

Learning to Think Politically: Toward More Complete Disciplinary Knowledge in Civics and Government Courses

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Abstract:

Secondary civics and government courses are often framed as a content area in which students learn about processes of government and ways of participating in a democratic society, as opposed to a discipline in which students use specific tools and ways of thinking that mimic those used by professionals within that discipline. In this article, we call for an increased emphasis on disciplinary knowledge in civics and government courses, specifically knowledge that utilizes the tools and methodologies of political scientists. Through a study of an exemplary civics teacher during the 2012 Presidential Election, we illustrate the benefits of a disciplinary approach to civics instruction. Our findings suggest that such an approach allows students to better understand tools of social inquiry and provides them with the skills to think critically about politics and political behavior.

Keywords: civics | disciplinary knowledge | electoral politics | government | political science | polling data | thinking politically

Article:

Although overshadowed by the contest between President Obama and Governor Romney, the 2012 Presidential Election was also a battleground for those charged with monitoring and predicting the status of the election. Perhaps the most publicized prognostication was made by Fox News political pundit Dick Morris (2012) who, in the days leading up to the election, insisted that Romney would win in an electoral landslide despite the fact that most political scientists and major polling agencies were predicting either an Obama victory or a race that was too close to call. When pressed to defend his prediction, Morris used statistics that were based on

selective conservative polling data and an incorrect assumption that many of the mainstream polling agencies had oversampled Democratic voters.

Morris was wrong, which in itself, is not that noteworthy. Infamous cases of incorrect predictions and inaccurate polling data have become part of American political folklore.¹ Morris, however, admitted to purposefully painting a more optimistic picture of Romney's chances as a way to ignite the Republican base. Appearing on Fox News' *Hannity* a week after the election, Morris stated that it was his "duty" to offer hope to Romney supporters at a time when his campaign was floundering (Ortiz, 2012, para. 4).²

The fact that Morris deliberately misled his audience is dishonest. However, what is potentially more disturbing is that members of his audience may have taken his argument as fact without questioning the data or sources present within it. In an era where political opinions are articulated to untold numbers of people via television, blogs, and social media, it is incumbent upon individuals to become critical consumers of political knowledge. Secondary civics and government classes would seem like an obvious forum in which to acquire these skills, but research suggests that these courses often overlook this type of disciplinary knowledge in favor of generic instruction on civic ideals and structures of government (Niemi & Smith, 2001).

In this article, we call for an increased emphasis on disciplinary knowledge in civics and government courses, specifically knowledge that utilizes the tools and methodologies of political scientists. Through a study of an exemplary high school civics teacher during the 2012 Presidential Election, we offer a glimpse into the possibilities afforded by incorporating this type of knowledge as part of the curriculum. Students in this class monitored the status of the election using tools such as polling and campaign finance data, which allowed them to critically analyze and predict decisions made by both campaigns during the course of the election. By the end of the semester, the students had begun to develop the skills necessary to become critical consumers of political information, which we believe is an essential aspect of learning to "think politically."

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Writing in *PS: Political Science & Politics*, the journal of record for the American Political Science Association (APSA), Niemi and Smith (2001) questioned the role of high school civics and government courses,³ specifically asking, "are they an introduction to political science or are they citizenship training?" (p. 285). Historically, the civic curriculum has emphasized the latter outcome (e.g., Avery & Simmons, 2000; Journell, 2010a). Within the literature, there seems to be a general consensus that the purpose of these courses is to promote "good" citizenship, although multiple interpretations of that goal exist (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

As a result, civics is often framed as a content area that students either learn about (e.g., structure of government) or participate in (e.g., service learning) as opposed to a discipline in which students use specific tools and ways of thinking that mimic those used by professionals within

that discipline. In this sense, civics is unique in that best practices in other social studies disciplines encourage the use of disciplinary knowledge.⁴ In the most recent *Handbook of Research in Social Studies Education* (Levstik & Tyson, 2008), for example, there is no chapter devoted to disciplinary practices in civics, although such chapters exist for the other traditional social studies disciplines. Another example of the marginalization of disciplinary practices in civics can be found in the new *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). Dimension 2 of the C3 Framework touts “applying disciplinary concepts and tools” (p. 29), but the majority of the civic standards in this dimension focus on student knowledge of governmental institutions, civic processes, and laws as opposed to mastery of skills related to a larger discipline.

As in the C3 Framework, too often the extent to which civics instruction delves into political science training is either through deliberations of policy, which McAvoy and Hess (2013) argued encourage students to “think politically” (p. 16), or active involvement in political or civic organizations. Research has shown there to be considerable value in engaging students in political deliberations (e.g., Hess, 2009; Parker, 2006) and service-learning projects (e.g., Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). However, these activities only constitute a portion of the disciplinary practices of political scientists. These types of activities also can be viewed as artificial if they are not placed within a broader disciplinary context. For example, Walzer (2007) noted that deliberation is an essential aspect of democratic politics, but it rarely exists in isolation. Real-life deliberations are influenced by a variety of factors, including political power dynamics and other aspects of political behavior. Yet, classroom deliberations often operate like a jury room in which students are asked to deliberate only on the merits of policy.

Using the APSA (2013) definition, political science is “the study of governments, public policies and political processes, systems, and political behavior” that uses “both humanistic and scientific perspectives and tools and a variety of methodological approaches” (para. 1) to examine social and political phenomena. Although these types of disciplinary knowledge and tools are not necessary for political thinking—Freeden (2008) argued that everyone engages in some form of political thinking as part of their daily lives—they are essential for sophisticated political thought. As Freeden (2013) noted, nuanced political thought requires thinking about *politics*, which he defined as pertaining to the following topics:

1. The appropriation of the locus of ultimate decision making
2. The distribution of material and symbolic goods,
3. The mobilization or withdrawing of public support,

4. The organization of social complexities through which stability or conflict/disruption are manufactured,
5. Policy-making and option-selection for collectives, and
6. The wielding of power (which Freedman [2013] argued cuts across the above categories).

An understanding of the political world, which includes the patterns and ranges of views that people hold about social issues and how they respond to the rhetoric and actions of political figures, is present within each of these different domains and is needed for rational political thought (Freedman, 2008). This type of understanding does not develop naturally. As Walzer (2007) noted, “people have to learn how to be political” (p. 135).

Most American K–12 civics courses, however, do not engage students with the disciplinary knowledge needed for sophisticated political thinking (Niemi & Smith, 2001). Perhaps one reason why pre-collegiate civics courses in the United States are not better aligned with the goals of a larger discipline is due to the APSA’s recent silence on K–12 instruction (Mann, 1996). The last official APSA standards for K–12 education were developed over 40 years ago, and in that report, the APSA Committee on Pre-Collegiate Education (1971) outlined eight purposes for K–12 political education:

1. Transmit knowledge about the “realities” of political life as well as exposing students to the cultural ideals of American democracy.
2. Transmit knowledge about political behavior and processes as well as knowledge about formal governmental institutions and legal structures.
3. Transmit knowledge about political systems other than the American system, particularly knowledge about the international system.
4. Develop a capacity to think about political phenomena in conceptually sophisticated ways.
5. Develop an understanding of and skill in the processes of social scientific inquiry.
6. Develop a capacity to make explicit and analyzed normative judgments about political decisions and policies.

7. Develop an understanding of the social psychological sources and historical–cultural origins of their own political attitudes and values and a capacity to critically analyze the personal and social implications of alternative values.

8. Develop an understanding of the capacities and skills needed to participate effectively and democratically in the life of the society.

Although the wording of the standards does not necessarily promote active inquiry or practice using disciplinary tools, the broad themes outlined in these eight standards suggest a stronger disciplinary focus than what is typically included in a traditional civics curriculum (Niemi & Smith, 2001). The APSA Committee on Pre-Collegiate Education (1971) continued by criticizing the state of K–12 political science instruction at that time, arguing that the curriculum presented a romanticized image of American political life and placed “undue stress upon historical events, legal structures and formal institutional aspects of government and [failed] to transmit adequate knowledge about political behaviors and processes” (p. 439).

It seems little has changed since that report was published. Textbooks and civic education standards continue to describe an American democracy in which everyone has the same political opportunities, despite the fact that political science research suggests otherwise (e.g., Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996), and studies of students from minority groups and low-socioeconomic households have found that they often come to their classrooms with experiences that contradict this traditional civic narrative (e.g., Abu El-Haj, 2007; Journell & Castro, 2011; Rubin, 2007). Even when teachers attempt to facilitate students’ understanding of their own political affiliations and policy stances, these lessons often are confined to units specific to elections and voting (e.g., Journell, 2011a). Classrooms, such as those described by Levy (2011) and Parker et al. (2011), in which students’ political understanding is developed over time, are rare. In addition, few studies have attempted to describe social studies teachers’ attempts at increasing students’ knowledge of polling and survey data despite its relevance to students’ civic competence (P. H. Wilson & Journell, 2011). Finally, although teachers and students often report engaging in policy deliberations in their civics classes, research suggests that the actual amount of time spent on these types of discussions pales in comparison to that spent on descriptions of governmental processes and productive civic practices (Hess, 2008).

In other words, few of the recommendations made by the 1971 APSA Committee on Pre-Collegiate Education have been incorporated into the common practices of secondary civics teachers. Research suggests that detailed analyses of political behavior rarely occur at the secondary level, even in Advanced Placement courses (Parker et al., 2011). In a study of civics teachers during the 2008 Presidential Election, for example, Journell (2011a, 2011b) found that they typically did not use disciplinary tools, such as polling data, in their instruction or engage students in analytical discussions of campaign strategies or voter behavior. Even in the classes

where this type of information was discussed, instruction was often teacher centered and did not provide students opportunities to explore data or critically analyze these topics on their own. Other research has found that students do not seem to understand the realities of politics, such as the power of money and other influences on the political process (Niemi & Junn, 1998).

The question becomes, then, whether the inclusion of disciplinary knowledge and tools is aligned with the larger goals of civics courses, namely increasing students' civic competence, engagement, and/or self-efficacy. Although the lack of empirical evidence from K–12 civics classrooms precludes a definitive answer to that question, the literature on undergraduate political science instruction offers anecdotal evidence to support a greater disciplinary focus in K–12 civics courses. Multiple studies on the use of polling data, experiential learning, and simulated electoral decision making in survey political science courses suggest that disciplinary approaches can lead to greater civic understanding, engagement, and self-efficacy among students (e.g., Bennion, 2006; Bernstein, 2008; Coffey, Miller, & Feuerstein, 2011; Cole, 2003; Williamson & Gregory, 2010).⁵

If these types of disciplinary approaches appear to enhance students' civic education, then it is reasonable to ask why they have not been adopted by K–12 civics teachers. One factor may be a perceived lack of instructional time, which research suggests often hinders teachers from engaging in discussions of politics and current events that may deviate from the standard curriculum (e.g., Journell, 2010a; Kahne, Rodriguez, Smith, & Thiede, 2000; Larson, 1997). Another possible explanation could be teachers' lack of political knowledge, given recent research suggesting that many social studies teachers may not possess adequate knowledge of political processes and current political issues (Journell, 2013b). Since many social studies teachers major in history as undergraduates, it may also be possible that they do not have strong enough pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) in political science to foster disciplinary knowledge in their students.⁶ It is for this reason that the APSA encourages prospective civics teachers to take multiple courses in political science, including courses that expose them to philosophical issues related to political democracy and democratic citizenship, sources of pluralism in American political life, and methods of political science data analysis (APSA Committee on Education, 1994). Finally, research suggests that some teachers may choose to avoid political topics completely due to their controversial nature (Hess, 2004). Yet, research also suggests that complete avoidance of political topics is nearly impossible, even in classes where teachers rigidly adhere to the formal curriculum (Journell, 2010a).

In this study, we used a model of wisdom approach (Wineburg & Wilson, 1988) to conduct a case study of a highly effective civics teacher who regularly incorporated disciplinary knowledge into his instruction. We do not present this teacher's instruction as what is typical, but rather, we use him as an example of what is possible when civics teachers incorporate greater disciplinary knowledge into their courses. Specifically, we sought to answer the following research questions.

1. How did the teacher incorporate disciplinary knowledge, specifically analyses of polling data and political behavior, into his course?
2. What were the instructional implications of this disciplinary focus?

RESEARCH CONTEXT

This study focuses on Mr. Monroe, an exemplary civics teacher who is White and was in his 5th year of teaching.⁷ Mr. Monroe was purposefully selected to participate in this study after the first author had observed him as part of an unrelated study 2 years earlier on using film in civics classrooms (Journell & Buchanan, 2013). During that 2010 study, the first author identified Mr. Monroe as an exceptional teacher, an opinion that was corroborated by administrator recommendations. Of particular interest to the present study was Mr. Monroe's undergraduate training in political science and his intrinsic interest in politics. Mr. Monroe was an avid consumer of political media, and he sought his political information from a range of news outlets on both sides of the political spectrum. Politically, Mr. Monroe was a registered independent and considered himself to be a left-leaning moderate; he had supported President Obama in 2008 and voted for him again in 2012, but he also had voted for President Bush in 2000 and 2004.

Mr. Monroe taught at Madison High School, which at the time of the study had an enrollment of approximately 1,000 students. The student body at Madison was approximately 71% White, 17% Black, 9% Latino/a, and 2% identifying as either Asian or biracial, with approximately 28% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. For the purposes of data collection, we focused specifically on one of Mr. Monroe's honors classes that contained 26 students (15 male, 11 female). The students were predominately sophomores, and based on student surveys, 16 self-identified as White, 7 as Black, and 2 as Latino/a.⁸ Surveys given at the end of the study also found that 17 students would have voted for Obama, 7 would have voted for Romney, and 2 would not have voted at all.

METHODOLOGY

We used case study methodology for data collection and analysis, which Yin (1994) argued is ideal for "examining contemporary events, but when relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated" (p. 8). Specifically, we engaged in an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) in that our intent was to learn from Mr. Monroe's political instruction as a way to better understand the potential benefits of a disciplinary approach to civics instruction. Mr. Monroe's honors class served as the "bounded system" for our study (Stake, 1995, p. 2).

Our primary method of data collection was regular observations of Mr. Monroe's instruction during the fall 2012 semester. A member of the research team, which was comprised of all three authors, observed Mr. Monroe's class approximately three times per week from the start of the

school year in August through the presidential election in November. We discussed our observation schedule with Mr. Monroe on a weekly basis to ensure that we would be observing on days in which students were engaged in content instruction. Only one member of the research team observed on any given day, and while we were in Mr. Monroe's classroom, we acted as participant observers (Merriam, 1998). The majority of our time was spent observing Mr. Monroe's instruction. However, we would occasionally work with students in small groups and help Mr. Monroe with administrative tasks. In total, we observed Mr. Monroe 30 times over the course of the semester.

During each observation, the member of the research team kept detailed field notes using a protocol that allowed for the delineation of observed events and the researcher's interpretations of those events. Due to Internal Review Board restrictions and district policies, we were unable to audio-record classroom conversations. However, each researcher attempted to record as many verbatim quotations as possible and clearly indicated exact quotations from other syntheses of classroom dialogue within his or her field notes. Therefore, any classroom conversations presented in this article are reflective of our field notes and the spirit of the comments as they occurred in the classroom, and any verbatim quotations are presented in quotation marks.

We informally discussed our observations with Mr. Monroe on a regular basis to increase the validity of our interpretations, and the research team met periodically throughout the study, which helped confirm or dispel our existing perceptions and better inform future observations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Maxwell, 2005). In addition to classroom observations, we formally interviewed Mr. Monroe twice, once at the beginning of the study and again after the conclusion of the election. Mr. Monroe's initial interview served to better understand his teaching philosophy and plans for the semester. The final interview asked him to reflect upon his instruction. Both interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and an interview protocol can be found in Appendix A.

We also collected relevant artifacts from Mr. Monroe's instruction. These artifacts included websites used by Mr. Monroe to discuss politics, assignments related to politics or the election, and student work that illustrated political understanding. Examples of these types of artifacts are located in Appendices C through F. Finally, we administered pre- and post-surveys to the students in Mr. Monroe's class that were modeled after the surveys used in Journell's (2011b) study of teachers during the 2008 Presidential Election. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix B. Taken collectively, these various data sources were used to triangulate our interpretations of the data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

All data were analyzed using the procedures for case study analysis outlined by Stake (1995). We identified areas of interest within our observational and artifact data related to Mr. Monroe's political instruction, which we then separated into relevant themes using the 1971 APSA Standards as an initial guide. Once themes were established, we then looked for patterns within the data, focusing specifically on Mr. Monroe's instruction as a starting point. Mr. Monroe's

classroom speech, as well as student comments if he was leading a discussion, was coded using one of the eight APSA standards. Once a statement or discussion was coded, we then went back and analyzed artifact data related to that statement or discussion. A pattern soon emerged in which Mr. Monroe regularly placed emphasis on encouraging a critical understanding of political reality, political behavior, and polling data within his instruction. We then engaged in an issues-focused analysis (Weiss, 1994) of our interview and survey data in which we used the themes present in our observational and artifact data. Collectively, the data were triangulated to paint a complex understanding of Mr. Monroe's instruction. We then revisited existing research and theory to create a narrative of the case (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Stake, 1995).

FINDINGS

The findings presented in this study come from a semester-long election project in which students were expected to demonstrate knowledge of the platforms of the two major candidates and the politics behind the presidential election. Mr. Monroe had students work in teams that were grouped based on their candidate preference, and the goal of the project was to produce a poster that would serve to inform other Madison students about the election prior to them voting in a mock election run by Mr. Monroe's classes.⁹ Two examples of completed posters are provided in Appendix C.

Pre-survey results suggest that Mr. Monroe's students' knowledge of politics was limited at the outset of the semester. As Table 1 shows, students admitted to not being knowledgeable about politics or following current political events, although they seemed to recognize the importance of doing so.¹⁰

Table 1. Students' Pre-Survey Data (n = 25)

Question	Students' responses ^a
I consider politics important	3.92 (0.81)
I pay attention to politics and current events	2.68 (1.14)
I consider myself knowledgeable about politics	2.40 (1.11)
I enjoy discussing politics with others	2.64 (1.43)
I often talk about politics with my family and friends	2.36 (1.28)
I enjoy discussing current political events in school	3.04 (1.17)
I think following politics is important to being a good citizen	3.16 (1.17)
I have paid attention to coverage of the 2012 Presidential Election	2.80 (1.19)

I feel strongly about who should win the 2012 Presidential Election	3.40 (1.38)
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^aThe mean is given with the standard deviation in parentheses.

In an attempt to present our data in the most efficient way possible, we focus largely on whole-class discussions facilitated by Mr. Monroe. These discussions, unfortunately, tended to be dominated by a few vocal students and oftentimes do not show a broad representation of student engagement.¹¹ Most of the time, however, the whole-class discussions occurred after students had worked together on an aspect of the election project that directly pertained to the topic being discussed, and the discussions served as a summary of what Mr. Monroe hoped students had taken from the assignment. In other words, although the whole-class discussions may not show broad student participation, every student was engaged with the topics being discussed as part of their election project. When applicable, we include the election project assignment that was related to a specific discussion in Appendices C–F.

Fostering a Critical and Realistic Understanding of Politics and Political Behavior

Throughout the semester, Mr. Monroe framed the election as a political game of chess in which every word uttered by a candidate and every decision made by a campaign was strategic. Mr. Monroe began this type of analysis with the Republican and Democratic National Conventions, which coincided with the first 2 weeks of the school year. In addition to using the RealClearPolitics (RCP) electoral map to have students hypothesize why the parties chose to hold their conventions in Florida and North Carolina, Mr. Monroe had his students analyze the lineup of speakers at each convention, as well as the rhetoric used by those individuals. For example, on August 28, he had the following exchange with his students:

Mr. Monroe:	Who watched last night’s coverage of the RNC? What did you see?
Billy:	Different people talking. I saw the vice president, or the vice presidential candidate.
Mr. Monroe:	Right. Paul Ryan. He was the keynote speaker, the main event.
Student¹²:	Mike Huckabee spoke.
Mr.	Yeah he did. Who is Mike Huckabee? (He writes Huckabee’s name on the board.)

Monroe:	
Student:	He has his own show.
Student:	He ran for president once.
Mr. Monroe:	We haven't really talked about this yet, but before Mitt Romney became the Republican nominee, he had to run a primary against people like Newt Gingrich and Herman Cain. You may have heard of those names before. Mike Huckabee ran in the Republican primary in 2008, and he does have his own show on Fox News. He is good in front of a camera, and that is part of the reason he was asked to speak. He is also known as an evangelical. Does anyone know what that means? (Silence.) Come on, someone knows what that means, right? (Continued silence; he explains the definition of "evangelical".) A lot of Republican voters are also evangelicals, and [Huckabee] might excite people to vote for Romney. And Romney has a problem there. Does anyone know Romney's religion?
Several students:	Mormon.
Mr. Monroe:	Right. So, everything Republicans and Democrats do at these conventions is trying to get votes. Who else spoke?
Students:	Condoleeza Rice.
Mr. Monroe:	What do you know about her?
Student:	She worked for Bush.
Mr. Monroe:	Yeah, she was the Secretary of State under Bush after Colin Powell left. I think she is from Colorado. What does she look like?

Students:	She is Black.
Mr. Monroe:	Right (he writes “White” beside Huckabee’s name and “African-American” beside Rice’s name). There was another speaker who talked after Condoleeza Rice last night. She is the governor of New Mexico. Did anyone catch her name? (Silence; he writes “Susana Martinez” on the board and writes “Hispanic” beside it.) This was “not an accident.” What is tough about politics is that you have to hit different demographics ... the Democrats will do the same thing. If you don’t get elected, you don’t get to pass any of your policies.

In this excerpt, Mr. Monroe highlights political realities by noting the often subversive way politicians attempt to influence voter behavior. By noting that the lineup of diverse speakers was “not an accident” but rather a purposeful attempt by the Republican Party to present a visual representation of the ideological and racial diversity present within the party, Mr. Monroe was having his students think critically about the messages, both explicit and implicit, that were being used by both campaigns.

Another example occurred at the end of the Democratic National Convention; Mr. Monroe referenced the phrase, “Osama bin Laden is dead, and General Motors is alive,” which had been a focal point of Vice President Biden’s speech at the convention. After asking students to identify which part of the electorate Biden was targeting with this phrase, Mr. Monroe returned to the RCP map and stated,

I read a study recently that said one in eight people in Ohio were positively affected by the [auto] bailout. If you do the math, if Obama picks up Ohio and Michigan, that gets him to 255 [electoral votes], which means he only needs a couple of other states. It is basically targeted advertising.

Then, after each convention, Mr. Monroe had students follow the RCP map to determine whether each candidate received a bump in their polling numbers, and if so, the size of the bump. Appendix D shows the formal assignment that Mr. Monroe had his students complete for their election projects related to the national conventions.

Mr. Monroe also regularly highlighted examples of how politicians use rhetoric to purposefully spin news and information so that it portrays their agenda in a positive light. Following the release of the September jobs report, for example, which stated that unemployment had dropped from 8.3% to 8.1% and the workforce had added 96,000 jobs, Mr. Monroe illustrated how both the Obama and Romney campaigns were taking apart the numbers to support their respective narratives, which he stated was “what politicians do.” Another example occurred after Romney’s

infamous 47% comment that was caught on video while he was speaking at a private fundraiser.¹³ Mr. Monroe unpacked the numbers behind the comment using a pie chart from *The Washington Post* and had the following exchange with his class:

Mr. Monroe:	This is something the media has run with. Watch MSNBC tonight—they are very liberally biased—they have been slamming Romney for this. Then you turn to Fox News and they are playing defense. That is how I like to watch the news; I like to see how both sides react to the same story. But overall, I think this will hurt him. How could it help him?
Peter:	People are cheating the system.
Mr. Monroe:	Right. So, it might excite the Republican base. Not everyone votes, so it is important to get your base out to vote (he brings up 2008 and how Obama got his base to vote). If this can excite the conservative base, it might get them out to vote. If 80% of Republicans vote, and 60% of Democrats vote, then the Republicans will win.

Mr. Monroe then had students apply these lessons to the presidential debates. On the eve of the first debate, he had his students read an article published by National Public Radio online (Spiegel, 2012) that discussed how politicians often pivot away from potentially damaging questions and reframe the premise of the question on their own terms. The following is an excerpt of the conversation that occurred after his students had read the article:

Mr. Monroe:	These guys have been training since June on how to evade questions. George W. Bush, although not a great debater, was awesome at the pivot. Both [Obama and Romney] are really good at it. That is why they won their primaries. If you can take a tough question and turn it into something positive, then you are a “daggum magician.”
Peter:	Why don't they answer questions directly?
Student:	It would make them look bad.
Mr.	Yeah, I mean what if the moderator tonight asks Obama about the high

Monroe:	unemployment rate that is going on right now. That won't be good for him. He will try to pivot away from that question and focus on something positive his administration has done.
Daniel:	Both are going to be doing it, so you can't penalize one and not the other.

That night, Mr. Monroe required that students watch at least the 1st hour of the debate and take notes using a chart in which students wrote down the topic being discussed and each candidate's response, including nonverbal communication and examples of pivots.

The following day, it was evident that many of Mr. Monroe's students had been able to apply what they had learned to their analysis of the debate, as this excerpt from the ensuing discussion illustrates:

Mr. Monroe:	So, what did you think about the debate? I saw where a lot of you took notes.
Vanessa:	I wrote down that they pivoted a lot. For example, when Obama got a question about social security, he started talking about his grandmother. And Romney was vague about the positions he was going to cut.
Peter:	They seemed to be all over the place. They didn't really stay on the questions.
Mary:	I wrote down some pivots. On one question, Obama went from jobs to taxes.
Mr. Monroe:	These guys don't really have 30 seconds to think before they answer, so a lot of times they just get going and then try to tie it in [to the question].

Mr. Monroe then supplemented these discussions by having students read post-debate commentary on FactCheck.org, which provided a stark contrast to what students were seeing on various cable news networks.

A final way in which Mr. Monroe sought to expose his students to the realities of politics was by having them explore the influence of money on the political process. In our initial interview, he

mentioned that he wanted his students to be “looking at where the money is spent.” Specifically, he said that he wanted them to “look at how much money is spent on advertising in certain states and not others,” especially by Super PACs and other types of independent organizations.

In class, Mr. Monroe began this analysis by discussing the differences between hard and soft money and having each student complete an assignment comparing the different funding sources for Obama and Romney, which can be seen in Appendix E.¹⁴ Then, as a class, he had his students visit a *New York Times* webpage (Ashkenas, Ericson, Parlapiano, & Willis, 2012) on their laptops that chronicled the amount of hard and soft money raised by each of the campaigns. Mr. Monroe then had students scan the webpage and call out how much money had been raised for the each of the candidates, starting with each candidate’s hard money earnings and followed by contributions made by various Super PACs. Mr. Monroe wrote down their responses on the board, and Table 2 shows the final list created by the class.

Table 2. List of Hard and Soft Money Contributions Compiled by Mr. Monroe’s Class on 10/9/12

Obama	Romney
\$432 million (hard money)	\$279 million (hard money)
\$40 million	\$88 million
	\$37 million
	\$31 million
	\$28 million
	\$17 million
	\$9 million
	\$8 million

The following is an excerpt of the ensuing discussion that occurred.

Mr. Monroe:	None of this outside money was allowed until 2009. A Supreme Court decision called <i>Citizens United</i> declared that money is free speech so there is no limit on it because you have the right to free speech. What do you think about this? What is your gut reaction to soft money?
Student:	A little sketchy.
Mr. Monroe:	Do you think it is a good loophole?

Seth:	A good loophole for candidates to get more money from donors.
Mr. Monroe:	Who is it really good for?
Seth:	Romney.
Mr. Monroe:	Right, Republicans. So, what you are seeing is that companies are giving tons of money. What you are doing is giving people who have money a much bigger voice. Obama's top five contributors in 2008 were all banks. [McCain's] top five contributors in 2008 were all banks, and they were the same banks [as the ones who gave to Obama]. Why did they do that? Why did the same banks give so much money to both candidates?
Seth:	So no matter who won they would be on the good side of them.

In a subsequent lesson, Mr. Monroe then had students compare this information with an interactive *Washington Post* website (“Presidential Campaign Stops,” 2012) that chronicled the visits of prominent campaign figures to various states. Students were able to see that not only was there a disparity in how money was being raised but that the campaigns were also distributing it unevenly—swing states and states with higher numbers of electoral votes were receiving more candidate visits and hosting more fundraisers.

When we interviewed Mr. Monroe at the end of the semester, he seemed to believe that his students had developed a realistic understanding of the political process. As he stated, “I really feel like the class gets it. I feel like they understand, you know, all of the mechanisms, but also sort of how it really works.” Focusing specifically on the presidential election, he continued by saying, “I think 100% of them understand how it works. And not just that you need 270 [electoral] votes, but how a campaign gets put together. I think they get it. I mean, I am pleased with their understanding.” Although his impressions were based largely on anecdotal evidence from class discussions and monitoring of student work over the course of the semester, the completed election projects offered supporting evidence that students understood the political processes behind the election. Mr. Monroe remarked that he was pleased with the sophisticated ways in which his students explained electoral strategies and campaign finance issues to those who passed by their posters on the way to the “voting booths” during the mock election.

Understanding and Using Polling Data

Mr. Monroe stated at the beginning of the semester that one of his goals was for his students to “[keep] track of national polls, state polls, in the swing states.” Monitoring polling data, therefore, became a regular staple of his instruction throughout the semester. As early as the second day of class, Mr. Monroe began discussing the importance of looking at polling data with a critical eye. In a preliminary discussion of the Electoral College, he cautioned his students on placing too much value on national polls. Then, as the semester progressed, Mr. Monroe encouraged students to become discerning in which state polls they trusted. He noted that some polling organizations had a reputation for leaning toward a certain political ideology and may have skewed their data by manipulating the types of respondents they selected. Instead, he encouraged students to use RCP, which provided an average of results from multiple polling agencies which, as Mr. Monroe noted, minimized the effect of margins of error.

After establishing guidelines for assessing the credibility of polling data, Mr. Monroe then used the RCP map to actively monitor the status of the election. After important events, Mr. Monroe would visit the map to see if one of the candidates had received a bump in the polls. These observations usually turned into a discussion in which students were asked to think critically about the next steps in the campaign, as this excerpt from September 27 illustrates:

Mr. Monroe:	(He opens the RCP map and asks students if anything had changed since the last time they had checked; several students notice that Obama’s electoral total had increased.) Right. Eighteen electoral votes have been attributed to Obama. Anyone know which state that is?
Student:	Ohio.
Mr. Monroe:	Right. And Ohio is a really important state. Like they said on [<i>CNN Student News</i>], every president who has won Ohio has gone on to win the election since when?
Vanessa:	1964.
Mr. Monroe:	So, let’s look at the numbers. The polling suggests that Obama is up by 5.4%, and on this site, if someone gets up by more than 5%, then they are placed in the “leaning” category, which is why they gave Obama the electoral votes. There has been a lot of movement by Obama in the past week. Why?
Student:	The 47% thing.

Mr. Monroe:	Yeah. It seems to have really hurt Romney. Even here in North Carolina, it is showing Obama up by a percent, which is a change. So, based on these numbers, it looks like what?
Monique:	It could change quickly.
Mr. Monroe:	If it moved 5% for Obama in 1 week, then it could do the same for Romney. Depending on which station you watch, they will say it's over, that Obama has it in the bag, or they will say it is still really close. You have to consider things like margin of error and the accuracy of polling. I mean, look at these polls; one says Obama is up by a percent, another says he is up by 8%. So, we don't know what is truly accurate. But if you are running Romney's campaign, what are you thinking?
Student:	You have to assume the polls are correct and do something to change it.
Mr. Monroe:	Right, and he needs to do it soon. And he will get an opportunity next week. Anyone know what is next week?
Seth:	The debate.
Mr. Monroe:	Right. The first presidential debate is next Wednesday. You need to go ahead and make plans to watch. There will be three debates, and people usually watch the first debate and last debate, so Romney really needs to do a good job in that first debate. He needs to do something quick to change the momentum.

Throughout the semester, it appeared that Mr. Monroe's students were able to apply what they had learned about polling data to arguments produced by political pundits. For example, on the eve of the election Mr. Monroe had his students compare Nate Silver's prediction of an Obama victory with the Morris prediction described in the introduction of this article. Students noted the stark differences in the two predictions and quickly determined that Silver's was more realistic and compared more favorably to the RCP averages while Morris's prediction relied on one poll to be completely accurate. In their own electoral predictions made later in that same class, most students predicted an Obama victory based on the RCP averages, but even those who felt Romney would win believed the result would be close and were hoping that a few of the key swing states would break Republican at the last minute.

The students, in other words, had learned to make informed predictions based on polling data. Mr. Monroe often took this process one step further by having students engage in political strategizing. On September 18, for example, Mr. Monroe had his students read an article from *The Week* (2012) about Obama’s post-convention bounce in the polls and the state of the race at that point. Mr. Monroe then had students complete an activity using the RCP electoral map, which can be found in Appendix F, that asked them to assume the role of a Romney campaign manager and strategize realistic ways in which Romney could reach 270 electoral votes given monetary constraints. After students completed this activity, Mr. Monroe pulled up the RCP electoral map and had students break down the way each swing state was leaning. Table 3 shows the final tally that Mr. Monroe wrote on the board.

Table 3. List of Electoral Votes Compiled by Mr. Monroe’s Class on 9/18/12

Obama (safe votes): 237		Romney (safe votes): 191
13	VA	
29	FL	
6	IA	
18	OH	
10	WI	
	NC	15
9	CO	
6	NV	
4	NH	
332		206

After compiling this list of electoral votes, Mr. Monroe then asked his class to report what they had decided to do if they were a Romney campaign manager. After some discussion, the class decided to spend money in North Carolina to keep it in the Romney column, and then they chose to focus on the states with the highest number of electoral votes where the polling data was reasonably close (Iowa, Florida, and Virginia). That strategy would have put Romney at 264 electoral votes, and the class determined that he could still win the election even without winning Ohio as long as he carried one other swing state besides New Hampshire. At the conclusion of the discussion, Mr. Monroe summarized the activity by saying

This is what the Romney strategists are doing right now, trying to figure out the best way to get to 270. Romney has his back up against the wall. It is harder for him to win, but he is really going to start picking states and going after them.

A similar example occurred on October 22. At this point in the campaign, Romney had begun to gain momentum following Obama’s lackluster first debate performance and the fallout from the Benghazi embassy attack.¹⁵ Mr. Monroe had his class complete another chart of the swing states using the RCP map, which is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. List of Electoral Votes Compiled by Mr. Monroe’s Class on 10/22/12

Obama	VA 13	Romney
201		206
OH 18		FL 29
WI 10		NH 4
MI 16		CO 9
PA 20		Total 248 (if given VA, 261)
IA 6		
NV 6		
Total 277		

Then, Mr. Monroe had his students again take the role of a Romney campaign manager. The following is an excerpt of the ensuing discussion.

Mr. Monroe:	So, it is much closer than when we did this a couple weeks ago. So, my question is, if I am on the Romney campaign, what do I need to do? (Students start shouting random states that are leaning toward Obama.) No, what do I need to do first? I need to hold the leads that I have. Then, what do I have to do?
Seth:	Win Virginia.
Mr.	That would put it at 261. Romney would then have to win one of the top four states on Obama’s list, either Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan, or Pennsylvania, or two of the

Monroe:	smaller ones, like Iowa and Nevada. So, what would you do? You have a certain amount of money—I don't know what it is, but you can only spend so much. Which ones do you go for?
Seth:	Ohio. It is the lowest for Obama and has the highest Electoral College votes.
Vanessa:	Wisconsin and Michigan.
Seth:	Wisconsin and Ohio.
Mr. Monroe:	(to Vanessa) Obama is up by 5 points in Michigan. That is a lot to overcome in two weeks. Something strange would have had to happen for that to occur. Romney has already “whooped” him in a debate and he didn't overcome him in Michigan, so it is unlikely that it will happen by Election Day.
Seth:	If he chooses one state, then Obama will have to spend money there to neutralize it.
Mr. Monroe:	Seth brings up a good point—what is Obama's countermove? I have an article I want to show you real quick. (Mr. Monroe reads excerpts from an article in <i>The News & Observer</i> [Christensen, 2012] about Romney feeling confident enough in North Carolina to move much of his campaign there to other states). I think this is smart of Romney. Where do you think they are going? (Students start answering with toss-up states.) Right. Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.

This excerpt illustrates the way in which Mr. Monroe wanted students to think strategically about the election. He started with simple electoral math—ways for Romney to reach 270 electoral votes. Then, he incorporated what the students had learned about campaign finance, specifically that advertising, travel, and other ways of promoting candidates cost money and required that candidates make strategic decisions in light of limited resources. Finally, he added an additional layer of complexity by noting that all political maneuvers resulted in a countermove by the other side.

This latter point was reinforced even after the election had concluded. On the day after the election, Mr. Monroe listed on the board early numbers that suggested Romney had failed to connect with non-White voters. Table 5 shows the percentages that Mr. Monroe used.

Table 5. Voting Demographics Used by Mr. Monroe on 11/7/12

Obama		Romney
39	White	60
93	Black	7
69	Hispanic	30
75	Asian	23

Note. The numbers represent the percentages of each group that voted for a particular candidate. In some cases, the numbers do not total 100% due to either rounding or support of a third-party candidate.

After explaining to students that Romney actually received more Black support than McCain had received in 2008 and that many Latino/as had switched to the Democratic Party over the previous two decades due to Republican immigration policies, Mr. Monroe then asked students to hypothesize on the future of the Republican Party. He stated,

So, you are a strategist. You work for the Republican Party. Which demographic are you going to try for? (Students start mumbling answers.) I guess I should have told you about population growth first. The slowest growing demographic is White people, and the fastest growing demographic is Hispanic people. So, you would have to either win 80% of the White votes or go someplace else. But what are they going to do? They are probably going to have to change their policy on immigration. In the primary, all of the candidates were anti-immigration and some were not overly respectful, although Romney was more respectful than most. A president's first term is about getting re-elected, but the second term is about building a legacy. I have a feeling that Obama is going to push the Dream Act in his second term, and I think a lot of Republicans are going to support it. If they want to win in 2016 or 2020, they will have to change their position on immigration or get 100% of White people. This is what political operatives do.

When we interviewed Mr. Monroe at the end of the study, he stated that one of the successes of the semester was his students being able to think about the future and predict possible political outcomes. As he said, "They come in with questions. 'Who's going to run in 2016?' You know, not only about this election, but going forward. I mean, I like that they are asking about what is going to happen in the future." He continued with an example from that day's lesson in which they briefly discussed the possibility of Puerto Rico becoming a state, "The first thing they said was 'Electoral College' and that it would probably be a blue state and that Republicans might block it. I think, if you can answer that, I mean, I think that they do really understand it."

Summary of Election Instruction

When asked to assess the merits of his disciplinary approach over the course of the semester, Mr. Monroe stated that he believed his students enjoyed discussing the political aspect of the election. Specifically, he believed that “they will be more interested in politics ... and government later on,” which he attributed to his focus on politics and political strategizing. Students’ post-survey results, which are listed in Table 6, appeared to corroborate Mr. Monroe’s opinion.¹⁶ Although we recognize that multiple factors, including simply being exposed to the presidential election, could have accounted for the increase in students’ positive opinions toward politics, we believe that the students’ responses to the statements specific to Mr. Monroe’s election coverage are worth noting. It seems clear that students enjoyed Mr. Monroe’s approach to teaching the election over the course of the semester.

Table 6. Students’ Post-Survey Data (n = 25)

Question	Students’ responses ^a
I consider politics important	4.60 (0.57)
I pay attention to politics and current events	4.04 (0.84)
I consider myself knowledgeable about politics	3.84 (0.80)
I enjoy discussing politics with others	3.56 (1.32)
I often talk about politics with my family and friends	3.40 (1.19)
I enjoy discussing current political events in school	3.88 (1.01)
I think following politics is important to being a good citizen	3.52 (1.04)
I have paid attention to coverage of the 2012 Presidential Election	4.68 (0.55)
I feel strongly about who should win the 2012 Presidential Election	4.08 (1.18)
I have enjoyed talking about the 2012 Presidential Election in Civics class	4.76 (0.59)
I enjoyed completing Mr. Monroe’s election project	4.76 (0.59)

^aThe mean is given with the standard deviation in parentheses.

Existing research tells us that Mr. Monroe’s students received a depth of understanding about the election that is not typically found in secondary civics classrooms in the United States. Although these findings are specific to Mr. Monroe’s classroom and pedagogical skillset, we believe that social studies teachers in comparable contexts can take a similar approach to infusing disciplinary knowledge into their instruction. The remainder of this article will discuss the

implications of these findings for both secondary social studies education and social studies teacher preparation.

DISCUSSION

Returning to the question posed by Niemi and Smith (2001) regarding the purpose of secondary civics courses, we do not believe that introducing students to the disciplinary practices of political scientists and training them for citizenship are mutually exclusive. As Kahne and Middaugh (2008) noted, having students monitor current political events is a hallmark of quality civic instruction. Disciplinary-focused civics instruction goes beyond awareness and asks students to become critical consumers of political information.

Using the APSA Committee on Pre-Collegiate Education's (1971) standards as a guide, we believe that Mr. Monroe's instruction touched on nearly all of the APSA's eight purposes for K–12 political education. By having students track campaign contributions, distinguish between hard and soft money, and use that information to monitor and predict where the candidates spent their time throughout the campaign, Mr. Monroe was certainly encouraging a greater understanding of the realities of political life (Standard 1), as well as increasing students' knowledge of political behavior and the legal structures surrounding governmental institutions and processes (Standard 2). In addition, by having students continually track polling data and then strategize and predict actions of the campaigns, Mr. Monroe was having students think about political phenomena in conceptually sophisticated ways (Standard 4), encouraging an understanding of the processes of social scientific inquiry (Standard 5), and developing students' capacity to make analytical judgments about political decisions (Standard 6). Finally, our observational and survey data suggest that these endeavors increased the capacities of Mr. Monroe's students to effectively participate in a democratic society (Standard 8), although we also acknowledge that determining civic competency is difficult to quantify.

We would argue that Mr. Monroe did not address APSA Standards 3 and 7 during his election instruction. Standard 7 of the APSA standards asks teachers to encourage their students to develop an understanding of the social psychological sources and historical–cultural origins of their own political values, as well as critically analyze the personal/social implications of alternative values. Although Mr. Monroe did not explicitly address this standard within the election project, he did have students assess their own political beliefs (Beeson, Journell, & Ayers, 2014) and often referenced the historical development of political parties in the United States and the cultural stereotypes that are often associated with Democrats and Republicans. Finally, Mr. Monroe rarely, if ever, addressed non-American political systems (Standard 3), which is a limitation of his instruction and possibly a reflection of the constraints of the high-stakes, end-of-course state assessment.

Despite the lack of explicit attention to these two standards, we believe that Mr. Monroe's instruction contained a greater disciplinary focus than the typical civics curriculum. The question

becomes, then, what impact this disciplinary focus had on students' civic understanding and potential for civic engagement. Although they may not have reached the level of sophisticated political thinking used by political theorists, Mr. Monroe's students were able to better understand the ways in which public support is generated, mobilized, and used by political actors, which is an essential foundation for rational political thought (Freeden, 2008, 2013). Mr. Monroe's students also were able to separate political fact from partisan opinion and critically evaluate claims made about the status of the election, a skill that will serve them well as adults. In addition, Mr. Monroe's students were able to analyze the connection between politics and money, which is an important aspect of how power is wielded within the political arena and, according to Freeden (2013), an essential context for the development of political thinking. Finally, a traditional hallmark of effective civic participation is engaging in civic deliberations about public policy and current political issues (e.g., Hess, 2009; Mutz, 2006; Walsh, 2004), but productive discussions can only occur when participants are armed with accurate information. By being able to critically evaluate political information, Mr. Monroe's students were able to practice the skills needed to make reasoned political decisions.

Increases in students' political engagement are more challenging to determine. Research on similar types of disciplinary approaches in undergraduate political science courses suggests that this type of instruction would encourage increased political engagement, but there are limitations in comparing undergraduate students and high school sophomores' political efficacy. Undergraduates, who are of voting age, have more opportunities to become engaged in the political process. The majority of Mr. Monroe's students were at least 2 years from being able to vote, and although research suggests that adolescents can become involved in the political process (e.g., Diemer & Li, 2011; Gordon, 2007), the opportunities are fewer, and access to the political arena is often more difficult for K–12 students than for adults. Future research is needed to determine whether a greater disciplinary focus in high school civics classes leads to greater political engagement, both as adolescents and as young adults.

Critics may also argue that Mr. Monroe's instruction offered a cynical view of the American political system. Mr. Monroe did not shy away from his belief that politicians often lie and misrepresent data to win elections, and he encouraged his students to view actions of candidates and political operatives with a fair amount of skepticism. Research suggests that individuals are increasingly disenchanted with both their elected officials and the political process (e.g., Hatier, 2012; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002), and this type of disciplinary approach to civics instruction is unlikely to alter those perceptions. Yet, we would argue that forcing students to adhere to a narrative that frames elected officials as always working to serve the needs of their nation and constituents is inaccurate and does not prepare students to understand the real-life political world. Politicians too often make decisions based on lobbyists, donors, and public opinion polls rather than their own ideological convictions, and we believe, as did the APSA's Committee on Pre-Collegiate Education (1971), that students should be exposed to these political realities.

From an instructional standpoint, it appeared that the disciplinary approach used by Mr. Monroe seemed to make following politics more engaging. Through the use of polling data and other disciplinary tools, Mr. Monroe framed the study of politics as an active process in which students were able to develop political strategies and predict political outcomes. By simulating the decisions made by each campaign, students were able to better understand and rationalize the continual game of chess that occurs among candidates and political operatives as they attempt to shape a narrative for the electorate. They also were able to simulate the same type of decisions that political operatives make when they are faced with having to balance political needs with limited financial resources.

Another salient implication of our findings is that political thinking is not innate. Having students take a disciplinary approach to civics involves a considerable amount of scaffolding. Mr. Monroe did not ask his students to strategize or predict early in the semester; rather, he started this process by first introducing them to social inquiry tools and background information on such topics as campaign finance reform. Although Mr. Monroe did not delve deeply into this initial information, he provided a general overview of the essential aspects of each (e.g., explaining margin of error in polling data), and students were able to apply this newfound knowledge to real-life situations by the end of the semester.

One potential limitation to Mr. Monroe's instruction, however, is that he never provided opportunities for students to use disciplinary tools themselves. Standard 5 of the APSA Committee on Pre-Collegiate Education (1971) report stated that students need to develop an understanding of *and* skill in the processes of social scientific inquiry. We would argue, for example, that Mr. Monroe's students developed an understanding of polling data, but they did not develop the skills needed to create and implement a poll of their own. Only then would they have been able to really grasp the mathematics behind polling data, which is integral to understanding concepts such as margin of error and response bias (P. H. Wilson & Journell, 2011). Given the ubiquitous nature of the presidential election, Mr. Monroe could have easily had his students collect data within the community or from the student body and evaluate the process. Such an activity would have given students a more complex understanding of polling data, which they then could have applied to their understanding of the real polling data they were analyzing in class.

Similar to the way in which historical thinking requires that students mimic the skills of document analysis and historical interpretation used by professional historians, students in civics should be able to practice the skills used by political scientists. Mr. Monroe's instruction is an excellent example of how students can replicate the ways in which political scientists analyze data and predict political behavior. For a true disciplinary experience, however, students would need practice in how political scientists form research questions and collect data. Such projects could create opportunities for interdisciplinary collaborations, such as having civics students collect data on environmental or other socio-scientific issues that could be then used as part of the science curriculum or partnering with math faculty who could have their students help with

any relevant statistical analyses once data is collected (P. H. Wilson & Journell, 2011). These are just examples of how teachers could help their students develop the skills of social scientific inquiry, but it seems clear that further research on K–12 students’ development of these types of skills is needed.

Overall, however, we believe that Mr. Monroe diligently incorporated a disciplinary approach to understanding politics throughout the semester, which leads to a final implication of our findings. It was clear that Mr. Monroe possessed the necessary pedagogical content knowledge to successfully implement this type of approach in his classroom.¹⁷ Although we have no way of knowing exactly how Mr. Monroe’s background in political science aided his ability to teach disciplinary concepts, we believe that it helped shape his instruction.

We concur, then, with the APSA Committee on Education’s (1994) stance that preservice and practicing teachers should have a solid foundation in political science before being asked to teach civics or government courses. Preservice teachers are too often only required to take survey courses in political science as part of their content preparation, which is troubling considering that research suggests many teacher education programs in the United States require students engage in disciplinary approaches to teaching history as part of their requirements for social studies licensure (Adler, 2008). To teach civics from a disciplinary perspective, teachers must have knowledge of survey research and methods of political science data analysis, and a teacher without this type of pervasive understanding would not have been able to develop the level of pedagogical content knowledge needed to scaffold students’ political thinking the way Mr. Monroe did in this study. Social studies teacher education programs are too often history-centric, and as a result, the teachers they produce often lack the disciplinary understanding to teach non-history courses in a meaningful way. The findings from the present study illustrate the need for a well-rounded curriculum in which preservice social studies teachers develop a basic understanding of the skills related to all of the disciplines they may encounter in public education.

Finally, we need to address two limitations of our findings. First, the fact that we observed an honors class may have affected the type of data we collected with respect to students’ ability to think politically. Mr. Monroe also taught a section of general-level civics in addition to his two honors classes, and in our interviews, he stated that he believed the students in the general-level class reaped the same benefits from the disciplinary approach as did his students in the honors classes. Unfortunately, our schedules did not allow for observation of the general-level class, so we cannot corroborate Mr. Monroe’s opinion. Future research is needed to determine whether this type of disciplinary approach can work in all levels of civics instruction.

The other limitation to our findings is that this study took place during a period of heightened political awareness. Certainly, situating the study during the presidential election allowed for multiple opportunities for Mr. Monroe to engage in disciplinary instruction, but it also raises the question of how applicable these activities would have been in non-presidential election years.

Congressional and gubernatorial elections may offer similar opportunities for applying disciplinary knowledge to real-life contexts, but the fervor over these off-year elections rarely reaches that of presidential contests, and oftentimes, there are less polling data with which to work.

The social studies literature, however, offers examples of how teachers can simulate presidential election politics in non-election years, often with film (e.g., Journell, 2013a; Wolfford, 2012). Teachers could easily enter into the same types of conversations that we witnessed in Mr. Monroe's classrooms by combining these simulations with other historical examples of presidential elections. We would also argue that this type of disciplinary instruction could be used in conjunction with any major national issue, such as the U.S.'s decision whether to intervene in Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. Students, for example, could analyze polling data regarding public support of such a policy and use it to predict the political strategies of politicians on both sides of the aisle. Further research is needed, however, to better understand best practices for incorporating disciplinary approaches in civics courses during times of typical political awareness.

CONCLUSION

For students to become critical consumers of political information, they need to practice ways of critically thinking about the political world around them. In this article, we presented Mr. Monroe's instruction as an example of the possibilities that are afforded by incorporating a disciplinary approach to understanding polling data and political behavior in secondary civics courses. By having his students think like political scientists, we believe that Mr. Monroe achieved a level of civic competence in his classes that extended beyond what is found in the typical civics curriculum and will serve his students as adults participating within a democratic society. Being able to think politically is not a skill that is developed naturally. Rather, it needs to be taught, practiced, and scaffolded before it can be applied within real-life contexts. As politicians and political pundits continue to extend their reach through cable news networks and social media, it is the responsibility of social studies educators to train students how to see through misinformation and half-truths, discern political fact from opinion, and become active and engaged consumers of political information.

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Initial Interview

How many years have you been teaching?

What is your educational background?

Have you won any awards for your teaching?

How would you describe Madison High School?

How would you describe the honors and general level classes at Madison?

How would you describe the political climate of Madison? Of the surrounding community?

How would you describe the typical Madison student?

How would you characterize your classes with respect to political identity?

Where do you get your political information?

What is your teaching philosophy?

Describe how you plan to teach the presidential election this fall.

What do you think will be the big issues in this election?

Who will you vote for in the election?

Do you plan on telling your students who you plan to vote for? Why or why not?

Do you consider yourself a Democrat or a Republican?

How does the political climate of the school/community affect your instruction?

What steps do you take to ensure that your class is a politically tolerant environment?

Post-Interview

How do you think your coverage of the election went this semester?

How do you think your election project went?

How well do you think your students got involved in the election?

What specific things seemed to work with regard to getting students interested in the election?

If you could go back and do something different, what would it be? Why?

What do you hope your students took away from this experience?

Do you think they understood how a presidential election worked?

Do you feel you were able to keep a good balance between liberal and conservative viewpoints? Why or why not?

How did the school/community political climate affect your instruction?

Do you think your students could correctly identify who you voted for?

APPENDIX B

Student Survey

Demographic Questions

I am

Male

Female

I consider myself

African-American

Asian

Latino/Hispanic

Caucasian

Other _____

Please circle the number that best corresponds to your feelings regarding each individual statement. For the first 11 questions, 1 is “Strongly Disagree” and 5 is “Strongly Agree”

	Strongly			Strongly
	Disagree			Agree
1) I consider politics important.	1	2	3	4 5
2) I pay attention to politics and current political events.	1	2	3	4 5
3) I consider myself knowledgeable about politics.	1	2	3	4 5
4) I enjoy discussing politics with others.	1	2	3	4 5
5) I often talk about politics with my family and friends.	1	2	3	4 5
6) I enjoy discussing current political events in school.	1	2	3	4 5
7) I think following politics is important to being a good citizen.	1	2	3	4 5
8) I have paid attention to coverage of the 2012 Presidential Election.	1	2	3	4 5
9) I feel strongly about who should win the 2012 Presidential Election.	1	2	3	4 5
10) I have enjoyed talking about the 2012 Presidential Election in Civics class.	1	2	3	4 5
11) I enjoyed completing Mr. Monroe’s Election Project	1	2	3	4 5
12) I would consider myself (circle one):				

a) Democrat

b) Republican

c) Neither Democrat nor Republican

d) Unsure of my political affiliation

13) If I could vote in the 2012 Presidential Election, I would vote for (circle one):

a) Barack Obama

b) Mitt Romney

c) Another candidate

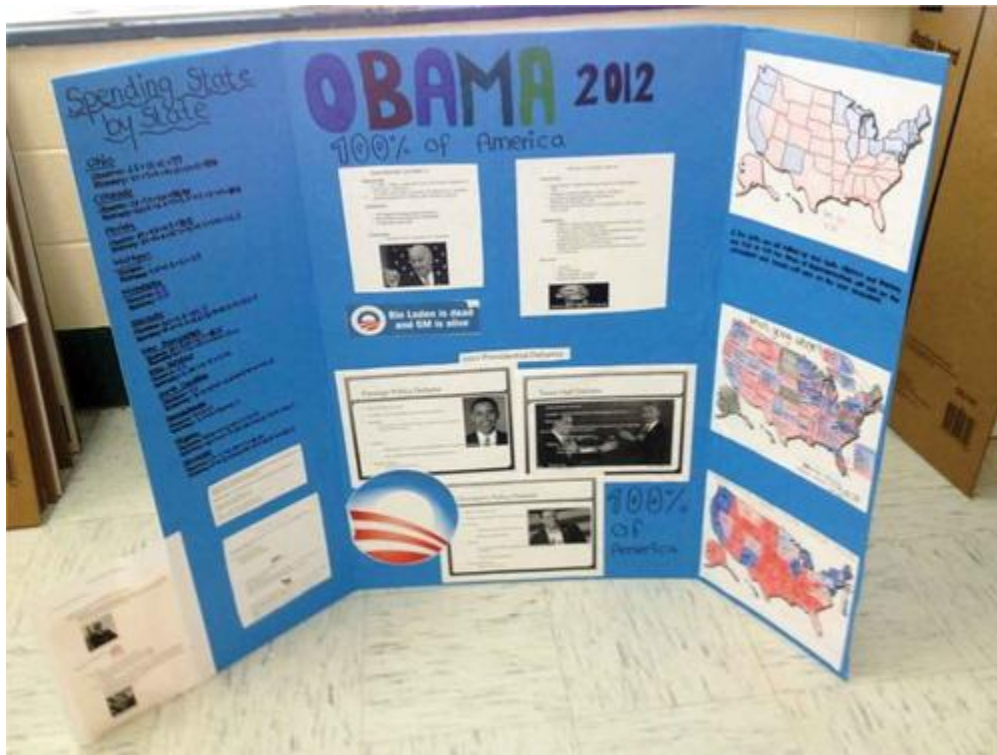
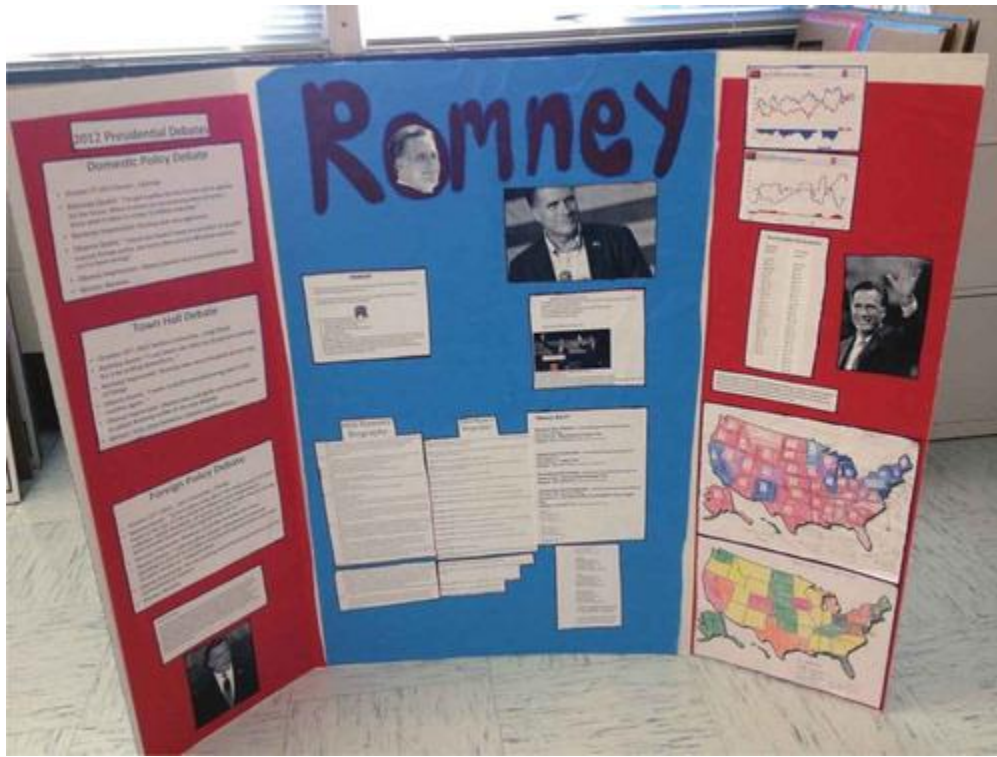
d) I would not vote

14) In the space below, please write what you know about Mitt Romney's political beliefs/policies

15) In the space below, please write what you know about Barack Obama's political beliefs/policies

APPENDIX C

Examples of Final Election Projects



APPENDIX D

Party Convention Assignment

Definition:	What is a national party convention?
Purposes:	List the purposes

Purpose 1

Purpose 2

Purpose 3

Republican National Convention: <http://www.gopconvention2012.com/>

Include a picture of the mascot

Dates

Location

Major speakers

Was there a post-convention bump? Explain why or why not.

Democratic National Convention: <http://www.demconvention.com/>

Include a picture of the mascot

Dates

Location

Major speakers

Was there a post-convention bump? Explain why or why not.

APPENDIX E

Campaign Finance Assignment

\$\$\$ Campaign Finance \$\$\$

Read 308–310 in your textbook and answer the following questions.

What must a candidate do if he or she receives a donation that exceeds \$200?

How much of his or her own money can a candidate spend?

Describe public funding of campaigns in one sentence.

Where does the government get the money to provide for public financing?

What is the difference between hard money and soft money?

Now, go to <http://www.opensecrets.org/pres12/index.php>.

How much money has Obama raised?

How much money has Obama spent?

Describe the source of Obama's funds.

What four states have given the most money?

List the top "contributors."

Click on the "Expenditures" tab. Examine the graph and chart and then, reproduce the pie graph

How much money has Romney raised?

How much money has Romney spent?

Describe the source of Romney's funds.

What four states have given the most money?

List the top "contributors."

Click on the "Expenditures" tab. Examine the graph and chart and then, reproduce the pie graph

Comparison: Answer the following question.

Compare how and where the two candidates spent their money. Does anything surprise you? Is there anything that you would do differently?

Synthesis: Answer the following question.

Compare the information that you have collected. What does this information tell you about each candidate, the campaign, and the likelihood of winning the election? Do you think it is fair for one candidate to have such a monetary advantage? What could be some alternatives to the current system?

APPENDIX F

Electoral Strategy Assignment

Use “Electoral College Map—Real Clear Politics” to examine this year’s political landscape.

Obama (Safe Votes): _____ Romney (Safe Votes): _____

Toss Up States and Margins: _____

If the election happened today, how many electoral votes would each candidate get?

Obama _____ Romney _____

Click “RCP Senate Ratings, Map” under “Battle for the Senate” to examine this year’s political landscape.

Democrats (Safe Seats): _____ Republicans (Safe Seats): _____

Toss Up States and Margins _____

If the election happened today, which party would have the majority in the Senate?

Democrats _____ Republicans _____

Click “RCP Senate Ratings, Map” under “Battle for the House” to examine this year’s political landscape.

Democrats (Safe Seats): _____ Republicans (Safe Seats): _____

Toss Up States and Margins _____

If the election happened today, which party would have the majority in the House?

Democrats _____ Republicans _____

List 3 different ways that Romney can reach 270. Which route do you think gives Romney the best chance to win?

If you were Romney's campaign advisor, which strategy would you devise to win the election? Discuss states and money.

What is the likely outcome of the battle for the Senate? What are the implications?

What is the likely outcome of the battle for the House? What are the implications?

What do the outcomes tell about how the government will operate over the next two years?

Notes

^aThe mean is given with the standard deviation in parentheses.

Note. The numbers represent the percentages of each group that voted for a particular candidate. In some cases, the numbers do not total 100% due to either rounding or support of a third-party candidate.

^aThe mean is given with the standard deviation in parentheses.

1. Perhaps the most notable examples are the oversampling of wealthy voters by *Literary Digest* in the 1936 Presidential Election (Squire, 1988), the early predictions of Thomas Dewey over Harry Truman by *The Chicago Tribune* and other major newspapers in the 1948 Presidential Election (McDonald, Glynn, Kim, & Ostman, 2001), and the 1988 California gubernatorial race that led to the so-called "Bradley Effect" in which White voters may lie about their willingness to vote for minority candidates (Payne, 2010).

2. It is worth noting that Fox News ultimately decided not to renew Morris's contract, although the network never indicated the motivation for its decision.

3. As Niemi and Smith (2001) noted, there is an implicit difference between "civics" and "government" courses. Civics conveys the idea of broad citizenship training, but among political scientists, the term "civics" represents an uncritical approach to studying politics that is not representative of the work of political scientists. Government, on the other hand, tends to hold political connotations, which is why many states prefer to use "civics" to describe these types of courses. Even in states that offer courses in both civics and government, research suggests that

both tend to lean more toward citizenship training than introductory courses in political science (Journell, 2010a). We, therefore, use the term “civics” for brevity.

4. For example, thinking historically (Wineburg, 2001), economically (Schug & Wood, 2011), or geographically (Nagel, 2008) are ways in which other social studies disciplines encourage disciplinary thinking.

5. It is also worth noting that at least one study refuted the relationship between the use of disciplinary tools, specifically polling data, and students’ civic competence in undergraduate political science courses (Jones & Meinhold, 1999).

6. Research also has shown that when social studies teachers are asked to teach courses outside of their disciplinary backgrounds, it affects the way they view their content instruction (Gudmundsdottir & Shulman, 1987; S. M. Wilson & Wineburg, 1988).

7. Pseudonyms have been used for all participants and other identifying information.

8. One student marked “other” but did not offer a more detailed explanation.

9. In addition to the poster, Mr. Monroe had each student create a mock television advertisement for their candidate using iMovie. For more information on this aspect of the study, refer to Beeson et al. (2014).

10. The quantitative portion of one student’s survey was invalid, so her answers were not included in the quantitative portion of the survey analysis.

11. One student, Seth, was particularly vocal and quick to answer Mr. Monroe’s questions before others could contribute. His overbearing participation was a source of frustration for Mr. Monroe over the course of the semester. Although Mr. Monroe tried various methods of reducing Seth’s participation, it remained a problem for the entirety of the study.

12. Some students’ names were not known at the time data collection occurred.

13. At that fundraiser, Romney stated that 47% of Americans would vote for Obama because they were dependent on government entitlement programs and paid no income taxes. Romney continued by stating that his job was not to worry about that percentage of Americans and that he could never convince them to take personal responsibility for their lives (MoJo News Team, 2012). Unbeknownst to Romney, his words were being recorded by a Democratic opposition researcher who subsequently leaked the video to the liberal magazine *Mother Jones*.

14. In the American political system, hard money is defined as money given directly to a candidate and regulated by the Federal Election Commission. There are limits to the amount of hard money individuals can give to candidates. Soft money, on the other hand, is money given to a political party or a Political Action Committee, and there are no limits on the amount individuals or corporations can give to these organizations.

15. On September 11, 2012, the American embassy in Benghazi, Libya, was overrun, resulting in the death of four embassy personnel, including American Ambassador Christopher Stevens. The American response to the attack was criticized by many politicians and political pundits, and it became an important aspect of Romney's criticism of the President during the campaign.

16. As in the pre-survey, the quantitative portion of one student's survey was invalid, so her answers were not included in the quantitative portion of the survey analysis.

17. We would also argue that Mr. Monroe possessed exceptional technological pedagogical content knowledge, an aspect of the study that is explored elsewhere (Beeson et al., 2014).

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