Losing Literature

The Reduction of the GDR to History

Elizabeth Priester Steding
German, Luther College

Abstract

Federal and state curricula not only determine much of what is taught in school, they also reveal what is important to political and cultural leaders and ultimately help shape a country's narrative. This article examines how the GDR currently is addressed in history and literature curricula for the *Oberstufe*. While state history curricula consistently require coverage of the GDR, literature curricula vary widely, with a few states clearly including GDR literature and many states completely omitting it. If GDR literature is ignored in state curricula, it risks being ignored in the classroom, limiting student understanding of the GDR to historical facts and depriving them of an opportunity to better understand both past and current German society.

Keywords

Abitur; curriculum studies; education; education policy; German Democratic Republic (GDR); GDR history; GDR literature; *Oberstufe*

> Education is deeply implicated in the politics of culture. The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a *selective tradition*, someone's selection, some group's vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of the cultural, political, and economic conflicts, tensions, and compromises that organize and disorganize a people.[1]

Every country has its "old standard" topics covered in school: Americans learn about the Civil War and read (or watch) *Romeo and Juliet*; Germans learn about the Third Reich and read at least one work by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. While students may feel that these old standards have always been in the curriculum, they are examples of Michael W. Apple's "selective

German Politics and Society, Issue 113 Vol. 32, No. 4 (Winter 2014): 39–55
doi:10.3167/gps.2014.320403 • ISSN 1045-0300 (Print) • ISSN 1558-5441 (Online)

tradition," a tradition that gets redefined every time curricula are revised or new testing standards are framed. Obviously, schools cannot attempt to teach the entirety of human knowledge, so choices are made about which topics and skills to include and which to omit. Contemporary history or the Middle Ages? Literature or nonfiction? A unified grand narrative or a multiplicity of voices? These choices reveal what a society views as "legitimate knowledge," what it emphasizes and wants to foster, as well as what it wishes to downplay or forget. Examining what is taught–and perhaps more precisely, where and when it is taught–reveals much about the values and visions of a nation's political and cultural leaders.

This article looks at the "new standard" topic of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and raises the following question: where does the GDR fit into state and federal curricula for the *Oberstufe* and what does this reveal about Germany today?[2] More specifically, it examines the large disparity in required coverage of the GDR in history and literature curricula. The argument is based upon a key supposition, that what is required in the official curriculum is privileged, and what is omitted is (or risks becoming) marginalized. There currently appears to be a tendency to reduce the GDR to politics and ideology, ignoring the cultural achievements of the GDR and their relevance for German culture at large. This inadequate presentation of the GDR sends a message to today's students about what is valued in education and in society: history over literature and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) over the GDR.

History Curricula

While German education policy is largely regulated by the sixteen federal states (Länder), The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (Kultusministerkonferenz) issues federal guidelines to ensure comparability and consistency of educational standards. The common testing standards (*einheitliche Prüfungsanforderungen,* EPA) for subjects covered in the final secondary school examinations (*Abitur*) are one example of federal-level curricular policy.[3] These standards then help shape individual state curricula for the Gymnasium, serving as a key cultural and political element of the "selective tradition" to which Apple refers.

The testing standards for history delineate the broad aims for history instruction in all states:

> The goal of history instruction is the acquisition of historical competence, that is, the skill of independent historical thought. This is made evident through the ability to examine, clarify and depict historical phenomenon; to interpret connections and variations over time; to participate in historical discourse as well as to draw conclusions about the present and future.[4]

There is an acknowledgement here that historical knowledge can help students, and societies, understand the present and plan for the future. This knowledge is based upon much more than memorizing names and dates; it includes a focus on the "political, economic, social, ecological, intellectual historical (*geistesgeschichtliche*) and cultural circumstances that have determined and determine our lives."[5] The GDR offers a vivid example of the role such circumstances played in the lives of its citizens and their continued impact on the world today.

Federal history standards also acknowledge the importance of content as well as skills. While allowing states to determine many aspects of their history curriculum, the federal standards do mandate that the *Abitur* should cover "various epochs: antiquity, Middle Ages, early modern era, modern era, and contemporary history."[6] While definitions of contemporary history are somewhat of a moving target, its inclusion in federal *Abitur* standards signal the importance assigned to twentieth- and twenty-first-century society.[7] In the specific German context, contemporary history is likely to include coverage of the FRG, GDR, and German reunification. This importance is highlighted in the history standards, which include several sample *Abitur* questions about the GDR.[8] Admittedly, these are included as examples of well-constructed questions rather than as specific examples of required topics, but including GDR history in sample questions helps establish its place in the history curriculum.[9]

The goals set at a federal level by the history testing standards are then interpreted and reflected in individual state curricula, which also can be seen as "social consensus documents."[10] In most German states, history curricula and textbooks follow a rough chronological outline, starting with antiquity in grade 5 and working through to the current day in grade 9/10. This ensures that each student has at least some exposure to a large span of history before they reach the *Oberstufe*. History curricula for the *Oberstufe* focus more deeply on selected historical themes and/or epochs, thus making it possible that students might cover GDR history not just once, but twice.[11] The developers of current state history curricula acknowledge the importance of (a knowledge of) GDR history for today's students–individuals born after the fall of the Berlin Wall, for whom the GDR truly is history.

The role of the GDR in history curricula and textbooks has undergone a marked change in the years since German reunification, however. In the early 1990s, history textbooks reflected an East versus West mentality, with the West portrayed as the clear victor.[12] In 1995, the Kultusministerkonferenz saw need to release a document that charged schools with "making students aware of the history of (German) division as well as the political, economic, and social developments in divided Germany."[13] The document, which never became legally binding, reveals federal education policymakers' concern that GDR history be taught, but it does not directly confront how that history should be addressed. National discourses change over time, and curricula and textbooks reflect that change. According to historian Christina Mätzing, it was not until the early 2000s that textbooks presented a "pan-German historical consciousness," balancing not only the number of pages devoted to the GDR and the FRG, but also the depiction of each state.[14]

Educational research in the past decade also emphasized the importance of an even-handed inclusion of GDR history. In his 2004 study, Ulrich Arnswald of the German Institute for International Educational Research argued that "school instruction in all of Germany bears a growing responsibility to teach GDR history in a fitting manner as part of German development after World War II."[15] Although state curricula do not always reveal whether subjects are taught in a "fitting manner," an examination of current history curricula does reveal that required inclusion of GDR history is high.[16] Fifteen of the sixteen federal states specifically require coverage of GDR history in the *Oberstufe*,[17] with many states mandating topics such as "double German history" (Berlin and Brandenburg) or "Germany/the world after 1945" (Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Schleswig-Holstein, and Bremen). There is currently–at both state and federal level–a clear recognition of GDR history's place within German history.

There is some fear shared by historians and educational researchers that inclusion of GDR history in future state curricula may be in danger. Over the past decade, pedagogy has been turning from a focus on content to a focus on competencies. While state curricula traditionally included a fairly detailed account of terminology, dates, and concepts that needed to be covered in class, they now focus more on the skills students will develop. Consequently, as Oliver Igel from the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the Socialist Unity Party Dictatorship (Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur) argues: "The road to these competencies via the teaching of concrete events, terms, and dates is not necessarily mapped out."[18] Igel sees a negative, albeit unintended, consequence of this new lack of content specificity in state curricula: "particular topics risk being omitted from

instruction."[19] Igel's article focuses on the inclusion of the Peaceful Revolution, the events in 1989 in the GDR that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall, but his argument easily can be expanded. If GDR history is no longer specifically required at a state or federal level, its likelihood of consistently being included in textbooks and classroom instruction will be at risk.

German Curricula

Along with mathematics, German is the only subject required of all students in the *Abitur*, reflecting the importance assigned to German at the secondary school level. The goals for German instruction set at a federal level are admittedly quite expansive: "Through the transmission of subject content and methods as well as through its relation to everyday life, German makes an essential contribution to the acquisition of basic skills needed for **post-secondary education and careers.**" It should "equip students for **active participation in cultural life** and should contribute to their **personality development**."[20] While the writers of the EPA chose to emphasize the three outcomes, I would like to draw attention back to the phrase "[t]hrough the transmission of subject content." Obviously, there is an underlying belief that content matters, and that (certain) texts play a vital role in reaching these overarching goals. The question, however, remains: which content comprises Apple's "legitimate knowledge"? Which texts, authors, and epochs are privileged and which are marginalized?

At first glance, the goals found in the federal testing guidelines may actually seem to downplay literature in general. When reading the more detailed description of knowledge and skills that students should possess by the *Abitur*, though, the key roles of literature and literary history become clear. Students must demonstrate "a well-grounded, broad basic education […] in German language and literature as well as its entrenchment in European cultural and intellectual history."[21] The *Abitur* also "presupposes a solid and networked basic knowledge of literary, intellectual, and cultural history."[22] In a list of more specific requirements, similar language is found, requiring "knowledge of German literature, its genres and epochs as well as its embedment in historical context."[23] Clearly (the history of) German literature is assigned a high level of importance at a federal level.

The federal testing guidelines also provide some insight into which epochs of German literature are considered essential (*wesentlich*) in the "required literary-historical basic education": "Middle Ages, Baroque, Enlightenment, Classicism, Romanticism, Realism, late- nineteenth century,

twentieth century and the present."[24] The standards also require an "appropriate" (*angemessen*) inclusion of texts from before 1900, "to make visible the correspondences between literary tradition and contemporary literature."[25] The inclusion of twentieth-century and contemporary literature in this list indicates that they are viewed as an important part of German literature and literary history. The requirement to include an appropriate amount of pre 1900 literature seems to imply that, if left to their own devices, state curriculum boards and teachers would gravitate toward twentieth-century and contemporary texts, although common practice seems to challenge this.[26] Such requirements also reveal that competencies and content both matter to educational policy makers.

Since the *Abitur* is the desired outcome of a Gymnasium education, and since the federal testing standards drive what is included in the *Abitur*, it logically follows that state German curricula echo the content and skills delineated in the EPA. Therefore there is a certain level of commonality between all sixteen state curricula.[27] Nevertheless, there are marked differences between the curricula currently in use, including release dates that range from 1998 (Rhineland-Palatinate) to 2011 (Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia). All sixteen states have updated their German curricula at least once since reunification–obviously a vital task for the states of the former GDR. As the earlier example of history textbooks illustrates, the goals and narratives of countries change over time; what is considered a "must teach" topic or viewpoint in one decade may disappear in later curricula. Thus some of the differences found in current curricula may be reflections of changing appraisals of GDR literature. State curricula also range in length from fifteen pages (Baden-Württemberg) to over 150 pages (North Rhine-Westphalia).[28] These vast differences in length already reveal widely varying levels of detail in curricular goals and explanations; therefore a range in the inclusion levels of GDR literature in individual curricula is to be expected.

Perhaps the greatest difference in German curricula arises from the shift in recent decades from content-based to competency-based curricula.[29] Traditional curricula often enumerated detailed content requirements, while many newer curricula instead emphasize student competencies (or outcomes) and therefore devote little space to specifying the content to be covered. For example, Thuringia leaves content choices up to individual schools, requiring only that the curriculum cover "the epochs of German literature from the Middle Ages to the present," echoing the federal testing standards.[30] Not surprisingly, many states combine the two approaches, adopting the new focus on student competency while also including some level of required content in their curricula.

There are many positive aspects to competency-based education, and this article does not aim to deny that fact. As more states appear to be shifting away from specific content requirements, however, the question arises of what will continue to be taught. Obviously authors such as Goethe, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, and Bertolt Brecht (to include a twentieth-century author) will be taught regardless of whether they are required in state curricula. But what about literature that has not had decades or even centuries to become integrated into the "school canon" and is not on the latest bestseller list? What about literature that has been created by a (cultural) minority and that often has been viewed by the West as secondary, only legitimate within its political context; literature that–in many cases–is not easily accessible for the majority of readers because it refers to a political and social world that no longer exists? My fear is that GDR literature will be excluded to make way for the "classics" or current bestsellers, therefore denying students the opportunity to study literature from this recent and important period.

An analysis of state curricula does suggest that a certain level of importance is placed on literature written after 1945, specifically on contemporary literature. Of the twelve state curricula that include required literary epochs, eight require contemporary literature. While there is no standard definition for contemporary literature, it generally has been viewed as any text written since 1945. In recent years, that has begun to shift to texts written after 1989. This lack of a standard definition has resulted in two diverging tendencies in state curricula: a narrow post 1989 focus or a very broad inclusion of "twentieth/twenty-first-century" literature. Several states have chosen the more narrow definition, thus making contemporary literature synonymous with post FRG/GDR literature. Specific requirements include a work from the "immediate present (since 1989)" (Hesse), texts from the twenty-first century (Berlin and Brandenburg), or from the last ten years (Rhineland-Palatinate).[31] Other states seem to include very contemporary literature almost as an afterthought, for example requiring instruction on "literature and language of the twentieth/twenty-first century" (Hamburg).[32] With 114 years to choose from, what are the chances that *Oberstufe* teachers focused on helping students prepare for the *Abitur* will choose a novel written after 1945 or after 1989? It is interesting, though, that eleven of the twelve states with required epochs do mention contemporary literature.[33] Whether required or optional, contemporary literature is assigned a level of some importance. The tendency toward narrow or very broad definitions of contemporary literature does, nevertheless, risk excluding GDR (and even FRG) literature from this category.

Table 1: Epochs and Content in Länder Curricula

Land	Required Epochs	Post 1945 Literature (1945-1989)	GDR Literature	Contemporary Literature
Baden-Württemberg	x			required
Bavaria	x	required	required	optional
Berlin*	x	optional	optional	required
Brandenburg	x	optional	optional	required
Bremen				
Hamburg	x			twentieth/twenty-first century
Hesse	x	required		required
Mecklenburg-West Pomerania				
Lower Saxony	x	required	optional	optional
North Rhine-Westphalia	x	required		required
Rhineland-Palatinate	x	optional	optional	required
Saarland	x			
*Saxony***	x	required	required	required and twentieth/ twenty-first century
Saxony-Anhalt				
Schleswig-Holstein	x			required
Thuringia				

States in the former GDR are in italics

*Since Berlin now encompasses the former East and West Berlin, it is not categorized as a former GDR state

** Saxony requires both a "contemporary work" and also a "novel of the twentieth/twenty-first century"

In contrast to the fairly high inclusion level of contemporary literature in state curricula, the role of post 1945 literature is much less clearly defined.[34] The federal testing guidelines specifically mention contemporary literature as separate from twentieth-century literature. This then means that the entire twentieth century is often seen as one unit, lumping writers such as Rainer Maria Rilke and Franz Kafka together with postwar authors such as Günter Grass and Christa Wolf. The wording of the German federal testing standards therefore places the responsibility for including post 1945 literature on individual states, where it is (not surprisingly) addressed in a variety of ways.

I would argue, though, that World War II served as a historic and literary caesura that cannot be ignored–and in fact is acknowledged in the federal guidelines for history.[35] Literature produced in a post Holocaust, Cold War, divided and then reunified Germany should not be lumped together with literature from the (pre) Weimar Republic simply because they fit neatly

within one century. It also should not be ignored, even if it is difficult, messy, or has not had centuries to establish itself in the school curriculum canon. As the Schleswig-Holstein curriculum says about the inclusion of literature in general:

> Engagement with German-language authors of the past and present leads to students becoming familiar with and grappling with our cultural inheritance and our current culture. Through understanding, interpreting and creating literature, students cultivate their understanding of how historical and cultural context determine life choices.[36]

This is perhaps nowhere as true as for literature of the divided Germany. It developed as a response to political events and social movements which continue to shape our lives today, but which seem like ancient history to today's students. If young adults do not have a clear view and understanding of Germany just one generation ago–an understanding which should include history and literature–how can they truly "grappl[e] with […] our current culture"?

Many state curricula, however, perhaps because of the wording of the federal testing standards, do not seem to reflect the pivotal role of post 1945 literature, particularly GDR literature. Only half of federal states include post 1945 literature in their curricula, and three of those states list it as optional. Of the five states that require post 1945 literature, two (Bavaria and Saxony) specifically include GDR literature as required, one (Lower Saxony) suggests it as optional, and two (Hesse and North Rhine-Westphalia) do not mention it. While one could argue that post 1945 German literature automatically includes both the FRG and the GDR, state curricula seem to acknowledge that a division still exists–six of the eight states that mention post 1945 literature also separately mention GDR literature. But then again, since only two states require inclusion of GDR literature, this could lead some students to conclude that post 1945 German literature automatically means West German literature. If GDR literature is not deliberately and unambiguously included in the definition of "post 1945 literature", it runs the risk of being marginalized in favor of more well-known FRG texts.

State-By-State Analysis

State curricula deal with GDR literature in one of four ways: they infrequently require it, they may include it as an optional topic, they sometimes include texts and authors in lists of suggested readings, and they frequently omit it entirely.

Only two of the sixteen states (Bavaria and Saxony) explicitly require GDR literature to be covered. This means that students in the other fourteen states may never read a work of GDR literature.[37] Bavaria has a fairly prescriptive curriculum for grade 12, and includes GDR literature in the required topic "literature since 1945", in which students will gain an "understanding of literary development after 1945: connections between literature and politics, different writing styles, and poetological concepts"; study literature's "examination of the past in East and West Germany"; and obtain an "overview of literary tendencies," which includes "literature in the GDR."[38]

Saxony is even more detailed in its requirements for the topic "German language literature since 1945", also written as a mix of competencies and content. Students will "take a position on aspects of literature in divided Germany (content suggestion: literature of the occupation zones)." They will also "take a position on GDR literature in the tension between exodus and confrontation (content suggestion: Wolf Biermann's 1976 expatriation and the consequences)" and will examine "political censorship of literary works and its consequences."[39] The specific goals for Saxony are the "development of a broad reading comprehension" and "development of knowledge for orientation in the history of ideas."[40] In Bavaria, post 1945 literature falls under the goal of "grappling with literature and nonfiction texts." While all of these goals could be met with literature from other epochs, Bavaria and Saxony chose to fully recognize the role of GDR literature–both as a part of post 1945 literature and as a part of German literature as a whole–by including it as a required topic.

Four states (Berlin, Brandenburg, Lower Saxony, and Rhineland-Palatinate) include GDR literature as optional in their curricula, thereby assigning it less value than Bavaria and Saxony while still granting it some recognition. Three of these states (Berlin, Brandenburg, and Rhineland-Palatinate) also include post 1945 literature as optional, so this is not necessarily a case of privileging FRG literature over that of the GDR.[41] Berlin and Brandenburg (which share many aspects of their German curricula) both have very similar inclusion levels of GDR literature, including it in a semester focus of "Literature and Language in the Twentieth/Twenty-First Century: Living and Writing in Times of Change." The curriculum states that "two of the following topics are required: literature and language during National Socialism; literature after 1945–literature of the GDR and the FRG; literature after 1989."[42] Therefore, while it is not guaranteed that literature from a divided Germany will be taught, FRG and GDR literature are given equal treatment here.

Lower Saxony requires coverage of "literature and language from 1945 to the present," focusing on the experiences of young people.[43] None of the

required elements of this unit specifically mention the FRG/GDR; however, they do require coverage of "life outlooks and concepts in contrast" or "norms and divergence in literary language since 1945."[44] The curriculum also offers quite a long list of suggested texts, roughly one-third of which are from the GDR. While it is not certain that students would encounter GDR literature in this unit, it does seem highly likely. The only units explicitly dealing with GDR literature, "Farewell from the GDR" and "Varying Views of Life in the GDR," are optional.[45]

The Rhineland-Palatinate curriculum offers the least assurance in this group that GDR literature will be included. In a list of nine literary "areas" (not all of which must be taught), two could possibly include GDR literature: "Pre- and Post-War Literature (World War II)" and "Important Authors of the Twentieth Century."[46] The curriculum suggests approaching these areas via topics such as "social criticism and political literature" and lists many suggested texts, which include both FRG and GDR authors.[47] Interestingly, Rhineland-Palatinate includes several GDR texts in its sample semester-by-semester plans.[48] As we see with these four states, including GDR literature as "optional" in state curricula leaves a broad field for the likelihood of inclusion.

Another quarter of all federal states (Bremen, Hesse, Saxony-Anhalt, and Schleswig-Holstein) include GDR literature in their curricula in a more tenuous way. Unlike the "optional" status it occupies in the previous group of states, GDR literature here is often simply included in book lists focusing on specific topics. Hesse includes the most GDR works in its many "text suggestions" on topics ranging from "socialization and upbringing" to "effects of Classicism and Romanticism."[49] Saxony-Anhalt includes a book list of "suggested readings for home and school for grades 5-12", which is sorted by genre and includes GDR texts in each category.[50] Schleswig-Holstein and Bremen devote the least space in this group to GDR literature, including Wolf in a list of fourteen "authors viewed as important" and Biermann as a possible author for the category "poetry and politics."[51] Both the Biermann and Wolf examples are the only GDR authors mentioned in either curriculum.[52] It becomes clear that the importance attached to GDR literature varies within this group, ranging from a meaningful level of inclusion in topical readings to near omission.

The remaining six states (Baden-Württemberg, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, North Rhine-Westphalia, Saarland, and Thuringia) make no mention of GDR literature. To some extent, this is not surprising, as Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and Thuringia include no required epochs in their curricula. Baden-Württemberg, Hamburg, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Saarland all include some specific required content, ranging from

Hamburg's previously mentioned "literature of the twentieth/twenty-first century" to North Rhine-Westphalia's focus for the first semester of grade 13 on "experiences of alienation in novels from the epochal break of the nineteenth/twentieth century as well as the time from 1945 to the present."[53] In all of these states, though, GDR literature runs a risk of being overlooked in the classroom because it is not required, recommended, or even mentioned in state curricula.

Comparing states in the former GDR and FRG also provides some perhaps surprising insight. Just looking at the former GDR, two states include GDR literature as required (Saxony) or optional (Brandenburg), one mentions it only in a suggested book list (Saxony-Anhalt), and two do not mention it at all (Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and Thuringia).[54] Therefore, students in only 20 percent of former GDR states and 10 percent of former FRG states are guaranteed exposure to GDR literature in school. Overall, 40 percent of states in both regions make no mention whatsoever of GDR literature in their curricula. The vast majority of students will experience GDR literature only if their individual school or teacher decides to include it.

Conclusion

So, does it matter if students are exposed to GDR literature? My answer is a clear yes, for several reasons. First, the GDR should not be reduced to historical facts. If students only encounter the GDR in history classes–as many of them do–their understanding of the country (and the times) is likely to be limited to politics and systemic changes. Literature reveals another side of culture; it is both a reaction to and a catalyst for social and political change. Not all issues can best be addressed via politics and history because empirical study is neither designed nor well-suited for exploring the emotions and personal experiences of individuals, which also contribute to a period's "cultural context."[55] Literature connects institutions and individuals, politics and personal experience. Secondly, this richer understanding of the GDR then offers an opportunity for students to question and deepen their understanding of the FRG as well. Particularly as both Germanys often defined themselves in comparison to the "other" Germany, insight into the reality of the GDR provides insight into the contrasting reality of the FRG.[56] If tomorrow's young adults are to contribute to and thrive in society, they must have a full and rich conception of the opportunities, struggles, and dreams of recent generations. Lastly, GDR literature can and should be valued for its own sake–not just as a message from a failed socialist experi-

ment. All too often in textbooks, the implication is that FRG literature should be viewed as "Literature" while GDR literature is reduced to "political" literature or mere propaganda.[57] This does a great disservice to GDR literature, whose creative, aesthetic, and thematic strengths deserve recognition right alongside literature from the West.

Leaving the decision about GDR literature inclusion levels to individual teachers or schools is far too great of a risk to run. Schools today are expected to play an ever-expanding role in the education and upbringing of a country's youth. With so many demands on instructional time, including the transition (back) to an 8-year Gymnasium, topics that are not required or strongly supported are likely to be ignored and omitted. Unlike the "classics" of the literature curriculum, which continue to be taught not only for their literary value but also because teachers, administrators, and educational policymakers are familiar with them, GDR literature truly risks being left out of the classroom if it is not codified in state and/or federal content standards.

One could argue that West German literature can fill this role–after all, current German culture draws much more heavily on pre 1989 FRG culture than on GDR culture. But FRG literature and culture really only make sense when held up alongside GDR literature and culture. (The opposite is true as well.) While the literature of the GDR was much more obviously the target of governmental policy manipulation, it often responded to the same events and issues as FRG literature. Only by studying the literature of both Germanys can we truly appreciate the literature of either and also avoid the impression that West German literature is "the" German literature. When curricula omit GDR literature in favor of (or along with) FRG literature, they limit student understanding of the FRG and Germany today. This consequence is unintended, but it is unfortunate nonetheless.

It is not completely clear why so many states downplay or completely ignore GDR literature in their German curricula. The wording of the federal testing standards is one likely reason; if the highest level of education policy does not require a topic, states often follow suit. Familiarity is another possibility–the majority of German teachers and educational policymakers were raised and studied in West Germany, so they are more familiar with West German literature. Another possibility is the growing focus on student competencies over specific content. State curricula devote space to describing what students will do rather than what content they will do it with. Regardless of the reasons, the consequence is that fourteen of sixteen federal states require no GDR literature for Gymnasium students. The "selective tradition" of German education is potentially leading to a loss of GDR literature in the *Oberstufe*, which would eventually lead to a loss for us all.

Elizabeth Priester Steding is Associate Professor of German at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. She has taught at the high school and college level in both the United States and Germany. Her research interests include (post) GDR literature and culture as well as textbook research.

Notes

1. Michael W. Apple, "The Politics of Official Knowledge: Does a National Curriculum Make Sense?" *Teachers College Record* 95, no. 2 (1993): 222. Emphasis in original.
2. The *Oberstufe* is the last two to three years of the college-preparatory Gymnasium, generally grades 10/11 to 12/13.
3. The *Einheitliche Prüfungsanforderungen* (EPA) (last updated in 2002) will be replaced with the *Bildungsstandards für die allgemeine Hochschulreife* (Educational Standards for the General Qualification for University Entrance) for the subjects German, Math, English, and French. The *Bildungsstandards* will serve as the basis for *Abitur* questions beginning with the 2016/2017 school year, so many state curricula are being or recently have been revised.
4. Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, "Einheitliche Prüfungsanforderungen in der Abiturprüfung Geschichte," 10 February 2005; available at http://www.kmk.org/dokumentation/veroeffentlichungen-beschluesse/bildung-schule/allgemeine-bildung.html#c7532, accessed 2 May 2014. All translations from the German are the author's own.
5. Ibid., 3.
6. Ibid., 4.
7. The term *Zeitgeschichte* (contemporary history) does not have a set definition. It can be viewed as the experiences of "contemporaries" still alive today, resulting in an ever-changing timeframe. In Germany it was often seen as the period since World War I; in recent years that has been changing to World War II.
8. See pages 17, 20, and 43 of the history EPA.
9. In contrast, there are no sample questions about GDR literature in the German standards, and very few sample questions covering post 1945 literature. Most literary sample questions focus on authors such as Goethe, Lessing, and Brecht. Contemporary texts in the sample questions are largely represented by nonfiction texts (newspaper articles, reference works, etc.).
10. Benjamin Wüst, "Die DDR im Schulbuch: Eine Fußnote der Geschichte?" Deutsche Welle, 18 May 2009; available at http://www.dw.de/die-ddr-im-schulbuch-eine-fupercentC3percent9Fnote-der-geschichte/a-4248923, accessed 1 May 2014.
11. At least five states specifically mention coverage of GDR history in grades 9/10 and again in the *Oberstufe*: Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Hesse, Saxony, and Saxony-Anhalt.
12. Wüst (see note 10).
13. "Handreichung des Schulauschusses der Kultusministerkonferenz: Darstellung Deutschlands im Unterricht" (28/29 September), quoted in Ulrich Arnswald, "Zum Stellenwert des Themas DDR-Geschichte in den Lehrplänen der deutschen Bundesländer: Eine Expertise im Auftrag der Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur," March 2004, 51–57; available at http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/ausserschulische-bildungsarbeit-1183.html.

14. Wüst (see note 10).
15. Arnswald (see note 13), 5.
16. Some studies question the level of student knowledge of GDR history. Monika Deutz-Schroeder and Klaus Schroeder, *Soziales Paradies oder Stasi-Staat? Das DDR-Bild von Schülern–ein Ost-West Vergleich* (Stamried, 2008) and Monika Deutz-Schroeder and Klaus Schroeder, *Oh, wie schön ist die DDR: Kommentare und Materialien zu den Ergebnissen einer Studie* (Schwalbach am Taunus, 2009). While perhaps the best-known study, *Soziales Paradies* has also been criticized by many scholars for its overly rigid definition of "correct" answers and its openly ideological tone. See Martin Sabrow, "Macht über das Wissen. DDR-Geschichte im Unterricht," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 4 February 2009.
17. Lower Saxony is the one (possible) exception. It includes a required unit "Interpretations of the German Self-Concept in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century," which has an associated optional unit of "German Self-Concept after 1945". While it would certainly be a logical choice to include GDR history, it is not specifically and deliberately included in the curriculum.
18. Oliver Igel, "Die Friedliche Revolution in den Lehrplänen" (Stiftung Aufarbeitung, 2007), 27; available at http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/ausserschulische-bildungsarbeit-1183.html.
19. Ibid., 1.
20. Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, "Einheitliche Prüfungsanforderungen in der Abiturprüfung Deutsch," 24 May 2002, 3; available at http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/1989/1989_12_01-EPA-Deutsch.pdf, accessed 7 May 2014. Emphasis in original. Similar language is found in the preamble of many state curricula.
21. Ibid., 5.
22. Ibid., 3.
23. Ibid., 5.
24. Ibid., 6.
25. Ibid.
26. While contemporary (young adult) literature is very popular in *Sekundarstufe I* classrooms, literature instruction in the *Oberstufe* is largely driven by the *Abitur*. Of the eleven states with required 2014 *Abitur* reading lists, texts written before 1945 appear four times as often as postwar texts. Of the postwar texts, approximately 20 percent are by GDR authors. For a useful list, see http://www.koenigs-erlaeuterungen.de/schueler-und-eltern/abi-pflichtlektueren-2014.
    See also Anika V. Greve-Dierfeld, "Moderne Literatur kommt im Deutschunterricht kaum vor," *Schwäbisches Tagblatt*, 4 February 2013; available at http://www.tagblatt.de/Home/nachrichten/nachrichten-newsticker_artikel,-Moderne-Literatur-kommt-im-Deutschunterricht-kaum-vor-_arid,202909.html., accessed 2 May 2014.
27. State German curricula are all available online. Links are current as of 5 May 2014. Ministerium für Kultus, Jugend und Sport des Landes Baden-Württemberg, "Bildungsstandards für Deutsch: Gymnasium - Klassen 6, 8, 10, Kursstufe," 2004; available at http://www.bildung-staerkt-menschen.de/service/downloads/Bildungsstandards/Gym/Gym_D_bs.pdf; Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Unterricht und Kultus, "Deutsch 12," Staatsinstitut für Schulqualität und Bildungsforschung, 2004; available at http://www.isb-gym8-lehrplan.de/contentserv/3.1.neu/g8.de/index.php?StoryID=26540; Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Sport Berlin, "Rahmenlehrplan für die Gymnasiale Oberstufe: Deutsch," 2006; available at http://www.berlin.de/imperia/md/content/senbildung/unterricht/lehrplaene/sek2_deutsch.pdf; Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport des Landes Brandenburg, "Vorläufiger Rahmenlehrplan für den Unterricht in der Gymnasialen Oberstufe im Land Brandenburg: Deutsch," 2011; available at http://bildungsserver.berlin-brandenburg.de/curricula_gost_bb.html; Die Senatorin für Bildung und Wissenschaft, Freie Hansestadt Bremen, "Deutsch: Bildungsplan für die Gymnasiale Oberstufe: Qualifikationsphase," 2008; available at http://www.lis.bremen.de/sixcms/

detail.php?gsid=bremen56.c.16698.de; Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg, Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung, "Rahmenplan Deutsch: Bildungsplan Gymnasiale Oberstufe," 2009; available at http://www.hamburg.de/contentblob/1475198/data/deutsch-gyo.pdf; Hessisches Kultusministerium, "Lehrplan Deutsch: Gymnasialer Bildungsgang, Jahrgangsstufen 5G Bis 9G und Gymnasiale Oberstufe," 2010; available at http://verwaltung.hessen.de/irj/HKM_Internet?uid=3b43019a-8cc6-1811-f3ef-ef91921321b2; Ministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur des Landes Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, "Kerncurriculum für die Qualifikationsphase der Gymnasialen Oberstufe: Deutsch," 2006; available at http://www.bildung-mv.de/schueler/schule-und-unterricht/faecher-und-rahmenplaene/rahmenplaene-an-allgemeinbildenden-schulen/deutsch/; Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium, "Kerncurriculum für das Gymnasium–Gymnasiale Oberstufe, die Gesamtschule - Gymnasiale Oberstufe, das Fachgymnasium, das Abendgymnasium, das Kolleg: Deutsch," 2009; available at http://db2.nibis.de/1db/cuvo/ausgabe/index.php?mat1=16; Ministerium für Schule und Weiterbildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, "Richtlinien und Lehrpläne für die Sekundarstufe II–Gymnasium/Gesamtschule in Nordrhein-Westfalen: Deutsch," 1999; available at http://www.standardsicherung.schulministerium.nrw.de/lehrplaene/lehrplannavigator-s-ii/gymnasiale-oberstufe/. Please note that North Rhine-Westphalia will adopt a new curriculum starting with the 2014/2015 school year; Ministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Weiterbildung Rheinland-Pfalz, "Lehrplan Deutsch: Grund- Und Leistungsfach, Jahrgangsstufen 11 bis 13 der Gymnasialen Oberstufe (Mainzer Studienstufe)," 1998; available at http://lehrplaene.bildung-rp.de/lehrplaene-nach-faechern.html?tx_abdownloads_pi1[action]=getviewcatalog&tx_abdownloads_pi1[category_uid]=87&tx_abdownloads_pi1[cid]=5786&cHash=7b53d0a76559d1f55651c1b22c8100e7; Ministerium für Bildung, Familie, Frauen und Kultur, "Gymnasiale Oberstufe Saar (GOS): Lehrplan für das Fach Deutsch (G-Kurs Und E-Kurs)," February 2008; available at http://www.saarland.de/7058.htm; Sächsisches Staatsministerium für Kultus, "Lehrplan Gymnasium: Deutsch," 2004; available at http://www.schule.Saxony.de/lpdb/; Kultusministerium des Landes Saxony-Anhalt, "Rahmenrichtlinien Gymnasium: Deutsch Schuljahrgänge 5-12 (angepasste Fassung gemäß Achtem Gesetz zur Änderung des Schulgesetzes des Landes Saxony-Anhalt vom 27.2.2003)," 2003; available at http://www.bildung-lsa.de/pool/RRL_Lehrplaene/deutgyma.pdf; Ministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur des Landes Schleswig-Holstein, "Lehrplan für die Sekundarstufe II Gymnasium, Gesamtschule, Fachgymnasium: Deutsch," 2002; available at http://lehrplan.lernnetz.de/index.php?wahl=117; Thüringer Ministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur, "Lehrplan für den Erwerb der Allgemeinen Hochschulreife: Deutsch," 2011; available at https://www.schulportal-thueringen.de/web/guest/media/detail?tspi=1394, accessed 5 May 2014.

28. The fifteen pages of Baden-Württemberg's German curriculum are for grades 6, 8, 10, and the *Kursstufe* (*Oberstufe*). Information specific to the *Kursstufe* is limited to two pages. The more than 150 pages of the North Rhine-Westphalia curriculum cover only the *Oberstufe*.
29. For readers interested in knowing more about the shift to competency-based pedagogy and its effects on teaching and curricula, see Daniela A. Frickel, Clemens Kammler and Gerhard Rupp, *Literaturdidaktik im Zeichen von Kompetenzenorientierung und Empirie: Perspektiven und Probleme* (Stuttgart, 2012) or Daniel Scholl, *Sind die traditionellen Lehrpläne überflüssig? Zur lehrplantheoretischen Problematik von Bildungsstandards und Kernlehrplänen* (Wiesbaden, 2009).
30. Thuringia (see note 27), 70.
31. Hesse (see note 27), 68; Berlin (see note 27), 23; Brandenburg (see note 27), 23; Rhineland-Palatinate (see note 27), 32.
32. Hamburg (see note 27), 21.
33. Saarland lists the requirement of twentieth-century literature, but nothing specifically post 1945.

34. Obviously contemporary literature can also be defined as post 1945 literature. I am using the term "post 1945 literature" to refer to literature from the years 1945-1989.
35. "European culture is characterized by civilization ruptures of the greatest magnitude (World Wars, the Holocaust)," Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, "Einheitliche Prüfungsanforderungen in der Abiturprüfung Geschichte" (see note 4), 34.
36. Schleswig-Holstein (see note 27), 32.
37. Some research suggests that (West) German students also read little to no GDR literature outside of school. See Klaus-Michael Bogdal and Bert Bresgen, "Vorbei Und Vergessen? Eine Umfrage über die Rezeption von DDR-Literatur bei Westdeutschen StudentInnen," *Der Deutschunterricht* 48, no. 2 (1996): 85-92; see also Klaus-Michael Bogdal and Bert Bresgen, "Vorbei Und Vergessen? Eine Umfrage über die Rezeption von DDR-Literatur bei Westdeutschen StudentInnen (Teil 2)," *Der Deutschunterricht* 48, no. 3 (1996): 49-58.
38. Bavaria (see note 27).
39. Saxony (see note 27), 41.
40. Ibid., 40.
41. This is, however, problematic in other ways, as it means that students may not read any 1945-1989 literature.
42. Brandenburg (see note 27), 22; Berlin (see note 27), 21.
43. Lower Saxony (see note 27), 39.
44. Ibid., 40.
45. Ibid., 43, 57. Both of these are *Wahlpflichtmodule*–optional compulsory modules. This means that teachers must cover a certain number of said topics, but they may choose which ones. This is somewhat reminiscent of the situation in Berlin and Brandenburg. Lower Saxony also includes GDR literature in book suggestions for the *Wahlpflichtmodule*.
46. Rhineland-Palatinate (see note 27), 32.
47. Ibid., 54.
48. Ibid., 71-107.
49. Hesse (see note 27), 52, 58.
50. Saxony-Anhalt (see note 27), 163-170.
51. Schleswig-Holstein (see note 27), 33; and Bremen (see note 27), 10.
52. Bertolt Brecht is also included in the "authors viewed as important" list (and in many curricula). I have not included him here as a GDR author because of his position in the (chronological) list, which ends as follows: Franz Kafka, Bertolt Brecht, Heinrich Böll, Ingeborg Bachmann, Christa Wolf, Günter Grass. This suggests that Brecht is being positioned more as a pre-1945 author than as a GDR author. While Brecht is closely connected with literature in the GDR, German textbooks more often than not choose to include his earlier works instead.
53. North Rhine-Westphalia (see note 27), 63.
54. Because the curriculum for Berlin obviously incorporates both halves of the city, I have not included it as specifically GDR or FRG.
55. Schleswig-Holstein (see note 27), 32.
56. Due to time limitations in the classroom, students admittedly may only gain a glimpse into GDR literature and culture. Several state curricula include suggestions of how many hours to spend on topics; they range from approximately ten (Rheinland-Pfalz–"Pre- and Postwar Literature [World War II]) to forty (Saxony–"German-Language Literature since 1945"); other states focus on one epoch per semester (Berlin, Brandenburg, and Hessen–"Twentieth/Twenty-first century literature").
57. For further discussion, see Elizabeth Priester Steding, "What Stories Are Being Told? Two Case Studies of (Grand) Narratives from and of the German Democratic Republic in Current *Oberstufe* Textbooks," *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 6, no. 1 (2014): 42-58.