

Introduction to Teaching, Learning & Leading in a Connected World
May 8, 2017 at the
Edward M. Kennedy Center for the Senate
Boston, MA

We do not have to look very far for examples to study: last week we had the incident (racial slur) at Fenway Park (which by the way, I can see from my window... when we hear the roar of the crowd we have the 10 second delay to go to the TV and watch what caused the crowd to roar.

And the accusations at Harvard's CS 50 (David Malan's course) of massive cheating. These sad events are useful for talking about how much more difficult it is today to deal with these issues... we hear, then see-again and again- and then read on social media and respond, sometimes without thinking.

I would like to suggest some observations and approaches and lay out some of the challenges. The short answer is that civics is both a curriculum and a (self) discipline.

Standing in the Senate Chamber today echoes two recent events I attended. Both were in another great hall in Boston ...Faneuil Hall. On the occasion of the annual Holocaust Commemoration students from the Foxborough Regional Charter School were recognized for collecting one postage stamp for each of the 11 million people who were systematically exterminated during the Nazi regime. (BTW, the MFA has an exhibit right now of the Lodz ghetto.) The students have not reached their goal but have about 9.1 million stamps so far.

This activity struck everyone as a powerful & engaging way to learn an important civics lesson and a reminder that learning is a social activity.

The second occasion was a convocation of the alumni of Yale College, class of 1958. Moderated by Foreign Correspondent and journalist, David Greenway with Nina Tumarkin, Professor of Russian studies at Wellesley College and the Davis Center at Harvard talked about Vladimir Putin; Stephen Walt, also from Harvard, spoke about the problems facing America in foreign affairs; and Tom Simons, former Ambassador to Pakistan, now at the Kennedy School, spoke about the Islamic World.

The reasons that these two events are pertinent is that both deal with issues that threaten our view of ourselves as a people and how we fit into the world order and therefore how we behave as a nation and also as individuals.

After listening to the panel on the second occasion comment on our current and future relations with Russia, China and North Korea and the Islamic world, I asked what lesson I should take back to students and educators now in school. These are the suggestions:

"Tell them to Learn Russian (and other foreign) languages
And that Facts matter; public policy matters" This reflects on the idea of "alternative facts".

And finally from the Askwith Forum I attended on April 27, at which Bill Drayton, founder of the Oshokaprogram (a 35 year old organization) which finds, selects, supports social entrepreneurs from all over the world to become change agents, claimed that “the new literacy is change making” and indicated that he was working with one entrepreneur at a time. While the panel agreed that we need new knowledge and approaches in this age of rapid technology and social change, one of the respondents, Rosabeth Moss Kantor, Harvard Business School made two points:

1. We still need the experience of the past (you know the expression about repeating the mistakes of the past if you do not study it and that there is nothing new under the sun according to Ecclesiastes) and 2. single action needs to be scaled up for there to be impact.

In the Q & A, ironically, one audience member asked...what does this have to do with Civics?

The answer is that civics is a curriculum and also a (self) discipline which needs to be learned and practiced.

Apropos the definition: To the government is a notion we do not often consider in this context. If you have ever wondered about the value of Student Government, or of the Debate Team, teaching/learning these should put that to rest. Some schools do have a student board which hears discipline cases and advises the administration about consequences.

While we do have a US history requirement for HS graduation from HS, I have not found a reference to civics as a part of that...Arizona, Idaho, Louisiana, North Dakota, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, & Wisconsin do.

Our notion of civics goes back to Roman times. But today in the global market place, people need to understand the differences in cultures.

Understanding these cultural differences is a major learning requirement so that work can get done and there are no misunderstandings.

When I started teaching you need to wear gloves and be at least 18 to examine the great documents of American history at the Library of Congress. Now all of them are on line.

There are downsides. The colleges and universities now read social media when accepting or rejecting applicants. Madame Secretary's daughter was denied admission to Rutgers because of her history of social media. This episode may have more impact than our “warning” students.

Boosters of the technology say kids typically learn to acquire information using the prevailing technology of the moment — from the library card catalogue, to Google, to brief conversations with friendly, all-knowing voices. But what if these gadgets lead children, whose faces are already glued to screens, further away from situations where they learn important interpersonal skills and civic responsibility? This is a question I have about home schooling as well.

Already the medical community is sending out warnings about the health impact of constant and into the night use of hand held devices. For this and so many other “lessons” we need support from parents so parent PD is necessary (moderation, self-control and mutual support).

As a youngster in Brooklyn I anticipated my iPhone. My mother taught me how make an origami envelope...I used it as a mobile repository for “objects and activities” I wanted by cutting out pictures and placing them in the handbag.

David Thornburg predated Daniel Pink by at least a decade in saying that we should be education students for their future and not our past. Daniel Pink in his book “A Whole New Mind” clearly states the importance of the right brain (creative) thinkers in the 21st century. He says: “In an age of abundance, appealing only to rational, logical and functional needs is woefully insufficient – mastery of design, empathy, play and other seemingly “soft” aptitudes is now the main way for individuals and firms to stand out in a crowded marketplace.”

I understand the message but I think we are placing a little too much emphasis on the market place.

Learning from mistakes needs to be reinforced by the Teacher (s).

I also heard Donald Leu of the Neag School of Education at UConn speak at another Askwith Forum at HGSE and he was incredibly eloquent about the need to teach online literacy which actually reminded of what Alan November once related.

When I tried to understand the technical explanation, I had a hard time. There is an article by Alan entitled: “Why More Schools Aren’t Teaching Web Literacy—and How They Can Start” which will help.

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