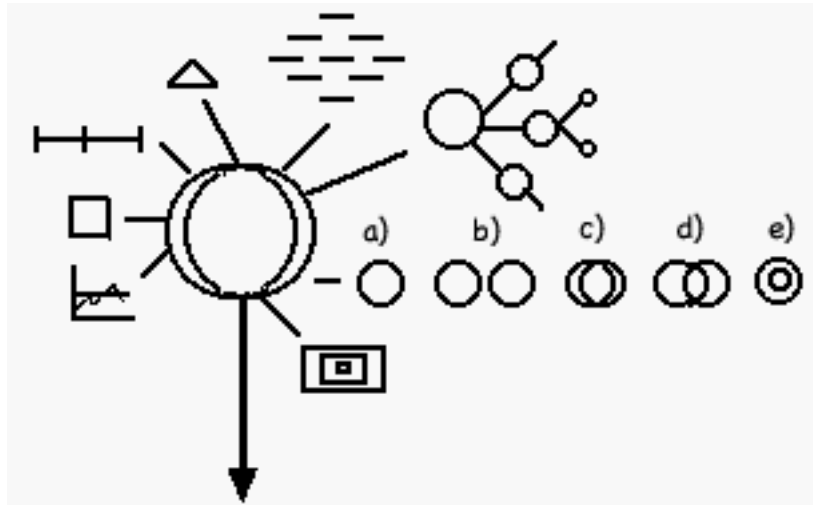


Let Them Talk Some More: More Powerful Purposeful Pairs Talk

OHASSTA 2007 Conference, Toronto

jmyers@oise.utoronto.ca

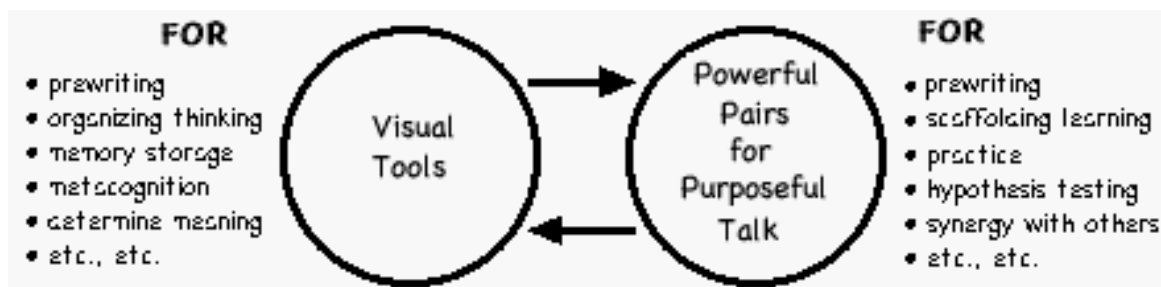


Background

The Power of Pairs for Promoting Purposeful Talk (2004) provided a rationale for combining several powerful strategies for deeper understanding of important content (<http://ohassta.org/general.htm>). At the 2004 conference four powerful though not well-known graphic organizers were introduced combined with powerful pairs for purposeful talk.



Feedback in the intervening years has led to this session. We explore four additional "think links", including one invented by the presenter.



This article concludes with thoughts on taking this work further within the realities of busy teaching.

The Tasks

These and similar tasks can work with students working as individuals, as a whole class exercise or in pairs of pairs (group of four) in addition to the pairs format. The final product should be individually completed if graded.

Concentric Rectangles:

Focused Thinking about a Primary Source

Compare the following approaches for analyzing a single primary source.

#1

If Canada had stood aside we would have betrayed our own national interests, repudiated our own responsibilities and dishonoured our own traditions. Canada did not stand aside in two world wars and Korea. Canada did not stand aside to the hard work of seeking a peaceful end to the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and ... Canada is not standing aside tonight from giving effect to the United Nations resolutions in the Persian Gulf.

—Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, 1991

1. What does this source tell me?
2. What guess can I make? What can I infer?
3. What doesn't this source tell me?
4. What other questions do I need to ask?

#2

4. What other questions do I need to ask?

3. What doesn't this source tell me?

2. What guess can I make? What can I infer?

1. What does this source tell me?

If Canada had stood aside we would have betrayed our own national interests, repudiated our own responsibilities and dishonoured our own traditions. Canada did not stand aside in two world wars and Korea. Canada did not stand aside to the hard work of seeking a peaceful end to the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and ... Canada is not standing aside tonight from giving effect to the United Nations resolutions in the Persian Gulf."

—Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, 1991

Students write within the appropriate rectangle.

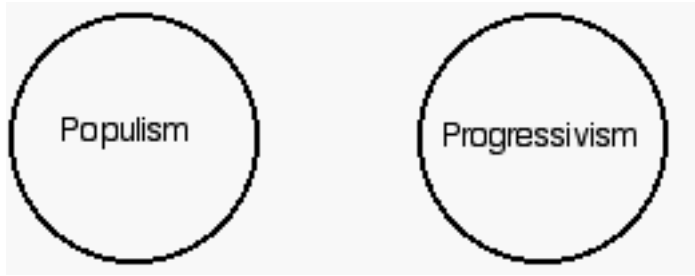
Which offers a better focus or link to thinking? Why?

The "Venn Test":

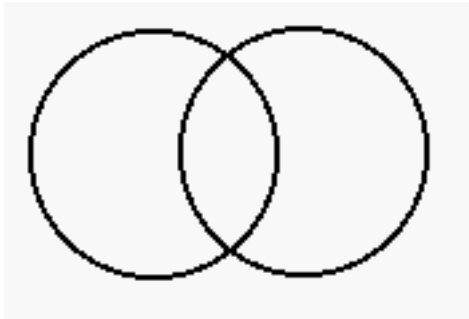
Extending Comparison and Contrast

Venn diagrams prompt students to compare: a key ingredient for improving student achievement. Here is a "test" to enhance comparison and contrast/ through scaffolding. If we were to compare two ideas; e.g. populism and progressivism in American history.

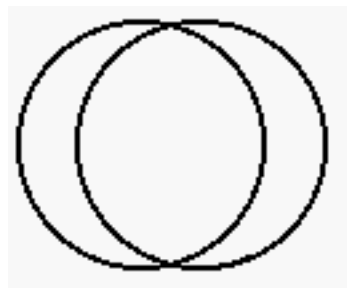
A Do the people, events, or ideas being compared have nothing in common?



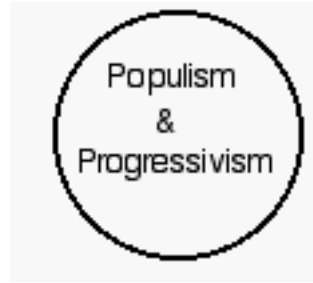
B Do they have some similarities or are these overshadowed by their differences?



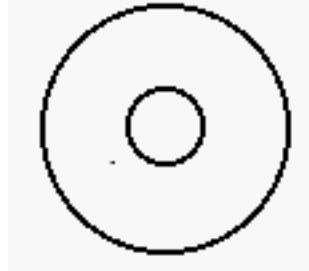
C Are their similarities so strong that the difference don't matter much?



D Are they synonymous: do they constitute the same thing although they go by different names?



E Is one idea a part of the other idea?



Here are some pairs that occur in American history for which the Venn test can be used.

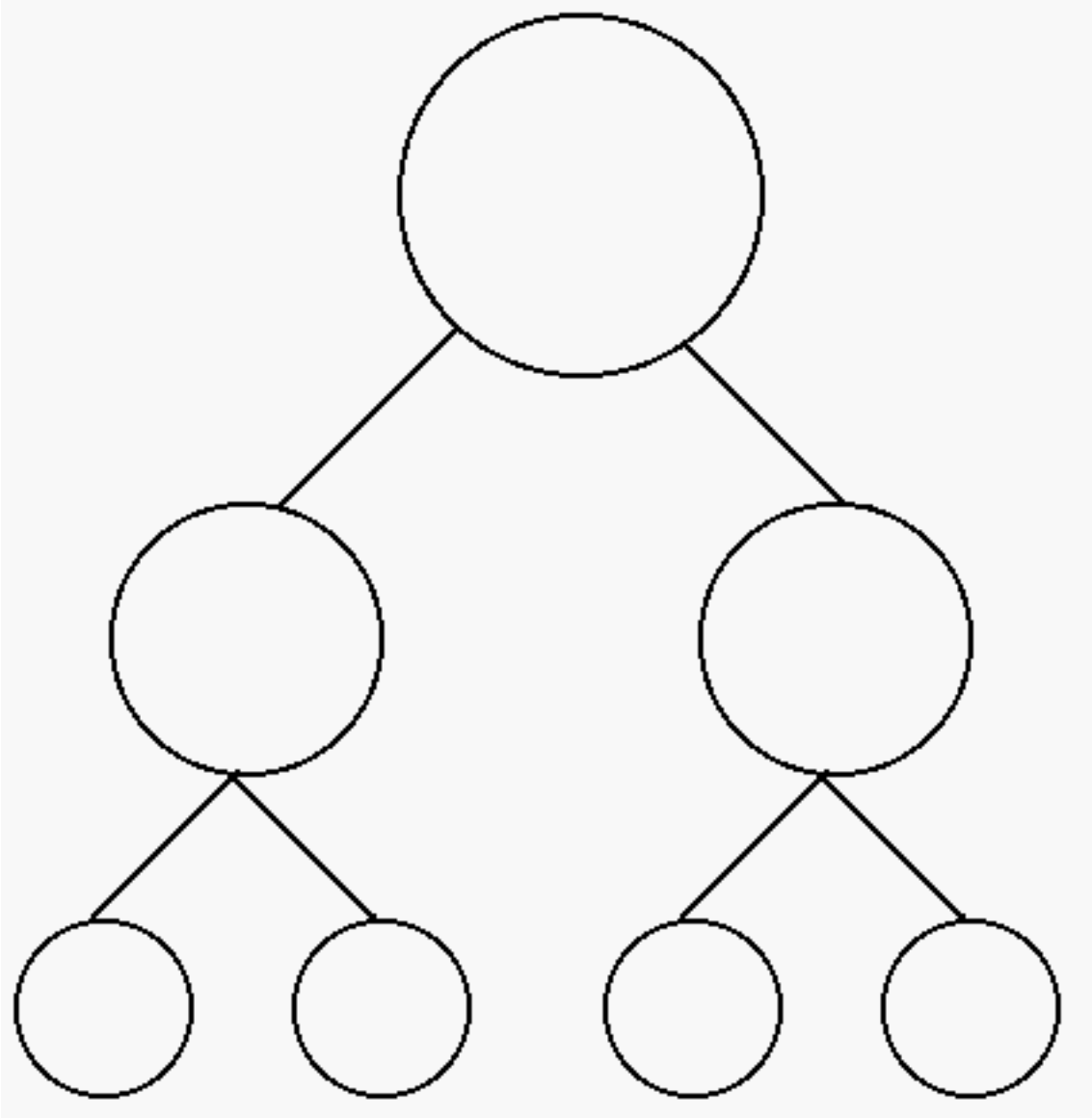
- French and Indian War and Seven Years War
- American Constitution and the Bill of Rights
- Presidential and prime ministerial powers
- Red Scare of 1919 and McCarthyism
- Vietnam War and Iraq War
- Is American society more like ancient Greece or ancient Rome?
- Regional attitudes to slavery before the Civil War
- Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy
- Mormons and Southern Baptists
- Andrew Carnegie and Bill Gates
- Robert Moses' and Jane Jacob's views on the modern American city
- Two historians' accounts of an event, idea, or person.

The Venn test is more open-ended than a simple Venn diagram and promotes deeper analysis of patterns and relationships. In many cases, arguments can be resolved when common ground is found. This test can be a tool for finding such ground if it exists.

Consequences Chart:

If "X" Happens, What Happens Next?

There is a variation called a "futures wheel" See Currier and Myers *Teaching and Learning in the Post Sept. 11 World* at OHASSTA.org for this.



There is potential for thoughtful focused sequencing with a deeper understanding of cause-effect relationships.

Diamond Mining:

Deepening Understanding of Historical Significance

Sometimes called "ranking diamond" it seductively fits neatly into that "standard" five paragraph argumentative essay. For example, where would you place the following factors behind the devastation of the Black Death in 14th century Europe?

- climate change from warm to cold
- famine and wars in early 1300s
- mass killing of cats due to fear of witchcraft
- crowded cities lacking sufficient sanitation
- global trade routes between Asia and Europe
- yersinia pestis bacteria
- rapid population rise in Europe from 1000-1300
- fleas carrying bacteria from rats to humans
- black rats were hosts to fleas carrying the fatal bacteria

On the positive side it promotes identifying patterns and relationships among ideas.

Of course, like the five paragraph essay, life ain't so simple. There may not be nine causes or a single key cause. So adjust the graphic accordingly. Or better yet, have students do the adjusting.

Most Significant _____

Least _____

Next Steps:

If we had more time we could add to this work by exploring the following:

- What would happen when we combine some of these tools?

- Can we document more precisely the thinking that occurs as students use these tools through their discussions in pairs?
- What can student thinking as revealed by tasks such as these tell us about
 - o their understanding of major concepts in history and the social sciences,
 - o the potential of history as a discipline of inquiry,
 - o student growth in habits of mind such as metacognition,
 - o the criteria students use spontaneously and independently for making their judgments,
 - o the most sound criteria students should use for such judgments,
 - o their understanding of a particular topic?
- Is the potential for any of the above enhanced when student pairs pair up to work in groups of four?

Speaking of potential, check out the bonus on the last page.

The following comes from the feedback on the session obtained from this.

Postscript

As a result of the Learning Star task (at the conclusion of this article I got the following feedback. My responses are also included.

Once participants have tried some of these and look at the original 2004 article and tried the examples presented then, they might have different responses.

Something New . . .

* The ranking diamond struck participants as quite novel.

A strong influence on this aspect of my work since my early teaching days in the mid 1960s has been work in the UK where historians and history teachers worked together to reshape the history curriculum in the late 1960s. That influence still exists. One point here is that deep thinking requires concentration in key studies rather than broad survey courses that only offer a casual acquaintance with knowledge. This has been reinforced through work in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Something Exciting . . .

* The other graphic organizers in the session were noted, along with the potential for more use group work through pairs.

The confusion and misconceptions around co-operative learning and group work astound me. I have written elsewhere about this and continue to

explore the positive power of social interactions for learning. Oh yes, being called the "co-operative learning guy" disrespects the power of this model of teaching.

Something Interesting . . .

* similar responses to the above

Something Surprising . . .

* The many opportunities for pairs talk and how well the graphics fit the learning tasks.

"Form follows function" is a motto for good teaching. Do NOT jump on something for its own sake or because it is IN, see if it helps you achieve the learning goal. If we learn anything form "backward design" it is this.

Something Challenging . . .

* Trying these ideas out in real classes and adapting them to other curricula.

Nothing works equally well for all students all the time. Educational practice and educational research do not offer magic bullets. When we recognize this, teaching will make a great leap forward.

Something Puzzling . . .

* In addition to the challenge of implementation and adapting to students, there is a danger of too much, too soon. There is also a concern about the subjective nature of the Venn test.

Remember what I said about magic bullets. If you want to try stuff out

- do it a bit at a time
- pick curriculum you really know
- pick an appropriate class: by this I do not mean your highest achieving class, but a class who will try it if you explain it as a little experiment and give you honest feedback; some classes find it cool to work with their teacher as "co-researchers" as it makes them feel important which they are

As far as subjectivity; that what setting clear criteria is all about. If the Critical Challenges model means anything it means justifying your response based on defensible criteria.

So much to do, so little time to do it.

Be thoughtful!

THE LEARNING STAR

Lois Cox used this in the late 1980s while teaching grade 7-8s at Winchester Public School. Before then I have no knowledge of its origins.

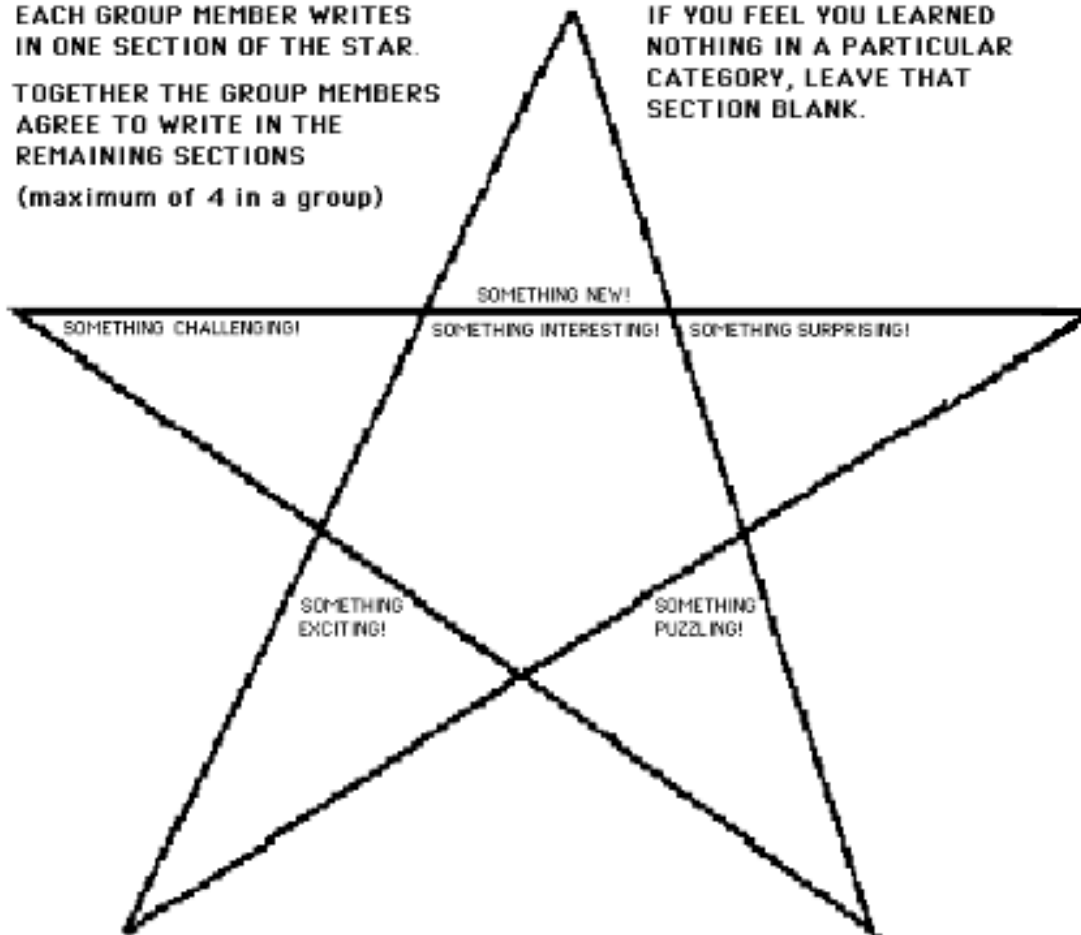
Note that the name signing is just another small step for promoting individual accountability in the group.

WHAT WE LEARNED

EACH GROUP MEMBER WRITES
IN ONE SECTION OF THE STAR.

TOGETHER THE GROUP MEMBERS
AGREE TO WRITE IN THE
REMAINING SECTIONS
(maximum of 4 in a group)

IF YOU FEEL YOU LEARNED
NOTHING IN A PARTICULAR
CATEGORY, LEAVE THAT
SECTION BLANK.



Names _____

John Myers, 1999
Lois Cox, 1990

Students have some choice and I have found that it is easy to find trends and patterns in the feedback useful for both your teaching and their learning.

Teaching and Learning in the Post Sept. 11 World for the

OHASSTA CONFERENCE, 2007

Colleen Currier, Thomas A Stewart S.S., Kawartha Pine D.S.B. with a special interest in law, civics, and human rights

John Myers, OISE/University of Toronto with a special interest in multicultural and global education, and inquiry

with a response by Dr. Paul Vermette, Niagara University

Our Premise

September 11th 2001 is both real as an historic event and as representation of a "turning point". By this we mean that a number of key ideas that been around for decades have jumped to a level of public consciousness and "turned on some lights". These include, but are not limited to the following interrelated ideas:

- The world is "flat"— McLuhan was right. The world REALLY is a global village.
- Security and safety are real issues and we are no longer sheltered from events "from faraway places with strange-sounding names".
- There are strains on human rights even in a democracy.
- We have had wake-up calls on issues such as
 - o Environment and climate change—what can/should we do
 - o Science, tech, and medicine— what do citizens need to understand?
 - o Human diversity— how much can we handle?
- In history we have new perspectives on the past and changing perspectives on the present. For example, Margaret Macmillan's *Paris 1919* does not view the Treaty of Versailles as a backgrounder to WW2 but of the modern Middle East.
- The concern that young people, whether as high school students or as potential voters, are increasingly disengaged from the informed, purposeful, and active citizenship promoted in the Ontario curriculum. Yet in our experience and in the experience of others, it becomes clear that young people aren't disinterested - but feel disengaged from democratic institutions and practices and high school curricula.

"In a democratic perspective, knowledge and quest for knowledge tend to follow rather than precede political engagement. Give people some significant power and they quickly appreciate the need for knowledge, but first foist knowledge upon them without giving them responsibility and they will display only indifference."

—political theorist Benjamin Barber

Like fish swimming in water, most of us are unaware of the "cultural curriculum" that surrounds us. Those who teach history and social studies to young people need to make connections between this curriculum and the "state-mandated curriculum" – or face the real prospect of becoming irrelevant in the 21st century.

– researchers Sam Wineburg, Susan Mosborg, Dan Porat, and Ariel Duncan

These assertions, supported by many others including other teachers, suggest that we have a job to do.

It would be nice if the curriculum in Canadian and World Studies (and we believe far beyond) gets a major overhaul in 2010– maybe gutted and rebuilt from scratch, but we have been around too long to think this likely. However, we can work with what we have to make it better.

**Because,
If you do what you've always done,
you'll get what you've always gotten,
and that's no longer good enough.**

Think about the courses you teach. Do you and your students ever wrestle with any of the following questions or provocative propositions?

"Are there any economic, cultural, or religious similarities between the Crusades of the Middle Ages and the present Western involvement in the Middle East?"

"Humanism (a concern for human life on earth) is not a novel concept but one that has roots in Classical Greek

philosophy and the Renaissance. Has humanism evolved or faced repeated failures/setbacks?"

"What is the future of trade relations and commercial exchanges as Eastern countries become increasingly powerful?"

"Ghandi stated that "poverty is the worst form of violence". A challenge facing the 21st century is the growth of extreme poverty. Is inequity on a global scale the breeding ground of discontent?"

"Ethnic cleansing and genocide have been prevalent throughout history (the Crusades, European Wars of Religion, WW 1, WW 2, Nanking, Kosovo, Rwanda, Darfur). Does the world have a moral responsibility to stop atrocities in foreign countries? Who decides when war will be waged? Should it be international agencies like the UN and NATO or individual countries like the US and China?"

"The impact of 9/11 continues to resound. The UN, NATO, and most countries did not support the US invasion of Iraq and a pre-emptive war. Did the invasion of Iraq undermine the world's perception of and respect for those international organizations or simply hurt American relations with important allies? Are there parallels to Vietnam, Latin America, and Iran?"

"Immigration policies will continue to be revisited as the number of displaced persons continues to rise. The new Swiss government has just been elected on an anti-immigration policy and France has discussed the possibility of DNA testing to ensure direct lineage for immigrants. Do affluent, secure countries have a responsibility to open their borders to the displaced and persecuted?"

"If humans destroy the earth's environment, nothing else matters. Who is upsetting this balance through overpopulation and pollution? What international agency can hold a country accountable?"

"Terrorism is not a new concept however many individuals exposed to American controlled media are being raised in a culture of fear. Differentiate between fundamentalism and terrorism and how both have been employed to justify violent acts."

Think about the Following

As educators, we have a tendency to teach what we have rather than what students need to learn. This is a crucial distinction. Where do we balance official curriculum and student interest? How do we integrate them?

Good teaching needs to be explicit.

In this era apathy appears to be our greatest hurdle in educating and it's very prevalent in a number of courses in Canadian and World Studies.

Does the curriculum truly reflect the global reality? Whatever your response, what areas in what courses can be modified/expanded upon and still maintain provincial standards?

Some Principles

- Know thyself.
- Know your students and their community.
- Know the policies: province, district, and school (Don't forget the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).
- Learn to use tools of sound management and sound teaching.
- The teaching and curriculum bars are higher.

Some Management Tools

We are speaking of personal comfort for both teachers and students.

- **Have knowledge of self, students, school, & society.**
- **Use a few key ground rules to promote security and respect. Give respect to get respect.**
- **Stress commonalities whenever appropriate.**
- **Use the teaching tools.**

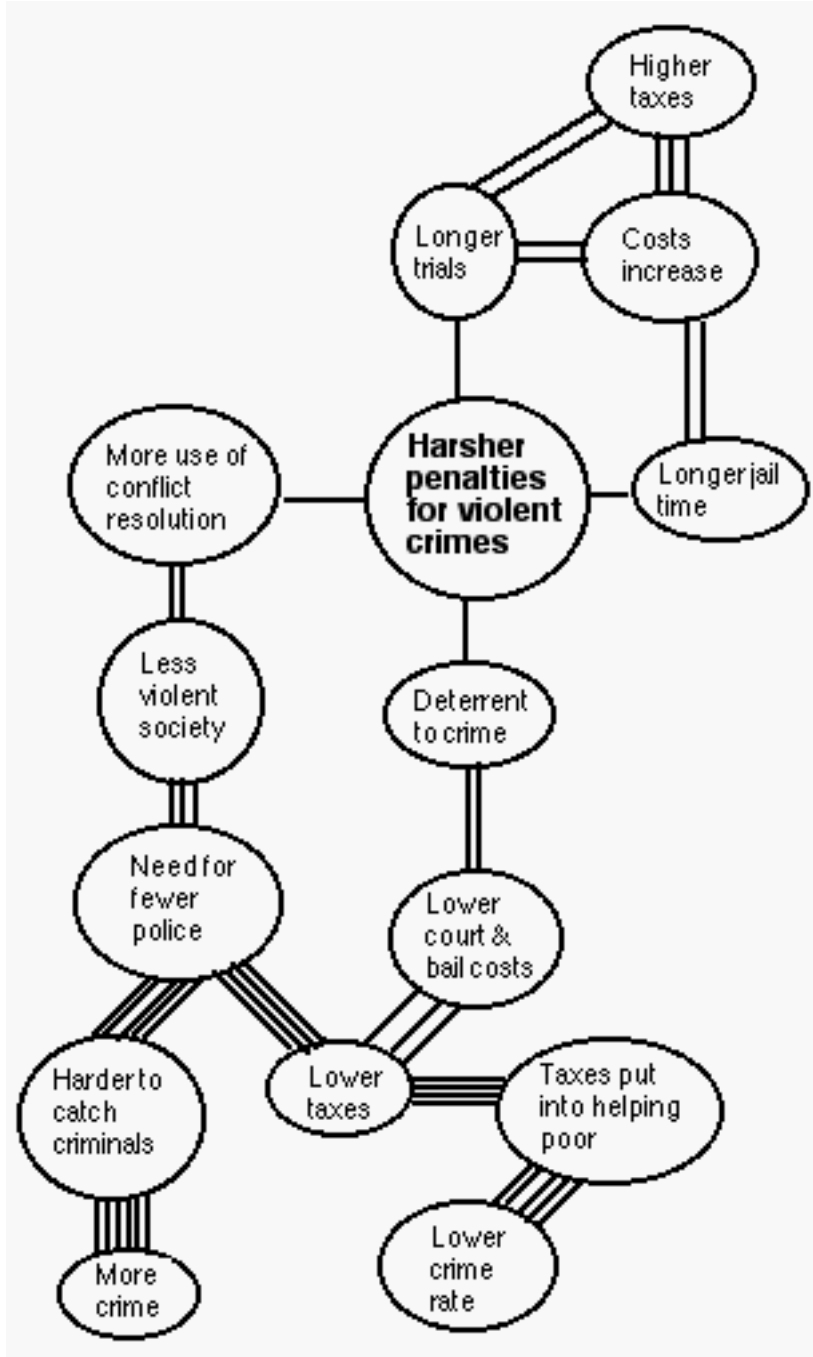
Teaching Tools

- **Recognize the connection between cognition and emotion by promoting purposeful talk. Students want to talk so make it safe for them to do so promote the use of purposeful talk as well as a positive classroom climate through co-operative learning whose attributes include:**
 - o **pursuit of common goals,**
 - o **face to face interaction,**

- positive interdependence,
- individual accountability.
- Teach students to identify the nature of disagreements
 - **Factual**: facts, descriptions, or explanations
 - **Definitional**: meaning of key words or phrases
 - **Ethical**: right or wrong– Ethical disagreements are most difficult to resolve
- Promote habits of mind such as
 - open mindedness
 - critical mindedness
 - listening with understanding and empathy
 - flexible thinking
- Promote deep thinking and understanding using case studies to explore key topics in greater depth.

We could take years on any of these but let's take twenty minutes to work on one specific approach– "think links": graphic organizers that promote focused thinking around complex issues; here is one example: future wheel.

Brainstorming Effects of a Decision Using Future Wheel



1. Begin with a central event or decision,
2. Brainstorm implications of this decision.
3. Brainstorm implications of the alternative implications.
4. Continue the chains of implications as far as you can.
5. Determine criteria for assessing the pathways of implications and use these to assess the wisdom of the original decision. If the original decision does not

- hold, repeat the above based on an alternative decision; e.g. restorative justice.
6. If your alternative does not hold, try again with a third option for the issue or pick a decision and identify factors that make the preferred pathway the likely one.

Some Implications for Teaching

- **Strive for deeper examination of topics rather than superficial coverage.**
- **Look for connections between students' worlds and curriculum**
- **Expand your teaching repertoire.**
- **Teach towards the pluralistic democratic society students will inherit.**
- **"Deprivatize" teaching through collaboration.**

Here are some questions and propositions based on teaching being "deprivatized" as we have discussed with colleagues. What do you think of these? What questions and propositions do you have for your classes?

CIVICS

- It is clear that these young Canadians aren't disinterested but feel disengaged from democratic institutions and practices.
- The curriculum reflects the knowledge that we would like them to have but the general consensus is the students are disengaged. How can we change this?
- Unanimous feedback is that the course is taught too young, cognitive development is not there. How can we change this? Apparently we can't change the age at which it is taught.
- Engage them, ask questions such as
 - o "Does your civic responsibility extend beyond our borders?"
 - o "Will the Canadian's role in Afghanistan change how we are perceived?"
 - o Do you care?
- These kids are proud to be Canadian and they need to know why, give them reasons.
- They've clearly indicated their four most important concerns are learning, work, health, and the environment.

- Empower them with knowledge and self-confidence in these areas.
- Strive beyond the curriculum and establish Canadian identity.
- What is relevant in your community/in your classroom?
- Students may not only be disengaged but they may be misinformed
- Take into consideration the diversity or lack thereof in your community

LAW 3E

- Concerns with learning, work, health and environment are important here as well.
- Human rights both nationally and internationally can be focused upon.
- Empower them with knowledge and self confidence in these areas.
- Workplace courses are intended to channel these individuals in the workplace and we want them to be knowledgeable, productive citizens and employees.
- We don't want them victimized or injured as an employee.
- Also identify the need for them to be conscientious, responsible employers.
- Identify and address racism in the workplace.
- What are the implications for globalism and outsourcing to lower paid foreign workers.

WORLD HISTORY AND LAW 4U, 3M

- Rather than approaching these courses chronologically or by specific units consider approaching by themes weaving in specific historical examples and case studies both domestic and international such as peace, security, human rights, the environment, economics justice.
- Draw parallels between historical events and modern policy, challenge the students.
- Place particular emphasis on the role of the individual in the evolving international legal and historical order.
- After the cold War the it became quite clear that there was no longer a balance of power in the world and America was alone at the top.
- Cold War fears have been replaced by those of global warming and terrorism.

- A new fear may be the loss of Western dominance to the East, nuclear proliferation as countries like Japan, China and India grow steadily stronger.
- In my observations of teachers and teacher candidates teaching the West and the World 4U history since 1999 the number of lessons going beyond European history has been ZERO.
- Of course the curriculum does post 9/11 it's in the policy document.

Stephan Lewis said that education is the eventual solution for almost everything (personal communication) What will you and your students do to strive for a better world?

**An American Secondary Social Studies Educator Reacts:
Teaching and Learning in the Post September 11th World**

A statement for OHASSTA

November 2007

Dr. Paul Vermette, Niagara University, NY USA 14109

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Opening Remarks:

The paper and presentation by Currier and Myers is comprehensive, thoughtful, challenging, and insightful and should be closely examined by anyone seriously considering what and how to teach teenagers in the next decade. I fully accept the notion that 9-11 was "a turning point" and I happily grasp the reality that North American democracies are pluralist in nature and that the graduates of our schools must be ready for diverse societies and global economies. Yes, the world is much "flatter" than it used to be.

However, the official US governmental response to 9-11 has been potentially catastrophic to the common good and has created a remarkable window of opportunity for educators in my country. We have become obsessed with terrorism, we have gladly surrendered many of the rights we formally took for granted, the US now accepts the concept of pre-emptive wars, and most importantly, teens...about to become full fledged citizens of a polity committed to democracy (and Equality, if Jefferson is to be remembered)...are seemingly uncaring, unaware and disinterested in their own lives.

There is much space in this "window" to challenge youngsters' thinking and their values and there is a great deal of opportunity to make History and Social Science & Social Studies THE most important, most relevant and most

powerful of all subjects taught in mandatory secondary schools.

In the History of History Teaching, has there ever been a more important time for good instruction in our various courses?

Proposals

Given that 9-11 sparked a potentially "New World", I posit that there are many things that we educators can, and should, do to reach the goals that have been set for us by the demands of Democratic Pluralist practice: these are NOT necessarily the same goals required by NCLB (No Child Left Behind federal government education policy, although they align well with the expectations of the famous New York State Regents exams.

I recommend that all Ontarian Educators take a look at those tests and critique them mightily: in New York, students and teachers have four years of required SS courses, and they should use all of that time wisely.

For our purposes today, I will identify three propositions that I think would improve HSS (History, Social Science and Social Studies) education and produce a better quality of citizen in a very short time. I ask my Canadian friends to consider these from both a Global perspective AND from a parochial, Ontarian perspective: there may be useful ideas embedded in here somewhere.

1. Societal Purpose

The goal of HSS (on the US side) courses should be on young people-citizens as Decision-Makers, who have the duty and responsibility to make a better world and protect the values inherent in the US Constitution: the US is a nation because of the Constitution, the President and other legal officials swear on a religious book (literally) to defend it, and all the good that the USA has ever done in the World can be traced to the values of the Constitution.

Good citizens should understand the Constitution (which includes the Bill of Right) but they should also use evidence to support their arguments and positions on serious questions and they should be able to explain the logic of their thought processes.

Citizenship is NOT voting: it is a much more detailed responsibility.

The HSS classes should be laboratories where young people (1) think deeply about serious issues, (2) examine evidence that refutes or supports their positions, (3) listen attentively to counter-arguments that make sense to other [respected] members of the community and (4) learn to flourish in a world that is complex and not always aligned with their beliefs or preferences. Legislatures make laws...and this is the process that they are supposed to follow. Citizens, too, should learn to think and make good decisions about things that affect everyone in their communities.

2. Individual Citizenship

This first point (above) needs to be considered in what has been called the "traditions" of Social Studies Education. Many adults think back to their history classes where they had to learn important things like the dates of all major wars, the State capitals (never the provinces), the Causes of the French Revolution and the reasons why New York is the greatest State in the Union. They cannot imagine a class in which they were asked to think, decide or judge: they never synthesized or analyzed, they just tried to remember for the test. (Hirsch's "cultural literacy" movement is alive and well in the US.)

Can we please just kill off the "memorize the facts" type (or tradition) of History as quickly as possible?

Another tradition suggests that we teach teens to think like historians and many of the modern leaders of the field support this approach. Kids learn to use evidence as they investigate a problem as an Historian would: why did turn-of-the-century African-Americans cross the Niagara to the Canadian side to start the NAACP? This is a fine question...for a historian. For a 16 year old, completing this research may be a fine scholarly activity, helping to develop his or her writing skills, forcing some conceptualization and producing an understanding of the time period. Use of evidence and reasoning may improve, too (if the teens actually do this project).

But, as such, it does little to help the teen think about his or her own world and the issues being faced by citizens: those realities should be the focus of the course, and, importantly, of the assessments that drive all courses.

A third tradition does emphasize the real world applications of knowledge drawn from the History, Social Science and Philosophical worlds. Psychologists call this "transfer": to get transfer, one must teach for transfer, it doesn't happen (easily) on its own. Teachers will not get teens who study that early event to transfer any of their ideas to their own lives without a clear emphasis on that application.

Can we consider using the teaching of H & SS to help teens make sense of their own meanings for the social realities that exist...with an eye for improving the world?

3. ENGAGING Pedagogy

Finally, a blatant self-serving call to use modern, progressive constructivist pedagogy is my third proposition. (I am an instructional researcher with a doctorate in Social studies Education.) Given what we now know about [human] learning AND what we seek from formal schooling; i.e, Ontario expectations & NY performance indicators, we need to use contemporary instructional strategies that engage "hearts and minds". We no longer have any excuse to teach teens so that they simply remember "stuff": we need to engage them in the thinking, collaboration and problem-solving that leads to meaningful understanding. It is a shame, when we know what works, to realize how many teachers ignore good instruction and instead bore their students to death telling them "facts" that they either won't listen to or will happily forget within a fortnight.

"Student-centered" instruction, where the focus is NOT on teacher coverage of content but on student meaning of ideas, is the order of the day. Cooperative Learning, supported by years of research and expert practice, should be a staple of the HSS classroom in which teens are asked to examine, exchange and refine ideas: It is the pace where they think with the powerful concepts learned in their courses. It is also the perfect forum to develop the Social and Emotional competencies required of citizens in diverse

democracies. It should also be a staple of skill preparation for successful careers in a Global Economy.

These are my three hopes for a powerful post 9-11 HSS education, on both sides of the border. Student reflections on our purposes as a society, a focus on each individual's role in a democracy, and the use of ENGAGING techniques would make school and society a better place and the future far more secure. Our contemporary world is full of issues worthy of the teen's full attention (check today's newspaper) and these could serve as a focus (or a resource) for our courses. These hopes are supported by every major research organization in North America and beyond. At a recent teaching and learning event in Toronto Nobel Physics Laureate Carl Weiman made similar points. Check out the powerpoint presentation, Science Education for the 21st Century for data

(<http://www.provost.utoronto.ca/tlsymposium.htm>).

9-11 has resulted in massive changes in the practice of democracy and the role of schooling in the US: may we thoughtfully proceed with its challenges and implications.

Post Workshop

Feedback was very positive, especially around the questions raised. So what can we do?