

# Developing Citizens of the World

By Lindy G. Poling

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Since I was a child I have loved the study of history, but as a young teacher, I quickly discovered that not all of my students shared my passion. So I began experimenting with different methods to make the study of history more inviting. One of the most successful methods has proven to be inviting community speakers into the classroom: veterans, public policymakers, professors, journalists, peace activists, refugees, and others. We call this experiential learning approach “Community-in-the-Classroom” (CIC). Our program has virtually exploded in recent years, as more than 60 community members from all over the country and the world help me “team teach” our *Lessons of Vietnam/Recent International Relations (LOV/RIR)* elective each semester.

How does this approach to teaching affect student performance? Guest speakers can motivate students to think more critically about major historical themes by inviting them to read primary sources and stimulate them to discuss and debate the historical information presented to them. These discussions and debates encourage students to form their own defensible opinions regarding major historical events, as well as current global issues. They also give history a *human face*. Millbrook Senior Morgan Fuller commented, “Never have I taken a history class where you have the opportunity to hear so many intelligent people tell their own *personal stories*...I feel like an educated citizen for the first time.”

I also try to identify “learning opportunities” for students that go beyond the classroom, such as our *LOV/RIR Pen Pal Link Program*, which encourages students to ask questions and to explore history and current international topics with their “living history pen pal links.” Each year, approximately 125-150 students and LINKS from all over the globe are involved in this program at Millbrook High School—an extraordinary educational program that is very carefully monitored by the teacher. Links include: former South Vietnamese Ambassador, Nguyen Phong; Lt. Col. James Zumwalt and Mrs. Mouzetta Zumwalt-Weathers, the son and daughter of Medal of Freedom recipient, Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr.; Peace Studies Professor Frances Reynolds; Mr. David Rabadan, former State Department official; Mr. Loc Duong, former ARVN soldier and refugee; Ms. June Eldridge, former Deputy Director of the Arlington National Women’s Memorial, and Captain Sean Keenan, Millbrook HS Class of ’92, a Marine helicopter pilot currently who has served two tours in Iraq. Students engage in a collegial exchange of questions and answers via e-mail with their *link* throughout the semester. Each of these is an individual record of first person histories based on the link’s perspective, levels of responsibilities, and personal memories, and finally, the student’s resulting conclusions. *LOV/RIR* student, Tyler Esqueda, stated, “This experience has helped me think outside the box—that box being the United States of America...Through the speakers and the linking project, I have learned significant life lessons: always

keep an open mind and embrace other cultures.” And, Irazu Valenzuela, whose family recently emigrated to the U.S., added, “Now I can compare and make some parallels as to why families come to the U.S., because here they find freedom of speech and liberty.” At the end of the semester, students give this unique oral history project as a gift to their pen pal links. Duplicate copies of their oral history projects are being preserved in the Texas Tech University Vietnam Center Archives where we have our own archive collection.

In addition to the classroom speakers and the link project, students respond enthusiastically to extended historical learning opportunities like a newsletter club. At Millbrook High, over thirty students do all of the writing, editing, artwork and graphic design work for our nationally recognized newsletter, *Bridges*, for no extra grade! Their “reward” is realizing that their publication brings over 500 visitors per week (since 2001) to our websites ([www.wcpss.net/community\\_in\\_the\\_classroom/](http://www.wcpss.net/community_in_the_classroom/) and <http://mhs.wcpss.net/academics/poling/index.htm>). Contributors to the *Bridges* newsletter are encouraged to use a variety of primary sources, interpret their findings, and write about the lessons they have learned from their study of American history and recent international relations, as well as from our annual Washington, DC field trip experience! Each spring, *LOV* students, veterans, and parents are invited to spend a stimulating afternoon with leading foreign policy experts at the U.S. Institute of Peace. We have been privileged to hear from USIP Program Officers who have spent time in Iraq, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Darfur, and Vietnam. We also visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and interview its Founder and President, Mr. Jan Scruggs, as well as visit numerous other historical sites, including the Holocaust Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery. *Bridges* Newsletter topics have included: “What are the Lessons of Vietnam?” “Peacemaking in the Real World,” “Point/Counterpoint: The War in Iraq”, “Genocide in Darfur,” “The Ghost of Russia’s Past,” “Olympic Rings of Disunity,” “Iran’s Nuclear Ambition,” “Veterans Helping My Generation,” and “25 Years of Healing: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial.” Since 2003, the *Bridges* Newsletter Club has been a charter member of the National History Club. This gives us the opportunity to share ideas and activities with students and advisors in other clubs around the country! 2008-09 *Bridges* Newsletter Editor, Karissa Wojcik commented, “Through our class and writing for *Bridges*, I have become more aware of major foreign policy issues around the world...I have been introduced to important human rights concerns in Vietnam, the Congo, and Darfur.”

The *Community in the Classroom*\* methodology not only makes the study of history more exciting, but students are also being challenged to develop the important critical thinking and writing skills they need in order to become well-informed citizens and effective leaders in their communities. As Millbrook senior Jane Liu, exclaimed, “I have gained a sense of responsibility to be an active and knowledgeable citizen of the world!”