

Fostering National and Global Citizenship: An Example from South Africa

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During a recent trip to South Africa, I had an array of opportunities to experience the cultural, historical, political, and geographic landscape of the country. I was privileged to visit classrooms and to teach and interact with students and teachers. Through teaching some lessons on democracy and citizenship, I learned that young South Africans are aware of events and conditions not only in their nation, but also in other countries such as the United States. These sixth grade students were very articulate about concepts such as diversity, unity within diversity, citizenship, democracy, and equality for women, as well as specific social problems such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, drugs and alcohol, and crime. They seemed well aware of their roles and responsibilities in building what they call “our rainbow nation” and “proudly South Africa.”

The South African concept of “Ubuntu” (meaning humanity, we are human) and the closely related “Ubumye” (oneness, together as one) are embodied in the everyday language of South Africans and also in their constitution. The students talked eloquently about historical “apartheid” and the “new” South Africa and its challenges. They spoke with pride about their leaders, like former president Nelson Mandela, whom they referred to as “Madiba” and “our father.” The students asked if I have met President Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and of course, some pop celebrities such as Beyonce and Halle Berry.

The experience with South African elementary students contrasted with my observations of students in grades 4–6 in some elementary schools in the United States regarding their knowledge of the history and social realities of their country and the world. In some of the U.S. classrooms, students mostly talked about living in a free country, having rights and freedoms, and little or nothing about how government works, current issues, or other concepts such as *E Pluribus Unum*. The difference between these two groups may be due to the fact that South

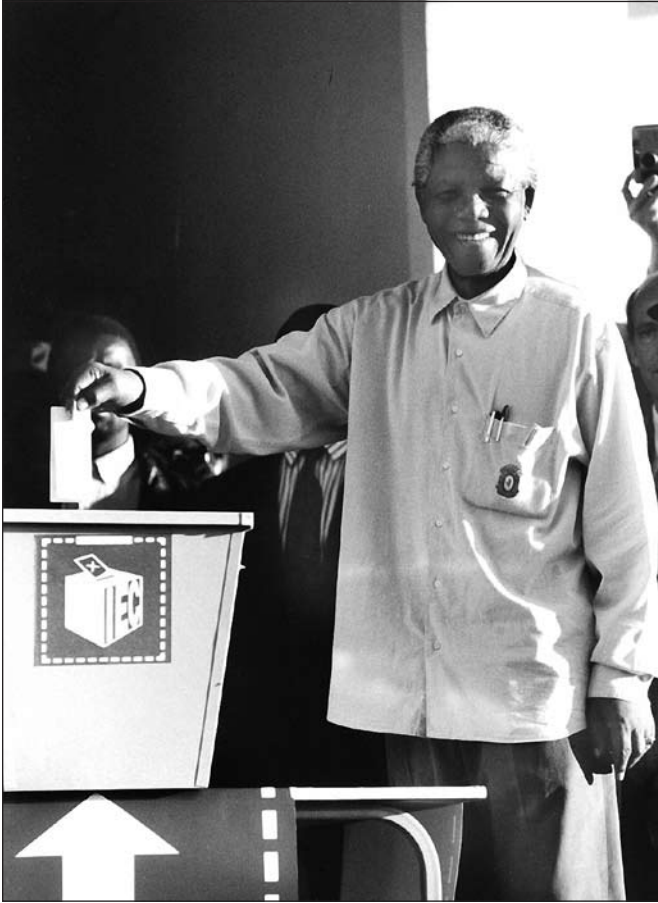
Africa’s school curriculum and instruction systematically integrate multicultural and global perspectives and current issues into students’ curricular experiences.

The approach to education in the United States must change. At no other time in the history of the human family have we been more connected with other nations through trade and communications, and yet never have we been more threatened by the results of humankind’s technological successes. Today, multicultural and global scholars urge that we rethink existing notions of citizenship and how we prepare the young for their roles and responsibilities in their multicultural democracy and global community.¹ The following are powerful strategies for systematically integrating global and multicultural perspectives into student learning in the social studies.

Current Events

Today, television and the Internet can bring the world into students’ homes and classrooms. Begin the day by discussing the news with your students. Introduce events occurring locally, nationally, and globally. Take advantage of critical and developmentally appropriate news events and facilitate critical learning. Ask students to bring to the classroom stories they have heard that are occurring in their community and around the world. Have students take turns looking up breaking news on the Internet and lead a discussion about them. Teachers can take advantage of special events and anniversaries (Global Youth Service Day, International Day, Peace Day, Earth Day, Human Rights Day, World AIDS Day) to integrate multicultural and global perspectives and issues into student learning as well as engage them in project-based learning.

As you study different cultures, recall that every country has national holidays and events that celebrate historical, cultural, and social events. For example, South Africa recognizes and celebrates a Day of Reconciliation, Human Rights Day, Youth Day, Day of Goodwill, and Freedom Day. Students



Nelson Mandela voting in South Africa's First Democratic Elections, April 1994.

will cultivate a broad knowledge base and social consciousness by studying special events that occur in different parts of the world.

Social Activism

Transformative scholars remind us that the purpose of education is to enable students to act on their knowledge, to create and transform social structures, to bring about change so that the world is a better place.

Global Youth Service Day, organized by Youth Service America, is an annual global event that celebrates the contributions of youth who address local needs and problems through volunteer service. The organization allows students to become part of the global youth service movement, which is a great source for social empowerment.²

Teachers should guide students in identifying social issues that connect to curricular topics and design social action projects around them. For example, this year teachers can capitalize on the national elections, which can involve more than knowing about political parties, casting votes, and the candidates. We can also educate students about the importance of citizen participation and the struggle for voting rights. Elections present great opportunities for students to learn about social issues. Students can research these issues as they have manifested in the 2008 election campaign, express their views, and conduct

a social action project. The book, *Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World* is an excellent resource for exploring social issues around the world.³

Trade Books

Trade books present a great opportunity for integrating multicultural and global perspectives into students' learning. In any given day teachers can use trade books or literature books in their instruction. In addition, notable events are always occurring, whether it is a celebration, holiday, election, or even a natural disaster. Teachers can often use trade books to promote student understanding of these events. We can select trade books from different cultures and regions of the world that highlight multicultural and global perspectives. For example, as Americans prepare for the November 2008 election, teachers can take advantage of this event to select trade books that present perspectives about elections in other places. The trade book, *The Day Gogo Went to Vote*, is a perfect example.⁴

The book depicts the story of an elderly woman who was determined to go to the polls to vote in the 1994 democratic election in South Africa, where Blacks were allowed to vote for the first time, even though she was too ill to get out of the house. This trade book will provide a great opportunity for teachers to integrate both multicultural and global perspectives related to democracy, citizenship, freedom, voting rights, elections, responsibilities, and social activism across time and space. The book presents some perspectives of South African Blacks in the days of apartheid when they were not allowed to vote. It is a reminder about the days of racial segregation in the United States, when African Americans did not have voting rights.

The lesson on pages 17–18 allows students to view and understand the commonality in the human experience. People from different generations, and living in different places, all feel an urge to live free of fear and to participate in governing things that affect their lives.

Conclusion

Multicultural and global scholars urge that we prepare the young for national and global democratic citizenship given the increasing interdependence and challenging realities of today.⁵ Young people desire to be a part of the solution to global problems, but they must be educated about what those problems are and how solutions can be arrived at. As has been seen in the U.S. presidential campaign, young people care about their communities, country, and planet, and they are volunteering and voting at record rates. We must take responsibility to plant the seeds of critical citizenship if we are to foster a more sustainable, peaceful, just, and prosperous world. Educator Sheldon Berman sums it up by writing:⁶

It is important for teachers to tell young people about the success stories of others, students who have

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LESSON PLAN

The Day Gogo Went to Vote: A Window on South Africa

Grade Level

Elementary–Grades 1–6. This lesson can be adapted to different grade levels as may be developmentally appropriate.

Objectives

- Students will define democracy and identify key ideals of a democratic society
- Students will identify examples of human rights and civil rights
- Students will explain actions citizens take to influence public policies
- Students will describe South Africa’s recent achievement of full democracy

Essential Questions

- How have human rights and civil rights been advanced at different times and places in history?
- How do individual citizen actions influence public policies?
- How do events in history motivate individuals and groups to participate in civic activities-election?

Materials

The book, *The Day Gogo Went to Vote*, Map of South Africa and the African Continent; pictures of South Africans voting for the first time for their country’s leaders (such as Nelson Mandela casting his vote);⁷ an overhead projector.

Book Summary

The Day Gogo Went to Vote narrates the story of a girl, Thembi, who accompanies her one hundred-year-old great-grandmother, Gogo, to the polling station in the first election in South Africa in which black citizens were allowed to vote, in 1994. Although infirm, Gogo was determined to vote with help from her community.

Anticipatory Set

Begin instruction by activating student prior knowledge. Use the following questions to guide knowledge activation.

- What is a democracy?
- What should people in a democracy do? (What is a good citizen?)
- How should a citizen prepare to vote?
- What do you know about how elections work?
- Who can vote?
- Why do some people vote and some do not vote?

The questions above should lead the teacher in summarizing for students (1) the meaning of democracy—a government system in which the supreme power lies in citizens who can elect people to represent them; (2) rights and responsibilities of citizens; (3) voting as a responsibility or obligation of citizens; (4) good citizens study the issues and candidates before voting; (5) voting—citizens casting their vote with a secret ballot on paper or on a computer; and (6) election—the whole process during which citizens vote to elect someone to a political office and the votes are carefully counted.

This discussion should lead nicely to the teacher introducing the book, *The Day Gogo Went to Vote*.

Conceptual Understanding

Lead students in discussing terms and concepts to be encountered in the book: township, voting, “Gogo” (meaning Grandma), vote, election, holiday, polling booth, polling station, identity card or book, voting machine, paper ballot, voting age, apartheid (the old system of keeping ethnic groups separated), and Nelson Mandela, the first president elected under the first free election in South Africa.

Prediction

Display the book cover, *The Day Gogo Went to Vote*, on the overhead projector. Invite students to describe what they see in the cover illustration and to guess what they think the book might be about. Obviously, the students will mention the elder woman and the child. This is a nice place to engage students in sharing about their grandparents and the activities they do with them.

Book Discussion

Read the book and ask students to take note of important events that happened in the story. Following the read-aloud, engage students in the following questions and activities.

- Why was Gogo so determined to go vote even though she was not in good health?
- Why could Gogo not vote for so many years ?
- How would you feel if you were not allowed to vote on something important to you?
- Who can vote in the United States?
- Have all Americans been able to vote in elections? Have minorities and women had the right to vote?
- How would you describe Gogo’s action? Would you want to act like Gogo someday when you reach voting age? Why or why not?

LESSON PLAN

- How does Thembi's relationship with her Gogo compare to your relationship with your grandmother/grandfather?

Activity I: Imaginative Writing

Have students write in their journal as if they were Gogo, describing their experience of voting for the first time in a democratic election. Have students share their writing.

Activity II: Imaginative Art

Divide students into cooperating groups. Give each group newspapers. Have students create a "Collage of America Vote 2008." Students should identify and cut out pictures, cartoons, and ideas about the 2008 presidential elections. Have each group share its collage.

Activity III: Interview an Elder

Ask students to read their journal entry to their grandparent or an older adult. The following questions should be used as guide for student conversation with their older adult/grandparent:

- How old were you when you first voted in an election?
- Were you ever denied the right to vote?
- How would you have felt if you were denied the right to vote?
- Did you know of anyone who was denied the right to vote?
- Would you vote this year?
- What is your political party? Why do you belong to that party?
- Would you like to tell me who you will vote for this year?

Extension Activity

Have students read the book *Grandmama's Pride*⁸ and compare it with *The Day Gogo Went to Vote*. *Grandmama's Pride* depicts the lived experience of Black Americans during the Jim Crow era and how a six-year-old learned why grandmama did not want her to drink water from the public fountain or to take the bus when she visited or went downtown.

Although *Grandmama's Pride* is not about an election per se, it describes the same sort of racial discrimination that prevented Gogo from voting in South Africa until she was 100 years old. Both books explore the intergenerational relationship between grandparent and granddaughter and the harsh realities of an unjust world. This is an excellent opportunity to explore national history as it relates to multicultural and global issues and perspectives.

"Inspiring and moving." — NELSON MANDELA

The Day Gogo Went to Vote



reclaimed forests, cleaned up rivers, improved their school environment, helped the homeless. They need to hear about the Mother Teresas and the Martin Luther Kings, of course, but also about the people who live down the street who are doing what they can to improve the neighborhood and about the many organizations that make a difference in our communities. We must put students in touch with these people and organizations so that they can see how deeply people care about their world and how worthwhile it is to participate in creating change. 🗳️

Notes

1. James Banks, *Democratic Citizenship Education in Multicultural Societies* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004).
2. Visit the home page of Youth Service America at ysa.org.
3. Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson, *Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World* (Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools Press, 2002).
4. Elinor B. Sisulu, *The Day Gogo Went to Vote* (New York: Little, Brown, 1996).
5. Merry Merryfield and Angene Wilson, *Social Studies and the World: Teaching Global Perspectives* (Silver Spring, MD: National Council for the Social Studies, 2005); Nel Noddings, *Educating Citizens for Global Awareness* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2005); Omiunota Nelly Ukpokodu, "The Effects of 9/11 Tragedy on Preservice Teachers' Perspectives and Dispositions Toward Global Concerns," *Social Studies Research and Practice* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 178-200.
6. Sheldon Berman, "Educating for Social Responsibility," *Educational Leadership* 48 (November 1990): 78.
7. Nelson Mandela, *The Illustrated Long Walk to Freedom* (South Africa: Jacana Media, 2006). This is an autobiography that was written secretly while Mandela was in prison on Robben Island.⁸⁶ Becky Birtha, *Grandmama's Pride* (Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman, 2005).

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