

The Dreyfuss Civics Curriculum: A National Model for Civics Education in Elementary and Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Due to the decline of civics education in Pre-Kindergarten through grade 12 in the United States, a conceptual model is presented to address the need for developmentally appropriate curriculum that can readily be infused into the existing school day. The model includes three separate approaches designed to offer access to the curriculum, all framed around 10 overarching concepts. The underlying historical, international and cultural reasons for the need are briefly discussed, and results of the curriculum development are provided. Recommendations include creating civics discussion clubs to implement the Dreyfuss Civics Curriculum utilizing the Backward Design process to improve the degree of civics education in the United States.

Keywords: Backward Design, Civics, Civics Education, Curriculum

1.0 Current State of Civics Education

1.1 Global Concerns

Many countries struggle with how to teach civics to their citizens. In a comparative study of civics education of over 90,000 students by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), it was determined that young people are less involved with formal political activities than in previous periods (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schultz, 2001; Torney-Purta, Schwille, & Amadeo 1999).

For example, in Canada the provinces and the territories understand that knowledge of civics is essential to school curriculum (Llewellyn, Cook & Molina, 2010), but there are few if any new means of teaching civics beyond the classroom. In Australia, young people have a responsibility to learn about civics as part of the education policy (Saha & Print, 2009), but there are few incentives to learn outside of school. In 2012 the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) called upon young people “to be active” citizens in their democracy (ACARA, 2012, p. 2), but it appears few have met the call.

Civics education in Spain is an interesting example of the difficulties and complexities of developing a civics curriculum. The Education for Citizenship (EC) was a new subject introduced in Spain in 2006 (Motos, 2010). The recommendation to use this subject all over Spain was made by the Council of Europe, which advises member states on educational reform. Education for Citizenship was proposed as a requirement of the curriculum in Spain at the primary and secondary education levels. The Education for Citizenship study materials included the fundamental characteristics of a democratic regime (Motos, 2010, p. 270). Unfortunately, there were two areas of opposition for Education for Citizenship including religious organizations that believed the Education for Citizenship is a threat to the church’s right to teach the morals of students; secondly, some groups rejected the Education for Citizenship because they believe teaching morality to students is a right reserved for families.

According to Haigh, Murcia, and Norris (2014), the policy to improve civics education at the global level “need[s] to develop better strategies to engage young people in the political process” (p. 613). As identified above, at least three countries are struggling to improve their civics education, and it is the same outcome in the United States. This paper presents the historical basis of civics in the United States, the decline of civics education, and one approach on how to improve civics education at the national and potentially global level.

1.2 The Decline of Civics Education in US Schools

Studies indicate a decline of civics education in the United States over the last 50 years (Downs, 2012; McNabb, 2013) with several reasons for the decline, including an overemphasis on science and math education; funding issues especially during the Great Recession from 2008 to 2010; and a de-emphasis on social studies testing including civic practices. According to the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2010), there are 10 themes which social studies should include within high school education, including civics. However, according to the Center for Information and Research on Civil Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University (2014), there are more states that have no test on social studies outcomes versus those that do. Although the CIRCLE (2014) indicates “90%” (paragraph 1) of students in high school have one civics class, only two states require a specific test on civics to pass high school: Ohio and Virginia.

2.0 A Need for Re-Awakening Civics in Schools

The United States was founded on the ultimate in civics. Our civics is a history unto itself because for the first time civics within government was founded on the Enlightenment ideals. Those ideals included increased ethics for humanity, as well as self-governance. Based on Montesquieu (1748) who created checks and balances within government to guard against tyranny, and other authors listed below, caste systems led by kings and queens were no longer the only forms of government. The United States was the first to be led by “We The People.”

What we take for granted in our civics based government was not easily won. Countless lives were given so we can lead ourselves. But our ability to lead ourselves in civics based government, and in a civil manner, is now degraded and continues to be degraded with each passing year, due in part to policies that take civics out of the schools. It is time to realize that we must re-awaken our civics based education before it is “too late” for our own children to “know how to lead our country before it is their time to lead our country” (Dreyfuss, 2010).

2.1 Founding Fathers and the Enlightenment – A Civics Lesson for All

Our Founding Fathers, including George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, George Mason, James Madison, and others, lived during the end of the Enlightenment period of the late 1500s to early 1800s. During the Enlightenment, new ways of thinking and education were brought to the masses, beyond those who were rich and born into the ruling class.

The Enlightenment Era, which turned so radically away from the traditional dismissiveness about the majority of humankind, allowed for a foundation of values all Americans can stand on, in agreement in broad strokes with the Individual’s Rights based on merit, talent, and creativity, rather than bloodline, shared ancestral religion, or wealth, or caste, or class.

The Enlightenment included the following authors, along with their ideas on civics, and instilled in our Founding Fathers the means to govern beyond the rich and those born as rulers:

(In chronological order):

- Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was an early writer of empiricism as a tool to make decision making, creating an early framework for civic debate.
- John Locke (1632-1704) argued for a clear relationship of the state and individuals, the rule of law, and the rights of property for all.
- Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) is best known for his seminal book *Ethics* (1677), where he enhanced rational debate, civics, and civility.
- Charles Louis de Secondat, et de Montesquieu (Montesquieu) (1689-1755) is best known for his seminal writing *Spirit of the Laws* (1748) that indicated the need for separation of powers in government with three separate areas (i.e., executive, legislative, and judicial).
- Francois-Marie Arouet (Voltaire) (1694-1778) is best known for his founding thought on the combination of freedom of religion, and separation of church and state.

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) is known for his influence on Enlightenment thought but continued with a romantic framework of civility.
- Adam Smith (1723-1790) is best known for his book *The Wealth of Nations* (Short Title; 1776) that provided a framework for economics based on capital and labor, not money. He influenced empirical thought based on logic, not anecdotal assessments, and he also wrote *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Short title; 1759) which created a framework for civility.
- Thomas Paine (1737-1809) is most known for his writing *Common Sense* (1776) and calling for American Independence based on rational thought in civics.

These individuals, who brought new forms of thought for civics based government during the Enlightenment, also brought new ethics and education frameworks. The new civics was first “Revolutionary” in the United States, which brought about a new form of government with three branches, changed the course of history with democratic rule, and brought communitarian ethics with a supra-personal frame of responsibility (Runes, 1955) versus the individual. For the first time, “We the People” meant more than any one person. The communitarian ethics stressed collective control (Beuchamp & Bowie, 1997) and that all are normal in their own way as in normative ethics (Wolfsonberger, 1980). Communitarian ethics also indicated we all have equality as in nominal ethics (Porter, 2004; Seth, 1899); equality was conceptual at first, with total equality still an evolving concept.

With a new frame of civics based government founded in ourselves and equality for all, at least conceptually, the United States had a great beginning although with many difficult periods which tested that equality (e.g., Civil War). Civics education grew as the country grew, and was a part of social studies. However, the civics taught to our next generation is on a steep decline. We need to re-invigorate our civics education before we revert back to the very reason we had a revolution – that all have an equal access to run our country versus only those who have limited access to knowledge of government operations. The haves versus the have-nots is a growing divide in the United States, and may lead us back to the days of pre-revolution where supra-personal is no longer existent.

3.0 Object of Concern: Need for a Civics Curriculum

With the current state of civics education and civics testing as a requirement of high school education at an abysmal amount (i.e., 4% of the states), there is a fundamental question of how we will lead ourselves in the future. We The People may not survive beyond the next generation if the “We” as it was created through Enlightenment ideals, becomes “them” again as a pre-revolutionary status of rigid class-based leadership. Therefore it is imperative that we ask if we are indeed educating our future generations in a way which will protect “We The People” as leaders.

4.0 The Dreyfuss Civics Initiative and Dreyfuss Civics Curriculum

Richard Dreyfuss is one of the few individuals in the world with almost instant recognition due to his acting career that includes his position as one of only 32 living Oscar Winners for Best Actor. However, few individuals know that Richard Dreyfuss spent four years studying at Oxford University to create a civics curriculum. There were two major outcomes from the studies at Oxford; The Dreyfuss Civics Curriculum (DCC) with 10 guiding concepts discussed here, and a deeper appreciation of the need to educate our future generations for “love of country” and “the means to lead our country” (Dreyfuss, 2010).

The 10 guiding concepts for The Dreyfuss Civics Curriculum are: 1. Reason, 2. Logic, 3. Clarity of Thought, 4. Clarity of Expression, 5. Critical Analysis, 6. Values of Debate, Dissent and Civility, 7. Historical Context, 8. Rumination & Contemplation, 9. Agility of Mind, and 10. Ethics. Each of the 10 concepts is defined within the context of civics, with the previous concept building into the next concept.

Reason: To think with a premise and in a formative way that leads to a honed and rational thought.

Logic: The act of using reason in a step by step means that has valid and reliable principles, and facts, as a foundation.

Clarity of Thought: The act of using logic to create ideas and beliefs about a specific occurrence that is not biased.

Clarity of Expression: The act of using precise and accurate ideas to present clarity of thought.

Critical Analysis: Judicious and significant evaluation of a specific situation that leads to valid and reliable outcomes, with thought for, and by, all sides.

Values of Debate, Dissent and Civility: The freedom to present and consider different means of mediation and dialogue, with outcomes that range from disagreement to agreement, all in a professional manner.

Historical Context: Chronological perspective of the most unique developments in human existence relating to Enlightenment ideas and freedom from class structure.

Rumination & Contemplation: Within historical contextualization, reflection and deliberate consideration of significant differences in thought and positions to achieve reason.

Agility of Mind: Skillful contemplation of thought and actions of others is using debate/dissent/context to achieve the highest level of precise propositions in all arts and sciences.

Ethics: An aggregate of morals and civil interactions within a specific group that uses logic to solve conflicts and in a manner that reflects an agility of mind.

After creation of the DCC concepts, it was determined that greater specificity for each of the concepts was required to help support civics education in elementary and secondary levels. Using the DCC concepts, the authors assessed several different types of curricula frameworks to provide specificity. Bringing valid and reliable models to enhance the DCC proved challenging, until the authors assessed the Backward Design model (BD) that is a well-known teaching method for elementary and secondary teachers.

4.1 The Backward Design Model

Developed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2011), the Backward Design model uses a three stage approach. Beginning with the end in mind, the educator first identifies the goals and expectations. These are framed as *enduring understandings*, and usually include *essential questions* the students should be able to answer at the end of the lesson or unit. The second phase is the determination of assessment evidence of understanding, either in the form of performance tasks or other evidence (e.g., classroom observation, tests, journals). The final stage is the *learning plan*; the plan includes activities and resources intentionally selected to lead to the identified goals and understandings. The Backward Design model was utilized to develop a template for each of the 10 concepts. Two are offered in the Appendix. It is suggested a lesson repository can be developed in the future where teachers are able to access and share assessments and learning activities based on the DCC.

4.2 Glory Tales and Civics

In addition to the 10 concepts, Dreyfuss provides several examples of Glory Tales that help tell the story of why we need civics, and what civics is in relation to those 10 concepts. Glory Tales utilize literature to define, illustrate, and teach the 10 concepts utilizing a familiar narrative style. Examples of Glory Tales that can be incorporated in the Dreyfuss Civics Curriculum through the Backward Design model include: a) Rome and the History of Democracy in creation from Autocracy to Theocracy, to Dictatorships, to Democracy; b) Enlightenment Writers (using those described above); c) Revolutionary tales, including George Washington and the cherry tree to convey honesty, and the ride of Paul Revere to embrace courage; d) The Civil War and Honest Abe, Civil versus Civic Methods of Government with the Separation of the States versus the Federal Government found in the Civil War Debates; e) The Great War found in WWI Policies; f) The Great Depression and CCC Camps as a means of helping those with the least means; g) The Civil Rights Era of the 1960s and the Civil Rights Act with outstanding contributions by Martin Luther King, Jr.; and h) Post 9/11 Era and those who sacrificed the ultimate for our security. Once the curriculum moves beyond the Glory Tales age, typically in middle school at the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, then more specific Backward Design lessons may be utilized.

4.3 Civics Discussion Club as a National Model

The curriculum enhancement offered through *Glory Tales* and the backward design model is only the first part of the DCC. The second aspect is the Civics Discussion Clubs. The purpose of the Clubs is to promote open, civil discussion, and debate on topics related to civics. The Clubs can be entirely extra-curricular or co-curricular, and are intended to be open to the entire community. Voices from all walks of life can be included; any facilitator with a passion for civics and civic education may be invited to participate.

4.4 Implementation of the Dreyfuss Civics Curriculum via Civics Clubs

After completion of the DCC, and in conjunction with a school district in Central Texas, a Civics Club model was created. The Civics Club model in grades PK-20 includes three components, with one component at the high school level, a second at the middle school level, and the third component at the elementary level. As the authors complete this article, the second year of the Civics Club implementation at the middle school level has begun. Although description of the pilot year is beyond the scope of this article, the club was deemed to be successful by both the participating students and faculty.

The students named themselves the Sons and Daughters of Liberty and met for discussion during their lunch period. It is expected that this first Dreyfuss Civics Club will continue meeting weekly during the course of the 2015-2016 school year.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 A National Model Civics Curriculum and Civics Clubs

The DCC is unique with the incorporation of frameworks not currently specified in traditional standards based instructional methods. In addition to the 10 concepts, there is focus on the affective domain (Civility) as well as the cognitive domain (Civics). Most importantly, the DCC is provided based on a community involvement of retired teachers, business owners and managers, and community volunteers through Civics Clubs. All DCC instructors are volunteers who want to ensure that the next generations of leaders are taught how to lead before it is time to lead.

It is anticipated that the DCC and Civics Clubs will continue to spread through the efforts of The Dreyfuss Civics Initiative, and through sharing of a valid academic model used to support the initiatives as well – namely the Wiggins and McTighe (2011) Backward Design. But the real outcome is an improvement in the civics education for our future generations based on the efforts of a focused group of individuals – both in and out of the academy. It may yet be that our future generations will indeed still be able to lead the country through “We The People.” It is the hope of the authors that the variation of individuals within the future generations who will lead us continues to grow instead of withering and reverting back to the reason we had a truly revolutionary revolution – so that those who “have not” are also able to lead.

5.2 Future Research

The authors will continue to refine the DCC and Civics Clubs as they continue with the implementation stage. Further civics curriculum research and scholarship will continue to be the focus of their work to help support the future generation so they can “lead the country when it is their time to lead the country” (Dreyfuss, 2010).

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Appendix

Abridged Dreyfuss Civics Curriculum™ (DCC) Guiding Concepts for the Backward Design Model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011):

1. The DCC is based on 10 guiding concepts
2. The DCC is framed within Wiggins and McTighe (2011) Backward Design, with an example of the fifth and sixth guiding concepts (*Critical Analysis* and *Values of Debate: Dissent & Civility*, respectively) provided here:

Dreyfuss Civics Curriculum – Critical Analysis

Based on Backward Curriculum Design by Wiggins and McTighe, 2005

Stage 1 – Desired Results

Established Goals: Ten Guiding Concepts within Dreyfuss Civics Curriculum

Understandings – Students will understand:

The Big Idea that significant evaluation requires judicious input

The Specific Idea that validity and reliability are necessary for thinking by all discussants

That a misunderstanding could be involved, and that all input has equality (With the understanding that all input is not equal)

Essential Questions:

Overarching Question: What does it mean to be judicious?

Topical Question: What does it mean to be valid and reliable?

Topical Question: When do we reach the level of including all discussants?

Students will know:

The meaning of judiciousness, validity and reliability

What leads to significant evaluation?

Students will be able to:

Present valid and reliable outcomes

Accept variable input

Stage 2 – Assessment Evidence

Performance Tasks

Cognitive (Synthesis Level 5)

Project 1: Understanding through synthesis of Pre-Revolutionary History in U.S. (Years 1650 to 1775)

Write a short paper of 3-5 pp. discussing 10 examples of Pre-Revolutionary democratic institutes in the English Colonies (e.g., House of Burgesses). Include definitions of judiciousness, validity and reliability with examples as input to the creation of the institutions. (Outcome: 3-5 pp.)

Project 2: Role play a meeting with written agenda for the Executive Members of the House of Burgesses and how they include all discussants (i.e., Members of the House from the Commonwealth of Virginia). Indicate the evaluation of different members and how they would have tried to decrease taxes going to the English Crown as “Taxation without Representation.”

(Outcome: 5-10 minute script and actual role playing)

Affective (Characterization Level 5)

Project 3: Choose an actual member of the Pre-Revolutionary House of Burgesses and present a bill that identifies a deontological framework on the inequities of taxation for a specific commodity.(Outcome: 5 minute presentation)

Other Evidence:

Students will write in a journal about their thoughts and actions when collecting data and overall research to complete the performance tasks.

Stage 3 – Learning Plan

Learning Activities for Civics Club Teacher and Guest Lecturer (Framework for specific Lesson Plans created by the teacher)

1. Introduce Essential Questions and Performance Tasks with expected level of performance [From Wiggins and McTighe with Cognitive = Meaningful and Affective = Empathy pp. 178-9)
2. Physically use library resources to answer the essential questions
3. Write two entries per week into a journal (for at least three months)
4. Research underlying topics related to essential questions
5. Create group meeting to complete projects on a weekly basis

Dreyfuss Civics Curriculum – Values of Debate: Dissent & Civility

Based on Backward Curriculum Design by Wiggins and McTighe, 2005

Stage 1 – Desired Results

Established Goals: Ten Guiding Concepts within Dreyfuss Civics Curriculum

Understandings – Students will understand that:

The big ideas: Is debate important or not important.

Dissent challenges a belief system

Civility is vital to the survival of a society

Misunderstandings: Misunderstandings exist about the values of debate, the relevancy of civility, and the need for dissent

Essential Questions:

Overarching Questions: Why do we debate and is it relevant?

Is civility necessary to us as a society?

Is dissent accepted or rejected by our culture

Topical Questions: What are some criticisms and some supporting factors of debate?

What is civility and what is incivility?

What are some types of dissent?

Students will know: The value of debate and the criticisms of debate.

Paul Root Wolpe’s distinctions between dissent, rebellion, heresy and revolution.

The crucial role civility plays in our society

The pros and cons of debate

Students will be able to:

- Analyze a debate
- Make oral presentations defending civility
- Present and write about varieties of dissent

Stage 2 – Assessment Evidence

Performance Tasks

Cognitive (Synthesis Level 6)

Project 1: Students use analysis, comparisons and contrasts, and evaluation to come to conclusions.

In 1960, as part of the presidential campaign between candidates John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon, they agreed to the first televised presidential debate. Kennedy went on to be elected president, in part, because it was thought he won the debate. Students will write a 2-3 page essay analyzing, comparing and contrasting, and evaluating the debate. A rubric will be provided.

Project 2: Students use synthesis to design a pamphlet promoting civility in our society.

Students will break into teams of two. The pamphlet will define civility and incivility, list characteristics and examples of civility and support the idea that civility is necessary for our society's survival.

The teams will share their results with each other. Pamphlets should be colorful and rich in information. A rubric will be provided.

Project 3: Students use comprehension and analysis to explain and interpret events

Cesar Chavez spent his life working for the rights of farm workers

In 1970 he began a boycott of lettuce in California, after striking successfully against grape growers. Students will write a 2-3 page essay on the life of Cesar Chavez as it relates to dissent. What are the methods, arenas, the reasons, the tactics and the rationales for his life-long dissent working for the rights of farm workers?

Affective (Characterization Level 6)

Project 4: Considering the Lincoln Debate value of Deontology derived from the work of Immanuel Kant students will write a one-page paper justifying Chavez's life's work. Kant said that "only those acts that further the status of people as free and rational beings are morally right" (Common LD Values). Were Chavez's actions for the most part correct under the Deontological construct or not correct?

Other Evidence:

Students will read about the Vietnam War and the bill outlawing slavery.

Students will work in groups discussing the common Lincoln Debate values.

Stage 3 – Learning Plan

Learning Activities for Civics Club Teacher and Guest Lecturer

(Framework for specific Lesson Plans created by the teacher)

1. Physically use library resources and articles provided to answer the essential questions
2. Class discussions on why civility is necessary for society's survival
3. Write two entries per week into a journal (for at least three months)
4. Research debate, civility and dissent as they relate to the essential questions
5. Create group meeting to complete projects on a weekly basis
6. Be able to write with big ideas.

Other evidence

Quizzes over civility, dissent and debate

Quiz over the common LD values.

Weekly journal reflection over progress

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