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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate four social studies textbooks recently under consideration for use by the Memphis (Tennessee) City Public Schools. The textbooks, chosen at random, are: "World Geography: A Physical and Cultural Study" (de Blij and others, Scott Foresman, 1989); "A History of the United States" (Boorstin and others); "Economics and Making Decisions" (Kourilsky, West Publishing, 1988); and "Government in America" (Hardy, Houghton Mifflin, 1990). Each of the textbooks was examined critically in five areas: (1) readability level; (2) number of concepts presented and subsequent concept development; (3) development of a problem solving sequence of material assessing cause and effect, testing hypothesis, and drawing conclusions; (4) analysis of the six levels of questions via Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain; and (5) type of evaluation. Overall the study determined that the four textbooks only partially developed the qualities for which they were evaluated. A 21-item bibliography is included. (DB)

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AN ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE OF SELECTED SOCIAL STUDIES TEXTBOOKS

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INTRODUCTION

America is still "A Nation at Risk" as far as education is concerned. (Newsweek, 5/2/88). On-going research has shown that the causes of academic failure are many, and that the long-term effects are devastating. Textbooks are but one piece of the education puzzle that need to be reviewed and critiqued.

The purpose of this research proposal is to evaluate current social studies textbooks under consideration by the Memphis City Schools Textbook Adoption Committee for 1990-91 implementation. Since textbooks play a vital role in daily classroom routines, and in the total educational process, such an analysis seems relevant, and in fact necessary.

A major reason for the interest in textbook quality is awareness of the inordinate classroom time that students spend with instructional materials or supplemental workbooks. This disproportionate amount of time-80 to 90 percent of available classroom time- is educationally unsound in itself, but the problem is exacerbated by the bland and intellectually sterile materials being used...the result is mediocre books and other materials...which undermine attempts to upgrade quality and intellectual demands (20, p. 26).

The delineation of this study is four social studies textbooks, 1989-90 copyright. Because textbooks are the primary vehicle used to convey social studies information to student, an analysis of the priorities given to the development of critical thinking skills in such text is crucial. A descriptive study of the four books will include investigating readable levels, concept development, adaptation to problem-solving methods, utilization of Bloom's taxonomy and the six levels of questions, and types of evaluation options presented.

The social studies teacher...has three main obligations in helping students learn from their textbook; Link their existing knowledge to concepts in the text, organize the information read for long-term retention, and make the expository style of the text accessible to the (7, p. 267).

These three goals emphasize that the subject called social studies is more than an abstract academic subject. The integration of all the social sciences enhances students' perceptions that the social sciences are necessarily interdependent.

If teachers approach social studies with the importance of process in mind, they will be able to teach skills in context that have overall purpose and meaning...Most important of all is to use content relating to all the social sciences in ways that touch the lives of children personally and get them involved individually (18, p. 42).

When teachers are surveyed about textbooks, educator-author Vincent Rogers discovered the following points. "The teachers agreed that text exert a powerful influence on what is taught and how it is taught. They also felt...that texts do not do a very good job teaching children how to think (17, p. 25). The teachers further commented that "...they would like to see textbooks emphasize critical thinking and seeing both sides of an issue or argument" (17, p. 26). Based on the above-referenced concerns, research into related social studies textbook evaluation is warranted.

The main goal of social studies should be to help students develop the ability to make reflective decision so they can resolve personal problems and shape public policy by participating in intelligent social action (1, Preface)

Therefore, textbooks should be written to provide a meaningful social studies experience for students. Unfortunately,

...forty percent of thirteen year olds and sixteen percent of seventeen year olds have not acquired the reading skills needed to be able to search for specific information and interrelated ideas or to make generalizations based on reading social studies materials...The inability to perform these tasks raises questions about how well students can read the range of textbook material they encounter in school (15, p. 115).

Using a textbook as the only method of instruction becomes an insufficient approach. The future outlook for literacy in America does not look any better.

By the beginning of the 21st century, three-fourths of American adults may lack the reading...knowledge required for any but the lowest-level, lowest-paying jobs. Using a map to get from one place to another was too hard for nearly half the young students recently tested by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the countries top assessment group (15, p. 22).

Based on this data, "Teachers must work to introduce vocabulary and

teach concepts prior to opening the textbook" (10, p. 116). Learning Theory analysts show that,

...concepts are abstract words that are useful for classifying groups of facts, events or ideas on the basis of similar common characteristics. Sorting out, classifying and labeling vast quantities of data within our environment leads us to concepts. These concepts help us reduce the complexity of our world to more manageable proportions (1, p. 110).

An extensive study of concept development has been done by Jerome S. Bruner. With great technical expertise Bruner examines the conceptual areas of cognition as the way man achieves, retains and transfers knowledge. In Bruner's method concept development is an umbrella term for a process that broadly categorizes knowledge and allows the student to glean generalization skills. His technique reinforces the idea that concepts are learned through experience with their experience. As one process in learning theory concept development illustrates that... "a person can learn something that goes beyond a specific concept or even a specific rule. Learning a system of rules represents the most abstract level in the conceptual hierarchy (7, p. 160).

"For the teacher, concept-formation strategy promotes concept learning, which classroom instruction is striving to accomplish" (14, p. 73). As an inductive process, concept-formation includes the creative processing of information as well as the use of information to problem solve. There should be no doubt that critical thinking skills should be focused on learning. "Thinking must pervade instruction at all levels. If teachers regard the development of thinking abilities as something that must wait until students have attained basic skills, pupils will attain neither...All real learning...requires thinking" (5, p. 4).

One reason why textbooks are suspect as appropriate instruments for developing critical thinking skill is the fact that their authors write textbook with questionable motivation. Harriet Tyson Bernstein expounds on this theme in her recent book, A Conspiracy of Good Intentions: America's Textbook Fiasco.

Less well-known...is the academy's role in the deterioration of textbooks prepared for students at all levels of the educational system...Writing a textbook is not considered an intellectual work; the endeavor contributes little or nothing to tenure or promotion and may even be harmful to an academies career (2, p.17).

Bernstein further notes that "the first prerequisite to good textbooks is a coherent national curriculum or at least a medley of coherent alternative curricula in each discipline" (2, p. 28). In the meantime, textbook authors and curriculum planners will have to "rely on political consensus rather than knowledgeable synthesis" (2, p. 28).

Revamping curriculum and instruction to foster higher ordered thinking in all students is a necessity. Since the goals of the teacher are instrumental in shaping the activities of the classroom, the onus of conveying various levels of questioning skill lays with the teacher. If a teacher limits a questioning sequence to merely knowledge and comprehension levels, little opportunity exist to test students thinking on more complex tasks. Questioning has most frequently been used as a means of evaluating a student's knowledge. However, a whole strategy of questioning for social inquiry has been developed. By promoting a questioning attitude a student becomes a more creative person.

Bloom's taxonomy was originally developed as a tool to classify educational objectives in six levels of instructional goals. Built into the taxonomy is the assumption that categories are cumulative and hierarchic, such as one must have knowledge to comprehend and application requires both knowledge and comprehension.

The single most important determinant of the kinds of thinking operation students attempt in classrooms is the question sequence that the teacher projects as he...guides discussion, outlines personalized study tasks, and evaluates growth in learning (9, p. 189).

Textbooks can be an excellent resource for questioning strategies when various levels of questions are demonstrated.

After textbooks have been written within realistic read-ability ranges including concept development, problem-solving skill, and various levels of questions, assessment of what the student has learned logically follows. Since the learning process involves continuous feedback, numerous forms of evaluation techniques are vital to thorough analysis. But

Whether the coin of assessment and evaluation in the schools is standardized tests or some other alternative, what is needed more than alternative instruments is a critical attitude toward assessment and a sider appreciation of its effects on teaching and learning (8, p. 683).

Non-traditional grading and creative awards can enhance standard evaluation measures. Similarly, observational reports, sociograms, committee reports, teacher-made tests, and anecdotal records can be used to appreciate individual student differences. Textbooks should be examined for the variety of evaluation instruments they recommend, as well as for how effectively the assessment measure academic objectives.

Questions to be Addressed

The literature suggests that the following questions be addressed:

1. What are the readability levels in the four textbooks under consideration?
2. How do current social studies textbooks exemplify development of critical thinking skills such as concept development, problem solving methods and levels of question based on Bloom's taxonomy?
3. What evaluation measures are recommended in the text to enable the teacher and student to know exactly where they are headed, and what needs review?
4. If the textbooks under evaluation are not addressing the development of primary critical thinking skills, what course of action is realistic for teachers to pursue?

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Four current social studies textbooks were chosen at random for study.

- 1) Harm J. de Blij, Gerald A. Danzer, Roger A. Hart, Dorothy W. Drummond. World Geography. A Physical and Cultural Study. Scott Foresman and Company, Glenview, Illinois, 1989.
- 2) Ruth Frankel Boorstin, Daniel J. Boorstin, Brooks Mather Kelley. A History of the United States.
- 3) Marilyn Kourilsky, William Dickneider, David Kaplan and Victor Tabbush. Economics and Making Decisions. West Publishing Company, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1988.
- 4) Richard J. Hardy. Government in America. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston Massachusetts, 1990.

Instruments

Each of the four textbooks were critically examined in five areas:

- 1) Readability level
- 2) Number of concepts presented and subsequent concept development
- 3) Development of a problem solving sequence of material assessing cause and effect, testing hypothesis, and drawing conclusions.
- 4) Analysis of the six levels of questions via Bloom's Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain.
- 5) Types of evaluation options presented.

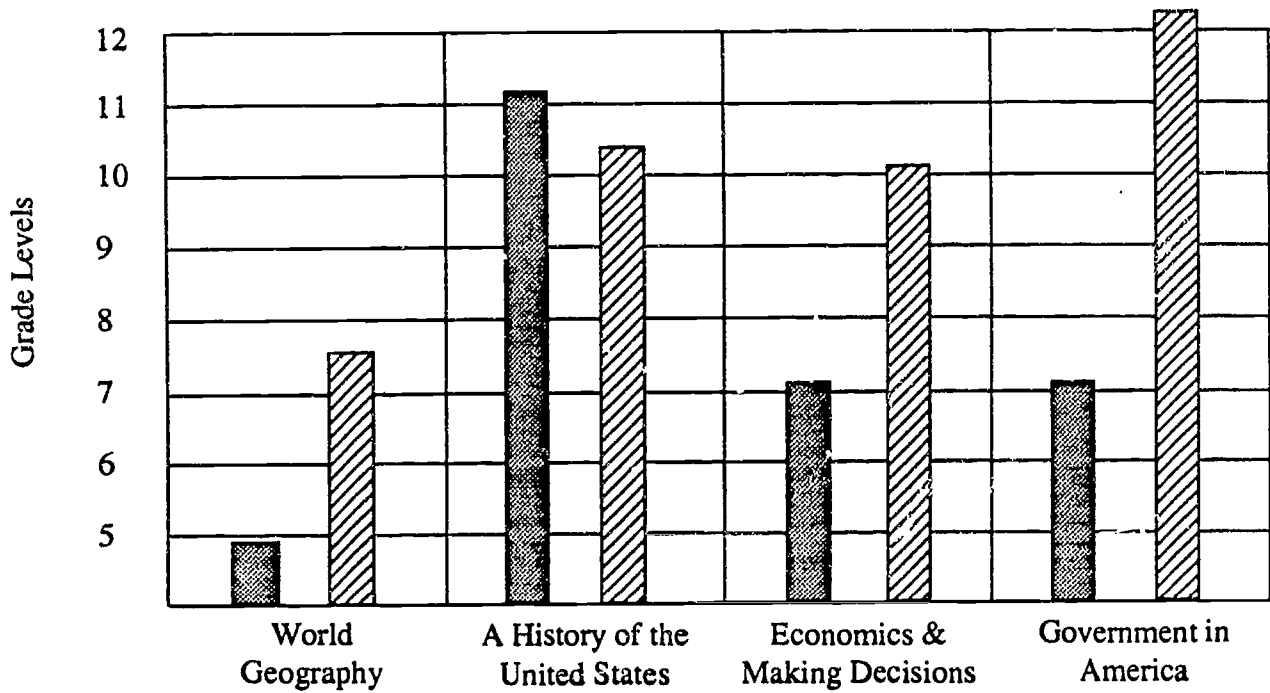
Procedures and Analysis

In attempting to answer the proposed questions, each textbook was examined in its entirety. An evaluation was compiled on each of the five instruments analyzed. The information on all four textbooks was then integrated into a summary in each of the fields examined to provide clarity and continuity. The sequence of critiquing is readability, concept-development, problem-solving skills, levels of questions, and evaluation recommendations.

In the area of readability, texts were evaluated using both the Raygor Readability Estimate and Fry's Readability Graph. (for detailed information on this procedure, see Addendum).

Since the Fry method does not include proper noun, the results on all but A History of the United States book appear invalid.

READABILITY



Raygor Readability Results = =

Fry Readability Results = =

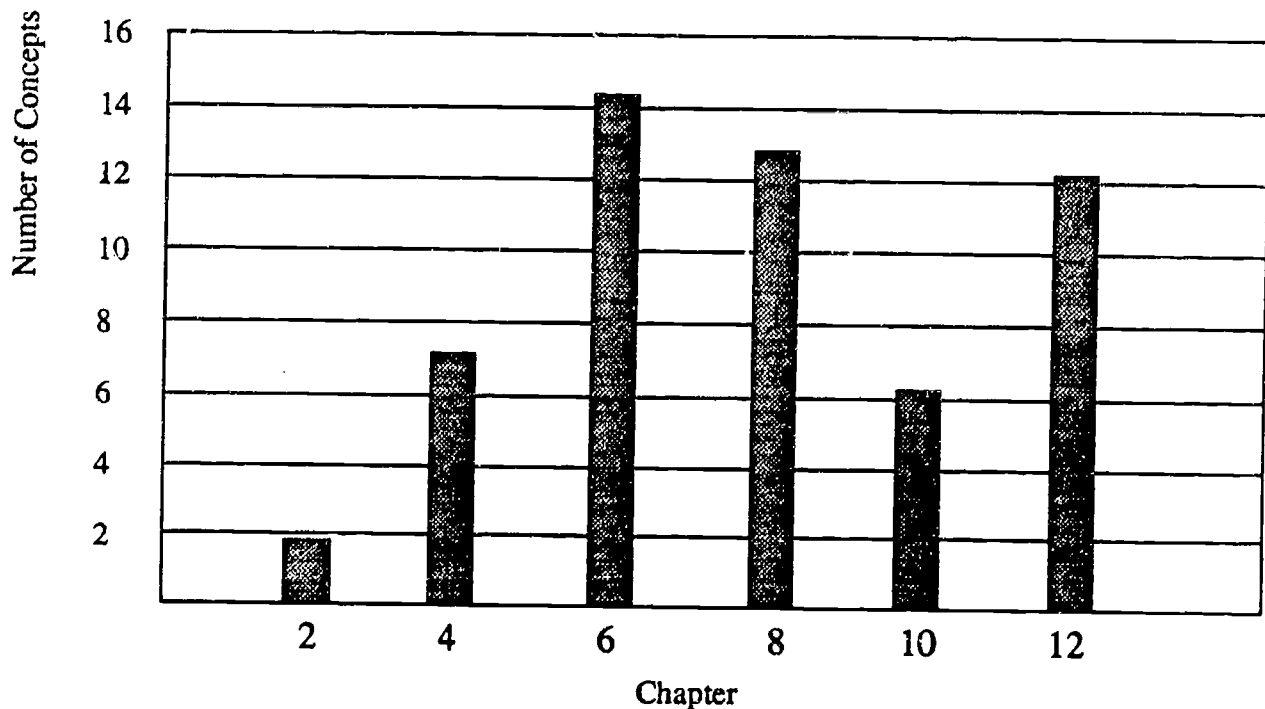
The graph reflects Fry results at great variance with Raygor, except on the history text. This discrepancy is due to the fact that the Fry method of analysis does not include counting proper nouns, and the Raygor method does.

Based on the Raygor scale, all the textbooks considered are appropriate for the grade level of instruction utilized by the Memphis City Schools.

Concepts were counted in chapters 2,4,6,8,10 and 12 of each text. References to concept development are as follow. Concepts presented in World Geography are listed as key terms at the beginning of each section within the chapter. Later in the text the concept appears in dark print within the context of a definition. Initially as many as 12 concepts (chapter 2, pp. 17-43) are introduced.

The Teacher's Edition shows a lesson development guide, incorporating map skills and hands-on usage. However, there is nothing that tethers the new concepts to the student's world. In chapter 2 of example, the concept of storms is discussed. The discussion/development of this concept deals with coastal deterioration. Here, in Memphis, an ideal application of the concept would be an analogy to the Mississippi River and the drought of 1988.

CONCEPTS WORLD GEOGRAPHY



A History of the United States is a narrative type of text. No separate vocabulary words/concepts are listed in the chapters, but Section Reviews list identification terms. History is presented as process, using historical concepts and historical generalization within the content. Chapter 3 (pp. 45-65) offers a fine example of how the concept of a nation is presented, developed and explained. Section Reviews raise questions such as, "How would your life be different if you were a colonial man, woman or child?" (pp.55), thus tying the general concept in with the students' lives.

A History of the United States did not specify concepts. Rather each chapter related a concept theme.

Chapter 1 - discovery/exploration

Chapter 2 - colonization

Chapter 3 - self-government

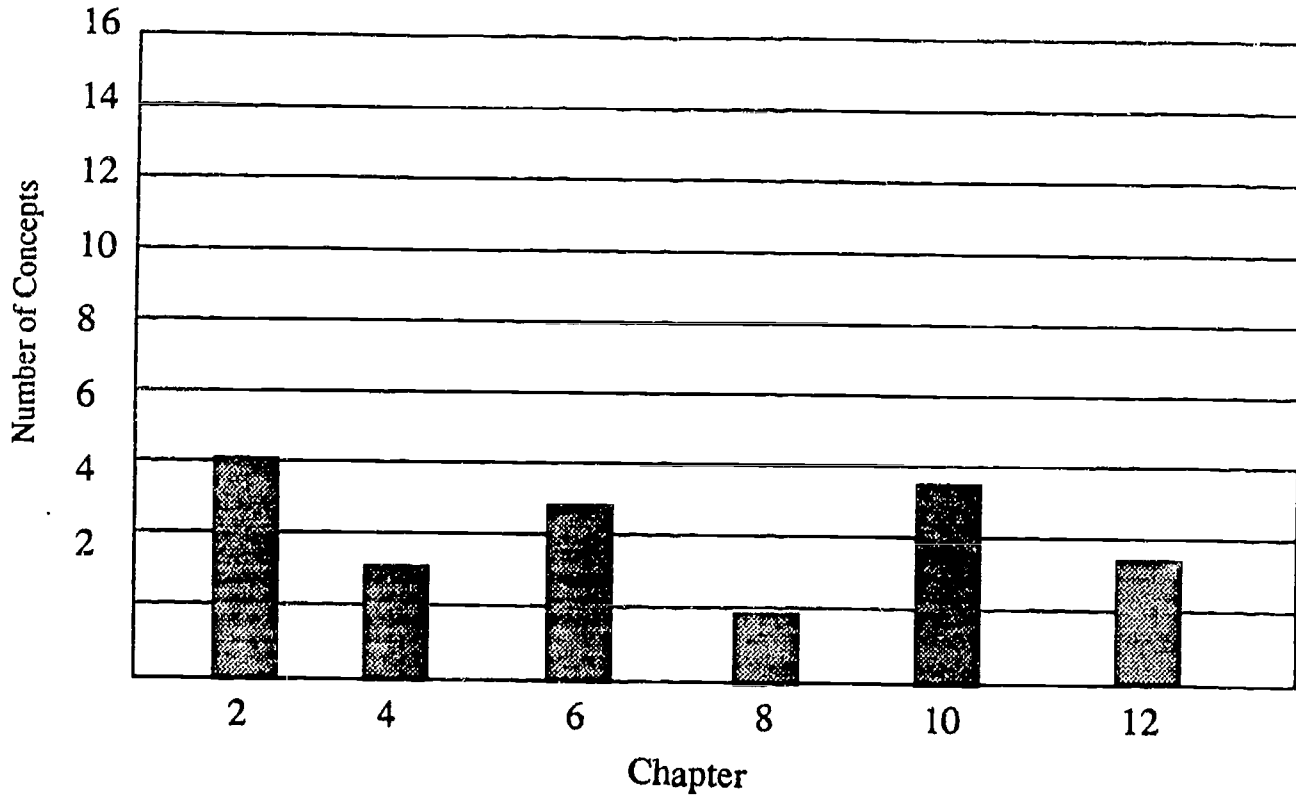
Chapter 4 - confederation

Chapter 5 - nationalism

This text shows an excellent source of true concept development.

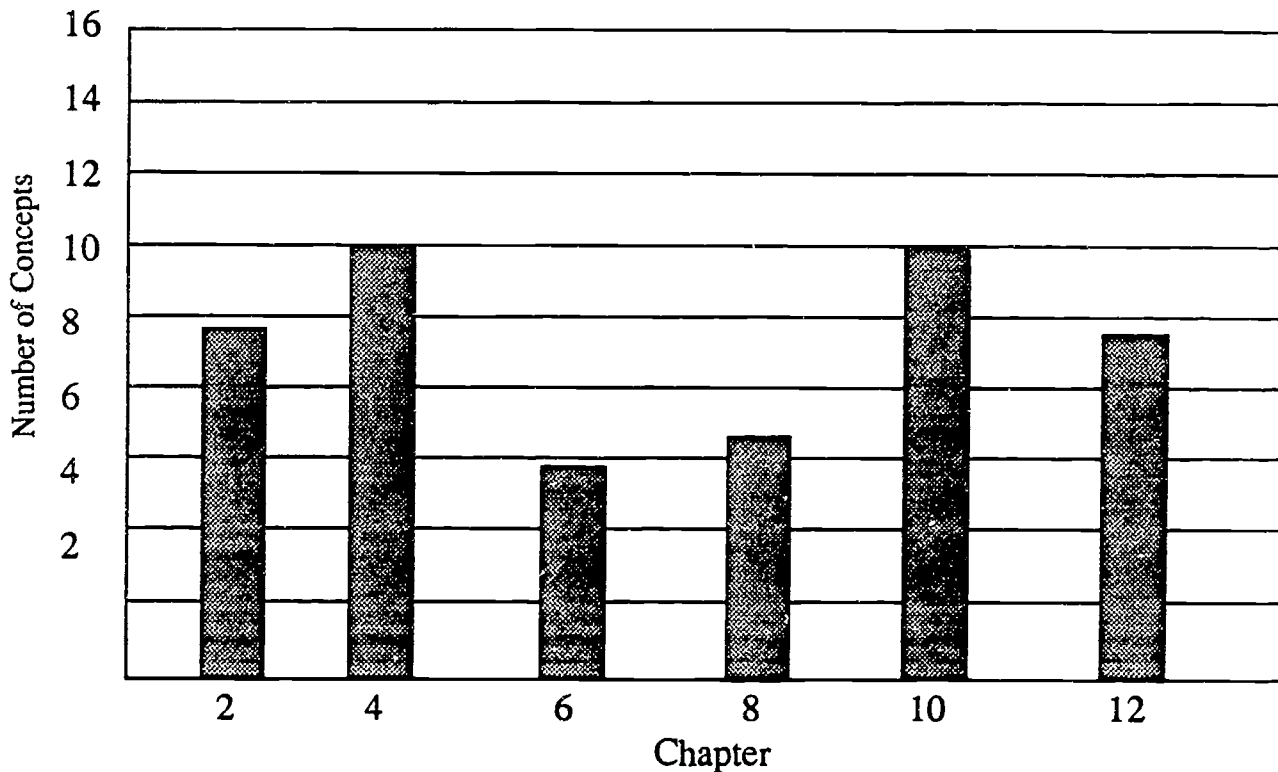
Economics and Making Decisions presents concepts verbally before presenting them graphically, but the concepts are not well developed. Concepts are framed in a box; they are in dark print with an appropriate definition. (This is a verbatim repeat from the concept used in the paragraph above). The key concept in all understanding of economics is scarcity-how man attempts to satisfy his unlimited wants with his limited resources. This easily lends itself to relating to day-to-day life experiences. The content incorporates McDonald's Restaurants, Coca-Cola, and concert tickets all relevant to the students, but when directing activities to develop concepts the text falls short. Page 162 discusses social security benefits. An appropriate exercise would be for students to discuss their respective families-grandparents/relatives on social security; page 308 describes the Japanese economic growth and the impact on the United States. A close examination of objects within the classroom and the students would reveal an imbalance of trade!

CONCEPTS ECONOMICS AND MAKING DECISIONS



Government In America has concepts printed in blue ink to contrast to the black ink of the regular wording. The words are defined in the context of the paragraphs. Chapter summaries use all vocabulary words in context. Concepts are also listed in Section Reviews as vocabulary and key terms. With one of the most fundamental concepts of American government, democracy, the author of this textbook historically site Aristotle and Lincoln rather than giving current examples. The book discusses various kinds of governments without allowing the students to transfer the knowledge of their environments such as school, the workplace or home governments.

CONCEPTS GOVERNMENT IN AMERICA



Problem solving skills relate to the ability to make a reasoned judgment. The development of this skill requires practice based on interaction with one's environment. Each text was scrutinized for the types of problem solving methods presented, and the recommended development of critical thinking skills.

The World Geography text offers critical thinking worksheets on skills to analyze cause and effect, making hypothesis, making decisions, identifying assumption, and analyzing comparisons. These directed activities easily lend themselves to enhancing problem solving capacities.

Additional resource information outside the textbook is recommended in the Teacher's Edition, as is literature for the student and supplemental audio-visual materials. The Teacher's Edition specifically lists motivational sections to peak the student's interest. The major deficit in student's environment. The teacher is given all the tools to do the job except the most important one!

In A History of the United States a narrative text creates interest, but it is up to the teacher to develop motivational techniques to involve

the students. The "Taking a Critical Look" section allows pupils to raise questions for discussion, thus establishing student ownership. The "Your Region In History" part is especially applicable to the students lives. The authors try to convince the readers that the text has meaning for them. The book even begins, "This is a book about us."

The Teacher's Edition divides the chapters into "Critical Thinking Skills," correlated with review worksheets. The authors also recommend integrating geography throughout the book in parts designated as "Focus on Geography."

Controversial issues are not skirted. The authors' opinions may reflect bias, but as least they serve as the foundation for many problem-solving opportunities.

Economics and Making Decisions affords good discussion questions at the end of the chapter. For example, "If the government puts a price ceiling on compact discs, what is likely to happen?" (p. 157, text). Subchapter headings like "Is Anything Free?" and "Now and Then" section likewise create a springboard for the teacher to develop problem-solving exercises.

Extensive additional readings are listed in the Teacher Edition which can be used to prepare resources information for students outside the textbook. Each chapter begins with an event familiar to the students which can arouse interest and thus become a motivational experience.

Government In America has an index which has "Critical Thinking About Controversial Issues" and refers to respective chapters. Also, each chapter presents critical thinking questions in the Chapter Review and suggest a Three-step process to answer dilemmas: 1) understand the material, 2) analyze the argument, 3) draw conclusions. This procedure is well explained in the Preface of the text.

Excellent introductory chapter quotations and paragraphs relate to present day activities. Chapter 3, page 61, quotes from James Madison's The Federalists, and then states, "It is impossible to understand the workings of American government without knowing its fundamental rules. Just like baseball, tennis or chess has basic rules, so does the American Government. The rulebook is the Constitution of the United States."

Suggested readings (p. 800) make a good source for the teacher to prepare additional resource information for the students.

The textbook questions critiqued within this paper are measured on Bloom's Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain - knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Questions at the end of chapters 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 of each text were classified in one of the

six categories. (See page 13 for breakdown.)

World Geography in "Review of Main Ideas" only offers knowledge and comprehension levels questions. The "Thinking Critically" areas have one "easy" comprehension level question and one "challenging" question at the evaluation level, utilizing such key words as choose, evaluate, decide, and judge.

Levels of Questions

WORLD GEOGRAPHY

Chapter	Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
2	29	18	1	1		
4	13	9	1	1		
6	19	11	1	1		
8	18	11	1		1	
10	25	8	1			1
12	21	7	1		1	
Totals	125	64	6	3	2	1

In A History of the United States Chapter Review section "Focusing on Ideas" present only knowledge and comprehension level queries, as does the Section Review. "Taking a Critical Look" parts offer analysis and synthesis types of question. Under "Historical Facts and Figures" there is a synthesizing information section, illustrated as follows:

- Chapter 1- synthesizing information
- Chapter 2- formulating hypothesis
- Chapter 3- inferring information
- Chapter 4- testing hypothesis
- Chapter 5- drawing conclusions

Levels of Questions

A HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

Chapter	Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
2	5	3	3			
4	4		1	2		
6	3	4	2		1	1
8	7	4	2	1		
10	6	5	2	1	1	1
12	2	6	1	2		
Totals	27	22	11	6	2	2

Economics and Decision Making addresses knowledge and comprehension level questions except under "Discussion Questions." Here at least one question is targeted at a higher cognitive capacity. Page 23 of the text, for example, asks, "Which do you think is a wiser choice for the nation - the draft or a volunteer army? Why?" These questions are open-ended, especially designed for discussion.

Levels of Questions

ECONOMICS AND MAKING DECISIONS

Chapter	Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
2	7	5				2
4	4	3	3			1
6	9	2	4			
8	5	4	2	2		1
10	6	4	2			1
12	6	4	2	1		1
Totals	37	22	13	3	---	6

In Government In America chapter sections "Reviewing the Facts" and "Understanding Key Concepts" direct knowledge and comprehension level questions, as do Section Reviews. "Thinking About Issues" stretches students to analyze and evaluate. For example, page 27 asks, "During WWII thousands of Japanese-Americans were classified as enemy aliens and moved from their homes to internment camps until the end of the war. Do you think this action is consistent with the ideals of a democratic society? How does the internment of the Japanese-Americans conflict with the concept of individual rights and freedoms?"

"Critical Thinking" sections raise analysis, synthesis and evaluation types of queries. Page 77 states, "After reading these editorials can you suggest a solution to the immigration problem?"

Levels of Questions

GOVERNMENT IN AMERICA

Chapter	Knowledge	Comprehension	Application	Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
2	19	9		1		1
4	13	10	4			
6	15	10		1		1
8	12	9		1		1
10	18	7		2		
12	18	4				2
Totals	95	49	4	5	---	5

Good evaluation will direct the teacher and student to plan for what needs to be included in the next phase of instruction. Various recommended assessment procedures were presented and referred to in the subsequent section.

In World Geography, "Using Geography Skills" and "Using Social Study Skills" provide the teacher with written material from the student. "Testing for Understanding" and "Recalling Key Terms" illustrate primarily rote recitation, with some provisions for students to define terms in their own words. The Teacher's Edition lists "Recommended Student Assignment, Homework" coordinated with activities from the "Activity Book" and "Outline Maps" from the Teacher's Resource Book. The Teacher's Edition also mentions "Reteaching and Enrichment" commentary in blue print, going beyond mere textbook material for group discussion.

Suggested tests do not cover more than knowledge and comprehension level questions and fundamental map skills; there is no provision for student feedback.

A History of the United States has a "History Through Literature" part with bibliographic annotations correlated with the text to enrich the study of the unit content. The "History Writers Handbook" lets students

reinforce their writing skills, while Chapter Tests list mere knowledge and comprehension level questions with some graph and map skills.

"Historical Facts and Figures" displays opportunities to formulate hypotheses for group discussion, to compare graphs and to make generalizations. It is an excellent evaluation source.

The textbook is keyed with a Teacher's Resource Book and Student Study Guide which give ideas for group discussions, activities, reports and written projects. Both are valuable resource materials which could allow some healthy student feedback. Regrettably, chapter test questions are geared to knowledge, comprehension and application level answers.

Economics and Making Decisions illustrate knowledge and comprehension level review questions. Discussion questions target at least one inquiry at a higher cognitive domain. "Activities" offer evaluation for group participation, discussion based on higher level questions, and some written work, but the usual rote memorization is required to pass Chapters Tests.

The Teacher's Manual offers two complete test banks consisting of vocabulary questions, true/false questions, multiple choice and essay questions. The Student's Workbook has a chapter review, vocabulary exercises and a sample test. Also, the workbook has sheets for building thinking skills and developing graphing and computational skills. The section entitled "Classroom Opportunities for the Teacher" gives good examples and ideas for projects for outside the textbook realm.

Government In America poses questions at the beginning of each section, and in review areas that call for knowledge, comprehension and application level responses. The Chapter Review gives practice in critical thinking, such as making generalizations. In "Extending Your Knowledge," outside resources are detailed for individual and group projects. The "Follow-Up" section calls for written work from the students.

Implications

Textbooks remain the schools' most widely used curriculum tool. Although it is beyond the scope of this research proposal to delve into the political nature of textbook adoption or the issue of bias within such text, it is imperative that social studies textbooks be directed at global and multi-cultural objectives. The operations of conceptualizing, problem-solving and generalizing are key tasks through which students can become actively involved with the content of social studies. The current 1989-90 social studies books reviewed only partially demonstrate these qualities.

Realistic readability levels have been achieved, but a word of caution is advised. "The social studies teacher should be mindful of the fact satisfactory achievement in general reading ability is no guarantee of ability to read effectively the various types of materials that social studies requires of students" (16, p. 275).

If students are taught about concepts through a strategy of concept development, the inductive process will increase the retention of information. "Apparently the process of forming concepts enabled the students to develop mental pictures that held the information better than structures that were provided to them" (11, p. 52).

It is important to note that the "primary application of concept attainment is to develop thinking capacity...by inducing students to go beyond the given data...inductive processes thus include the creative processing of information as well as the convergent use of information to solve problems" (11, p. 51). Fewer concepts developed more adequately within the content are required.

In the area of problem-solving, if textbooks are watered down to avoid debatable, controversial issues, students will not get the opportunity to develop the necessary problem-solving skills to deal with the multi-cultural, pluralistic challenges of our society.

Logically, then, to become adept at thinking and reasoning, students need practice in solving real problems and comprehending complex text. Not surprisingly, students given instruction aimed at conceptual understanding do better on skill test than students drilled on skills directly. Thus, the practice of postponing higher-ordered thinking skills until low-level skills have been mastered is harmful. (19, p. 6)

Since the publication of textbooks is a national industry, fraught with internal chaos and conflicting demands, it is a miracle that any type of quality text can meet the public's criteria and educator's needs, and still be a viable, stimulating book from a student's perspective. What research on these 1989-90 social studies textbooks shows is that there is still a lot of room for improvement in addressing the development of concepts, relevant problem-solving activities and lessons, and higher level questions.

A History of the United States offers the best concept development approach. The other textbook authors would be well advised to adopt a similar approach in their respective fields. Problem-solving situations are one area that all four textbooks have some merit. However, there is a critical need to relate the problem exercised to the students' environment.

The books evaluated fall short in questions on higher-ordered thinking. The books are still asking too many knowledge and comprehension level queries. This deficit spills over into suggested evaluation measures, too, although the four textbooks reviewed did present some variety in assessment techniques.

Textbooks, although central to the core of all curriculum, should take a back seat to on-hands experience. The old adage: I hear - I forget, I see - I remember; I act - I understand, gets to the heart of social studies learning theory. The more tangible applications the students deal with, the better able they will be to transfer their knowledge to new and different situations.

As the United States continues to change from an industrial society to one of information processing and high technology, the best test of good social studies textbooks will be how effective the books are at relating to the students' lives, and how well the texts provide for individual differences.

As textbooks become resource instruments rather than primary tools, educators can offer supplemental materials more relevant to current events and to the students themselves. The ball remains in the teacher's court!

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