Specifications:

Investigating American History—A Systems Approach

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Main objective:

Develop learners' abilities to make sense of complex reality.

Subsidiary enabling objectives:

1. Enhancing learners' abilities to use the full range of cognitive skills, i.e. inferring, hypothesizing, categorizing, comparing, contrasting, correlating, describing, abstracting, recalling, extrapolating, applying, predicting, sequencing, relating, integrating, synthesizing, generalizing, interpreting, translating, empathizing, valuing, visioning, imagining, intuiting.
2. Developing learners' understanding of systems—their components, interactions, environments, and driving forces, especially those in which humans are the actors, shared ideas motivate their actions and shape their culture, and important social and historical changes result from internal and external influences.

Overview:

Investigating American History demonstrates how the objectives listed above can generate a paradigm shift in approaches to crucial learning. The course is focused on development of a logical sequence of powerful explanatory concepts that collectively explore the crucial relationships that shape human societies, past, present and future.

Conventional expository narrative is not a significant part of the course materials; instead, learner activity is focused on analysis and interpretation of historical primary sources. As learners progress through the materials, each newly-introduced conceptual element is applied to historical data, then to present-day situations, in "Follow-Up" activities. These "here and now" activities are an important element in gaining learner understanding and acceptance of the importance of the skills and concepts they're learning, because they see their application in situations directly affecting their lives.

The conceptual and methical framework is developed in *Investigating American History—A Systems Approach TE*, a professional manual for educators. It is illustrated with exemplar learner materials that make up a course of study for adolescent or older learners. However, it does not have enough activities to fill a complete school year. For those who wish to expand activity into a full course of historical investigation, we've provided supplementary investigations. Additional "Follow-Up" activities which apply the unit theme to present-day circumstances are included in the supplementary units.

Links (All materials are provided at no cost. See copyright notice):

Investigating American History TE: http://www.marionbrady.com/documents/AHHandbook.pdf

Investigating American History SE: http://www.marionbrady.com/documents/InvestigatingAH.pdf

Supplementary units: http://www.marionbrady.com/MoreInvestigationsinAmericanHistory.asp

Contents—Scope and Sequence (Supplementary units, in sequence, are in blue):

Additional Notes for Teachers and Mentors:

1: **Active Learning**

Active learning, which gives learners significant puzzles and problems to solve and projects to complete, is far more likely to result in intense learning than traditional passive "read and remember" teaching. This entire course focuses on active learning. Once they are familiar with the process, learners generally find it much more satisfying than conventional classwork.

Investigation: Planning a Spanish Town, based on ordinances issued by Phillip II in 1573 for town design in Spanish New World colonies.

2: **Primary Sources and Complex Thought**

The full range of thinking skills (see list above) cannot be elicited with conventional textbook narrative, because the textbook author pre-processes the information and supplies conclusions to be remembered, short-circuiting deep thought by learners. Simply telling learners what they should learn is ineffective. To develop high-order thinking skills, learners must be given resources that require them to use those skills. In the study of history, primary sources (along with good analytical questions) provide the raw material for in-depth thought.

Investigation: Life in a Puritan Village; analysis of records from New England towns.

3: **Organizing Knowledge**

Learners are inundated with information beyond their ability to cope. One key to gaining control of this flood of information is learning to develop "knowledge trees"— hierarchical arrangements of information based on subsumption. Beginning with powerful main categories, then identifying sub-categories, sub-sub-categories, etc. is essential to the whole process of making sense of complex reality.

Investigation: New England Native Americans; based on ethnographic descriptions by a 17th century English traveler.

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A simple systems model with five main parts is used to guide inquiry from this point forward. It's main function is to organize understanding, and to generate questions to be investigated to reveal system characteristics and changes.

4: **Model Category: Setting**

The first general category of the Model, *setting,* encompasses both the primary habitat or natural environment and its resources, and the secondary, human-made habitat, ranging from tools to cities. Human activity both shapes and is shaped by all aspects of setting.

Investigation: Colonial Virginia's Setting.

5: **Model Category: Demographics**

Understanding any society and its historical changes required investigation of its population size, distribution, and composition, including sub-groups, and the changes that are occuring in each of these elements.

Investigation: Colonial Population Changes, and their relationship to other aspects of society, particularly in Pennsylvania.

6: **Model Category: Patterns of Action**

Every society generates standardized ways of solving its main problems, and these action patterns form major subsystems—political, economic, educational, religious, family, etc. These patterns are most apparent in a society that differs from the learner's own, as in the investigation outlined here. These patterns resist change, but still evolve under the influence of other changes.

Investigation: Native American Patterns of Action.

7: **Model Category: Shared Ideas**

Shared ideas, values, and beliefs are the motives that collectively "explain" much of what humans are doing. Understanding these shared ideas is the single best key to making sense of any society. As with action patterns, a group's shared ideas tend to persist for long periods, resisting change until they no longer "fit" the group's reality.

Investigation: Shared Ideas in Puritan Society.

> Investigation: Colonial Exchange Patterns, 1725-1765 (Economic systems, shared idea differences)
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> Investigation: Stamp Act; Colonials React, 1765-1766 (Values, emotions)
>
> Investigation: Biased Reporting/Boston Massacre, 1770 (Values, emotions, selective perception)
>
> Investigation: Constitution/Bill of Rights, 1787-1791 (Political power)

8: **Identifying Systemic Relationships**

The fifth and final major Model category is the systemic interrelationships that tie each of the other parts together, generally indicated by change over time. Because we're

dealing with systems, a change in any part is sure to cause changes elsewhere. Developing the learner's ability to discover these systemic relationships is the final key to improving historical understanding.

Investigation: Systemic Relationships on the Ohio Frontier.

Investigation: Northeastern Region, 1800-1850 (Systemic relationships)

Investigation: Southern Region, 1800-1850 (Systemic relationships)

Investigation: Western Region, 1800-1850 (Systemic relationships)

Investigation: Comparing Regions, 1800-1850 (Cultural differences)

9: System Change: Polarization

Of the systemic changes that shape history, one of the most significant is polarization. It causes societies to divide, and it begins and escalates hostility. Shared ideas on each side are simplified, causing growth of ideology and stereotypes. Each side takes what it considers to be defensive action, which is generally percieved as offensive action by the other group. Conditions can easily spiral into violent conflict. An understanding of the system change processes involved in polarization is essential to avoiding its dangers.

Investigation: Polarization before the Civil War

Investigation: Polarization and Slavery, 1819-1860 (Polarization)

10: System Change: Autonomy

Another history-maker is the frustration and stress that grows when many people feel they lack adequte control over their own fate. This is often caused by domination by another group, by adverse economic conditions, or by other significant changes. Inadequate autonomy leads to a variety of reactions, including group formation, opinion appeals, strikes, boycotts, violence, and other responses.

Investigation: Problems in Late 19th Century America

Investigation: Industrial Change, 1865-1890 (Autonomy and stress)

Investigation: Native Americans, 1840-1900 (Systemic relationships, cultural interaction, autonomy and stress)

Investigation: African-Americans, 1865-1910 (Autonomy and stress)

Investigation: Immigrants, 1870-1930 (Autonomy and stress)

11: System Change: Complex Causation

In complex systems, significant changes have multiple causes and multiple effects. Additionally, changes can feed back and reinforce transition, or, conversely, stabilize the system and inhibit further changes. These elements of system change are particularly important in generating economic cycles, but are evident whenever societal change is occurring.

Investigations: Changes in a Native American Group; Changes due to World War I.

12: **How to Build Investigations**

Appendix A: Some Ramifications of Active Learning

Appendix B: Shared Ideas in American Society

Feedback: Classroom teachers, working together, are better positioned to improve instructional materials than are policymakers and publishers. To facilitate dialogue and continuous refinement, we invite participation in an interactive, supportive, on-line community to discuss learner reactions, suggest improvements to existing activities, and suggest additional or alternative activities. The website (http://www.marionbrady.com/AHH.asp) provides a simple way for users to comment on any aspect of the program.