Lifting as We Climb: A Citizenship Project in a Professional Development School Setting

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ABSTRACT: The study of a middle school social studies project this article addresses occurred in the national capital region of the United States, where perceptions of ''patriotism'' and xenophobic immigration policies were the subjects of frequent media reports. With this examination the authors considered the overarching research question ''How do middle school students in a Professional Development School describe and illustrate citizenship when given access to multimodal texts and media (e.g., digital photography and slam poetry)?'' The authors called on young adolescents to create slam poems with incorporated images to address the question ''What does it mean to be a 'citizen?''; the authors then examined products of this project, including surveys and slam poems, to address this research query. The results of this study revealed that teachers' employment of alternative and multimodal texts—in a context supported by the structures of a PDS partnership—can motivate students to share more expansive perspectives about what they believe makes a ''citizen.'' Such instructional activities, research inquiries, and broad concepts of citizenship are increasingly important in our ever more diverse schools and in our more global world.

NAPDS Essentials Addressed: #4/A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants; #8/Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings

Introduction

Pay attention and take some notes

Here we go

Our country is overrun by illegal immigrants

Overweight babies with rabies

No cure for cancer. . .

We need more answers. . .

Corrupt politicians and lawyers argue over pointless pieces of information

As war veterans oversee genocides in third-world nations. . .

As Death drags people in with his cold, dark hands

And spray paint artists are branded as dangerous graffiti monsters

The image and writing above were selected and crafted by Ryan[1] as a part of a cross-curricular collaborative study of a "slam" poetry project conducted within a faltering Professional Development School (PDS) partnership by three of this article's authors—a university-based social studies educator, a university-based English educator, and a school-based middle level language arts teacher. Ryan, a student in one of the honors-level language arts classes where we conducted this project and examination, offered a harsh critique of the state of US society through his illustrated verses. Per the instructions for the final project of our unit, his poem—entitled "It's Not All About You"—was intended to address the question "What does it mean to be a 'citizen'?"

But, like so many of the young adolescents in our classes, Ryan did both more and something other than what we anticipated, and his sentiments were hardly unique among the creative products our middle school students crafted. Called on to consider "citizenship" in early 21st century America, concern about what they perceived as our society's skewed values, our nation's interventionist foreign policies, and individuals' indulgent tendencies were prominent themes in these youths' writings and illustrations. Tellingly, Ryan's and his peers' pre-project survey responses exhibited virtually none of this depth or revealed any of these themes.

As teachers and teacher educators, we have a shared interest in multimodal practices, a lived and daily recognition of youths' appreciation for digital media forms, and a commitment to cultivating students' most thoughtful notions of citizenship. Given our boundary-spanning roles as university- and school-based teacher educators working in a PDS context, these interests and awareness served as three of the key motivations behind our study of youths' concepts of national identity. While we framed our inquiry with one primary research question—"How do middle school students in a Professional Development School describe and illustrate citizenship when given access to multimodal texts and media (e.g., digital photography and slam poetry)?"—we were aware of many other queries. For example, what do youth hold in their minds' eyes when they reflect on what a citizen *looks* like? What notions of citizenship

[1]All names are pseudonyms

do they *see* through the digital images they choose and take? And based on young adults' deliberations on these questions—and their illustrated "slam" poem responses—what are the implications for our civic education pedagogies and curricula in either social studies or literacy contexts?

We examined the products of this project—including youths' pre-project surveys and end-of-project slam poems, in which they articulated and depicted their notions of what it means to be a citizen—for data to address our research question. We also gathered considerable additional data, including pre-writing activities, drafts and revisions of students' poems, and interviews of youth participants. For the results on which we report in this article, we concentrated first on content analyses of the project surveys and, later, for the sake of comparison, on young people's final poem products and the images they included to illustrate the ideas they described, which we frame with one of the key pre-writing activities utilized in this project. We believe the results of this examination—the lessons, instructional tools, and youths' concepts of citizenship—have important implications for civics and social studies education, while elucidating how such projects and examinations might be best implemented in even struggling PDS contexts. The results we detail here also provide important insights into diverse youths' perspectives on citizenship and reveal the utility of multimodal text forms for promoting young adolescents' engagement with complex, candid notions of an "American" national identity.

Our project and examination were also motivated by our shared concern—as university- and school-based constituents—about the quality and very existence of our then eleven year old PDS partnership, which was comprised of two middle schools, two high schools, and a college of education. While our commitment to innovative and reflective practice (NAPDS Essential #4) and collaborative P-12 and university teaching and research efforts (NAPDS Essential #8) would seem to indicate that ours was a PDS operating at a fairly high level, this was the first activity that attempted to give back to our school team by jointly investigating middle or secondary student learning within our schools' classrooms. As veteran PDS constituents, we were conscious of the need to revive what had become a partnership focused almost exclusively on the teacher education elements of our work—a phenomenon that research has consistently revealed is common in PDS contexts (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Neapolitan & Levine, 2011; Teitel, 1998; Wong & Glass, 2011).

At the conclusion of this citizenship-focused attempt at rejuvenating our partnership, we recognized that our PDS might not be sustained beyond the year in which we conducted our project. It was evident that after more than a decade of an almost exclusive focus on teacher education efforts that our school collaborators' dissatisfaction with the inequitable, one-sided nature of our school/university relationship simply—and quite reasonably—could not be mollified with one well-intentioned collaborative research project. But the impending demise of our partnership provided us—veteran university- and school-based teacher educators and teachers—with an important opportunity to reflect on the very nature of PDS partnerships, particularly in secondary settings. We believe we can now offer insights into how PDS efforts—including the curricular/research project we detail here—can help PDS constituents to "lift as we climb" (Chang & Lui, 2010) by purposely engaging in projects that simultaneously serve our school-based partners' needs and our own teacher education and research interests.

Contexts

The PDS site for this project housed a middle and high school within the same facility; our work was with the partnering middle school

nested within the secondary school structure. The school resided within a suburb of the US national capital region. The student population was 60% White with small but significant percentages of minority students, including 13% Hispanic, 14% Asian, 8% African-American, and five percent identified as "other." In this upper middle class suburb, only 11.5% of the student population qualified for free or reduced lunch.

Professional Development Schools have historically had four, equally important emphases: one, a focus on PK-12 student achievement; two, effective field-based teacher education; three, professional development for all of the partnerships' constituents; and, four, engagement in collaborative research activities. While other PDS objectives appear in the research literature, these four were highlighted in our partnership's design and original Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). As we began to plan the project and study on which we report in this article, we became aware of the struggles university partnerships with middle schools have historically faced—from challenges associated with the structure of the school's day (Mebane & Galasi, 2000) to long-term commitment issues from university and school partners (Walters & Pritchard, 1999). Our PDS partnership suffered from many of these same concerns, and we recognized that it had reached what Teitel (1998) refers to as a "plateau," where "successful partnering activities coexisted with minor disappointments, missed expectations, and unmaterialized ideas" (p. 94). Aware of our partnership's tenuous existence, and troubled by the almost complete focus of our PDS on the university's teacher education interests, we aimed for our multimodal citizenship curriculum and research project to simultaneously serve our middle school students and us as veteran social studies and language arts educators, helping all to learn about effective and innovative citizenship education and language arts practices.

Our project and study were also influenced by geography and the demographics of our community. We live, learn, and teach in the national capital region in the US, where questions of "citizenship" are asked and answered every day, including whether or not every de facto citizen—often classified only as "residents" of our nation—should be entitled to attend public schools. The ubiquity of civic issues appearing in virtually every form of media in our community and the sheer number of spaces in our region honoring significant historical and current civic events would suggest to most casual observers that young people in our communities have innumerable opportunities for robust engagement as citizens and for developing complex notions of citizenship. Unfortunately, the first set of data we collected as a part of this project revealed that neither of these was true.

Finally—and unfortunately—as evidenced by the 2007 introduction in an area county of one of the nation's first explicitly anti-immigrant policies, our region has played a leadership role in what has become a deluge of legislation of intolerance. One of our overarching goals as social studies and literacy teacher educators and teachers has been to create and study integrated teaching practices and curricula that challenge reductionist, xenophobic notions of citizenship. Ultimately, through this project, we became more aware of our own and our students' thirst for negotiating civic mindedness beyond traditional classroom experiences.

Frameworks and Relevant Literature

Given these contexts, a range of citizenship, literacy, and PDS issues informed the content and methods of our study. In civic education, we focused on scholarship related to youths' general lack of civic engagement and educators' and researchers' efforts to challenge this detachment. Knight Abowitz and Harnish's (2006) review of citizenship and citizenship

education revealed that instructional efforts concentrating on civic engagement are most often ineffectual and disengaging. Worse, much of our existing citizenship education curricula favor frameworks that promote civic understanding from a myopically celebratory and nationalistic perspective, thereby discouraging critical engagement with transnational notions of citizenship that foster the type of civic-mindedness that our era of increasing globalization requires.

Representing hope for our goal of complicating our civic education practices, over a decade ago the American Political Science Association (APSA), under the guidance of Elinor Ostrom, created the Task Force on Civic Education. Ostrom identified "one of the core problems [of U.S civil society as]. . .the decline of civic engagement" and articulated the need to "think, develop, test, evaluate, and reformulate a diversity of educational tools that provide more effective forms of civic education" (1996, p. 756). In response to this stance on citizenship and civic engagement, Banks' (2008) typology of citizenship guided the curricular architecture of this project. Banks includes notions of "active" and "transformational" citizenship and details the extent to which the citizen as a cultural participant seeks civic mindedness to actualize "values and moral principles beyond those of conventional authority" (p. 137).

Further informing our perspectives by locating civic spaces beyond traditional social studies classrooms were researchers including Dolby (2003) and McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood, and Park (2003), who identified diverse discourses of civic education as potentially enhancing students' conceptions of citizenship. These researchers noted that civic identity is largely developed outside the walls of a social studies classroom and that it is instead the cultural space our students occupy which most directly shapes their attitudes and actions as citizens. To that end we also appealed to the theoretical framing provided by Gutierrez (2008), who has utilized a constructivist, sociocritical notion of literacy and the concept of a "third space" to orient the foundations of curricula, emphasizing a learning ecology in which students employ cultural and civic experiences as generative forms of learning. Relying on these research bases and ideas, cultural citizenship, then, is "the popular site where youth are invested, where things happen, where identities and democratic possibilities are worked out, performed and negotiated, and where new futures are written" (Dolby, 2003, p. 276). These scholars turned us toward the future of citizenship by enmeshing culture as the new, primary civic space, and their schemes became the primary conceptual lens through which we formulated our PDS-based project.

To support our citizenship education and research project—and the more amorphous PDS resurrection effort—we looked to a growing bank of research on multimodal texts and their relevance to increasingly diverse youth in an early 21st century context. Young adolescent students are ever more reliant on these multimodal forms of literacy tools, and contemporary literacy theorists have described a reclassification of "literacy" that includes texts with which youth are familiar, including visual media (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro & Cammack, 2004; Williams, 2008). Considerable research has demonstrated that image-based tools provide richer learning opportunities and insights into youths' perspectives than traditional language-centered methods (Author, 2007, 2009; Harper, 2005; Streng, et al., 2004; Zagora, 2011).

Finally, to explicitly address the partnership context in which this project was conducted, we sought literature including that related to student learning—including related to citizenship education—within the context of a PDS. For example, utilizing standardized test scores, Castle, Arends, and Rockwood (2008) found PDS partnership work positively impacted student learning, particularly for students at the lowest levels of achievement. Such reports aside, while student achievement is a founda-

tional focus of PDSs, the research on connections between PDS partnerships and student learning remains surprisingly thin (Teitel, 1998; Nolan, Grove, Leftwich, Mark & Peters, 2011) and the impact of PDSs on student learning has proven difficult to establish (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Howey, 2011; Teitel, 2004; Wong & Glass, 2011).

With regards to citizenship education, extant research including that on school/university partnerships typically focuses on service-learning projects (Slavkin, Braysmith, & Faust, 2010) and their effects on students' learning and engagement. Other scholarship describes ad hoc relationships between school(s) and universit(ies) that have attempted to determine the civic knowledge and attitudes of youth (e.g., Pasek, Kenski, Romer, & Hall Jamieson, 2006; Syvertsen, et al, 2009; Torney-Purta, 2002). Few scholarly publications, however, have examined civic education efforts in PDS settings. Informed by these research literature foundations, we believed that our project and study might contribute to the body of knowledge regarding student learning—specifically related to multimodal civic education—in Professional Development Schools.

Methods

Intrigued by these citizenship awareness and multimodal literacy issues, we co-planned and implemented the "Slam Poetry and Citizenship" unit over the course of five weeks during the middle of the 2010–2011 school year. We conducted the project in two honors-level language arts classes with 55 students, approximately 50% girls and 50% boys, all 12–14 years old, with widely varying ethnic backgrounds but residing in a homogenously middle class neighborhood. These courses were taught by one of the researchers and authors of this article, who had previously served as a mentor teacher for pre-service teachers completing their student teaching internships. Youth participants in these classes were either native English speakers or had a sufficient English proficiency to have been assigned to an honors-level language arts class.

As noted in the "Introduction" and "Contexts" section above, the collaboration that enabled the development and implementation of our project emerged in large part as a result of the mentor teacher's (Calamito) interest in exploring student achievement on his creative language arts projects, including his slam poetry unit. Calamito reached out for assistance to Zenkov, a university-based English educator who had worked with Calamito when he mentored pre-service teachers. Together they joined with Pellegrino, a university-based social studies educator who had worked with other partnerships between our university and area schools. Both Pellegrino and Zenkov had considerable experience integrating visual, multi-modal, and musical texts into language arts and social studies curricula.

All of the authors were intrigued and troubled by the popular and political perceptions of immigration and citizenship that had appeared so frequently in recent years in local media. Spurred on by their shared desire to enact richer elements of what they hoped might be a salvageable PDS, these teachers, teacher educators, and authors agreed that this civics-focused slam poetry project might serve as an important, mutually beneficial collaboration. Ultimately, through a series of a half dozen planning meetings with this article's authors, the original slam poetry unit was revised and explicated to include more focused attention on the topic of citizenship and require students' use of images to communicate their poems' key ideas. Conscious of the potential utility of multimodal texts for enabling youth to share some of their most candid and complex ideas, we looked to "slam" poetry as our curricular means.

We chose this rich and accessible genre as the mechanism through which we tasked these students to creatively express and interpret their understandings of what it means to be an

American citizen. During the first class sessions, we explained slam poetry through both print and video examples. In subsequent discussions and close reading activities in which students were asked to identify words and phrases that explicated context, evoked emotion, or contributed to the overall tone of the poem, we emphasized how slam poetry differs from traditional forms of poetry in its confrontational nature and dual emphasis on writing and performance (Glazner, 2000). We shared how slam poems rely on emotion and draw from authors' prior experiences to stir questions, identify controversies, and contribute insights about topics ranging from the intimately personal to the distantly political (Gregory, 2007). We also highlighted the connection between poetry slams and hip hop performance competitions where rappers face off through performance to gain audience approval. Combined, these activities allowed students to read, see, and hear slam poetry and served as important illustrations of the types of poems they would develop themselves. Eventually we challenged students to visually illustrate their poems to highlight salient themes related to the concepts of citizenship they detailed in these poems.

To implement and study this unit, each university investigator attended two sessions of the language arts classes taught by our middle school teacher co-author each week over the course of the five-week study. Prior to commencement of the unit, we asked students to complete a brief survey (see Appendix A) with questions related to their conceptions of citizenship, notions of poetry, and the use of visual images as communication. The surveys provided insights into youths' beliefs about the various aspects of the project including poetry, citizenship, and the relationship of images to both, and thus served as the first major data set of our study. We then introduced the unit by outlining the steps students would undertake over the course of the project to address the question "What does it mean to be a 'citizen?"

In their alternating block schedule, these young adolescents attended their language arts classes two or three times per week and completed pre-writing activities; they eventually drafted and revised final versions of their poems during class and for homework. After writing the first drafts of their poems, each student took or collected a pool of photographs to illustrate as many concepts of citizenship appearing in their poems as they could identify. Following in-class discussions and one-to-one interactions with peers and the first three authors of this article, each youth settled on three images that were included with computer-based presentations of the final drafts of their poems, using digital production and presentation software. These poems and corresponding presentations became the second data source we considered for this article.

To gather additional insights—and in an effort to trouble the stark contrasts we were noting between the survey results and illustrated slam poem findings—the classroom teacher selected six students representing a range of academic performance levels and ethnic diversity for the university faculty investigators to interview at the conclusion of the project. The researchers conducted these interviews employing a standard open-ended interview model in which questions were fully formed prior to the interviews to ensure "that each interviewee gets asked the same questions—the same stimuli—in the same way and in the same order..." (Patton, 2002, p. 344). We hoped that the interview data would serve to triangulate the findings discerned from student poems and presentations. In these audio-recorded sessions, students were again asked about their ideas about citizenship, their impressions of poetry, and the impact of our multimodal instruction and use of visual media on their understandings of citizenship and appreciation for poetry.

At the conclusion of the project we content analyzed 49 youths' poems and the approximately 170 images in these poems

Figure 1. Wordle® Image of Common Student Responses to the Pre-Exercise Survey Question, "What Does Being a Citizen Mean to You?"

(shared via their presentations) for prevalent and outlying visual and descriptive topics and themes (Creswell, 1998; Rose, 2006), concentrating on the concepts of citizenship students were sharing with their writing or representing with photographs. We reviewed considerable additional data, including the transcriptions and codings of the six interviews we conducted. Inspired by the initial, disquieting findings related to the concepts of citizenship we discovered in youths' surveys, we focused on the notions of "citizenship" emerging in these poetry projects, images, and interviews.

The results and conclusions we describe below relate to these various conceptions of a citizen, as identified in the survey findings and compared with those drawn from youths' poems and illustrations. These results also suggest an apparent utility of multimodal texts for encouraging young people to engage with more complex ideas about citizenship. Ultimately we discovered that slam poetry and these image-oriented activities—which included students' production of illustrated presentations using popular software (e.g., PowerPoint, Keynote, or QuickTime)—meshed quite seamlessly to enable youths' artful, contemplative, and even controversial explorations of citizenship. The results likewise made us more aware of the complexities of "citizenship" in school/university partnerships. We reserve these contextual PDS conclusions for the final section of the article.

Results

As noted above, we began with a review and analysis of students' answers to our pre-project survey questions. We followed these relatively straightforward examinations with robust explorations of student poems and the images they chose to represent the salient themes they identified. In addition to examples from students' surveys responses and their poems (both lines and images), we occasionally illustrate our findings with analyses of student interview data.

Survey findings

Responding to the question about citizenship we posed, students' survey answers represented a strikingly narrow range of the civic roles with which they were familiar or in which they believed (See Figure 1). Terms used to describe a "citizen" in these surveys were decidedly positive and moralistic. Most prominent in these survey responses were the terms "pride" and "patriotic," featured in nearly one-third of answers (31%). Notions of responsibility and obedience were also common, with terms such as "loyal," "obey," and—surprisingly to us—"manners" included in a total of 29% of surveys. And, most disappointing but perhaps not unanticipated, more than 10% of the students answered "I don't know" when asked how they would describe a citizen. We chose to depict survey responses through a Wordle®, given our commitment to multimodal text and the critical importance of allowing students—and ourselves—to utilize visual illustrations of information.

Slam poetry and interview findings

Fortunately we discovered in these young adolescents' slam poems much more nuanced, expansive, critical, hopeful, and occasionally troubling conceptions of citizenship. As well, our interviews of six students revealed ideas that echoed many themes we identified in participants' poems. In their slam poems students consistently elucidated some of the more superficial thinking expressed on the surveys and disclosed dramatic changes in their thinking about citizenship. As we describe and illustrate in the three findings sub-sections below, through their illustrated poems young adolescents offered rich descriptions and depictions of the themes in their writings, frequently introducing and clarifying abstract notions. Notably, although nearly two weeks passed between the completion of these poetry projects and our interviews, youth exhibited nearly complete recall when sharing specific ideas in their poems.

One of the primary activities we used to help students articulate their beliefs about citizenship—and to begin to make connections between their notions and visual representations of these—was through a tool we called the "Slam Poetry Citizen Body Diagram" (see Appendix B). This tool also served as the final analysis lens through which we considered poems and themes, given that it explicitly revealed, via words and images, how students' use of these multimodal texts inspired consideration of very different notions of citizenship from those shared in the pre-project surveys. We opened our second class of this project by calling on students to refer to their completed "'What It Means to Be a Citizen' Slam Idea Generator" worksheets (see Appendix C) and choose one-word answers from at least three of the eight questions that they then posted on question-specific chart tablet papers. We encouraged youths to consider answers and questions that they felt were intriguing, controversial, or absolute. These choices also helped students to identify the most important elements of their citizenship definitions.

We then used the "Slam Poetry Citizen Body Diagram" to transition youth to *illustrating* their concepts through specific characteristics and identifiable attributes. We assigned students to small groups to create collective body diagrams on chart tablet paper by sharing their individual worksheet responses using a round-robin approach. Such a straightforward method allowed students to describe and illustrate an approximately equal number of ideas. More importantly, this strategy ensured that young adolescents saw, heard, and inquired about a range of others' perceptions and pictures of what it means to be a citizen, helping them to refine and expand their own thinking.

We recognized that while some students might find the task of exploring the idea of citizenship daunting—especially when this concept is increasingly more narrowly defined in public circles—others were able to generate ideas quite easily. Peer interactions at this juncture clearly served to expose participants to new conceptions and draw out ideas from reticent youth. Finally, students shared their collective body diagrams, again using a round-robin method, with each individual participant describing one idea or illustration suggested by

another member of their small group, rather than one of their own notions.

During the content analysis of youths' poems—when we paid attention to the ideas about citizenship in their poems, identified relevant lines, and highlighted images they selected to illustrate these concepts—we recognized that this diagram might offer a rich means for sharing our findings. Thus, we organized the findings below into three categories that align with this drawing: 1) what youths think citizens *say*; 2) what our middle school students suggest that citizens *do*; 3) what young adolescents believe citizens *think*. We believe that the notions young people identified—illustrated below with sample slam poem lines and selected images—are compelling, surprising, and instructive.

What citizens see—and say

We have seen people starve so badly that it looks as if the wind could blow them down

In his poem entitled "Are We Part of the Puzzle of Human Existence?" from which the line and image above were taken, Nicholas shared one of the common but troubling examples of what our middle school students witness as citizens in our society—a suffering amongst a certain segment of the US population that too many people ignore. In these youths' eyes, a *real* citizen is someone who is not only aware of these difficulties, but is willing to address the injustices too many just pass by. Even more importantly, Nicholas and a number of his classmates illustrated with their pictures and words a more complex notion of "seeing" than we initially introduced to them: they appreciated that *vision* actually involves a mindfulness of the realities of society, the challenges others face, and the justice with which the US *should* be functioning.

With lines from his poem, "The Two Faces of America," Ishwaak echoed both this notion of consciousness—seeing—and the focus on "ugliness" to which Nicholas introduced us:

And to walk outside and look around to the ugly, unsightly, ubiquitous

Yellow tape

Everywhere

Everyone penniless

The weight on people's shoulders

The weight was made of starvation.

It could be easy—and maybe even reasonable—to dismiss these youths' emphases on the suffering they were witnessing. After all, they were living and attending school in one of the largest, most diverse, wealthiest, and highest performing school districts in the United States. But we found it instructive and hopeful that given a new—if not *blank*—slate on which to paint in poetic words and digital images their perceptions of the state of citizenship in our nation that they paid so much attention to these everyday concerns of equity.

In their poems these middle school students also consistently emphasized—with often harsh, descriptive terms followed by many exclamation

points—that they were not addressing merely the appearance of injustice or the fact that "true" citizens should make more than token efforts to tackle the suffering around them. And the young people we interviewed repeated this theme. For example, CeCe commented that the expressive nature of the slams they were tasked to create empowered her to explore deep-seated frustrations of injustice she saw (personal communication, 18 January 2011).

Students were also concerned with our society's flawed focus on appearances, as Graciela's poem entitled "A Citizen's True Colors" revealed:

An American citizen is someone who looks beyond the layers

And layers of skin

And that Christopher's poem ("What's a Citizen?") echoed:

America has changed a lot

Realize that there is still discrimination

If you opened your eyes to what I'm saying, shout out with me

I'm an American Citizen!

But in this concentration on the superficial aspects of human beings—race, in particular—these youth repeatedly made a case that citizenship has nothing to do with skin color, clothing choices, or anything related to the surface of our selves. In fact, they were angry that any notion of "citizenship" would ever be reduced to such traits. One young man, Reid, vented:

I am tired!...

Of seeing the "good citizens"...Of this country...

Disrespect others...

Based on skin color or religion

Finally, again, we called on students to illustrate their ideas with images through what we imagined would be a straightforward exercise involving literal depictions of what citizens—"good" and "bad," legal and illegal—look like and do. But these youth consistently challenged us with their metaphorical takes on "seeing." This abstract thinking was powerfully illustrated by Paige's words and images from her poem "I Want to See...This America":

I want to see

Risk takers and peacemakers...

I want to see

People who understand

People who care...

I want to see shoes

For the man with bare feet

What citizens do, don't do—and "do unto others"

Through their poems the young people in our study revealed considerable emotion—and some mildly tempered vitriol—when describing their reactions to the inequity and poverty that they were witnessing and the connections between these realities and citizenship. Just as consistently—and with as much passion—they detailed how they believed that citizens *should* have an environmental awareness and *not* waste our planet's precious resources. Sydney's poem, "World as One," was one of the many that depicted and described these Earth-conscious actions:

Somehow

Someone

Told you it was ok

To pollute this world by driving around all the time

Wasting gasoline

We originally expected these young people to provide a laundry list of actions in which they thought citizens should engage: we assumed, wrongly, that our students would stay mostly on a *literal* level with these poetic descriptions of citizenship. This assumption was largely borne out in the small quantity and narrow range of types of activities youth shared in their survey responses. But in our review of their poems and images we were struck by how often they detailed and illustrated *ideals* that should guide citizens' efforts. These included cautions about the limits of freedom, as described by Ninamarie in her poem "Appreciation to Our Nation":

We have freedom

But that doesn't mean we can do

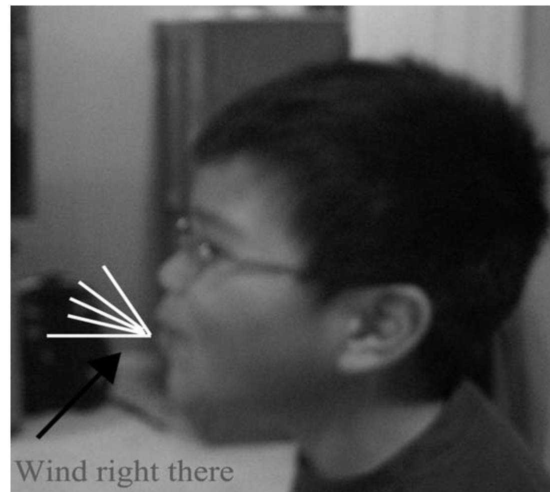
ANYTHING

And echoed by Nicholas—and others—who emphasized the importance of the "golden rule":

A true American citizen treats others

The way he would want to be treated

While much of what these young adolescents suggest that citizens do could be characterized as clichéd ideas, we also discovered a number of examples of our roles as *global* citizens, with responsibilities to aid less fortunate others around the world. The lines and image from Jude's poem, "The Fight for Our Names," illustrated this concept:



We just became the father

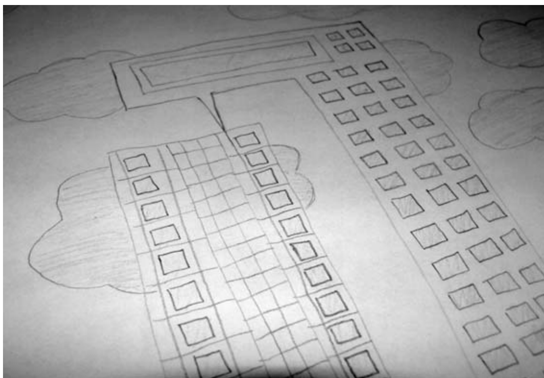
always taking care if that country has an earthquake

Americans are just like the wind beneath other countries' wings

always helping them to their feet

And this notion was reiterated in our interview with Jude, in which he shared that being a citizen includes a global role in which one would "do anything" to help people regardless of national origin and status (personal communication 18 January 2011).

And, finally, we discovered countless examples of youths' impatience with adults' ineffective and misguided attempts to act as responsible—and responsive—citizens. Thus, one of the primary activities in which *adolescent* citizens engage is simply waiting for these adults—their parents, teachers, political leaders, and so on—to cede power to them. While Wesley's poem "Expiration" offered a particularly dramatic and frustrated perspective on the extent to which young adolescents feel persecuted by their adult guides' failed citizenship efforts, his sentiments about young adults' anticipated action were shared by many of his peers:



So we punch our pillows

And wait

When we

Can tower over those

Who don't yet know

These young people not only differentiated between *adult* citizen actions and *youth* citizen activities, but also between "good" or "real" citizen efforts and "bad" or "fake" citizen pursuits. They also perceived their own adolescent demographic as a *body* of citizens, distinct from a national identity, and capable of and committed to particular actions—including wresting power from adults, in the interests of their notions of justice. This age-oriented definition was interesting to us as teachers and scholars and potentially instructive for our work as teachers and teacher educators

What citizens think, believe, and feel

In our review of these youths' poems and related images we were repeatedly impressed by the extent to which we simply had underestimated our students and their abilities to describe their interests in detailing complex notions of citizenship. As an example, we imagined that youth would offer a very technical, concrete definition of citizenship, with only tangible examples of what citizens say, do, wear, and think. However, we were perhaps most surprised by the complicated ways in which these youth understood citizenship when we paid attention to what they believe citizens *think*. They challenged the limits we had set for them, focusing most often not on the ideas in citizens' heads, but on their deepest beliefs. As illustrated by the following line and image from Annie's poem, "Give a Little," one of the primary sentiments by which young people believe citizens should be guided is a commitment to equity:

I imagine an America where no one is rich
because no one is poor

In their illustrated poems, numerous other students identified fairly traditional notions of what citizens think, believe, and feel, including patriotism, empathy for the less fortunate, gratitude for our freedoms and opportunities, and a sense of responsibility for ensuring the survival of the human species and Earth. Similarly, in our post-project interview, Zoe told us about her newfound recognition that citizenship is rooted in the belief in the "power to change things" (personal communication, 18 January 2011). Two examples of what these young people believe that citizens should think or feel appeared most consistently, impressing us as particularly important because of the fact that they seemed almost contradictory. Nicholas addressed the first—a passionate independence—with the following lines from his poem:

A true American citizen has passion

In what he believes in

He will do anything to share his ideas

And does not worry about what people think of him

And in her poem, "Respect," Rebecca illustrated with words and an image another perspective on what citizens understand about the very nature of a unique American nationality:

This is a poem about imagining

Imagining a world where there is no

Individual

Our students did not seem to recognize these tensions between being an absolute individual and subsuming one's individuality for the good of the larger society. But they did appreciate that the benefits of citizenship were largely a matter of perception. They consistently articulated and illustrated how wealthy members of US society perceive the distribution of citizenship advantages as *equal*, while those individuals on the bottom end of the economic scale recognize that their status as lower income Americans means that they are *less* than citizens. A similar notion was illustrated through attention to race and ethnicity; those outside of White middle class culture feel marginalized. Fortunately these young people believe they share in the responsibility to shift this perception and address these inequities.

Implications and Conclusions

As the images, slam poetry lines, and themes we have shared reveal, the illustrated slam poems that resulted from our project became meaningful products for these young people and unique data for us as teachers, teacher educators, and scholars partnering in a PDS context to intelligently complicate our students' concepts of citizenship. Interestingly, our focus on reviving the working relationship between the university and middle school faculty reminded us of what we now think should be an equally complex notion—"citizenship" in PDS partnerships. We consider both in this brief final discussion.

The data from this study provided us with important and novel insights into youths' understandings of and appreciation for the concept of citizenship, and we believe this project answered Ostrom's call (1996) for teachers to seek innovative ways to engage students in civic education. Youths' poetry

projects demonstrated the potential for adolescents to articulate remarkably sophisticated ideas about citizenship, when they are called on or enabled to do so through the multimodal approaches that remain largely absent from today's civics classrooms (Knight Abowitz & Harnish, 2006). The implications of such student investment reach deep into social studies curriculum and include promising possibilities to diversify pedagogy and activate student learning. We believe that this project has significance for what we understand about our own civic education pedagogies and for challenging the xenophobic policies that often impact even who is able to attend US schools in the early 21st century.

Crafting these illustrated slam poems allowed young people to explore the familiar yet often unexamined notion of what it means to be a citizen, what active involvement in the civic space might encompass, and what it means to be a young person reflecting on her or his surroundings. Through their slam poems and presentations, we noted increasingly close connections between our students' evolving ideas and what Banks (2008) referred to as "active" and "transformative" citizenship. Specifically, our project participants consistently suggested that citizens should work spiritedly to articulate, discuss, and consider ways to solve societal problems. They also frequently lamented what they saw as a lack of initiative to do so in a world powered by greed and exaltation of material wealth.

The potential impact of this project on social studies classroom instruction and teacher education is therefore considerable. Teachers and teacher educators might be consistently empowered to seek out, explore, and employ students' perceptions of and experiences with sophisticated and controversial concepts, moving with youth well beyond the all-encompassing and "definitive" explanation provided in a textbook or the often problematic notions proffered by reactionary policies. Recognition of students as *experts* allows for a more personal, and thus more meaningful, appreciation of citizenship and potent means to communicate that understanding. Finally, we believe this project allowed us and the students opportunities to explore Gutierrez' (2008) "third space," by encouraging expression of personal experiences as a valid and potent means to understand citizenship at a level far deeper than through traditional civic classroom pedagogies and practice.

We in no way held our students and their newfound, more critical perspectives on citizenship as responsible for the development—or even rebirth—of our PDS program. Yet, as a result of this project, we became increasingly conscious of the fact that this unique collaborative endeavor was enabled by the very structures of a PDS and that our young adolescents were articulating ideas that spoke to the type of "citizenship" we hoped to see—*first*—in our school and university partners and—eventually—in the operation of our PDS. Perhaps naively, we hoped that the relationships between our tenuous PDS partners would deepen and become more authentic and that more collaborative, mutually beneficial projects might result—that our PDS would survive and thrive.

What became acutely evident was that conducting one small-scale collaborative curriculum/research project, regardless of its impact on students or the profundity of ideas students articulated and illustrated, would not magically fix our partnership. The complexity of PDS partnerships goes far beyond such single, solitary projects, which often find little daylight beyond the classroom in which they are enacted. We learned that efforts to work within a PDS must serve the partnership objectives, such that Teitel's (1998) "plateau" is transcended. While our collaborative curricular/research project worked to design, implement, and study cross-disciplinary activities that enabled students to find their civic voices, our effort was, at the very least, too little and too late. As our partnership in these middle and high schools faded (new partner-

ship efforts in other secondary schools have since arisen), it was evident that we had burned any "citizenship" or partnership capital: while our middle school author partner was committed to this project, the larger body of teachers and administrators in these sites could no longer appreciate this endeavor as evidence of the promise of a partnership. In summary, maybe the lesson is that PDS "citizenship" only tolerates so many cries of "Wolf!" or declarations that "The sky is falling!" before they simply stop believing and focus exclusively, reasonably, on their own students' needs.

At the conclusion of our collaborative intervention, we were left with the same assessment of our partnership: the secondary school saw the PDS partnership as nothing more than a service effort in teacher preparation and all parties silently agreed that this academically successful school seemed to have little desire for the too often promised and too infrequently delivered professional development that might serve the schools' or other partnership members' constituents, or even for collaborative research activities that might explicitly serve the schools' teachers or students. We are more aware than ever that the complex nature of these unique partnerships requires further and sustained study to better understand how both sides—the university *and* school constituents in a PDS—can "lift as they climb" toward better educational outcomes for all. While we are cautious to draw too many generalizable conclusions about secondary PDSs as the result of this one project and study, it is evident that we are among the majority of secondary PDSs that struggle in this way.

While scholars have recognized culture as the primary civic space in which youth might explore and enact notions of citizenship, we now believe that these notions of "culture" might similarly enable us to examine the nature of PDS partnerships and orient them more toward the needs of our school partners. NAPDS "Essentials" #4—"a shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants"—and #8—"work by college/ university faculty and P-12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings"—might be guiding principles in partnerships' efforts to develop such cultures, to move past universities' often exclusive focus on our teacher education ends. Establishing such a culture might involve having these projects become more known within and across our school and university contexts, and the dissemination of these student achievement focused projects might also be seen as a given element and an accomplishment in themselves. And the focus of any such project might tied—explicitly—to the articulated partnership objectives.

Of course, there was significant value in this project and study—what became a last gasp effort before the "reconstitution" of our PDS. We have introduced a handful of the tools and daily pedagogical practices we developed to enable our middle school students to explore notions of citizenship with these multimodal texts. The innovations of this project were the direct result of even the small-scale school/university connections we forged. Such everyday strategies and mechanisms are vitally important starting points for pedagogies and curricula that allow youth to explore more complicated concepts of citizenship. Ultimately our primary, shared focus was on these practical realities in the service of developing young people as complex thinkers and even activist members of their communities.

Recognizing and responding to increasingly complicated concepts of citizenship has obvious significance for us and our students, near our nation's capital and in an extraordinarily diverse, immigrant-rich region. But even a glance at population growth trends suggests that ours is only one of the first of many communities that will eventually know this diversity, where we will not just *hope* young people think more broadly about who a citizen is but where they will *need* to do so, for their own good and for the well-being of our

democracy. Where perhaps the sparse words of a poem, expressed in many languages and illustrated by universally understood images, might allow for the authentic, respectful communication that represent the shared and highest ideals of our social studies instruction. While the university and schools that were involved in the PDS and the curricular/research venture we detail here have moved on—away from each other—we believe it is evident from the findings on which we report here that classroom teachers and university faculty partnering to challenge middle school youths to think more deeply can lead to promising controversies that we likely would not have encountered in isolation. SUP

Appendix A

Poetry Survey

Are you male or female (Please circle your response)?

What is the first word that pops into your mind when you hear the word “poetry”?__________

Do you know the names of any poets? _____________ If “yes” please list their names.

____
____

Do you know the titles of any poems? _____________ If “yes” please list the poems you know.

____
____

What does **photography** have to do with poetry? Explain your answer.

____
____
____

When a poet thinks about a topic to write about, he or she might first think about what that topic means to him or her. An example of a topic for a poem might be “being a citizen.” What does being a citizen mean to you?

____
____
____

How do you feel about poetry? Circle the number

1	2	3	4	5
(Dislike it)	(No opinion either way)		(Love it)	

Appendix B

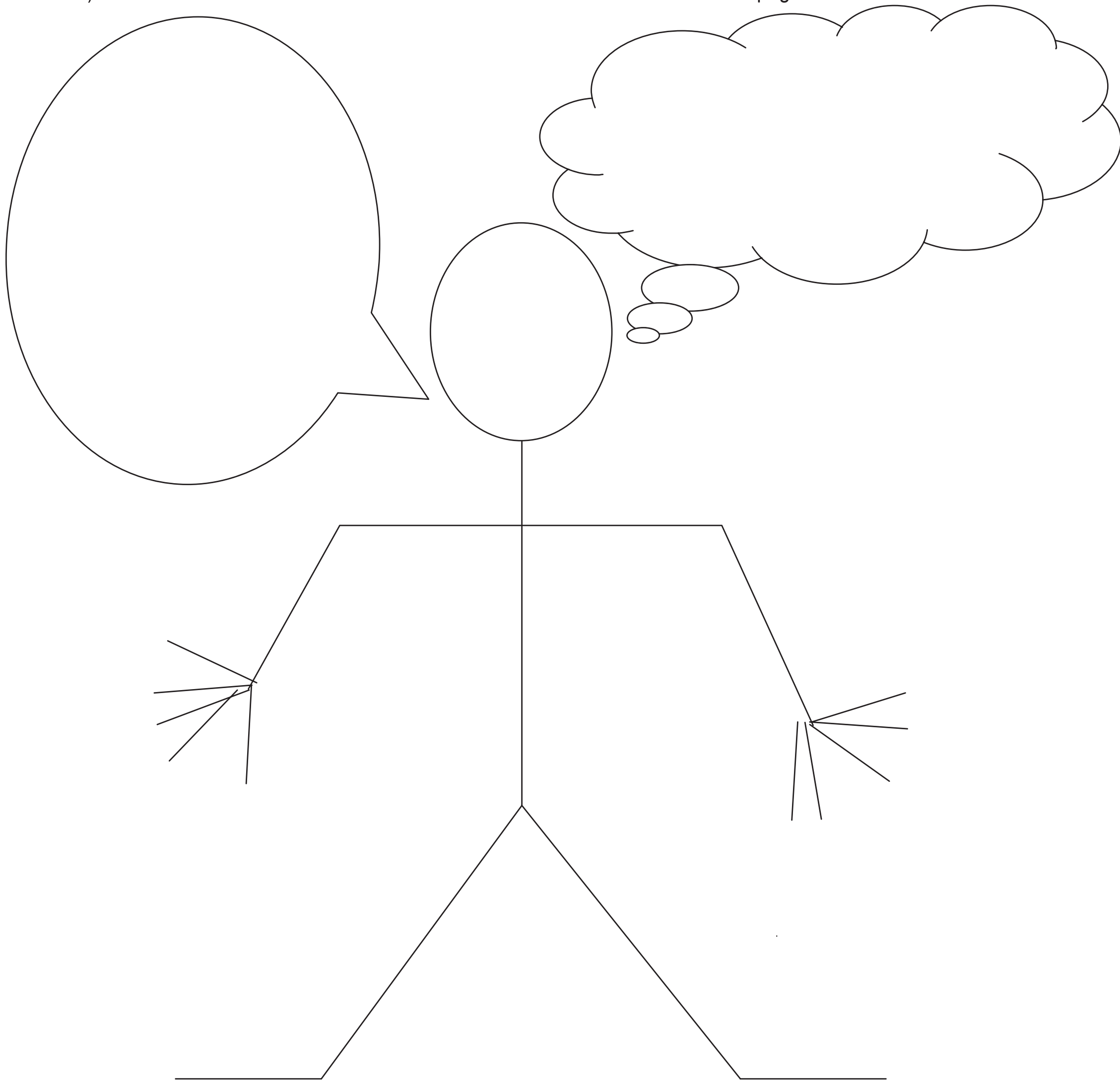
Slam Poem Citizen Body Diagram

Name:_______________________________ Period/Date:_______________

<u>What Is A Citizen?</u>

Everyone thinks about what it means to be a "citizen" differently.
Please respond to the questions below based on what YOU think about what it means to be citizen...

1) What does a citizen SAY? Share this in the dialogue bubble below…
2) What does a citizen THINK? Share this in the thought bubble below…
3) What does a citizen DO? Draw and label at least TWO of actions next to the hands of the diagram below…
4) What does a citizen WEAR? Draw and label at least THREE items of clothing on the diagram below...
5) What does a citizen SEE? Sketch at least TWO items on the back of this page…



Appendix C

"What It Means to Be a Citizen" Slam Poem Idea Generator

Name:________________________________ **Date:**________________

I believe our country would be better off if people ________________________________

____

To make our country a better place I believe people need to stop ________________________

____

There would be nothing better for our country than ____________________________

____

I imagine an America where ____

____

I love it when I hear about people ____________________________________

____

I hate it when I hear about people ____________________________________

____

One of the most important things about being an American is ______________________

____

The difference between being an American citizen and a citizen of other countries is ____________

____

The biggest challenge facing our country is ________________________________

____

The definition of "citizen" should change to include ____________________________

____

People who should NOT be allowed to be citizens are ____________________________

____

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