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This paper is grounded on the premise that effective educators base lessons on rich and intriguing content which is relevant to students' lives, implement the content using engaging and age-appropriate methodology, and measure students' learning through authentic assessments. In order to support practicing teachers' effective implementation of best practice methodology and assessment, educational researchers investigate the interconnections between content, methodology, and assessment. As technology facilitates teaching methodologies and learning assessments, meaningful activities such as students' original political cartooning should be examined, detailed, and adapted. In this article, the methodological suggestions for, and adaptations of, students' original political cartoons guide educators who seek to enable students' creative and critical expressions of understandings about complex historical content.

Key Words: Social studies methodology, authentic assessments, concept maps, substitution list, critical thinking

Introduction

Researchers have thoroughly examined the positive and substantive connections between students' engagement and academic success (Bean, 2000; Cook-Sather, 2002; Vacca & Vacca, 2008). These connections are especially significant for adolescent learners where apathy and ambivalence emerge intensely at times (Brozo & Simpson, 2007; Gee, 2001; McCarthey & Moje, 2002). In an effort to motivate and engage students, researchers encourage teachers to intertwine substantive content with best practice methodology and authentic assessments (Bickford, 2011b; Fallace, Biscoe, & Perry, 2007; Holloway & Chiodo, 2009; Senechal, 2010; Wineburg, 2001). This effort is both a vital and meaningful pursuit as high-stakes testing reduces classroom time for social studies content (Lintner, 2006; Yendol-Hoppy & Tilford, 2004) and as debates occur about the content within social studies and history curricula (Bragaw, 2010; Evans, 2006; Loewen, 1995; Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 1997; Symcox, 2002).

History education researchers assert that rich primary historical source documents provide fruitful learning opportunities for students to better comprehend and actively interpret complex content (Dewey, 1933; Nokes, 2011; Wineburg, 2001). Teachers frequently employ political cartoons as a primary source for, among other things, their visual appeal, rich use of humor, and ability to facilitate students' interpretations (Miller, 2011; Thomas, 2004). Many educational researchers have examined teachers' uses of political cartoons to determine how to better aid students' historical comprehension through analysis and interpretation (Risinger & Heitzmann, 2008; Werner, 2003, 2004). Research, however, indicates that comprehension and

interpretation are not the highest tiers of critical thinking (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bloom, 1956). In response, researchers urge teachers to provide students with opportunities to actively develop and creatively express understandings through authentic assessments (Brozo & Simpson, 2007; Rule & Auge, 2005; Sallis, Rule, & Jennings, 2009; Sunal & Haas, 2008). Researchers denote active and authentic assessments as the highest level of thinking (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2002; Dweck, 1999; Tierney, 1998).

Students' *original* political cartooning appears to be an illustrative example in which methodology and authentic assessment are strongly linked. As a teaching method, original political cartooning facilitates students' active involvement with complex content. As an authentic assessment of learning, original political cartooning enables students to creatively express newly developed understandings. Research indicates that original political cartooning elicits middle level students' attention, enthusiasm, and historical thinking with user-friendly technologies (Bickford, 2010a, 2010b). As an alternative, or supplement, to writing assignments, this activity enables students to express abstract ideas in a novel way. Research also suggests which qualities of original political cartoons best demonstrate young adolescent students' learning and which attributes spark substantive whole-class interpretative discussions (Bickford, 2011a). Previous research, however, has not provided teachers with practical methodological steps and useful social studies-based adaptations. I offer, here, some practical applications and suggestions for teachers to successfully implement cartooning in their classrooms.

To accomplish its purpose, this paper is organized into three sections. The first section, *Methods for Cartoons as Learning Assessments*, provides a methodological guide for teachers using this activity to assess individual students' expressions of learning. This section provides examples of one student's concept map, substitution list, and original political cartoon. The second section, *Methods for Cartoons as Teaching Tools*, details a methodological guide for teachers using individual students' expressions of learning as a teaching tool for the entire class. This section provides a format for organizing a meaningful discussion to facilitate students' whole-class interpretations of cartoons. The final section, *Alternative Adaptations*, identifies useful ways to modify the activity to fit specific goals for a social studies classroom. These adaptations, similarly based on students' active engagement and intellectual involvement, address social studies-specific concerns such as timelines, vocabulary comprehension, and multiple perspectives.

Methods for Cartoons as Learning Assessments

Using relatively common technology, middle school students can express newly constructed understandings within original political cartoons. Such authentic assessments illustrate an effective connection between engaging methodology and meaningful content (Bickford, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011c). Using a history curriculum based on the interactions between Native Americans and the American army during the 18th and 19th century, this section details one way to incorporate this teaching method and authentic assessment of learning. It is suitable to utilize such an assessment after students spend what the teacher deems to be an appropriate amount of time processing content from multiple perspectives within various teaching materials. Suggested teaching materials include, but are not limited to, primary source documents, secondary historical interpretations, expository texts, and young

adult historical fiction (Bickford, 2010a; Lindquist, 2002; Nokes, 2011; Wineburg, 2001). I also encourage teachers to consider using professional political cartoons as illustrative examples for their vast potential to articulate ideas. Introducing students to such primary sources might engage students in a deeper historical understanding.

While adaptations are provided later in this article, readers are encouraged to think of these steps as a methodological guide for enabling students to create original political cartoons. Microsoft *PowerPoint*[™], Microsoft *Paint*[™], and Internet imagery are the milieu through which students construct original political cartoons to express what they believe about the content. While I encourage teachers to acquaint students with the technologies, their ubiquity and user-friendliness likely make such procedural steps unnecessary for middle level teachers (Bickford, 2010b).

Since students' motivation for demonstrating learning is important (Bickford, 2010a; Brozo & Simpson, 2007), the first step is for students to generate an opinion-based declarative statement that can be supported with evidence. Students then place this declarative statement at the center of a blank Microsoft *PowerPoint*[™] page; this will become a graphic organizer and function as a concept map for the original political cartoon (Bickford, 2011c). The concept map manifests in lines that connect the declarative statement with historical evidence, evidence-based logic, and opinion-based logic.



Figure 1. The Concept Map.

Figure 1 is an example of one student's concept map, which usually takes students about 10-30 minutes to construct. With a declarative statement in the middle and lines connecting relevant evidence, logic, and opinions, Becca (all names are pseudonyms) has graphically organized and expressed newly developed understandings about the historical event.

Becca's concept map demonstrates her evidence-based opinion about the expansion of colonial and post-colonial America. She juxtaposes content about various Native North American tribes' lifestyles with content related to colonial motivation for expansion. While the majority of the content in the concept map is text-based, her original use of colors for organization was noteworthy: the declarative statement was black, references to Native Americans were red, and references to European-Americans were white. The latter two color-based designations in the concept map cohere with the color-based social hierarchy designations of 18th and 19th century America. (For purposes of publication and to facilitate readability, however, I adjusted the color scheme so that it all appears in black.) During an interview, Becca described this as a purposeful decision to help her organize content associations between the two conflicting sides. Research suggests that graphic organizers, such as Becca's concept map, enable students to better comprehend complex content because they are able to independently organize and express their understandings (Brozo & Simpson, 2007; Smith & Wilhelm, 2006). During the creation of a visual representation of their understandings, students organize and reorganize the evidence and logic, which facilitates comprehension (Brozo & Simpson; Smith & Wilhelm). Becca noted, during an interview, how often she adjusted and readjusted the text of her concept map. This comment indicated Becca's willingness and ability to independently organize and creatively express her newly constructed opinion using evidence and logic.

Concept maps, when supplemented with substitution lists, also facilitate students' abilities to encode messages and utilize visually rhetorical devices, which are common within political cartoons (Werner, 2002; 2003; 2004). A substitution list becomes an inventory of concrete images and/or text that can be effectively and efficiently substituted for abstract concepts, people, or events. I encourage students to make a substitution list for each branch on the concept map, which also takes them about 10-30 minutes to construct. Becca generated the substitution list below (labeled as Figure 2) using the content in her concept map (seen above in Figure 1).

The substitution list is a foundation to enable students to transfer abstract concepts embedded within the concept map to concrete visual and textual representations within the original political cartoon. To do so, students can easily locate, modify, and employ imagery and text mentioned in the substitution list and employ it within their original political cartoon. Through observations and anecdotal evidence, it appears that students' development of a comprehensive substitution list can increase the complexity of original political cartoons dramatically because of the possibilities associated with each item on the substitution list. As the following original political cartoon demonstrates, the possibilities to craft cartoons are endless for students who combine concept maps, substitution lists, and imagination with common, accessible technology such as Microsoft *PowerPoint*[™], Microsoft *Paint*[™], and

Internet imagery. Figure 3 is the original political cartoon that Becca generated using the concept map (Figure 1) and the substitution list (Figure 2).

<u>Words & photographs for Indians:</u>	<u>Words & photographs for white people:</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Photographs of bows, arrows, spears• Photographs of buffalo, fish, and corn• Photographs of real Indians• Types of houses• Photographs of land to show they lived there first• To show peaceful: peace sign, peace pipe, peace fingers• Indian tribe names	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Map of America• Map of colonies• The number 13 (for colonies)• A photograph of Louisiana (for Louisiana Purchase)• To show greed: "\$", photograph of dollars, photograph of monopoly game• To show violent and mean: photographs of angry face, bullets, guns, cannons, a bomb blowing up• To show westward movement or manifest destiny: arrows

Figure 2. The Substitution List.

Derived from content in an interview with Becca, no less than 25 abstract concepts from Figure 1 (the concept map) and Figure 2 (the substitution list) appear in concrete imagery and text in the above original political cartoon (Figure 3). While not an exhaustive list of the concept map's content (Figure 1) and substitution list (Figure 2), the political cartoon in Figure 3 includes textual references to the names of the colonies, to the number of colonies, to abstract concepts like the Louisiana Purchase, Manifest Destiny and westward expansion, and to visual depictions of various types of housing for Native Americans, the peace pipe, and an arrow. Many ideas expressed within the original political cartoon were not mentioned on the concept map and substitution list. These include, but are not limited to, the lyrical (and sardonic) modification of Woody Guthrie's famous "This Land is Your Land" song, the purposeful use of multiple colors for each letter in the words "Native Nations" to symbolize the differences among specific tribes, the symbolic circular cross-out of the peace pipe to represent an unavoidable violent conflict, and the "{" used to show symbolic colonial unification against the Native American tribes. As has been demonstrated in previous research (Bickford, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011c), Becca deftly employed various technologies to creatively express ideas in novel ways. The above suggestions are a guide to enable students to creatively express newly

developed understandings. These authentic assessments, though, also can be used as teaching tools.



Figure 3. The Original Political Cartoon.

Methods for Cartoons as Teaching Tools

This section provides a guide for teachers to utilize the cartoon (and also the concept map and substitution list) as teaching tools in a whole class interpretative discussion. Original political cartoons, when used as teaching tools, are arguably more effective than professional political cartoons for two reasons. First, they are age-appropriate catalysts for discussions because students' original political cartoons are created by and for students of similar age with comparable prior knowledge and analogous styles of wit, humor, irony, and sarcasm. This is quite different from professional political cartoons where the cartoonist potentially has very different prior knowledge and likely has a dissimilar style of expression. These disparities are likely magnified if/when the professional cartoonist is separated from the students by decades or more.

Second, whereas interpretative activities stimulate students' interest through decoding and inferring, it has been my experience that such thinking usually elicits students' requests for a definitive answer. Students frequently ask which speculative inference most accurately represents the cartoonist's original intent, which teachers cannot readily provide because professional cartoonists rarely disclose details and intent. Students' original political

cartooning, however, provides an opportunity for the cartoonist to share original intent, which is not the case with professional political cartoonists. For these reasons, educators are encouraged to employ these authentic assessments as teaching tools for whole class interpretative discussions. To do so, I encourage teachers to follow three steps to ensure accuracy, anonymity, and authenticity.

To secure accuracy, I encourage educators to require students to reflectively write – prior to class discussion – what they wanted to express and the method by which it would be expressed. This reflective explanation of intent can be accomplished quite simply when they emerge from prescriptive statements like, “I tried to show...” (which is encapsulated within the declarative statement referenced in the concept map) and “I tried to show this by...” (which is denoted in the concrete images and text the student generated from the substitution list). This step can settle disputes between competing interpretations during the class’s analytical discussions. Further, this ensures that the cartoonist’s original intent is accurately communicated prior to discussion. Otherwise, due to social dynamics that often take the form of popularity contests in classroom contexts, the cartoonist may feel compelled to adjust his/her original intent to fit the most popular student’s interpretation or to avoid confirming the less-than-popular student’s suggested interpretation.

To ensure anonymity, I suggest educators to print all of the students’ original political cartoons and post them anonymously around the room. Teachers can place “interpretation envelopes” in close proximity to the cartoons and hide the cartoonist’s reflective, written explanation of intent behind the original political cartoon. I encourage teachers to give students a few “interpretation note cards” on which they can offer analytical speculations about the intent of individual original political cartoons within the interpretation envelopes. Also, teachers can provide students with a few “compliment stickers” to praise those cartoonists who displayed high levels of creativity and originality or to applaud those cartoonists who expressed an opinion worthy of recognition. Finally, teachers should allow students to move freely around the room at their own pace. As this activity ensures anonymity, it also coheres with research literature encouraging educators to incorporate opportunities for movement and choice (Brown & Knowles, 2007; McKenna & Robinson, 2009; Vacca & Vacca, 2008). Such anonymity provides security for less-confident cartoonists who fear criticism and ensures compliment stickers are awarded genuinely for originality and not popularity. As students move around the room, applying compliment stickers to praiseworthy original political cartoons and filling the interpretation envelopes with interpretation note cards, I encourage the teacher to identify those original political cartoons that elicited the most attention based on the number of compliment stickers given or interpretation note cards submitted.

To facilitate an authentic discussion, I encourage teachers to create a Microsoft *PowerPoint*[™] of all the original political cartoons – where cartoonists remain anonymous – to use during whole class interpretation discussions. The teacher can then point out which cartoons received the most compliment stickers and interpretation note cards, which affirms both the cartoonist’s effort and his or her finished product. This form of authentic praise, in which students are complimented for their work and where popularity has little or no influence because of anonymity, is rare in education and I am unaware of research indicating otherwise. The teacher then provides opportunities for students to share interpretations about peers’

anonymous original political cartoons, their original intent, and the evidence which supports the expressed message within the cartoon, much like those discussions described in previous research (Bickford, 2010a, 2011a). In doing so, students gain a stronger understanding of the multiple ways in which complex content can be organized and how divergent understandings are both generated and expressed from the same content. The teacher also can encourage students to make interpretative connections between an anonymous original political cartoon and the substitution list and concept map that aided its construction. In doing so, peers can analytically examine the cartoonist's purposeful choices and thought processes.

These suggestions for teachers using authentic assessments as teaching tools are intended to ensure accuracy, anonymity, and authenticity during students' individual interpretations of peers' cartoons and during whole class interpretative discussions. Such steps can improve the classroom context by facilitating genuine celebration of original political cartoons worthy of praise, encouraging students' divergent interpretations of cartoons during a robust discussion, and eliciting questions about the evidence that support the declarative statements embedded and encoded within the original political cartoons. While this section and the previous section are meant to be a guide for teachers interested in such authentic assessments and teaching tools, they are not intended to suggest that these are the only ways in which such methodology can be employed. The following section provides suggestions for variations.

Alternative Adaptations

To reduce this original political cartoon methodology to its most basic description, it is a digital creation based on students' active engagement with, and strong understandings of, complex content. From this most basic description, a plethora of alternative adaptations emerge. These adaptations address such social studies specific concerns as timelines, vocabulary comprehension, and multiple perspectives.

Timelines, while applicable to all curricula, are strongly connected to history content (Holt, 1990; Wilson, Wright, & Peirano, 2007; Wineburg, 2001). Upon completion of a unit, a possible engaging activity is dividing a time period – the length of which can vary from the decades within a century, to the stages of a war, to the hour-by-hour timeline of a specific event like the President Kennedy assassination – and then randomly and anonymously assigning students one segment of that time period. Without peers knowing their assigned time segment, students individually create a concept map, a substitution list, and a digital creation – similar to an original political cartoon – about their assigned section of the time period. Peers then examine the digital creation and speculate – based on text and imagery within the cartoon and their understanding of the history – its location on the timeline in a whole class discussion. An alternative approach might be to organize the class into small groups who then examine – and place in proper historical order – the digital creations. Such purposeful cartooning about historical timelines appears to fit well within the social studies and specifically within a history curriculum for two reasons: timelines are inextricably intertwined with history content (Holt; Wilson, Wright, & Peirano; Wineburg), and students' organization – then reorganization – of content facilitates comprehension (Brozo & Simpson, 2007).

Vocabulary development, whereby students acquire content specific terminology, is a necessary part of curricula and at all grade levels, including social studies (Brozo & Simpson,

2007; Fallace, Biscoe, & Perry, 2007; Holloway & Chiodo, 2009; Neumann, 2011). At an opportune time during a specific area of study, assign students a key abstract concept about which they are expected to demonstrate understanding. As with the previous suggestion about timelines, students could benefit from whole class or small group interpretative discussions about a peer's digital creation of a vocabulary concept. Examining – individually and then socially, as a small group or as a whole class – how a given vocabulary term appears first within the concept map, then within the substitution list, and finally within a digital creation, incorporates the various dimensions of comprehension (Brozo & Simpson).

History and the social studies are based on divergent interpretations and multiple perspectives of the same event or content (Conklin, 2011; Holt, 1990; Potter, 2011; Wineburg, 2001). At the appropriate point during a specific topic, let individual students select a perspective about an event to express within a digital creation. Make this expression of understanding available for the whole class (or small groups) to interpret. Since divergent opinions about an event emerge during students' examination of content and are based on evidence and/or logic, it can be meaningful for students to examine abstract concepts that manifest in concrete expressions within digital creations. It similarly can be consequential for students to then connect the opinion expressed within the digital creation to the concept map and substitution list through which the digital creation originated. An examination of the evidence and/or logic that support a perspective would facilitate students' comprehension, criticality, and reflectivity.

The previous adaptations, while slight in numbers, are rich in potential. The suggested adaptations for timelines, vocabulary comprehension, and multiple perspectives are based on thinking skills required within the social studies and are ubiquitous social studies teaching tools and methods. Teachers are limited only by imagination and creativity because the technology is so readily available to students, the method is quite adaptable, and it supplements critical examination of complex content.

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