

## Media Review

### From the Media Review Editor

#### **Arabs, atlases and explorations in the exciting, exploding, exhausting world of on-line resources.**

First of all, congratulations to the new Editor of the *Journal of International Social Studies*, Dr. Ruth Reynolds, University of Newcastle, Australia. Founding editor Dr. Beverly (Lee) Bisland, Queens College, City University of New York, put many, many hours of hard work and love into its inception, so it is wonderful that she can pass it into Ruth's very capable and equally caring hands. As we move forward, JISS can develop as a truly international journal, not just in content, but in administration also.

I look forward to working with Dr. Reynolds and to hearing from readers. Please contribute to the community by sending me your commentaries and reviews of books, websites, and other media that you are finding useful for teaching social studies with global perspectives in mind.

In this issue of the *Journal of International Social Studies*, Hani Morgan considers how using the scholarship of Jack Shaheen and Marvin Wingfield can help teachers mediate negative media representations of the Arab world and its people. Within his article he reminds readers of important distinctions when addressing race, ethnicity and religion with students. Not all Arabs are Muslims, not all Muslims are Arabs, and not all Arabs live in the "Arab world" that is defined by location.

Earlier in the year I posted a request to the International Assembly listserver for suggestions regarding world atlases. I considered the possible reasons for the general silence. My first idea was that the majority of IA members who are teacher educators do not respond to requests sent to lists. Then I thought perhaps people do not see the need or have the time to address geography teaching in their social studies methods class. The third reason, which is the one that I am going to elaborate on here, was that perhaps readers wondered why I was even bothering having student teachers purchase atlases. In these days of Google Maps and ubiquitous global positioning systems in cell phones and vehicles, hard copy atlases and maps are perhaps going the way of 45 rpm records and analog signal television receivers.

However, even truly committed educational technologists point out that technology integration needs to be meaningful. Educators need to be talking with each other about the instructional materials they choose to use. What are the benefits and the opportunity costs of moving from a print-based classroom to a screen-based or 1:1 (one student: one computer) learning environment? Charged with launching the iPad and Google Apps for Education in high schools, Boston-based Instructional Technology Specialist Andrew Marcinek's comment on his [blog](#) (2012) resonated with my experiences with student teachers. Marcinek pointed out that many students deemed "digital natives" prefer analog formats for learning and organizing information. Accordingly, the use of technology should

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be purposeful rather than forced. He quoted [Chris Lehman](#) (2009), principal of the award-winning Science Leadership Academy in Pennsylvania: "Technology should be like oxygen: ubiquitous, necessary and invisible."

For the next few months I had some intellectually nourishing conversations with educators including Mary Haas, Professor of Curriculum and Instruction, University of West Virginia; Jeri Hammond, former middle school teacher, social studies resource specialist, and current district coordinator for International Baccalaureate, Orange County, Florida; and David Virtue, Associate Professor, University of South Carolina. Among other things, we discussed the merits of various atlases such as Rand McNally's *Goode's World Atlas*, which is used in the geography courses at USC, and Map.com's paperback *World Atlas - Scholastic Edition*, which is the price of a cup of designer coffee but has little in the way of comparative information. For just a little more you can purchase their world history atlas, which is printed on far superior quality paper. Mary advised caution with using historical atlases as stand-alone resources. If students do not know current land and water locations and shapes, or political or cultural regions, misconceptions can be created or perpetuated. As an example, she suggested that most U.S. university students would be unlikely to know the current or historical importance of the Indian Ocean for international trade.

A longtime advocate for geography education, Mary proposed having students or student teachers undertake a country study just using the information they could glean from an atlas, in order to really learn their way around using the resource. I am guessing that the information they would share would be much more tentative, and more thought-provoking than the usual "the currency is the New Zealand dollar and the capital city is Wellington" type of report.

Jeri shared that rather than using an atlas per se, her sixth grade students had loved using the [CIA Factbook](#), both paper and online versions. Using the lens of social geography, she also advocated using TED (Technology, Education, Design) Talks to put her students in touch with thinkers from around the world. As it happens, in a recent TED Talk Mike Matas (2011) demonstrated the new generation of [digital book](#). It is an electronic book that links expository text to real time images and spatial information.

Despite the wonderful access to information that the Internet allows teachers and their students, and the exciting paths that the work of Matas and his colleagues point to, and the exciting research of colleagues presented in journals such as [Theory and Research in Social Education](#), [Contemporary Issues in Teacher Education](#), or [Social Studies Research and Practice](#), to name a few, my ambivalence towards what seems to be an all out assault on paper versions of books remains. In my elementary social studies methods class a few weeks back I was reminded yet again as to why educators need to be cautious in whole-sale advocacy for internet connectivity rather than books in our twenty-first century classrooms.

This semester I have asked the student teachers to have either hard copy or electronic versions of our texts for the class. It is the Fall semester and, as it is a federally recognized holiday in the United States, a number of schools celebrate Columbus Day in mid-October. In preparation for my class the student teachers read extracts about Columbus from Jody

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Potts' [Adventure Tales of America](#) (2005). We reviewed what they had learned. Then I asked the students to work with a partner, to look through their resources to find a map (or other visual representation of information) that would help them talk with students about Christopher Columbus and why he might be celebrated or vilified.

Some students immediately pulled out and flipped through their paper "historical world atlases," found useful pages, started asking questions of themselves and dived from there into maps on other pages in the book, exclaiming that they had not realized how far south the explorations of Columbus were and wondering about the connection between his routes and those of the slave trade. Other student teachers struggled with their partner to use electronic versions of the same resource to find the same images. They did not generate the range or depth of questions, or browse in the same way. Instead, they were dealing with technical issues. Of course, afterwards we were able to look on the internet for answers to the questions we had generated – something that would have been extremely difficult just five years ago.

Perhaps one could argue that twenty-two year old student teachers are not digital natives, as fifth graders might be – but upon reflection I realized that the electronic version of the atlas we were using was an example of the internet being used as an electronic storage spot for text and images. It was not that helpful in the limited-time context of the classroom, even if the images and text can be updated daily. The screen size of portable devices meant that having multiple windows open rendered images so miniscule as to be useless.

The power of the internet as a useful instructional tool for social studies educators lies in its interactivity, not its storage capacity. It is time to move from thinking of the internet as an electronic library where we send students to get information to create their own beautifully presented you-tube videos, for such videos may be as full of inaccuracies as their mothers' stunning two-fold informational brochures were. Instead, we can revisit the "internet as cyberspace" metaphor. The internet is not a galaxy that remains as static as a book, where teachers ask their learners to journey from planet to planet, collecting information as Nintendo's Super Mario collects stars and coins without any apparent change to local environments. Alternatively, today's learners are on a journey in cyberspace where, just like Christopher Columbus and his men, their interactions with the environment change the nature of the places they visit. They should expect to contribute to what has already been shared by other people around the world – ideally in mutually beneficial ways.

Which brings me to another contributor to the conversation about world atlases, Peter Britton. Peter responded to my post on the International Assembly listserver and suggested that I might want to look at the work he and his colleagues are doing online. Based in Great Britain, [Timemaps](#) is an interactive atlas and timeline. Peter explained, "We're a small group of British history educators who were originally wanting to promote world history studies in UK schools... Most of the interest in our project comes from outside Britain. More than 90% of our visitors are from North America, and we have a far higher proportion of repeat visitors than average, which is very encouraging." Peter asked me to invite IA members to

contact him ([peter.britton@timemaps.com](mailto:peter.britton@timemaps.com)), as his group would appreciate having international contributors to the project.

So, there you have it, International Assembly members can help colleagues, both novice and veteran teachers, to better use our internet connectivity in the service of improving social studies education. In this “new world” we can help teach about the planet by sharing and making public our discoveries. We can help others think about instructional practices in this not-quite-new millennium.

Brilliant blogger or happily book-bound, please consider sending descriptions of your journeys to the *Journal of International Social Studies*.

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