Dr. Charles Reagan Wilson to give Keynote address at the 2013 Annual Conference

Charles Reagan Wilson is the Kelly Gene Cook, Sr. Chair in History and Professor of Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi. His research interests include the South and American religion. He is the coeditor of the Encyclopedia of Southern Culture and the author of Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920 and Judgment and Grace in Dixie: Southern Faiths from Faulkner to Elvis. MCSS is honored that Dr. Wilson has agreed to deliver the keynote for the Fall Conference in Natchez.

NATCHEZ, MISSISSIPPI

- Recently named one of the 100 Must See Destinations by Life Magazine
- Recognized as the Best Small City for a Weekend by AAA Southern Traveler Magazine
- “Natchez is what you love about the south:—City Motto

Call For Papers Deadline June 1st

If you are interested in presenting a paper at the conference the deadline for submissions is June 1st.

We are interested in what you are doing in the classroom, your ideas on how to implement CCSS, and

Major Themes include:
- History
- Economics
- Geography
- Civics
- Social Sciences
- Global Connections

If you are interested please visit the MCSS website for directions on proposal submissions.

Please share what you are doing with others at our Fall Conference in Natchez.
Research in Action    by Dr. Kenneth Anthony

Tis the season for testing. All across the state US history teachers are preparing their students for the US history test. Many are concerned based on the results from the test last year. Evidence of this concern was a recent proposal by a Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) task force to drop the US history test from the assessment model, but not as a graduation requirement. To be clear it was a recommendation and has not been acted upon and the state superintendent and others in the MDE have indicated that they intend to keep the US history test in the assessment model. The larger question is how do we most effectively prepare our students for the US history test? But I think that this is the wrong question. The question we should be asking is, "How do we best teach our students US history?" If we do a quality job of teaching our students history it follows they will do well on the US history test.

We are constantly told that we should use data to make instructional and education decisions. I have followed that advice and looked at the 12th grade US history results from the 2010 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) (available at http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/). I analyzed the data to see the effect of a variety of teaching strategies that teachers and schools participating in the NAEP report.

Before I share what I found, I’d like you to do a self-test. Below I have listed 12 teaching strategies mentioned in the NAEP data. Rank these methods from high to low according to which you think would be the most effective:

- Discuss materials studied
- Give presentation to the class (students)
- Read extra material not in the text book
- Read material from a text book
- Focus on preparation for state assessments
- Work on group project for history or social studies
- Watch movies or videos for history or social studies
- Use letters, diaries, or essays by historical people
- Do research using a CD or the internet
- Offer help through before and after school programs
- Go on field trips or have outside speakers
- Offer help through extra work or homework

Now in a way this was a trick question, because most of these strategies work well as measured by scores on the US history NAEP, it just depends on how often you use them. There can be too much of a good thing when it comes to teaching. Below are three charts that include the teaching strategies above with the resulting NAEP score for how often a particular strategy is used. I have bolded the highest score for each method. The average national score was 288. As you look through the chart, identify what strategies and time factors result in scores above and below the national average. I have included some commentary on what I have learned from the data about instruction, but I encourage you to study and draw your own conclusions.

Of interest to me are the things that when done almost every day are associated with higher test scores including discussion of material studied, reading material from a text book, and doing research on the internet. In this era when we tend to focus on how to leverage technology for instructional purposes those teachers who report that they have students read from the text book every day have higher test scores than those who have students read from text books never, a few times a year, or once or twice a month. In our efforts to be relevant, interesting teachers, and motivated by experts many schools have abandoned the textbook, but maybe that’s a bad idea. Now I’m not advocating only using the textbook, but from a common sense approach it makes no sense to throw out textbooks because it is the largest single source of reliable information available and the source of the test makers’ questions.

I think if we look closely at the charts above we find that using text books in conjunction with some other strategies result in higher levels of learning as measured by the NAEP US history test. Some of the other strategies that are associated with higher NAEP scores are reading extra material not in textbook; using letters, diaries, or essays by historical people (primary sources); and watching movies or videos for history of social studies when done once or twice a month or once or twice a week (see the tables). Another group of strategies appear to be associated with increased learning when done only a few times per year: giving presentation to the class, going on field trips or having outside speakers, and working on group projects for history or social studies.
What is great about this information is that each strategy is something that teachers can control (with support from school and district administration). They are proactive strategies that teachers and schools can use to improve student achievement in US history and are applicable to other grade levels. An analysis of the data for grades 4 and 8 indicate similar results. What about reactive measures? How do efforts to prepare for the state tests impact student performance?

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MISSISSIPPI COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES
FALL CONFERENCE REGISTRATION AND MEMBERSHIP FORM
Conference Theme: Putting the Common Good into the Common Core
Natchez Convention Center, Natchez, Mississippi
October 17-18, 2013

Name ________________________________________________

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Check One: _____ Elementary School Teacher _____ Middle School Teacher _____ Secondary School Teacher
____ College Instructor _____ University Professor _____ Pre-Service Teacher
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Circle the Congressional District in which you vote: CD 1 CD 2 CD 3 CD 4

SELECT ONE OF THE FOLLOWING OPTIONS:

I. Conference Pre-Registration (October 1 postmark deadline):
   To pre-register for the conference, enter $70.00 on this line.
   (Note: Lifetime MCSS Members enter $45.)

II. Conference Registration (after October 1):
   To register by mail after October 1 or to register on site, enter $80 on this line.
   (Note: Lifetime MCSS members enter $55.)

III. Payment of Membership Dues ONLY:
   If you will not be able to attend the conference but would like to renew your membership
   or would like to become a new member, enter $25 on this line.
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*** Please note: Conference registration includes the welcome reception on Thursday evening, all
conference sessions, the luncheon and business meeting on Friday, and membership dues for the 2014
calendar year.

Mail this form along with a check, money order, or pre-approved purchase order to:

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IMPORTANT REMINDERS:

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   when it is submitted to the Treasurer. There are no exceptions to this policy.

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   MCSS Treasurer two weeks prior to the conference.
Mississippi Council for the Social Studies

Call for Proposals

What: MCSS Fall Conference

Where: The Grand Hotel, Natchez, Mississippi

When: October 17-18, 2013

* Proposals are due no later than June 1, 2013 *

Presentations available for all grade levels covering:
- History
- Economics
- Geography
- Civics
- Social Sciences
- Global Connections

Sub-Themes:
Correlations with the Common Core
Using Primary Source Documents
Geography across the Curriculum
Economics/Financial Literacy

Submit proposals at: http://goo.gl/B3hpU
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The bottom two charts include questions that focus on preparing for state tests and remediation. It appears that a focus on preparation for state assessments is inversely related to student achievement. Put another way, if you focus on the test rather than focus on teaching, student achievement is lower. If a teacher only focuses on preparation a few times a year student achievement increases. Why is this so? It might be because teachers who are focusing on preparing for the test are not teaching or using the other strategies associated with student achievement. What about efforts to remediate using before and after school programs or through extra work and homework? Again, there is an inverse relationship between these remediation efforts and success.

So what can we learn from this data? I think the most important thing is that good teaching and strategic choices about teaching strategies including a proper mix of strategies is a good way to increase student achievement. Waiting until students are behind and remediating is ineffective and replacing quality teaching with a test preparation curriculum is equally ineffective. Bringing in consultants to mine the QDI data and target specific students for score increases, plugging students into the computer to drill them on history facts, and weekly practice tests are no replacement for good teaching.

So what do we do with this information? We claim we make decisions based on the data. Well, NAEP provides us with a wealth of data from across the nation. The students tested are a nationally representative sample. 500 schools and 12,400 students took the NAEP US history assessment. The results of the 2010 NAEP challenge many of the educational practices in US history classes in Mississippi. I encourage you to think about your practice as a social studies teacher. What methods and strategies do you use? Are the supported by data? Are you relying on one or two methods or strategies because you are comfortable with them or believe that they are best for your students? Have you abandoned the text book? How often do you focus on the US history test?

If I take anything from this data it's that teachers can make a difference. Teachers must teach and must make wise decisions on how to use their limited instructional time wisely. The NAEP data should challenge our ideas about the best use of instructional time and the value of large amounts of test preparation. Though I have focused on 12th grade US history, similar trends are found in other subjects including reading and math. Not only does this data call into question our instructional strategies in the social studies, but also in other subjects.