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**PARTICIPATE! An Urban Civic Education Curriculum
Promotes Active Citizenship
by
Jon Schmidt and Todd Alan Price**

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Abstract

The Illinois General Assembly passed Public Act 099-0434 in August 2015, requiring that all high school students complete a semester long civics course in order to graduate from an Illinois High School. With the passage of civic education legislation, Illinois becomes the 39th state to require its students to study civics in order to graduate. What makes Public Act 099-0434 unique is that it is the first education policy in the state to require a particular classroom pedagogy. The following study revisits the history and philosophy of citizenship and civics, and secondly and most practically, examines the resurgence of civic education in the third largest school district in the country, Chicago Public Schools, through the experiences of teachers using Participate! This study concludes with a discussion about current urban civic education practices and future research aspirations.

The Illinois General Assembly passed Public Act 099-0434 in August 2015, requiring that all high school students complete a semester long civics course in order to graduate from an Illinois High School. With the passage of civic education legislation, Illinois became the 39th state to require its students to study civics in order to graduate. What makes Public Act 099-0434 unique is that it is the first education policy in the state to require a particular classroom pedagogy. The General Assembly hoped to steer clear of traditional civic education course material that students found pedantic and uninspiring. The required pedagogies are: Service-learning; Discussion of contemporary and controversial issues; Simulations; and Instruction in government and government processes.

Two years prior to the new law, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) rolled out a collaboratively-designed civic education curriculum to a limited number of schools. This curriculum ultimately meshed well with the new law, offering opportunities for teachers to facilitate simulation, implement service-learning, and support controversial discussions in addition to providing content in government and government processes. With the statewide mandate, CPS revised its curriculum and *Participate!* was launched. *Participate!* is designed to provide teachers with high quality, flexible curriculum with an emphasis on active student engagement. *Participate!* aims to develop the knowledge, skills, habits, and dispositions for students to become better citizens.

Re-booting civic education as participation, though unique, is not entirely new; to be certain, civic education has a long history in the United States. Thomas Jefferson at the turn of the 18th century argued that the central purpose of the nation's schools was civic in nature; to prepare young people for active participation in democracy. Similarly, American philosopher and educator John Dewey in *Democracy and Education* (1916) suggested that democracy must be reborn in each new generation and that schools should prepare young people for the challenges of democracy.

But civic education has not always played such a central role in curriculum as the nation's schools have historically had to negotiate between competing

interests, including demands from industry leaders to align education to work or political leaders' various demands and claims on education that have more recently driven standardized curriculum and assessments. Implicit as well are the no less strident demands placed upon school leaders in the context of dwindling public resources, shifting societal demographics, and the ceaseless and frequent criticism of public education. These phenomena number but a few of the challenges arriving at the schoolhouse door. As schools have negotiated these complex phenomena, the presence and nature of civic education has ebbed and flowed in relation to local contexts, regional trends, and national crises.

The current moment is no different. Once again, civic education is being touted as necessary to address social ills. Given this backdrop, the following study revisits the history and philosophy of citizenship and civics, and secondly and most practically, examines the resurgence of civic education in the third largest school district in the country through the experiences of teachers using *Participate!* This study concludes with a discussion about current urban civic education practices and future research aspirations.

Citizenship education has a remarkable history in the American context. It is instructive to consider the aims, means and ends that Dewey (1916) articulated, along with the idea that education should serve to create model citizens. It is also helpful to consider how the meaning of citizenship has changed, thereby influencing policy frames, education reforms, and curriculum. Why and how has the notion of citizenship changed? How have those evolving ideas been reflected in classroom instruction? Much may be gained as well in our contemporary context by better understanding the manner in which civics as a curriculum is experienced by the teachers and the students.

But first let's consider the different eras in which civics has been offered using a theoretical curricular lens that we will term critical civics. To do critical civics, the authors of this paper acknowledge the foundational work of Dewey (1916) in *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*, and bind that monumental contribution with the more contemporary work of James Banks (2017) over one hundred years later in *Citizenship education and global migration: Implications for theory, research, and teaching*. These works bracket a century of educational philosophy and provide excellent demarcation points for imagining and reimagining civic education as a formative experience for citizenship and nation building. Next, we draw upon an assortment of germinal texts. Our aim herein is to underscore the shifting definition(s) and meaning(s) attributable to citizenship and civic education: Herbert M. Kliebard, (2004). *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*; Roger Smith, (1997). *Civic Ideals: Conflicting visions of citizenship in US History*; Ronald W. Evans, (2004). *The social studies wars: What should we teach the children?*; Joel Westheimer, (2015). *What kind of citizen? Educating our children for the common good*.

Each text provides essential background of civic education history and illuminates the tensions created by education reform efforts. Especially pertinent when we consider the curriculum struggles past are the efforts to implement civics during various periods of contested curriculum reform, including, for example, the "heyday" of the progressive education era and its efforts toward Social Meliorism, as outlined by Kliebard.

Noteworthy is the progression in our own thinking as authors, how "the struggle for the American curriculum" and "conflicting visions of citizenship in US History" relate perfectly to Westheimer's contemporary critical inquiry: "What kind of citizen" ought we develop? This naturally joins with Evan's essential question "what should we teach the children?" Definitions, classroom practices, and themes

revolving around social identity formation are not trivial matters! *Participate!* attempts to answer these questions and aims, as a formative curricula, to support problem-based methods, project-based learning, and community engagement opportunities, that address the urgent problems of our time.

If we as educators and curricularists are to address the problems and challenges of our own “era” intentionally, we need to be better informed in how the construction of divergent curricular strands (critical to Evans’ contention) emerge and continue to emerge. Given the different struggles over curriculum (Kliebard, 2004), and the general arguments over the meaning(s) behind civic education, we welcome the scholarly engagement that take these matters up in a serious and generative way. We begin then with *Civic Ideals* to better understand the meaning(s) of citizenship and civic education across different eras of American education, evolving alongside the growth and maturation of the country itself.

During the Jeffersonian Era, citizenship was imagined to be a societal good acquired through education. Jefferson was incensed with the idea of inherited privilege and, like other philosophers and rabble rousers of the American Revolutionary Period who sought to cast off the vestiges of monarchism, gave strong sentiment to a general education for all, including women. He essentially fought for much of his life after the revolution and the founding of a new country to ensure a sweeping role for the new government: to provide education for free to those who, through their demonstrated achievement, would merit such a reward. Given the generally assumed privilege of station afforded to white males, Jefferson hopefully struggled with the contradiction. Yet he was not immune to this, his otherwise self-serving latitude, nor was he unaware that not all were free or beneficiary (at this time) to his otherwise radical proposal. He rather relentlessly advocated for a people’s government that would provide three years of general education with the end of citizen-leadership. His was essentially an aim for a democratic meritocracy where the best and brightest, naturally like him, would receive continued subsidy and hence go on to fulfill their station in governing the young country.

Citizenship education in the post-Revolutionary period (1776-1830), much to the chagrin of Jefferson, the other presidents, and one Mary Wollstonecraft (an early feminist who advocated like Jefferson for co-education), was not embraced as a national agenda, although it served one in each state and local community. The general form of education, where it was available and desired by the constituency, took hold as a result of local initiatives and did, according to Smith, help to build a common culture and national identity. Unlike the United Kingdom where the upper class feared education of “the masses” and hence confirmed private education as the norm, Smith argues that education in the United States would serve the teeming multitudes, those not born of aristocratic stock, toward enfranchisement and liberty.

In the Jeffersonian Era assumed was an “ascriptive” citizenship where “the basic purpose of education should be to form the sort of moral character . . . needed for a republican citizenry to be truly virtuous” (Smith, 1997, p. 189). The Jacksonian Era, as Horace Mann and other Unitarian Ministers (who were likewise German university-educated) would subscribe, proposed to create a space where rich and poor alike would commingle and learn together, subsequently recognizing no class distinction(s). As Jefferson and fellow patriot Benjamin Rush had long championed, education was the vehicle for citizenship, a citizenship that would allow for effective participation in and an upholding of a republican form of government. During the Jacksonian Era, the Common Man emerged by way of the process of Common School schooling and citizenship subsequently meant independence.

Smith in his text draws from the proclamation of an Illinois superintendent in 1862 that “the chief end is to make good citizens. Not to make precocious scholars .

. . . not to impart the secret of imparting wealth . . . not to qualify directly for professional success . . . but simply to make good citizens” (Smith, 1997, p. 219). Smith also warned, however, that revisionist critics had different impressions of this vision, arguing that in practice citizenship education had a primary goal to prepare workers for the new factory system in growing urban areas (Smith, 1997, p. 220).

As previously noted, citizenship education could mean teaching toward a classless society or alternately for the children of immigrants to become obedient workers. Many years after Jefferson and Jackson there continued to be different meanings behind just what citizenship would turn out to be in the ever expanding America. At that time pedagogues from the more prestigious higher education institutions were busily philosophizing about just what education should be in a republican democracy with deeply contesting undercurrents being formed between their ideas of curriculum and the different tones of that curriculum in public schools across America. Not least of which of these tones were those played by adherents to Liberal Humanism whose affectation for a traditional curriculum based on knowledge of the ages and perennial great books conflicted with calls for a more vocational approach. Indeed, demographics for the nation were changing, especially with the emigre taking up places in the labor force. Liberal humanism seemed out of step with industrial demands.

Educational philosophers and budding curricularists responded. Reflecting a felt need for the democratization of the country, three different, progressive curricular strands emerged, standing in contrast to the preceding traditional one. They began to gain momentum during what came to be known as the Progressive Era. Developmentalism, Social Efficiency, and Social Meliorism characterize the complex efforts by progressive curriculum theorists to reform education with different aims, means and ends in mind. Developmentalism placed the child in the center of the educational enterprise, moving away from subject-centered curriculum into learning by doing and inspiring the attention of pedagogical progressives to the imagined developmental stages that a student goes through in acquiring knowledge and, more importantly, *being ready* to acquire knowledge. Social Efficiency was attributed to the efforts of administrative progressives, who became increasingly concerned with eliminating waste through efficiencies, or in other words, breaking up tasks into ever smaller parts for teachers to impart to their students. Social Efficiency in most ways sought to prepare students to fit into predetermined places in society including certain civic obligations to their communities. In stark contrast, radical educators in the Social Meliorist movement, led by left progressives, aspired to and leaned toward deliberative democracy. They would argue that education should build knowledge with the intent to change society. A curriculum focused on alleviating (or ameliorating, hence the name meliorism) social problems was their aim.

While different in spirit, each of the strands were utopian in nature; the end was a better society. One envisioned a society wherein individuals would develop and grow through the nurturing of their talents and proclivities, a second sought a more efficient society, and the third a more just society with the ability to shape it in new, novel ways. Ironically, Liberal Humanism as a curricular theory, though on the wane during the Progressive Era, proved rather resilient and continued to play a role in curriculum decision-making during the post-war period.

Citizenship education might well have played a role in the Liberal Humanism tradition, if only by the notion that gaining traditional, essential knowledge of the ages would lead one to impart or develop a philosophically benevolent and expansive view of the good society. We will argue, however, that the new approach to citizenship education, civic education, as embodied in the *Participate!* curriculum, reflects and draws upon the aforementioned curricular theories (Developmentalism,

Social Efficiency, Social Meliorism) that gained credulity primarily during the Progressive Era.

The 20th century in American public education, when viewed from the Jeffersonian Era perspective of preparation for democracy, can be seen as an ebb and flow between *unum* and *pluribus* (Butts, 1989) and liberal and republican ideologies. The *unum/pluribus* dichotomy infers a cultural tension, a struggle over the narrative of American history. Competing liberal and republican democratic ideologies, however, suggest a political tension. Liberals preference individual rights, self-sufficiency and limited government. Small 'r' republicans are more inclined to value communitarianism, enlightened participation, self-sacrifice, and pursuit of the common good. Indeed, the debate within the field of civic education has reflected this conflict as well. Both cultural and political tensions have been ever present in American history and have heavily influenced how we understand citizenship and how we have educated our children toward those understandings of citizenship.

As the nation faced specific challenges and/or changing circumstances, civic education curriculum theory and practice tended to adjust to meet the perceived needs of the nation. At the turn of the 20th century, the nation was rapidly urbanizing, industrializing, and receiving vast new waves of immigrants. An inordinate amount of pressure was placed on schools to both assimilate new arrivals culturally and prepare them economically for the emergent capitalist-industrialist economy in need of urban workers. Civic education at that time reflected a strong impulse toward *unum*, aggressively Americanizing and assimilating new immigrants, developing traditional patriotic values, and attempting to inculcate students with a single, nationalist narrative of the American experience. However, as the Great Depression and subsequent New Deal approached, strains of civic education began to emerge in the Progressive tradition that leaned more toward *pluribus*. Students were asked to consider the problems of democracy and participate in their solutions, engage in critical thinking, and develop a sense of public spiritedness. At this time, social studies was emerging as a discipline with civics as a discreet curriculum. Important impulses encouraged students to consider multiple perspectives and develop critical thought (Crabtree, Dunn & Nash, 1997).

As the nation moved toward World War II and the subsequent Cold War, however, the nation along with civic education practices pivot back to a more traditionally patriotic form of civic education in order to build unity around a national narrative that perceived the United States as a leader among nations. By the 1960s this emphasis became too restrictive and social studies and civic education began once again to expand toward diverse perspectives of the country and its standing in the world. The discipline of civic education experienced a return to critical thinking, multicultural perspectives, and active engagement in the problems of the time. As 1970s drew to a close, however, progressive voices in social studies education were met with an onslaught of criticism from conservatives who argued that the "new" and "newer" social studies waves represented dangerous turns toward liberal humanism, functionally a replacement for the dangers of communism of the 1950s (Evans, 2011). The last 20 years of the 20th century then witnessed the emergence of neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies that generated a marketplace orientation for public education with a focus on standards and standardization, school choice initiatives, academic excellence, and a focus on literacy and numeracy. Sleeter (2008) argues that this period ushered in the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002) legislation and its concomitant narrowing of curriculum. Social studies in general and civic education in particular were, in many school districts, relegated to minor, fairly unimportant roles in the curriculum. At best, teachers committed to civic education now had to navigate emerging standards that did not prioritize democratic, multi-

valent classroom practices, in order to introduce civics concepts and content. In fact, civic and non-profit educational organizations began, in the 1990s, to fill a vacuum left by the inattention to civic education. Quigley (1999) notes that civic education in schools reflected oases of high quality and engaging practice in a desert bereft of support for quality and relevant civic engagement opportunities.

Civic education practice experiences a quiet resurgence in the early 21st century as states were encouraged to develop strategies to revisit the civic mission and purpose of public education. The renaissance was bolstered by national and state civic groups (Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Illinois Civic Mission Coalition, for example) along with non-profit civic education organizations like Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago and Mikva Challenge in Illinois. By 2015, most states had policies and practices on the books requiring courses in government and civics at middle and high schools and/or assessments for graduation. Arizona, for example, requires that students pass the US citizenship exam while Tennessee requires that students complete a project-based civic assessment (T.C.A. § 49-6-1028) through which students demonstrate an understanding of civics. Illinois came late to the civic education table, first requiring a civics course of its public schools in 2015. Until that time, an Illinois student could graduate high school without having taken or completed a course in government or civics. Illinois then required only a course in World Studies, American History, and a single elective.

Dreams of Citizenship

Banks (2017) draws a useful distinction between citizenship as status and citizenship as identity in his analysis of legal citizenship attainment through American history. Banks argues that notions of citizenship were historically closely bound to a set of cultural and political assumptions that conformed to the white majority: a commitment to the rule of law, a belief in individualism, self-sufficiency, Christian beliefs, and English language skills. Individuals who stood outside that narrow value system were often regarded as “posing a threat to America’s democratic experiment” (p. 69). Often these values were used to restrict citizenship status to certain groups either explicitly or implicitly based on race, gender, or class. But Banks argues, and we share his conviction, that citizenship is more than just legal status; it is also about identity. One can understand identity in terms of membership in a specific race or cultural group or as “a means by which people experience a sense of solidarity . . . with others in the wider world” (p. 68). The United States, however, has used racial group membership as a strategy to exclude individuals from attaining citizenship. While some of these identity barriers began to fall, particularly after the *Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952* abolished racial restrictions dating to the *Naturalization Act of 1790*, the law continued to codify the national origins quota system, which preferenced Northern and Western European immigrants.¹ Banks and others would argue, however, that identity though foundational to citizenship connotes something much larger than legal status, even if identity has been used to restrict instead of expand our notions of citizenship. Identity as a marker of citizenship suggests the extent to which individuals belong in society (Karst, 1989) and how individuals participate in society (Barber, 1998) whether or not they have attained legal status. Banks (2001) argues for a multicultural, cosmopolitan understanding of citizenship.

Beyond a legalistic understanding of citizenship, then, we can understand citizenship as identity, belonging, and participation in ways that acknowledge and support diverse, multicultural, cosmopolitan, and dynamic understandings of what it means to be a citizen in the United States in the 21st century. What then does *Participate!* reflect about what it means to be a citizen in the 21st century America? We now turn to our study.

Methods

Our mixed methods study sought to provide insights into our research question: How do CPS high school civics teachers experience a District-developed curriculum designed to encourage civic participation among students? We hoped to generate an understanding of how civics teachers in Chicago Public Schools perceived the *Participate!* civics curriculum and accompanying resources provided by the CPS Office of Social Science and Civic Engagement. Chicago Public Schools currently enrolls 390,000 students in 640 schools. The district is comprised of 46 percent Latinx, 37 percent African-American, 9 percent White, and 4 percent Asian students. 85 percent of district students experience poverty, 17 percent are English Language Learners, and 13 percent are diverse learners. The District developed the curriculum for use in civics classrooms eschewing both the distribution of an outsourced civics textbook or a laissez faire approach to curriculum. Other districts have recommended a civics textbook (Dade County Public Schools) or encouraged teachers to develop their own curriculum (Oakland Public Schools). Chicago chose a middle ground in seeking to develop a local curriculum that was flexible, had multiple points of entry and engagement, valued teacher choice and student voice, yet provided a set of curricular resources and supports and enabled teachers to collaborate through professional development and networking as they sought to implement the curriculum in authentic ways.

We gathered data for this study through classroom observations, teacher surveys, and teacher interviews. We sought to identify and study a convenience sample of teachers in four high schools representing the geographic diversity of an extraordinarily diverse school district. At the time, approximately 60 teachers in 40 schools were teaching the civics course using *Participate!* Of the 100 plus high schools in the district, many of them are majority African-American, majority Latinx, or in far fewer instances, integrated and diverse. Chicago Public Schools is a severely stratified school district along race and class lines. The schools are divided into the following categories at the high school level: selective enrollment, charter, magnet, military, neighborhood, and alternative. Charter schools are not required to meet many of the district mandates and therefore rarely adopt District curricular offerings. Selective enrollment schools are granted broad autonomy and are less likely to participate in District opportunities. Alternative schools serve very small student populations that tends to be transitory and therefore seldom are situated to participate in district initiatives. Neighborhood and military schools are those schools most likely to participate in district initiatives either through mandate or choice.

Neighborhood schools represent those schools across the district most likely to be resource poor and comprised of high numbers of students experiencing poverty. For many students, they are the schools not of choice but of last resort. They may have applied for selective enrollment schools but have not been granted access. In the past decade, neighborhood schools have suffered greatly from parents actively pursuing selective enrollment for their children and a population drain facilitated by gentrification (Lipmann, 2004) in addition to the subsequent mushrooming of charter high schools across the city. Tens of schools that might have housed more than 1000 students in the 2000s are now at risk of being closed with attendance hovering in the low hundreds. It is primarily in neighborhood schools that this study was conducted. One diverse school on the far north side, one school on the near north side comprised mainly of African-American and Latinx students, one school on the far southwest side also comprised of African-American and Latinx students, and one selective enrollment school on the mid-south side comprised of majority African-American students.

In our classroom observations, we sought to observe practices that represented high quality civic education pedagogy (See: Appendix 1). These practices included student engagement, relevance, controversy, authentic discussion, service-learning, group learning activities, community building, simulation, critical thinking, reflection, and project development. Literature supports that these strategies can lead to robust student participation and increased academic achievement, along with the development of civic knowledge, skills, habits, and dispositions. Public Act 099-0434 mandated that classrooms use controversial discussion, service-learning, simulation, and instruction in government institutions and processes. We observed the teachers (all white, two men, two women with varying years of experience as teachers and in civics classrooms) as they provided instruction to their students (n=76). The vast majority of students we observed in these classrooms were African-American or Latinx.

The teacher survey and follow-up semi-structured interview sought to ascertain their experience, perspectives of the curriculum, and insights into student impact. Specifically, we hoped to gain insights into how teachers experienced the *Participate!* curriculum, professional supports generated and provided by the district, collaboration with community partners, the extent to which the civics course had impact within the school, and student outcomes. The semi-structured teacher interviews enabled us to probe more deeply into these areas and gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how and why teachers came to the civics classrooms, how they valued the curriculum and accompanying supports, and how they experienced and understood student civic development. We purposely avoided examining artifacts of traditional student achievement (tests, grades), instead choosing to focus on student civic skills, habits, and dispositional development. Upon completing the classrooms observations, surveys and teacher interviews, the authors read and re-read the data and offered independent analysis. We conducted open and axial coding.

Findings

In classroom observations, we witnessed regular use of group work strategies and discussion. We also found that students were regularly engaged in relevant themes, topics and issues. We found less robust but still regular use of facilitative teaching strategies, encouragement of critical thinking, project-based learning, and collaboration with community partners. Interestingly, however, we found little use of the state-mandated pedagogies including service-learning, controversial discussion, and simulation in addition to few reflection strategies. While we did not personally observe these missing strategies, we cannot claim that these strategies were never present in these classrooms. In our semi-structured interviews, teachers made regular reference to the service-learning or civic action projects in development or in planning stages.

The three major themes that emerged through the teacher surveys and interviews were curriculum and pedagogy, teacher supports, and student outcomes. Regarding curriculum and pedagogy, we were able to identify three themes that consistently emerged among the teacher respondents: intent, flexibility, and focus on neighborhood projects. As the teachers discussed the perceived intent of the curriculum, they expressed appreciation for its ability to explore the meaning of community, enable critical analysis, facilitate civil conversations and civic action, generate awareness of power and how politics are enacted, and, finally, how *Participate!* focuses on building a strong sense of civic identity. The summative assessment for the course, in fact, asks students to construct a civic resume. Teachers also articulated their satisfaction with the ability of the curriculum to provide

flexible options for teachers even as it provided thorough grounding in civic power through four constructed units: foundations of democracy, elections, policy, and social movements. One teacher was pleasantly surprised that the District had generated such a high-quality curriculum that consistently engaged students. Teachers pointed to the value of professional development, teacher networks, one-on-one classrooms supports, as well as opportunities for professional and personal reflection.

Teachers discussed student outcomes and reported seeing growth and development in civic skills, habits, and disposition. Almost universally, teachers suggested that students began the civics class with a strong sense of resignation and apathy. Rubin (2012) represents this phenomenon in a typology of civic identity suggesting that students tend to fall into one of four civic identity quadrants: Aware, Empowered, Complacent, and Discouraged. Those students who are aware experience congruence with their ideals and social and political norms but are not yet fully active in society, though they see the need to be. Students who are empowered experience congruence and have made the choice to be actively engaged. Students who are complacent do not see the necessity of working for change as they, too, like the aware students, experience congruence, which supports their own perception of the status quo. Students who are discouraged experience incongruity between their ideals and extant norms and do not believe real change is possible. Teachers seemed to be arguing that students arrived in their classrooms feeling awareness and discouragement. They consistently articulated a deep incongruity between what they thought was just and what they saw happening in their world but were unable to see how their voice and actions mattered or would amount to any substantial change.

What teachers experienced during the course, however, was students beginning to demonstrate civic skills, habits, and dispositions. Students were, according to the teachers, much more likely to come to class on a regular basis and engage in conversations of civic purpose in the classroom, around the school, and in their homes. Students were more likely to reach an understanding that their actions and the actions of others had important consequences in a variety of contexts. They began to demonstrate a healthy skepticism about how politics is played or performed. This, according to the teachers, was an important step forward in their dispositional understanding of the meaning of politics in the world. They no longer entirely discounted politics as the domain of others. But they also did not come to accept their social and political contexts as simple to navigate or easy to get things done. They moved, perhaps, not yet to fully empowered, but toward greater awareness. Teachers observed students seeking out more leadership opportunities in school and community and participating more actively in campaigns and projects.

It is important here to address teacher dispositions that were revealed through the interviews. We argue that what teachers bring to the instructional task is extraordinarily important in a civics classroom. Our teacher respondents identified three key dispositions that they brought to their classrooms. First, teachers brought a desire to create informed, engaged, empowered citizens capable of making important decisions in their communities. Without this foundational disposition, we think it would be difficult to provide powerful instruction in a civics classroom that focuses on participatory action. Secondly, teachers were reticent to be perceived as the source of all knowledge. Freire (2000) argues that education is too heavily oriented toward a banking model where teachers simply make knowledge deposits in their students. That dynamic sets the teacher up to be powerful and authoritarian, while the students are docile and compliant. These teachers, however, seemed to be arguing that the role of the civics teacher is not to simply provide information for

students but to facilitate learning. They are clearly diverting from knowledge-centered curriculum theory discussed above toward student-centered types of learning and Social Reconstructionism (essentially a derivative of Social Meliorism). Finally, teachers did not perceive themselves to be in classrooms devoid of political, social, historical and economic context. They saw and appeared to be responding to the fact that students in their classes came from low-income, historically marginalized communities of color. Additionally, these students had not, according to several of the teachers, been exposed to the rules of the game. How does one navigate the political world in order to achieve and exercise power? These were new lessons and understandings for the students and teachers felt compelled to be in these classrooms contributing to greater equity among students.

Participate! curriculum seems to cross each of the strands of progressive education. As a District-developed curriculum, it draws from Social Efficiency ideals and is steeped in Social Meliorism with its focus on analyzing power, critical thinking, and informed action. It offers many choices for teachers and students alike; it is choice-based and flexible, yet structured so as to support the teacher with proven practices.

The limitations of this study simply put is that it was small scale by design, with four schools with one classroom observation per school. No student level data/perspective was sought after or availed, although students freely offered comments upon completion of the observation and appeared to enjoy the co-researchers engagement with them as we observed and asked questions on occasion concerning the nature of a lesson, assignment, or activity. Future research would most assuredly include intentionally bringing the high school students into the conversation, and one research strategy imagined would be to survey the students using the format/method of a semi-structured focus group. As co-researchers, our interest in this regard would be to critically reflect with the students themselves, learning and discovering what are some of the takeaways they would describe from their experience with *Participate!* Furthermore, we believe that extending classroom observations over several sessions would be beneficial, especially when those observations are related to the enactment of a service-learning or community engagement project. We aspire to observe classrooms in school and community settings when and where the teacher managing the class is using a problem-based methodology, project-based learning, or other critical civics pedagogical strategies. We would then be able to make stronger claims regarding the efficacy of civic education drawing from student level data and by examining student outcomes from course participation. What we are most interested in is developing a longitudinal study of student civic participation and identity development while accounting for and exploring the alignment of teacher values/perspective with curricular intent.

Discussion

We are witnessing a resurgence in the value of civic education as emerging ideas of what it means to be a citizen are part of the national dialogue. The United States Congress and the American public continue the contentious debate over who belongs, who might gain identity, and who can participate fully. The authors we have cited here represent a far more robust, and we suggest interesting and engaging, contribution to the debate that tends to be characterized by misinformation, racist tropes, and half-hearted attempts to seek resolution to the question through compromise that leaves no one satisfied. But if we look inside a public school classroom in Chicago where civic education is being enacted, we see possibilities for students to engage their local contexts cognizant of city, state, and national political realities with meaningful civic action. Kahne and Westheimer (2006) provide a useful

framework for understanding the ways in which students in civic education classrooms might be engaged. The authors propose a typology of citizenship: personally responsible, participatory, and social justice-oriented. Again, these citizen types reflect characteristics of Progressive Education curricular theories evolving through the 20th and continuing into the 21st century. Preparing young people to be personally responsible citizens reflects curricular theory in the liberal democratic education tradition as well as drawing from Developmentalism (students being prepared to become adults). Kahne and Westheimer argue that the vast majority of civic education in the United States fits this idea of citizenship.

The participatory citizen fits the Social Meliorism ideal – a citizen who is public-spirited, hopes to solve social problems, and seeks to participate in and through existing forms and structures. This citizenship ideal represents a smaller though still fairly robust segment of the American public. This citizen seeks not so much to change or alter the systems and structures of society as to generate social improvements through existing forms of participation.

The third type of citizen, the social justice-oriented citizen, seeks not to follow social and political norms as much as to disrupt them. The social justice-oriented citizen, embraces Social Reconstructionist ideals, offers a compelling critique of society and offers ways to re-orient society around more just, equitable principles. Historical referents abound including W.E.B. DuBois (1910), who helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and then president of the Progressive Education Association (PEA) George Counts (1934), who “dared the schools to change the social order”. Kahne and Westheimer argue, however, that most civic education practices steer clear of preparing the social justice-oriented citizen. Indeed, most Americans lack a clear social justice framework from which they engage public life.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS), by far the state’s largest school district, was well-situated to support schools and classrooms as they sought to meet the new mandate. Though CPS did not require its schools to use the *Participate!* curriculum, each school was required to offer a civics course that met the pedagogical requirements of the new law. This study examined the experiences of four CPS teachers who offered the new *Participate!* curriculum in their classrooms. We have argued earlier that *Participate!* is reflective of Progressive Era theoretical frames - Social Efficiency, Developmentalism, and Social Meliorism. As its name suggests, the curriculum requires that students participate in public life through service-learning, community engagement, or civic action. But the nature of participation is left up to the teachers and the students in classrooms and tends to reflect local, authentic concerns. In one classroom, students were engaging the politically contentious issue of gentrification and debating ways to preserve affordable housing in their communities and maintain local businesses that were being forced out by rising property rates. These forms of classroom engagement reflect what Rubin (2012) identifies as critical civic engagement based on the lived experiences of students. This process represents an integration of child-centered learning and socially reconstructionist pedagogy. It seeks to engage the authentic lived experiences of students in classroom experience and facilitate a critique of social and political systems toward civic action.

Conclusion

American democracy can be conceived as living in and, for some, embracing political and cultural tensions and discerning how best to craft a common existence and purpose from those tensions. We argue then that civic education in this country must seek ways to engage these tensions, not so much to overcome

them as to provide opportunities for all students to participate meaningfully, critically, and collaboratively in the democratic process. As long as there is an American democratic republic, these tensions will be part of our discourse. However, in order to realize the goal of meaningful, critical, and collaborative participation, all students need to feel they belong, not simply as Americans writ large, but as citizens with multiple, changing, boundary-crossing, emerging, local, national, and global civic identities that position themselves for full and equitable participation. In other words, they need to feel both a deep sense of belonging and a full sense of purpose with diverse avenues for political participation. Civic education that creates sufficient opportunities to explore and navigate ongoing tensions, engage in purposeful action that reflects lived experiences, and space to develop engaged and authentic civic identities, will be critical in order to develop the next generation of citizens who are not cowed by diverse expressions and perspectives or paralyzed by polarizing argumentation.

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