

# Assessing Citizenship

The goal of creating good citizens—an important mission of the entire school but of the social studies curriculum in particular—can be achieved, and it can be purposefully assessed.

It makes no sense to hold the social studies curriculum alone accountable for what must be the school-wide mission to educate citizens for democracy. Clearly, a concerted effort by the entire school community is required. The school culture might be transformed, for example, so that all children feel welcome and capable and so that all children are provoked to reach out of their private worlds to the shared, public world.

Nonetheless, the social studies curriculum is pivotal in this mission. This is where, if anywhere, the core knowledge base of citizenship will be debated and developed. Social studies is the only place in the school curriculum where focused inquiry on democratic ideals and practices might be located. It is where the tragedies and victories of "liberty and justice for all" can be laid out for study. It is where students encounter models of civic courage—Abraham Lincoln and Sojourner Truth, for example. *And* it is where students stand the best chance of being introduced systematically to popular sovereignty—participating in decision making and grappling with enduring public issues.

Here I want to accomplish two things: first, to show that democratic citizenship, in spite of the whole school's involvement in it, is the

proper goal of the social studies curriculum in particular and, second, to highlight what I believe is an entirely feasible plan for achieving it.

## The Goal

The most important thing to understand about the citizenship goal is the kind of citizenship it entails: *democratic* citizenship.<sup>1</sup> This means that the citizenship goal is practical. Its essence is transfer: Knowledge of history, geography, and civics developed in social studies units is to be used and challenged in deliberation on public



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issues. Sound pedagogy tells us that this deliberation cannot wait until adulthood. It *also* must occur in social studies units. In this way, practical knowledge is developed and refined through successive intersections of acquisition and application. One without the other is not democratic citizenship but something else, just as one without the other is not good art, baseball, or medicine.

Furthermore, democratic citizenship is not only a matter of *preserving* democracy—it is also a matter of *creating* it. Of course, democratic institutions are carried forward from the past—popular sovereignty, rule by law, and limited government, to name three; however, the daily labor of democracy, the "gruntwork," involves processes that are always of the moment that is just now unfolding: identifying public problems, deliberating on them without repression or discrimination, safeguarding the opposition, opening the system to the dispossessed, responding to injustice.<sup>2</sup> Because democracy is a living ideal, democratic education cannot be reduced to a pious defense of the status quo, and it cannot end with studying the mechanics of democratic government. Either denies the work still to be done. Had the founding fathers and mothers of this nation been smug about what had been achieved by 1800—winning

independence from England and writing a social contract—the vote would have remained the sole privilege of white male property owners, and slaves would still be bought and sold.

Some critics have charged that citizenship education is at once so vague and all-encompassing that it can mean anything to anybody. In other words, it works nicely as a rhetorical device in the *written* curriculum but malfunctions in the *taught* curriculum, where it is used to justify virtually anything (including nothing at all).<sup>3</sup>

This complaint has wrongly been taken as reason enough to abandon the citizenship goal. I read it differently, however, as a legitimate complaint about the difficulty of achieving a goal that is left too vague. I take it as a request for clarification and specification, for representing the goal in such a way that (1) it functions as a guide for content selection and (2) students know what it means to achieve it. Let me sketch a plan for doing just this.

### The Plan

Local curriculum committees need to make sense of these matters themselves, of course, and devise plans that respond to local needs and sensibilities. My work with such committees over the past 20 years leads me to a set of recommendations that may be helpful. They are based on two principles:

1. Curriculum planning for democratic citizenship should begin by discussing the kinds of things high school graduates ought to be very good at that will serve as exhibitions of their understanding of democratic citizenship.

2. A sequence of learning experiences should be designed, K-12, which is aimed at and culminates in these exhibitions.

#### Principle 1: Begin with the End

Sizer and Wiggins<sup>4</sup> have helped educators think about "authentic," standard-setting measures of student learning, and elsewhere I have adapted this work to the learning we are concerned with here: democratic citizenship.<sup>5</sup> Basically, authentic assessment involves asking ourselves the question: What would it look like if graduates of our

school system had learned well this cluster of things we call democratic citizenship? That is, what tasks could they perform well as demonstrations of their readiness to hold the office of citizen? We would want such tasks to go to the heart of democratic citizenship; hence, they would have to engage students in the use of already-developed knowledge in deliberations on the public's problems, especially its raging controversies. Of course, they would involve other learnings, too, but this is essential.

What tasks should we identify? I have worked with a number of curriculum planning committees on this question, and we have found it manageable to begin with the most important rite of passage in a student's K-12 years: receiving a diploma upon graduation from high school. The tasks given in Figure 1 are my favorites, at least for now. After identifying tasks for this culminating point, a planning committee can identify approximations of these to mark the passage from middle to high school and from elementary to middle school.

Note that several tasks double as assessments of citizenship and writing ability. With the exception of the second task, note as well that each requires the use of already-developed

knowledge. The first task, for example, asks students to draw upon their knowledge of public controversies, persuasive and expository writing, dialogical reasoning, and history and to organize and apply it to the analysis of a then-current public issue. The third task exhibits students' knowledge of the changing ethnic diversity of North America and their ability to forecast some number of years ahead.

My point here is twofold: a committee effectively *can* clarify and specify the citizenship objective, and it makes great sense to begin curriculum planning for citizenship education with a specification of standard-setting performances. This makes clear to students what they should aim for, thus setting high standards for both learning and instruction.

Of course, this outcome-oriented approach to curriculum planning carries with it several quality-control criteria. First, as we have seen, outcomes need to be conceptualized as tasks. Tasks are relatively clear instances of what otherwise can be an amorphous goal. Second, the citizenship tasks should be authentic or genuine; that is, they need to resemble the real-world challenges faced by democratic citizens. Third, the tasks need to be standard-setting, thus pointing students toward a high, rich level of knowing while at the same time providing the specificity that tasks convey. Fourth, the tasks should be few in number. Note that only six are given in the figure. This forces curriculum planners to deliberate extensively on which tasks matter the most and to select tasks that are representative.

Fifth, the handful of tasks should be attempted by all students. Sixth, the tasks generally should involve higher-order thinking—a challenge for which the student has to go beyond the routine use of previously learned information. This is the transfer point. Only the second task in Figure 1 lacks this quality (I justify it on the grounds that it meets the other criteria so well). Finally, the tasks should be known to students well in advance. Otherwise, students will not know the sort of performance they are to strive for. Because the tasks are not kept secret,

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**Fig. 1. Examples of Assessments of Democratic Citizenship**

Graduates of our school system, in demonstration of their readiness to hold the office of citizen, are able to:

1. select one pressing public controversy drawn from this month's newspapers, given three of the same, and write an analysis of the issues involved, take a position, argue both for and against the position, and draw at least one historical parallel;
2. respond correctly to 95 percent of the items on the citizenship test given to immigrants seeking citizenship;
3. describe the changing diversity and relations of ethnic groups in North America from the 12th century to today, and forecast a number of years (to be announced) hence;
4. give three pressing international conflicts related to economic development, select one and summarize it in writing, addressing the role of climate, resources, and location, and sketch from memory a map of that region of the world;
5. compare and contrast a diverse set of examples of societies organized and attempting to organize under the democratic ideal;
6. analyze a transcribed excerpt of a discussion of a public issue, distinguishing among factual, definitional, and ethical issues, and judging the quality of each participant's contribution to the discussion.

students can marshal their own resources—perseverance, study strategies, and initiative—to help them meet these challenges.

### **Principle 2: Plan a Sequence of Learning**

Once a representative set of standard-setting outcomes has been stipulated, relevant learning activities need to be planned. A mountain of advice is available on what the K-12 social studies curriculum should be; very little of it, however, is concerned with outcomes, let alone citizenship outcomes. It may be helpful, then, if I give a few examples of features of a K-12 curriculum sequence designed to support students' eventual success on the six outcomes in Figure 1. Space permits just two examples, one for lower and one for upper grades. The idea here is to sequence particular learnings through the 12 grades. I have intentionally chosen examples that are feasible today—they are aligned with present curriculum patterns in social studies (for example, U.S. history is generally placed in the 5th, 8th, and 11th grades), materials are available, costs are low to average, the research is supportive, the difficulty level is rigorous but reasonable.

*Grades 1-4.* In the lower grades, children will need to work daily on geographic understandings, steadily getting the world in mind. By the end of 4th grade, they should be able to create maps of local places, with legends, and sketch from memory a physical map of the world. Meanwhile, they should be introduced to the democratic ideal through some of the famous people who exemplify it—James Madison and Patrick Henry, for exam-

ple, who argued about democracy, and Susan Anthony and Sojourner Truth, who fought to narrow the gap between the ideal and the real. Further, everyday democrats should be studied. They will serve as attainable visions—role models who show children what it means in today's terms to care for the common good.

A multiple-case study of community in the 3rd grade should emphasize the ways people in selected communities, both in North America and elsewhere, govern themselves and confront public problems. A multiple-case study of

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regions of the United States in the 4th grade should convey the particular histories, public issues, and geography of the regions. This study should emphasize the various Indian groups that flourished in these regions—a diversity lost to stereotypes when only local Indians are studied.

These studies need to be enriched with *practice* so that the two extend and reinforce one another. The type of practice especially needed, as indicated by the outcomes, is years of clarifying and analyzing public issues. This includes grappling with the multiple perspectives brought to such issues and drawing on one's store of disciplinary knowledge and lived experience. Well-led discussions with peers are an ideal medium.<sup>6</sup>

This practice can begin in the early grades. An impressive model is the one developed by Joanne Shaheen and her colleagues.<sup>7</sup> Children are regularly engaged in democratic meetings to which they bring school problems to the group for discussion (for example, name-calling, playground disputes). Teachers chair the classroom meetings, and the school principal chairs the school meetings. These are composed of classroom-elected delegates. Children learn firsthand about majority rule and minority rights, about fairness and written law, and about the central work in a democracy: deliberating public issues on an endless terrain of value conflict and uncertainty.

*Grades 11-12.* Nearing the end of high school, students are culminating a 12-year sequence of constructing understandings related to U.S. and world history and geography, the evolution of democratic institutions, and the multiethnic nature of societies. As well, they have been applying and refining their understanding of democracy and diversity in classroom and school meetings and in frequent discussions of public issues. This sort of talk is the most basic, everyday work of democracy. (At Tiananmen Square, talk was crushed; *glasnost* was an allowing of talk.) Now, in the 11th and 12th grades, democratic talk can be made even more competent.

The model of choice is one that pushes students to build yet another layer of historical understanding onto

the existing conceptual framework. That framework, understandably shallow in the elementary grades, providing just a vague sense of the whole, has been, we should be sure, deepened and elaborated in intermediate and middle grades. This is best accomplished by revisiting the same topics, but with more challenging and diverse examples and with more rigorous analyses. Now, in the final years of school, a capstone experience is needed, blending rigorous study and practice. This is not easy work for either curriculum planners or teachers. The good news, however, is that

good materials are available. My three favorites are described next.

**11th grade case studies.** Case studies encourage in-depth study while putting students' existing knowledge base to the test. Consequently, they fulfill the knowledge-development and knowledge-in-use, or acquisition and application, imperatives of citizenship education discussed earlier. The 11th grade U.S. history course is an ideal site.

The cases should focus study at once on enduring public issues, U.S. history, and deliberation. This is a feasible combination, since U.S. history is loaded with enduring issues

and since students' democratic practice in prior grades has readied them for lively discussion on these matters. Two collections of cases that help teachers accomplish this are the *Public Issues Series*<sup>8</sup> and *Reasoning with Democratic Values: Ethical Problems in United States History*.<sup>9</sup>

Six cases are provided in the first of these, 49 in the second. Let me give an example from each. In the Civil War case study of the *Public Issues Series*, the war is treated as a crisis of union, and as students dig into its causes, consequences, and events, they grapple with four issues.

1. Who is morally responsible for the effects of slavery? What duties does such responsibility create?

2. On what kinds of issues must their be a single uniform national policy? For what issues is it reasonable to allow differing policies and institutions, depending upon the wishes of the local government?

3. On what grounds is it legitimate for a person, group, or government to secede from a contract or agreement to which they have been party by tradition or choice?

4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of responses such as martyrdom, peaceful civil disobedience, rioting, secession, or revolution by groups that feel they cannot tolerate existing national policy?

It should be helpful to note two things here. First, the issues are posed in such a way that they contain value dilemmas, and these dilemmas, while instantiated in the American Civil War, persist across time and place. The curriculum design thus helps students learn not only to think through the inevitable value conflicts of public life but also to draw and evaluate what might be helpful historical parallels. At the conclusion of the Civil War case study, for example, students are asked to compare the Civil War with the Vietnam War. The point here is not that the two wars are parallel but for students to decide whether or not they are and to learn the criteria on which such a decision might be made.

Second, while students should have studied the Civil War in earlier grades, too, the present work in the high

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*Speaking to a Presidential Classroom group, the Honorable Jay B. Stephens, U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, addresses the topic "Justice in America" at Washington's Omni Shoreham Hotel, June 21, 1990.*

### A New Curriculum

Motivating high school students to participate in public affairs as active and informed citizens is the goal of a successful state curriculum that is now available nationally. The Effective Participation in Government program (EPG) teaches policy skills essential for participation in government by emphasizing learning by doing. Students collect, analyze, and act upon public policy information from readily available sources on a variety of suitable issues.

Initially developed at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Public Affairs and Citizenship, EPG was adopted for secondary school use in 1985. The EPG materials—which are currently being used by more than 200 schools across New York state—emphasize public policy concepts, information-gathering skills, use of numbers and graphs, and the formulation, evaluation, and implementation of policy.

For more information, write to EPG, P.O. Box 632, Fayetteville, NY 13066, or call (315) 637-9650.

*Photograph by Maryrose Eismace, Syracuse, New York*



*At Norwich High School in Norwich, New York, librarian Judy Busch shares her expertise in research techniques with students in the Effective Participation in Government program.*

school U.S. history course surely should not be regarded as studying the Civil War "again." Of course, the topic is up for study again. Now, however, it is up for advanced study. In visits to the topic in earlier grades, only rough, incipient glimmerings of the topic were achieved (if that). Now, however, the Civil War may be seen substantively for the first time, thanks both to the preparatory work done in earlier grades and to the much more rigorous and interesting analytic lens that now, *because of the earlier visits,*

can be brought to bear. (The new California social studies framework, in spite of all its attendant rhetoric about in-depth study, actually works against in-depth learning by encouraging teachers *not* to revisit a topic in subsequent grades.)

The second resource, probably somewhat easier to use and going into less depth on each case, still manages to concentrate student study and discussion on important value dilemmas in U.S. history. For example, from the second World War: *Should the U.S. govern-*

*ment have relocated Japanese-American citizens?* Intelligent discussion on such a question requires a good deal of information and analysis beyond that provided in the case unit itself, so students will need to go to their texts and other reference material. Of the 49 cases provided, the teacher and students together might select 1 or 2 from each era of U.S. history for a total of 10–20 across the year.

*12th grade case studies.* At least one semester of the final high school year ought to be dedicated to honing students' discussion abilities while engaging them in deliberation on some of our toughest contemporary problems. Like the 11th grade issues-oriented history course, this should be required of all students.

The most helpful resource material I have found is the National Issues Forum's *Participation in Government* program.<sup>10</sup> It is used by several districts in New York, where such a course is required in the senior year. Here is how it works. From a collection of nine contemporary problems, students select four or five for in-depth study. The first of these is preceded by a preparatory unit, and the last is followed by a unit that takes students through the work of finding and defining a local problem, grappling with it, and generating policy options. The public problems most recently added to the collection concern the drug crisis, the battle over abortion, and equality for African Americans.

### An Ambitious but Attainable Goal

Education for democratic citizenship is an ambitious goal, to be sure. It relies on the regular teaching of history, geography, and civics, on the one hand, and the provision of ample opportunities for students to clarify and analyze public issues, on the other. Neither is widely in place.

Yet, this is an attainable vision. I am excited about the possibility that schools actually help realize the hope called *e pluribus unum*—that they can help all students to join in an examination of the public world that is rigorous yet feasible, multi-valued and

## Will Teaching More History Result in Better Citizens?

Stephen J. Thornton

Once again we are confronting curriculum reform in the social studies. At the heart of today's proposals is the assumption that history is more worthwhile content than most other social studies courses.<sup>1</sup> Historical-mindedness, the reformers say, is central to educating tomorrow's voters; other mind-sets shortchange our youth.

I question, however, whether historical thinking is necessarily the one best system for civic education.<sup>2</sup> As feminist theorist Nel Noddings (1989) has pointed out, most existing social studies courses—including history courses—are not successful in producing either good citizens or good neighbors (see also Downey and Levstik, in press).

Now, plainly, the history advocates would respond: "We don't want more of the same history courses." But the essential problem remains: Where is the evidence that we should expect the learning outcomes the reformers say will result from studying history? Their case rests more on assertion than on any demonstrated benefits of historical thinking.

The primacy that the reformers place on getting more history into social studies programs distracts attention from a more pressing concern: despite more than a half century of social studies curriculum reform movements, classroom instruction has hardly changed at all (Cuban, in press). As the New Social Studies reformers of the '60s—who also tried to redefine how social studies is taught—found, teachers must have a stake in and a commitment to major changes in curriculum and instruction (see Haas 1977). Similarly, unless teachers change how they teach, the proposed reforms will have minimal effects on what students learn.

What we need far more urgently than more history courses is careful consideration of why social studies teachers teach as they do. Without thorough understanding of the teacher's role as curricular-instructional gatekeeper (Thornton, in press) and the societal, school, and professional contexts in which teachers tend the gate, the addition of more history courses is not likely to result in greater student engagement with either historical content or civic education.

A look back at social studies education reveals a lengthy tradition of one reform bandwagon followed by another. Few have had much effect at the classroom level (Shaver 1979). Until social studies reformers—including the present advocates of history—deal with that stark reality, the periodic cycles of social studies reforms will carry on the tradition.

<sup>1</sup>For example, W.J. Bennett, (1987), *James Madison High School: A Curriculum for American Students*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education); Bradley Commission on History in Schools, (1988), *Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools*, (Washington, D.C.: Educational Excellence Network); P. Gagnon and The Bradley Commission on History in Schools, (1989), *Historical Literacy: The Case for History in American Education*, (New York: Macmillan); National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools, Curriculum Task Force, (1989), *Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century*, (Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools); D. Ravitch, (1987), "The Revival of History: Problems and Progress," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C.; and D. Ravitch, (1989), "The Plight of History in American Schools," in *Historical Literacy: The Case for History in American Education*, edited by P. Gagnon and the Bradley Commission on History in Schools, (New York: Macmillan).

<sup>2</sup>For a fuller version of the arguments laid out here, see Thornton (1990).

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multi-voiced yet unified through shared commitment to democratic ideals. While the whole school must make this its mission, the social studies curriculum plays the key role. □

<sup>1</sup>For example, see goal statements in National Council for the Social Studies, (1979), *Curriculum Guidelines*, (Washington, D.C.: NCSS); W. Parker and J. Jarolimek, (1984), *Citizenship and the Critical Role of the Social Studies*, (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies); F. M. Newmann and D. W. Oliver, (1970), *Clarifying Public Controversy: An Approach to Teaching Social Studies*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co.).

<sup>2</sup>A. Gutmann, (1987), *Democratic Education*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

<sup>3</sup>W. Longstreet, (1985), "Citizenship: The Phantom Core of Social Studies," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 13: 21–29. See also J. S. Leming, (1989), "The Two Cultures of Social Studies Education," *Social Education* 53: 404–408.

<sup>4</sup>T. Sizer, (1986), "Changing Schools and Testing: An Uneasy Proposal," 1985 conference proceedings: *The Redesign of Testing for the 21st Century*, (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service); G. Wiggins, (1989), "Teaching to the Authentic Test," *Educational Leadership* 46: 41–47.

<sup>5</sup>W. C. Parker, (in press), *Renewing the Social Studies Curriculum*, (Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development).

<sup>6</sup>Public controversies and both "everyday" and well-known democratic role models are featured in the elementary social studies textbooks I helped to write, *The World Around Us*, (1990), (New York: Macmillan/McGraw-Hill).

<sup>7</sup>J. C. Shaheen, (1989), "Participatory Citizenship in the Elementary Grades," *Social Education* 53: 361–363.

<sup>8</sup>Social Science Education Consortium, (1989), *Public Issues Series*, (Boulder, Colo.: SSEC).

<sup>9</sup>A. L. Lockwood and D. E. Harris, (1985), *Reasoning with Democratic Values: Ethical Problems in United States History*, (New York: Teachers College Press).

<sup>10</sup>National Issues Forum in the Classroom, (1989), *Participation in Government*, (Dayton, Ohio: National Issues Forum in the Classroom).

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