

Formative Evaluation of Bridging World History



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Submitted to
Oregon Public Broadcasting
Portland, OR

FORMATIVE EVALUATION OF BRIDGING WORLD HISTORY: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Goodman Research Group, Inc. (GRG), of Cambridge, Massachusetts, a research firm that specializes in the evaluation of educational programs, materials, and services, was contracted by Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB) to conduct formative evaluation of *Bridging World History*, a 26-unit series intended to provide secondary history teachers, as well as community college undergraduates, with world history content from a global and thematic perspective.

Each unit will contain a video, text, and web component. Videos are intended to provide an overview to engage the users' interest in the unit. The text will include materials intended to put each unit in a historical context, introduce unit themes and case studies, and describe what users should know upon unit completion, along with two to three academic articles. The web component will focus on the historiographical treatment of the series content.

The purpose of the formative evaluation was to obtain feedback from the initial primary target audience of this professional development series -- secondary history teachers -- that would support and guide producers as they make decisions about the series content.

Three formative evaluation activities were conducted:

1. **Video Script review (Summer 2003):** Upon the producers' completion of the rough drafts of the video scripts, 18 teachers and teacher-leaders reviewed two scripts and provided feedback to inform the fine draft of the scripts and subsequent video production.
2. **National Survey of History Teachers (Winter 2003):** In order to make sure program developers were working from an accurate understanding of their audience, GRG conducted a national survey with 206 history and world history teachers to develop a profile of their educational background and training, as well as their history-related learning and teaching experiences.
3. **Video review:** In Summer 2004, the teachers and teacher-leaders reviewed the video and text materials for one unit and provided feedback to inform the final print selections and to speak to the extent to which unit components complement one another.

This document summarizes key findings and recommendations made by evaluators based on these three evaluation components.

KEY FINDINGS

Secondary History Teachers' Background

Evaluation participants reported academic background in history, including undergraduate degrees and certifications in History; about a third also held graduate degrees in history. Three participants reported they had an undergraduate degree or certification in World History. Nearly all had received professional development in History and in World History and about half had led professional development in those areas.

This corresponded with findings from the national survey of History teachers; most reported undergraduate degrees and/or teaching certification in History or Social Studies.

Computer and Internet Experiences and Access

Most evaluation participants reported they have used the Web to review history-related curriculum content. National survey findings indicated that nearly all History and World History teachers had Web access at school and most also had access at home. Beyond emailing, teachers are accustomed to using the Web for obtaining history content and lesson ideas. Most have also acquired history content from television sources including the History Channel, PBS, and The Discovery Channel.

Evaluation participants described readiness to employ a variety of approaches to teaching and slightly lower familiarity with using the Web to download curriculum content for students.

Evaluator recommendation: *These findings suggest the BWH professional development series would be a good fit and would be well received if developed and promoted as a way to build upon familiar teaching practices and introduce new content while demonstrating new dynamic and interactive styles of instruction.*

Receptivity to This Type of Series

Based on their background experiences, the script reviews, and the video and print reviews, the secondary history teachers appear to be an appropriate audience for the *Bridging World History* Series.

Participants have participated in professional development that uses a global thematic approach to content, but have not necessarily participated in professional development that incorporates video with print as well as Web materials. They expressed interest in such a delivery mechanism.

Evaluator recommendation: *This new mode of presentation should be highlighted as valuable and accessible when promoting the series and seeking to engage users' interest.*

Participants reported strong familiarity with content provided by the units (video-scripts and video and text materials) and experience teaching similar content in their classrooms. The main perceived difference had to do with the presentation of the content in terms of the case studies selected and the types of comparisons and contrasts made.

Evaluator recommendations: *Promotional and introductory information about the BWH series should communicate the idea that the series may include familiar content, but will present it in a new way intended to encourage teachers to rethink their ideas about world history and how they can present it to students.*

Based on the video scripts, participants described content they expected to see in the videos that was missing. Some participants noted that the unit felt disconnected and lacked context after viewing a video and reading the accompanying text.

Some points considered missing by participants were topics deliberately excluded by producers, based on the assumption that the audience for the series would have the necessary background knowledge (e.g., discussion of the basic beliefs of each religion was intentionally excluded from the Religions in Motion unit). Participants reported knowledge of some of the assumptions made by series developers indicating that exclusion of some broader topics, such as the origins of various religions, would be acceptable for this series. Complete knowledge, however, cannot be assumed to the point of exclusion from the series.

Evaluator Recommendation: *We recommend that introductory materials developed for the series be clear and complete and that users are required to read those materials first, regardless of the number units they use and the order in which they use them.*

- *It should be made clear that the video is intended to provide a general introduction or framework and a deeper exploration of detail will be included in the text materials.*
- *An overview of the units and the rationale for inclusion should be outlined in introductory materials. Having read this outline, users should find the references in each unit to other related units more meaningful. This should alleviate the feeling of any individual unit feeling disconnected from the broader series content.*

Comments on Individual Components

Video

After reading two video-scripts, participants expressed that some of the content was familiar to them and overlapped with their current knowledge and with content they have presented to their students. The treatment and presentation of the content, however, differed from what they had seen and used in the past.

Evaluator recommendation: *Participants reported knowledge of some of the assumptions made by series developers indicating that exclusion of*

some topics (such as the origins of various religions) would be acceptable for this series. Project developers should consider including references, and links to primary sources, in the text and web materials for topics about which participants may have less current knowledge.

Evaluation participants' comments on the two video scripts included suggestions for ways to increase the appeal of the videos. Specifically, the video should open with a hook to engage interest in the video, and the video as a whole should pique users' interest in the particular unit.

Participants found the case studies used in each video to be well-balanced and they reported learning in the areas intended by the producers. Despite familiarity with some of the content, participants reported the information enhanced and, to some extent, challenged their understanding of the content.

Evaluator Recommendation: *The familiarity with basic content but not with the particular comparative approach presents an opportunity for producers of the BWH series to go further with their treatment of the topics. Series developers can build on this opportunity to take the new focus and make new connections or link the content to controversial issues, new research findings, and new questions that have been or can be raised.*

Text

Overall, the Unit Materials and Video-Related Materials adequately conveyed information about the unit and how the readings related to the video. Participants were less clear about the historical context for the unit and what they should know upon unit completion.

Evaluator Recommendation: *Because all 26 units will be outlined and their order and context will be explained in an introductory document at the beginning of the series, all users should be directed to that introduction before using any of the units. A description of what the user should know after using the current unit was not stated explicitly in the Video-Related Materials documents. If this remains a goal of this document, then an explicit statement, with a clear and appropriate heading, should be included. This information was not inferred by study participants.*

The use of journal articles for the text was well-received by evaluation participants. Findings from the national survey indicated that history teachers do refer to academic journals to obtain history content. Reasons provided for not reading journals regularly had to do with time, expense, or availability of journals rather than with content or density.

Evaluation participants perceived each of the three readings to be at or above their current knowledge level. The three readings contributed differentially to the content knowledge participants reported learning relative to program developers' objectives for the unit, suggesting that it was valuable for participants to have watched the video and read all three articles. Where one article may have fallen short of accomplishing the unit's learning goals, one or the other of the readings

and, in some cases, the inclusion of the video, filled in the missing content or information conveyed.

Evaluator Recommendation: *Because of this variation in perceived contribution to knowledge, we recommend that users be strongly encouraged to read all of the accompanying print materials for each unit. In this way, program developers can feel more confident that each unit will meet its intended purpose. Different users, bringing their own prior knowledge to the unit, will likely acquire the desired information from different articles.*

The teachers and teacher leaders who participated in this evaluation represent the high end of the spectrum of potential users of this series. None of them perceived the readings to contain entirely new information, and only one reported that the readings provided no new information (i.e. complete overlap with known content).

This suggests that the current readings are on target for the broad series audience. Readings should provide some new information to experienced World History teachers, and should not be overly challenging to those at the lower end of the spectrum (i.e., community college undergraduates).

Regarding scope of the readings, participants expressed perceived advantages to both broad and narrowly focused readings for a series like *Bridging World History*, and they reported that each of the current readings had the optimal balance of a narrow and wide scope. Participants found the readings to be as comprehensive and complete as they expected them to be.

Evaluator Recommendation: *Program developers should seek readings for the remaining units of the series that include a similar mix of scope, both within and across the readings for a particular unit.*

Overall, series producers appear to have reached an optimal organization in the scope, level, and purpose of the unit readings. Participants recognized the connections between the readings and video and were satisfied with the content and presentation of the three readings.