Politics as Usual?
Civics in Education

By Elizabeth Keroack, MASCD President

In the early 1990s I joined educators from around the country at a Filenes Foundation Institute on Writing, Thinking, and Citizenship Education at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. We worked together to explore innovative ways to revitalize civic learning so that we might “enhance motivation for the future participation in the civic process and pave the way for the development of civic literacy” (Institute publicity).

Experts at the Institute spoke eloquently about the dearth of civic consciousness in America; about the role of reading, writing, and speaking in establishing civic identity; and about the effect of a civically conscious population upon the character of democracy. What was especially provocative was a collection of the following civic discussion points—at least one updated appropriately—shared with us for the purpose of stimulating our thinking:

- In ancient Greece, proof and evidence came from the political arena into the school; in contemporary society, proof and evidence have moved from the school into the political arena.
- Documents like the Declaration of Independence and Gettysburg Address were written at a very high level of readability. If only 40% of grade 12 students in the United States are adept readers (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2002 results), how can these documents be successfully studied?
- Research indicates that forty percent (40%) of a population must be literate if a country is to become an industrial force.
- The Regan landslide, as it was coined in 1980, was only made up of 33% of the popular vote.
- Americans, with a growing lack of civic engagement, seek to find great leaders to “save” the country.
- Dictatorship is more efficient than democracy.

Today these discussion points, whether or not we agree with them, still resonate as a call to action. Surely we can each confirm our engagement in civic life in a multiplicity of ways: we can call our Mayor to laud her for repaving our street; we can write our Congressman or Senator to protest the high cost of health care; we can read presidential election literature to make an informed choice about candidates. These actions are in the realm of our personal civic reality and responsibility.

But what about the civic responsibility inherent in our roles as educators? To discharge such responsibility, we must first identify those curriculum standards in our programs and classrooms that contribute to civic awareness; then we must establish a deliberate connection between those standards and students’ understanding of how meeting them can lead to productive, meaningful lives.

Clearly, there is power in the realization that each of us has the potential to make the world a better place in which to live—and what better place to harness that potential than in our schools?
Do Our Schools Mirror the Principles of Our Democratic Society?

Turning the Political Tides: Education for Citizenship

By Susan Wheltle

Doonesbury's Alex
In runup to the 2004 presidential election, Alex, the media savvy teenager in Gary Trudeau's comic strip, Doonesbury, did her best for political participation. In January she rallied her middle school classmates to the phones for a Deanathon and by August she was luring Ralph Nader supporters into discussions on Internet chatrooms.¹ Knowledgeable about government, active in the political process, and willing to enlist others, Alex has many traits sought by the proponents of civics education.

Are Most Students as Politically Engaged as Alex?
In a word, no. And, sadly, neither are many of their elders. Concern about American youth's disconnection from the democratic process has stimulated a rash of demographic surveys, position papers, and voter registration drives by groups as diverse at the Republican and Democratic Parties and MTV’s Rock the Vote.² Courting the votes of younger Americans makes sense: in 2004 almost 25% of potential voters – about 43,000,000 citizens – were between 18 and 30.

In the election of 2000 (2004 results not yet available), participation by registered voters under age 24 averaged 42% while 72% of those above 24 voted.³ The decline in youth voting poses a long-term problem for the political health of the country and is symptomatic of an overall decrease in newspaper readership, awareness of public affairs, and membership in civic organizations. Judging from the results of a survey conducted in 2003, it is more important than ever to have politically engaged characters such as Alex play a prominent role in popular culture and in real life. In the 2003 report, Citizenship: A Challenge for All Generations, Karl Kurtz, Alan Rosenthal, and Cliff Zukin contrasted the civic knowledge and attitudes of 15 to 26 year olds with those of respondents over 26. Their conclusions were:

…Young people do not understand the ideals of citizenship, they are disengaged from the political process, they lack the knowledge necessary for effective self-government, and their appreciation and support of American democracy is limited. The older generations have failed to teach the ideals of citizenship to the next generation. But there is hope. The report provides new evidence that civic education makes a big difference in the attitudes towards citizenship, knowledge, and civic engagement of young people.⁴

What About Massachusetts Youth Voter Participation?
As the state that considers itself the birthplace of the American Revolution and that fought to ensure representation in government, Massachusetts currently has a less than stellar record in youth voting. Consider these statistics:

• Voting participation by 18 to 24 year olds in MA declined by 16% between 1972 (the year the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18) and 2000.

• 47% of the Commonwealth's 18 to 24 year olds voted in the 2000 national election, thus putting our state (tied with Illinois) in 10th place, behind Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Minnesota, Mississippi, North Dakota, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

• Massachusetts ranked 11th in the 18 to 24 year old voting rate (23%) in the 2002 mid-term election.

• There is a bit of a silver lining, at least for Democrats: while young voters nationally accounted for just under 10% of the Democratic primary voters in 2004, the number of young voters in that election increased in Massachusetts.⁵
How Can Schools Foster Citizenship?
For starters, the information on the websites of the Center for Civic Education is required reading, especially the standards for civic education at [http://www.civiced.org/civitasexec.html](http://www.civiced.org/civitasexec.html), as well as survey reports and position papers at the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE for short, [http://www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)). Its 2003 position paper, *The Civic Mission of Schools*, describes the goal of civics education as creating citizens who:

- are informed and thoughtful; have a grasp and an appreciation of history and the fundamental processes of American democracy; have an understanding and awareness of public and community issues; have the ability to obtain information, think critically, and enter into dialogue among others with different perspectives;

- participate in their community through membership in or contributions to organizations working to address an array of cultural, social, political, and religious interests and beliefs;

- act politically by having the skills, knowledge, and commitment needed to accomplish public purposes, such as group problem solving, public speaking, petitioning, protesting, and voting;

- have moral and civic virtues such as concern for the rights and welfare of others, social responsibility, tolerance and respect and belief in the capacity to make a difference.6

Authors of *The Civic Mission of Schools* suggest that there should be more discussion of current, local, and national issues in classrooms, more service-learning linked to the political process, greater student participation in school governance, and more extracurricular activities that involve students in their schools and communities.

State Policies In Massachusetts
The Massachusetts General Laws (Chapter 71, Section 2) stipulate that “American history and civics” be taught “as required subjects” but do not outline a specific curriculum. While there is no statewide requirement for a specific civics course, the standards of the Center for Civic Education served as the basis for the relevant standards in the 2003 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Science.7 Local, state, and national history and government (along with geography and economics) are addressed in the standards for grade 3, 4, 5, and for United States History I and II, which contain a set of civics standards. A history and social science component of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) at grades 5, 7, and 10/11 is currently under development. The assessments will focus on American government, history, geography, and economics in grades 5 and at the high school level, where passing the assessment is planned to become a statewide requirement for high school graduation.

Recent State Activities to Promote Citizenship
Many of the position papers on civic education point out that students need opportunities to use their civic knowledge in a variety of ways. The Massachusetts Department of Education supports a Statewide Student Advisory Council which elects a student to serve as a voting member on the Board of Education, and collaborates with the Legislature on an annual Student Government Day at the State House.8 It also supports grant programs that emphasize service-learning linked to the curriculum framework standards. Notable among these are the Living Democracy grants, a New England project linking service-learning to the standards for civics education.9

State Senator Richard Moore has sponsored two conferences on civic education in educator preparation programs at the State House. In 2003 he, representatives of the Massachusetts Department of Education and the We the People…program of the Center for Civic Education, teachers and administrators attended the first of five national Congressional Conferences on Civic Learning and Engagement in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the Alliance for Representative Democracy (comprised of the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Center on Congress at Indiana University and the Center for Civic Education). The delegation plans, in the years to come, to better engage Massachusetts youth in the political enterprise that is our legacy.

Making Time for Democracy
Remember Alex? While she could spend her time on private concerns, she chooses involvement in public life instead. More than 2400 years ago, Pericles spoke with pride about the characteristics that distinguished the citizens of Athens from those of other city-states:
Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. …Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well: even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics – this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say he has no business here at all.10

Like those citizens, we can make it our business to shape government, and as teachers to shape our students’ attitudes towards their role in society. It’s up to us – the people – to help democracy flourish or let it languish. Let’s hope we make the right choice.

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3 Researchers Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina, and Krista Jenkins christened the generation born after 1976 the “DotNets” because these citizens “(came) of age along with the Internet. Information has always been virtually costless and universally available to them; technology cheap and easily mastered; community as much a digital place of common interest as a shared physical space.” The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait, College Park, MD: The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2002, http://www.civicyouth.org.


5 The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, http://www.civicyouth.org/quick/youth_voting.htm

6 The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The Civic Mission of Schools. College Park, MD: School of Public Affairs, the University of Maryland, 2003, 4.


8 See http://www.doe.mass.edu/hssss/program/advisory.html.

9 For information on grants and other projects, see the Massachusetts Department of Education Community Service Learning site at http://www.doe.mass.edu/csl.

Amidst Pressing Academic Accountability, Can Civics Education be a Priority, as Well?

Democracy as a Contact Sport: The Humanities Scholars’ Collaborative

By Gale Nigrosh and James Hedlund

In 1995, a time marked by the proliferation of academic programs for high school students excelling in math and science, Millbury Public Schools Superintendent David Roach lamented to a group of area history teachers that little was being offered in the humanities for high achieving students. Out of that discussion came a new paradigm for teaching American history—the Humanities Scholars’ Collaborative (HSC). Its purpose is to bring high school students together, to engage them in the rigors of being introspective, informed, and involved citizens. Author David McCullough quotes from a letter that John Adams wrote in 1807 to U.S. Attorney General Richard Rush about the task facing the citizenry of the newly created nation, “We must learn to know ourselves, to esteem ourselves and to respect ourselves.”

We hold the same goal for HSC students.

The HSC offers highly motivated high school students a unique yearlong program structured around a theme in American history/American culture. During the year, students spend a day each at four different college campuses, beginning the day’s visit with a presentation by a panel of three professors who address the theme from their different humanities disciplines.

**Collaborative Participants**

The Humanities Scholars’ Collaborative truly reflects a collaborative enterprise. Presently, nine Worcester county public high schools participate in HSC. Each school (Algonquin Regional, Auburn, Worcester, Grafton, Millbury, Northborough/Southborough, Northbridge, Sutton, and Wachusett Regional) sends ten to fifteen juniors/seniors who have been selected by their teachers after completing an application and an interview; these students participate in all of the HSC sessions throughout the school year. (In one school, students receive academic credit.) Four colleges/universities have been with HSC since its inception: Assumption College, Clark University, College of the Holy Cross, and Worcester State College. The University of Massachusetts Medical School and Becker College also participated when their professors brought expertise to the year’s topic. Participating museums include: the Worcester Art Museum, the American Antiquarian Society, and the Worcester Historical Museum.

HSC costs have always been absorbed by participating school districts that have responded to the HSC as a valuable program worth supporting, even in the worst of monetary times. The Blackstone Valley Collaborative provides a small stipend for program coordinator Jim Hedlund, who coordinates the year’s events and works with professors in choosing appropriate subject matter and reading materials. In her role as Worcester Public Schools Development Specialist for Higher Education and Business Partnerships, Dr. Gale Nigrosh works to identify and solicit humanities professors who understand the personality of a high school audience. Each of the colleges provides free venues and lunch and professors volunteer their time and expertise. Museum visits are also free. Teachers, who serve as panel moderators and group discussion leaders, are able to use their participation as part of their professional development. Funding for buses and teacher substitutes is provided by individual school districts.

**Exciting Learning Opportunities**

The Humanities Scholars’ Collaborative offers students opportunities to enhance their studies in American history and American culture. HSC applicants begin as a self-selected group, some astoundingly knowledgeable about U.S. history (last year, one HSC student named Adlai Stevenson among Americans she most admired). Many are as mature as college students and are often well-spoken, sometimes opinionated, and are typically quite able to hold their own with college professors (as
professors themselves have often remarked. They work with and learn from their peers at other high schools, some with ethnic populations quite different from their own. They visit the region’s renowned museums and historical sites and they taste life on different college campuses, at a time in their own lives when college applications loom.

College/university faculty panelists represent the spectrum of humanities disciplines: history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, government and international relations, English, foreign languages and literatures, visual and performing arts. Dr. Gale Nigrosh, who develops Higher Education Partnerships for the Worcester Public Schools, has arranged faculty panels for the HSC since its inception. Panelists have included college presidents, provosts, deans, and department chairs. Each presenter speaks to the year’s theme, challenging students to think critically and creatively. Professors show high school students the varied ways that “specialists” approach a topic in American history, and students see that college professors are themselves more approachable than they may have imagined.

Over the year, twelve professors address the same theme differently. HSC students and teachers are invited to attend related campus presentations, special programs and lectures. The HSC encourages

### College Visits

In preparation for class sessions, professors assign students a reading or related activity. At Holy Cross last fall, Claudia Ross, Ph.D. (Modern Languages and Literatures), spoke about how the Chinese view Americans since the opening of Beijing’s first McDonald’s restaurant, which Prof. Ross patronizes on frequent trips to China. She assigned the reading, “McDonald’s in Beijing: The Localization of America” by Yunziang Yan, which recounts McDonald’s huge success and how it quickly became a popular destination—air conditioned, clean and well lit. Steve Vineberg, Ph.D. (Theatre), a nationally known film critic, asked HSC students to watch a film, choosing Bill Forsyth’s “Local Hero” to spark discussion of how stereo-

### Theme Selection

At the end of the school year, HSC teachers select a theme for the year ahead. Some themes address current events—local, regional or national. Others are suggested by questions raised in discussions. The theme “What is Heroic?” (2000-01) followed the horrific Cold Storage Warehouse fire (December, 1999) that claimed the lives of six Worcester firefighters. Last year, 2003-2004, “Eyes on America Abroad” responded to foreign expressions of anti-Americanism brought on by the U.S. role in Iraq. (See blue box for complete chronology of HSC themes.)

### Chronology of Humanities Scholars’ Collaborative Themes

- Media: Impact on our Lives
- Conflict and Resolution: Personal, Local, National, International
- 1st Amendment: Rights and Responsibilities
- The Color Line in America
- Who is an American?
- What is Heroic?
- Crime & Punishment
- Coming to America: Immigrants and Immigration
- Eyes on America Abroad
- The American Dream: Different Generations, Different Aspirations

The Humanities Scholars’ Collaborative encourages students to be knowledgeable citizens, to accept responsibility—individually and collectively—for knowing the nation’s past, and to recognize that they will shape its future.
Americans a model for their own struggle against the British.

Like musical conductors, college professors articulate their own scholarly approach to the year’s theme. Last year, Clark University Prof. Dorothy Kaufmann Ph.D. (Foreign Languages and Literatures), surveyed French high school students about their views of Americans. When asked, “Who is the American you most admire?” six of forty French students answered, “Michael Moore” (prompting HSC students to continue correspondence with their French counterparts). At Assumption College, professors spoke of how U.S. foreign policy has caused foreigners to harbor negative feelings toward Americans. One of the HSC’s long-time supporters, John McClymer, Ph.D. (History), traced these negative feelings from the current day back to President McKinley’s “White Man’s Burden.” At Becker College, Provost Bruce Stronach, Ph.D., an educator in Japan and China for seventeen years, prepared a slide show demonstrating how Japan and China have often held opposing views of America at different points in their long histories.

Additional Program Activities

Student discussions follow the faculty panel. Teachers lead student discussions in small, cross-district groups, referencing the readings and professors’ presentations. The format of the discussions varies and may include reaction to a survey or a focused inquiry such as, “Which one of the presidential candidates will best lead the American people in their pursuit of American Dreams?” In addition, students keep individual reaction journals, which may suggest essay topics, critiques, or research papers/projects for further investigation at school. The intention is for students to react to the day’s events in a variety of ways, but always including an introspective analysis. As a result, discussions and journal writing serve as a critical link between the topics presented by professors and their high school studies. HSC teachers often share materials and information from the day’s events with colleagues and students when they return to their schools.

Concluding the morning’s activities, representatives from the host site’s college admissions address HSC students. Colleges see this as a great marketing opportunity, as many of the HSC high school students have already begun their college searches, and the others soon will. After lunch at the college (the cafeteria is always a favorite stop), students either tour the campus or visit a local museum or historical site to follow-up on the theme. At the Worcester Art Museum last year, for example, HSC students toured the European galleries to study how artists abroad have pictured America.

Presentation Night Celebration

Presentation Night, held at one of the HSC high schools in May, is the culminating celebration for the year. At this event, attended by administrators, college representatives, students and their families, and community representatives, program leaders pull the year’s learning together through a summary of the twelve professor presentations from the year and provide essential ties to the overarching theme of the year’s learning. Then, each school presents a brief project or program also highlighting the year’s theme. Last spring, each of the nine schools gave a video or PowerPoint presentation featuring a person from their community speaking to the theme, “Eyes on America Abroad.” An HSC team from Millbury High School inter-
to continue studying the topic and classroom teachers often incorporate various materials and learning from these efforts into their classes in the sending schools.

Student Response
Students complete a detailed questionnaire at the conclusion of the program. They respond to questions asking how the HSC influenced their understanding of the theme, their ability to make connections to the high school curriculum, their motivations to continue learning about the topic, and their outlook on America. They are also asked to comment on professors’ presentations and readings, on teachers’ discussion sessions, and on college and museum tours and visits, as well as the program’s overall impact. What they say would make John Adams hopeful for the future of the nation, no longer new, but creating itself anew with each generation.

Typical of his HSC peers, a student from Algonquin Regional High wrote:

“I was able to…widen my knowledge on how many ways the United States is viewed. The professor lectures backed up the facts of American history that I was learning. Thank you for the experience.”

Students quite consistently rave about the HSC, encourage their friends to join, and comment on how helpful it was in preparing them for the college scene. In fact, admissions’ directors at participating colleges often tell us that many of our HSC students submit applications to their schools based on their visits during the program. Articles about the collaborative have appeared in local and school newspapers, and at Wachusett Regional School District, the collaborative appears in their booklet of titled, “Outstanding Programs.” In fact, in this time of budget slashing, the program has grown from five to nine schools. People like Superintendent David Roach support creativity, innovation, and hard work and have supported these HSC efforts for ten years.

The Collaborative’s Success
The Humanities Scholars’ Collaborative is a melting pot of ideas, people and places. High school teachers and administrators, college/university professors and admissions people, parents, community leaders and the HSC students themselves hail the program as invaluable. HSC teachers note that students often mention the HSC in college applications. Project Coordinator Jim Hedlund speaks from a decade of guiding the HSC:

“To me, the success of the collaborative resonates in a number of ways: watching students react to a sudden epiphany while struggling to understand a difficult passage, trying to figure out how a professor will develop a new thematic perspective, speaking to students from other high schools whose ideas are an antithesis to their own, confronting their futures as college students, accepting responsibility to engage in the democratic process by being introspective, informed, involved.”

Do students learn about civic engagement from the Humanities Scholars’ Collaborative? Absolutely. They learn that democracy is a “contact” sport—they learn this in their history classes and they learn this from their very first encounter with the Humanities Scholars’ Collaborative. The conclusion of the HSC mission statement states, “Overall, the program’s design encourages students to be knowledgeable citizens and to accept responsibility in shaping the future of the United States.” The student questionnaire asks students to articulate how they will “accept responsibility.” Historically, students have responded by saying that they plan to join political action groups to work toward improving the democratic system for all citizens; they will continue to learn about the theme for self-edification and to engage others in dialogue; they will be better citizens by respecting the rights of others. Civic engagement is critical in our society and the Humanities Scholars’ Collaborative is one way to unify and build upon this shared commitment within our democracy.

Dr. Gale Hilary Nigrosh has been the Worcester Public Schools Development Specialist for Higher Education and Business Partnerships since the position’s creation in 1990. She received a Ph.D. in Linguistics from Brown University and taught for 20 years at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Gale has developed many school-college partnerships and is especially proud of the Humanities Scholars’ Collaborative. Gale may be reached at Nigrosh@worc.k12.ma.us.

James Hedlund recently retired from the Wachusett Regional School District, where he was Humanities Curriculum Coordinator K-12. He received his Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies from Clark University, concentrating on Interdisciplinary Studies and Curricula Development. In 1995, as a Fellow at the Alliance for Education in Worcester, Jim helped design and became the Humanities Scholars’ Collaborative Coordinator. He may be reached at JamesHedlund@msn.com.

What are the Elements of a Comprehensive and Realistic Civics Education?

Civics Class? No — A Civic Life? Yes!

By Bill Schechter

Civility has become a catch word at my high school, Lincoln-Sudbury-Regional High School, in Sudbury Massachusetts. We even have a Civility Committee that encourages everyone to be civil to everyone else. And who could possibly be against civility, courtesy and manners? What occasionally does seem strange, though, is that this emphasis on civility takes place themselves with all manner of activities that inevitably become part of “the resume.” While a few kids may have a wider social view, the student body generally shares a view of life based on individual success and happiness, devoid of any sense of “commonwealth.” Nowadays, the Student Senate has basically given up on debate or proposing new policies and instead organizes dances and raises money for good causes. It’s been civility all the way, and the administration appears to have appreciated this positive, conflict adverse attitude.

Unfortunately, the L-S staff—and we have an excellent one—does not model an active civic life for students. In the past, the faculty played a leading role in making policy decisions in collaboration with the administration. Now it accepts a vastly diminished role, and many of the younger teachers are seemingly unaware that things could be or ever were different. At L-S, we pay tribute to civic virtues, but there is little in the way the school is run that educates students in democratic practice. Democracy is appreciated, but only in theory, on Lincoln Road. And it doesn’t start or stop here. Attendance at Town Meeting has also been declining for some time.

Is civics education necessary? The answer is an emphatic “Yes.” We want and need young people to become active citizens, because that activism is the heartbeat of a democratic society. But civics is much too important to be confined to a course that not all students will have a chance to take or where they might be consigned to learning about constitutional or bureaucratic esoterica. Civics should be a way of life that defines one’s relationship (and responsibilities) to both fellow citizens and society. You can teach civics until the cows come home, but until students have an opportunity for real participation in the life of their school and country, it’s just so much talk. Kids know the difference.

So how to teach civics in a meaningful way? There are several approaches, and they are all valid and necessary.

Regular classes have an important role to play. Whenever possible, and in whatever discipline, teachers should strive to make connections between the curriculum and current issues. Each of these “teachable moments” is an opportunity to encourage a civic consciousness. For example, in math class, students study

You can teach civics until the cows come home, but until students have an opportunity for real participation in the life of their school and country, it’s just so much talk. Kids know the difference.
Students should try to resolve the disagreements about whether the MCAS high-stakes standardized state exams are succeeding in raising standards in Massachusetts. There are good statistical arguments on both sides—let the kids thrash it out. In history, a lesson about the Mexican American War, WWI, or Vietnam should always make connections to the Iraq War as still another conflict where the casus belli was controversial. In English, the possibilities are virtually endless, and these should include supporting journalism and a school newspaper. Science classes should make references to global warming, public policy debates, and the creationism controversy.

To the maximum extent possible, our curriculum should be biased in favor of making such contemporary connections. The bias, however, always needs to be expressed in the raising of certain questions and not in the conclusions reached. By demonstrating how course material can provide context and advance an understanding of the world, we help to place the issue of relevance beyond dispute. “Why do I have to know this?” is soon replaced by “Tell me more.”

However, civic consciousness cannot be forged in classrooms alone. Schools have to create broad and inviting avenues to the outside world. One way to do this is through a service program, and we have an excellent one at L-S. It’s called the Martin Luther King Action Project (MLKAP), and it brings student volunteers to Boston-area soup kitchens, shelters, and food banks. MLKAP also sponsors AIDS marches, Thanksgiving dinners for the town’s elderly, and an April vacation Habitat for Humanity program in Philadelphia. Through MLKAP, students can fulfill the school’s service requirement and through their experiences develop qualities of empathy and social consciousness. Moreover, MLKAP helps isolated suburban youth become sensitized to a very different world, albeit one not very geographically distant from their own. Service helps, but even that’s not enough. There are at least two other opportunities that schools have to create a civic life, apart from obvious things like encouraging student government to play a meaningful role.

No important historical holiday or anniversary should pass without a response by someone at the school. Sixtieth anniversary of the end of WWII? Time for students to plant a tree or to invite veterans in. Abraham Lincoln’s birthday? Any and all classes should begin by reading some of his eloquent words. Anniversary of 9/11? At the very least, students should participate in a moment of silence. The hallways of the school should always be used to support the teaching of history and current issues. Holocaust Remembrances? Great. Murals about history painted on the walls? Definitely! The hallways should be used as an extension of the classroom. Where advertisers and corporate America try to “eroticize” our cultural environment, teachers should try to historicize or “civicize the school’s physical space. The entire school building can and should be mobilized to support the idea of a common involvement in a larger community across time and space.

Finally, students should be allowed to take positions on real issues, whether by signing petitions, lobbying, going to demonstrations, or advocating for change. I am not talking about class simulations here. However, caution is required. Anyone who has seen the classic film, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, knows that it isn’t difficult for a charismatic, well-intentioned teacher to unintentionally manipulate young people. There’s a fine line, and it needs to be respected.

So how to proceed? Where issues are most partisan, teacher/advisors should play the most passive role. For example, at L-S, we have a Young Democrats club and an ACLU chapter, but these are wholly student-
driven activities. We also have a Gay/Straight Alliance, an Amnesty International, and a Free Tibet club. In each of these, students circulate petitions and try to organize around their issues. Once upon a time, we had an anti-apartheid group that organized, and attended demonstrations, and even built a Soweto-type shantytown in front of the school. In these activities as well, it is important for teachers to help provide guidance and structure, but for students to make the decisions. Unfortunately, there are no exact formulas that can guide a teacher. An appraisal of students' maturity, a respect for their autonomy, common sense, the nature of the activity—all these factors need to be taken into consideration. Most important, teachers need to be aware of their power to persuade, and to temper their own desired outcomes with a respect for the educational value of good process. Activity advisers, no matter how sensitive and conscientious, won’t always get it “right.” But this isn’t reason enough to stop trying. We should take heart from Samuel Beckett’s words: “Fail. Fail again. Fail better.”

One expression of civic life last year came entirely from students: they walked out of school to protest the Iraq War. In such a case, it was the job of teachers to help students process the experience. One other instance deserving of mention involved the recent controversy surrounding gay marriage in Massachusetts. On March 11, 2004, the student and faculty coordinators of MLKAP organized an event called, “Democracy Day.” Buses were chartered to transport students, whatever their viewpoint, to the State House—and over 100 students went—where pro- and anti-gay marriage demonstrators were lobbying and making their views known. For many of our students, this was their first exposure to “democracy in the streets.” They learned, among other things, that exercising democratic rights can be exhilarating.

These are some of the things we have done at L-S to encourage students to connect to the larger society to which they belong. Still, the school is hardly a hotbed of civic activism. There is far more preoccupation with GPAs, hot colleges, and SAT scores. Clubs that encourage a civic consciousness are tolerated, even applauded. However, many students and staff seem not to actively share the view that civics—as defined here—is as important to school culture as academic achievement or sports. To them, it remains just an “extra.” Those committed to civic involvement believe a meaningful education must expose students to the democratic ethos. To this end, we are all held accountable not by the narrow and mind-numbing MCAS approach to education, but by the fundamental principles of our society.

Lincoln-Sudbury’s motto is “Think For Yourself, But Think Of Others.” Giving meaning to these words by creating a civil and vigorous civic life takes a lot of work, inside the classroom and out. Young citizens in a democratic society need adult role-models as well as opportunities to exercise their democratic rights. But no make-believe allowed here. As one alumnus recently wrote to his former teachers, “Please keep it real.”

This is easier said then done, particularly when many school leaders actually prefer authority, apathy, and good order. How important it is then that public school teachers remain committed to the transmission of values central to a democratic culture. There are few lessons more enduring and more important to teach.

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Plymouth, MA
What are the Elements of a Comprehensive and Realistic Civics Education?

Experience and Reflection: 
Teaching Decision Making in History

By Kevin O’Reilly

Most teachers believe the overriding goal of social studies education is a thoughtful, informed citizenry. We want students who will be active citizens and who are thoughtful about their decisions. Without citizens who can think for themselves, democracy falls prey to demagoguery. Check any state standards in social studies and you’ll see several standards on improving decision making skills. Unfortunately, teachers face a number of complexities when they approach teaching students the critical skills and habits of effective decision making:

• Simple decision making formulas aren’t authentic or effective. Some courses and books outline a step-by-step formula for decision making. The decision maker is supposed to: 1. Identify the problem, 2. Consider goals, 3. Generate alternatives, 4. Evaluate the alternatives, and 5) Choose the best alternative in light of the goals. Unfortunately, few of us actually use this decision making formula. Despite its clarity and common sense, it is rarely practical. Experienced military commanders, world class chess players, and expert nurses, among others, do not use a formula in their decision making. Rather, they are exceptionally skilled at playing out scenarios and foreseeing possible problems.

• Decision making situations vary widely. Deciding which kind of candy bar to buy is fundamentally different from deciding how to get the Soviets to remove missiles from Cuba. What decision making skills can translate to such a wide variety of problems?

• Effective decision making requires the application and intersection of a broad set of skills. For example, in teaching students how to evaluate the reliability of sources, we instruct them to ask a series of questions: Is it a primary source? Does the author have a reason to lie? Do other sources say the same thing? While exploring the layers of a single skill is complex enough, evaluating the reliability of sources is only one of twenty or more skills, along with many less formal skills and attitudes, in the mega-task of decision making.

• Researching and writing decision making problem sets for student use is difficult and time consuming. When recording authentic, historical problems for student use, the teacher must provide the information that the person at
the time had access to, but only that information. If the problem description accidentally includes hints about the outcome of the decision, students won’t have to think the problem through for themselves. On the other hand, if insufficient information is provided, students may not understand the problem and its complexities. Similarly, the outcomes of problems must be carefully written so students recognize the richness and complexity of the historical problems and their effects.

- **Teachers feel pressured to focus on breadth rather than depth.** This perennial challenge has been exacerbated by state standards that require broad content coverage, particularly in the areas of history and the social sciences, and that compromise the classroom time needed for practice and development of critical skills.

**Overcoming the Challenges**

The process of supervising teachers—especially new teachers—and guiding them toward improved decision making in their classrooms can provide insight into how we might overcome similar challenges to improving student decision making through classroom work. According to research by Jon Saphier, founder and president of Research for Better Teaching, full-time teachers make as many as 1,500 decisions per day. Supervisors are trying to help teachers to make more of those 1,500 decisions good ones. After observing a teacher in class, a supervisor often begins by asking the teacher how she thought the lesson went and what she would do differently. The supervisor then discusses the lesson, offering suggestions or asking questions, as a coach might. A supervisor will do this with new teachers multiple times, building a framework of skills that the teachers can apply to the many decisions and contexts they face on a daily basis. Thus, the model for teaching decision making—confront the learner with many problems—requires them to reflect on what they decided and what they would do differently, and guides them in how to analyze their decisions. The same can be done with students in the classroom.

If teachers are going to engage students in many problems, as well, most of them should be relatively short, and take only brief segments of class time (see box: Decision Making Case 1 from colonial American history.)

Teachers may choose to spend entire class periods on a single problem; however, the problems do not necessarily require a lot of class time. In fact, the “New Colonies” problem and two other problems were done in ten minutes at the end of a class one day. The students discussed their choices in pairs and then the class voted on whether they would support the new colonies. I then told them what actually happened (see box next page: Decision Making Case 1, part 2) and the students were instructed to write reflections in their journals about their decision making. Naturally, a teacher can decide to go into more depth on any of these short problems, pulling in more historical context, exploring different options, or helping students make connections. The teacher’s judgment would be based on the goals, both content and skills, of the lesson and unit. Reflection is an essential element of engaging students in thinking for themselves and monitoring their own thinking processes. Students could also reflect through discussion, but journal writing is unhurried and allows students to see changes in their thinking.

Experience is a harsh but effective teacher. Students will gain perspective by the ups and downs of making decisions. Sometimes they will feel wise, sometimes foolish. Whichever way they feel, they will be learning.

**Developing Decision Making Guidelines**

Students will gain even more by developing guidelines for making better decisions. These guidelines aren’t part of a formula or step-by-step approach. Rather, they are general rules of thumb from which students select those most
appropriate to the problem at hand. Students construct these guidelines through reflection and discussion as they proceed through the various problem sets explored in class. In the problem above about supporting new colonies, for example, students may suggest guidelines such as:

- consider other options for accomplishing my goals,
- be skeptical of proponents of an action,
- ask questions about background.

The emphasis on guidelines rather than formulaic, lock-step processes encourages students to adapt their decision making approach by selecting the guidelines appropriate to the various types of problems they encounter. A number of instructional strategies can be used to help students develop skills inherent to these guidelines:

**Student Skill: Think of other points of view**
**Instructional Strategy:** Give half the class a problem from one side (USSR) while the other half gets the same problem from the other side (US). After students decide what to do from their assigned perspectives, they can be given the opposing perspective and asked to make a decision from that perspective. Alternatively, each group can explain its decision and reasons from its perspective, and students can discuss how hearing the other perspectives influenced their thinking.

**Student Skill: Ask insightful questions**
**Instructional Strategy:** Have answers prepared for students who ask about key points or information for decision making problems. Give recognition to students who ask key questions.

**Student Skill: Consider short- and long-term consequences**
**Instructional Strategy:** Ask students to focus solely on the possible consequences of a particular event or decision, recognizing students who generate a wider variety of effects (social, political, economic) as well as both short- and long-term effects.

**Student Skill: Identify the underlying problem**
**Instructional Strategy:** Design problems that focus students specifically on considering underlying issues. For example, a problem on Reconstruction can’t be addressed well until students identify and understand the underlying conflict between property rights and civil rights.

**Student Skill: Consider the history of the issue**
**Instructional Strategy:** No problem can include all the relevant background. Prepare separate background sheets for complex inquiries, or at least be prepared to elaborate on background verbally.

**Student Skill: Evaluate sources of information**
**Instructional Strategy:** Include arguments or information in the problems, such as that of Richard Hakluyt in the problem above. As described, students should ask if the sources are primary, if they have a reason to lie, and so forth. In the problem in Box 2, students should recognize, as Queen Elizabeth did, that Richard Hakluyt had a reason to lie.

**Student Skill: Monitor emotions and assumptions**
**Instructional Strategy:** During the debriefing, you can ask students about their emotions and assumptions. In the computer simulation “Escalation,” www.escalationsim.com for example, students often become frustrated and make decisions they later regret. Asking about their emotional state during the simulation brings this element of decision making to the surface. Likewise, asking about assumptions they made during the process is an eye opener for students.

**Student Skill: Evaluate analogies**
**Instructional Strategy:** Ask students what historical cases, if any, they considered in making their decision. For example, in deciding what to do in the New Deal, they may remember what happened in the Progressive Reforms. In Vietnam, the actual historical decision makers and my students use the Munich Crisis and the Korean War as analogies. Ask if those are good analogies by asking how the two cases are similar and different. Students may conclude that Korea is a poor analogy because it was a conventional war whereas Vietnam was largely a guerrilla war in the time period of the simulation (1964-1968).
There are several ways teachers can evaluate student progress with these decision making skills. One approach is for teachers to write a description of an historical character's thinking and decisions during a particular event in time and ask students to assess this character's decision making according to the guidelines developed in class. Alternatively, students can be assigned to choose a person in history and write an essay evaluating that person's decision making. Or students could be asked to evaluate a decision they have made or expect to make.

**Conclusion**

Improving student decision making is a challenging and complex task, but an essential one in a democratic society. It can also provide students with exciting and engaging encounters with history. Students confronted with decision making problems have a need to know and understand information pertinent to the problem. They are more likely to remember this information because of the intensity of the decision making experience. Though the problems are often specific, the contexts for good decision making are broad and the skills can be applied extensively. Students may gather critical information throughout a whole unit of study in order to make a decision for a narrow and specific problem that is discussed and revisited throughout or held for decision making at the unit's conclusion. For example, students learn a great deal of information about the Cold War, the McCarthy Era, the Great Society Program, and the 1960's, in addition to the Vietnam War when they play the computer simulation “Escalation” (cited above) on decision making in the Vietnam War. More importantly, decision making problems help students learn that history didn't have to turn out the way it did. Implicitly, they realize that history is a series of decisions made by people. By implication, they also realize they have an important role to play as citizens in the unfolding drama of our democratic society.

**Suggested Readings & Resources**


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We want students who will be active citizens and who are thoughtful about their decisions.
What are the Elements of a Comprehensive and Realistic Civics Education?

An Inquiring Mind: Placing Questioning at the Center of Civics Education

By Mark Piechota and Patricia Evans

Who are responsible citizens? Some would say they are people who care for their families, earn a living, obey the law, and act ethically. Such people are relied upon everywhere to be dependable members of society. They are valued in every country, even by the most repressive of governments.

The United States values such qualities in its citizens, and yet as a representative democracy, it must expect more from them. This form of government requires citizens who are informed and engaged. It expects that they will ask questions and seek the best information so that they can act on their knowledge. These citizens must be in the habit of asking six essential questions:

- What are the facts?
- Says who?
- What do you think?
- So what?
- Is it fair?
- How can I help?

These questions are stated in a simple form that can be easily remembered. In application, they are often phrased in different ways. Though they are organized as a list, they do not necessarily occur in this sequence. Any one of them can serve as an entry point.

The Six Questions

With the first question, What are the facts?, student citizens seek information. They work to strip away rumors, hearsay, and sound bites to gain clarity about the facts. They want to gain the confidence that allows them to take informed positions on issues so they can influence decisions in their school, community, state, and nation. Since most of our information comes through others rather than through direct experience, this inquiry is closely related to the second question.

When students ask, Says who?, they double-check whether the information they gathered indeed represents the facts. They consult multiple sources and check veracity. They question media accounts and politicians’ claims. They learn to consider what they know about the source’s background, principles, bias, and motives. They begin to weigh competing claims and consider the factors that influence them to believe one source over another and why. They gain experience in seriously regarding other perspectives. It is essential for our young citizens to gain experience with these skills since they live in a world of ideological reporting, crafted language, misleading sound bites, and manipulative advertising.

The third question, What do you think?, closely related to the first two, engages student citizens in dialogue, helping them recognize that they can learn from each other and that they live in an interdependent, diverse world. In all classes, students engaged in paired and group discussions refine, integrate, and retain information. At the same time, they develop the habit of seeking and listening to others’ opinions. They try to understand others’ points of view and, over time, develop a tolerance and respect for differences. In turn, they experience being asked, “What do you think?” and learn to articulate their own thoughts.
The question, So what?, encourages students to consider relevance and value. They ask about the importance of the matter in the greater scheme of things. Many students, particularly adolescents, often ask this question. Here we try to widen the frame of inquiry to consider not only how the topic is important to the individual, but how it is important to society.

The fifth question, Is it fair?, engages students in thinking beyond themselves and asking about fairness and equity. With this orientation, they learn to speak out against injustice and protect not only their own rights, but those of others, as well. Tied together with the earlier questions, the discussion can develop what Deborah Meier calls “informed empathy” (“Supposing That...” Phi Delta Kappan, December 1996) rather than mere emotional response.

The final question, How can I help?, encourages students’ consideration of how they can contribute time, effort, moral support, and/or resources to improve situations and support others. The question underlines that we are members of an interdependent whole and that our contributions to the common good are needed and can make a difference.

Application in the Classroom
How can public schools develop these habits of questioning in students? We believe the effort should start in the early grades and persist through high school graduation. In the elementary school, or at whatever level the questions are initially presented, student responses may be relatively basic, but with guidance, experience, and growing maturity, students can explore these questions with significant sophistication. All personnel—teachers, staff, and administration—must look for opportunities to pursue such questions with students. They can do so through the ways they present classroom subject matter, manage student behavior, and guide student activities. They can also do so by modeling citizenship—that is by employing the questions in their adult interactions.

Social Problems and Current Events
The six questions can often be applied to the content of the standard curriculum, and should be whenever appropriate. However, to help students truly integrate these habits of questioning into their daily lives, teachers must continually connect curriculum content to relevant social problems and current events and ask students to employ the questions to analyze the issues. Service learning and current events bring energy and meaning into the classroom because students recognize the relevance to their lives. It is well worth the effort to identify the parts of the mandated curriculum that can be addressed through the vehicle of real world issues and to help students probe and influence these issues through frequent engagement with these questions.

When the curriculum includes service learning, it often begins with the question “How can I help?” Incorporating the other five questions deepens a service learning project—turning it from what might merely be a feel-good experience to an experience that helps develop a more reflective, thoughtful, and engaged citizen.

Current events discussions also provide rich contexts for the development of effective citizens. The goal of these discussions is not to come to agreement as a class. It is for all class members to grow in their understanding of the issues at hand and to become more skilled and fluent in the process of forming opinions based on thoughtful questioning and reflection. The teacher’s role is to
assume a neutral stance and to ask probing questions that push the students to think more deeply. Teachers must encourage students to ask more questions, seek understanding, and grow in their ability to state and defend their developing understandings.

With the teacher remaining neutral, “Says who?” can become profoundly important. The work doesn’t end with naming the source, but continues with exploring relevant background and context. What point of view does this source represent? What values or principles are present? Is this a neutral observer or one with vested interests? What relevant history is behind this source? If a particular point of view seems underrepresented, the teacher can ask for volunteers to investigate it and make a presentation so that the whole class can gain a more complete understanding.

**Managing Student Behavior**
Many teachers hold regular class meetings to explore the operations and relationships in their classrooms. The six questions can help guide these discussions. In addition, common interpersonal conflicts that arise among students present opportunities to integrate and apply these questions, as well. Teachers, administrators, and peer mediators can use the questions to guide their interventions. A third party may ask a party in conflict to describe what happened (an example of “What are the facts?”) and then ask the other to do the same. Each story has an obvious “says who” attached. Even simple mediation techniques that invite the parties to suggest solutions involves “What do you think?” and “Is it fair?” The depth and extent of the questioning varies depending upon the severity of the issue and the maturity of the people in conflict.

**Adult Modeling**
The six guiding questions of effective citizens that we have discussed can be used by every person in our schools. Teachers can use the questions in the classroom during student discussions, service learning projects, and conflict resolution efforts, and adults across the school can continually model how to use these questions in their professional lives. The questions help create a structure within which people can take strong and differing points of view and they complement many problem-solving and decision-making strategies. In small groups, faculty meetings, parent sessions, and committee work, these questions can help us all model responsible citizenship.

**Conclusion**
Our form of government requires not just dependable law abiding citizens, but individuals who are active and engaged in the social and political issues surrounding them. By helping all students develop attitudes of inquiry and habits of questioning, our schools will fulfill their responsibility for bringing forth a new generation of engaged and productive citizens.

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MASCD News & Updates

Elizabeth Taylor & Claire-Marie Hart are Presented with MASCD’s First Annual Mentor Award!

MASCD congratulates Elizabeth Taylor and Claire-Marie Hart of the Beverly Public Schools for winning the 2003-2004 MASCD Mentor Award.

Heather Hurley, MASCD board member and member of the Awards Committee, presented the Mentor Award to the two teachers at their local school committee meeting, noting, “[MASCD] was very impressed with all that you have accomplished in the two years that you’ve been leading the Beverly Public Schools’ mentoring program. The time that you have committed to the program is commendable. You serve six elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. You meet weekly with teachers, conduct peer observations, model lessons, and conduct seminars—all of this while still teaching in the classroom.

It is also apparent that you go above and beyond outside of school as well. Teacher Matthew Riordan stated in his recommendation how he was encouraged to call you at home with questions and was even invited to your home. It was that kind of personal touch that made you stand out to the committee. As fellow educators, we stand in grateful respect of your efforts towards providing the new teachers in your district with a meaningful mentor program. Your work is an inspiration to all.

January 2005 Institute Features

Teacher Instructional Leadership with Jill Mirman Owen, Teachers 21

Friday, January 14 and 28
8:30 - 3:30
The Education Cooperative
Dedham, MA

Visit www.mascd.org for registration!

MASCD Announces Complimentary Conference Registration for New Teachers in Honor of Peter Reynolds

MASCD has established two complimentary registrations for each of its 2005 Institutes (January and June) to honor Peter Reynolds, CEO and founder of FableVision, a children’s media and publishing company in Watertown. Teachers in their first five years of service who would otherwise not be able to attend MASCD’s professional development offerings are invited to submit their request to Mary Forte Hayes, MASCD Executive Director, at mfhayes@mascd.org.

Peter Reynolds has generously provided support to MASCD over the years. Most recently, Peter designed the covers for the Association’s newest books: Using State Frameworks to Develop Quality Curricula for Massachusetts Schools (Glatthorn and Kerouack) and Mission Possible: Reaching All Learners with Technology (Zimmerman and Koufman-Frederick). MASCD and FableVision hosted a party to launch Mission Possible at FableVision headquarters on November 12.
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