Opening Up the Textbook (OUT)

Rationale and Purpose

In an interesting modern paradox, students are socialized to accept their classroom textbook as the final authority on a subject and yet in the twenty-first century textbooks are adopted by politicians and managed by staff of textbook companies (instead of the experts whose names are listed on the cover). Through this politicized and fragmented process, textbooks inevitably acquire errors, distortions, and omissions. Students can be guided to correct the textbook by comparing texts, challenging them with primary sources, drawing interpretive comparisons, and articulating silences.

Strategies for Opening Up Textbooks

1. **Direct Challenge** – bringing primary evidence to challenge issues of fact or interpretation
2. **Comparison** – US to other national textbooks; Old to new textbooks; Leftist to rightwing interpretations; Traditional diplomatic history to newer social or cultural history
3. **Articulating Silences** – identify who is left out of the narrative; bring in voices of the silenced; breathe life to a text that “mentions” or expurgates; explore issues of representation and narrative choice

Designing an OUT Lesson Plan

1. Choose a **topic** you have studied and know well.
2. Find the relevant textbook passage (not more than 2 pages) for the lesson.
3. Identify the **part of the passage** that will be problematized and consider how to address the problems with a sound historical question (grounded in the past, causation, explanation, evaluation, often cannot be answered definitively or provoke multiple interpretations).
4. Select **source(s)** that you will use to “open up” the textbook's account. Consider how these sources challenge or problematize the textbook's narrative: What particular passages or visuals in the textbook are being opened up? What strategy are you using to do so? What particular details from each source do this? What will students learn from juxtaposing the source(s) with the textbook? The best sources provide rich historical information, illustrate different perspectives, and draw on different types of evidence. Choose brief excerpts; you may have to help with syntax or vocabulary.
5. Consider how you will **lead your students** through processes of establishing hypotheses, closely reading sources, supporting claims with evidence, questioning or contradicting hypotheses with new evidence, and complicating simple stories with complex histories. Remember to push your students to use multiple texts (sourcing and corroboration), to use evidence and cite with quotes, to problematize the single authoritative story of the textbook, to answer a historical question, and to rewrite the textbook passage.
6. Write up an outline for a lesson plan that presents a textbook, opens it up, and allows students to rewrite its contents. Prepare a timeline or graphic organizer to guide students.