, but also to productively participate in the present and to be prepared for the future? Should they rely upon scholars such as Hirsch in deciding what historical content should be included in the school curriculum and then ensure that students receive such information either through their texts or other instructional approaches? Hirsch offers such an argument (Cox, 1987). Or perhaps, are all the items on the list really not that important, as textbook authors and editors seem to be saying by not including some items within their texts? In fact one could easily add to this discussion whether or not the content oriented national assessment tests administered to youngsters truly reflect the vocabulary and information all culturally literate citizens possess. How does one reconcile these important differences in attaching weight to historical items or in fact any subject matter in developing this common vocabulary? How could one justifyingly argue that someone is culturally illiterate

without some common consensus or criteria to make such a judgment?

Such questions must be given careful consideration and attention by educational leaders on all levels if the goal of producing a culturally literate citizenry is to realized in the forseeable future. Youngsters need to be imbued with some commonly agreed upon knowledge, essential to not only better understand and appreciate America's past, traditions and values, but to comprehend, deliberate upon and interpret written, oral and visual information about important local, national, and international issues and events that may affect their lives and futures. Otherwise, America's school system with its competing forces and interest groups will continue to perpetuate a "patchwork" curriculum that tries to please all but satisfies noone. At stake is America's ability to produce an informed citizenry capable of preserving liberty at home and maintaining America's economic and democratic preeminance in the world.

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