

What I Learned at the NCSS Annual Meeting

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I went to my first NCSS annual meeting in 1970, and I've only missed two since then. I was a 30-year-old classroom teacher on leave from my high school to work with the Social Science Education Consortium in Boulder, Colorado. I welcomed the opportunity to go to the convention, which was held in New York City.

I loved the convention! I had never been around so many professionals who were genuinely interested in both the content and methodology of my field. I wandered into what became the organizational meeting of the Social Studies Supervisors Association (SSSA—now the NSSSA) and attended dozens of stimulating and fun sessions.

However, my favorite part of the convention was the exhibit area. Filling a hall nearly the size of a football field, the publishers and not-for-profit agencies described their products and services and gave away samples of textbooks and other materials. In each of the subsequent conventions I attended, I always blocked out parts of two days to go through the exhibits (as I will again at this year's meeting in San Diego, November 30 to December 2).

In November 2006, in Washington, D.C., as I wandered through the exhibits, I realized how much educational technology has revolutionized the exhibits. Today, nearly all of the exhibitors have their own websites, and a majority provides free materials, lesson plans, maps, and a range of information and products that can help classroom teachers, supervisors, and teacher educators.

The following websites caught my attention and appeared to have useful resources for classroom teachers at various grade levels. A few of them require participants to register an email address

before allowing materials to be downloaded. Curriculum supervisors and department heads may want to point their teacher-colleagues to these sites. Teacher educators could develop assignments asking students to develop lesson plans using these resources or to add to the below list by finding additional websites.

Cable in the Classroom

www.ciconline.org/home

Cable in the Classroom has a tremendous number of programs and resources for teachers in all subject areas and at all grade levels. It does require a cable linkup to the school. One of their programs, "Media Smart," provides an overview of the key concepts of media literacy; it



also explores how kids can use television, the Internet, and other technologies safely, productively, and ethically. In the social studies field, "eLECTIONS" is a nonpartisan election simulation game developed in partnership with CNN and The History Channel. It's a one- or

two-player game that students can play either with another student, or with a teacher or parent. It also provides access to some tremendous programs such as "History's Mysteries" and "Unwrapped: The Mysterious World of Mummies." Teachers can record the programs and use them for 10 days.

Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago

www.crfc.org/index.html

Last summer at the Social Science Education Consortium's conference in Prague, Czech Republic, I observed



groups of Czech high school students use the "Deliberating in a Democracy" program of the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago (CRFC). They were deliberating whether or not voting in national elections should be mandatory, as it is in Australia and in several other nations. The students were very knowledgeable. I learned a few new things from the materials and their discussion. The CRFC has several lesson plans that can be somewhat controversial, such as expanding FBI powers of surveillance and the use of torture on terrorist suspects. Visit the website for more activities

such as “Youth for Justice,” a national network of law-related organizations that provide training, materials, and technical support to every state.

My Wonderful World

mywonderfulworld.org/index.html

This National Geographic-led project backed by a coalition of major national partners focuses on geography. It provides a broad view of geography that



helps students (and parents and teachers) grasp the world’s interdependence. The site provides activities for parents to use with their kids and well-designed classroom activities and projects for teachers at all grade levels. One of the aspects that intrigued me was the use of advanced G.P.S. technology that allows students to zoom in on cities and regions to understand how geography is linked to world events. The site has a wonderful interactive animated story about the founding of Jamestown by Captain John Smith. Students can build a fort, observe Smith and his fellow explorers meet Native Americans, and learn how to shoot a bow and arrow. Lesson plans for grades K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12 are well designed and appear to be both informative and fun. If for no other reason, check out this site for a model of website development.

Choices

www.choices.edu

I’ve been a fan of the Choices Program at Brown University for several years. I think it produces some of the best lessons and materials for students and teachers on historical and current issues. It’s sponsored by the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown, and the program has recently redesigned

and upgraded its website. The teaching resources include curriculum units with background readings, lesson plans, and a teacher’s guide. The “Teaching with the News” section provides online curriculum materials and ideas on connecting the classroom to the headlines. The program also provides teacher professional development opportunities, such as half-day and full-day workshops, longer seminars, and summer teacher institutes. Choices



has aligned its programs with national standards in several subject areas and with about a dozen states including Texas, California, New York, and Indiana. More states are being added.

The section on “Supplemental Materials” is one of my favorites—in this section you can find resources on topics as diverse as “Beyond Manifest Destiny” and “Between World Wars: FDR and the Age of Isolationism.” The latter has audio recordings of six FDR speeches and one by Charles Lindbergh, speaking against U.S. involvement in a European War. Most of the resources are geared for secondary students. There is a fee for some of the printed materials, but there are plenty of free resources.

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History

www.gilderlehrman.org/index.html

Founded a dozen years ago, this website promotes the study and understanding of American history and serves teachers, students, scholars, and the general public. The Institute’s work is based on the Gilder Lehrman Collection of more than 60,000 documents detailing the political and social history of the United States. It includes thousands of unpublished letters from Civil War soldiers, as

well as letters from George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Mercy Otis Warren, and Lucy Knox. Online resources for teachers and students include more than two dozen “modules” on American history topics such as Progressivism, Slavery, and September 11. The modules include background readings, lesson plans, and learning tools. One of the Institute’s new ventures brings historians to your computer, IPOD, or MP3 device. You can download speeches by eminent historians. The first one features James McPherson talking about “Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam.” You can even participate in talks on a discussion board. This site is a “must see” for American history teachers.

On a final note, I would be remiss if I didn’t recommend a new NCSS publication. Titled *Digital Age: Technology-Based K-12 Lesson Plans for Social Studies*, it’s edited by Linda Bennett and Michael J. Berson. Whereas my column, “Surfing the Net,” focuses primarily on finding and recommending online resources for teachers, administrators, and students, *Digital Age* is much broader and incorporates diverse technologies. The 30 exemplary lesson plans featured in this book were developed by classroom teachers and are divided into elementary, middle, and high school sections. While it can serve many audiences, I do think it would be particularly superb for methods instructors in their teacher education classes. If students can learn the skills and proficiencies utilized in these lessons, they will be well prepared to use technology in their classrooms. 🌐

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