

The C3 Framework: A Powerful Tool for Preparing Future Generations for Informed and Engaged Civic Life

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Developed by representatives of state education agencies and leading organizations of the major social studies disciplines and writers from a range of academic backgrounds and universities, the College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework for the social studies was designed to provide states with voluntary guidance for enhancing existing social studies standards or developing new standards. There are other potential uses for the Framework, as well. It can be a powerful tool for local or site level curriculum planning and development or for teachers in refining their practice.

Agreeing that inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge through questioning is a central focus of the four core social studies disciplines—Civics, Economics, Geography, and History—the developers organized the Framework around a so-called Inquiry Arc, composed of four dimensions. The first Dimension focuses on developing compelling and supporting questions that can frame and advance an inquiry. Dimension 2 emphasizes applying concepts and tools from the four disciplines to help address the inquiry and answer questions. Dimension 3 centers on students' evaluating sources and using evidence when addressing questions. And finally, Dimension 4 presents the learner with opportunities to communicate conclusions and take informed action on issues and problems identified through the process. The final dimension can and often does lead to more inquiry.

The Civic Learning Arc of the Framework

While the idea of the Inquiry Arc is perfectly sound, from a Civics educator and

teacher perspective, the Framework can be thought of as also offering a Civic Learning Arc. That is, it anticipates the concepts and tools necessary for informed, skilled, and engaged participation in civic life.

Dimension 1

On a daily basis American citizens are confronted with dizzying array of compelling civics-related questions: What is justice? What does equal protection really mean? What are the appropriate limits of government power? What foreign policy should the United States pursue? Many of these questions are thrust upon us in headlines, news stories and events of everyday life: a controversial U.S. Supreme Court case; a discrimination issue at work; a police shooting case; a border flare up; or a humanitarian crisis somewhere in the world. While the average person is removed from addressing these questions on a policy level, they may influence the course of decision making through responding to polls, writing letters or emails to officials, social networking, attending or present-

ing at public meetings, joining a demonstration, or advocating and voting in the next election.

Dimension 1 helps prepare students to identify and construct compelling and supporting questions and make determinations about the kinds of information sources that will be helpful in answering them. These capacities are essential for informed and engaged participation in civic life.

Imagine the sadly common situation when a local confrontation between police officers and a suspect of color revolves around the use of deadly force. It is likely that the subsequent controversy will raise questions of justice and, more specifically, questions about what constitutes due process and equal protection of laws under the circumstances. Of course, this requires a focus on a range of supporting questions as well: What laws govern an arrest?, What is reasonable force?, When is deadly force justified? In addition, a range of timeless questions are likely to raise issues about the possibility of discriminatory law enforcement and racial attitudes in

America, along with questions about changing policies that govern the issues.

Soon the citizen observing the situation will be confronted with a barrage of sources providing answers to these questions: pundits and experts on news shows; editorial writers in newspapers; and opinions on Internet and social networking sites. Dimension 1 seeks to assure that students are prepared to determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering these questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view and the potential use of the sources.

Dimension 2

Dimension 2, Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools, provides another set of lenses for a student preparing for civic life to utilize. The Framework emphasizes essential concepts and skills drawn from the disciplines of Civics, Economics, Geography and History, all of which are critical for an understanding of the problems, issues, and controversies that confront policymakers and citizens alike.

Let's consider the recent example of Russia's seizure of Crimea, its incursions into Eastern Ukraine, and the attendant issues about how the United States should respond. To understand the crisis, an engaged citizen needs to understand the historical context and, as called for in the Framework, be able to "Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past" (D2.His.14.9-12). These events, of course, include Russia's historic possession of Crimea and the division of territory with Ukraine after the fall of the Soviet Union.

A geographic perspective is also necessary. For example, an evaluation of "how political and economic decisions throughout time have influenced cultural and environmental characteristics of various places and regions" (D2.Geo.5.9-12) would help explain the Russian orientation of many residents of Eastern Ukraine and how Russia's lack of suitable warm weather ports have influenced Russian policies over the years.

Economics also plays a key role in understanding the situation. Analyzing "the role of comparative advantage in international trade of goods and services" (D2.Eco.14.9-12) casts light on how Russian oil exports to Western Europe may affect Western European political behavior and the debate over the effectiveness of potential sanctions.

Grounding in the disciplinary concepts and tools of Civics is crucial. Our engaged citizen would need to be able to "Distinguish the powers and responsibilities of... national, and international civic and political institutions" (D2.Civ.1.9-12) to understand how our Constitution splits the foreign policy, treaty, and war powers between the executive and legislative branches and the role of the UN, NATO and the European Union in the crisis. An analysis "of the impact of constitutions, laws, treaties and international agreements on the maintenance of national and international order," (D2.Civ.3.9-12) would give insights into the mechanisms to deter aggression, protect civilian populations, and negotiate settlements.

Dimension 3

In this, the Information Age, with its vast array of print, electronic, and emerging media, the ability of participants in civic life to evaluate a multitude of sources is more important than ever. Moreover, in times of highly charged and partisan political discourse, when one-third fewer people work as professional journalists than in 1989¹ but billions are spent on campaign advertising,² claims often stem from polemics and ideology rather than facts or evidence. Any citizen seeking to be informed on an issue, advocate a position, or decide on candidates for office must be able to develop and evaluate claims by the use of evidence.

Many teachers note that while students of this generation have more sources at their fingertips than any other time in history, their capacity to separate the wheat from the chaff is often compromised. An Internet search, a perusal of cable news shows, or a search of blogs

will reveal thousands of supposed facts, opinions, and conclusions on almost any political or social issue, but users must be able to determine relevance, consult multiple sources and a range of views, and evaluate sources by understanding the importance of source, authority, structure, context, and corroboration to evaluate it.

When developing claims, such as a position on an issue, students and citizens alike must be able "to identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims" (D3.3.9-12). Claims and counterclaims must be evaluated using such evidence.

Dimension 4

From the point of view of a civics educator Dimension 4, Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action, is among the most bold, important and innovative aspects of the Framework. With this dimension, students learn to apply the learnings from the previous dimensions and develop concepts and skills for active engagement in the real world.

First, it recognizes the importance of, and articulates concepts and skills necessary for, making and critiquing arguments, debate, and discussion in a plural democracy. These concepts and skills are applicable to the courtroom, the political arena, and all manner of civic discourse.

Second, it recognizes that to be engaged citizens, students need to know how to frame and address real problems, deliberate and collaborate with others, and plan and take action to address political, societal, and community and issues.

It might be said that students learn best by doing. Civic education research has found that students best develop civic capacities and competencies through active learning such as discussion of real issues in the classroom; simulations, in which they take on roles that model civic processes such as trials, hearings, and the legislative processes; and service learning, linked to the curriculum.

The “Taking Informed Action” component of Dimension 4 supports a significant trend in civic learning. This trend has been called “action civics,” “service learning with a focus on social problems,” “guided experiential learning,”³ or project-based learning for civics. With this model, students identify a problem or issue of concern to them, research it in terms of causes and effects, identify options for addressing it, and plan and or take civic action. In some versions, students are required to identify the specific public policies such as laws, ordinances, school rules that affect their problem or issues. When conducting research or civic action, they are encouraged to interact with policymakers and implementers, especially at the local level. Throughout the process, students develop and practice critical-thinking skills, such as analysis, questioning, and drawing evidence-based conclusions, as well as discussion and presentation skills. Moreover, students

experience real civic engagement, many reporting a sense of empowerment by the conclusion of the experience.

There are many such civic engagement programs around the country that provide curriculum, teacher professional development and supporting resources. Among them are:

Civic Action Project (CAP)

<http://crfcap.org>

CAP is Constitutional Rights Foundation’s project-based, blended-learning program designed to support U.S. government courses. It provides lessons linked to state, Common Core, and C3 standards addressing public policy making, democratic ideals and the role of citizens. Designed around research-based “proven practices” for civic learning, students conduct civic actions to address real issues and problems, documenting their work through writing and multimedia. This free online resource offers teacher professional

development opportunities, a project management system, and teacher and student communication tools.

Project Citizen

<http://new.civiced.org/programs/project-citizen>

Center for Civic Education’s Project Citizen is a civic education program for middle, secondary, and post-secondary students and youth or adult groups. Project Citizen promotes competent and responsible participation in state, local, and federal government. It actively engages people in learning how to monitor and influence public policy. Participants work together as a class or extracurricular group to identify and study a public policy issue. The final product is a portfolio that may be presented before other classes, groups, community organizations, or policymakers.

Real Voices. Real Stories. Real Relevance.

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ABC: About Building Communities

www.crfc.org/student-programs/abc-project-5-8-grade

The ABC Project: Action-Based Communities is the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago's dynamic new program that engages 5th-8th grade students in "civic learning through doing." Participating students explore their community; identify, research and write about a problem; consider public policy options; design and implement a civic project; share their recommendations with local experts and policymakers; and reflect on what they've learned. The program provides students the opportunity to create and exhibit web-based presentations of their work, and promotes civic participation among students, their parents, and members of the community.

Mikva Challenge

www.mikvachallenge.org/programs/

The Mikva Challenge works with underserved teenagers in Chicago to develop their civic leadership. Their programs place youth in experiential learning environments where they work on community activism projects, participate in electoral campaigns, and research and lobby for issues of importance to them at the school and city level.

Rock the Vote Democracy Class

www.rockthevote.com/about/democracy-class.html

Democracy Class is a one-class-period program targeting high school students across the United States. The program uses video, a classroom discussion, and a mock election to teach young people the skills to navigate the elections process and encourages them to get involved.

Generation Citizen

www.generationcitizen.org

Generation Citizen is an "action civics" program delivered in classrooms. In the twice-weekly, semester-long pro-

gram, students choose an issue they care about, develop a focused, strategic plan to address the issue, take real action, and then reflect on their successes and challenges. Each semester culminates in a Civics Day, in which student representatives from classes in each city present their work to other students, community members, and public officials, celebrating their work and gaining feedback to further their efforts.

iCivics

www.icivics.org/

iCivics prepares young Americans to become knowledgeable, engaged 21st century citizens through free, web-based interactive games. iCivics has produced 17 educational video games as well as teaching materials that have been used in classrooms in all 50 states.

Street Law, Inc.

www.streetlaw.org/

Street Law creates classroom and community programs that teach people about law, democracy, and human rights worldwide. Street Law participants benefit from "real-life" lessons and insights, which they can use to effect positive change for the rest of their lives. The organization offers accessible, engaging, and interactive programs designed to empower students and communities to become active, legally savvy contributors to society. Its Youth Act program offers a model and support of student civic action.

Conclusion


As the C3 Framework for the social studies rolls out, it is hoped that its influence will grow, offering a vision and guidance for the development of a new generation of state social studies standards that promote deeper student learning and the acquisition of essential skills for college, career, and civic life. In the interim, it can be an inspiring and useful tool for social studies teachers who dedicate their lives to preparing each new genera-

tion of students for informed, skilled, and engaged participation in the workings of our constitutional republic. ●

Notes

1. Pew Research Center's Journalism Project, "Key Indicators In Media & News" (March 26, 2014) www.Journalism.Org/2014/03/26/State-Of-The-News-Media-2014-Key-Indicators-In-Media-And-News/.
2. Center for Responsive Politics, "2012 Election Spending Will Reach \$6 Billion, Center for Responsive Politics Predicts" (October 31, 2012) www.opensecrets.org/news/2012/10/2012-election-spending-will-reach-6/.
3. Meira Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind* (Harvard University Press, March 26, 2012).

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