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Using a Simple Conceptual Framework for Informing Thoughtful Student Engagement with Democracy in High School Civics Classes

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Abstract

The foundation of “good citizenship” in a democracy is a shared understanding and appreciation for engaging with others through a deliberative process to manage community conflicts. Based on our experience in teacher preparation training and university coursework, specifically in Political Science, we propose that social studies teachers utilize a model framework consisting of four successively related concepts (Human Nature, Collective Dilemma, Pluralism, and Pragmatic Idealism) to critically examine democratic governance with students. Our proposed framework is intended for use by high school civics teachers and college and university professors who are teaching social studies methods courses preparing their students for a deeper analysis of democracy including understanding the fundamental basis for our institutions and processes of democratic governance, appreciating the important role of citizenship, and having realistic expectations for outcomes based upon compromise. We believe this model can strengthen teachers’ ability to more fully realize the purpose of a civics education: the training of good citizens who share the ideals of a pluralist society, believe in the democratic process, and have realistic expectations for the outcomes of those processes.

Keywords: social studies, civics, democracy, teacher education, citizenship

Over the past 40 years, there has been a growing consensus that Americans are losing faith in their democratic political system. From decreasing voter turnout to surveys indicating a diminishing trust in our institutions to solve continuing political challenges, Americans seem to be disengaging from civic politics. Today, our politics are often described as being wracked by conflict and controversy as a result of extreme partisanship and society being fragmented due to “tribalization.” If we wish to be citizens of a cohesive democratic community, we must effectively teach civics so our citizens have sufficient skills and knowledge to engage with and evaluate our politics in respectful deliberation with others (McCarty et al., 2008; Bok, 2021).

Perhaps due to this environment, there has never been a more challenging time to educate secondary students about the benefits, processes, and realistic expectations of democracy as a political system. A system of government that students would ideally want to support, actively engage with, and ensure remains vital. “A twenty-first century civic education must meet challenges of polarization and growing diversity and inequality and equip people for forms of democratic participation necessary to the health of constitutional democracy” (McClain & Fleming, 2021, p.1771). While today may represent a difficult time to convince students to adopt an Aristotelian perspective of “the good

citizen,” the foundation of good citizenship remains a shared understanding and realistic appreciation for engaging with others through a peaceful, deliberative process to solve community issues. Therefore, having students understand and value the processes of democratic politics and develop trust in its institutions should be the overall goal of civics education. The strength of a democracy relies upon a “faith from knowledge” about how the processes of governance operate and a belief that these processes represent, as much as possible, the ideal of a just community fairly balancing the values of individual freedom, community order, and equity among its citizens. If we agree that this is the basis for a healthy democracy, then we must carefully evaluate how we are teaching civics.

The purpose of this paper is to present a conceptual framework for teaching civics in high school which we believe will assist instructors in more easily explaining and critically examining democratic governance with students. Preparing students for a deeper analysis of democracy includes having them understand the fundamental basis for our institutions and processes of democratic governance, appreciate the important role of citizenship, and have realistic expectations for outcomes based upon compromise. This framework was developed from our experiences in teacher preparation training, undergraduate university instruction (specifically Political Science), participation in a university Quality Enhancement Program, and anecdotal evidence gleaned from interviews with high school teachers. Our audience for this discussion is both the high school civics teacher and college and university professors who are teaching social studies methods courses. The principal question we address is how we organize and teach content in a way that maximizes its impact upon students.

The framework we propose utilizes four integrated concepts representing the foundation of democratic politics and civic education: *human nature*, *collective dilemma*, *pluralism*, and *pragmatic idealism*. Using these four concepts has the potential to enable students to more easily make a personal connection with democracy as an organizational process for decision making and increase their democratic civic competence, the key in any effort to educate and engage “the good citizen.”

Teaching Civic Competence Using the Four Thematic Elements of Democratic Governance

According to the Kentucky Department of Education, The National Council for the Social Studies (2019) contends that:

The primary purpose of Social Studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. Civic competence requires a commitment to democratic values and the ability to use knowledge about one’s community, nation and world (p. 5).

If this purpose for civics education is accepted, the question we ask is by what means should we teach civic competence and respect for democratic politics? While there may be limitations as to the impact teachers can have on a student’s political socialization, as Aristotle (2010) suggests, it is within the context of formal civics education where we have the best opportunity to develop a healthy understanding among students of their role as citizens and add to their political knowledge and appreciation of democracy.

A civics education, according to Gottlieb and Shuffleton (2020), enables teachers to nurture among students “identifications, attachments, and attunements across differences both historical and yet to come” (p. 751). Coming to understand and learning to appreciate the processes of democracy in

social studies classes permits students the opportunity to view issues using a multidisciplinary perspective. This approach for instilling democratic political culture will be more likely to achieve “the broader solidarity that democratic politics requires” (Gottlieb and Shuffleton, 2020, p. 754). Developing among students a sense of “political co-belonging” will result in the development of the idea of shared citizenship that transcends identity politics. This is essential if we want students to understand and appreciate the institutional processes of democracy that allow a diverse society to function sufficiently as its politics tolerate differences and enable conflicts to be settled peacefully through a political system that values equity. We must convince students of the benefits of a system that, while striving for ideal outcomes, accepts the reality that we find our truths and facts by deliberating with others about whose self-interests will guide societal decision making through “a process that values both the facts and the others involved” (Gottlieb and Shuffleton, 2020, p. 766). As citizens of a democracy, we must prioritize broader solidarity and pride in our political processes over individual interests.

Instead of focusing on an institutional approach to understanding our democratic political system by emphasizing concepts which may or may not be related, or sharing leadership stories which are not necessarily linked to appreciating democratic processes, we suggest that introducing students to democracy through a more targeted approach will provide students with an effective, overarching structure for understanding the complexities of democratic governance. If initial instruction is based upon a highly focused application of four major concepts to describe democratic politics (Human Character, Collective Dilemma, Pluralism, and Pragmatic Idealism), students are more likely to intellectually appreciate and effectively engage with complex civic issues while learning how a democracy accepts conflict as naturally inherent in human relations and settles disputes through constructive engagement. As Fantuzzo (2018) states, we need to develop a civics education that appreciates others’ perspectives and cultivates “interpersonal solidarity” (p. 385). Because these four concepts are successively related (see Figure 1), understanding their relationship and application to managing conflict makes democratic politics more accessible and relevant, thus enhancing students’ critical thinking skills and promoting culturally aware, socially responsible, civically knowledgeable, and engaged student citizens. Perhaps most importantly, using these four concepts as a foundation for a civics education may result in students gaining realistic expectations of the challenges and benefits of democratic political processes.

Figure 1

The Successive Relationship Among the Four Concepts of Democratic Governance

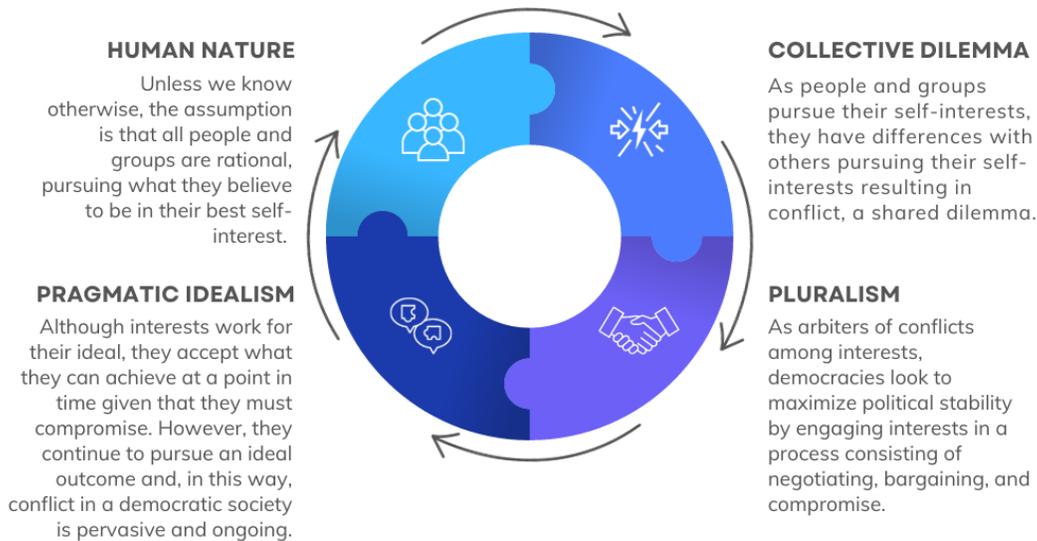


Figure 1 reflects a visual for understanding each of the four major concepts related to democratic governance and how they may be applied will help instructors recognize the power these concepts have to inform and educate students. The first concept is *Human Nature*. Before describing this concept, it is important to understand that the philosophical roots of government relate to ensuring individual and group security and a stable society that values a commitment to the good of the community (Aristotle, 2010). The assumption underlying the concept of human nature is that people and groups tend to be self-interested; unless it is otherwise known, we can assume that all people and groups are rational and pursue what they believe to be in their best interests even when it might not be in the best interests of the community (Locke, 2003). Examples can be easily constructed based upon students' own life experiences enabling students to see the basis for democratic governance in a very personal way. Connections with ideas such as "free ridership" or the "principal-agent dilemma" further strengthen students' deeper understanding of why we have government and how individual interests may conflict with community interests. Instructors may also include examples of how society naturally responds to the awareness of human character, for instance, by discussing why "one should not be a judge in one's own case," why we hold government accountable, or why we limit personal freedom.

The inherent tendency for people and groups to be self-interested naturally creates conflicts among them which results in a *Collective Dilemma*. Conflicts among interests can be predictable or unpredictable and can occur between individuals, groups, states, and/or nations. The basis for these conflicts can be differences of opinions and attitudes about life choices, policies and procedures, social expectations, or economic values and the distribution of resources, etc. The result of such conflicts can threaten social stability, and if the conflict is significant enough, call for government to be the arbiter between interests. As a community's continued viability is dependent upon finding common ground between competing interests, a democratic government's principal role is maintaining social stability (Aristotle, 2010 & Locke, 2003). With this context, classroom instruction may reference for students the means by which communities promulgate laws to guide behavior, adopt rules to manage social interchange, and develop institutions to address such conflicts at the local, state, and national levels.

Once a conflict between interests in a democracy reaches a certain degree of intensity, conflicts are generally moved to an institutional setting, ideally to achieve resolution. Competing interests then

engage in a process referred to as *Pluralism* (Dahl, 1989) which consists of interests negotiating, bargaining, and compromising; all activities that are only possible if no one interest group has the power to dominate the political process. Achieving any resolution to a conflict relies upon the support of others (see Madison's (2004) arguments in Federalist numbers 10 and 51 and the idea of "the fragmentation of power"). For democracies, finding an amenable solution to resolving conflict and maintaining social stability depends on achieving some degree of balance between competing interests. In legislative politics, a less than ideal compromise may be made in order to pass legislation. In judicial politics, a resolution may relate to protecting some element of a protected right or considering a punishment which reflects larger social justice issues, such as Civil Rights. In local politics, there are many examples of conflict resolution between neighbors over issues of aesthetics or building code violations. In the international arena, examples of pluralism can be found in trade agreements and diplomatic treaties. However, settling conflicts peacefully does not mean that the issue is permanently resolved, and it is important for students to understand that the outcome of pluralism is only a temporary solution to the question at hand.

Although each interest, through the pluralist process, works for its ideal outcome, the result of compromise means that each accepts what they can achieve at any one point in time depending upon their power to influence. However, interests are discerning and pragmatic, they understand that though they must accept less than the ideal outcome in the short term, they will continue to work toward their ultimate goal, a concept known as *Pragmatic Idealism*. Civics instructors may use a sports analogy as an example of this concept. Typically, players accept an official's call and continue play despite not necessarily agreeing with the decision. Also, what constitutes a 'good' or a 'bad' call can be subjective, and coaches may subtly (or not so subtly) nominally accept one decision to create opportunities for more favorable future decisions. Despite compromising, interests will continue to pursue their ideal, meaning students should understand that conflicts are a regular and expected part of democratic politics, a fact that may be difficult for students to appreciate. However, compromise between interests allows government to temporarily achieve social stability (the goal of democratic governance) and, if compromise is achieved through a democratic institution, it reaffirms pluralism as a valid process for addressing conflicts.

Perceived Advantage of Using the Concepts for Teaching Civics

How to best deliver an impactful, quality civic education in high school and college has stimulated much debate. As Gregory and Miyazaki (2018) note, despite the ongoing dialogue on this question, student test scores on civic literacy remain low. What is needed, they argue, is a new way to teach civics, particularly to those with lower socioeconomic status. Their research findings indicate that basic literacy is the most significant of several variables generally associated with higher student civic knowledge scores. Students who have a higher level of reading comprehension and whose parents have higher levels of education score higher on civic knowledge tests. While not surprising, it does underscore the question of how to address civics education for the rest of the population. What might we implement to make civics education accessible and sufficiently relevant to lift the scores of all students regardless of reading comprehension skills and parents' education? Optimistically, Gregory and Miyazaki (2018) suggest that it is possible to enhance literacy in the classroom particularly if every teacher is prepared to also be a reading teacher and to help their students achieve a

higher level of reading comprehension. What this discussion does not address, however, is the framework for delivering that civics education itself.

Cultivating inquiry in students is the key focus of the College, Career, and Civic Framework for State Social Studies Standards (C3 Framework). Avoiding prescriptions for teaching social studies, it instead challenges teachers to help students “develop the capacity to know, analyze, explain, and argue about interdisciplinary challenges in our social world” (Cuenca, 2021, p.298). The interdisciplinary nature of a civics education would seem to warrant this approach, sometimes referenced as teaching students “critical thinking” skills. Students should be able to identify (regardless of whether the question posed is economic, political, or social) the interests involved and the basis for their arguments, consider alternative perspectives, and reach a conclusion that they can rationally defend while remaining open to reassessing their position based on new information. The challenge to teaching students critical thinking skills is what Cuenca (2021) identifies as a framework for instruction or “core practices.”

Cuenca (2021) describes these practices for teaching as an “organizational tool for the implementation of practice-based teacher education initiatives” and must be of necessity “small enough to be clearly visible in practice, but large enough to be analyzed, taught, and rehearsed within teacher education programs” (p. 304). Importantly, Cuenca (2021) emphasizes the need for teachers and students to communicate utilizing the same language, view questions through the lens of many different fields of study (recognizing the interdisciplinary nature of social studies), and use interpretive questions to explore issues. Teachers should also help students organize their inquiries to enable them to be more discerning regarding their sources and their approach to analyzing a question, make lessons relevant to students’ life perspectives, and enable students to debate their perspectives with others in class, all of which Cuenca (2021) identifies as “a proxy for democratic participation” (p. 309). A critical aspect of teaching civics is “the ability for novices to recognize, appreciate, and reasonably learn how to enact certain practices in the social studies classroom” (p. 310). For both teacher and student, initiating learning on any issue using a simple frame of reference for understanding democratic politics, examining social issues, and posing critical thinking questions to enable a deeper understanding of civics would provide this opportunity.

If we are to develop a shared vision of democracy in our civics education, then the framework for teaching complicated and controversial topics is important. When students realize a personal connection with a topic and are able to express opinions in class, they are more likely to engage. To this point, Gargroetzi and Garcia (2022) remind us that the seminal purpose of an education is to “ensure that students understand their responsibilities as citizens” (p. 481). This entails helping students develop an informed voice and an appreciation for processes that work for consensus, value their responsibility to the community, and commit to participating in decision making toward a common good. For a student to work toward these goals requires open-mindedness and a willingness to challenge one’s existing ways of thinking. Therefore, how we create an intellectual environment that allows for questioning paradigms is an important consideration for a vital civics education. In their examination of the impact of a “letter writing campaign” associated with the Letters to the Next President 2.0 project, where students choose a topic of personal interest as the basis for writing a letter to the president, Gargroetzi and Garcia (2022) stress the importance of sharing the letters in class as it allows students to “listen, hear, deliberate, and organize with each other for change...” (p. 491) thus

enhancing civic learning. Sharing our voices is important, but perhaps it is more important to have a shared vocabulary as it enhances our ability to cooperatively affect change. In this respect, a simple, unified framework for exploring the impact of our individual and collective voices on public policy is a critical element for a civics education that prioritizes the responsibilities of the “good citizen.”

In respect to sharing a simple, unified framework for teaching and engaging in civics, it is instructive to consider an argument by Berger (2009) that “conceptual clarity and agreement affect our ability to diagnose problems and prescribe solutions cooperatively,” a hallmark of democratic politics (p. 337). He notes that we need a more coherent conceptual thread that connects us to common definitions of civics and civic engagement. Before we explore and promote issues of political, social, and moral engagement with students, we need a shared reference for that conversation (p. 336). We agree that students are more likely to understand, appreciate, and engage with democratic politics if they have a shared vocabulary and a simple, easily understood frame of reference for engaging with the subject. We believe that the four principal concepts that undergird and describe democratic politics provide such a frame of reference for teaching students to be good citizens.

The Framework of the Four Principal Concepts of Democracy and Goodness of Fit

Additional advantages of using a unified framework for teaching civics can be found in its conceptual clarity. Therefore, it is useful to analyze our four concepts relative to Gerring’s (1999) “Criteria of Conceptual Goodness.” He asks, “What makes a concept good” and postulates that a concept that effectively defines a phenomenon, describes its attributes, and explains the relationship of the phenomenon to its attributes, is a “good concept” (Gerring, 1999). In Table 1, we present Gerring’s (1999) eight criteria for evaluating the “goodness” of a concept and then discuss the strong compatibility of our four concepts with his criteria.

Table 1

Criteria of Conceptual Goodness

Familiarity	How familiar is the concept (to a lay or academic audience)?
Resonance	Does the chosen term ring (resonate with the student)?
Parsimony	How short is the term and its attributes (the intention)?
Coherence	How internally consistent (logically related) are the instances and attributes?
Differentiation	How differentiated are the instances and the attributes (from other most-similar concepts)? How bounded or operationalizable is the concept?
Depth	How many accompanying properties are shared by the instances?
Theoretical Utility	How useful is the concept in a wider field of inferences?
Field Utility	How useful is the concept within a field of wider instances and attributes?

Note. Taken from *What Makes a Concept Good? A Criterial Framework for Understanding Concept Formation in the Social Sciences*, (p.367) by Gerring, 1999.

First, utilizing a framework with our four principal concepts of democracy for teaching civics and for teaching those who will teach civics will be familiar to and resonate with students as they will

recognize that each concept has a high degree of familiarity in their everyday lives. We pursue our self-interests which are not necessarily the same as others', so conflicts arise that we tend to settle through negotiation, bargaining and compromise. We generally, if at least temporarily, accept that compromise.

Further, our framework makes sense in that it is not difficult to understand and has little definitional ambiguity in its application to democratic politics. The four concepts are very clear and are not in conflict with other descriptors or concepts related to democracy. The concepts are an abbreviation for the complexities of democracy and easily capture the essence of democratic governance processes. They have an internal coherence; they are connected and sequential in a replicable pattern regardless of the social or political question being examined. Despite being related, each concept is well bounded from the others and is distinctive enough to stand alone. In addition, each concept in the framework provides a powerful short-hand for a deeper exploration of "democracy." Finally, these concepts provide both theoretical and field utility. They theoretically represent the ideals of democratic politics, and they very practically express the reality of our democratic processes as well. While we acknowledge that our conceptual framework is not a perfect match with Gerring's criteria for a good concept, we believe that it fits well within his construct, making it a "good" conceptual framework for teaching democratic politics in civics classes. As Gerring (1999) states, "[T]he better we can "cover" a given phenomenal and terminological terrain, the better are the individual concepts that inhabit that terrain" (p. 383).

Aligning of Concepts with Kentucky Academic Standards

In order to illustrate how high school teachers, and university professors who train teachers, can utilize the four major concepts of democracy to teach civics, it may be helpful to see how they relate to *Kentucky's Academic Standards (KAS) for Teaching Civics* (2019). We selected this model because it is the state where we educate future teachers, but we believe our proposed framework of democratic concepts can be used in any civics classroom setting. Kentucky's standards are meant to provide guidance for actively engaging students with "social studies concepts, ideas and practices needed to participate in and navigate the community, state, nation and world in which they live" (p. 10). The report published by the Kentucky Department of Education, states that "students must be life-long critical thinkers and questioners who can undertake multidimensional, complex reasoning." Additionally, the standards "are designed to include a breadth of knowledge, not as isolated facts to be simply memorized, but as useable knowledge to be integrated into an understanding of the world" (p. 5). In this respect, illustrating how the concepts we propose are compatible with this goal is beneficial.

The chart below presents a crosswalk between the *KAS for Civics Education* and our proposed conceptual framework for teaching civics. We specifically reference the section of the publication that focuses on standards for civics education (p. 173). In Table 2, we present the outlined goals for achievement associated with a civics education for high school (pages 141-142) and how the four principal concepts we propose for teaching civic democracy are associated, supporting the idea that "civic competence requires a commitment to democratic values and the ability to use knowledge about one's community, nation and world" (*KAS for Social Studies*, 2019, p. 5).

Table 2 provides an overarching description of how these four concepts of democratic governance can frame any discussion of politics in the classroom. If students understand the processes of democratic governance first and use the same vocabulary to build a clear understanding of which

questions to ask about any political issue, then any example of politics can be introduced. Once students grasp the interests involved and the basis for any resulting conflict, they then can engage in an analysis of how pluralism will affect decision-making and understand potential outcomes.

Approaching an examination of case studies of civil rights or economic policy decisions, whether at the national, state, or local level, allows students to build a shared vocabulary and framework for discussion. By using these concepts, teachers can offer students a clear path to gaining a broader and deeper perspective not only on specific issues, but democratic politics in general.

Table 2*Concepts for Learning Democracy/KAS for Civics Education Alignment***Roles and Responsibilities of a Citizen****Kentucky Academic Standards for Civics Education**

Exemplifying the characteristics of productive citizenship includes adherence to and understanding of the social contract, consent of the governed, limited government, legitimate authority, federalism and separation of powers. It also includes civic dispositions – such as honesty, mutual respect, cooperation and attentiveness to multiple perspectives – citizens should use when they interact with each other on public matters. It means understanding the diverse arguments made about the underlying principles and founding documents and their meanings.

	Human Character	Collective Dilemma	Pluralism	Pragmatic Idealism
Evaluate the civic responsibilities of individuals within a society. HS.C.RR.1	We know that people pursue their own self-interests, sometimes to the detriment of the community.	We know that people have conflicts with others as they pursue their self-interests and this causes the community a dilemma. One such conflict is determining our individual responsibilities to the community.	Using the institutions that the community has created to peacefully address dilemma, we seek to protect and preserve the community and continue to have people affirm their commitment to the community.	We negotiate the roles and responsibilities of individual citizens to the community and develop rules, laws, and policies to describe these responsibilities. However, we are constantly re-evaluating these citizenship requirements.
Explain how active citizens can affect the lawmaking process locally, nationally and internationally. HS.C.RR.2	As people pursue their self-interests they have conflicts with others, this motivates them to solve that conflict and engage with other citizens to do so.	The investment people have in achieving their self-interests motivates them to actively engage with others in order to realize some aspect of their interests.	People pursue their self-interests through the institutions the community has organized to peacefully settle conflict. They expend effort to develop law that supports their interests.	In order to settle disputes between self-interests, individuals and groups compromise and accept something less than the ideal in order to reduce conflict and enable some return on investment.

Civic Virtues and Democratic Principles**Kentucky Academic Standards for Civics Education**

Understanding principles such as equality, freedom, liberty and respect for individual rights and how they apply to both official institutions and informal interactions among citizens is a fundamental concept of being a citizen in a democratic republic. Learning these virtues and principles requires obtaining factual knowledge of written provisions found in important texts, such as the founding documents of the United States.

	Human Character	Collective Dilemma	Pluralism	Pragmatic Idealism
Explain how classical republicanism, natural rights philosophy and English common law influenced the thinking and actions of the American Founders. HS.C.CV.1	Constitutions and laws originate from practical experience based upon an understanding of human nature. Madison's Federalist 51 is an excellent source document in this respect.	Forms of government, such as republicanism, are based upon an understanding that conflicts between interests are inevitable. Laws enable peaceful processes for settling these conflicts.	In democratic governance, institutions are developed, guided by the pluralist process enabling temporary solutions to the clash of self-interests through compromise.	Divergent interests are satisfied for some period of time as a result of compromise, accepting temporary solutions while reimagining how to further express their interests.
Assess how the expansion of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights and human rights influence the thoughts and actions of individuals and groups. HS.C.CV.2	As societies adopt the ideal principles of democratic governance, such as inalienable rights, self-interests are more able to define and defend their interests as rights.	The expression of self-interests creates conflicts with other interests which puts pressure on democratic societies to find a peaceful solution to the conflict.	What constitutes a right is derived from a process of negotiation between competing interests in an effort to find a suitable compromise. As rights expand, prior compromises form the basis for revisions of what is a right.	While compromise results in a temporary solution to defining rights, revisions result in pragmatic consequences that raise further questions or illuminate challenges to adoption of an overarching societal understanding.
Analyze the impact of the efforts of individuals and reform movements on the expansion of civil rights and liberties locally, nationally and internationally. HS.C.CV.3	Examples of efforts to expand rights are ubiquitous in American history, beginning with the 'right to vote'. The impact of interests to strategically expand rights becomes a model for other interests.	The effort to expand rights results in conflicts between interests, even when that conflict doesn't appear rationale, for example, Women's voting rights.	Interests are generally guided by laws and processes to settle conflicts within democratic institutions, often however the ability to access these institutions requires a struggle to raise the consciousness of public opinion to the issue.	While compromise results in societal movement in respect to adopting law that expands rights an ideal solution is rarely achieved. The resultant laws are often challenged. American voting rights continue to be an example.

Processes, Rules, and Laws
Kentucky Academic Standards for Civics Education

Determining how groups of people make decisions, govern themselves and address public problems is a key component of functioning in a democratic republic. People address problems at all scales, from a classroom to the agreements among nations. Public policies are among the tools that governments use to address public problems.

	Human Character	Collective Dilemma	Pluralism	Pragmatic Idealism
Analyze the role of the three branches of government in the lawmaking process. HS.C.PR.1	Institutions of governance are developed to guide human interaction, particularly self-interests. Madison's Federalist Papers # 10 and #51 describing the fragmentation of power is a good source.	Having only one powerful interest in society ensures it will dominate governance, excluding other interests. Fragmenting power among branches increases the probability that other interests will have a voice in governance.	The fragmentation of power typically creates the need for interests to negotiate, bargain, and compromise on issues as a result of the need to cobble together sufficient support for policy adoption or the passage of laws.	When interests are forced to negotiate policies tend to be more moderate as a result of similar interests' willingness to compromise. No one interest group will dominate the political environment, allowing more voices in society to have an impact.
Analyze the role of elections, bureaucracy, political parties, interest groups and media in shaping public policy. HS.C.PR.2	All self-interests have an ideal perspective as to what constitutes the appropriate public policy on an issue that affects them.	Various affected self-interests' ideal perspectives are in conflict. Depending upon the issue this can result in large-scale societal conflict.	The institutions of American democracy are designed to not only provide the perspectives of competing interests, but also provide the means to peacefully settle conflicts.	Citizens have the ability to become educated about issues and affect which policies are adopted through engagement with these institutions even if only at the aggregate level.
Evaluate intended and unintended consequences of public policies locally, nationally and internationally. HS.C.PR.3	Individuals and groups pursue their self-interests despite the potential for conflict in society with others.	The pursuit of self-interest causes conflict between competing interests, none of which generally have sufficient power to obtain their ideal interest.	The need to develop alliances with others creates the impetus for arriving at compromise with others, but the nature of that compromise is unknown, as are its consequences.	The point at which compromise is able to be achieved to create public policy and its impact is generally unknown. The consequences of compromise are not known until policy has an impact upon society.

Kentucky Government

Kentucky Academic Standards for Civics Education

Kentucky's government influenced the history and culture of the citizens of Kentucky. These standards promote understanding of the functions of local government where applicable.

	Human Character	Collective Dilemma	Pluralism	Pragmatic Idealism
Explain how the Kentucky Constitution embodies the principles of rule of law, popular sovereignty, separation of powers and checks and balances. HS.C.KGO.1	The Kentucky Constitution embodies the ideas of the framers of the U. S. Constitution in terms of recognizing the potential threat to the state of self-interests and consolidated power.	The Kentucky Constitution assumes that conflicts will occur between interests. As a result laws, elections, and the fragmentation of power are designed to protect the state from control by any one interest.	The Kentucky Constitution recognizes that settling conflicts between interests requires, for the good of the state, a process that emphasizes negotiation, bargaining and compromise between interests.	The result of pluralism is a temporary solution to conflicts between interests as no one interests dominates all others.
Compare Kentucky's government to other states and to the federal government. HS.C.KOG.2	The structures and Constitutions of state governments are based upon ideals espoused in the national Constitution. Some variations in laws exist between states based on their historical political culture.	Some of the variations in state law results in conflicts between states which are resolved at the national level either through legislation or rulings of law in federal courts.	Conflicts between states are addressed through a process of pluralism that allows for each state to speak to its interests, thus affecting the federal decision-making process.	Rarely is any one outcome an ideal settling of a conflict and typically conflicts between states again arise as a consequence of compromise.
Describe how active citizens can affect change in their communities and Kentucky. HS.C.KOG.3	As people pursue their self-interests they have conflicts with others, this motivates them to solve that conflict and engage with other citizens to do so whether it is at the federal, state, or local level of governance.	The investment people have in achieving their self-interests motivates them to actively engage with others in order to realize through law and public policy some aspect of their interests.	People pursue their self-interests through the institutions the community has organized to peacefully settle conflict. They expend effort to develop law and policy that supports their interests.	In order to settle disputes between self-interests, individuals and groups compromise and accept something less than the ideal law or policy in order to reduce conflict and enable some return on investment.

Measuring the Potential for Usage in High School Civics Classes

To gain further understanding of the potential for utilizing our four major concepts as a “gateway” for students learning to appreciate democratic governance, we presented our framework to a focus group of four secondary education Social Studies teachers for their comments. The purpose of this qualitative discussion was to introduce our framework to teachers engaged in teaching social studies, learn about their current approach to teaching social studies, and discover if they would consider adapting their approach to include our conceptual framework. Three of the teachers with whom we spoke teach at public schools, the fourth teaches at a private school. Participants reported teaching World Civilization and American Government for a range of grade levels and stated that they adhered to state mandated curriculum standards (namely, National Social Studies Standards and Kentucky Academic Social Studies Standards). Participants were asked, “*Based on your current social studies curriculum, what does thoughtful student engagement with democracy look like in your high school Social Studies classroom?*” Respondents said they employed problem solving strategies, open discussions, and debates to analyze various aspects of the government and how it works. One teacher described using the absence of democracy when studying world history through the lens of the American Revolution. Another teacher responded,

My class touches on if true democracy exists in the United States. Students participate in various simulations, case studies and video comparisons to delve into these topics. The main

issue I encounter in my classroom is to dispel the stereotypes and misconceptions associated with various forms of government and political parties.

We also asked, “*Would you consider framing your current curriculum around the four concepts of Human Character, Collective Dilemma, Pluralism, and Pragmatic Idealism?*” Participants indicated interest in implementing the framework, but also described potential barriers to usage of the concepts. Table 3 summarizes teacher responses.

Table 3

Teacher Responses to Using the Four Concepts Framework in Classroom

Question: Would you consider framing your current curriculum around the four concepts of Human Character, Collective Dilemma, Pluralism, and Pragmatic Idealism?

Response #1	“I have used some of these ideas in class. Pragmatic Idealism is one that I use the most. Pluralism is also used in my American government class as well. Both ideas were taught to me by my Political Science Professor at Thomas More University. The other two would require more understanding before using them.”
Response #2	“If it was something that would help my students increase their understanding of democracy and the role they play, I would absolutely consider it.”
Response #3	“I am not sure. If I had more freedom and control over the content [taught in school] these concepts would be very beneficial for students. Time constraints and other materials required by Kentucky to be covered make it difficult.”
Response #4	“These concepts would be fabulous for high school sophomores to truly understand. I also believe that these concepts would greatly help with educating the general populace and would increase our civic engagement in the country. However, I do not believe that the overall current student clientele in our rural, conservative community would be able to grasp and fully understand these concepts. Sadly, I do not see it being something that would be easily grasped or accepted by our students.”

Although a very small sample, the four responses suggest that teachers are open to integrating new ideas in their teaching and are willing to be experiential. The first respondent had been introduced to our concepts in college while studying political science during his preservice teaching preparation under the author’s guidance. However, he initiated the application from his preservice content training in his classroom, and while not using the entire framework, he appears interested in integrating the framework with Kentucky’s mandated curriculum expectations. The third respondent indicated hesitation on integrating the concepts based on perceived curriculum limitations. While this hesitation may be warranted, the KAS (2019) outlines the minimum standards Kentucky students should learn in each grade level kindergarten through eighth grade or high school grade-span. The standards provide foundational guidance for what is to be taught, but do not address how learning experiences are to be designed or what resources should be used (p 12). We take this to mean that if properly introduced to preservice social studies teachers during their training, the four concepts for democracy could provide them with a simple, coherent framework for teaching according to the Kentucky standards.

The fourth respondent offered an interesting perspective on teaching in a rural school district, suggesting that students may be challenged to understand and utilize the concepts. This may be a reference to the very different role politics is perceived to play in rural versus urban environments. However, this response aligns with Levinson and Solomon (2021) who assert, “students are taught about how others do civics and politics...but they rarely learn how (or why) to do it themselves” (p. 517).

We recognize that additional field input is needed and plan to host future focus groups representing a larger sample of social studies teachers. In addition, in the fall 2022 semester, we began conducting surveys to obtain data from university students in introductory political science classes. Using a pre- and post-test methodology, the survey questions are focused on gaining insights into how first year students perceive their role as citizens engaged in democratic politics and particularly how broadly they conceive of politics as playing a role in their everyday lives. By using this methodology, we can measure their perceptions at the beginning of the semester compared with the end, after which they have been introduced to politics using our four concepts of democracy. We intend to analyze and present these data after we obtain a sufficiently large sample size to enable us to appropriately test for statistical significance and draw conclusions from our findings.

Conclusion and Future Research

In the formative years of America’s public education movement, Horace Mann argued: “One of the highest and most valuable objects to which the influence of school can be made conducive consists of training our children for self-government.” (cited in Bok, 2021) If we believe all citizens, regardless of occupation or socio-economic status, should understand how democracy functions, then it is critical that our society prioritize civic literacy. The conceptual model we are proposing for high school social studies teachers to utilize in teaching civics and for instructors in social studies methods courses at the university level, has several advantages for organizing lesson content to achieve this goal. Each concept in the framework is simple to understand, allowing students to approach complex issues by easily organizing them in regard to identifying competing interests, understanding the goals of these interests, and analyzing the arguments for the position each interest takes on issues. The framework supports a case study approach of any related subject matter, both current and historical. It provides an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the basis for political conflict whether that conflict is based upon economics, geography, or culture. It can also increase student engagement in the classroom as it places students in a position to recommend realistic solutions to social challenges based upon their understanding of competing interests, political power, and the application of pluralism (negotiation, bargaining, and compromise).

While we have confidence in the benefits of using the framework of the four concepts for teaching democratic politics, we plan to continue to test our assumptions through pre and post-test surveys in the classroom and expand the collection of input through dialogue with high school teachers and university instructors teaching social studies methods courses. We appreciate that there are challenges for integrating our framework in high school classrooms. In particular, we understand that teachers must know how to apply these concepts in a way that both enables them to meet state guidelines and provides an intellectual foundation upon which their students can base their understanding of the reasons undergirding democratic processes and institutions. Most importantly, it

is critical that students have pragmatic, as opposed to ideal, expectations for outcomes resulting from these democratic processes.

Our review of the literature and limited qualitative data from high school social studies teachers indicates that what is lacking in teaching civics is an overarching framework for students to gain an appreciation for collaborative decision making processes and outcomes which are the essential core elements of democratic politics. Learning about current issues alone does not result in students' valuing the basis for, or benefits of, democratic processes and the need to work with others to find common sense solutions to societal challenges. Nor does simply learning about current political issues illustrate to students the importance of democratic institutions for balancing interests and maintaining democratic social stability. We agree with the contention that students "at the high school level have a level of cognitive maturity to understand issues facing society..." and that "providing focused opportunities for students to acquire the knowledge and skills associated with effective engagement in our democratic society would be a prudent option for helping society address the current social, political, and economic conflicts." (Evans, p.62, 2022) Our model framework enables teachers to help students understand democracy using a shared vocabulary, compatible with the interdisciplinary approach common to social studies classrooms, utilizing a simple set of concepts that foster students' ability to develop a deeper understanding of, and appreciation for, democratic processes. In this way, we believe this model can strengthen civics education and enable teachers to more fully realize the purpose of a civics education: the training of good citizens who share the ideals of a pluralist society and believe in the democratic "rules of the game."

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