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"Why do you want to join this initiative - what is your motivation - and why do you think public discussions about key moments in the history of American democracy are valuable to your students?"

My educational goal is to help students build skills to navigate the real world after graduation. First, do they have the interpersonal skills to hold constructive and meaningful conversations with peers and the community as a whole? Second, do they have enough situational awareness to make decisions in the moment? Third, can they find and decipher information that can help them solve problems? I believe an active and dynamic classroom with an instructor that identifies more as a facilitator of learning than an expert of content can serve as a lab for these skills, and that the Harvard Case Study method can be an on-ramp for students to fast track their skill development in a government classroom.

The Harvard Case Study pedagogical approach mirrors the experiential approach that guided my personal journey to teaching. My first teaching experiences with the curriculum at the Colorado Outdoor Education Center involved the use of several instructional strategies I've been able to apply to the walled classroom environment. The use of role playing in the field was core to the COEC method. For example, students studied the local geology of the Pikes Peak region by 'becoming' miners. Teaching staff dressed as miners, students were hooked in with a 'quartz-rush' activity, heard stories of cripple creek culture in the 1870's and concluded by digging for crystals. The design of the curriculum is based on active participation, cooperative group work and supported leadership opportunities, all of which lead to high student engagement and a unique intellectual experience. Since my work in the outdoor education field, I've been able to transfer the methods used on the trail to the classroom but have also been seeking a formal way to use the stories of history to lead student engagement. In the high school classroom, storytelling is a powerful tool. When I relate personal experiences connected to content and concepts we study all eyes are on me. To put students into the shoes of important people during key historic events in our time builds on the students' instinct to engage with the story. When students engage with the narrative they start to build their own story, and will be motivated to share that story with others. We need students who can engage with constructive discussion to solve the big problems our world faces.

The most recent pedagogical focus I've adopted in the classroom is project-based learning (PBL). PBL focuses on student-choice to increase engagement. Randy Sherer and Tom Fehrenbacker, in the book, "Hands and Minds - A guide to project based learning for teachers by teachers", describes PBL as 'an educational approach that engages educators and students in authentic work that is grounded in real-world contexts, and demands real-world solutions. Work of this nature necessarily continues for an extended period of time...pursuing a complex, challenging question.' The Harvard Case Study model has the potential to complement the PBL strategy very harmoniously. The key words for me in the Hands and Minds authors definition are 'authentic' and 'real world', which are the core components to deeper learning for high school students. I have an idea about how the Case Study and PBL methods could work hand in hand. What if students select and design their own cases based on stories from US History and Government that inspire them? PBL requires good models. I will use the models provided by the Harvard group to teach the skills, then students create their own case to be presented at an end of the

year exhibition. This will require them to understand deeply not just the content but the process of learning.

Students don't communicate directly as often as they need, which hurts their ability to hold healthy discussions. Constructive discussion is key to democracy. Students need the skill to use evidence-based rationale in their discussions as argument based on opinion becomes very diluted, and often is counter-productive. The Case Study method builds a scaffold for students in the development of the use of evidence and primary sources to build their argument. However I've also witnessed a disconnect in the new age of media, especially with high school age students, in their ability to be discerning readers. How do we decide what information is true, right or valid? How can they be decent fact checkers?

The study of history helps students identify key moments in the development of our nation's character and challenges them to recognize and discuss the era in which they currently live. As I seek to constantly learn and refine my skills, I hope to be a model of life-long learning for students as they decide what problems of the future to tackle. I believe creating a classroom that is student-centered, creative and connected will help inspire them to actively participate in our democracy.