The Industrial Revolution: The Dominant Story Taught

The industrial revolution is a very important time in The United State’s history that is necessary for students to learn about to fully understand the development of the United States in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Knowledge of the Industrial Revolution will help students understand how our working society is set up today. After researching some lesson plans taught in the elementary/middle school setting, I found some common topics that were taught. This included: urbanization; railroads; government regulations and acts on monopolies; business enterprises; and inventions (Glauner, 2003). These topics make up the dominant story of the American Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution first started with the urbanization of people. People began to move from rural areas to urban areas with the growing number of jobs in factories that were available. The jobs that the people were newly working in were unlike their previous jobs at a farm or a local store. (“Teacher’s Guide Primary Source Set: The Industrial Revolution in the United States”, n.d.). The working conditions in the factories were awful in the beginning. In the traditional way that the industrial revolution is taught, the topic of bad working conditions is taught, but the traditional way that it is taught and how media portrays The Industrial Revolution fails to include how brutal the conditions really were. The traditional way of teaching this topic brushes on the topic, but fails to give the full perspective of the workers, and children, that had to endure these harsh conditions. Many of the factories that people were forced to work in were very dangerous for their health and paid very little. Because there was very little pay, everyone in the family worked, including small children, to make enough money for a suitable life for their family. The workdays that children endured consisted of 10-14 hour days. This also permitted them from receiving an education. There were many advocates for child labor that should be taught about because of their important efforts, including Grace Abbott and Jane Addams (Childhood Lost: Child Labor During the Industrial Revolution, n.d.). These topics are very important and should go into more depth because of the effects that they have on the way the workforce is today. Students will be encouraged to compare their lives in school with the quality of life that the children during The Industrial Revolution had.

There are many primary sources that can be used in the teaching of the industrial revolution to show the perspective of the children who worked in these tough conditions during The Industrial Revolution. Not only is it important that students learn about what primary sources are and how to use them, they will get a better understanding of the realities that the children during The Industrial Revolution faced. The primary sources that can be included are pictures of children working, newspaper articles about the working conditions from that time, and articles about the new childhood labor laws at that time (Childhood Lost: Child Labor During the Industrial Revolution, n.d.). Students will reflect on how these conditions put the laws that are in place today advocating healthy workplace conditions and the importance of childhood education. Because The Industrial Revolution is traditionally taught in a way that only briefly describes the harsh working conditions, students are not given the true story. Through primary sources and perspectives of laborers themselves, students will learn more in depth about the Industrial Revolution and be forced to critically think about the effects that the terrible working conditions have on how we live today.

References

*Childhood Lost: Child Labor During the Industrial Revolution*. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.eiu.edu/eiutps/childhood.php

Glauner, L. (2003). *Isn’t It Exciting? (The American Industrial Revolution and Urbanization)*. Retrieved from http://www.coreknowledge.org/mimik/mimik\_uploads/lesson\_plans/1436/6\_IsntExciting.pdf

*Teacher's Guide Primary Source Set: The Industrial Revolution in the United States.* (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/industrial-revolution/pdf/teacher\_guide.pdf