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Comics in the Classroom

LOWER GWYNEDD >> A few years ago, Wissahickon High School social studies teacher Tim Smyth, a by-the-book AP instructor who had earned himself a reputation among students for being “very challenging,” did something unexpected.

By: Dutch Goldshalk



Social Studies teacher Tim Smyth uses comic books in his class lessons. Photo: Bob Raines, Digital First Media

He started handing out comic books in his classes — lots of comic books.

Sometimes they'd be purely historical comics, books that illustrate a famous battle from the Hundred Years War or examine the American civil rights movement. Other times, though, they'd be Amazing Spider-Man comics, or Captain America comics, or Batman.

Occasionally the books would be hybrids of fact and fiction, “where Batman is in the French Revolution or Superman is in the American Civil War,” explains Smyth, 42, sitting in his classroom on a recent Friday afternoon, wearing a royal-blue Captain America necktie. “It’s kind of a neat hook,” he found.

The students would be drawn-in by the heroes, but then class conversation would turn to the historical event itself.

It didn't take long for the teacher to realize he was onto something. He brought in even more comics, populated entire shelves in his classroom with them. He hung up posters. He brought in figurines — Darth Vader and Superman statuettes, an inflatable Spider-Man — and arranged them all over the room.

Comic books became a standard part of his lessons.

What Smyth soon found was that not only did comics get his students thinking about class lessons; it got them thinking about the

world around them. It also got them reading for the pleasure of reading. Kids would ask to borrow his comics, either for extra-credit writing assignments or just to read them in full at home.

And while the idea of teens reading for fun might not seem so extraordinary, recent studies have shown that a large number of modern American high-schoolers don't spend much free time doing it.

According to a 2014 report by Common Sense Media, 45 percent of 17-year-olds surveyed say they read for pleasure no more than one or two times per year (a significant jump from 19 percent in 1984). With the exception of

the occasional Hunger Games or Harry Potter book binge, it seems there isn't a whole lot of pleasure-reading going on with modern teens.

Smyth says this is something he heard often when he was in graduate school, particularly regarding boys: “When I was in my master's program [at Gwynedd Mercy University] as a reading specialist, the people were saying boys don't like to read. And statistics backed it up.”

But when he looked over the typical reading lists for high school students, the teacher thought, “I don't like to read [those books] either. ‘Anna Karenina’ almost killed me in high school. I was a kid who was reading

Stephen King in middle school. Not everybody likes to read the classics.”

It was around this time that Smyth remembered the words of comic artist Art Spiegelman, whose landmark, Pulitzer Prize-winning Holocaust series *Maus* awakened many critics and readers to the narrative possibilities of comic books.

“Comics are a gateway drug to literacy,” Spiegelman said.

Keeping those words in mind, Smyth decided to integrate comics into his classes, little by little, at first just testing the waters.

“The reaction from the students was very encouraging,” he says. “So I said, ‘OK, let’s go.’”

‘That’s How We Connected’

“Comic book heroes are like our mythology, they’re our Greek gods,” journalist and Black Panther comic-book author Ta-Nehisi Coates recently told NPR. He’s not wrong. For the better part of the 20th century, comic-book heroes like Batman, Iron Man and The Hulk have steadily evolved into more than characters in paper cartoons; they’ve become fictive celebrities, icons known to generations.

They’re part of our culture’s common language.

In recent years, superhero films have consistently raked in millions of dollars at the global box office — the six films featuring Robert Downey Jr.’s Iron Man alone have grossed more than a billion dollars worldwide since 2008 — and Comic Cons all over the country attract hundreds of thousands of fans.

Multiple reports — including one by the website *Comic Beats* and another conducted by online ticketing platform Eventbrite — suggest that comic book readers, as well as convention-

goers, are split pretty evenly between men and women.

Comics and their film counterparts have wide appeal, and Tim Smyth, in his classes, began to understand that wide appeal firsthand.

The teacher found that comics were not only useful tools for engaging students in lessons and getting them interested in reading; they could be helpful in connecting with a diverse group of kids.

This idea took shape for Smyth during an encounter with a student a couple years ago, an African-American boy who “I really wasn’t able to connect with and get involved in the classroom,” he says.

During class one day, the boy noticed a comic on Smyth’s shelves, a book featuring an African-American Spider-Man by the name of Mile Morales, “a character who looked like my student,” as the teacher would later write. The comic issue that the student found, Smyth explains, is “a powerful comic, when [Morales] stands up and you see his full face and he says, ‘I am Spider-Man.’”

Looking down at the comic in his hands, the student found a hero he could connect with on a personal level.

“He saw the comic and he asked if he could borrow it,” Smyth says.

After that, the teacher noticed a change in his student: the boy began to engage in class lessons and even formed a friendship with Smyth, who started buying him comics. “By the end of the year, that’s how we connected,” the teacher says.

“Comic book heroes are like our mythology, they’re our Greek gods.”

- Ta-Nehisi Coates

“I began to regularly share each new issue and his engagement, both in class and with me, changed drastically,” Smyth would later write for PBS. “I began to see how comic books could not only convey historical topics, but also help students to see themselves in our lessons.”

In his classroom recently, he adds, “And that’s the thing you want with a kid. Whether someone likes Notre Dame or someone likes the Eagles or something. For [that student], it was a comic book and because Spider-Man looked like him. It was neat, because now he and I talk in the hallway all the time.”

‘Then you’re not depicting the world’

For those familiar with comic-book culture, it comes as no surprise that, for a long time, superheroes were not very diverse. Despite their wide appeal, comics often failed to feature people of color as the heroes of their stories. The typical hero was white, straight, and male.

Even when publishers began to change that trend, there were still deeply-rooted problems with how women and people of color were being depicted. The former was frequently scantily clad, and the latter was frequently paired with some racial descriptor.

“In the ’90s there was Milestone Comics,” Smyth explains, “and it had African-American titles: Black Lightning, things like that. Unfortunately, white characters would be called Lightning, but if it’s a black character, it’s got to be Black Lightning.”

In recent years, comics have become much more diverse, with series featuring a female Thor, an African-American Captain America, a gay Iceman, and a Korean-American Hulk (just to name a few).

More contemporary comic authors, like G. Willow Wilson and Ta-Nehisi Coates, are now not just creating strong heroes of varying ethnic and religious backgrounds but gearing those heroes toward a younger audience, in effect designing role models for adolescent readers who might lack many options.

Wilson’s version of Ms. Marvel is a female, Muslim-American teenager from New Jersey. A particular favorite of Smyth’s, the superhero has grown in popularity among younger readers since her debut in 2013.

“My kids can relate to her as a 16-year-old,” Smyth says of Ms. Marvel, who is Marvel Comics’ first Muslim character to headline a series. “It doesn’t matter that she’s Muslim. She’s got parents that are overreaching, she’s got weird holiday traditions just like some of the other kids do.”

In short, she’s relatable.

Then there’s Coates, one of Marvel’s most controversial author hires, if only for the fact that he’s not a comic writer at all. A working journalist, Coates contributes to *The Atlantic* and recently published the best-selling memoir “Between the World and Me,” an award-winning examination of institutional racism in the United States.

Marvel hired Coates to reinvent one of its legacy heroes, Black Panther, a prince from a wealthy (and fictional) African nation who also moonlights as a leather-clad crime fighter. The Black Panther character made his film debut in this month’s box-office hit “Captain America: Civil War.”

Smyth says Coates is “a very well

-known, very literate writer” who “lends a lot of credit to what he’s trying to do” with Black Panther.

In an April 6 interview with NPR, Coates said, “I think diversity is a storytelling imperative. If you’re not at least grappling with diversity, then you’re not depicting the world. And while the world of comic books is not literally the true world, why would there not be gay superheroes? Why not?”

“I feel like the people who don’t do it actually are the ones that have to defend the argument,” the author continued. “You know? Why does that not exist? Why would there not be black superheroes? Why would there not be Asian-American superheroes? If this is our mythology, why would our mythology only be straight, white males?”

The first issue of Coates’ Black Panther series debuted at #1 on April 6, having already sold more than 300,000 copies before its release. It’s remained at the very top of the comic-book charts ever since. To many, the immediate and overwhelming success of the comic indicates how hungry readers are for more diverse heroes with strong voices and personalities.

'Fills me with a lot of hope'

When Art Spiegelman referred to comics as a gateway drug to literacy, maybe the artist’s claim fell short. It seems, for authors like Coates and teachers like Smyth, comics can also serve as a gateway to confronting some of this country’s most pressing issues.

Gay rights. Gender equality. Institutional racism. Police brutality.

“We talk about Black Lives Matter” in class, Smyth says. “We were talking about Ferguson last year — things that aren’t in the pen-

and-paper curriculum, but things that, as a history teacher, you need to talk about. I think that once you set that tone then these kids who were talking about this in the lunchroom or tweeting about it, now they’re having these conversations in the classroom.”

One of those gateways opened when a comic book series introduced an African-American Captain America, Smyth says.

“Some media outlets blew up because Captain America became black and, ‘well, you can’t do that, because Captain America is supposed to be Caucasian and Christian.’ So we talked about the symbolism of who is Captain America and what is he supposed to represent?”

He adds, “Unfortunately sometimes when you watch the news — the half-hour news media — they want us to [think] we’re either all this or all that. The message I want in my classroom is that most of America is somewhere in the middle.”

Polarizing class discussions can be difficult terrain for a teacher to navigate, but Smyth seems up to the challenge.

“We have some disagreements,” he admits, but “the idea is always to encourage the kids to send me an email, talk to me after class if you don’t feel comfortable saying something. I want everybody’s voice to be heard.”

To have real dialogues in class — where students take on tough topics and maybe disagree with each other but feel comfortable enough to hear each other out — is exhilarating and encouraging, the teacher says. And parents seem to feel the same way.

“The number one thing parents say to me is, we never talked about this when I was in school,” Smyth says. “And me neither. Everybody is excited that we’re able to talk about these things.”

“Being from Philly and going to public schools, the diversity was everywhere, but we never talked about it,” he adds. “Here, it’s every day. It’s awesome. Transgender issues? We never would have talked about that. LGBT issues? We have a club to try to help bridge the gaps between people. This generation fills me with a lot of hope.”

'BOOM - it's out there'

Back in 2013, when Smyth first started bringing comics to class, he took to the internet in search of other teachers with whom he could share his ideas and findings. He admits he didn’t have many colleagues at Wissahickon who understood what he was doing.

“I’m kind of on an island,” he says. “There’s nobody who really shares my passion. So I was kind of shy about it. Then you find all these other people [online] who are involved in using comic books.”

Eventually, Smyth started a blog called Using Comics in the Classroom, where he’d write about his experiences. He’s been updating the blog since September 2014.

A few months ago, an editor from PBS NewsHour “just happened to read one of my posts on Twitter” and invited Smyth to pen an article for its education series The Teachers’ Lounge.

In the article, titled “How I use comic books as a learning tool in my social studies classroom,” Smyth wrote about the student who found comfort in Miles Morales’ African-American Spider-Man, about the impact Ms. Marvel has had on his students, and how comics have fostered a more open and accepting environment in his classroom.

“While I do not use comic books in every lesson, my classes are surrounded by im-

ages of diverse comic book characters, which allows my students to see themselves in these titles,” he wrote in the PBS article. “Many students learn to see past the idea that comics are about superheroes in tights and learn instead to recognize the current issues the stories seek to explore.”

Below the article, in the comment section, students both past and present wrote endorsements of Smyth.

“I learned that comic books can help people of all ages to learn about history and current events in a totally new way,” one student, Crystal Li, wrote.

The article got Smyth quite a bit of attention, and he was recently invited to give presentations on teaching comics in the classroom at the upcoming Philadelphia Wizard World Comic Con, on June 4, and the San Diego Comic Con in July, “and I put in for a Harrisburg social studies conference in October,” he says.

In only a few years, this experiment of sorts has grown beyond Smyth’s classroom; “it’s become this thing,” he says. “All of a sudden, it was like, BOOM — it’s out there.”

Smyth’s presentations at conventions will be geared toward many different lesson plans, he says: “I’ve got ones for history and art and music and all different levels — English as a second language.”

For a guy who used to spend so much of his time reading G.I. Joe and Transformers comics when he was kid, this is all pretty surreal. It’s easy to see that visiting Comic Cons and presenting to his fellow nerds is a thrilling concept for the teacher.

But it’s also thrilling for his students.

“The kids are seeing our conversations in the classroom go out to the real world,” he says. “They’re so excited to see that.”



Future of History

Essay Writing

In Middle School History Class

By Jody Passanisi & Shara Peters

The main purpose of school is to prepare children to be successful after school. Everyone talks about our “digital age” and the shifts in education it necessitates. One shift is abundantly clear: written communication has never been as important as it is now.

When we were in school, people communicated differently – people actually talked on the phone. Now, thanks to texting, email, blogs, etc., more and more communication happens through writing.

The nature of writing is changing as well. People are rapidly scrolling through newsfeeds and scanning for interesting articles. If you want your ideas to be read, you have to get to the point quickly. And if you make grammar errors, or state something that is factually incorrect, you will be judged instantly – in a very public way.

In our own teaching, we’ve always maintained that writing is an essential skill for middle schoolers to develop. Whether your classroom is project based, inquiry based, student-centered, teacher-driven or lecture-style, your students are going to need to learn to express their understandings, evaluation, and synthesis through writing.

And not just any writing, but writing that is clear, cogent, concise, backed-up with research and facts, and well argued.

SCAFFOLDING THE WRITING EXPERIENCE

Middle grades students are asked to do more with their writing than we were as students. Today, summaries and reporting on facts are seldom enough; standards speak to evaluation, analysis, and synthesis. Advances in technology are helping to move writing in these directions, giving students the capacity to quickly revise their work from first to final draft, without tediously copying multiple versions.

In addition, the availability of information plays an important part in the raising of expectations. It is no longer difficult to gather facts and data, so the difficulty must be reflected elsewhere – in what is done with the information. Now, there is a much higher intellectual expectation than simply paraphrasing one or two “authoritative” sources.

With this advance in expectations comes an increased need for scaffolding the learning process. Some students find these demands for higher orders of thinking and writing very challenging, to say the least. They are adolescents, still moving from concrete to formal operations in the Piagetian sense, and will often need our support with their writing.

THE FIVE PARAGRAPH ESSAY

Throughout our teaching careers, integrating writing skills – and having students demonstrate understanding of content through writing – has been a priority. But we haven't always done it the same way.

When we first started teaching social studies in middle school, we used a five-paragraph essay. We provided the students an outline so that they could learn the important components of the format (intro, thesis, supporting paragraphs, transitions, conclusion – for example, this essay organizer on the Constitution - link <http://www.middleweb.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/essay-organizer.doc>). The essays were evaluative, and the students were required to use evidence from specific readings and notes that had been introduced and worked through during class.

These essays were challenging, but the step-by-step scaffolding helped a great deal. The parts that were the most difficult are not really surprising: the thesis, the analysis, the conclusion – the components that required the most critical and evaluative thinking.

As time passed, we began to ask our students to be more accountable for the sources they used, as Jody wrote about last year in this MiddleWeb piece on [using citations in history](#). Even so, at the end of each unit, students continued to use our five-part outline to showcase their writing, their ability to synthesize, and their knowledge of the historical content that we had just explored.

While this organizing tool helped some students structure their ideas into some impressive essays, we came to see that it was masking

some students' writing deficiencies. Though the final product (after multiple revisions) often appeared to include high level thinking and deep comprehension, the amount of teacher guidance and outside help that some students received made us doubt the integrity of the assignment, and whether it was a true assessment of student comprehension and ability.

We began to wonder if timed writing events, where student writing skills would be “unmasked,” might add an important formative assessment element.

THE ESSAY UNDER TIME CONSTRAINTS

Timed writing is by no means new, but it is seeing a resurgence in the high schools where our students often matriculate. In history class these timed writings are based on a few primary or secondary source documents (or a mixed grouping of both) and students are asked to make an evaluative statement about a historical period or concept using the evidence given.

DBQs, or Document Based Questions, have also been around awhile (in AP courses, for example). But again, they are increasingly becoming a primary way to procure evidence of student understanding – evidence of students' ability to read, comprehend, synthesize, organize, and evaluate evidence “like historians” through their own writing.

This resurgence can be seen as part of the general increase in activities and experiences that ask the students to think more critically and analytically, a phenomenon we associate with the rise of the Common Core Standards. We have been incorporating more and

more of these types of writing experiences into our teaching to prepare our students for what will be expected of them when they go to high school.

Timed writings don't always have to be DBQ based. At the end of a project-based learning unit, Jody used a timed writing to see if students were able to synthesize the varied information they had learned about the causes of the Civil War into an evaluative and succinct four paragraph essay that was written over a class period.

Students were asked to answer the question “What Caused the Civil War?” with a clear thesis, evidence, and citations, culminating in a conclusion that got to a “so what?” point. While this was a challenge, most students were able to demonstrate understanding with clear writing. The feeling of self-efficacy gained in timed writings in middle school will carry over to high school when students are tasked with a similar writing assignment – to write quickly and clearly and convey something important to the reader.

These timed writings can better show the teacher the students' process skills at various stages, without having to rely completely on a finished (and often heavily scaffolded) product. That said, the scaffolding provided by the essay outline should also be part of instruction. You don't just hand challenging assignments to the kids and say “go for it!”

There will be some students who have special needs or Individualized Education Plans who may need a great deal of additional support and possibly much more time than other students in the class, but the exposure to timed writing, if it is done with a learning rather than

“testing” vibe, can help each and every student to reach a personal goal, even if that goal is modified.

Teachers can help all students to lower their affective filter in writing simply by exposing them to the timed writing process. We believe this exposure will help them a great deal in their academic careers.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Despite the fact that timed writings seem to be in vogue at the moment and the DBQ method helps students to begin to think like historians, we don't think that the five paragraph essay is ready for the dumpster. The writing skills that the students gain, not to mention the thinking skills, are important. The vehicle in which they get to the writing is secondary to the experience of writing about historical concepts – and writing a lot.

What's next for middle grades writing in social studies? The push for writing analytically is an important one, and one that will only help students be able to navigate the past in a more critical way. Gaining advanced writing skills will also impact their present, empowering them to articulate their views in more meaningful language.

How do you use writing in the social studies classroom?

Students & Teachers Learning Together

In first year of Team 19 Project

By: Aaron Richardson

previously struggled in traditional classroom settings.

“They eat their breakfast in here and get ready for the day,” he said. “And then they spend all day in here and all three hours in the program ... this is where they then like to spend another hour of their time during lunch.”

With almost an entire school year to look back on, the teachers, students and administrators involved with Team 19 have two basic takeaways: Students who previously did not gel with school are excited and engaged in the classroom, and there is still a lot to learn.

“A lot of the kids have really opened up and blossomed,” Frankfurth said. “A lot of kids who were not too active in the classroom, who were maybe a bit shy ... we have seen a lot of kids just kind of come alive.”

Team 19 students spend the first three hours of their day being team-taught by teachers in history, math, science and English in a class that rolls all four subjects into interdisciplinary projects.



Above: English teacher Joe Frankfurth speaks to his Team 19 students.
Right: Alg teacher Sarah Lilly gives her Team 19 students a pep talk.
Photo credits: Ryan Kelley, The Daily Press.

When English teacher Joe Frankfurth gets to his classroom at Albemarle High School each morning, more often than not, there is a line of students waiting for him to unlock the door.

The students are part of Team 19, a pilot program in project-based learning for ninth-graders who pre-

The work of Team 19, said Albemarle High School’s principal, Jay Thomas, is simple.

“Our hope with this group of freshmen, by the time they get to senior year, we have opened doors for them,” he said. “Whether it is going to the workforce or going to college, they have choices, whereas before they would have had very limited choices.”

Students in the program — named for the cohort’s graduation year — said their grades have improved and that they are better able to relate school to everyday life.

“You are able to learn so much more working hands-on, and you form close relationships with the teachers and the other students and get really involved, and I think that is a better way to learn,” student Charlotte Austin said.

After a tough time in middle school, Austin said, she has seen her grades and opinion of school improve. Using what she learns in class on a real-world project is the key.

“I have trouble sitting still, and most kids don’t want to sit in a classroom,” she said. “Being able to get up, get hands-on, work with different people all the time, it’s easier to get involved and want to know the information. Wanting to know the information helps you keep the information.”

The program is still working on smoothly integrating project-based learning with state Standards of Learning tests.

The issue is not that Team 19 lessons do not cover SOL topics, teachers said, but that the information is presented in a vastly different format than it is on SOLs.

“We are reviewing the information that they had already seen and showing how it might

be seen on an SOL test, because it is a little different than if you are working on it in a project,” algebra teacher Sarah Lilly said. “As far as the concepts, I think they have a much better general grasp and a deeper understanding of how we would actually use it in the real world.”

Pausing project-based learning to study for the tests is not ideal, teachers said, but in a traditional classroom setting, most of the lessons and class time would be spent on preparing for the SOLs, the opposite of the Team 19 approach.

History teacher Andy Ulrich sees some-



thing more valuable in Team 19 than specific, rote facts required for success on the SOLs.

“They have increased confidence, and that is going to boost every aspect of them being a student,” he said. “Now, they are starting to realize the intrinsic value of what we are doing, and they are jumping on board.”

Though there are still challenges, Thomas said the program is not going anywhere.

“This team concept, it’s not leaving,” he said. “It has been a beautiful pilot year, we have had a lot of success with it, and it needs to continue to grow and evolve.”



Students at Phillipsburg-Oscealo Middle School—Photo Credit: Abby Drey

Programs Tackle Childhood Hunger

By Britney Milazzo

Stuff, pass and go.

That was the routine Thursday morning at Phillipsburg-Osceola Area Middle School for volunteers stuffing backpacks with food.

An assembly line was set up in the school's gymnasium along a group of tables filled with items like variety pack pasta, ready-to-go meals, ramen noodles, snack packs, fruit cups, nutrition bars, crackers and more.

Each backpack was to get one of each item, YMCA of Centre County Moshannon Valley branch director Mel Curtis said.

There were about 500 bags to fill. They were then being distributed to school districts in Centre and Clearfield counties for students in the Backpack Food Program.

It was part of a celebration after receiving a grant to help fund the program.

On Thursday, Wal-Mart awarded the YMCA of Centre County a \$50,000 grant to put specifically toward that initiative, and the Summer Lunch Program that offers school-aged students a free lunch five days a week from June 6 to Aug. 26.

Curtis said summer lunches follow nutrition requirements provided by the state.

Since its inception in 2004, more than 170,000 meals have been served through the Summer Lunch Program. This year, 15 sites will offer lunches, and a bus will be available to offer "mobile meals," Curtis said.

The Backpack Program, on the other hand, was started about 10 years later.

Curtis said that campaign began during the 2014-15 school year at the Phillipsburg-Osceola Area School District and provides students

with food to eat during the weekend. This school year, the Backpack Food Program expanded to Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Moshannon Valley, Penns Valley and West Branch area school districts.

"This is something that made a major difference in the areas we serve," Curtis said. "The astonishing fact is that 1 in 5 children in Pennsylvania don't know where their next meal is coming from. You stop and think about that like, 'that's not in my backyard or where I live,' but hunger doesn't have a face or territory. ... The long-range part of the program is to make sure no child is left hungry."

In its first year, 140 backpacks were filled per weekend during the school year.

Curtis said more than 700 backpacks are filled per weekend in six school districts.

From the fall to the end of March, 123,427 meals were provided to students, and 68,771 snacks were offered.

Bald Eagle Area faculty and staff meet every Thursday at Wingate Elementary School to fill the bags for BEA and Bellefonte Area students.

About 200 backpacks a week are specifically filled for BEA students, Superintendent Jeff Miles said.

"I feel like I have 1,700 children that are my own and you feel protective, but this is by far the best thing I've been a part of," he said with some emotion. "As far as the children, you can tell it's effective when the kids can't wait to get their backpacks on Friday. Honestly, when you do it the first time, you're hooked. I think I missed two Thursdays, but it's therapeutic and I'm better because of it."

‘Politically Correct’ - For Whom?

By Rosalind Wiseman
Rosalind's Classroom Conversations
April 2016

When I first started teaching high school students, the term “politically correct” routinely came up. Especially when I covered sexual harassment, it was not uncommon for a male student to declare that he had the right to make offensive statements because the constitution protected his free speech. Further, he would proclaim that anyone who disagreed with him wasn’t worthy of his respect because they were being “politically correct.”

The moment he made this declaration the following reaction occurred. Most of the boys and girls in the room rolled their eyes or shifted their bodies that clearly indicated they didn’t agree. But a few of the students would immediately laugh, put their arms up in triumph and declare their support for this student. In their minds, he was speaking truth to power.

In these situations, I would often initially try to reason with the student. It didn’t work. Once or twice I remember trying to appeal to their compassion, using the “how

would you feel if that happened to you” strategy. That was even less effective.

The “politically correct” term is increasingly being used in our political discourse. And it is becoming just as serious of a problem as it is in the classroom. Why? Because in merely two words, it’s a formidable strategy to ridicule not only an idea but the person who communicates the idea. Moreover, the accusation deftly distracts from the content, kills civil debate and creates a delusional perception that the person engaging in “politically correct” discourse is honest, authentic and brave while the PC person is intolerant, weak and overly sensitive.

And it’s dangerous because it’s a subtle warning to those who point out offensive and biased language/behavior that they are overreacting and limiting others’ so-called “free speech.” It runs the risk that the progress our society has made in being sensitive to bigotry and bias will move backwards.

Beyond political campaigns, we are see-

ing people struggle with this issue all over the country including on college campuses. This is not to say that the debate college students and many of us are having around the country about the balance between free speech and hate speech isn’t important. It couldn’t be more important. But that’s the point—it must be a debate. It’s only when we remove the accusation of being “PC” from our conversations that we can approach people with the critical thinking skills and maturity necessary to hear opinions that we passionately disagree with.

We can ask these questions for young people to reflect upon:

1. When someone mocks you, what is your automatic reaction?
2. How do you maintain your self-respect in that moment?
3. What is your most powerful and dignified response when you’re in the presence of someone who openly disrespects you?

We’d suggest remembering that everyone has the right to their opinion. People can disagree with a specific opinion you put forth but they can’t disagree with your overall perspective and the way you see the world. Also, it may be helpful to reflect on the fact that often these “politically correct” accusations come from those who are in power positions or privileged groups and it immediately shuts down the conversation. Why are they doing this? Why don’t they want to hear what the other person has to say?

One idea to drive home this point is the following class activity:

Have students conduct research on three

adults in positions of leadership/power who accused someone of being politically correct. Then have them investigate three people who are accused of being politically correct. Are there patterns to what happened? Who were the accusers? Who were the accused? Do any of your answers fit into biases we can see in other areas of our culture?

We can also remind young people that for those among us who like to be rude and offensive and then use that “politically correct” term to label other people’s frustration with us, consider the following questions:

1. In what way is your right to be offensive more important than another person’s right to be heard?
2. How does the truth you want to share reflect your values and character?
3. Why is offending someone rewarding for you?

Those questions always provoke intense dialogue because at their core, they’re about balancing people’s rights “to be” in a public communal space like a school.

Young people are often rightfully frustrated that what they learn in school is not relatable to important issues happening in their real lives. Here’s an issue that does have application, not only in spontaneous conversations that take place between young people in hallways, lunch tables and online, but is also a dynamic they can see taking place throughout our culture. Let’s help our students understand that having a free flowing exchange of ideas--especially when someone wants to shut someone else down--is an issue they need to think critically about and know how to facilitate in their everyday lives.



Holocaust survivor's art gives Canoga Park students history lesson

*By Brenda Gazzar
Los Angeles Daily News
POSTED: 05/25/16, 8:13 PM PDT*

Eighth-grade students at a public charter school in Canoga Park recently learned about the Holocaust through the art of a late Holocaust survivor who was a Siberian exile.

Through The David Labkovski Project, 30 students at the Multicultural Learning Center spent 16 sessions in the classroom over the past three months and created their own artwork, including poetry, in response to artist Labkovski's work, according to Leora Raikin, founder of the project and great niece of Labkovski.

The students served as docents Wednesday, showing their artwork and that of Labkovski's to other students in the school.

At the program's start, not one of the eighth-grade students had heard about the Holocaust, Raikin said.

Labkovski was a Lithuanian-Israeli artist who survived a Siberian prison for eight years by becoming the resident tattoo and sketch artist for extra scraps of food. His paintings and sketches were on display for the first time in the U.S. last year at the New Community Jewish High School in West Hills, Raikin has said.

A larger sample of his work was also displayed at the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust.

The project is scheduled to be repeated next year at the school, said Raikin, who is also a West Hills artist.

Photo: Eighth-grade students (Chelsea Taura, 13-years-old, above left) talks to fellow students about her work at the Multicultural Learning Center in Canoga Park, Wednesday, May 25, 2016. The students were part of the David Labkovski Project, which educates through the art of a Holocaust survivor and Siberian exile with the same name. About 30 students spent 16 days sessions in the classroom over the past three months and created their own artwork, including poetry and paintings, in response to Labkovski's work. Photo credit: Hans Gutknecht/Los Angeles Daily News.



McCort students recount Auschwitz Experience

By Beth Ann Miller

On a sweltering summer day last July, Bishop McCort Catholic High School students Jordan Wherthey, Elizabeth Rager and Abigail Slezak were riding in a train car from Berlin, Germany to Warsaw, Poland. The train car's air conditioning wasn't working, and there was only one small open window to provide any kind of comfort for the passengers during the six-hour trip.

The window didn't help much; the air temperature inside the car was 113 degrees, while the outside temperature that day was 105 degrees.

"To experience that and know the Jews traveled by train car and they were packed together (with) no windows, it gave us the sense of what they were feeling," Slezak said.

That and other profound events the three experienced during their 10-day trip to Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic made real for them what many people alive today have only read about in history books: the Holocaust.

Since their return, these three graduating seniors have made numerous presentations about their trip, sharing their own photographs and teaching school students and community group members how approximately 11 million people -- 6 million European Jews and 5 million other so-called "undesirables" -- in those three countries were killed deliberately from

1933 to 1945 by the Nazi regime, led by Adolf Hitler.

Bishop McCort received a grant last year from the Abe and Janet Beerman Fund at the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies to send three students and two teachers to Europe on a Holocaust tour. The school held an essay contest to choose three students for the trip, and Wherthey, Rager and Slezak were chosen based on their essays.

"I've always had a fascination with history, particularly World War II," Wherthey said. "I've grown up reading about it, (and) my father and I collect the American memorabilia from that time period (uniforms, hats, medals, et cetera).

"When I was first introduced to the Holocaust part of World War II, it just seemed so unreal to me that something like that could actually happen. I thought it was fiction, but the more I read about it, it was like, 'Wow, this actually happened.' I started to realize that there are people who will wholeheartedly deny that this ever took place, and that's when it really hit me that I need to be one of the people that helps get the message out that this really did happen."

One of those defining moments for Wherthey came about as the visitors walked into the concentration camp memorial and museum at Auschwitz-Birkenau in southern Poland, where 1.2 million people died.

"I had seen it in pictures and textbooks before, but it doesn't seem real when you just look at it in a textbook," he said. "There's something you can't get out of it that actually walking under it will give you. It's a very humbling experience by far, to date the most humbling experience I've had or probably will ever have, to know that so many people walked through that gate and did not come out."

The concentration camp experience made a profound impression on the two young ladies as well.

"We walked through the first-ever-built gas chamber at Auschwitz," Slezak said. "You walk through this door and there's a little hallway where they would take their clothes off and then they would continue into the main vessel. Just knowing that 1.2 million people died in that same room that we were in,

it made your blood run cold and there's no feeling like it . . . it was numbing. It was definitely the most surreal experience I've had in my entire life."

Rager was affected as she walked on the hard gravel roads at the concentration camps they visited.

"One of the things I noticed the most was the gravel under our feet was very hard to walk on, even in really good shoes, and they (the victims) wouldn't have any shoes — and that hit me really hard," she said. "And then also we were told when we were walking through these camps, they would just throw the ashes of the people that were killed on the ground, so we were walking on their ashes."

Bishop McCort faculty members Mary Clare Piatak and Durinda Reaman supervised the students on their trip to Europe, and Wherthey's father went with the group as well.

"(The trip) was especially memorable for me because I went with my father," Wherthey said. "He had wanted to go to Europe as well (because of their shared interest in history and World War II), so it was just really cool that he got to go when I went."

The group did have an opportunity to experience some pleasant activities while in Europe; in particular, Wherthey and his father chose to visit a salt mine in Krakow, and Rager and Slezak explored the local shops.

"It was just interesting to be able to experience the different cultures, especially how different the stores were and just the food, too, was delicious! It was one way to experience the culture," Slezak said.

After they returned, Wherthey, Rager and Slezak worked together to create a 30-minute presentation about their European experience, including photographs they took on the trip along with famous quotes and other information about the Holocaust.

The three have given their presentation eight times in the last few months to Johnstown-area school children and community groups. They adjust the material they present based on the age group of the audience, but are committed to repeating the story of the Holocaust to those who've only read about it in books.

"We have to be a voice for those people who



Photo: Slezak and Wherthey respond to a student's question during a presentation.
Photo: Beth Miller

can't speak out anymore because of what happened to them," Rager said. "It is an insult to them to say this never happened, and we have to show that this is about them and bring the attention to the fact that all of these people were killed through no fault of their own. They were innocent, and it's important to speak up for them and we have to work to make sure something like this doesn't happen again."

Slezak agreed, adding that being there in person made the history of the Holocaust real for all of them.

"You can study and read as much as you want about the Holocaust, but there's no sense the same as walking through the concentration camp and experiencing the same feelings we did as we went through," she said.

"To have that hands-on experience, walk through the camp and still have such a somber eerie feeling in your heart — there's nothing like it."

A Deeper Understanding

Bate students, teacher explain how they have been affected by performing Holocaust piece

By: Kendra Peek

Image: Bate Middle School eighth-graders perform "And a Child Shall Lead Them" in Gravely Hall.



For the Bate Middle School students, Friday night was the culmination of their lessons on the Holocaust, lessons the students won't soon forget.

Eighth-graders were set up to show their poems, journal entries and artwork inspired by their study of the Holocaust in their English class.

The production was made possible by the Anne Frank and Eva Schloss: Reaching Students from Page to Stage Partnership Project made possible by the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts, Stage One Family Theatre and funded through a generous grant from

the Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence.

Following the showcase of works, select students, joined by one fifth grader and two sixth-graders performed "And A Child Shall Lead," a play written by Michael Slade and inspired by the lives of children in Terezín, a Jewish ghetto and work camp in the modern-day Czech Republic.

"The whole thing kind of fell in our laps," said Darell Rickmers, the forensics and drama teacher at Bate Middle School.

Rickmers had come across "And A Child Shall Lead" while trying to find a play for the spring and thought it would be perfect

for the students. He connected with Linda Cottle, an English teacher at the school and the two came up with a plan to work the piece with the eighth grade English class.

It was then he was approached by Jane Dewey, who had learned of an opportunity to participate in the Anne Frank and Eva Schloss: School Partnership Program, through the Kentucky Center For the Performing Arts. They jumped at the opportunity, which included training on Holocaust education and more.

Beyond the arts involved, students have had the opportunity to meet and speak with Frank Gross, a Holocaust survivor. He re-

turned to the district Friday night to attend the play, along with other young survivors and Michael Slade.

Students will have the opportunity to perform the play again, in part, at the Kentucky Center For the Performing Arts on May 23 as part of the ArtsLiteracy project.

According the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Terezín, in the modern-day Czech Republic, was referred to as Theresienstadt by the Nazis and was operational from Nov. 24, 1941, to May 9, 1945. It was a ghetto combined with a labor camp and a stopping point before transportation to more

eastern camps.

Approximately 140,000 Jews passed through, nearly 90,000 were deported further east to concentration camps, such as Auschwitz and about 33,000 people died in Theresienstadt, largely due to disease or starvation.

Fifteen thousand children passed through Terezín, where they created an underground newspaper, “Vedem,” collecting writings and artwork about the camp and their experiences, despite the threat of death.

“And A Child Shall Lead” is the story of those children, highlighting their lives in the camp. The pieces were hidden away and only recovered in the 1980s.

Lessons Learned

Beyond the history behind the Holocaust, students have learned a lot about the people, the emotions and what it means for their lives now.

“I’m a whole lot more thankful,” said Summer Quinn. She admits she was a little apprehensive when she learned that the spring play was going to be based on the Holocaust, simply because of how difficult a topic it is to depict.

“It’s a harsh topic to get into character on and learn everything about. Even when Mr. Gross came and everything, since he went through that time, it was difficult to understand everything, in a way. You would almost rather not understand it, but when you do it really opens your eyes and determines how you see things,” she said. “I didn’t realize how really, really lucky I am. Just going through this

whole process and becoming Alena has changed things in my own life, too.

“It gets into a habit when you say ‘Thank you,’ and you don’t really appreciate it. Its made me appreciate things more, and the life that I have.”

Even the most basic things, like food. “Going through a drivethrough is so, so different than what these kids got — all they had was a crust of bread.”

It brings the experience even closer; her grandmother’s neighbor is a survivor of the Holocaust. Although she has heard stories, Summer said the lessons and being part of the play has really helped her understand and be more appreciative of those talks.

Logan Smothers and Madison Clay were the two sixth-graders in the production. For the two more junior members, they had to learn a lot about the techniques of a play, too. “It’s not easy,” said Madison. “You work hard with the others; the cast becomes kind of like your at-school family.”

It’s been a fascinating play to be a part of, they said, because they are portraying something that actually happened. While the students don’t get the full scope of the lessons, because they aren’t part of the English classes where the eighth grade students were getting more, they said it was still an eye-opening ex-

perience.

That was echoed by Grayson Fowlkes, an eighth grader.

“I learned a lot about life in the concentration camps. It helped me understand that so I could get into character,” he said.

That, Grayson said, enabled him to portray the realities to those watching Friday.

“I hope people gain a deeper understanding of what life was like in concentration camps, how bad it was, and why it can’t hap-

pen again,” he said. “I think a play is a good way to convey that.

“I have a deeper understanding of it now; it’s affected me.”

It’s affected all the students, said Rickmers.

“We didn’t

shield our students, but we didn’t want to scare our students either. The reality has shocked them,” he said. “I think it’s going to be very powerful.”

It has opened the door of conversation, he said, and students are drawing parallels in the world around them, including what they can do to ensure that the Holocaust doesn’t happen again.

“They are concerned about the future. They know they can take a stand; their ideas can be heard,” Rickmers said.

“It’s definitely been a good experience,” said Samantha Sallee. “I think the history of

the Holocaust is important to know.”

She said she is concerned it could happen again, which is why it’s important to pay attention to the world events.

“I’ve been a lot more into the news and things like that,” Sallee said. “I’ve realized how fortunate we are.”

Making sure it doesn’t happen again is connected to not allowing people to become scapegoats, said Libby Hale.

“You shouldn’t grab someone and blame them,” she said. “It could escalate.”

Libby said she is really interested by the research into the Holocaust and this has taught her not to take things for granted and to be more appreciative.

The lessons were kicked off for the eighth grade students by reading and watching “The Diary of Anne Frank,” something that all the students were vividly impacted by.

None more so than Hunter Baxter, who portrayed an S.S. Guard in the play.

“It’s first-hand what a girl during the Holocaust, a Jew during the Holocaust, it’s what she went through personally each and every day.

She influenced me to keep striving every day,” he said, calling Anne Frank a “huge influence.”

“Treat people nicely. Instead of treating them like they’re lower than you, treat them the same or higher than you. What happened during the Holocaust, people were being killed or judged by how they looked, their religion, if they were disabled. People who are disabled or different religion than me are still people,” Hunter said.

“We didn’t shield our students, but we didn’t want to scare our students, either. The reality has shocked them... I think it’s going to be very powerful.”



Transcending Traditional Definitions

United Nations ASPIRE of East Stroudsburg South High School

By Michael Healy

Generating movement towards positive dialogue, fostering good will, and strengthening the foundation of our American democracy. These are the goals of the United Nations ASPIRE chapter of East Stroudsburg South High School. Uniting around the diversity of its members, ASPIRE aims to make an impact globally and locally by actively pursuing social justice while developing a broader understanding of global citizenship.

As students operating with 21st Century technology and the ability to communicate across the world at their fingertips, ASPIRE students reject the passive in favor of the active. An idea needs to be put into action and not merely put on social media. A criticism must be accompanied by a plan towards positive change. ASPIRE students seek to be fully aware of their responsibilities to their local and global communities as evidenced in their actions and their service. Moved by the Syrian refugee crisis, ASPIRE students started a coin drive for the Malala Fund which raised over \$600 for girls' education. Impacted by two suicides in our school district, students disseminated outreach materials and crisis hotlines via Twitter while fundraising \$250 for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. A discussion on political efficacy was followed by an initiative to register students and staff to vote, a tour of our Capitol in Harrisburg, and a youth discussion with our State Legislator for over 150 students hosted in our high school library. Illustrating that diversity includes all students, ASPIRE members volunteered weekly with our special needs students while fundraising over \$800 towards their Spring Gala, attending as guests and "buddies".

ASPIRE students have taken these master class lessons back to our community, highlighting our belief that what we learn is only as good as we can use it to improve our own community. At our high school in the Pocono region of Pennsylvania, we have hosted Pulitzer Prize winning author of the best selling non-fiction *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* Sheryl WuDunn, United States Congressman Matt Cartwright (PA-17 th), United States Congressman Tom Marino (PA- 10 th), Democratic Senatorial Candidate Admiral Joe Sestak, and Glamour Magazine College Woman of the Year, Afghan Activist Noorjahan Akbar. We are not a college or university. We are not located in or around a major city. We are not a private academy. We are an economically disadvantaged rural high school.

ASPIRE students believe that they can accomplish what they set out to do because they have learned firsthand from those that took great risks to improve the lives of their communities and the lives of others, the vast majority of whom they will never meet. The ASPIRE chapter of East Stroudsburg South High School has shown that the opportunities they have been given to engage with academics, activists, politicians, and world leaders is a positive investment in youth that pays off exponentially in the present and beyond. Giving youth the opportunity to improve themselves is an investment in our future and in our communities. This investment promotes peace, social justice, and global citizenship by simply opening the door and allowing youth to be part of the conversation.



Photos: ASPIRE students as flag bearers at the Peace Bell ringing ceremony on International Day of Peace at the UN and ASPIRE students at the Philadelphia Museum this past May.



NCSS is coming to Pennsylvania in 2022!!

The Pennsylvania Council of the Social Studies is pleased to announce the city of Philadelphia has been selected to host the National Council of the Social Studies annual conference in 2022.

Proposals for the city of Philadelphia to host this event started a little over a year ago and board members for the PCSS and NCSS worked closely this past summer to highlight the important historical elements of the city to draw Social Studies teachers from across the nation.

Philadelphia was able to capture the conference for the fall of 2022 by competing with top contending cities such as Atlanta, GA and New Orleans, LA.

PCSS representatives and board members could not be more pleased and honored to host the annual conference in the Keystone State and look forward to working closely with NCSS with organizing the conference and hosting a conference that will be truly remembered.

PCSS Officer Nominations



Harry Cooper
Running for: PCSS Board

Biography

As a former Chief of Police and school teacher who now works as both a criminal justice attorney and as an instructor in law-related and civic education, I see the future of social studies in Pennsylvania in terms of promoting hands-on education so the next generation of young people will be prepared to take on the role of active citizen in our society. Mock trials, search simulations, moot court, mediation, anti-bullying education, youth courts...I have used all of these interactive and stimulating methods of making the law come alive for young people and I have seen students who didn't have a spark in the classroom come alive with interest.

The Future of Social Studies

PCSS, as the umbrella organization for social studies education in the Commonwealth, must support social studies educators young and old. I have been part of a strong Philadelphia area law-related education partnership with Immediate Past PCSS President David Trevaskis and I have been involved in PCSS activities, such as the annual conference, for many years. If elected to the Board, I look forward to building on my civic education work and helping PCSS grow.



Kristy L. Snider
Running for: Recording Secretary

Kristy L. Snider will be entering her 20th year teaching at Pocono Mountain School District. Mrs. Snider currently holds a bachelor's degree in history from Susquehanna University, and a M.Ed from Wilkes University. She currently teaches geography at Pocono Mountain West Junior High School, and several courses at Northampton Community College. She has taught subjects within social studies including American History, geography, civics, and psychology, anthropology, and archeology as well, at East Stroudsburg University's Upward Bound Program, Lancaster Learning Institute, and Marywood University. She enjoys being a member of the steering committee for Pennsylvania Geographic Education Alliance and has served as both a member of the board of directors and the secretary for PCSS. She enjoys administering the state level questions for the National Geographic Bee each year. She was awarded the Distinguished Teacher Award through National Council for Geography and also traveled to Peru through a grant from NCGE. Kristy has also served as a Fulbright Scholar, living and studying in Ghana for one month, as well as a earning a Gilder-Lehrman Scholarship for the Revolutionary War. She worked on a TAH grant in Pennsylvania as well, where students worked on writing within the social studies curriculum.

Social Studies Statement of Purpose:

In this ever changing world, I have great concern that students are being denied a basic education in academia matters such as civics and basic history. As we continue to compete in the world, students need an understanding of our systems of justice and creation as a country, but not without the ability to adapt and be present considering today's needs. Students, teachers, and legislators must also gain recognition of cultures and the world around us, while honoring our basic rights. Students must be made aware of ways in which they can become part of their government and country; they must contribute meaningfully. In addition, they need to be aware of our individual roles in society as laws are made by those we elect. It is of the utmost importance that we continue to teach our children the responsibilities that they have as citizens and to help them explore the world successfully with open, and well taught minds. Teachers of social studies should continue to utilize a variety of techniques to produce upstanding citizens who can contribute to society as a result of their civic beliefs and evaluative abilities that have been gained through their education. At the primary levels, implementation of social studies into the reading curriculum might provide a broader appreciation and base knowledge for our students, while fostering awareness of current events, geography, cultures, and government systems. As such, we as educators, must promote the importance of a social studies education for each child, we must support one another and we must take an active role in our communities.



Michael Healey

Running for: PCSS Board

Carrying member state flags at the Peace Bell Ringing Ceremony at the United Nations Headquarters, welcoming a United States Senate candidate to speak to over 130 students, accepting an American flag which flew over the Capitol building for our school district presented by our Congressman, introducing one of Forbes Magazine's Most Powerful Women in the World to our administrative team, and being filmed by PBS for the documentary adaptation of the New York Times non-fiction *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* -- these are the experiences of my students, putting words into action, applying their Social Studies curriculum, and representing their community.

Developing our Social Studies curriculum and receiving the support of colleagues and administrators has given me the confidence, foundation, and platform to highlight the power of Social Studies education. In turn, my students become collaborators and leaders with a responsibility to mentor younger students of East Stroudsburg South High School.

I learned these skills over 13 years of teaching at East Stroudsburg South High School. During my undergraduate studies in Political Science at Dickinson College, I learned how to foster a spirit of collaboration and the integral role of community service. My liberal arts education included service and a wide range of courses in the humanities that enhanced each other. At Dickinson, I viewed curriculum as interconnected and interdependent. Spanish language courses included lessons on culture that seemed to speak with my classes in sociology which laid out centuries of human interaction, complimented by the study of world history, further strengthened by art history which taught me that the greatest stories ever written are also displayed in museums all over the world. Together, these experiences shaped my interdisciplinary vision for curriculum across the humanities. On this small campus in southern Pennsylvania, I was taught the value of global citizenship. It was also at this campus that I was encouraged to pursue my interest in global citizenship, studying abroad in a Spanish language immersion program in Malaga, Spain.

Upon graduating from Dickinson, I enrolled in a graduate level teaching certification program at Marywood University and was hired by the East Stroudsburg Area School District shortly after completing my certification. I will complete a Master of Science degree from Wilkes University in Instructional Technology in May 2017. I have taught World History my entire career and have taught AP US Government and Politics for the last 4 years. With my wife Michele, a psychologist, I founded a social justice and global citizenship student group called United Nations ASPIRE. We are officially affiliated with the United Nations Academic Impact and have served as the model group globally for other schools to launch their own chapter.

I have sought creative ways to bridge gaps within my classroom and community and most importantly use lessons in the classroom to affect positive change through service and citizenship. Working with my students on Social Studies based initiatives, fund raisers, and speaker series has afforded opportunities for students and staff alike that have taken us to the United Nations on numerous occasions. For educating my students to be grassroots advocates for community health, we received the United Nations CTAUN Best Practices in Education Award in 2014. Our studies of current world issues includes an emphasis on gender inequality and inequity that lead to our hosting Pulitzer Prize Winner Sheryl WuDunn at our high school. For this, I was recognized with the Pennsylvania State Education Association Human Rights and Civil Rights Excellence in Education Award for 2013.

Connecting my students to community and working with them to develop meaningful service learning based projects to support Social Studies curriculum has been a focus of mine over the last two academic years and I look forward to continuing this as part of all my classes. My students have fundraised \$800 dollars donated to provide our Special Needs students with their very own Prom, we participate yearly in the Juvenile Diabetes Research Fund Walk, and have collected thousands of canned goods for homeless veterans in our local community.

My interest in being a board member of the Pennsylvania Council for the Social Studies is rooted in how the study of Social Studies enriches my life and educational philosophies. I bring an interdisciplinary vision of Social Studies to the board as well as a drive to enhance and broaden the experiences of students and teachers in Social Studies courses. As a teacher in a high school that has four years of required Social Studies courses as well as numerous electives still offered despite the scaling back of Social Studies statewide, I can attest to the utility and value of teaching and offering a wide range of rich Social Studies courses to students. The support of Social Studies in our district has made our students models for service and citizenship at the local and global levels.

The Future of Social Studies in Pennsylvania

As a Social Studies educator teaching in an era when many school districts have reduced the requirement to only three years, I can attest to the immeasurable positive impact that four required years of Social Studies has had upon our students. Social Studies is the richest of the core courses as part of a high school education. World History, American History, Geography, Civics and Citizenship, Sociology, and Psychology are all courses offered at East Stroudsburg Area School District. Looking further at these courses, inside their curricula, we have Art History, Anthropology, Literature, Poetry, and Philosophy. Further, we study the history of Mathematics and Geometry, the impact of human beings upon the Earth's weather and climate, the migration of animals and other species. The Social Studies are the humanities, but also when embraced and nourished, it is the study of human development and the documentation of all civilization. As Social Studies educators, we stand at the epicenter of cross-curricular instruction and have developed an interdisciplinary vision. An emphasis upon and discourse of four year Social Studies curriculum should be a goal of Social Studies departments and Social Studies based organizations across Pennsylvania.



Jonathan Rutledge
Running for: PCSS Board

Jonathan Rutledge is a teacher at Westmont Hilltop Junior/Senior High School in Johnstown, PA. Through his 14 years of teaching experience, Jonathan has taught a wide range of social studies classes, from World Cultures to Leadership. Currently, Jonathan teaches AP U.S. History, AP European History and Psychology. Jonathan received his BA in Secondary Education with a social studies concentration from the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown in 2000. He completed his Masters Degree in Special Education from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 2008. He has used his Masters degree in the classroom in his academic reinforcement classes, as well as running the Gifted Support program at the Westmont Hilltop High School until from 2009-2016. Jonathan is also the Student Council advisor and has been the Junior and Senior class advisor in the past. Jonathan is happily married to his wonderful wife Katherine, who is also a social studies teacher at Conemaugh Valley Junior/Senior High School, also in Johnstown, PA. Together, they have a 2 year old Golden Retriever, Indy. In his spare time, Jonathan is a Past Master of the Greater Johnstown Lodge #538 of Masons, is a Past President of the Ferndale Lions Club, is on the Board of Directors for the Pitt-Johnstown Alumni, served on the PCSS board from 2013 to 2016, has traveled to Norway for a Rotary vocational exchange, loves to read and listen to music and enjoys snowboarding in the winters and hitting the beaches during the summers.

The future of social studies education is something that not many people who are not in the field may think about, however it is a topic that needs more attention. Local, State and National policy makers seem to be thriving on the current of anti-intellectualism that is coursing through the United States. All one needs to do is log in to the World Wide Web, or crack open a newspaper to read how the political discourse in the United States has hit a nadir. When states like Texas want to edit history text books to remove historical truths such as the impact of slavery on those that were in fact slaves, or minimizing the impact national policy has had on Native Americans since the birth of this nation, it only makes the job of a social studies educator harder. It does the nation a disservice. It breeds a population that doesn't know the truth of their nations' history. It leads to blind followers. Lack of knowledge about our collective past only widens the divisions that already exist. When, we as a nation of immigrants want to exclude groups of people because of where they are from, we forget our own pasts. This is why the future of Social Studies education is so important. We as social studies educators need to combat the ignorance that seems to be so prevalent in today's society. We need to make sure our students are informed, not only of current events, but about why these current events are happening. We need to make sure our students can think critically and not just be sold a product by talk radio or network news, like so many in this country seem to have fallen sway to. The future of social studies education rests on us to make sure that we are preparing informed citizens to leave our schools make decisions based on critical thought, so that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. If we as educators are not active in preparing students for their futures as active citizens in this democratic republic, then we are not doing our jobs. The future of social studies education is more fragile than ever and it is up to us to make it strong once again.



Dennis Henderson
Running for: PCSS Board

Mr. Henderson currently serves as the Educational Director of Manchester Academic Charter School located in Pittsburgh. His commitment to the students and families he serves has gained him local and national recognition. He was honored among 25 of the top educators internationally in New York City as a recipient of the NFTE Global Enterprising Educator Award and frequently speaks at various university and community forums regarding education and community empowerment.

Beyond his work at school, Mr. Henderson coordinates programs in the community to teach youth entrepreneurial skills and law related education. Dennis serves as on the board of the Venture Outdoors and the Alliance for Police Accountability

Originally from Erie, PA, Mr. Henderson has been committed to improving the lives of youth and families prior completing undergrad in 1999. After moving to Pittsburgh in 2000, he continued working with youth and families in effort to improve the greater community.

Dennis Henderson resides in Pittsburgh with his wife, Dr. Monica Henderson c/o '98 and their two daughters Denia and Jacey.

For more information about Mr. Henderson go to: <http://thesoulpitt.com/main/dennis-henderson-community-change-agent/>

The Future of Social Studies:

Social studies have always been the subject in which we can observe how cumulative knowledge, events, skills and decisions have shaped our society. As many districts transition to project-based/problem-based learning environments to promote and encourage teaching 21st century skills, moving forward social studies has the capacity to serve as the platform in which educators can design lessons applicable to our greater society. As we continue to seek resolutions to the many challenges that our society is faced with, social studies empowers our youth to become active participants in this pursuit of solutions. As educations continue to innovate, social studies will transcend from simply a subject matter but to the overall culture that drives the school and prepare young people to transfer their acquired skills beyond.



Keith Bailey
Running for: PCSS Board

Keith Bailey is a Penn State graduate who has worked for the past two decades in public interest programs from Ameri-corps to his current work at Congreso de Latinos Unidos, Inc., a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization founded in 1977 with a mission to strengthen Latino communities through social, economic, education and health services, leadership development and advocacy. He is a past two term Board member of the Pennsylvania Council for the Social Studies and he has been a frequent presenter at the annual conference.

Although now in a primarily administrative role, Keith has always been a mentor to the young people in his programs and it is not unusual for him to receive calls from former students, now in college and beyond, asking for his support from help writing a paper to dealing with family issues. While working for Physicians for Social Responsibility during the last decade, Keith developed a series of youth courts in Philadelphia area schools, building on work he first did at Kensington High School back in the late 1990s. His students appeared on television shows and testified at government hearings about the value of these youth run alternatives to traditional discipline in schools. Keith set up these programs where students were trained by lawyers, law students, law and justice professionals and teachers to perform all court functions (judge, bailiff, jurors, etc.).

On the Future of Social Studies

PCSS is the future of social studies in Pennsylvania. I have spent enough time with PCSS to know that is leading the field of social studies in the right direction for the future, a future where diversity is embraced in all its permutations and where the focus is on building successful citizens. My work in youth courts reflects the kind of social studies I envision--innovative and interactive programming that educates students about self-government and the courts while impacting students where they live. Positive peer pressure helps offenders reflect on their behavior, recognize that actions have consequences, and accept responsibility.

Neuroscience informs us that the stress and trauma disadvantaged youth experience impairs their decision making and impulse control. Absent nurturing relationships with stable adults, some youth fail to acquire the executive function skills to cope with their environment. Teachers confirm such youth have problems following instructions and socializing. Without effective intervention they fall behind, becoming a danger to themselves and their community.

Effective social studies programming like youth court participation in under-resourced schools improves life outcomes for these youth. Youth court participation in well-resourced schools helps educate the next generation of social justice leaders.