The Expanding Environments Curriculum in America's First Primary Schools

Sherry Schwartz
State University of New York - Geneseo

Abstract:
This paper shows how America's first educators rejected traditional biblical and classical material and introduced a citizenship curriculum that emphasized more personal and current topics. Similar to today's Expanding Environment curriculum, reading, geography and history texts of the new republic shared themes dealing with an individual's place in the community.

The purpose of this paper is to show how the roots of the Expanding Environments curriculum, attributed to the mid-20th century work of Paul Hanna and others, actually was an important key to citizenship education in America's first schools. The theory itself suggests that teachers begin the sequence of social studies--citizenship education--by introducing the concepts of self and community in the early grades, and expand to the nation and world in the higher grades. Though no one knows exactly when this curriculum theory emerged, Hanna's influential, 1963 article connects his name to the idea.

Earlier, educators such as John Dewey and Lucy Sprague Mitchell argued that it was necessary to connect students to their world by looking at their familiar surroundings. Dewey (1929) claimed that memorization of disconnected facts actually harms young children: "The school must represent present life –life as real and vital to the child as that which he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or in the playground...Much of present education fails because it neglects [the] fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life".

Sprague built upon Dewey's principle by emphasizing the "here and now" of a child's life. More recently Gail Hickey (2000) stated that teachers who use family and local history projects find that classroom community grows. Children need to know that history is about them. Current learning theory also fortifies the belief that children construct knowledge by connecting new information to existing understandings. Active learning involves feelings and actions, and can be accomplished by experiencing one's personal environment (Novack & Gowin, 1984; Brooks & Brooks, 1989).

America's first educators also reinforced the "here and now" by introducing a curriculum of practical knowledge, behaviors and skills for citizenship development. In their desire to create the modern world's first generation of democratic citizens, local New England educators such as Jedediah Morse, Noah Webster, Hannah Adams, Caleb Bingham and others created curriculum specifically designed for children to connect with their personal environment. These authors wanted new Americans to understand their place in America's past and present, and become active members of their community. In an effort to introduce educational material that was considered more relevant, useful and practical for an American audience, these educators radically broke away from a colonial curriculum of Biblical and classical material. Arguing that a local understanding was far more necessary for the development of democratic citizenship than a knowledge of European and classical material, educators wrote textbooks that emphasized the development of self, community and country. To become active and productive citizens, educators believed young Americans first had to understand themselves and their personal environment.

To accomplish the goal of creating contributing citizens, early 19th century textbook writers, regardless of specific subject matter, emphasized a number of important themes they believed necessary to mold an activist American identity. These themes all stemmed from the personal and local aspects of life and included: the development of common language and communication skills; the development of individual "self-governance" in the form of personal control and behavior; and an understanding of history as it connects to local and current issues and ideas. Such themes of citizenship appeared in local reading, history and geography textbooks of New England schools in the first two decades of the 19th century. They were addressed to an audience that included all classes and genders.

Citizen-making themes found their way into many school subjects in early 19th century schools. In fact, the distinction of various subjects was not as clear then as it is today. Readers, such as Webster's (1814) *Elements of Useful knowledge,* Piedmont's (1824) *The National Reader*, and Bentley's (1825) *The American Instructor*, all incorporated local history, politics, documents and speeches as important reading material. On the other hand, geography texts such as Morse's (1804) *Geography made Easy* and his (1816) *Universal Geography* both included historical as well as geographical material. Morse also instructed teachers to use his books to teach reading as well as geography. This paper will analyze a variety of local New England textbooks that were published in the first two decades of the 19th century to understand how an emphasis upon personal and local understandings fostered democratic citizenship development.

The first major theme seen throughout these textbooks is an emphasis upon communication skills and a common language. Noah Webster was indeed one of the first individuals who believed that Americans should speak their own language (Unger,1998; Nietz, 1961). Shortly

after the Revolution, he created a series of popular spellers, grammars and readers. Webster saw communication as a key to the creation of a democratic state. In the preface of his 14th (1814) edition of *An American Selection*, he describes the importance of "transfusing[ing]" famous American speeches "into the breast of the rising generation". Fearing these speeches might become "neglected or forgotten", Webster wanted new Americans to read, hear and understand what noble Americans felt during the recent Revolution. He believed these local speeches were "not inferior to the orations of Cicero and Demosthenes," and would "impress interesting truths upon young minds (preface)".

But Webster wanted his students to learn much more than words from these written speeches. He wanted new Americans to develop, listening, reading and speaking skills as well. Webster, as well as other early educators believed the development of an American language was an important component of citizenship development. People had to properly and clearly communicate. According to Webster one important "rule" of speech was to "let the sentiments you express be accompanied with proper tones, looks and gestures ... A speaker should endeavor to feel what he speaks"(p.5).Webster even gave specific directions for expressing certain "passions" or "sentiments" such as "mirth, pity, grief and fear". He describes the sentiment of courage, for example, as "steady and cool [which] opens the countenance [and] gives the whole form an erect and graceful air. The voice is firm and the accents strong and articulate" (p.6). On the other hand, "boasting is loud and blustering...eyes flare...the face is red and bloated" (p.7).

Other contemporary readers echoed Webster's style of local patriotic speeches and historical essays to emphasize the importance of language for citizenship. Rensselaer Bentley's (1825) *The American Instructor* "initiate[s] children into the first principles of our language" by instructing "meaning of words" and "a sense of the writer" (preface). After including The Declaration of Independence as a reading selection, Bentley declared, "*This* (italics mine) is the language of America, of Reason and of Truth (p.197)." Like Webster, Bentley wanted all American citizens to go beyond the mere knowledge of words; he wanted new citizens to possess America's language. "In every Town, County and State in America," he noted, "are offices of honour (sic) and profit which some of you...will be called upon to fill... To hold office [Americans] have to read well, write a fair hand and understand the use of figures (p. 43)" Bentley even explains how two citizens should have a conversation: "look him in the face with modesty and attention...answer respectfully...let modesty and decency govern your words and deportment...don't over speak...know when to be silent (pp. 180-2).

In a similar manner, Caleb Bingham (1815) writes about the "Importance of Studying the English Language Grammatically" in his reader, *American Preceptor*. Just as the Romans and Greeks studied their own language, Bingham urges young Americans to study English for "freedom, liberty and the life of our country depend upon it" (pp.156-59).

Like readers, geography textbooks emphasized local language and communication by introducing a vocabulary of place. Jedediah Morse (1804) noted in the preface of his book *Geography Made Easy*, "To discharge the duties of public office with honor and applause, the history, commerce, productions, peculiar advantages and interests of the several states ought to be thoroughly understood." Morse lamented that until recently American students "have been much better acquainted with the geography of Europe and Asia, than that of their own state and country...we have seldom pretended to write, and hardly to think for ourselves." Morse, as well as other geography writers (i.e. Dwight, 1795; Olney,1828; Willett ,1814 & 1822 and Goldsmith,1811) provided a common vocabulary of local geographical terms, places, maps and features. Goldsmith even named his book a *Grammar of Geography*, while Willett (1814) *An Easy Grammar of Geography*. Obviously, geographic vocabulary terms were important. An 1814 edition of Morse's *Geography Made Easy*—the 18th edition—included an expanded vocabulary section that grew from 30 pages and 12 definitions in the 1804 edition to 52 pages and 34 definitions in the 1814 edition. Some additions included such terms as political divisions of the Earth, inhabitants, forms of government, and religions. In both the definitions and descriptions of the earth the emphasis was upon the local. For instance, in describing political divisions, Morse (1814) labeled "Europe...the most improved...Africa the most barbarous...Asia the wealthiest...and America the largest, the grandest, as to its mountains and rivers, the least populous and wealthy" (p.43). In his 1804 edition Morse defined America's waterways, as the world's greatest: "no part of the world is so well watered with springs, rivulets, rivers and lakes" (p.67). While all the geography textbooks noted many geographical areas of the world, each began with and emphasized the New England states. Morse (1804) noted that New Englanders speak English "with great purity" while in the middle and southern states the language "is corrupted" due to "the great influx of foreigners" (p. 96).

A second theme dealing with self and citizenship was the matter of personal control or duty, which was often termed "self-government." Many educators believed that for such a large republic to survive every American citizen had to exercise a certain measure of self-control. The phrase of "self-government" was often repeated in early textbooks and speeches concerning education. To achieve communal harmony, discordance in the form of personal extremes or excess could not be tolerated. Bingham's (1815) *The American Preceptor*, for instance, compares American society to a heap of glowing embers, "when placed asunder, can retain neither their light or heat...but when brought together ...give heat and light to each other" (p.172). Readings in *The American Preceptor* urge moderation and personal obligation. For instance, "sensual excesses...debase, corrupt and brutalize...moderation is essential to true pleasure" (p.20)...Blessed is that nation

whose sons and daughters are trained to virtue, honor and usefulness" (p. 49). "The way to wealth...depends chiefly on two words, industry and frugality; that is waste neither time nor money, but make the best use of both" (p.73). In a discussion of female education Bingham notes, "Let the habit of self-government be early produced; for all the world conspiring cannot make a woman happy who does not govern her passion" (p91-92). In a piece called "A Short System of Virtue and Happiness" the author shows how individual governance is connected to the governance of society:

> My duty to myself is, indeed, intimately, connected with my duty to others.
> By preserving the faculties of my mind and my body, and by improving them
> To the utmost, I am enabled to exert them with effect to the service of society. I am connected with others by the ties of consanguinity and friendship, and by the common bond of partaking in the same humanity (p.21).

Historian Hannah Adams (1804) noted in her *History of New England* that "[e]ducation and early habits form the great outline of human character...It is the command of heaven, that we use every exertion to improve the talents which our great Creator has afforded us" (p.16). She believed that America's ancestors left excellent examples of conduct upon which new citizens could model their own behavior.

> Let us of the present age be instructed by (our ancestor's) example, to guard against the prejudices of ignorance, and under their wise institutions, improved as they have been by succeeding generations, let us be careful to acquire a competent fund of information for the correct discharge of the duties of our respective situations in society (p.58).

Bentley (1825) also emphasizes similar themes of self-government: "It is of utmost importance that we rule our own tongues" (p.102)... "Happy is that man ...[who is] master of himself, his time and his fortune" (p.137)...Have arms for your defense, but have none for offence" (p.199). Webster (1814) quotes Dr. Belnap's address concerning self-government in education. Good instructors "must teach by their example as well as their precepts; that they must govern themselves, and teach their students the art of self-government" (p. 63).

The third common theme of emphasizing the "here and now" is the inclusion of local and recent history. These topics dominate early 19th century geography, reading and history books. Educators connected the past to the present in a variety of clever and interesting ways. The Revolution was only several generations old, but many of America's school-age citizens had not been actively involved. Educators wanted young people to understand the sacrifices and courage of their fathers and grandfathers. "Honorable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor which is measured by numbers of years", said Webster (1814). Adams (1804) noted, "[Americans] have raised their character to a level with that of the bravest people recorded in history" (p.99)..." their judgment in forming their policy...was consistent with the best, greatest and wisest legislators of antiquity" (p.27).

Histories, geography texts and readers often blurred time periods by connecting past events to present day occasions. Authors, for instance, would include a recent speech that was commemorating a prior event of America's short past. Sometimes they would juxtapose a great speech from antiquity as part of both events. Other times an author would stay with one theme by using a variety of literary material from several time periods.

For example, Webster (1814) included a "current" speech of elderly Boston Congressman Ames (1800?) advocating the passage of a treaty between America and Great Britain (p.153-161). Just prior to this selection is the "Declaration by the representatives of the United Colonies of North America setting forth the causes and necessity of their taking up Arms [against Great Britain], July 6th, 1775" (p.146-153). Right after Ames speech Webster includes a speech by Cicero who castigates Verres for pleading immunity from Roman punishment merely because he was a wealthy citizen of the state (161-164).

Pierpont (1829) also blurs time periods. First he includes an account of the landing at Plymouth in 1620 by Robertson and Neal (p.196), which is followed by an 1824 oration commemorating the Pilgrims' landing: "that this grand industry was accomplished on the spot where we dwell..." (p.200). Next he includes a variety of commemorative poems about the Pilgrims, and ends the segment with a narrative about the "Character of the Puritan" (p.213). On another occasion Pierpont (1829) used the theme of the beginning of the Revolution to include Patrick Henry's Speech (p.221), William Pitt's Speech to the British Parliament (p.219), an account of the attack on Lexington and Concord by Botta (p.223), and an Oration Delivered at Concord in the early 19th century: "This is a proud anniversary for our neighborhood..." (p.229), and the inclusion of several poems commemorating Concord and Bunker Hill. Pierpont 's last selection of his reader is a speech delivered on August 2, 1826 at Boston's Faneul Hall by Daniel Webster (p.260-61). The speech describes the common lives of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, who both died a few weeks before on July 4th, 1826.

All the textbooks discuss the 4th of July in a current manner. Bentley (1825), for instance, takes a backward look: ""Still do their sons retrace with proud delight the record of their [fathers'] noble deeds...although most of the sages and heroes of the Revolution, have yielded to the law of nature...yet their mantle still rests on their sons...the enthusiasm with which the return of this day is hailed, is a pledge to the spirit of seventy-six... Let the youth grow up amidst annual festivals, commemorative of the events of war...let his first study be of your declaration of independence and the code of the

constitution" (p.198-9). Bingham (1815) used a 4th of July oration by John Quincy Adams which he delivered in 1793: "millions of hearts which then palpitated with the rapturous glow of patriotism have already been translated to brighter worlds," but Adams directs his words to those who were too young "to partake of the divine enthusiasm which inspired the American bosom". Adams hopes that if a time for fighting should again arise, the new generation would live up to those of the past and be "faithful disciples" (pp. 142-45).

Nineteenth century Geography books use July 4th as a cut-off date when the geographical description of the United States changes: Morse's (1804) *Universal Geography* , for example, describes the United States as being a possession of Great Britain until July 4th, 1776 (p.97), and Goldsmith (1811) explains that prior to July 4th the United States was "denominated the American Colonies" (p.11).

Another method of using local history and connecting the then and now was to talk at length about America's "natural curiosities". Pierpont (1829) notes in his reader how the British "sneer at our country...it has no monuments, no ruins...no castles...nothing to connect the imagination...with the past; no recollections of former ages, to associate the past with the future... I cannot judge of the recollections excited by castles and towers that I have not seen. But I have seen...those lonely tombs of the desert—seen them rise from their boundless and un-peopled plains. My imagination and my heart have been full of the past" (p.44-5).

History, geography and reading books discussed America's natural wonders as a means of connecting the past to the present. All texts, for instance, described Niagara Falls from a variety of time perspectives. Bingham (1815) discusses how time and "the great quantity of water" had worn away the stone "for about seven miles up towards Lake Erie, and a chasm is formed which no person can approach without horror" (p.170). Pierpont (1829) notes, "When the admirer of nature's wonders visits Niagara...he reflects upon the generations of aboriginal inhabitants that vanished from these woods during many centuries, as the foam of the cataract has risen daily, to fall again, and to be swept away" (p.99). Morse (1816) notes that the Indians never pass the falls "without offering a sacrifice of tobacco to the spirit of the water" (p.64).

Studying the familiar through the "here and now" has been an important part of America's citizenship curriculum throughout its educational history. Regardless of time and place, uncovering one's personal and local identity connects a student to his/her past as well as present. Such connections not only make history more relevant and meaningful, but also allow students to understand their particular place in society. Young citizens can discover relationships between their own personal environment and the past, present and future environments of their world While this curriculum may contribute to an ethnocentric tradition in the teaching of American social studies, it does foster interest and citizenship understanding for a variety of age groups. Perhaps elements of this curriculum should be as common in middle and secondary social studies curriculums as it is in the Expanding Environments curriculum of elementary school.

This research also shows the insightful understanding of this nation's first generation of educators. Very little is known or understood concerning the motives strategies, and background of these individuals. Instead of emphasizing the memorization of unrelated facts and ideas, these educators carefully identified and implemented three important citizenship themes communication skills, self-government, and local history. All wrote popular textbooks that were used in hundreds of New England schools and elsewhere to educate the world's first generation of a modern democracy. Researchers need to understand what these educators did and how they did it. Studying America's first educators may help generations of current and future American students to understand their roles and responsibilities in today's society. This study may also help the emerging educational systems of newly created democratic nations to create their own personal and local social studies curriculum.

REFERENCES

Adams, H. (1805). *An abridgement of the history of New England for the use of young persons.* Boston: Beicher & Armstrong.

Antler, J. (1989). *Lucy Sprague Mitchell.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bentley, R. (1825). *The American instructor.* Troy: Platt

Bingham, C. (1815). *The American preceptor.* New York: Duyckinck.

Brooks, J. G., & Brooks, M. G. (1989). *Constructivist learning.* NY: Merrill.

Dewey, J. (1929). "My Pedagogic Creed" In D. Flinders & S. Thornton (Eds.), *The curriculum studies reader* (pp 17-23). New York: Routledge.

Goldsmith, the Rev. J. (1811). *The easy grammar of geography for use in schools.* (2nd ed.). Boston: John Norman.

Hanna, P.(1962). *Education: an instrument of national goals; papers presented at the Cubberley Conference. Stanford University.* NY: McGraw Hill.

Hickey, G. (2000) *Bringing history home.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Morse, J. (1804). (1814). *Geography made easy.* Boston: Samuel Hall.

Morse, J. (1814). *Universal Geography.* Boston: Grey & Hilliard.

Nietz, J. (1961). *Old textbooks.* PA.: Univ. of Pittsburgh.

Novack, J. D., & Gowin, D. B. (1984) *How students learn.* NY: Cornell Univ.

Pierpont, J. (1829). *The national reader.* Boston: Hilliard & Grey.

References continued on page 67.

ethnology. He was cautious about crainioscopy and, unlike Spurzheim, conservative in politics and religion, believing that human nature was incapable of significant improvement.

[15] On Abram Combe and the Orbiston community see Alexander Cullen, *Adventures in Socialism, New Lanark Establishment and Orbiston Community* (Glasgow: J. Smith and Son ltd., 1910).

[16] Cullen, *Adventures in Socialism*, 206.

[17] Cullen, *Adventures in Socialism*, 206.

[18] Cullen, *Adventures in Socialism*, 92.

[19] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 8.

[20] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 4.

[21] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 9.

[22] Combe, *Lectures on Popular Education*, 26.

[23] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 77.

[24] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 77.

[25] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 77.

[26] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 79.

[27] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 103.

[28] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 112.

[29] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 113.

[30] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 142.

[31] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 159.

[32] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 205.

[33] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 205.

[34] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 205.

[35] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 204.

[36] Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, 206.

[37] Combe *Lectures on Popular Education*, 8.

[38] Simpson, *The Philosophy of Education*, 12.

[39] Simpson, *The Philosophy of Education*, 13-14.

[40] Simpson, *The Philosophy of Education*, 28-29.

[41] Simpson, *The Philosophy of Education*, 109-110.

[42] Simpson, *The Philosophy of Education*, 110.

[43] Simpson, *The Philosophy of Education*, 91.

[44] Simpson, *The Philosophy of Education*, 98.

[45] Simpson, *The Philosophy of Education*, 98.

[46] On the Mayos see Kate Silber, *Pestalozzi: the Man and his Work*. (London: Routledge and Paul,1960).

[47] Simpson, *Philosophy of Education*, 113-114.

[48] Simpson, *The Philosophy of Education*, 124.

[49] Simpson, *The Philosophy of Education*, 124.

[50] Quoted from "Legal Provisions for the Education of the People in Massachusetts," in George Combe, *Notes*, I, p. 359.

[51] Mary Peabody Mann, *Life and Works of Horace Mann* 5 vols, 2nd Edition. (Boston: Lee and Sheppard Publishers, 1891), 75.

[52] Mann, *Life and Works of Horace Mann*, I, 75.

[53] Mann, *Life and Works of Horace Mann*, I, 81.

[54] Mann, *Life and Works of Horace Mann*, I, 83.

[55] Quoted Messerli, *Horace Mann*, 351.

[56] Mann, *Life and Works of Mann*, I, 85.

[57] Horace Mann, *First Annual Report*, 6.

[58] Mann, *Lectures*, 14.

[59] Mann, *Lectures*, 15.

[60] Mann, *Lectures*, 13.

[61] Mann, *Lectures*, 13, 17-18.

[62] Mann, *Lectures*, 20.

[63] Mann, *Lectures*, 37.

[64] Mann, *Lectures*, 38.

[65] Mann, *Lectures*, 47.

[66] Mann, *Lectures*, 47.

[67] Mann, *Lectures*, 55-56, 53.

[68] Horace Mann, *First Annual Report of the Board of Education, Together with the First Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board*, (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1837), 58.

[69] Mann, *First Annual Report*, 58.

[70] Mann, *First Annual Report*, 58.

[71] Mann, *Lectures*, 73.

[72] Mann, *Lectures*, 74.

[73] Mann, *Lectures*, 80.

[74] Mann, *Lectures*, 81.

[75] Mann, *Lectures*, 82.

[76] Mann, *Lectures*, 83.

[77] Mann, *Lectures*, 85.

[78] Mann, *Lectures*, 85.

[79] Mann, *Lectures*, 88.

[80] Mann, *Lectures*, 88-93.

[81] Mann, *Lectures*, 94.

[82] Mann, *Lectures*, 80, 81, 82, 94, 94-95.

[83] Mann, *Lectures*, 96-99.

[84] Mann, *Lectures*, 103.

[85] Mann, *Lectures*, 111.

[86] Combe, *Notes*, I, 51.

[87] Horace Mann, Seventh *Annual Report of the Board of Education, Together with the Seventh Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board*, (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1843), [183]. For Combe's "Address to the American People" See Combe, *Notes*, III.

[88] Mann, Seventh Annual Report, 187.

[89] Mann, Seventh Annual Report, 188-89.

[90] Mann, Seventh Annual Report, 187-88.

[91] Mann, Seventh Annual Report, 191

[92] Mann, Seventh Annual Report, 192.

Continuation of References for Schwartz from page 56.

Schwartz, S. (2001). The origins of history's mission in American schools: a case study of Hannah Adams. *Theory & Research in Social Education.* 29 (2), 212-237.

Unger, H. (1998). *The life and times of Noah Webster.* Wiley NY.

Webster, N (1814). *An American selection.* Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin.

Willetts, J. (1814) *An easy grammar of geography.* Boston: Grey.

Willetts,J. (1822). *A compendious system of geography.* Poughkeepsie: Potter.