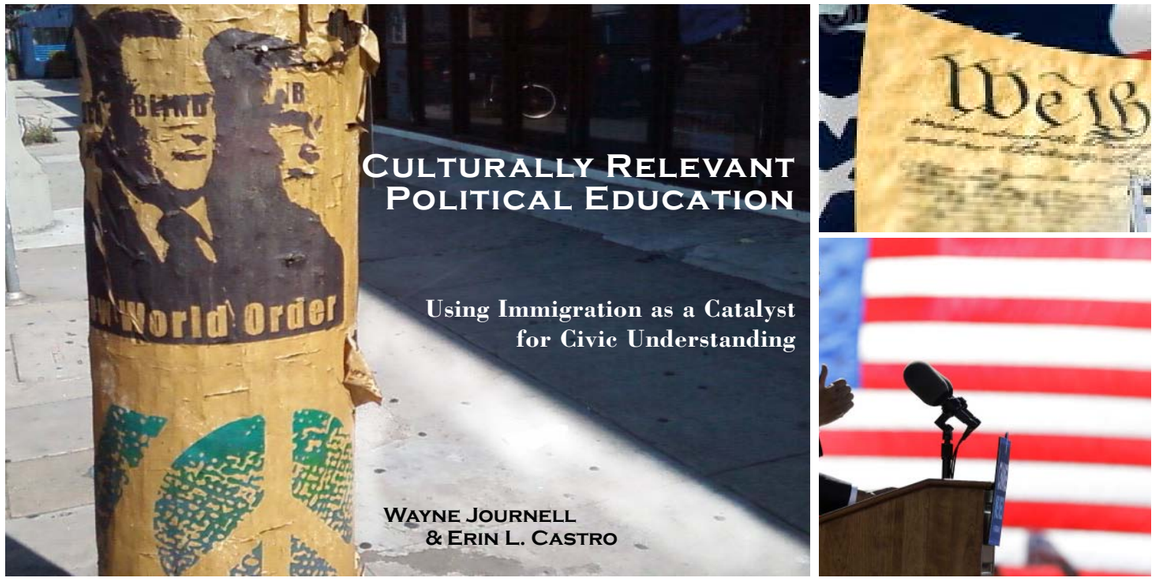

Introduction

In an analysis of National Assessment of Educational Progress data, Niemi and Junn (1998) found that students in the United States know very little about politics. While this news may be unsettling to those who place a premium on engaged citizenship, it is hardly surprising given the general lack of political knowledge and civic interest among the American electorate that has been well documented within political science research (e.g., Delli Carpini, & Keeter, 1996; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Putnam, 2000). Yet, many of those concerned with this lack of political engagement in the United States point to the perpetually uninformed and politically lethargic 18-to-25-year-old voting bloc and argue that public education must do a better job of informing and engaging students in the political process (Macedo, Alex-Assensoh, Berry, Brintnall, Campbell, Fraga, Fung et al., 2005).

Already a daunting task for educators, teaching about the American political system during this era of transcultural migration is particularly difficult. As Banks (2008) notes, attempting to educate students through a mainstream approach that often does not account for ethnic and cultural differences does little to further immigrant students' conceptions of citizenship. Many members of immigrant groups, even if they were born in the United States or have gone through the naturalization process, often fail to identify with the American political process either out of a lingering sense of loyalty to their homeland or a distrust of American politics that is fueled by the institutional racism faced by many of these groups upon entering the nation (Abu El-Haj, 2007; Mitchell & Parker, 2008).

Latino students, in particular, often feel alienated from politics, especially at the federal level, and this political disengagement often correlates with the immigrant status of students or their families (Torney-Purta, Barber, & Wilkenfeld, 2007). However, recent research suggests that the amount and quality of social studies coursework taken by immigrant students can reverse these attitudes and produce positive feelings toward political engagement (Callahan, Muller, & Schiller, 2008).

Specifically, Torney-Purta and her colleagues (2007) posit that Latino students would benefit from "creating an open climate for discussion, and explicitly including the study of political topics in the curriculum [in their social studies curriculum]" (p. 121). Our analysis here details the efforts of one teacher, Mr. Harrison,[1] who followed this strategy with his predominately Latino high school civics class during his coverage of the 2008 Presidential election. Using immigration, a topic that elicited passionate reactions from his students, as a reoccurring theme throughout the semester, Mr. Harrison was able to engage in a type of culturally relevant pedagogy that allowed his students to involve themselves in discussions of the American political process.

Wayne Journell is an assistant professor in the Department of Teacher Education and Higher Education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, North Carolina, and Erin L. Castro is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, Illinois.

Theoretical Framework

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The dynamic of teaching and learning is a political undertaking in which students bring with them social and cultural experiences into the classroom. These experiences are useful—and arguably necessary—in cultivating meaningful educational experiences for all students. The idea of a culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995; 2009) or culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000) recognizes the myriad ways that culture affects and influences students' ability to learn and connect with educational institutions.

Culturally relevant teaching grew out of a concern for the educational experiences of underrepresented and marginalized communities within schools. As a way to understand student performance, the concept of culturally relevant teaching argues that in order for students to be successful in school, they must be given the opportunity to relate to the things that are familiar to them.

Other theories attempt to understand the phenomenon of student "underperformance" as well, such as cultural capital theory (Yosso, 2005), student resistance theory (Kohl, 1995), and cultural difference theory (Spring, 2009), all of which complicate our understanding of student "failure." These theories reposition the onus of responsibility for student academic and behavioral failure away from the student and instead look at the educator, the curricula, the school, and the cultural mismatch between all three. Culturally relevant teaching, however, focuses specific attention on the role of the instructor in bridging the cultural divide.

Although referred to by different names, such as culturally compatible instruction (Jordan, 1985) or culturally congruent teaching (Au & Jordan, 1981), the foundation of this teaching approach is based on the recognition that the process of teaching and learning is neither politically nor culturally neutral. Rather than understanding the concept of teaching as politically sanitized, a culturally relevant pedagogy explicitly considers the ways that students are implicated in discursive systems of power that influence their ability to be successful in school. In other words, academic success is closely tied to a student's ability to understand and connect with the culture of the school and the classroom.

Throughout history, students of color have had to compromise their cultural attachments in order to pursue academic excellence. Delpit (1995) argues that much of what is considered to be underachievement by students of color can actually be attributed to a cultural mismatch between the teacher, what is valued in the classroom, and the student. Delpit outlines what she refers to a "culture of power" and points out that those with power are frequently the least aware of this power and the most unwilling to acknowledge its existence (p. 24). However, those without this cultural power can easily recognize the ways the system operates to their disadvantage. Similarly, culturally relevant teaching approaches understand this dynamic of power and argue that academic achievement does not have to come at the cost of cultural detachment for students. Demonstrably, this decision continues to be one that Latino students must face.

In public schools across the United States, pedagogies and curricula continue to reflect White middle-class values (Spring, 2009). Students of color and other disenfranchised students who do not hold the social and political capital necessary to influence educational practices and policies continue to fall behind their White peers in every measurement of academic achievement, from test scores to graduation rates (Orfield, 2009).

Latino students, specifically, are disserved by our public education system as they are severely overrepresented in the numbers of students who "drop-out" of high school and are practically invisible in postsecondary graduate and professional programs (Orfield, 2009)—a clear indication that their experiences in educational institutions are vastly different from their White counterparts who do not suffer from the same statistics.

Herein lies a central tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy, that academic success is intimately linked to a cultural match between students and schools. Since discourses of culturally relevant pedagogies exist, we can infer that culturally *irrelevant* pedagogies exist then, too. It is in this irrelevance that students of color are not given the same opportunities to connect with school life as students who are part of and more familiar with the dominant culture.

The Dimensions of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Although scholars warn against essentializing and prescribing a set of teaching methods that will invariably work to engage students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2009), pedagogies that are considered to be culturally relevant do share similar qualities. For example, in discussing the efficacy of teacher education programs in preparing pre-service educators "to do" culturally relevant pedagogy post-graduation, Siwatu (2007) specifies four themes of culturally relevant pedagogy. Drawing from a variety of educational scholars, Siwatu defines culturally sensitive and equity-centered teaching practices by arguing that culturally relevant pedagogy:

> 1. Uses students' cultural knowledge (e.g., culturally familiar scenarios, examples, and vignettes) experiences, prior knowledge, and individual learning preferences as a conduit to facilitate the teaching-learning process (curriculum and instruction);
>
> 2. Incorporates students' cultural orientations to design culturally compatible classroom environments (classroom management);
>
> 3. Provides students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned using a variety of assessment techniques (students assessment); and
>
> 4. Provides students with the knowledge and skills needed to function in mainstream culture while simultaneously helping students maintain their cultural identity, native language, and connection to their cultural (cultural enrichment and competence). (p. 1086-1087).

Additionally, Gay (2000), argues that culturally responsive teaching "teaches to and through the strengths" of students and is "culturally validating and affirming" for them (p. 29). Importantly, Gay and others committed to a social justice approach to education, such as Shor (1992), Kumashiro (2004; 2008), hooks (2003), and Ayers et al. (2008), argue that cultivating a critical awareness on behalf of students is a desired outcome of cultural relevant pedagogy.

For example, Gay proposes that "…knowledge and skills needed to challenge existing social orders and power structures are desirable goals to be taught in schools" (p. 30). One of the reasons for this critical awareness is so that students can come to see themselves as part of a larger social system and recognize that their circumstances in and out of school are not entirely of their own making but are shaped by social forces such as the political economy (e.g., immigration laws and public education funding structures) and ideology (e.g., xenophobia and racism).

In this sense, culturally relevant pedagogies are rooted in a hope for transformation, and educators are conscious of the ways that students are implicated in an unjust social order. Educators work to make connections between student performance in school and the social arrangements that position students as more likely to fail in traditionally, seemingly meritocratic educational environments.

Culturally relevant pedagogies recognize that teaching and learning are socially-situated, political endeavors, and, as such, educators reject cultural deficit models that position students as in-need and "at-risk" and instead rely on students' cultural knowledge to guide and inspire teaching and learning. Beginning with what is familiar to students, such educators work to teach the whole student, recognizing that culture is a salient component of student identity. The contextual nature of teaching and learning is made explicit through these practices where classroom social interactions honor the complex identities students bring with them when they enter the doors of the classroom.

These interactions occur within the intersections of race, gender, class, nationality, language, ability, religion, sexuality, and other identities. Culturally relevant pedagogies give educators and students the ability to relate to familiar life circumstances together and use these experiences as the basis for connection and instruction.

For example, Michie (2009) discusses a critical media class he taught eighth grade students in Chicago. One of the

most important realizations for him in teaching this course was to use television programs that the students were already familiar with, rather than attempting to "indoctrinate" them with "quality," educative television. He argues that, "Some educators would shudder at the thought of using Marcia Brady or Al Bundy as subjects of serious study. But in many ways, the 'texts' of which these characters are a part are richer and more multilayered than the textbooks and basal readers that clutter classroom shelves" (p. 104).

The same message can be transferred to the civic development of Latinos and students of other ethnic minority groups in primary and secondary education. Too often, traditional civic education—learning about the branches of the American government, discussing the various duties of responsible citizens, and appreciating the nuances of the United States Constitution—fails to connect with many Latino students (Torney-Purta et al., 2007).

This is not to say, however, that Latino students are uninterested in politics or civic participation. On the contrary, studies of political behavior in the United States have shown that Latinos, regardless of their citizenship status, are politically active, particularly when political activity is measured beyond the act of voting (Barreto & Munoz, 2003; Staton, Jackson, & Canache, 2007).

Therefore, the civic disengagement often reported among Latino students suggests a problem in the way the message is being presented in their social studies classes rather than a problem with the message itself. Kahne and Middaugh (2008) report that, on average, non-Latino students are considerably more likely to receive what they consider a "quality" civic education, one that provides opportunities for non-traditional instruction and incorporates discussions of political events and issues that are of interest to students. By insisting on teaching traditional methods of civic education to all students regardless of whether they fall outside of the targeted majority, schools are promoting a culture of civic exclusion which only serves to reproduce existing civic norms (Walsh, 1987).

The study that follows is one of possibility, not typicality. By providing his students with culturally relevant political instruction, the teacher in this scenario, Mr. Harrison, generated civic interest by using a reoccurring theme—immigration—that students found interesting and to which they could relate. His students, a group that was predominately Latino/a, summarily used that issue as a way in which they could contextualize the traditional civic messages offered by their textbook and the state-mandated curriculum.

Context of the Study

As part of a larger study on teaching politics in secondary education (Journell, 2009), the first author observed three civics classes at Roosevelt High School during coverage of the 2008 Presidential Election. A large school servicing over 2,500 students, Roosevelt is located in a predominantly working-class, urban area in the Southwest Chicago suburbs. The student body at Roosevelt is representative of the socioeconomic status and racial diversity of the surrounding community—at the time of the study the student population was 43% Latino/a, 29% African American, and 27% White, and over 30% of Roosevelt students were eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Academically, the school faced many of the problems often associated with urban schools (Fine, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2006), including a 30% drop-out rate and sanctions by the state for failing to consistently achieve Adequate Yearly Progress on several No Child Left Behind benchmarks. In addition, when comparing ACT results of Roosevelt students with other students in Illinois, Roosevelt fell below both state and district averages in all academic areas.

Civics at Roosevelt was a required course for freshmen, and the focus of the present study is the regular-level civics course taught by Mr. Harrison. In his mid-forties, but only in his fourth year of teaching, Mr. Harrison had taken a non-traditional path into education. After 20 successful years in the private sector, he decided to take a pay cut and go back to school to obtain a teaching degree, a transition he described in the following way:

> As I grew older, I grew more spiritually and began to look for my purpose and how I could affect change more. I loved what I did . . . but my relationship with God was more important and this direction I felt He was leading me in.

Upon completion of his degree, he accepted an offer at Roosevelt, the same school he had attended as a teenager.

As a Roosevelt alumnus and an African American, Mr. Harrison maintained a unique relationship with his students. He often reminded them that he grew up in a nearby neighborhood, and that he was aware of the home issues and peer pressures that many of them faced in their daily lives. At the same time, Mr. Harrison made a point to tell his students that they always had the choice to pursue a better life for themselves and repeatedly cited education as the key to leaving the streets and finding gainful employment opportunities.

A deeply spiritual individual, Mr. Harrison likened teaching to a ministry, although not necessarily from a religious standpoint. Instead, he viewed himself as a mentor, someone who could share real-life experiences on what it takes to be successful in the "real world." As a result, Mr. Harrison placed as much emphasis on the way his students carried themselves as on their academic performance. Failure of students to turn in work or a lack of focus during class often elicited lectures on the importance of maturity and hard work.

Politically, Mr. Harrison classified himself as an independent, and he maintained that he was undecided about the 2008 presidential election up to election day. Throughout the semester, he intimated to his class that he was not sold on the idea of voting for Obama and admitted that he had voted Republican in the past, including for George W. Bush four years earlier, which elicited responses of disbelief from the students in his overwhelmingly pro-Obama class. Ultimately, Mr. Harrison did vote for McCain, although he chose to keep that decision from his students and many of his friends given the unpopular reaction he would have received at school and within the local African-American community (Journell, in press).

Mr. Harrison's class that was observed was comprised of 24 students, 15 of whom were males and nine of whom were female. Eighteen of the students in the class were Latino/a, with the rest of the class split equally between White and African-American students. Academically, the students in the class actively participated on a regular basis and appeared very interested in both the subject matter and the election; however, many of the students' grades suffered from a failure to complete their work on a consistent basis. Surveys given to the students at the beginning and end of the study showed that they overwhelmingly favored Obama in the presidential election.

Methodology

Using a case study design (Stake, 1995), the first author visited Mr. Harrison's class three to four times per week from the start of school in August 2008 through the election in November. During these visits, he acted as a participant-observer (Merriam, 1998) in which he spent time observing classroom instruction and helping students with their assignments. In addition to field notes, data were obtained through interviews and artifact analysis. The first author formally interviewed Mr. Harrison twice, once at the beginning of the study and again after the election. He also interviewed six of Mr. Harrison's students who volunteered to take part in the study. All of the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for accuracy.

In addition to the qualitative data, surveys were given to Mr. Harrison's students at the beginning and end of the study in order to better gauge their interest in politics and the election. The surveys consisted of statements that required students to respond via a Likert scale, as well as a couple of multiple choice questions that asked students to indicate their candidate preference. The initial seven questions were the same on each survey, which allowed for a comparison of students' civic dispositions over the course of the semester.

Data were analyzed by triangulating (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) sources and following the guidelines for case studies described by Stake (1995). Specific areas of interest within the data were examined and categorized into relevant topics. Patterns then emerged within the data from which meaning was assigned and naturalistic generalizations were formed.

Findings

Race at Roosevelt

From an instructional standpoint, Mr. Harrison relied on what he termed an "old school" approach that involved primarily worksheets and lectures. However, where he separated himself from his peers at Roosevelt was in his ability to respond to the dynamics of his classroom and cater his instruction to his students' interests and understandings. In our initial interview he observed that

> Specifically in this particular environment, the Hispanic population has truly increased and is dominant now. In my particular classes we have 150 kids . . . and in those 150, just from eyesight alone, I speculate that there are probably about 85-90 kids that are Hispanic and 20 kids that are Black and 20 kids that are White.

When asked whether those demographics affected his classroom instruction, Mr. Harrison replied,

> It does at times. I try to focus on things that at times specifically are spearheaded and geared toward a particular group, yet are still relevant and important for everyone else. So, yeah, at times, based on where we are at, the environment, the mood of the classroom, I can do something like that, that I know will get everybody involved, and then you kind of transition into where you want to go.

The mood of Mr. Harrison's classroom, and the overall mood of the school, often revolved around dynamics of race. At Roosevelt, race was not ignored, and it simultaneously served as a source of pride, a method of stratification, and a lens from which students viewed their classroom instruction. The Latino students, in particular, seemed to relish their heritage, as evidenced by the large number of Mexican flags affixed to students' backpacks and clothing, passionate discussions of "real" Mexican food, and allegiance to their homeland. One Latina student was overheard telling one of her friends, "If you haven't been to Mexico, then you aren't a real Mexican. I go every year!"

From the very beginning of the school year, Mr. Harrison embraced the diversity in his classroom and often chose to confront potentially taboo comments directly, as the following conversation from one of the first days of class shows:

> MR. HARRISON: Do you agree with the statement in the book? (about European immigrants constituting the majority of immigrants in the United States)
>
> CHARLIE *(African-American student)*: I disagree because America is the great melting pot
>
> DAVID *(White student)*: I disagree because the Europeans weren't really immigrants because they were born here. Therefore, the greatest number of immigrants are Mexicans (turning to the class), no offense.
>
> MR. HARRISON: No, it's cool. This is civics class. (Turning to the majority of Latinos in the class) Can he say Mexican?
>
> SEVERAL LATINO STUDENTS: Yeah.

As an African-American, Mr. Harrison often attempted to relate to his students' conceptions of race and their frequent expressions of frustration with the racism present in American society. He often told his students that racism and sexism still exist in the United States and that he had to "keep it real" by saying that our nation was too often flawed when trying to promote freedom, justice, and equality. Using himself as an example during a discussion of freedom, Mr. Harrison admitted, "I take freedom for granted. I never experienced slavery. I was always a Black guy who was with the White guys when it came to education. I always got good jobs and things like that."

Turning to his students, he continued by saying, "Some of you, your life is just the East side. There are people on the far West side that look like you who have nice homes and good jobs. Think about that for a second." He concluded the discussion by saying, "We live in an imperfect society. The idea of freedom isn't flawed; we just don't apply it well sometimes."

Immigration as a Catalyst for Civic Understanding

Throughout the semester, Mr. Harrison embraced race as a context from which his students could better understand the often abstract civic concepts discussed in class. In particular, Mr. Harrison repeatedly structured his lessons around immigration, a topic that often elicited passionate feelings among the students in his class and one with to which many of his students could personally relate.

This approach often conflicted with the information presented in the textbook, which was written for a general audience and explained civic concepts from a universal perspective that clashed with the real-life experiences of many members of Mr. Harrison's class. For example, a discussion of the Lockean notion of natural rights for all human beings led to the following exchange:

> MR. HARRISON: Just because you were born on this Earth, no matter what color you are or gender, you should have the right to life, liberty, and property.
>
> ALBERTO: Then how come all these people are deported?
>
> MR. HARRISON: Good question. It's an ideal, but we have imperfect people implementing these ideals.
>
> ANOTHER LATINO STUDENT: Yeah, Bush!
>
> MR. HARRISON: Not just Bush; there are a lot of people in charge.

Similarly, the textbook's portrayal of the United States as a melting pot of diverse cultures was met with skepticism by many of the Latino students in the class. The students recognized the diversity that surrounded them and embraced the notion of unity, as evidenced by one Latina student's reaction to Obama's acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention. When asked by Mr. Harrison to share her favorite part of the speech, the student responded, "Where [he said] we all have dreams and goals but all come together as one American family."

Yet, many of the students questioned whether the melting pot analogy truly represented the attitude of the majority of Americans and, in particular, members of the federal government. This skepticism was clearly evident during Mr. Harrison's political cartoon unit when he had his students analyze three immigration-themed cartoons during class (See Figure 1).

For example, when asked to discuss the first cartoon, which depicted a welcome message constructed from bricks and barbed wire, the students were quick to recognize the irony of the cartoon, particularly when compared to the ideology found in the textbook. Charlie, an African-American student, called the cartoon "a racial slur" while Alberto, a Latino student, interpreted the cartoon as saying that "immigrants come into America but then go to jail." Beth, a Latina student, tied the cartoon into previous classroom discussions and stated that the cartoon showed that "America is known as the melting pot but we don't really buy into it."

Mr. Harrison used these cartoons and similar prompts throughout the semester to transition from civic ideology to discussions of public policy and economics. For example, conversations like the one described above often led to discussions of immigration policy, such as border security and naturalization. Many of these conversations were lighthearted, as when Alberto jokingly stated that he would like the government to remove all border control in the United States. His classmates were quick to criticize the logistics of that idea:

EMILIO *(Latino student)*: You can't do that!

MR. HARRISON: Why not?

DAVID *(White student)*: It takes the fun out of it. (prompts laughter from the class)

EMILIO: There will be nothing but Mexicans coming over. The country will be run by Mexicans!

MR. HARRISON: Well, [Latinos] are the largest non-White group in the United States right now.

ALBERTO: Go Mexicans! (prompts laughter from the class)

Other conversations throughout the semester undertook a serious tone and led to ideological confrontations among students, often along racial lines, as this conversation shows:

EMILIO *(Latino student)*: If immigrants come here to work, then they should stay here. They work and they help the White people out.

ALBERTO *(Latino student)*: If they made it here, then they should be citizens. They risked their life.

MR. HARRISON: Sounds like an obstacle course! (prompts laughter from the class)

MARC *(Latino student)*: They are coming here to get a better life!

EMILIO: The thing is that things are different over there. Over there, they are sleeping in boxes and shit like that.

BETH *(Latina student)*: I think it is dumb that we have all of these restrictions because this is supposed to be the melting pot.

MR. HARRISON: There ya go! That is the way to think.

DAVID *(White student)*: Expanding on that, we were all immigrants and we, the White people, kicked the Indians out, so why should we restrict?

EMILIO: White boy telling the truth! (prompts laughter from the class)

MR. HARRISON: (turning to the White students in the class). Aren't these illegal aliens taking your jobs?

EMILIO: We are taking the jobs that they don't want to do!

BETH: Everyone talks about the Latinos being poor when they come over, but they aren't given an education right away.

MR. HARRISON: Yeah, I saw recently where a survey showed that the percentage of Latino males going to college is very small.

EMILIO: But they come here because they don't have nothing!

MR. HARRISON: Yeah, they don't have time to get an education because they need to provide for their families. All men are providers—White, Black, Latino, Mars, Jupiter—it is engrained in them.

ALBERTO: What if you have a sugar mama?

MR. HARRISON: Then you are a weak man! (prompts laughter from the class)

As one can see from that conversation, Mr. Harrison was not afraid to engage his students in potentially confrontational discussions. Rather, he often seemed to intentionally provoke heated discussions in his class and encouraged his students to think about how race often influences public policy. By the end of the semester, Mr. Harrison seemed to recognize that his students understood the nuances of immigration policy in the United States and regularly used that information as a springboard to discussions about other aspects of politics and civic policy in the United States.

Figure 1
Immigration-themed cartoons used by Mr. Harrison

Cartoons reproduced with permission.

The following conversation is an excerpt from a seminar Mr. Harrison held in his class prior to the presidential election in which his students were allowed to bring up any topic of their choice, and it provides an excellent example of how Mr. Harrison facilitated these discussions so that students' passions about immigration were able to transfer to other political and economic contexts.

MR. HARRISON: Is there an issue that you think is important to you as Hispanic-Americans? Or you as African-Americans? What do you White students think about the whole thing?

CASSIDY *(White student)*: I don't think immigration should be taken lightly. If we don't monitor it, the country will become overpopulated.

MR. HARRISON: Was that the case in the 19th century when immigrants were coming to Ellis Island?

DAVID *(White student)*: No, but there are more people here now.

MARC *(Latino student)*: I think people should have to go through the naturalization process.

ALBERTO *(Latino student)*: I don't think it is fair because the Mexican government won't let them be immigrants. The immigrants here get a bad rap because of a few bad Mexicans here that ruin it for everyone.

MR. HARRISON: That is a good point. Terrance, what does this mean for African-Americans?

TERRANCE *(African-American student)*: Money.

MR. HARRISON: How so?

TERRANCE: Taking jobs.

EDUARDO *(Latino student)*: People talk about immigrants taking jobs, but I don't see Whites or Blacks out in the fields.

MARC: But the illegal immigrants that come in and apply for welfare are taking my money, stuff that I would use to buy something else.

EDUARDO: Mexican immigrants should get paid more because they work hard.

ALBERTO: People talk about Mexicans and say they are lazy, but it's because they can't get jobs because of the economy and gas prices.

BETH *(Latina student)*: I don't think lazy is the word, but they come here with nothing.

DAVID: But they don't pay taxes, so whatever they do make they get to keep.

MR. HARRISON: The economy is a big thing. When the economy is bad, people come and compete for the same jobs. So what would McCain do with this?

RICKY *(Latino student)*: Same thing as Bush.

MR. HARRISON: Ok, what is that?

RICKY: Where he is building a fence for immigrants.

MR. HARRISON: So you see how this issue affects everyone, all of the young African-American and White kids who want these jobs will be in trouble. Competition is competition.

RICKY: They will go with White people because Republicans are White.

DAVID: My uncle is a police officer in San Diego and he sees people who jumped the fence but he doesn't arrest them. He just stops them and tells them to contribute to the economy and help build a better life.

CHARLIE *(African-American student)*: Your uncle is a good American citizen!

MR. HARRISON: Should affirmative action be used there?

DAVID: That was right a long time ago, but now the only minorities are illegal immigrants.

MR. HARRISON: The thing is that if you eliminate it, it will revert back to the old boys club, or that is at least what people say.

DAVID: It makes me feel guilty that I am White!

After interviewing the students in Mr. Harrison's class, it appeared evident that the students appreciated the opportunity to discuss these issues over the course of the semester. When asked why she considered Mr. Harrison her favorite teacher, Sarah stated,

> Because he makes it fun to learn about politics. When some people talk about [politics], it is really boring, you don't really want to listen. But he makes it exciting and he gets your attention.

Other students specifically highlighted the continued focus on immigration, particularly within the context of the election. When Sergio, a Latino student, was asked what his favorite part of the class had been, he replied, "That [Mr. Harrison] wants our opinions on immigration and economics and stuff." Similarly, Melissa, a Latina student, stated that immigration was an issue of importance to her in the election, which she qualified by stating, "a lot of my family has come from Mexico so I know a lot of things about there."

Finally, the survey data suggest that the students seemed to gain an appreciation for politics over the course of the semester. Table 1 provides the results of both the pre and post surveys. As the table shows, the mean responses rose for all of the statements when compared to the results from the beginning of the semester. While we hesitate to place too much stock in these results because a host of factors could explain this rise in civic interest, such as constant attention being given to the election on television and other media during this period, the results may also reflect, at least partially, the nature of students' experiences in the government class.

In any case, it appears that the students' interest in politics increased, and they became more comfortable talking about political issues both in and out of school. Again, while there is no concrete evidence linking these results to Mr. Harrison's instruction, when combined with the enthusiasm observed during classroom discussions and the positive comments made by students about their government class, these results may provide further support that the culturally relevant approach taken by Mr. Harrison had a positive impact on his students' civic dispositions.

Discussion

By using immigration as a catalyst to better understand the American political system, Mr. Harrison provides an excellent example of using culturally relevant pedagogy as a medium for increasing students' political awareness and civic dispositions. Clearly, Mr. Harrison recognized the cultural identities and interests present in his classroom and intentionally chose a topic that elicited passionate feelings among many of his students and, in some cases, represented a lived experience of

Table 1
Student Survey Responses

Survey Item	*Pre-Survey*	*Post-Survey*
I consider politics important	3.12 (1.29)	3.95 (0.82)
I pay attention to politics and current events	2.16 (1.00)	2.65 (0.93)
I consider myself knowledgeable about politics	2.16 (1.30)	2.65 (0.98)
I enjoy discussing politics with others	2.04 (1.30)	2.34 (1.33)
I often talk about politics with my family and friends	2.16 (1.20)	2.78 (1.31)
I enjoy discussing current political events in school	2.12 (1.19)	2.65 (1.02)
I think following politics is important to being a good citizen	2.58 (1.13)	3.52 (1.16)

Note. The mean for each statement is given, with the standard deviation in parentheses.

his students or their families. As Siwatu (2007) and others (e.g., Obgu, 1992) have noted, using culturally familiar approaches to teaching and learning unfamiliar or abstract concepts encourages students of ethnic minority groups to take interest in their studies by allowing them to feel connected to the curriculum being taught.

While garnering interest is certainly important, it often appeared that Mr. Harrison extended his use of immigration as a way for his Latino students to better understand the paradox that existed between the civic education presented in the textbook and the lived experiences of many of his students that often contradict the traditional civic narrative presented in school. For students who may have experienced the racism that is often present in the United States or have seen the government that they have been told is supposed to protect its citizens actively seek to arrest or deport individuals who that do not fit within the formal definition of citizenship, the idea of "life, liberty, and property" or Jefferson's assertion that "all men are created equal" may come across as very hollow promises. By using immigration as a way to contextualize the traditional canon, Mr. Harrison was able to separate democratic theory from democratic reality while at the same time providing a platform for students to voice and express their personal experiences and opinions.

The resulting instruction appeared to foster critical responses from all students, not just the Latinos in the class. Instead of taking their textbook at face value, the students began actively questioning the accuracy of the claims being made by the authors, a strategy that Loewen (2010) argues is an effective way for students to uncover the truth about American history and culture.

This critical response is perhaps best represented by Beth's comparison of the melting pot metaphor offered by the textbook and the political cartoon welcoming immigrants to the United States with barbed wire and a brick wall. The fact that she was able to recognize the hypocrisy behind the textbook's portrayal of immigration shows that Beth had gained a nuanced understanding of public policy that she might not have received had Mr. Harrison simply taught about cultural diversity from a traditional perspective.

Even for the non-Latinos in the class, the use of immigration as a continuing theme seemed to increase their civic and political awareness. For the African-American students in the class, Mr. Harrison used immigration as way of providing a real-life economics lesson by showing how increased numbers of non-skilled laborers entering the workplace would reduce job opportunities and cut wages for individuals having to compete with the influx of immigrants. For the White students, the immigration focus seemed to serve a social justice function in that they were better able to see how state and federal policies can be viewed as furthering racial stereotypes and maintaining traditional societal power structures. David's admission toward the end of the semester that he felt guilty for being White suggests that the continual focus on equity in public policy may have unpacked some of the White privilege (McIntosh, 1990) present in society, a revelation that most likely would not have occurred using traditional forms of civic instruction.

Finally, by using immigration as a backdrop for his instruction throughout the semester, Mr. Harrison was able to maintain the delicate balance of teaching about American citizenship while simultaneously recognizing the backgrounds and identities of his students. The underlying purpose behind a course on American government is to promote civic unity through an appreciation of the structure and scope of the American political system. However, the traditional curriculum often takes a "one size fits all" approach to civic understanding that leaves little room for those who fall outside the mainstream of American society (Forbes, 2000; Journell, 2010).

Mr. Harrison's classroom contained many students who may indeed live in the United States but who clearly identify with another nation or culture, and, as McCarthey and Moje (2002) note, "identity matters" in education (p. 228). By taking a culturally relevant approach to teaching civics, Mr. Harrison allowed his students to learn about and appreciate the American political system without losing their self-identities as Latinos or immigrants from other nations.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, this type of approach to civic education is not typical. Too often, teachers teach the standard curriculum without much regard to the students who are in their classes. From a civic perspective, failing to teach from a culturally relevant standpoint runs the risk of alienating those students who do not identify with the traditional narrative that paints the United States as a land of opportunity for all who reside within its borders.

As the recent anti-immigration laws in Arizona have highlighted, the traditional canon certainly does not apply to all members of American society. Blindly advocating stories of melting pots and individuals pulling themselves up by the bootstraps while Latino students and students from immigrant families experience racism and xenophobia via the policies articulated by their government is not only a poor pedagogical practice, but it also exacerbates the civic disconnect many of these students already feel toward the nation in which they live.

Furthermore, such practices fail to provide already marginalized students with the opportunity to see themselves as active participants in the political process, an essential ingredient in the realization of full democratic citizenship. Given the recent studies detailing increasing levels of civic disengagement in the United States, educators have a responsibility to ensure that the civic instruction that they provide is one that reaches *all* students, not just those targeted by and included in the traditional narrative.

Note

[1] Pseudonyms have been used for participants and all other identifying information contained in this article.

References

Abu El-Haj, T. R. (2007). "I was born here, but my home, it's not here": Educating for democratic citizenship in an era of transnational migration and global conflict. *Harvard Educational Review, 77*, 285-316.

Au, K., & Jordan, C. (1981). Teaching reading to Hawaiian children: Finding a culturally appropriate solution. In H. Trueba, G. Guthrie, & K. Au (eds.), *Culture and the bilingual classroom: Classroom ethnography (*pp. 139-152). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Ayers, W., Ladson-Billings, G., Michie, G., & Noguera, P. A. (Eds.) (2008). *City kids city schools: More reports from the front row.* New York: The New Press.

Banks, J. A. (2008). Diversity, group identity, and citizenship education in a global age. *Educational Researcher, 37,* 129-139.

Barreto, M. A., & Munoz, J. A. (2003). Reexamining the "politics of in-between": Political participation among Mexican immigrants in the United States. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 25,* 427-447.

Callahan, R. M., Muller, C., & Schiller, K. S. (2008). Preparing students for citizenship: Immigrant high school students' curriculum and socialization. *Theory and Research in Social Education, 36,* 6-31.

Delli Carpini, M. X., & Keeter, S. (1996). *What Americans know about politics and why it matters.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: Free Press.

Delpit, L. D. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review, 59*, 280-298.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2003). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (2nd ed., pp. 1-45). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fine, M. (1991). *Framing dropouts: Notes on the politics of an urban public high school.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Forbes, J. D. (2000). The new assimilation movement: Standards, tests, and Anglo-American supremacy. *Journal of American Indian Education, 39*(2), 7-28.

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education, 53*, 106-116.

Hibbing, J. R., & Theiss-Morse, E. (2002). *Stealth democracy: Americans' beliefs about how government should work.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. New York: Routledge.

Jordan, C. (1985). Translating culture: From ethnographic information to educational program. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *16*, 102-123.

Journell, W. (2009). Setting the (un)welcome mat: A portrayal of immigration in American history standards. *The Social Studies, 100*, 160-168.

Journell, W. (2010). Standardizing citizenship: The potential influence of state curriculum standards on the civic development of adolescents. *Political Science and Politics, 43*, 351-358.

Journell, W. (in press). Ideological homogeneity, school leadership, and political intolerance in secondary education: A study of three high schools during the 2008 presidential election. *Journal of School Leadership*.

Kahne, J., & Middaugh, E. (2008). High quality civic education: What is it and who gets it? *Social Education, 72,* 34-39.

Kohl, H. (1995). *'I won't learn from you': And other thoughts on creative maladjustment*. New York: New Press.

Kumashiro, K. K. (2008). *The Seduction of common sense: How the right has framed the debate on America's schools.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Kumashiro, K. K. (2004). *Against common sense: Teaching and learning toward social justice.* New York: Routledge.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*, 465-491.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher, 35*(7), 3-12.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2008). "Yes, but how do we do it?": Practicing culturally relevant pedagogy. In W. Ayers, G. Ladson-Billings, G. Michie, & P. A. Noguera (Eds.), *City kids city schools: More reports from the front row*. New York: New Press.

Loewen, J. W. (2010). *Teaching what really happened: How to avoid the tyranny of textbooks & get students excited about doing history.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Macedo, S., Alex-Assensoh, Y., Berry, J. M., Brintnall, M., Campbell, D. E., Fraga, L. R., Fung, A., & .Walsh, K. C. (2005). *Democracy at risk: How political choices undermine citizen participation and what we can do about it.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

McCarthey, S. J., & Moje, E. B. (2002). Identity matters. *Reading Research Quarterly, 37,* 228-238.

McIntosh, P. (1990). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Independent School, 49*, 31-35.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Michie, G. (2009). *Holler if you hear me: The education of a teacher and his students*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Mitchell, K., & Parker, W. C. (2008). I pledge allegiance to . . . Flexible citizenship and shifting scales of belonging. *Teachers College Record, 110,* 775-804.

Niemi, R. G., & Junn, J. (1998). *Civic education: What makes students learn.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Ogbu, J. U. (1992). Understanding cultural diversity and learning. *Educational Researcher, 21*(8), 5-14, 24.

Orfield, G. (2009), *Reviving the goal of an integrated society: A 21st century challenge.* Los Angeles: The UCLA Civil Rights Project.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Shor, I. (1992). *Empowering education: Critical teaching for social change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Siwatu, K. O. (2007). Preservice teachers' culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy and outcome expectancy beliefs. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 23*, 1086-1101.

Spring, J. (2009). *American education* (14th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Staton, J. K., Jackson, R. A., & Canache, D. (2007). Dual nationality among Latinos: What are the implications for political connectedness? *Journal of Politics, 69,* 470-482.

Torney-Purta, J., Barber, C. H., & Wilkenfeld, B. (2007). Latino adolescents' civic development in the United States: Research results from the IEA civic education study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 36,* 111-125.

Walsh, C. E. (1987). Schooling and the civic exclusion of Latinos: Toward a discourse of dissonance. *Journal of Education, 169,* 115-131.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *8*, 69-91.