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Young Citizens of the World Unite! A Case for the Model United Nations in Middle School Classrooms

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Abstract

In this essay, the authors describe the benefits and theoretical connections of the Junior Model United Nations (JMUN) program in middle school classrooms. The lens used to view the JMUN program is informed by literature on the needs of young adolescents, inquiry learning, and global citizenship. Findings based on this literature illuminate nuances in the interaction between inquiry learning through the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards and active learning participation. Implications for middle school students, in-service teachers, and teacher candidates are discussed.

Introduction

There are three primary objectives that our theoretical examination seeks to fulfill. The first is to show how the current emphasis on high-stakes standardized tests has discouraged middle grades social studies teachers from finding ways for their students to practice democratic citizenship in the ways that John Dewey (1997) and others believed public education could function. The second is to show evidence that simulations, which give students opportunities to engage in this civic practice, are more motivating and instructive than traditional classroom practices. Many of the 16 characteristics of effective middle grades education, published by the Association of Middle Level Education (AMLE) (2010) are met by way of a Junior Model United Nations (JMUN) program. Specifically, that "students and teachers are engaged in active, purposeful learning," is accomplished in the way that students and teachers work in a collaborative fashion to investigate and propose solutions to problems facing their peers around the globe (AMLE, 2010, p. 16). In addition, the Model United Nations (MUN) program is "curriculum [that] is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant" (AMLE, 2010, p. 17).

The third objective is to provide an overview of what a MUN program looks like when carried out with, and how it can benefit,

middle grades students based on research on adolescents. The end goal of the simulation conference is typically to pass Resolutions on controversial topics by a majority vote. Within the program, students practice reading, writing, and speaking skills while taking on leadership roles.

Theoretical Framework

Our investigation occurs at an intersection of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards, theory on inquiry learning as meeting the needs of young adolescents, and the tenets of global citizenship. These three theories come together to support the JMUN program. Inquiry learning has the potential to help learners to be producers of their own knowledge as they ask and answer their own questions. Inquiry is at the core of the C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards, as is clear in its "four Dimensions of informed inquiry in social studies," the first of which is "developing questions and planning inquiries" (C3 Framework). Inquiry learning and the C3 Framework are perfectly aligned with the intended outcomes of a JMUN program, one being that students will investigate complex, multilateral issues from a national perspective in order to propose Resolutions to these issues (Mehling, 2010). Thus, inquiry learning, the C3 Framework, and the MUN form three sides of a triangle at the center of which exists recognition that students can practice their roles as global citizens when given opportunities to ask and answer their own challenging, genuine questions about the world around them.

Methods and Data Sources

The readings in this review were retrieved primarily through Internet search engines, such as ERIC, Google Scholar, and EBSCO. We used keyword searches including "C3," "Model UN", "middle school curriculum", and "democratic education." In addition to Internet search engines, we searched through recent issues of journals publishing on this topic, including the *Journal of Social Studies Research* and *Middle School Journal*. We focused this review on the last 10 years, encompassing the years 2005-2015.

The articles, books, and chapters include different theoretical frameworks and represent various research designs, methods, and analytic techniques (Pettit, 2011). We analyzed the articles in the review qualitatively by initially using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) open coding system to write

down any thoughts as we read the articles and books. From there, codes were applied that resulted in categories. Ginn, Albert, Hunter, Fitzgerald, and Phillips (2015) call for a combination of content and thematic analysis (Ezzy, 2002) because at times the categories were predetermined, yet another category emerged from the data.

What is the Junior Model United Nations Program?

In this section, we discuss how a JMUN Conference works. The hour-by-hour activities are provided that point towards the conference goal: passing a Resolution on a controversial subject. Once the conference proceedings are delineated, this section proceeds to discuss how middle school students and teachers prepare for the conference with a JMUN curriculum. Generally, all MUN are educational simulations, requiring weeks, if not months, of preparation before the simulation begins.

The simulation, depending on the organization running it, tends to have several real-world topics that are to be discussed by the students in a mock-delegate setting. Students (hereafter called delegates) negotiate with one another (usually with two delegates representing a Member State of the United Nations) in order to achieve outcomes about the pre-selected topics that benefit the Member State they represent. The end goal of the conference is typically to pass Resolutions by a majority vote.

Each delegation then seeks to include provisions within the working paper (pre-Resolution), that benefits their Member State, or they seek to impede other delegations from inserting provisions contrary to their interests. A Resolution (discussed below in more detail), in nonspecific terms, is an international treaty that serves as guidelines that Member States follow concerning specific topics. For a typical JMUN program targeting middle school students, the conference lasts a full day, though some organizations sponsor overnight conferences.

Formal Caucusing

During the conference, delegates must always stay "in character," meaning a delegate must always try to act in a way that a delegate or ambassador in the real world would actually behave. This is critical when it comes to giving speeches and arguing positions in working papers. Delegates must know their Member States' stances on the topics and must always stay true to those views. Within this context, delegates are expected to give formal speeches in a variety of contexts, but for the purposes of this paper, the main context is policy or position speeches. Delegates speak to the entire committee (we will use an example of the General Assembly—a main organ of the United Nations) regarding one of the topics assigned for deliberation (child soldiers, for example). In these speeches the delegate will try to persuade other delegates representing different Member States to accept their position regarding child soldiers. For example, a delegate representing a Member State from Sub Saharan Africa may not want to have a Resolution passed that condemns the use of child soldiers in warfare. Thus, the delegate representing said Member State will try to convince that such a Resolution would be an infringement on their sovereignty, a violation of international law.

Another delegate representing a Western European Member State may speak next. This delegate would try to point out the flaws of the previous delegate's speech (diplomatically of course) and try to convince the General Assembly of the necessity of banning the use of people under the age of 18 from warfare, and the delegate may invoke the argument from a human rights perspective, thus quoting "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights." The point of the speech is to alert Member States of your position in order to form a working group that has similar views and to draft a working paper that benefits the interests of that specific group. Typically, this process of formal speeches is known as "formal caucusing" or "formal debate." This process is repeated for each topic being covered at the specific conference, or until time runs out.

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Informal Caucusing

As mentioned above, formal caucusing consists of delegates giving speeches on their Member States' positions while all other Member States are attentively listening and taking notes. Typically, after a few delegates have spoken, a motion is made to "suspend the meeting" and to move into "informal caucusing" or "informal debate." This is the process in which delegates seek out other delegates in order to work with them to start or continue formulating a working paper, or to seek out delegates that have differing policy options in order to win them over to their side. Delegates use the tools of diplomacy, negotiations, and all other forms of Statecraft, while always staying in character.

Resolutions

After a few rounds of formal and informal caucusing, the Committee is ready to present a Resolution (a non-binding–unless passed in the Security Council–international agreement that serves to guide Member States' policies and actions in the international arena) and the delegates vote on whether or not to pass the Resolution. Typically, a general JMUN conference will have two or three topics to discuss in a conference, each resulting in at least one Resolution, but perhaps more, per topic. Although brief, this section has provided the basic idea and structure of a MUN simulation aimed at middle school students. Specifically then, what skills do students learn from this typical MUN experience?

Perhaps the most prestigious outlet for Middle School Model United Nations curriculum development and resources is the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA). It is the standard-bearer for educating through the use of MUN simulations. As such, the specifics, applicability, and practicality of how the MUN can help students achieve and excel in C3 standards, will be guided by the UNA-USA's standard curriculum. UNA-USA suggests a broad curriculum consisting of three large areas of focus: economics of globalization; human rights; and sustainable

development. Through its "Global Classrooms" module, the UNA-USA states that students will learn the following skills: become expert researchers, investigating multilateral issues from a national perspective (their Member State's perspective); acquire negotiation skills by role-playing as representatives of their specific Member State; develop public speaking and debating skills as they articulate their Member State's perspective; engage in consensus-building; and finally, respect diversity of opinions (Mehling, 2010).

According to Mehling (2010), students learn these skills by covering complex and often controversial lessons covering issues including the French headscarf ban; the Responsibility to Protect (R2P); the crisis in Darfur; women's rights and the protection from discrimination; and child rights, specifically related to the right to education (a right taken for granted in the US, but one not recognized by much of the world). The world witnessed a tragic reminder of this in the case of Malala Yousafzai who was shot in the head by the Taliban for advocating the educational rights of women in Pakistan. Each unit in the Global Classrooms module teaches first from a primary document, such as the "Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women;" a case study, such as "the Freedom of Expression Controversy;" a practical skill, such as technical writing or negotiation tactics; all followed by a simulation that adds an experiential learning element to the theoretical information gained through the previous lessons. Although brief, this section illuminates how the MUN experience captures the types of learning students need most and those that the C3 framework requires. Thus, the MUN program is a unique paradigm to innovatively address C3 standards.

The purpose of implementing a JMUN program into middle school classrooms is to better meet the unique needs of middle school students and provide an engaging curriculum for middle school teachers and students. Middle schools often fall short of meeting the educational and social needs of millions of students (Jackson & Davis,

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2000). One way to address this concern in social studies classrooms in particular is by implementing a JMUN program. This implementation has positive benefits for both middle grades students, middle grades teachers, and in some cases, the teacher candidates involved with the project. The following sections will address how the needs of these various groups are met through the program, as well as how the JMUN program aligns with the curriculum middle school students desire. Finally, a connection will be made between the problems with high stakes testing and the JMUN as one way to address these issues.

How JMUN Benefits Students by Aligning with Research on Effective Middle Level Curricula

The main purpose of middle grades education is to "enable every student to think creatively, to identify and solve meaningful problems, and to communicate and work with others" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, pp. 10-11). Difficult as this task sounds, we posit that a JMUN program will accomplish these objectives while meeting subject area standards in social studies and literacy. A developmentally responsive curriculum in middle school is one that provides students opportunities to examine and understand complex issues such as poverty, health, and culture. Student participants in the JMUN program must research and delve into complicated topics that have global implications, such as these. Each of these components is addressed through a JMUN curriculum.

The alignment among the JMUN activities and a developmentally responsive curriculum for middle grades students is staggering. For example, middle school students over the course of a year and found that the students believed that excellent instruction should be about: opportunities for interacting with different people, reading and discussion, simulations, cooperative learning, research, in-depth information about a topic, project work, presentations and demonstrations, and choice. If you examine the structure of the JMUN, you will see all these characteristics embedded in the program's curriculum. The student

participants in this study were describing the tenets of a JMUN program without even having experienced it. Many of the essential characteristics of middle school curriculum, as described by the AMLE are met through a MUN framework. These include "students and teachers are engaged in active, purposeful learning" and "curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant," among others (AMLE, 2010, pp. 16-17). In addition, AMLE cites one of the main goals of middle level education as young adolescents need to "become actively aware of the larger world, asking significant and relevant questions about the world and wrestling with big ideas and questions for which there may not be one right answer" (2010, p. 11).

Various other goals include thinking rationally and critically, expressing thoughts clearly, reading deeply, respecting and valuing diversities, and understanding local, national, and global civic responsibilities. We posit these tenets of an academically excellent curriculum are each addressed by implementing a JMUN program. For example, when JMUN participants are given choice of which country to represent, they must engage in identifying and locating resources to address significant problems or issues of social concern (Pate, 2013). Furthermore, effective middle schools use various methods of assessment, with an emphasis on authentic assessment, and JMUN programs provide ample opportunities for these forms of evaluation.

Citing low scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) report calls for creating an "intensely engaging school experience" for middle school students that involves creative thinking and problem solving (2015). The new mission, according to the SREB, includes middle grades students having "richer learning experiences that allow them to explore their interests, aptitudes and talents and to relate their learning to future education and career choices and to those current interests" (p. 4). The JMUN is an engaging program that involves participants' problem solving just as described, connecting to their interests.

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In addition to the curriculum goals spelled out by AMLE, leading researchers in middle level education have described the need for middle schools and middle level classrooms to be democratic in nature. For example, Beane (1999) believed that democratic schools would work against the inequities and injustices that negatively affect the lives of many adolescents. Pate (2013) writes, "The middle grades years must provide young adolescents with educational experiences that focus not only on traditional academics, but also on issues of equity and social justice, democratic principles and practices, and participatory citizenship" (p. 165). A JMUN program fits within the curriculum model that best aligns with the true purpose of middle schools where democracy is central.

How JMUN Benefits Teacher Candidates and In-service Teachers

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), in its Standards for Social Studies Teachers, identified five principles for "powerful social studies" (NCSS, 2002, p. 12). These principles call for "social studies teaching and learning" that is meaningful, integrative, values-based, challenging, and active (NCSS, 2002). Powerful social studies would be teaching and learning that yields "competent and responsible citizens [who] are informed and thoughtful, participate in their communities, are involved politically, and exhibit moral and civic virtues" (NCSS, 2008, p. 1).

Middle school learners who experienced social studies for these purposes would be equipped to lead the way in social justice efforts aimed at positive changes to improve the lives of fellow citizens living below their potential. In contrast, our experiences with teacher candidates in social studies methods courses are of students eager to learn entertaining cut-and-paste activities that will occupy their learners with surface-level study of an assigned topic for a predictable amount of time.

Efforts to push teacher candidates into deeper, more critical investigations of causes and effects of historical events are sometimes met with resistance. It is our view that this expectation of "what to do" with middle grades social studies learners is not reflective of the NCSS call for powerful social studies teaching and learning (2002). In addition to this mismatch between expectations about how to teach and learn social studies, we find that students are sometimes unable to engage in critical explorations and discussions about events because they lack the knowledge required to do so. Their own understandings of history, geography, economics, and civics are not deep enough that they can explore the other side(s) of historical and current issues in ways that mirror those necessary by democratic citizens at work for social justice.

While it is impossible to isolate one or a few direct causes of teacher candidates' lack of willingness and ability to teach social studies powerfully, we feel that there is evidence to suggest that they bring with them the attitudes and skills they absorbed in their own middle grades social studies experiences. As stated above, in the years since *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) pressured schools to reach achievement goals in math and reading, social studies has sometimes taken a backseat to instruction in other content areas. As it was not a requirement that social studies teachers be "highly qualified" like reading and math teachers had to be, those teachers who found themselves before students ready to learn social studies were sometimes under-qualified to teach it. Time and resources designated for social studies have sometimes found themselves repurposed for remediation activities in math and reading for students who needed it.

Though we recognize the potential usefulness of exploring the causes and effects of a missing knowledge base, and insufficient critical thinking skills that would ensure powerful study of the world around us all, we choose instead to present a case for the JMUN program being a way to strengthen these identified weaknesses in social studies education.

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Problems of Testing and Solutions Offered Through JMUN

It is more difficult to evaluate higher level thinking than basic facts. According to AMLE (2012), most high-stakes tests do not assess the knowledge and skills students need to be active and productive citizens in the 21st century. This leads us to the difficult place described by Westheimer (2015) as "since we can't measure what we care about we start to care about what we can measure" (p. 27). In other words, the act of teaching history as a list of facts becomes how teachers teach because that is how students are tested. Teaching the basics is necessary and has value, but students need and deserve more; "They also need to know how to connect that knowledge to matters of social concern–that is, to their roles as democratic citizens" (Westheimer, 2015, p. 33).

Young adolescents are confronted with the task of striving for and achieving socially responsible behavior. Students are vulnerable in social studies, in particular in the middle grades because of declining social studies instruction in elementary schools. Recent emphasis on standardized test scores in mathematics and reading in grades 3-5 has meant time during the day to focus on social studies domains such as history, and geography has been absorbed into math and reading blocks. Unfortunately, teachers are not incorporating social studies content into the reading time, so students are missing important social studies content.

The amount of time devoted to social studies in elementary schools decreased significantly with the inception of NCLB because of the emphasis on testing math and English Language Arts (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012). However, at that time, instructional time in social studies was at least even with, if not greater than, science. With the reauthorization of NCLB, states were required to test student achievement in science at least once in grades 3-5. This policy has caused social studies to be the core content area with the least amount of instructional time in elementary schools (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012).

Westheimer (2015) outlines some of the main problems of social studies classrooms today and preferred alternatives. His description of teaching students to think about "root causes of problems or challenge existing social, economic, and political norms as a way to strengthen democracy" (p. 45) aligns with the JMUN framework, particularly in the areas of engaging in informed critique and making collective choices. Other researchers have found that options other than lecture-based learning work well for social studies.

For example, Loewen (2010) advocates for students teaching history topics to the class in order to really grasp their importance. The JMUN delegates are required to present information to the class about real problems they have researched. Too many schools today are teaching one unquestioned version of "truth" rather than the democratic principles and values that we would expect (Westheimer, 2015). Students should be taught the skills of "analysis and exploration, free political expression, and independent thought" (Westheimer, 2015, p. 12).

A common myth of education is that politics should be kept out of schools, and this idea threatens engagement of students in thoughtful discussion (Westheimer, 2015). Politics should be welcomed in school because it is the way people with different values can come together to negotiate differences (Westheimer, 2015). This is the center of a JMUN experience.

Problems of Histlexia and Solutions offered through JMUN

As theorists for middle grades methodology courses, we see the value in theory and practice. According to Zeichner (2010), there exists a disconnect between theory (methodology courses) and teaching (field experience) in the education profession. Pryor (2006) addresses how teacher candidates' experiences in school tend to provide a revisit to early learning experiences for teacher candidates' information transmission (histlexia).

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Table 1

Histlexia

| A social studies teacher who seeks to simplify complex historical events |
| A social studies teacher who teaches from one perspective (usually a hero narrative) |
| A social studies teacher who purposefully or intentionally limits student learning |
| A social studies teacher who see's lecture as the only successful method for teaching |
| A social studies teacher who does not seek to connect or explain real world connections |
| A social studies teacher who overly relies of textbook materials |
| A social studies teacher who has little to no interest in professional growth |
| A social studies teacher who is not reflective of their teaching |

Within histlexia, at this early teaching stage, teacher candidates are encouraged to enter the classroom as information transmission experts as opposed to educational experts. See Table 1 for traits of histlexia. Despite the rise in media access, Americans as a whole are less knowledgeable about politics and current events. With Putman's stance, modern Americans are disengaged from politics (2000). A theory that is supported by Snell (2010) reports that one of the main reasons for a degree in civic-minded behavior is the role held by social studies teachers in the classroom. At the risk of being overly simplistic, histlexia is a learning disorder, and JMUN is a viable technique to counteract the disorder. Within the process of becoming educational experts, teacher candidates are engaged in a malleable process that will be essential to their success as a teacher. All social studies teachers must decide if they are going to act as information transmitters or educational experts. Traits of educational experts can be found in Table 2.

A great content field to address global events is in social studies because they play an important role in understanding historical concepts. How does the international community explore complex and controversial issues? How do world leaders view the use of child soldiers? An effective way of engaging in this process is through the JMUN Program.

Table 2

Educational Expert Traits

| A social studies teacher who realizes that historical events are complex and require more explanation |
| A social studies teacher who provides different perspectives |
| A social studies teacher who uses multiple sources and techniques |
| A social studies teacher who seeks student engagement |
| A social studies teacher who seeks real world connections |
| A social studies teacher who seeks constant improvement |
| A social studies teacher who is self-reflective |

Beineke (2011) writes: "What is called subject matter is often defined, some may think narrowly, as synonymous with curriculum. And that curriculum is more than the subject matter being taught" (p. 174). A teacher candidate being able to address modern global issues is invaluable. Providing a context for this approach is essential for teacher candidates. Beineke (2011) writes: "The issue is not to criticize this effort. If the book is picked up by a middle school student who enjoys history, then what it contains will do them no harm and probably a great deal of good" (p. 177). Within this view, the teachers can use global issues to allow all the students to take ownership of their own learning by selecting global events that are of interest to them.

Many skills associated with primary source analysis can also be used in examining global events. Yakel and Malkmus (2016) define primary source usage as: "Primary sources foster historical empathy, which can be defined as understanding the past on its own terms. Primary sources can challenge deeply held stereotypes and present the authentic voices of underrepresented groups" (p. 11). This framework is also evident in global events. Certain media outlets may support a particular country's stance and actively try to mitigate information that might be unfavorable. Whereas another network may seek to

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explore an event in more detail because of journalist integrity or because of conflicting ideologies. Doyle and Zakrajsek (2017) expressed: "The more ways you engage with something that you are learning-such as listening, talking, reading, writing, reviewing, or thinking about material of skill-the stronger the connections on your brain become and the more likely the new learning will become a more permanent memory" (p. 7). The JMUN program provides a context for this learning experience to take place.

Within this educational expert view, Yakel and Malkmus (2016) define domain knowledge as: "Domain Knowledge helps build historicization and contextualization of documents and place evidence within a temporal, cultural, or social framework, which enables sense making" (p. 10). A challenge for new teacher candidates is the realization that not all students may share their views. An educational expert classroom of this nature may seem daunting to a new teacher who is inclined towards information transmission (histlexia) process. Doyle and Zakrajsek (2017) argue: "The important message for all learners is that new learning requires a considerable amount of practice and a meaningful connection to other information in order to become a more permanent part of memory" (p. 7). Within the histlexia view, a new teacher may limit this type of learning by narrowing the curriculum to avoid controversy which is in fact narrowing the learning potential of the learner in the process.

For many content fields, controversial topics might seem unnecessary. However, it is our contention that within social studies controversy is necessary (Hess, 2010). Hess advocates for a balanced approach to learning about privilege and viewpoints. In fact, using controversy as an educational technique is common in science education. As for social studies, a clear gap exists in the usage and value of this approach (Levinson, 2006). Why as a field that is largely based on controversial social issues is so anemic in this regard rest with a philosophical base that actively tries to avoid conflict in the classroom with a traditional didactic hero narrative method (histlexia). According to

Doyle and Zakrajsek (2017), "Some subjects are more difficult for you to learn because you lack prior knowledge, not because you lack intelligence. Lack of knowledge makes it difficult for your brain to figure out how to make connections to patterns already known" (p. 12). Within a single version of understanding key events, teacher candidates might not embrace controversial social issues in the classroom. Lack of understanding extends into adulthood (Snell, 2010). However, according to Damon (2007), lack of civic knowledge as an adult is a dispositional issue.

Additionally, some may argue that Hirsch's (1987) and Schelsinger's (1988) arguments concerning civically minded education could create better middle grade students. Here, students would focus on ideals and/or education that is specifically geared towards Europe and the Western world and perhaps even centered on only a specific American context. Although these arguments have merit, we believe a curriculum focusing on the entire international community not only better serves middle grade students in the contemporary globalized world, but also, because the JMUN curriculum focuses on a global understanding, it better fulfills the requirements and standards of the C3 than does a solely Western-Centric view. Within a JMUN simulation, students are exposed to different viewpoints, and they explore the nature of these differences and engage in dialogue about these vantage points.

As a social studies teacher candidate, lack of global understanding can diminish their ability to teach. A contention within dispositions is that there is fluidness to them and context and experience need to be considered (Diez, 2007). Within this perspective, teacher candidates are not static in their professional development. As long as they realize the value of global events and civics, they can improve, or become an educational expert, but if they find no value in global events and civics, they will continue to teach from an information transmission view, or histlexia. Teachers' dispositions are visible in their instruction (Schussler, Stooksberry, & Bercaw, 2010). One of the reasons that some teachers are more successful than others is because they

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are deliberate in their teaching method (Fairbanks, Duffy, Faircloth, He, Levin, Rohr, & Stein, 2010). From our perspective as theorists, we are actively creating a classroom that requires political knowledge and global events in order to help develop teacher candidates as educational experts and combat histlexia.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards

Applied connections exist between what we refer to as methods (techniques for learning) and content (material to be grasped). As methods professors and university faculty we must consider how we learn best as a culture. College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards (2015), and the JMUN program are concepts that are entrenched in the inquiry process. One of the main objectives of the C3 Framework is to encourage inquiry learning.

The inquiry process is a form of intellectual exploration. As students are exposed to new ideas and concepts (Vajoczki, Watt, & Vine, 2011), the students act as co-producers of knowledge by engaging in the inquiry process. By allowing the students to ask their own questions and foster a sense of acting as archivist, the learners take on the role of being producers of knowledge. The skill of producing knowledge will allow students to act as more informed consumers, by understanding an intellectual proposition from the conception, as Derrida (1967) would refer to as a deconstruction process. Requiring students to research topics and offering solutions allows for a better learning experience.

Global Skills and Critical Thinking Skills

In order to understand the inquiry process from a global perspective, students must examine beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge that guide diverse cultures' actions. As social studies teachers we can also explore why in our modern culture similar social and political decisions are rendered. The JMUN program provides students with these

intellectual skills. Within VanSledright's (2010) view, all the cognitive tools discussed here are insignificant without theory about how the tools work and communicate student learning.

According to Beddow, Kidwell, and Chadwick's (2015) principles, the critical thinker has to process the presence of the evidence and consider an endless possibility of meanings among texts or artifacts that are different from his or her everyday lives. The researchers offered this guidance to future teachers, writing, "A mock trial is an example of this type of learning activity that emphasizes thinking skills, questioning strategies, research, communication skills, and collaboration (p. 11). The JMUN program services as a framework for our middle school mock trial experience by providing online resources ranging from background of the organization to the purposes that it serves. The program provides a step-by-step interaction process for teachers.

The development of theme exploration is very important for a project of this nature. Having the students investigate usage of chemical warfare and robots used in combat, for instance, raise real ethical concerns. Noddings (2004) states, "Existential themes are universal. Choose a theme that matters, and pursue it in depth. Themes to consider include love of place, war and peace, our relationship to nonhuman animals, religion and spirituality, virtue and vice, friendship, and romance (p. 403). A JMUN experience provides complex social issues that require advanced skills.

Snyder and Snyder (2008) suggest students should be faced with an issue to problem solve, despite the specificity of the content, as "critical thinking uses questioning techniques that require students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information to solve problems and make decisions rather than merely to repeat information" (p. 91). These real-world skills allow the students to adopt the roles of policy makers and debate the real-life issues with the same format to allow for authentic experience.

Piaget's (1954) theory of development and

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Vygotsky's (1978) constructivism theory combine prior experience and active learning that leads the child to develop new capacities. Within this framework, simulations provide a context for real-world interaction (de Freitas, 2007; Dorn, 1989). By providing middle school students with a simulation experience, the students can also work towards how knowledge is structured and what biases or misconceptions should be addressed.

According to Myers and Zaman (2009), "The current national debate over the purposes of civic education is largely tied to outdated notions of citizenship that overlook its changing nature under globalization" (p. 2590). Knight (2011) refers to the duplicity in our reasoning when engaging in the examination of different cultures:

> And now, we grapple with transnationalism and civic responsibility. This grappling takes place amidst conversations on the contentious debates on immigration, (mis)representations of all immigrants in the media, and policies designed to limit access and possibilities for transnational immigrant youth living in a time of global interdependence. (p. 1277)

As advocates of inquiry learning, we must work to encourage teachers to avoid being transmitters of knowledge and to act more as co-producers of knowledge. A classroom needs teachers to act more as facilitators of experiences not the holders of knowledge.

Results

One of the conclusions we have drawn is that a JMUN program fulfills many of the obligations middle schools have to their unique young adolescent learners. A JMUN program could fit under the curriculum model that best aligns with the true purpose of middle schools and where democracy is central (Beane, 2005). The results of our inquiry confirm that a JMUN program can provide middle grades students with the relevant, exploratory curriculum that AMLE (2010) says is what young adolescents need to feel they are an integral part of their own

education. "The middle grades years must provide young adolescents with educational experiences that focus not only on traditional academics, but also on issues of equity and social justice, democratic principles and practices, and participatory citizenship" (Pate, 2013, p. 165). We argue that these tenets of an academically excellent curriculum are each addressed by implementing a JMUN program (Ginn, Albert, & Phillips, 2011). The fact that the JMUN program requires learners to simulate actual UN Assembly meetings means young adolescents' notorious transition from concrete to abstract thinking is accommodated by hands-on practice. Additionally, there is some evidence that teachers also recognize the benefits of embedding their curriculum standards into a JMUN program (United Nations Foundation, 2013). There seems to be a need for more research on exactly how teachers are accomplishing this around the nation.

Scholarly Significance of the Study

This exploration into the viability and utility of a JMUN program in middle schools has scholarly significance in that it presents an alternative, yet C3 Framework compliant, way to engage in middle grades social studies teaching and learning. Our goal is to combat histlexia (Walker & Langan, 2016), a disconnect between historical learning and application that is rampant with middle school students today. We feel the greatest significance of this study is that it sets the stage for others to undertake JMUN programs in their schools. Our conclusions build on our own observations of under-inspired social studies teaching and address the conflict that exists between "teaching for the test" and teaching students to think critically and conscientiously about global issues. A JMUN program is a perfect fit for middle schools aiming to address the characteristics for successful middle schools according to AMLE.

Conclusion

This theoretical exploration of the JMUN program endorses the program in multiple ways, such as how it benefits middle school students, teacher candidates, and in-service

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teachers. Additionally, we advocate that the JMUN program helps address many of the concerns with standardized testing while also teaching important skills of global citizenship. Finally, the ways in which implementation of JMUN helps meet the needs of young adolescents according to the AMLE were highlighted while also showing how JMUN addresses the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards.

A case has been made here for the potential of the JMUN program to right many of the wrongs that exist today as a result of deemphasized teaching and learning of social studies in middle schools. Middle grades students are developmentally ideally suited for study of world issues in the ways that the JMUN structures learning experiences. These learning experiences require students to be active participants in their construction of knowledge about circumstances in the world, causes of these circumstances, and effective, transformative solutions that could change the lives of others in the world for the better. Students are required to form and defend their evidence-based decisions. These experiences capture much of what NCSS calls for in its definition of "powerful social studies," such as interactive discourse, examination of values-based policies and practices, and the exploration of fewer issues in depth as opposed to many issues on the surface (NCSS, 2002). Ultimately, we believe the JMUN program has the potential to right the most severe wrong, which is what has happened as students of perhaps well intentioned, but insufficiently inspired, teachers are entering the teaching profession. This gradual loss of fidelity means that each generation of social studies teachers is less likely to inspire his or her students to learn about, and bring positive changes to, the world we all share. Bringing in the JMUN to middle school social studies programs is a way to transform educational experiences into ones that yield globally minded, competent future citizens who are prepared, through simulations of democracy-in-action, to make the world into one deserved by all.

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