Golda Och Academy

COHORT 6

In my 11th Grade Bioethics class, we used Civic Spirit's dialogic classroom model for discussions of organ donation and therapeutic abortion through the lens of Jewish law. Our focus during this learning was on creating competency in respectful discussion, design thinking, collaboration, problem solving, and authentic relationship-building across differences.

One of the expectations of our school is that students learn how to navigate both the differences and similarities between Jewish and contemporary American values, with the aim of each student becoming empowered to define his/her/their place within a spectrum of views on contemporary issues in halacha (Jewish law).

The two main issues we explored this year are organ donation and therapeutic abortion. With organ donation, we learned about the current medical definition of death and how modern technology makes it possible to keep a person's heart beating even after they have suffered complete destruction of the brain stem. Sources in Jewish law included Talmud, Shulchan Aruch, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's teshuva (responsa) on brain death.

The halachic sources we used for therapeutic abortion included Mishnah, Gemara, Mishneh Torah, Rabbi Yaakov Emden, Rabbi Trani, Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg, and Rav Moshe Feinstein. Students also explored the views of the Personhood Movement and the legal reasoning underlying both Roe v. Wade and the Dobbs Decision.

Students wrote position papers on both topics. Before holding a class discussion, we did the following:

1. Explored the differences between the debate model and the dialogue model, analyzed the pros and cons of each model, and the big ideas underlying both the debate and the dialogue model.

2. Came to an understanding that our goal was to create a safe space in which every person could share a personal viewpoint, be heard, and be respected.

3. Created our own ground rules for discussion and experimented with having the students themselves monitor whether we were staying within our guidelines.

When we experimented with using the dialogic classroom model for the first time, students gradually became used to not challenging, judging, or bringing arguments in opposition to the views presented.

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The second time we had a class discussion using the dialogic classroom model, I was amazed. Students were respectful, and I could tell that they were consciously struggling with moving from the debate model ("I'm right and you are wrong.") into the dialogic model.

The students were noticeably quiet and calm. Working within the dialogic classroom framework seems to have de-personalized the discussion and made the people sharing out feel calmer and safer.

This was particularly impressive because our discussion topic was therapeutic abortion and there was a wide range of personal statements on this topic.

To view Rabbi Johnston's Dialogic Classroom exercise, click here!

11th Grade Bioethics Elective

Analyzing different Jewish views on organ donation

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1. Talk together about the differences between debate and dialogue

[Chart on board]

Debate	Dialogue
Either / Or One side is right, the other side is wrong It's about "who is right" Does not necessarily require respect or kindness during the interchange	Not Either / Or Spectrum of views Not about who is "right" and who is "Wrong" Require respect, kindness, and active listening to work

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Heather Smith, Teacher

By 11th grade students are very aware of the world around them and evaluating their place within it. The 11th grade curriculum at Golda Och Academy is U.S. History II, which begins at Reconstruction, Post-American Civil War, and proceeds thematically through the modern day. The central theme is “What is American Identity, and how has it changed?” The intent of centering the class around the evolution of American Identity is to personalize the American experience for students so they can connect with how the concepts of being an American change based on the time period in conjunction with individual features like race, ethnicity, religion, social status, etc.

I selected this grade and group of students because they are on the cusp of adulthood, and I wanted to ignite their passions in an effort to spur future civic action. As we covered our curriculum, we honed in on issues within American society and how they were addressed to build a connection to issues of today. Guided by the Civic Spirit Pillar of Civic Belonging, it was important that the project would allow student choice of focus and outcome so each student would experience their own individual journey.

With this in mind, my Civic Spirit Coach, Audi Hecht, and I began meeting and brainstorming early in the school year. I knew early that I wanted to focus on Civic Belonging and allow students to focus on an issue they were passionate about. To give students a baseline for issues in American History, I created an Issue Identifier Assignment, which had students choose several issues within our studied time periods (Reconstruction, The Gilded Age, The Progressive Era, and The New Deal) but focus on one within each era. Among the requirements for students were creating a thesis statement based on “What effect did this issue have on society,” creating two supporting points and one counterpoint (finding evidence from a reputable source for each), then locating a US Supreme Court Case related to the issue. Finally, students needed to evaluate if anyone tried to solve the issue and their level of success. These Issue Identifier Activities were done three times throughout the school year and therefore gave students a choice between 3 historical topics in which to draw from when introduced to their final project.

The final project required students to select a reform movement and individual reformer, read an autobiography or memoir on the individual, and research the movement. Through specific tasks over a period of 8 weeks, students learned about the movement from beginning to present day with a focus on how their person changed American Identity. The ultimate product produced by this project is an expression of the student’s understanding of this evolution.

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By seeing how others fought injustice and oppression, the hope is that these students will have the courage to do the same. Their excitement to explore these reform movements and create a unique expression is the most rewarding aspect of the Civic Spirit Cohort Journey, but it did not just happen over the eight weeks the students had for their project. The groundwork was laid back in August at the Summer Educators Workshop and throughout the school year. My coach, Audi Hecht, helped me shape, evaluate, and reevaluate the supporting benchmarks and the ultimate plan for the project. While the results of the Educators Cohort are visible in the produced work of my students and their future civic action, the encouragement, reflection, and support from Civic Spirit have made me a better educator.

To view Ms. Smith's exercise on American Identity, click here!

American Identity changes depending on social, economic, and/or political status during a given time period. In every era, there are issues which concern Americans who seek reform, but how and why those reform movements are successful depends on many factors. As we move through the school year, we are going to explore the evolution of American society through the evolution of American identity.

Using the materials we studied, you are tasked with choosing an issue which plagued American society due to the New Deal.

List 3, choose 1:

1) 2) 3)

Circle or highlight your choice above.

What event or idea caused this issue?

If you are unsure, you may have to do outside research. If you do, please put your MLA citation here:

Author's Last Name, Author's First Name. "Title of Source." Title of Container, Other contributors, Version, Publisher, Date Published, Location, Date Accessed, URL. (2nd + lines of the citation are indented, but the 1st line is not)

What effect or impact did this issue have on society? (format: answer the question directly *because* why you believe it to be so)