

Jackie Hain  
Francis Rust and Chris Dean  
Field Seminar  
4 March 2013

#### Rationale

#### **A. How is your topic *central to one or more disciplines* and how does it meet mandates?**

There has recently been less of an emphasis on civic education and several other topics with the push and pressure to raise student achievement in reading and math. Many subjects have taken a back seat, which has affected the well-roundedness of students. Civic engagement has been a concern in recent decades. “Americans under the age of 25 are less likely to vote than either their older counterparts or young people of past decades. Surveys have shown they are not as interested in political discussion and public issues as past generations were at the same point in their lives” (Torney-Purta & Lopez, 2006, 6).

It seems to be a trend that young people are not prepared to participate fully in democracy when they become adults, because there are gaps in young people’s knowledge of fundamental democratic principles and government processes. Experts in the field say it is important to introduce topics early and often to children so they can have the foundation they need to grow up and be strong, contributing members to society.

Peter Levine of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University said in a speech in 2011, “America has never overcome any major challenges without unleashing the skills, energies, and passions of millions of our citizens. Collaboration is the genius of American democracy.”

There are countless centers and advocates that support the need for civic education. In an address on January 31, 2003, Margaret Branson, associate director in the Center for Civic Education, shared that “civic education is an essential, if the essential, purpose of education. Americans can agree that educating young people for responsible citizenship should be the

primary goal our schools.” Critics have gone so far as to say that schools have failed to fulfill their civic mission of preparing students to be informed and effective citizens.

The importance of having a voice and a say in government is a right we have as Americans. Conducting a two-week curriculum focusing on citizenship will give my students the exposure and foundation upon which to build a more advanced understanding in future grades and as adults (Torney-Purta & Lopez, 2006).

The School District of Philadelphia has standards that correspond to a unit on citizenship, very similar to the Pennsylvania Standards. In this context, I will use the School District’s standards. For my unit on citizenship, I will be pulling standards from the categories of Civics and Government: Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship; Economics: Scarcity and Choice; Geography: Basic Geographic Literacy Describe and Locate Regions; Geography: The Interactions between People and Place.

The concept of citizenship is not something that can only be taught through direct instruction in the classroom. It needs to be enacted and performed consistently every day. For instance, large and small group work in any subject is a task that practices citizenship because it involves making decisions and problem-solve as a group, and working collectively. Defining responsibility is a standard found under the subgroup Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship: The Citizen, but can be addressed in a variety of ways and interpreted differently. A student can be reminded to be accountable for one’s actions, to take responsibility for having a sharpened pencil, and to take responsibility for remembering lunch or to returning a library book. This is a multidimensional concept that will be threaded throughout all subject areas.

In my classroom, we will vote when decisions need to be made and gather this data to put into a graph. This task is combining both math and civic education. When the data is collected,

we will discuss the concepts of “greater than” and “less than,” incorporating both decision-making and a mathematical standard. For our writing lesson, we will be introduced to persuasive writing and taking it one step at a time, first focus on opinions. This will address a whole section of writing standards devoted to opinion and argument style. Forming one’s own opinion is the beginning of a student finding his/her voice. They can use this form of persuasive writing to communicate something they find important. In terms of science, there is a huge element of citizenship that attends to protecting the environment. There is an opportunity here to introduce the “three Rs”: reduce, reuse, and recycle.

**B. Why would your topic be *interesting*?**

**1.) To your students:**

It is my intention that this curriculum matches with authentic tasks that are purposeful for teaching children. I plan to create an environment in the classroom that serves as a model for the “real-world” when they grow up: they can do anything they want if they put their mind to it and ask for help along the way. It is very relatable and allows students to look at themselves as integral parts of the world and community in which we live.

My students have dreams for the future. In a pre-assessment task, I asked each student what he or she wants their job to be when they grow up. Although we have not talked about this yet, I am going to emphasize that in order to be whatever they want when they grow up (doctor, veterinarian, police officer, zoo keeper, etc.), they need to be educated.

In first grade, children become more social, no longer just seeing “me” and being egocentric. They become more curious about the world around them and where they fit into it. Since we just finished a whole month focusing on black history and African Americans who stood up for the right thing, this unit will complement that nicely by supporting the importance

of everyone contributing in a meaningful way to their community. Civic engagement is something that is going to be a part of the rest of their lives; the sooner they learn they have a role and can make a difference, the more effective my students will be in society.

During the day, my goal is to incorporate some sort of community building activity. This will engage the students and allow them to interact with each other in a way that is different than they are used to. A different group activity each day will give the children something to look forward to and hopefully allow them to learn things about each other they never knew. I have a vision of whenever we have a few free minutes (when a lesson is finished and before the bell rings), to have all different questions in a fish bowl and, one at a time, have students come up and pick out of the bowl and answer the question in front of the class. We play a game, "I am thinking of a word..." but this could be a new version to build upon the idea of community and getting to know each other. When students learn about one another, they can realize a commonality they have and build a relationship, especially for students who are new to the class.

## **2) To you as a teacher?**

There is nothing more I want as a teacher than for all my students to believe in themselves. I want them to know they can do anything they put their mind to. The importance of education is sometimes hard to instill, but I want them to feel empowered and enjoy learning.

The violence that has been going on in our world is terrifying, and it boils down to people not tolerating differences or not working with others. This is a skill that should be facilitated at a young age and strongly reinforced in future years. Everyone does not have to like everyone, but they do have to tolerate each other and learn how to be civil. Citizenship is about working together and being a part of something bigger than oneself. These first graders are the future citizens of this country and this world needs them to work together peacefully and be the best

people they can. I chose this topic because I know some of my students go home to unstable households with abuse and violence, drugs, alcohol, and I want them to know they can make something of themselves and make the world a better place.

My school's boundaries expanded this year due to the closing of other schools, and there is a bit of a transition in the student population. The catchment now includes a shelter for homeless women and children. Regardless of where my students live, I want them to have big dreams and know their voice matters. "Children from families living in poverty or in households in which parent education is low typically enter school with lower levels of foundational skills, such as those in language, reading, and mathematics" (Barbarin, et al, 2006). Ideally, I would like to see my classroom sustaining a caring community of learners.

### **C. How is this topic *accessible to students*?**

#### **1) In terms of developmental appropriateness?**

Students in first grade are experiencing remarkable physical, mental, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Piaget's concrete operational stage begins around the age of seven when children start thinking logically about events. Students need to practice positive relationships with peers, problem solving skills and conflict resolution at this age. Concrete tasks are appropriate because they are just starting to think abstractly and still depend on manipulatives and hands-on activities.

Developmentally appropriate practice in the classroom will allow students to be engaged and achieve the goals that are set. The child's age, experiences, abilities, and interests all need to be taken into consideration. Knowing my students and how they learn will allow my teaching to be more effective. This goes back to meeting children where they are. The class for which this unit is designed has a wide range of learners; this is why groups and centers are going to be

essential during the two-week take-over. I want my two weeks to be seen as intentional teaching: every time I do something, I want there to be a purpose for that action.

## **2) In terms of resources available?**

I recently got our Smartboard working in the classroom. The option of the Smartboard will allow me to show pictures of various leaders (both in the community and the world), present the concept of Philadelphia being in Pennsylvania which is in the United States, etc. by using Google Maps and zooming in and out, showing pictures of different scenarios that can introduce discussions about what we would do in that situation. This resource will add a creative element to our school day, rather than only using the whiteboard.

Chart paper in our classroom will give me the opportunity to create anchor charts and present information that we can keep hanging in the classroom. We have three computers in the classroom, which I will use for a center, most likely a literacy center, but nonetheless, they will be utilized. Although we do not have them directly in our classroom, I will use manipulatives from across the hall (my fall student teaching placement) for certain math lessons. I also plan on organizing an afternoon for parents to come in and talk about their jobs so students can be exposed to different roles in the community.

## **D. How does this topic provide opportunities for *multiple connections*?**

Citizenship and being a good citizen can be connected throughout each and every school day. It is more of an action than direct instruction. I do not want them to get a 100% on their citizenship test (not that I am giving one) or always have the right answers, but I want to see it in the hallways, at their tables, and out on the playground.

Powel demonstrates navigational capital by finding a way to give students opportunities despite the strict budget they follow (Yosso, 2005). Because of their location, they have a

relationship with both the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University. Powel students can sign up to be tutored for free by Penn students, be part of the Big Brother/Big Sister Program, and PennPals.

After this unit, I hope my students can walk away with aspirational capital of their own and act on their hopes and dreams for the future regardless of obstacles in their way today. In our classroom, we talk a lot about respecting others and following the rules. This is a good stepping-stone for what I want to accomplish during my two-week takeover.

## References

- Barbarin, O., D. Bryant, T. McCandies, M. Burchinal, D. Early, R. Clifford, & R. Pianta. 2006. Children enrolled in public pre-K: The relation of family life, neighborhood quality, and socioeconomic resources to early competence. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 76: 265-76.
- Moll, L.C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 132-140.
- Torney-Purta, J., & Lopez, S. V. (2006). Developing Citizenship Competencies from Kindergarten through Grade 12: A Background Paper for Policymakers and Educator. *Education Commission of the States*, 2-33.
- Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*. Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 69-91.



School District of Philadelphia standards that will be covered in my two-week take over:

- 5.2.1: Civics and Government: Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship
  - 5.2.1.A: Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship
    - 5.2.1.A.2: Describe roles and responsibilities at home and in school
    - 5.2.1.A.3: Understand how people can work together and get along
    - 5.2.1.A.4: Explain what can happen if people do not cooperate and work together in the classroom
    - 5.2.1.A.6: Identify school and classroom rules
    - 5.2.1.A.7: Discuss why school and classroom rules are important
  - 5.2.1.C: Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship: The Citizen
    - 5.2.1.C.1: Understand our rights and responsibilities
    - 5.2.1.C.2: Define responsibility
    - 5.2.1.C.3: Explain what makes someone a good citizen in the classroom/school
    - 5.2.1.C.4: Understand leadership
    - 5.2.1.C.5: Identify ways to be a leader in the classroom
    - 5.2.1.C.8: Make decisions as a group
    - 5.2.1.C.9: Participate in small groups to make decisions and problem solve
    - 5.2.1.C.10: Work collectively to take action against injustice
    - 5.2.1.C.11: In small groups address and resolve a situation in which someone is treated unfairly
  - 5.2.1.D: Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship: Events as History Makers
    - 5.2.1.D.4: Recognize who are our local heroes and heroines
    - 5.2.1.D.5: Identify important role models and their leadership qualities
    - 5.2.1.D.6: Recognize national and global role models
    - 5.2.1.D.9: Understand the concept of the future
- 6.3.1: Economics: Scarcity and Choice
  - 6.3.1.A: Scarcity and Choice
    - 6.3.1.A.1: Understand wants and needs
    - 6.3.1.A.2: Determine the difference between wants and needs
    - 6.3.1.A.7: Determine from a list of goods which are more important than others for your survival
    - 6.3.1.A.8: Understand the role of community workers
    - 6.3.1.A.9: Identify the many different roles of community helpers in meeting our wants and needs
- 7.1.1: Geography: Basic Geographic Literacy Describe and Locate Regions
  - 7.1.1.B: Basic Geographic Literacy Describe and Locate Regions
    - 7.1.1.B.1: Identify geographic tools and their uses
- 7.4.1: Geography: The Interactions between People and Places
  - 7.4.1.A: The Interactions between People and Places
    - 7.4.1.A.3: Identify elements of the environment in your community
    - 7.4.1.A.7: Identify natural resources in the community
    - 7.4.1.A.8: Define natural resource
    - 7.4.1.A.9: Identify use and conservation of resources
    - 7.4.1.A.10: Define waste
    - 7.4.1.A.11: List ways children can help to reduce waste