Pennsylvania Council for the Social Studies

Summer 2017

PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES

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Mission Statement

The Pennsylvania Council for the Social Studies promotes quality Social Studies Education from kindergarten to higher learning by:

Advocating the Social Studies at all levels of education in Pennsylvania.

Promoting the analysis, dissemination and valuation of Social Studies materials.

Examining and recommending certification requirements for teachers.

Assisting educators in organizing local Social Studies councils for professional development.

Cooperating with schools, districts, intermediate units and other interested parties on Social Studies projects.

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How bringing comics into the classroom made me love teaching again

By Tim Smyth

Via pbs.org

Most teachers would agree that teaching is one of the most exhausting jobs to love. Between meeting the individual needs of our students, keeping up with the latest initiatives and completing the day-to-day tasks required for keeping a classroom productive and positive, the job can be overwhelming and sometimes discouraging.

In my 15th year of teaching, these feelings only intensified for me. Facing burnout, I realized that I needed a way to regroup and re-energize. I feared that like so many others, I might have to leave the classroom. I decided to go back to the basics.

Most teachers would agree that teaching is one of the most exhausting jobs to love.

Every introductory education class declares that bringing our personal passions into our classroom is fun for us and fun for our students. It was this premise that gave me the permission to finally do what I had been deliberating ever since completing my reading specialist studies: I committed myself to bringing my passion ð comics ð into the classroom.

I said óyesô to being excited and to broadening my approach to teaching social studies. I said óyesô to people who share my passion. I said óyesô to new experiences and stepping out of my comfort zone. But most of all, I gave myself permission to use my strengths to bring to life the core concepts of my curriculum, and it has made all the difference in my lessons, in my perspective and in my ability to connect with my students.

I wrote about this journey, still in its beginning stages, in a blog one year ago. The reaction was swift. My students responded positively, validating that the approach worked for them. Educators, artists and writers in the industry reached out to me over Twitter. I was asked to present a program about comic books in the classroom at Philadelphia Wizard World. I was terrified, but it was so well-received that it was clear other educators want to know how to do this as well.

Through social media, I received a multitude of requests. I helped college professors develop curriculum materials. I previewed possible educational comic books for publishers. I ran Twitter chats for teachers discussing how to integrate pop culture in the classroom. I was chosen as ñGeek of the Weekò

For every opportunity, I stayed the Super Bowl of all nerdom ï I was asked to present on a panel at the San Diego Comic Con about my experiences in the classroom. And it was awesome. I found my people.

In August, having just returned from my San Diego trip, I began my 16th year of teaching, feeling energized and excited. Despite having two new courses, I began looking for ways to integrate these new ideas into classroom life. I still have a curriculum, data points, special schedules and lesson plans. But now I look for opportunities for broadening my studentôs experi

This year we used ñMarch,ò a graphic novel by Rep. John Lewis, And Aydin and Nate Powell, to explore the civil rights movement. At the same time, a teacher whom I had met over Twitter and I arranged to have our students work together, discussing the historical and modern implications of the story. It just so happened that the teacher and her class were in Norway.

This forced my students to look at the topic differently, to explain their ideas more clearly and more globally. And it is this more worldly perspective that I think I was missing before.

In another instance, while talking about various atrocities in history, we used the comic book ñMadaya Mi è ò ï ch a mom in Syria. This comic was put together by Marvel Comics and ABC News. We discussed the historical and social implications of the panels and applied them to the human experience of groups facing persecution. My students had many questions. They were drawn in by the emotional panels; they answers for.

Through Twitter, we contacted the ABC news correspondent who had interviewed My class then Skyped with the two news correspondents, one in New York and one in Paris, to ask their questions, learning about Syria in a way I never would have been able to convey. Several students took the comic books to their after-school organizations, hoping to develop service projects so that they can help the people suffering from the war in Syria. Seeing their reaction made it the single most rewarding day of my teaching career.

And yet some days teaching is still stressful and overwhelming. The grading, the planning, the expectations still overwhelm me. But over the course of the last two years, I have learned to share more and to celebrate my successes more. I have learned to reach out to other educators, writers, artists, publishers, and not to be afraid to use social media. We need to overcome the self-imposed stigma of boasting about our successes ï we need to celebrate the awesome things that happen in our classrooms every day.

Several students took the comic books to their after-school organizations, hoping to develop service projects so that they can help the people suffering from the war in Syria. Seeing their reaction made it the single most rewarding day of my teaching career.

I have given myself permission to use what I know and what I love in order to bring new experiences and connections to my students. At my most recent Comic Con experience in Chicago, as I was seated on a panel of teachers, authors and artists, I said that we must give ourselves permission to use comics, music and pop culture in our classrooms, because we know it works for our students.

Cover Photo:
Social studies teacher Tim Smyth,
at Wissahickon High School in Ambler, Pennsylvania,
gearing up for Teacher Appreciation Week.

Photo taken by Donovan Kennedy,
with editing by Gordy Michie

Mad about Civics:

Johnstown eighth -graders compete to choose most influential American

by Ronald Fisher
rfisher@tribdem.com

Greater Johnstown Middle School civics teacher Christian Wrabley has found a way to engage his students. For the fourth consecutive year, Wrabley had his eighth-grade civics students participate in a project he calls JMS Civics Madness.

ñI try to piggyback March Madness tourney, ò he said.

year we set out to answer a large research question: Who is the most influential U.S. president of all time? Who is the greatest military president in U.S. history? Who is the most influential member of the U.S. government in history? And this year: Who is the most influential American of all time?ò

Wrableyôs civics tournament, 64 influential people, goes through 63 matchups and results in one person taking the title as the most influential American of all time.

Students are assigned a matchup for each round. They have to research both individuals and present their findings.

The civics tournament is broken into six rounds: Google slides, text dependent analysis essay, poetry writing, magazine design detailing highlights of the matchup, wild card (choose your own project) and persuasive letter to the editor.

Wrabley randomly selected two letters ï by Mia Jordan and Nathan Saintz ï as examples of the studentsô work.

They can be viewed online at www.tribdem.com.

Each round challenged the students to learn not only more about the historical figures but also more about themselves, Wrabley said.

The students gain basic knowledge about the individuals in the first round. They had to find an article on the individual, analyze and then write a five-paragraph essay in the next round.

After being pushed out of their comfort zones throughout the project, Wrabley said it was the wild card round where he saw his students shine using their talents. Many of the students relied on their strengths for the that round, Wrabley said.

ñI was trying to allow perform in the area that they do best. We have some great writers, we have some great artists, some great researchers and some people who do great with technology, ò he said.

Student Taylor Kennedy said she liked the project because she could use it as an outlet.

ñI am an artist, so I was actually kind of cool, because I never drew a president and I got to express the way I feel about drawing. ò

Classmate Ayanna Gibson said she also liked being able to express herself through the project.

ñYou actually got to than just doing the regular TDAs (text dependent analysis) like we do

ñHere we got to write not just stick to one topic.

ñWith the wild card round you wanted to do and show the teacher who you really are through your artwork and poetry, so you can show more of yourself instead of sticking to the script, ò she said.

After presenting their research for each round, students voted for who should advance from each matchup.

The final four included matchups of Martin Luther King Jr. versus Abraham Lincoln, and George Washington versus Harriet Tubman. Once the votes were tallied, a battle between King and Washington was slated championship. ò

The students voted King as the most influential American of all time. He took 70 percent of the vote ï the largest margin of victory since the project began, Wrabley said.

With current issues pertaining to race and civil rights, King seemed to have a big influence this year, Wrabley said.

Student Shantia Jordan said she found herself immersed in learning throughout the project. She said the work allowed her to be more hands-on than other projects that she has done.

ñIt was more effective, project.

Wrabley said he liked the idea, ò as she the students who donôt reading taking notes and then taking a test. Some kids, itôs just not for

ñThis project kind of different way, ò he said.

ñIt was so challenging and

ïI enjoy watching them rise to the challenge and

ñI think it would be possible with going a

can do what you

Photo: Nathan Saintz (left) and Mia Jordan, eighth-graders at Greater Johnson Middle School

We the Pupils:
More States Teaching Founding US Documents

By Matt OôBrien, AP

NORTH SMITHFIELD, R.I. (AP) ð Should U.S. high school students know at least as much about the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Federalist papers as immigrants passing a citizenship test?

In a growing number of school systems, having such a basic knowledge is now a graduation requirement. But states are taking different approaches to combating what's seen as a widespread lack of knowledge about how government works.

Kentucky last week and Arkansas on March 16 became the latest of more than a dozen states since 2015 that have required the high school social studies curriculum to include material covered by the 100 questions asked on the naturalization exam. Lawmakers in other states, including Minnesota, are hoping to foster even deeper understanding of the fundamentals of American democracy by adding a full course to study its most important documents.

"Rights might be inherent, but ideas need to be taught," said Maida Buckley, a retired classroom teacher in Fairbanks, Alaska, who testified last year to an Alaskan legislative task force on civics education. "When you have a system of government that's based on ideas, espoused in the Declaration of Independence and carried out with a working document in the Constitution, those ideas need to be taught."

It's a bipartisan cause, and in many states such bills are jointly introduced by Republicans and Democrats. But proponents' motivations vary from dismay about the lack of participation in local school boards and town halls to concerns about how Republican President Donald Trump and his supporters view the power of the executive branch.

"We clearly have seen there is a serious civics deficiency in this country, all the way up to the top, the very top," said Rhode Island Democratic state Rep. Gregg Amore, a longtime high school history teacher who is co-sponsoring legislation that contends the "survival of the republic" depends on Americans understanding its principles and history.

A campaign by the Scottsdale, Arizona-based Joe Foss Institute has led many states to pass laws requiring students to know what's on the citizenship test.

"It's not a panacea or silver bullet, but it's a step forward," said the group's Lucian Spataro, who said 17 states have adopted the model or something similar. "You have to learn the basics before you can have the higher-level discussions."

Other civics education boosters say such a mandate is too simplistic.

"If you do something like that, people are going to

start teaching to the test and teaching a game of Trivial Pursuit," said Charles Quigley, executive director of the Calabasas, California-based Center for Civic Education. "Kids are already tested to death."

The Rhode Island bill, introduced by a Republican from North Smithfield, a conservative town where Trump is popular, is partly inspired by a ninth-grade class taught at North Smithfield High School. The honors class uses the "We the People" curriculum developed by Quigley's group. Students participate in a national competition in which they must orally defend their ideas.

On a March afternoon, teenagers stood at their classroom's lectern one by one, debating whether a California police officer can search a suspected gang member's smartphone without a warrant.

As they argued, some cited language from the U.S. Constitution's Fourth Amendment. Others looked to Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis' 1928 dissenting opinion in a wiretapping case.

Their teacher, Natalie O'Brien, gently prodded them to think critically and tap into more than 200 years of American history and legal philosophy. She didn't tell them that, in 2014, a unanimous Supreme Court ruled in the California case that police may not generally search the cellphones of people they arrest without first getting search warrants.

"Someone's going to channel James Madison, right?" she said. "What would Brandeis be saying about this particular decision? What would the founders be saying?"

North Smithfield High student Megan Skinner said she didn't pay much attention to politics before O'Brien's class, but the 15-year-old now said she now uses the founding U.S. documents as a guide as family and friends debate the Trump presidency.

"It gives us an entirely new perspective on all the events that are going on," Skinner said. "You see all these things in the news, and especially about the election, and all the things that are going on with the executive orders he passed, the travel bans. Before this class, we wouldn't have understood these things."

Photo Caption:

In this March 8 photo, high school teacher Natalie O'Brien, center, hands out papers during a civics class called "We the People," at North Smithfield High School in North Smithfield, R.I. More states are requiring graduating high school students to know at least as much about the U.S. founding documents as immigrants passing a citizenship test. Boosting civics literacy has been a bipartisan cause. But some advocates say a mandate to test government trivia is too simplistic.

(AP Photo/Steven Senne)

Book Review:

Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy V. Ferguson

By Sarah White

Blair L. M. Kelleyôs Right to Ride is an exploration of the contexts and intricacies of streetcar boycotts in the American South at the turn of the 20th century. This work at first appears to be scattershot in its focus, but as the author argues the book has different purposes. But upon further examination, this appearance proves to be appropriate, for just as streetcar boycotts themselves contained many layers and purposes, so too does Kelleyôs purpose in writing about them ï if an author ôs work is of a complex nature, intersectional and multipurpose, then it is only fitting that an author ôs exploration of the topic be as well.

Kelleyôs first statement of her intentions with Right to Ride is a testament to ñthis forgotten chapter in the history of the South, while simultaneously placing southerners within the context of the ñreminder that southern cities were not the first in the nation ò to see streetcar protests initiated in the U.S. North as attempts to control recently emancipated slaves arriving from the South. Without understanding this context, Kelley argues, prevents us from arriving at a full analysis of the South's streetcar protests. Immediately after this assertion, Kelley is clear about how exactly Right to Ride contributes to the field of civil rights research and early protests: no other studies have included an analysis of how exactly the Plessy v. Ferguson decision of 1896 influenced African American political culture during this era (p. 5). Right to Ride thus serves as the first work which fully connects the history of post-Civil War protests in the U.S. North, legal struggles in New Orleans, and streetcar boycotts after Plessy v. Ferguson.

Kelley also argues that ñthis notion of accommodation ò (p. 6) in streetcar protests were never solely about streetcars, but about citizenship, and that ñthe struggle for civil rights was not only to physical accommodations on public transit, but national, political, and social acceptance as United States citizens. Further, within the struggle for civil rights, there were contested meanings of class within African American communities ò (p. 9) by reminding readers that streetcars did not discriminate based on socio-economic status, but by racial perceptions. Black passengers in a first-class, white streetcar threatened white supremacy by their mere assertion of their right to belong there (p. 36) ï however, black Pullman porters, for instance, were allowed on white cars so long as they were in positions of servitude (p. 38), and African American maids attending to white children were allowed onto ladiesô car reaffirming the notion that segregation was not about physical integration, but social integration. (p. 38)

As streetcars became more affordable, African Americans from all class backgrounds utilized them for travelling to work, school, or social activities. But while segregation did not account for class difference, Kelley argues that another intention behind Right to Ride is to explore how African Americans perceived class differentiations among themselves, often causing dissent within protest organizations. The black middle class in particular felt this division acutely. Believing themselves to be rising above the black working class, they were torn between the desire for inclusion at the expense of demonizing the black working class as the beneficiary of racial uplift as a whole (p. 120).

Kelley then moves on to state another intention: to analyze streetcar protests through intersectionality, through the lenses of the rich and poor, women and men, across all levels of education that rode the streetcars on a day-to-day basis (p. 12). And in drawing from this intersectionality, discussions of citizenship and accommodation, and the contexts that gave birth to these protests, she argues that Right to Ride connects two contrasting themes: ñthe collective nature of the trains and streetcars and the tensions that existed within black communities ò (p. 12). What do educated African American man? And what does it mean to a poor, illiterate African American maid? How can a community with wildly differing circumstances unite under a common cause?

As Kelley succinctly writes: ñthis book shows that the act of boycotting streetcars served not only as a physical protest within the politics of space, determining who is allowed to sit in which section, but also as a psychological protest within the context of the integrity of citizenship and federally protected rights as such. Kelley does a remarkable job of incorporating context into her analysis. And while her intentions with Right to Ride seemed to be scattered and misplaced in her introduction, it is clear why Kelley took the time to explain each argument of her thesis in detail. Her inclusion of Plessy v. Ferguson into the conversation of streetcar protests offers a more thorough and complex analysis. Overall, Right to Ride should be critical reading to students and researchers engaged in civil rights work.

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Kelley, Blair L. M. *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy V. Ferguson.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

Pennsylvania Bar Association
Youth Courts

Youth courts are student run alternatives to juvenile justice and school disciplinary systems. Students are trained by lawyers, law students, law and justice professionals and teachers to perform all court functions (judge, bailiff, jurors, etc.). 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. 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.

Youth court participants report its transformative impact as they learn coping skills they otherwise fail to acquire, and will use the rest of their lives. Using restorative justice as a participatory tool, youth court students contribute to the well-being of their school and community. The most empowering courts limit the role of adults to trainer and mentor, trusting youth, and empowering them to control the entire process.

Youth courts can operate after-school or be integrated within Social Studies classes. They can also operate as a pre-arrest juvenile justice diversion. 65% of the courts process juvenile justice offenses. 35% are school-based. The Philadelphia area has more than a dozen school-based and no juvenile justice-based youth courts. Erie County has the longest running youth court in the Commonwealth, dating back to the 1970s, and it a juvenile justice-based youth court run out of the Erie County Juvenile Probation Department.

Quality youth courts achieve recidivism rates lower than traditional justice programs. Quality youth courts achieve the following benefits:

Youth Court benefits for respondents

1) Offenders get to tell their story to their peers and view youth courts as more fair.
2) Offenders experience restorative justice, instead of being suspended they stay in school.
3) Offenders respect peer justice more than adult discipline.
4) Offenders have lower recidivism rates (Urban Institute, 2002; Hamilton Fish, 2008).

Youth Court benefits for student participants (many are former offenders)

1) Participants acquire legal knowledge and a positive attitude towards the legal system.
2) Participants contribute to their community through experiential and service learning.
3) Students learn academic skills: concentration, public speaking and communication skills.
4) Students acquire socialization skills by collaborating to form a restorative disposition.
5) Students become engaged and empowered and learn to become good citizens.
6) Youth court is a drop-out prevention program; members graduate from high school.

Youth Court benefits for schools and neighborhoods

1) School safety and climate can be improved if used with other restorative practices.
2) Disciplinary systems can be improved as well as adult volunteers. Nationally 1,100
3) Costs of school discipline can be reduced.
4) A culture of justice is created.
5) Curriculum is enhanced by hands-on application of civic education.
6) Communication between juvenile and educational systems can be improved.

For more youth court backgrounder, please check out
http://www.pabar.org/public/committees/childavo/basedyouthcourt.asp
and find there the PBA Resolution supporting youth courts at
http://www.pabar.org/public/committees/childavo/PassedPBARESOLUTIONONYOUTHCOURTS.pdf
The Philadelphia Bar Resolution backing youth courts is at
http://www.pabar.org/public/probono/Youth%20Court%20Resolution%20FINAL.pdf
Look at
http://stoneleighfoundation.org/fellows/volz for a summary of former Stoneleigh Fellow Gregg Volz's work in the field.
The testimony that lead to the City Council of Philadelphia Resolution supporting youth courts is found at
http://www.pabar.org/public/committees/childavo/CompilationOfYouthCourtTestimony.pdf
The exhaustive ABA Youth court materials can be found at
http://www.pabar.org/public/probono/ABA_YouthCourtGuide.pdf

Youth courts are an important component of Project PEACE (Peaceful Endings through Authorities, Children and Educators), a partnership of the Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General, the Pennsylvania Bar Association and the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation. Project PEACE is a peer-mediation, anti-bullying and youth court training program that enhances in Pennsylvania schools and communities the skills of non-violent conflict resolution and active civic engagement that are necessary for productive citizenship. This public-private partnership introduces dispute resolution techniques, first to elementary school students throughout the Commonwealth, while promoting bullying prevention education in the schools. Youth courts are then introduced as students move into upper elementary and middle school.

The video found at http://stoneleighfoundation.org/content/how-run- youth-court gives a nice picture of youth courts but nothing can beat seeing one in person and anyone interested in this effort to help young people should contact david.trevaskis@pabar.org to set up a visit to see a youth court in action.

Photo:
Pictured left to right:
University of Pittsburgh School of Law Director, Public Interest & overnment Relations, Rochelle R. McCain; Duquense University School of Law ssociate Clinical Professor and Pro Bono Program Coordinator Tracey McCants ewis; Immediate Past PCSS President and Pennsylvania Bar Association Pro Bono Coordinator David Trevaskis; Dr. Darla Gerlach, Fulbright Scholar and Teacher, Shaler Middle School; Dr. Kay Atman, Professor Emeritus, University of Pittsburgh School of Education; and Mary Hall, Community Activist Not pictured, Deborah Sagan, Olweus Bullying Prevention and Project PEACE Trainer

Civic Mirror Project

helps Westfield Middle School students learn

By Mark Ambrogi

Westfield Middle School eighth-grader Cyle Ginsberg found the Civic Mirror project an effective way to learn about how governments run.

ñIt ôs a lot more involved than reading from a text book. It ôs actually doing something than reading about it.ò

Ginsberg was in WMS social studies Stephanie Walker ôs eighth-grade classes, w

ñThey turn the students into citizens of a country for the first time this semester. b

ñThe students come out with an actual identity, flag, constitution, which is the ph curriculum for eighth grade.ò

Walker said the students use budgeting and tax laws. The students elect a senate, house of representatives and a president.

ñThey appoint a judge so they learn about the separation of powers. It is a mini-simulation of the United States.ò

The students also learn about the economics of a nation.

ñThey are competing among themselves and my classes who had five classes t in use the project.

The eight-week period has just been completed for Walker ôs classes.

ñI have a group that meets with me in the middle of the school day, ò Wa

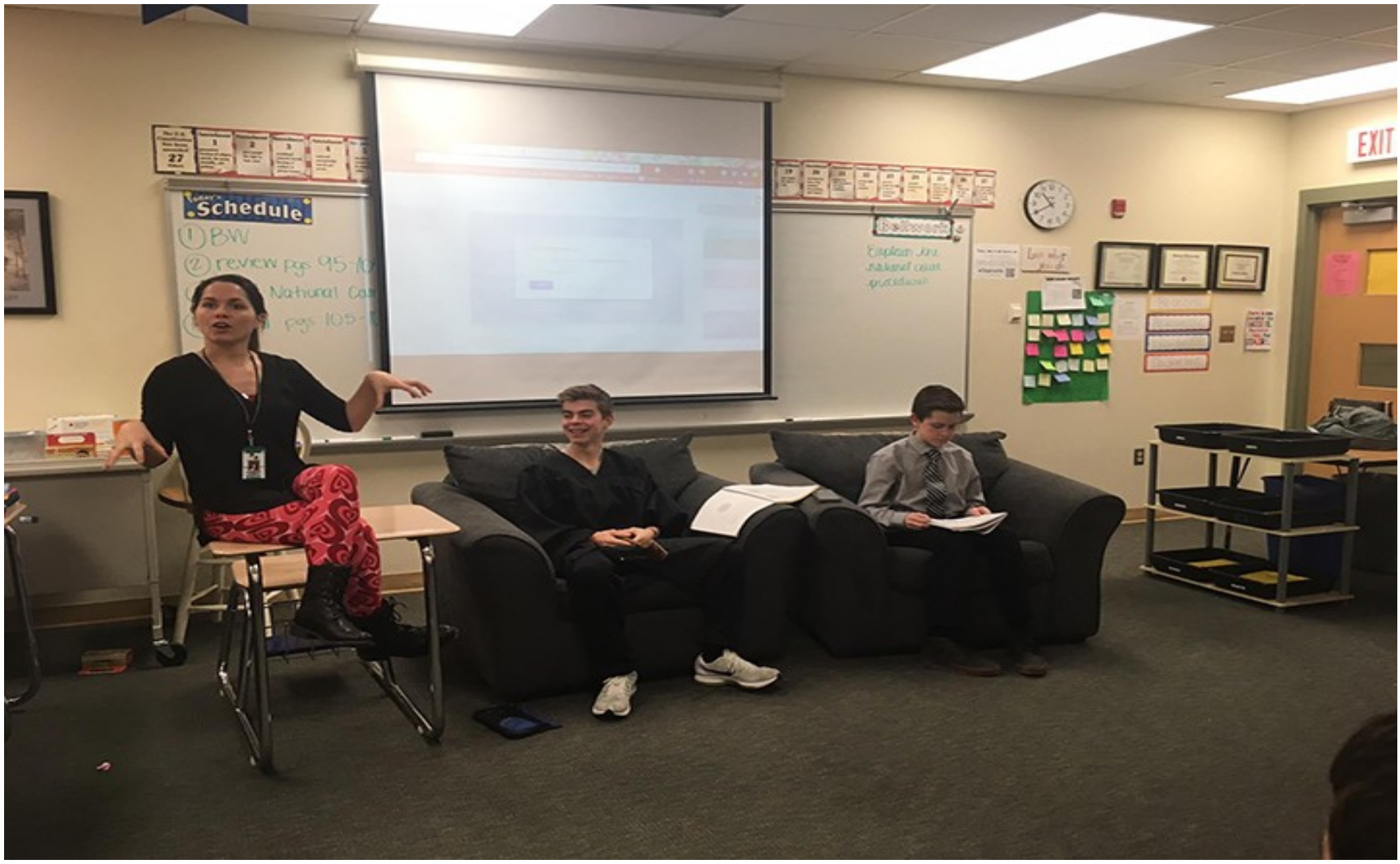
Another WMS teacher, Joe Loeffel, has started it in his classes.

ñWe ended it with a video session with the three-tasked. Things they can take s t with them beyond the history. Things like remembering to use good morals and ethics when making business transactions so people will trust you and continue buying from you.ò

Lincoln Strong, another of Walker ôs students, said he learned mo

ñIt ôs more enjoyable than the usual classroom set two, you could compete with d o your classmates to work to be better than someone else.ò

Photo: Westfield Middle School social studies teacher Stephanie Walker, Robby Bogdajewicz and Alex Coulombe are using the Civic Mirror.



How to Teach about Borders and Global Migration

By Ryan Sprott

Many teachers are struggling to include the topic of immigration in their classrooms. Ryan Sprott, AP World History teacher at International School of the Americas in San Antonio, Texas, created the Border-land project as a way to get his students exploring these issues on a deep level. Read on to learn how he created it.

"By seeing the border in real life, by standing only feet away from it, I was able to see the border for what it ultimately i

"By seeing the border in real life, by standing only feet away from it, I was able to see the border for what it ultimately is: arbitrary. Thousands of years of weathering and erosion in a specific spot resulted in this specific river that a group of people decided over a hundred years ago would be the line between two countries. We are the ones that give it meaning; otherwise, it would be just another river. There is nothing inherently threatening about it, but the way we treat it creates fear in others. By seeing the border in person I was able to, at least to a certain extent, remove the actual border from the idea of a border that countries have constructed through their discourse." - Samantha Lozano, Border-land Student, Class of 2017

In 2014, over 68,000 unaccompanied minors crossed the US/Mexico border fleeing unbearable violence and unrest throughout Mexico and Central America. The border is just a few hours' drive south of the public high school where I teach. I thought this nearby humanitarian crisis could serve as an important opportunity to teach global competence. However, as I began planning the curriculum, I found that the divisive rhetoric that pervaded much of the coverage of this crisis conflicted with the 21st century skills I try to foster in students. This rekindled a lingering question: In an era when complex events are often portrayed in a limited and polarizing manner, how can teachers address contemporary dilemmas in ways that nurture students' global competencies, including empathy, collaboration, and critical thinking?

To explore this question, I teamed with artist and professor Jason Reed, who was investigating similar issues. Together, we designed Border-land, a course where art, dialogue, and travel served as pathways for civil discourse and social action on the topic of global borders and human migration. We hoped that by going to the border to listen firsthand to multiple stories and perspectives ð a Central American mother who crossed the border fleeing gang violence, and the US Border Patrol officer tasked with detaining her ð students could better humanize each individual and understand each story. We wanted to shift from the prevailing "us" versus "them" ideology into spaces of collaboration and creativity. The following passage outlines strategies we used to assist a group of 40 high school students to develop skills in global competence as they grappled with the inherent complexities of borders.

A Single, Overarching Question

"It can often be easy to forget how broad, guiding questions like 'what is the purpose of a border?' are relevant in the context of our debate over immigration. Nevertheless, our society's answers to questions like these serve as the philosophical foundation for the policies that we pass....If the mainstream ideology were to change, then our border policies would be expected to change as well." - Avery Coltharp, Border-land Student, Class of 2017.

What is the purpose of a border? This question helped guide learning during readings, conversations, and travel. By focusing on one essential question, students were able to uncover a variety of perspectives on the topic. Students asked this same question to each guest speaker, who included activists, lawyers, politicians, law officers, and asylum seekers. Their answers varied greatly which helped students weigh and compare the diverse views relating to borders.

ñWe wanted to shift versus óthemô id collaboration

Students also engaged with the essential question through dialogues, writings, and other art projects. Throughout the year, their work and conversations were archived so that they could reflect upon how and why their responses to the question, "What is the purpose of a border?" were becoming increasingly complex.

Photo:

During Border-land, a high school course at the International School of Americas, many students visited the US/Mexico border for the first time.

Gender Studies Class Approved by Board

By Michelle Merlin of the Morning Call

Two members objected to a course they believed encourages victimhood.

- A study of gender roles and norms, interlocking systems of power and the intersectionality of identity.
- The first women's studies program started in 1970 at San Diego State University.
- Evolved from examining women's roles in history to social and cultural impacts of gender.
- There are more than 900 women's studies programs at colleges and universities in the United States

Sources:
Mary Armstrong, Allison Kimmich

Next year, Saucon Valley High School students could choose to enroll in a gender studies course for the first time.

School board members approved the course, along with the district's new graduation requirements at their meeting Tuesday night.

The decision wasnôt unanimous. Board member Sandra Miller disagreed. board member Bryan Eichfeld saying he was worried the course would teach activism and victim-hood and voted against it. He was joined by Ed Inghrim. Board member Jack Dowling, who previously expressed concerns about the lack of women's studies classes at the high school, was absent.

The course, a social studies elective, will be open to any student and examine social and cultural gender constructs, historical and religious roles of men and women, transgender issues, gender in the workplace as well as policy and government and other issues, said Amy Kozel, the teacher who created the class, at a Feb. 28 board meeting. It would be offered every other year and would replace a womenôs studies course that had low enrollment and focused on achievements.

ñI can actually instruct them and help them and have them feel proud of who they are at the same time promoting an understanding of issues in our society that we have existed that we have kept under the rug for so long,ò Kozel said.

Some board members spoke out against the course at their last meeting. Bryan Eichfeld said he was worried it would promote victimhood ñproperò for high school students, saying he felt Dowling said it would not be a good course.

Eichfeld said he still opposed the course Tuesday night and proposed delaying a decision for another year. His motion was supported by Inghrim and Linda Leewright and ultimately failed.

ñMy concern is this course promotes a study of victimization and how to be an activist to promote this victimization,ò Eichfeld said. ñWould it be proper to teach activism such as the tea party, and its issues, like constitutional government, school choice, protection of borders? Most folks would say, no, thatôs not what a school should be doing, is teaching activism on those types of subjects, and I would not be agreeable to agree even though I believe in those things.ò

Board member Sandra Miller disagreed.

ñThis is a course that teaches students how to be activists in a course that ôs not about victimhood,ò she said.

ñAny time you have an elective course that covers a large portion, if not all the population of our school, is a valuable course,ò she said.

Superintendent Monica McHale-Small spoke in support of the course. She noted it fit in with the goals of the district's equity committee, a group that was tasked in part with helping the district respond to a spate of racist incidents that came to light in the wake of the November election.

She noted it would help students see varied perspectives.

ñWe need to make sure that women and racial and ethnic minorities are represented in our texts, media, resources, and their perspectives are represented in our classrooms. K through 12,ò she said.

McHale-Small also announced her plans to resign sometime this summer. She said she hoped to have the flexibility to spend time with her family and work to promote social justice and other ñprojects,ò she said. She said she would continue to work on behalf of children and public education. Board members unanimously approved her retirement at a date not yet determined.

They voted to add her retirement to the agenda during the meeting.

Several people spoke during a public comment session about the gender studies course. Rachel Altemose, a former Saucon Valley student who is now a sophomore in college, said a gender studies course would have helped prepare her for the classes she takes now.

ñThe one thing I feel education are the kinds of things that would be taught in a gender studies class,ò she said. ñAfter 12 years of education and people who are different from us is talked about in the majority of my classes. ... It ôs something we need to talk about.ò

She said the class would be especially helpful in Saucon Valley, where she said the district's equity committee never had a teacher of color in her 10 years at Saucon Valley.

Parent Kate Duffy said teachers at Saucon Valley deal with sensitive issues in a professional manner, and noted that her son was introduced to nearly every topic covered in the gender studies course when he went to college.

ñThe fact that this history is being brought forth for these children is such a valuable tool and an eye opener to those who donôt have it in their childrenôs reality.ò

ñWe need to make sure that women and racial and ethnic minorities are represented in our texts, media, resources, and their perspectives are represented in our classrooms.

Survey:

Teachers Talk Politics to Students, Despite Divisive Atmosphere

By Madeline Will

Teachers not shying away from political talk.

Months after the 2016 presidential election, a majority of educators say that national politics have created a sharp divide among students, leaving teachers grappling with how to handle classroom conversations about controversial issues.

But most said they ... from politics, ... contentious nature.

That ... according to ... February by the Education Week Research Center. More than 830 K-12 teachers and other school-based instructional staff members who are registered users of Education Week's edweek.org website responded to an email invitation for a survey about their experiences teaching about controversial topics in a time of division.

President Donald ... November of Hillary Clinton capped the most divisive presidential election in recent memory, and the first few months of his tenure have been marked by controversy. In addition, a number of issues have made their way into the classroom as current events, including: immigration; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights; and issues related to race, religion, and gender.

While most teachers ... important to talk about these topics in the classroom, 42 percent noted that it was difficult to discuss national politics with students ... more so than any other controversial issue. And while the vast majority of teachers are at least moderately confident in their own ability to have civil conversations with their students, 66 percent said they have noticed an increase in uncivil political discourse at their school since the presidential campaign began.

Discussing Hot Topics in Schools

More than 830 educators took part in a survey on discussing controversial topics in class. National politics, rather than perennial hot-button issues like race and religion, seemed to be the most divisive this year ... more so than in previous years, ... educators said. Even so, 56 percent said they were no more ... and no less ... likely than before to share their own political views with students.

(SOURCE: Education Week Research Center, 2017)

Those conversations give students and a space to talk about ...

About half the teachers said the number of bullying incidents related to national politics has increased in the past year ... more so than for any other topic, although about 30 percent of teachers pointed to spikes in bullying related to immigration or language and race and ethnicity.

Alethea Patterson-Jahn, the head special education teacher at an Albuquerque, N.M., middle school, recalled seeing a student tell another that Trump would deport the student's father.

Talking about controversial subjects could ...

Many teachers said they feel obligated to make sure all their students ... regardless of nationality, race, ethnicity, or religion ... feel safe and secure, and that has made conversations about politics and other current events feel necessary.

Those conversations give students an outlet and a space ... going on," said Can ... grade teacher in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. "[Aft ... had to have a conversation about feelings. ... I try to make su ... reassuring in these ...

While 55 percent of teachers said they have not avoided discussing controversial current events with their students this school year, another 28 percent did avoid talking about national politics with their students. Smaller percentages of teachers have refrained from discussing politically charged topics like LGBT issues, race, and religion.

Twenty-six percent of teachers said they did not discuss any controversial events with their students because the topics are not relevant to the subject area they teach. That's Robert Williams, a 4th grade teacher in Delano, Calif., who teaches mostly Hispanic and Filipino students.

"The only issue we h ... election ... students came to school and they were upset about what their parents had said. ... They feared immigration [policies], they fe ... said. "I said we're ... it, because we're he ... writing, and math."

Talking about controversial subjects could ... "I ... safe."

Teachers are 'Fearful'

Other reasons that teachers chose for veering away from controversial topics include: wanting to avoid dissension in the classroom, knowing that their personal

Those conversations give students ... "am ...

and not knowing how to handle such discussions in class.

ñ[Teachers are] fearful of teaching some of the controversial events for fear of parental pushback, fear [theyôre afraid of] pushing their political views, fear of student pushback,ò said Maureen Costello, director of Teaching Tolerance, an education project of the Southern Poverty Law Center.

ñIf as educators weôre not going to talk about what it looks like to talk about politics, ... weôre not supporting what is an essential democratic practice.ò

Still, she said, itôs critical that civil discourse in the classroom. ñIf as educators weôre not going to talk about what it looks like to talk about politics, weôre not supporting what is an essential democratic practice,ò she said.

For the most part, teachers seemed to agree. Almost 70 percent said it was important to discuss national politics with students ð a little less than the 79 percent who said it was important to discuss race and ethnicity and the 75 percent who think it important to discuss immigration with students.

In interviews, teachers cited the rise of fake news as a reason for talking about politics in class ð they felt a responsibility to help their students learn how to critically evaluate whatôs on the internet. DiAnne Bredvick, a social studies teacher in Texas who works at an alternative high school 20 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border, said her students have been interested in immigration policy, but often get their news from unreliable sources, including social media. ñA lot of what they heard isnôt correct information,ò Bredvick said. ñMy role is to provide them with the facts as we know them.ò

While most educators said they could discuss controversial issues with their students in a civil manner, only 44 percent said their training adequately prepared them to handle those discussions, and 23 percent said they have received no such training.

Most teachers said they have not received guidance from administrators on how to talk about such issues with their students.

When asked where they did receive guidance or ideas, just 40 percent cited their fellow teachers, administrators, and other staff members; 27 percent said news articles; 17 percent cited curriculum from social-justice organizations like Teaching Tolerance; and 13 percent said they drew from their own experience and common sense.

While teachers generally try to stay politically neutral in front of their students, 18 percent said they have become more likely to share their political views with their students in the past year.

Jolene Vincent, an 8th grade social studies teacher in Phoenix, said she was open about her political beliefs with her students during the election. She had originally been a Trump supporter, but voted for Clinton after disavowing Trump's comments. ñIt's important to be great to debate, because if you're wrong,ò she said. ñ

Months after the 2016 presidential election, a majority of educators say that national politics have created a sharp divide among students, leaving teachers grappling with how to handle classroom conversations about controversial issues.

The majority of survey respondents ð 61 percent ð voted for Clinton, while 17 percent voted for Trump, 12 percent voted for a third-party candidate, and 10 percent did not vote at all. While the survey does not statistically mirror the nationôs teachers, it is geographically and demographically diverse school districts.

The survey found that Clinton voters were slightly less comfortable than Trump voters discussing the election results with students who hold differing views. Overall, 22 percent of teachers said they were uncomfortable discussing the election results with students who supported the other candidate.

Local Teacher Adds Ties

to School's Male Achievement Lessons

by Maya Earls, Philadelphia Tribune Staff Writer

For more than 20 years students at Murrell Dobbins CTE High School have worn ties to school. Year after year, since Commercial and Advertising arts teacher Troy Stratton has been around, students struggled to tie their ties. Some students did not have a tie at all.

ñWe ôre talk ôn3g0 0a byoouutn g2 0m0e n ties,ò Stratton said in an interview, that shows mastery

Stratton decided two years ago to do something to help his students, and ñKnot Meò was

The teacher first decided to collect ties to give to the students. He posted a request on social media for donors to send ties to the school. Family members, friends and even strangers began to share his call for ties and the next thing he knew, hundreds of donations were coming in.

ñThe first year we collect ed ties, 50 of them were proper shirts for an interview. Stratton said. country, some as far as Wash

With all the ties in hand, Stratton then called together several male sponsors. Stratton and the sponsors gathered in a mirrored room the day before the schoolôs Male Leadership Day in and taught the entire male student body how to tie a tie. The students then got to keep their ties.

ñThe ties werenôt perfect kn ñWe shep ut out the y h iwledr ree no n b e t h o v i e r Stratton said of the young recipients and their effort.

Stratton decided to make the lesson into a regular program. The name ñKnot Meò came from his student from learning.

ñI always taught young men ike never the entire school,ò he said.

School Principal Toni Damon said the lesson is another way the school helps students become college ready.

ñI think it was a much needed complement to our educati program,ò Damon said.

After the lesson, each student receives an exit ticket. The ticket shows the student is able to tie a tie on their own three times. The ticket also has instructions on the back, just in case the holder forgets in the future. Stratton said students appreciated the lesson.

ñThey loved it,ò he said. ñEven the young men who said

With all of the students learning the first year, the tie lesson was taught to only the freshman class in February. Some of the seniors joined the program as mentors for the freshman students this year.

ñTo h ad to w ôat h gr ve e t b e c a u s e w h e n ñ I k e v i t h w t , t h a t s h o w s m a s t e r y

He usually collects ties over the summer, with many donations coming from retirees. The ties that need freshening up are repaired and pressed by the s

ñI ran into one man who had a told me, óIôm retired and don

For Stratton, a tie is essential to making a good first impression. He says the simpler the tie, success. The teacher is thinking about expanding his class to ov

ñYou have to put your best fo foot is practiced and perfect

Principal Damon said the tie lesson promotes the idea that it is always better to be overdressed than under dressed.

ñ Y o u h a v e t o p u t y o u r b e s t f o w i t h t h e i r c o n f i d e n c e a n d s p i

The Dobbins Alumni Association held its 28th annual Male Leadership Day Feb. 23. Students were able to interact with industry professionals and learn life skills. Jack Drummond, director of the cityôs Office keynote speaker. classroom how to tie tie

ð ð ð ð

Stratton said anyone interested in donating a tie can mail it to:

Murrell Dobbins High School
2150 W. Lehigh Ave.
Philadelphia, Pa. 19132.

You Can't Cover Everything

By David Cutler, Edutopia

Teachers have mandated content to cover, but also seek to develop skills that students will use long after they have forgotten rote facts.

Now that itôs March, about what to cover in my American history class for the remainder of the year. Should I prioritize skills or content? Are the two mutually exclusive? Years from now, what do I really want students to still remember and find useful?

Even after a decade in the classroom, I struggle mightily with deciding what to cover and in how much depth. I feel guilty about focusing less on World War I, for instance, to emphasize the 1920s and the Great Depression. If I ôm being honest, I often feel inadequate, wondering how much less other teachers would think of me for making that call.

Don't Try to Cover Everything

Needing advice, I recently sought out Jim Grossman, executive director of the American Historical Association and a giant in the fields of history and history education.

Grossman put me more at ease. ñYou can't cover everything,ò he told me. ñIt ôs just not humanly possible. Therefore, different teachers have to make choices as to where they are most likely to engage their students.ò More to the point, Grossman said, ñIt ôs not whether you should look on ôvictory ñ This X, Y, or Z, but how much emphasis you put on X, Y, or Z.ò

For added perspective, I contacted Dan Lang, head of the middle school at Francis Parker School in San Diego. ñTo often we believe that a ódebate can be won ôor a óproblem can be solved ô when the best defeat for some Republicans ò that the perceived óproblemô to be solved is actually a healthy tension that needs to be managed well,ò he wrote to me in a recent email.

Emphasize Relatable Content

With this tension in mind, Grossman reaffirmed my refusal to force students to memorize a myriad of seemingly endless facts, citing the accessibility of the internet. He reminded me that my students could use their phones to easily get information on people and events.

Grossman urged me to consider what I want students to still know and consider useful years down the road. ñI don ôt think it ôs very often to be some particular pieces of information, so much as you want them to learn how to think about something,ò he capitalizing on content that students find most interesting, and how and why a particular topic still matters today.

For example, Grossman says, ñThe Constitution is something that students probably do not read constantly matters in everyday life, ò and could be a wise idea to discuss how a document ratified in 1788 remains relevant in 2017.

Years from now, what do I really want students to still remember and find useful?

Emphazise Relevant Skills

I told Grossman that I was already following that advice. After we studied the Jacksonian Era during election season, for example, I asked my students to respond to the following prompt:

ñThis is like Andrew Jackson ôs victory ñ the people beating the establishment,ò former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani recently told MSNBCôs Chris Matthews. ñAnd that ôs how [Donald Trump] posited it right from the beginning, the people are rising up against a government they find to be dysfunctional. And yes, it ôs a defeat for the Democrats, but that may be to recognize ñ too,ò

In what respects, if any, do similarities exist between President Andrew Jackson and President-elect Donald Trump? What might these parallels reveal? Or is Giuliani off base here? Either way, please compose a well-written, convincing editorial that supports your stance.

I instructed students on how to respond in journalistic form, which they found more engaging and useful than more formal academic writing. One junior, Sophie Lapat, wrote a highly engaging article ðñTrump: The Jackson which I shared on The Gator, a student news site where I work and which I also advise. Several students enjoyed the assignment so much that they enrolled in my journalism class.

told me. This calls fo Itôs comforting to hea disciplines who share my emphasis on introducing relatable content to help reinforce key skills. ñI would rather to ask questions and use data to support conclusions than have, for example, memorized the electrpn configurat a science teacher at the Hockaday School in Dallas, told me via email.

Agree on Skills Taught, Not Content Delivered

When it gets down to it, Grossman said, five historians gathered in a room would never agree on every bit of content to include in the curriculum, ñbut they c student has to learn from spending a year indulging in historical

Certainly, itôs importa foundational understanding of key events, like the American Revolution and the Civil Rights Movement. But at a cer content delivered that should matter most, but rather how such content can engage students in building upon their understanding of historical inquiry, which will stick with them long after their memorization of facts has faded.

Granted, the majority of teachers are mandated to that cover certain content. Still, the pinnacle of instructional success, I believe, is balancing how to make content also relevant to refining critical, lifelong skills ðno matter the subject taught. Depending on intrinsic interest in a certain area of study, this is more or less challenging. After chatting with Grossman while skills canôt be d without content that st unlikely that many will remember much of either for very long.

These high school journalists investigated a new principal's credentials. Days later, she resigned.

By Samantha Schmidt, The Washington Post

Connor Balthazor, 17, was in the middle of study hall when he was called into a meeting with his high school newspaper adviser.

A group of reporters and editors from the student newspaper, the Booster Redux at Pittsburg High School in southeastern Kansas, had gathered to talk about Amy Robertson, who was hired principal on March 6.

The student journalists had begun researching Robertson, and quickly found some discrepancies in her education credentials. For one, when they researched Corllins University, the private university where Robertson said she got her masterôs and doctorate degrees years ago, the website didn't work. They found no evidence that it was an accredited university.

A team of six students ð five juniors and one senior ð revealed that Corllins had been portrayed in a number of articles as a diploma mill, a place where people can buy a degree, diploma or certificates.

ñThere were some things Balthazor told The Washington Post.

The students began digging into a weeks-long investigation that would result in an article published Friday questioning the degrees and of her work as an education consultant.

On Tuesday night, Robertson resigned.

ñIn light of the issues in the best interest of Pittsburg Community Schools announced in a statement. ñThe Board has agreed to accept her resignation.ò

The resignation thrust the student newspaper staff into local, state and national news, with professional journalists nationwide applauding the students for asking tough questions and prompting change in their administration.

ñEverybody kept telling it where it doesnôt belong, Smith told The Post. But with the encouragement of the superintendent, the students persisted.

ñThey were at a loss that the school was choosing the said.

In the Booster Redux article, a team of six students ð five juniors and one senior ð revealed that Corllins had been portrayed in a number of articles as a diploma mill, a place where people can buy a degree, diploma or certificates. Corllins is not accredited by the U.S. Department of Education, the students reported. The Better Business Bureau website says physicians add letters to their names using mail-order degrees from unaccredited institution.

ñAll of this was completely ñAll of the shining reviews people give is meaningless if you don't know what to look for. The students had to dig into public records and figures to find this.ò

Robertson had been living in Dubai for more than 20 years before she was hired for the position. She said she most recently worked as the chief executive of an education consulting firm known as Atticus in Sheridan Consultants there.

In a conference call with the student journalists, Robertson ñpresented inconsistencies dates and inconsistencies reported. She said she attended Corllins before it lost accreditation, the Booster Redux reported.

When contacted by the Kansas City Star after the publication of the studentsô article, Robertson s three of her degrees ñhave been authenticated by t government.ò She declined to comment directly on studentsô questions about her credentials, ñbecaus concerns are not based on facts,ò she said.

In an emergency faculty meeting Tuesday, the superintendent said Robertson was unable to produce a transcript confirming her undergraduate degree from the **University of Tulsa, Smith said.**

During the course of their reporting, the students spent weeks reaching out to educational institutions and accreditation agencies to corroborate Robertson background, some even working through spring break. Their adviser, Smith, had to recuse herself from the story because she was on the committee that hired Robertson. So the students sought the help of Eric Thom

transcript confirming her undergraduate degree from the