

Reform Composition

**Constructivist Education to promote Civic Engagement &
Democracy**

By
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I. Issue Assessment

The decision-makers in education today claim that market strategies promote democratic educational reform, when what they really promote is the market reform of education.¹ Subsequently, schooling has been under constant pressure to support the expanding capitalist economy by establishing a competitive meritocracy and preparing students for their vocational roles.

My reform composition examines how the market-centred aspects of our education system have crucial implications for the learning process and the democratic way of life. It then proceeds to address the importance of constructivist approaches in cultivating a sense of civil engagement in our educational system.

The way our market-centered system of education functions is reflective of the contradictions that exist between democratic and market values. It illustrates how the economic standpoint tends to overshadow democratic ideals in education reform.

Advocates of educational reform are expected:

to shape their proposals within the ‘rules of game’ and to accept what they are told is ‘acceptable.’ Being ‘realistic’ in these ways reinforces institutional and elite positions and practices. It also limits social imagination and innovation by ruling ‘unrealistic’ alternatives beyond consideration.²

Market ideology thus dictates the extent of government funding in providing educational services based on the needs of the market economy and national security. It requires that public responsibility for financing those services be calculated in relation to external benefits based on economic rationale. Education for any non-economic purpose -such as

¹ Engel, Michael, *The Struggle for control of Public Education: Market Ideology vs. Democratic Values*

² Kurth-Schai, Ruthanne, Green, Charles R., *Re-envisioning Education and Democracy*

promoting a democratic citizenry- may well be regarded as a positive externality³ but its value in relation to economic growth is considered minimal. Because of the inability to measure it in terms of a cost-benefit analysis, there has been little incentive to include it on the reform agenda.

Furthermore, market values have penetrated the notion of competition into our system of education. Because the “academic culture only knows one form of conflict, the win lose form called competition, we fear the live encounter as a contest from which one party emerges victorious while the other leaves defeated and ashamed.” (Palmer, 38) This fear has shut down our capacity for connectedness and destroyed our capacity to teach and learn. The use of standardised testing to determine and compare the academic standing of our students has become the norm in our educational culture. This has led to a system of education that greatly undermines the importance of discussion-based learning, critical thinking, participation in decision- making, and social awareness in public schools.

The market approach is inadequate because it neglects the fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life. Schools have "de-contextualized" learning by making the school environment the only one that matters, thus, narrowing the scope of learning exclusively to the school vicinity. As a result, the concept of education as a community enterprise has been severely diminished, thereby encouraging the erosion of social cohesion and inter-group communication. If citizens cannot relate across social and economic division - the lack of ongoing exchange of ideas and open dialogue undermine the very nature of democracy.

³ Positive externality refers to a situation in which the social benefit of an action exceeds its private benefit; or, the result of a social benefit of a good in excess of its private benefit

Our current system of education is oriented towards one purpose: the market purpose. My reform initiative advocates that education should serve an alternative purpose, i.e. it calls for the revitalization of public democratic life through education. Education is the one public institution that has enormous potential to prepare students to become full members of society and can play a central role in the formation of young peoples' understandings of democracy, and of themselves as citizens in a democracy. In *My Pedagogic Creed*, Dewey holds that education is "a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction."

To justify the democratic purpose of education over the market purpose, it is necessary to compare their pedagogical foundations, since purpose shapes the nature of pedagogy.

The market purpose fosters and perpetuates our dominant way of knowing, referred to as objectivism. "Objectivist instruction communicates knowledge by breaking it into component parts and then systematically presenting the components to learners. Objectivism begins by deciding what the student needs to know and then constructing a task analysis of that knowledge."⁴ Assessments such as tests or exams are used to determine if the learning process was successful, and learning is usually conducted in an artificial setting, such as a classroom, to minimize distractions. According to Palmer, objectivity is something we can achieve only by disconnecting ourselves physically and emotionally from the thing we want to know.

The pursuit of objectivity is "so obsessed with protecting the purity of knowledge that students are forbidden direct access to the subject of study, lest their subjectivity defile it.

⁴ <http://www.gsu.edu/~mstsw/courses/it7000/papers/construc.htm>

Whatever they know about it must be mediated through the teacher, who stands in for the object, serves as its mouthpiece, and is the sole focus of the students' attention. (Palmer, 119)

Students have become passive learners because knowledge is frequently reduced to a one-way process of transmission (from teacher to student). The lack of student participation in the construction of knowledge has led to alienation from the subject that they are studying - "When we distance ourselves from something, it becomes an object; when it becomes an object, it no longer has life; when it is lifeless, it cannot touch or transform us."

Therefore, the aim of the reform composition is to encourage constructivist approaches to teaching. I believe that constructivist education goes hand in hand with civic engagement in the pursuit of democracy. Civic engagement, according to Professor Andrew Latham⁵, is to prepare students for public life as citizens and leaders. It entails "a commitment to enriching public discourse on significant questions, responding to the social needs of the local and global communities in which we live, cultivating effective and ethical public leaders, encouraging civic imagination and creativity".

Constructivism adopts a different approach to developing instruction when compared to traditional approach used by objectivism. Constructivist education is where students are active learners, constructing their own knowledge rather than observing the demonstrative behaviour of a teacher. Such learning may involve one or more of the following strategies- surveys, case studies, interviews, field trips, role-plays, simulations, group discussions and so forth. The instructional strategy provides various tools for inquiring into the problem and collecting information in order to construct solutions to the problem. The task is usually accomplished by working in a group as opposed to

⁵ Latham, Andrew, "Liberal Education for Global Citizenship: Renewing Macalester's Traditions of Public Scholarship and Civic Learning", 2003, <<http://www.macalester.edu/pericles/>>

working alone. The instructor's role is that of a facilitator i.e. encouraging students to see things from multiple perspectives. Assessments come in the form of completion of the tasks, and whether they indicate successful learning. The emphasis is placed on assessing students' ability to construct a plausible interpretation of the task, rather than requiring them to know certain things.

Constructivist education promotes what Palmer refers to as a subject –centred classroom, in which students are exposed to a world larger than their own experiences and egos, a world that goes beyond their personal boundaries and enhances their sense of community. (Palmer, 120) Dewey also stresses that a student's knowledge grows and develops from the experiences of the individual student. This is imperative to accomplishing civic learning, which involves instilling in students “a capacity for responsible participation/leadership in private, associational, public organizations and institutions” along with “a sense of personal and a sense of social responsibility and agency.” (Latham, 3)

To support constructivist approaches, Palmer talks about the increasing success of programs that place students in community activities related to the field they are studying. It is a misconception to think that those students suffer academically, since they have to spend more time and energy on field assignments and might have even resented doing that “extra” work. Palmer presents us with examples of students who did better academically because they “became more “personally and substantively engaged with the course because the great things they met by being involved with the community made their bookwork more real.” (Palmer, 118)

Furthermore, we must acknowledge the pedagogical power of constructivist education for two reasons. Many studies illustrate that the human brain is better at

retaining information when it appears as patterns of meaningful connections, as opposed to isolated data bits. Secondly, the constructivist approach emphasises students to do their learning together and through the community outside school. Thus, learning in this manner “offers them a chance to look at reality through the eyes of others, instead forcing them to process everything through their own limited vision.” (Palmer, p.128) For these reasons, we should recognize the ability of constructivist education in preparing students to become active and conscientious members of society in order to promote a democratic way of life.

Constructivist education fosters a curriculum that cultivates forms of critical and explanatory knowledge that allow people to interrogate social norms and to reflect critically on dominant institutions and practices. It includes participatory practices that nurture the skills and attitudes that democratic processes require. Most importantly, schools are viewed as communities in which the problems of communal life are resolved through collective consideration and a shared concern for the common good.

II. Reform Initiative

The Introduction of a Civic Engagement Course in Middle School

Course Description: This course applies constructivist approaches to social studies education. It consists of two main subject areas: 1) Civics: Government & Citizenship and 2) Economics. It employs a constructivist theme while ensuring that content standards are met. The goal of this course is to address multiple standards through the integration of civic engagement activities, which originate from constructivist pedagogy. Through this course, it is hoped that students will be exposed to the essential nature of a democracy and its applications.

The importance of studying Civics:

Students will learn how to become active citizens and will acquire the skills for necessary competent participation in the political process. They will be exposed to different ways to influence policies and critically evaluate the performance of public officials and policy decisions. “The aim of civic education is not just any kind of participation by any kind of citizen; it is the participation of informed and responsible citizens, skilled in the arts of deliberation and effective action.”⁶

The importance of studying Economics:

As citizens of a democratic society, it is vital for students to have an adequate foundation of economic theory and how it influences the decisions of the government. The study of economics equips students with tools to more effectively analyse both personal economic questions and broader questions of economic policy. “A basic grasp of how markets works and of the tradeoffs involved in trying to meet unlimited wants with limited resources is essential for meaningful democratic dialogue on what government should or should not be doing.”⁷

Standards for Economics*	Access to information (How info. will be made available to students)	Processing of information (Tasks/Activities)	Assessment (How student learning will be assessed)

⁶ Minnesota Department of Education: <http://education.state.mn.us/content/078663.doc>

⁷ Minnesota Department of Education: <http://education.state.mn.us/content/078663.doc>

<p>The student will understand basic principles of economic decision making.</p>	<p>Information on the concept of Scarcity will be made available through short lectures, and through class discussion of articles reflecting real-life examples of scarcity. Attending a public policy debate on the funding of a specific issue will be incorporated into this course section.</p>	<p>Problem- based Learning: Students will pick one topic of interest in relation to a policy that requires funding. They are to write a short proposal which states the problem, identifies possible alternatives, makes a decision and explains why that choice that was made (i.e. how is the government to allocate scarce resources in the most efficient way?) The proposals will be presented in class, to address questions and get feedback from peers.</p>	<p>Do students understand the concept of scarcity and its role in decision-making? Did the student do a good job of providing alternatives to the problem? Was the student able to adequately address the questions put forth by classmates?</p>
<p>The student will understand that in a market economy income is earned in different ways</p>	<p>Students are to acquire information about different kinds of earnings on their own through personal research. (Wages and salary, rent, interest, and profit).</p>	<p>They are gather information from teachers/parents/relatives/neighbours on the meanings of these terms. They are to demonstrate how all these terms are linked together through an interview on monthly finances.</p>	<p>Are students able to adequately grasp the meanings of these terms and can they make distinctions between them? Can students identify multiple forms of income and their sources?</p>

<p>The student will understand business organizations, market structures, and financial institutions that operate within our economy.</p>	<p>Information on the concepts of competition and monopoly and their implications will be presented in the form of a power-point presentation on the teachers' behalf.</p> <p>A local financial analyst (who could be a parent) or government finance officer will be invited to give students an insight into various financial institutions (Banks, credit unions, stock market, the Federal Reserve)</p>	<p>Students are to research real-life examples of competitive/ monopoly markets, and their effects on price and quantity. They have to come to class ready to engage in exchange of ideas. The teacher will be there to facilitate the session.</p> <p>After the presentation, a short question-answer will follow. They will be divided into groups so that they can compare and contrast the roles of different financial institutions, and brainstorm how they relate to their lives.</p>	<p>Do the students' examples illustrate that they understand what these concepts mean?</p> <p>Do the group discussions reflect that they can distinguish between the different financial organizations? Can they identify the role of these institutions in their present/future lives?</p>
<p>The student will understand the economic activities of government.</p>	<p>Students will be divided into groups to research/brainstorm how the government pays for the goods and services that it provides to the public.</p>	<p>They are to hold group presentations on how the government regulates economic activity to promote public welfare, encourage competition, and protect against monopolistic abuses (e.g. Pollution control, Anti-monopoly laws etc...)</p> <p>They are then to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper to address a specific issue, chosen by them, which requires government intervention. E.g. Should the government provide subsidies to farmers? /Should the government raise taxes to protect the environment? Etc...</p>	<p>Are they able to use their knowledge of concepts/theories to analyze current events?</p>

<p>The student will understand the concepts that measure the national economy.</p>	<p>The teacher will pick news articles that include concepts that measure the national economy (e.g. inflation/ GDP/ interest rates/recession etc...) They will read them together during the class session and the teacher will ask students if they can try to guess or interpret what these terms mean. The responses of the students, combined with the teacher's knowledge, will be the means to learning the definitions of these concepts.</p>	<p>The students will discuss in groups why these indicators are important in shaping the decisions of the government.</p>	<p>Do the students adequately comprehend the meanings and uses of these terms? Are they able to recognize their implications with regard to government policy?</p>
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<p>Standards for CIVICS*</p>	<p>Access to information (How info. will be made available to students)</p>	<p>Processing of information (Tasks/Activities)</p>	<p>Assessment (How student learning will be assessed)</p>
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<p>The student will articulate the range of rights and responsibilities in a republic</p>	<p>Copies of the Bill of Rights and the Minnesota Constitution will be handed out to students to read on their own. (the copies will be edited by the teacher to make it easier for students to read and understand them)</p>	<p>They are to discuss as a class the importance of first 10 amendments and identify additional rights in Minnesota not specifically mentioned by the federal constitution. They are to design posters/songs/ poems (or any other type of creative venture) which highlight the responsibilities of citizens living in a democracy. The finished pieces will be distributed to websites and community organizations that support democratic advancement. Examples: Respect the rights and property of others, obey rules and laws, be informed, care for your community etc...</p>	<p>Did the students understand the nature of the amendments in relation to the protection of individual rights?</p> <p>Did the student do an effective representation of our responsibilities as citizens of a democracy?</p>
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The student will understand the importance of participation in civic life and demonstrate effective civic skills

The teacher will put forth the following questions for students to discuss & answer: What are the necessary steps to become an informed voter and engaged citizen? What is the meaning of civic life? How can members of a community be involved civic life? (e.g. Running for elected office, informed voting, serving on school board and city council, organizing a neighbourhood watch group, belonging to a political party, immigrant and refugee community building)

Students will be divided into groups and will analyze sources of information for accuracy, bias, and relevance. They will have to make distinctions between fact and opinion in order to analyze a public policy issue.

Students will debate for & against the stance taken by a political candidate on a particular issue (they can pick an issue that interests them most)

They will be required to put what they have learned into practice by contributing to the local community. For instance, students on the school's soccer team could collaborate with local community groups (mentally challenged, children's shelters etc.) to play soccer with them on a bi-weekly/monthly basis. Students belonging to the cooking club can bake in homes for the elderly, those in theatre club can hold a performance in homeless/battered women's shelters, and the debate club can organize competitions to debate over the pros and cons of a government policy specific to that community group.

Can the students critically analyze/interpret various sources of information? Can they differentiate between fact and opinion?

Are the students able to see both sides of the issue and make their case accordingly?

Are the students being civically engaged by actively participating in the local community?

<p>The student will demonstrate knowledge and understanding of principles and beliefs upon which our republic is based.</p>	<p>The teacher will provide conceptual maps to relate the definitions of limited government, rule of law, democracy, and representative government. A political activist/organic intellectual⁸ will be invited to explain the ideals of the American system of government: liberty, justice & equality. He/she will then address the contradictions that exist in society in relation to those values.</p>	<p>They are to write a letter to a political leader expressing their views on an issue with regard to the ideals of liberty/justice/equality, and propose changes or solutions to address the problem.</p>	<p>Are the students able to understand the complexities of real world situations in relation to democratic ideals?</p>
<p>The student will know the functions of the United States government and ways in which power is delegated and controlled</p>	<p>The students will be taken to the Capitol to learn about the three branches of the U.S. government, their primary functions, and their relationships.</p>	<p>Students will discuss as a class the separation of powers, and checks and balances used to control government's power. They will analyze articles that address historical and contemporary examples of how these measures are applied among the branches of government.</p>	<p>Do the students fully comprehend the significance of ways in which political power is delegated and controlled?</p>

⁸ Organic Intellectuals are usually leaders/participants of social movements, and they provide expertise in the area they are discussing.

<p>The student will describe the relationships the U.S. has with other nations in the world.</p>	<p>The teacher will provide a brief lecture on the different kinds of foreign policy (military/trade etc...) He/she will then distribute articles with examples of implementations of foreign policy (UN, NATO, EU)</p> <p>Faculty members/organic intellectuals who hold conflicting views on a particular foreign policy issue will be invited to debate.</p>	<p>Students will be divided into groups to discuss ways in which U.S. foreign policy affects their lives.</p> <p>Students will critique cases when the U.S. government has used diplomacy and other foreign policy tools to mediate international disputes.</p>	<p>Do the students realize the implications of foreign policy on the county affected and on the domestic sphere?</p> <p>Are the students able to analyze the pros/cons of the governments' actions in terms of foreign policy?</p>
<p>The student will understand other government systems in the world.</p>	<p>Students will research the political framework of any country that they choose.</p> <p>(Republic, democracy, monarchy, dictatorship etc...)</p>	<p>Students will hold presentations to compare governmental structure and individual rights in the United States to the country they have researched. They will have to indicate which system they prefer and why.</p>	<p>Do the students understand how different governmental systems work? Can they make effective arguments for systems they believe to be better?</p>

*Standards selected from Minnesota State Requirements

*****Note:** Part of the assessment criteria also involves monthly student evaluations of the course.

**Justifications for incorporating Constructivist approaches to the
Civic Engagement Course:**

- Writing letters to political leaders can be versatile way of learning and be applied to any subject area. This type of democratic process allows students to learn by expressing their views on issues, by way of democratic participation. It is also a stepping-stone for students to learn about the implications of government policy.

- Inviting organic intellectuals or political activists to present or give speeches can add more meaning to the entire process of classroom learning. They can be very resourceful for students in terms of provoking them to think about what they learn in a broader context, and from alternative standpoints. The questions raised by students can be more thoroughly addressed. Most importantly, it provides hope for students, as they are with in contact a leader from that particular social movement. The words and actions of organic intellectuals/political activists can promote a constructive path for students trying to achieve societal goals. The lecture many or many not bring inspiration to a child. Either way, it is a learning process that is embodied in democratic principles; it provides students the opportunity to expand their scope of knowledge on issues.

- The media is a dominant institution of democratic society and student participation is essential in ensuring that a wide range of perspectives are taken into account. Writing to newspapers empowers students as it gives them the opportunity to voice their perspectives in the public sphere. Reading one's writing in a newspaper can be highly

motivating, and gives students an incentive to put more effort into the work. The learning process is enhanced as they practice writing in a way that substantiates their point of view.

- Attending policy debates issue can be an effective way for students to understand the complications of real world applications versus what they learn in the classroom. If transportation or timing is an issue, debates can be brought inside the school environment. Legislators or members of interest groups (of opposing sides) can be invited to schools to discuss and defend the pro/cons of a certain policy initiative. However, this may be difficult to arrange on a frequent scale. Thus, inviting faculty members/ organic intellectuals who hold conflicting views on a particular issue can be an alternative way to address policy debate. Students themselves can take multiple sides to debate on a subject matter that pertains to what they are learning at the time. This would be a more in-depth way to evaluate students, in terms of whether or not they fully comprehend the various layers, applicability, and limitations of a concept or idea.

- Involving teachers, parents and members of the community to become part collaborative educational efforts is a compelling move in democratizing education and achieving social change, according to Grant & Sleeter (Making Choices for Multicultural Education). There are many ways in which assignments can be framed around teachers, parents or community members, such as interviewing one's parents on monthly finances for economics.

- Discussion and debate are essential ways to practice democratic values and enhancing the learning process. According to Brooks, author of "To See Beyond the Lesson", schools consistently report progress in conceptual thinking and test scores brought about by using interactive teaching methods rooted in big ideas and supplemented with student

suppositions. Problem-based learning can be used in conjunction with discussion and debate. Problem based learning fosters a curriculum that recognizes the need to develop problem solving skills as well as the necessity of helping students to acquire necessary knowledge and skills. The discussion and debate stemming from this process allows students to consistently conceptualise new ideas within a larger system of related ideas, and to critically re-examine issues since they are faced with multiple solutions for the same problem.

- Constructivist approaches are also applied in the extracurricular component in schools, so that students can put into practice what they learn about civic engagement. For instance, a school's soccer team could collaborate with local community groups (mentally challenged, children's shelters etc.) to play soccer with them on a bi-weekly/monthly basis. In doing so, their chance to practice is not impeded upon in a significant manner, and they are actually using their talent for the benefit of the less advantaged. This strategy is not limited to sports teams: the cooking club can bake in homes for the elderly, the theatre club can hold a performance in homeless/battered women's shelters, and the debate club can organize competitions to debate over the pros and cons of a government policy specific to that community group.

- Regular (monthly) student evaluations are essential in order to understand how a certain approach either enriches or deters one's learning experience. In this way, instructors can continually renew their strategies to make the teaching more meaningful. Furthermore, once students realize that they have an influence on how teachers design the curriculum, they become part of a constructive learning process - as opposed to passive learners. They have a greater incentive to be open about what captures their attention and their will to learn. Evaluations also take the form of assessments, in order to determine the extent of

student learning and understanding of the task/ material. It would also be resourceful if parents were given the chance to read through these evaluations in order to give them a more comprehensive idea on what's going on in their children's lives at school.

III. Challenges to Reform Initiative

To convince the district school board and policy makers to support this kind of curriculum will indeed be a difficult task for 2 main reasons:

- a. Funding
- b. Meeting academic standards/requirements

The board needs to be convinced that in order for this curriculum to be implemented, there does not need to be a substantial increase in funding. Constructivist activities, such as writing letters to political leaders and engaging in community service, do not require large amounts of monetary resources. However, there may be issues with transportation if the activities involve being outside the classroom. This could be dealt with by organizing car-pooling with the help of parents and volunteers in the community.

The greatest challenge to this reform is what teachers need to know and be able to do. This involves balancing the need to acknowledge the different discipline-specific requirements and constructivist approaches in teaching. Thus, teacher training becomes an area where funding does become an issue. The justification for this funding is to ensure that teachers produce well-rounded students that possess a wide range of skills needed to move forward in society. Stimulating the students' ability to communicate, organize and think critically will allow for learning to take place in its true essence. In order to lower the costs of training, there could be collaboration amongst teachers. For instance, teachers that require training could attend class sessions of experienced teachers to learn more about constructivist strategies. Workshops could also be organized where

teachers who are well endowed with constructivist teaching skills can pass them on to their peers and colleagues.

The argument that constructivism allows to put into practice what students learn in textbooks can be used to motivate businesses to provide funding. After all, it is through real life experiences that the organisational and vocational skills of students can be improved. It allows students to become better prepared for integration into the real world, by providing hands-on experiences in tasks associated with their respective subject areas. It provides students the opportunities to thoroughly explore their interests, as the process of education becomes more personalized, as opposed to textbook or lecture-oriented learning. To solidify the justifications for funding from businesses, an activity that enhances students' technical and practical skills could be incorporated into the curriculum e.g. web designing, power point presentations, marketing-oriented projects etc...

In a competitive educational system, students have to be prepared for nationwide testing requirements in order to meet the academic levels required for moving onto higher education. Policy makers must be convinced that the proposed strategies will allow for the same level of academic achievement if integrated properly into the curriculum. Students do not have to take time after school to engage in constructionist activities. Various types of social action can be incorporated in the respective subject areas within school hours. Elisa Goodwin, principal of a local charter school known as *Southside*, says that her students' academic standards have not been negatively affected by the socially activist approaches they partake in. In fact, the average grade range for standardised testing is at the same level or even above those of regular public schools. Furthermore, colleges and universities actively seek well-rounded applicants. Students' accomplishments throughout their learning experience can be as important as test scores

when they seek acceptance from institutions of higher education. Thus, we cannot just “discount” the strengths of a constructivist curriculum. In fact, it is a reality that students’ would be more likely to get accepted if they could demonstrate that their academic foundation was broader than just high test scores.

IV. Annotated Resources

The Struggle for Control of Public Education by Michael Engel (2000)

This book was particularly helpful for issue assessment section. Engel effectively questioned educational policies in the US that are deep-rooted in market ideology. He argued against this tendency, saying that the market purpose upholds individual achievement, competition and economic growth, thereby diminishing the democratic ideals that American society is based on.

Interview with Principal Elisa Goodwill of Southside in Minneapolis (Southside is a charter school that began in 1971 and promotes social activism amongst its students)

The interview was my one of my favorite aspects of the reform composition. It was very helpful in helping me strengthen my arguments in terms of grades. My reform suggested that grades should not be necessarily be affected by engaging in constructivist learning tasks because it adds meaning to the process of learning and stimulates mental and academic development. This was further reiterated by Principal Goodwill as she said that the academic standing of her students was the same as or above the public school level, even though they were actively involved in the community.

Peer review session with classmate and friend Elizabeth Severance

My peer review sessions with Severance were very insightful, and assisted me greatly in terms of making my arguments clear and comprehensible. It was extremely valuable to have her go through my paper, noting the areas she thought were well-done and those that were confusing and required attention. Thanks to her feedback, I was able to improve the overall quality of my paper.

Visual/Aesthetic

I was in a friend's apartment recently and I noticed a symbol on one of her mugs in the kitchen. It was the logo of the United Nations. For me, the UN symbol is closely linked to constructivist education and civic engagement. Such kind of education does not only have positive implications for the district or nation where it is implemented; the benefits can cross borders if the true meaning of its vision is lived out.

Re-envisioning Education and Democracy by Charles Green & Ruthanne Kurth-Schai (2004)

I read several chapters from this book and I was immediately intrigued by its philosophical nature when it came to addressing problems related to education. I enjoyed reading the chapter on Crisis, which I used as a resource for my issue assessment. It provided a thorough and stimulating discussion of "standardization" in education reform. This helped further my understanding of why education reformers are expected to frame policy initiatives "within the rules of the game."

The Courage to Teach by Parker J. Palmer (1998)

This was a unique book in that it thoroughly addressed the inner workings of what it means to be a teacher. Palmer's view that education is a fearful enterprise provoked me into thinking more deeply about its ties to market ideology. It helped me link the market purpose of education to pedagogy, and examine its implications for democratic learning.

Liberal Education for Global Citizenship by Andrew Latham (2003)

I had to read this paper for another class, but it gave me inspiration and ideas for my reform initiative. I gained a deeper understanding of the definition of civic engagement, civic learning and why this is important. I found that civic engagement is a way to practice and nurture the ideals democracy. Thus, I incorporated what I learned from this paper to justify the use of constructivist approaches.

Constructivism and Instructional Design: Georgia State University Website

<http://www2.gsu.edu/~mstsw/courses/it7000/papers/construc.htm>

This website was a great resource for me to learn more about different instructional strategies. Thus, I was able to make detailed comparisons between objectivist instruction and constructivist instruction. It assisted me in examining the strengths of constructivist approaches to learning in order to justify my reform initiative.

Minnesota Department of Education Website

<http://education.state.mn.us/content/078663.doc>

This website provided a comprehensive overview of Minnesota state standards for Social Studies. It was very useful for designing my proposal for a Civic Engagement course, because it helped me integrate content standards and constructivist strategies.

Letters to the Next President by Carl Glickman (2004)

The letters to the Next President made me realize that there are many people out there who believe that education serves the purpose of advancing democratic ideals. It was an important source of support and motivation for my reform initiative.

The Rhetorical Tradition by Bizzel & Herzberg (2001)

We had to read this book for my Theories of Rhetoric class. I was specifically inspired by one classical philosopher's/rhetorician's ideas known as Isocartes. The purpose of

education, according to Isocrates, was to move people to action for common good. He believed that it was his duty to make useful citizens of the young men entrusted to his care. His ideas on education aroused my interest to advocate education for civic engagement and democracy.

To See Beyond the Lesson by Jacqueline Grennon Brooks (2004)

In See Beyond the Lesson, Brooks suggested that our educational practices have less to do with our “lack of collective knowledge or ability” and more to do with “our lack of collective vision and will.” This statement really got me thinking about the dissemination plan for my reform composition, i.e. how can I do my best to attain collaborative support required to move forward my vision?

V. Dissemination Plan

Ways in which I hope to make my work available to those it might be of benefit:

- Attach my letter to the next Secretary of Education to my composition. Send it to education policy makers along with signatures of supporters (faculty members, parents, students, activists etc...) of the reform
- Make a request to paste it on the National Council for the Social Studies Website.
- Make my reform composition available to websites that promote Education for Civic Engagement & Democracy. Some possibilities cited below:

Center for Civic Education: <http://www.civiced.org/index.php>

World Movement for Democracy: <http://www.wmd.org/conference/w6.html>

The Albert Shanker Institute: <http://www.shankerinstitute.org/education.html>

- Try to have parts of it published in public policy column/section of newspaper so that the ideas can reach a wider audience.

- Use it to participate constructively by calling in on radio talk shows addressing educational policy issues/Use it to strengthen my arguments in opinion sections of newspapers