

Culturally Responsive Active Citizenship Education for Newcomer Students: A Cross-State Case Study of Two Teachers in Arizona and New York

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines how two social studies teachers in New York and Arizona engage newcomer youth in active citizenship education. Using a framework of culturally responsive active citizenship education, this article sheds light on how two teachers, in two different social, political, and educational contexts, enact critical citizenship practices and culturally responsive teaching. Findings from this study have the potential to inform how best to support newcomer students' understanding of and engagement in active citizenship in their local community(ies).

KEYWORDS: culturally responsive teaching, citizenship education, newcomer youth, social studies, active citizenship

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For the past two decades, newcomer youth have been underachieving in educational settings. Newcomers are students for whom English is not their first language (Short, 2002). Newcomer youth are characterized as students that have some or no formal education in their country of origin and have interrupted schooling due to extraordinary societal and/or educational factors (Echevarria, Short, & Vogt, 2013). Latino/a secondary newcomer youth have not attained the same level of academic success in comparison to other youth (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Much of the blame for this underachievement from schools and other institutions is placed on students, families, and historically marginalized communities of color (Irizarry & Raible, 2011). According to the Pew Hispanic Center (Fry, 2014), Latino/a newcomer youth have the highest high school dropout rate in the public school system. Salinas and Franquiz (2011) argue that newcomer students do not have access to a meaningful and rigorous citizenship

curriculum in secondary schools. Furthermore, a series of studies centered on citizenship education and diverse youth (Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Salinas & Franquiz, 2011) have documented that a culturally irrelevant curriculum, lack of multicultural resources, and an (in)effective social studies teacher have historically shaped the notions of citizenship for newcomer youth. Hence, newcomer youth assimilate to norms associated with U.S. schools, consequently molding students' beliefs about citizenship. Prieto and Villenas (2012) contend that newcomer youth continue to be excluded from serious conversations about citizenship in U.S. classrooms.

We argue that newcomer Latino/a youth bring to classrooms rich lived experiences and multilingual literacies that support academic content learning. Moreover, newcomer students in secondary schools possess powerful cultural background knowledge, which guides and informs their understanding of being a citizen in the United States. That being said, newcomer youth face many constraints in public schooling across the United States, including high-stakes standards and statewide standardized exams. These standards often center on historical narratives of the White dominant culture and further marginalize the voices, experiences, and perspectives of diverse youth. Teachers in this study face the constraints of high-stakes standards and statewide exams while advocating for and engaging with their newcomer youth's perspectives and experiences in the social studies curriculum and pedagogy on a daily basis.

Focusing on two case studies of social studies teachers in New York and Arizona, the purpose of this article is to shed light on how they enacted critical citizenship practices and culturally responsive teaching to support their newcomer students' understanding of citizenship in their local communities. The research question guiding this study was: How do social studies teachers engage newcomer youth in active citizenship education? First, we present a review of the literature associated with citizenship education and culturally responsive teaching. Secondly, the culturally responsive active citizenship education framework guiding and informing this study is presented. Next, we describe the methodology used in both contexts, followed by the findings on two teachers that emerged from the study. The article concludes with recommendations for teaching, research, and teacher education of citizenship education for Latino/a newcomer youth.

Literature Review

The literature reviewed encompassed two bodies of scholarship, active citizenship education and culturally responsive teaching. This review of the literature provided a foundation for our theoretical framework and for how we analyzed the data collected.

Active Citizenship Education

In this paper we re-conceptualize notions of “good” citizenship for newcomer youth, considering how to engage with active citizenship education in social studies classrooms for new immigrant students. Ladson-Billings’ (2004) notions of “new citizenship,” described as “allegiances and self-interests along a variety of axes—racial, ethnic, international, regional, religious, and political” (p. 117), gives us a lens to rephrase, reframe, and reimagine citizenship for new immigrant students. We use her framework to help us re-conceptualize “good” citizenship due to the “creative imaginings” of people of color who have been faced with and challenged by the limits and constraints in society, such as political representation and participation, and who want to “remake their world into a more just and equitable one” (Ladson-Billings, 2004, p. 117). Active citizenship, therefore, might include participating in community-wide civic and political activities that work toward promoting social justice. These activities could include researching social issues in one’s community, designing and enacting projects on these issues, sharing findings in school/community-wide events, and becoming active members in the community to challenge these issues. In thinking about the unique civic positionality and notions of active citizenship for newcomer immigrant youth, we also consider Epstein’s (2001) work on race, identity, and teaching U.S. History, as well as notions of participatory social justice (Westheimer & Kahn, 2004), and cultural citizenship (Flores & Benmayor, 1997).

Epstein (2001) examined how youth think about and interact with the U.S. historical narrative taught in schools. She explored the effects of youths’ (White and African American) racial identities and social studies teachers’ pedagogies on young people’s interpretations of U.S. history. Through a collective case study design, Epstein (2001) found that African American students saw their parents and the community as the primary source of, and influence on, their conceptions of U.S. history and citizenship. Furthermore, their White peers saw school, textbooks, or teachers as the primary influence on their interpretation of U.S. history. Implications for this study include focusing on culturally and linguistically diverse students’ understandings, perspectives, and experiences when teaching the U.S. historical narrative, as these interpretations may be multifaceted and grounded in knowledge that is gained from outside the classroom and in various forms.

Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) suggestions for “good” citizenship highlight the practices associated with being a “good” citizen by examining 10 programs “aimed to advance the democratic purposes of education” (p. 1). They organized these practices into three conceptions of citizenship: personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented. They wished to advance the notions of participatory and justice-oriented citizens. Participatory citizens (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) actively engage in collective or community-based

local, state, and/or national civic related affairs. They focus on understanding how community organizations work, in support of preparing youth to run these efforts in the future. Justice-oriented citizens “analyze and understand the interplay of social, economic, and political forces” (p. 3). Therefore, rather than solely preparing to run and organize events, the justice-oriented citizen inquires about, researches, and analyzes the root cause of issues pertaining to the event. The goals of a justice-oriented citizen are to interrupt issues of injustice and work toward social justice in their communities as well as in the nation and world. Scholars also seek to highlight how immigrant communities are defining “good” citizenship through individuals claiming membership and recognition, asserting and maintaining social and public rights, and identifying as active change agents in U.S. democratic society (Rosaldo, 1997).

Cultural citizenship is another way we wish to rephrase, reframe, and reimagine notions of citizenship by centering on the perspective that “difference is seen as a resource, not a threat” (Flores & Benmayor, 1997, p. 5). Silvestrini (1997) defines cultural citizenship as “the ways people organize their values, their beliefs about their rights, and their practices based on their sense of cultural belonging rather than on their formal status as citizens of a nation” (p. 44). United States democratic society, according to this perspective, is strengthened by difference and thrives due to the cultural knowledge drawn from the resources, perspectives, and cultural attributes brought to the United States by immigrant communities; therefore, active citizenship education must be enacted through accessing this cultural knowledge by using a framework for culturally responsive teaching.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is defined as a way of engaging youth in education by using students’ cultures, languages, and lived experiences (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzales, 2008). According to Gay (2010), CRT is grounded in teachers validating students’ lived experiences and building a trusting and caring relationship with them. In the past 10 years, a series of studies associated with CRT in the public school system has demonstrated a positive influence between CRT and culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students’ engagement. Seminal studies by Lucas et al. (2008) and Ladson-Billings (1994) have documented the impact CRT has on teachers and teacher educators. The authors argue that teachers need to understand students’ cultural, language, and lived experiences in order for students to be successful and sustain academic success. Further, studies by Irvine (1992) on CRT have demonstrated the impact CRT has on teachers working with students of color. Irvine’s (1992) study found that teachers who used elements of CRT in their teaching, and in school communities, had a comprehensive understanding of CLD youth. These actions have been found to influence educators’ teaching styles and lesson plan development.

Along with student validation, societal transformation is a central characteristic of CRT. Through CRT, students develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and then implement their decisions in effective ways through personal, social, political, and economic actions (Banks, 2001). The knowledge and skills developed when implementing CRT further notions of active citizenship for newcomer youth. Specifically, students learn to analyze the effects of inequities on individuals and groups and become change agents committed to promoting greater equality, justice, and power balance. Gay (2010) and Banks (2001) affirm that CRT must lead to transformation in the educational system. Students should have opportunities to examine the conditions faced by their community members and reflect on ways to take action. School-community projects can build critical literacy skills and prepare youth for community activism and active citizenship.

Nieto (2006) recommends that teachers prepare students to develop critical skills to challenge oppression and transform society. A study by Cammarota and Romero (2012) documented how Latino/a youth and teachers were able to challenge factors in their school district that were impeding students' academic success. Consequently, students attained academic success and developed critical literacy skills through the multicultural/ critical pedagogy they were advocating for in their schools. This study demonstrated that Latino/a youth engaged in their school community as active citizens who wanted access to resources benefiting their academic trajectory as well as legitimizing their cultural identity. Moreover, Latino/a students enacted citizenship skills to problematize issues via democratic practices inside and outside of the school context.

Culturally Responsive Active Citizenship Education Framework

We draw on key characteristics of Cultural Responsive Teaching and Active Citizenship Education to guide and inform our work. We braid notions of culturally responsive teaching and active citizenship education for newcomer youth to create a framework for culturally responsive active citizenship education. This framework centers on using newcomer student's cultures, languages, and lived experiences (Lucas et al., 2008) to engage with citizenship education in social studies classrooms.

Culturally responsive citizenship education promotes active citizenship that is participatory and engages in research, analysis, and actions associated with promoting social justice and interrupting oppressive systems that connect to social, political, economic, and cultural issues affecting one's local community, society(ies), and world (Ladson-Billings, 2004; Westheimer & Kahn, 2004). Specifically, active citizens might participate in various ways including becoming aware, researching, discussing, presenting, advocating, voting, or protesting (Banks, 2001; Cammarota & Romero, 2012; Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Gay, 2010).

It is critical, for immigrant youth, that active citizenship is fluid and open, based on what youth feel are issues that are most important to them (e.g., policy, educational, immigration, or familial issues/concerns). Furthermore, this framework sees immigrant youth as participating in ways they feel they can make the most difference in their community(ies), families, and individual lives and experiences (Rosaldo, 1997; Silvestrini, 1997). We use this framework as a lens to analyze and interpret two case studies of social studies teachers for newcomer immigrant youth in New York and Arizona.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) multi-site collective case study design of two teachers (Stake, 1995) by observing, interviewing, and gathering artifacts in social studies classrooms in New York and Arizona. The goal of this study was to understand and interpret each case in regards to the principles and intersections of CRT and active citizenship education and to illuminate findings of social studies practice for newcomer immigrant youth in public schools across two states.

Teachers in this study were selected based on the criteria associated with CRT and teaching social studies education dedicated to citizenship education. We also asked school members, researchers, and other teachers to identify social studies teachers who enacted CRT and citizenship education with their newcomer students.

Data sources include interviews, observations, and artifact collection. Interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, one-on-one with each teacher (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). We asked questions that elicited deeper exploration and understanding of teaching/educational background, philosophical foundations in social studies/citizenship education, incorporation of students' culture/language in the curriculum, and conceptualization of social studies/pedagogical strategies for newcomer immigrant youth.

Observations included multiple units of study in two social studies classes in New York and Arizona. During classroom observations, detailed notes were taken on events and/or interactions between teachers and students or between students and students that occurred during the lessons as well as the general daily classroom occurrences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Artifacts were collected to provide more factual information and offered a curricular context for instruction that was implemented in the social studies classroom. Artifacts including teacher handouts, student work, student responses, and school/official documents were collected.

Data analysis of this multi-site collective case study design included a cross-case analysis of two cases in New York and Arizona, examining the major principles and intersections of CRT and citizenship education. Interview transcripts, observation field notes, and classroom artifacts were coded using

deductive data analysis (Patton, 2002) examining ways in which the teachers employed the principles of CRT and citizenship education, and inductive data analysis was conducted to examine emerging themes within and across the two case studies (Patton, 2002). The following section provides an overview of the two case studies informing this research study.

Context of the Study

In Arizona, newcomer students are provided some services for English language development. Much of the services provided are associated with restrictive language policies such as Proposition 203. Many English Language Learners (ELLs) are placed in four-hour blocks of intense English instruction (Faltis & Coulter, 2008). This group of students, generally, has their content classes (Math/Science) in the afternoon portion of their daily school schedule.

In contrast, in New York, there are varying programs and services offered for newcomer ELLs to strengthen their native language development and content knowledge while learning English. New York State is committed to the academic, linguistic, social, and emotional wellbeing of their newcomer students. Programs offered include bilingual programs (Transitional Bilingual and Dual Language programs), English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, and newcomer programs. The newcomer programs offered in New York not only provide language and content instruction, but also are places where parents can come and learn more about the educational system and their child's new experiences. Additionally, faculty/staff are provided with ongoing professional development to better understand their newcomer students and become better prepared to offer the support necessary for students' evolving needs.

Mr. Luis Vega¹ and Northeast International High School in New York

Northeast International High School (NIHS) is located in a highly diverse neighborhood in New York. The district in which the school is housed is considered one of the poorest congressional districts in the United States. NIHS serves roughly 420 students in grades 9-12. The school has been open for four years and admits students who are residents of the city and have been in the United States for four years or less. NIHS requires that students are native Spanish speakers and identified as needing English as a Second Language support by the Department of Education. Additionally, 100% of the students at NIHS receive free lunch.

NIHS's mission statement emphasizes students' social, academic, and leadership skills through a collaborative, project-based curriculum using experiential learning methods. The school focuses on implementing these goals to support its Latino/a newcomer students' development of their English language skills and build on current Spanish language proficiencies. Every

classroom is equipped with technology access, either through a media cart with a computer and LCD projector, a SMART board, or a laptop cart. NIHS encourages a collaborative working environment, and students work at tables.

At the time of this study, 100% of the students at NIHS were Latino, Spanish-speaking newcomers: 85% Dominican and 15% Mexican, Ecuadorian, and Colombian. Students' English language levels varied, due to an increasing number of students enrolling in NIHS who had been in the United States for at least one year. Mr. Vega's Global History class was comprised of 25 students: 17 of the students in the class were female and eight were male. The class was inter-aged, including both ninth and tenth grade students. The course centered on the essential goal of encouraging students to "question things," and "not accept every fact that is given to them" (Mr. Vega, interview). For example, in class discussions Mr. Vega pushed students to inquire and critically examine various texts, including news media, current events, and images.

Mr. Luis Vega

Mr. Luis Vega, a Mexican American man in his early 30s, was born in Mexico and moved to the Midwest in the United States when he was eight years old. Mr. Vega identified ethnically, racially, and linguistically with his students. This identity framed how he conceptualized and implemented his social studies pedagogy for Latino/a students, as he frequently talked about "we" and "our" experiences. In an interview, Mr. Vega identified himself as Brown, rather than Hispanic or Chicano, because it encompassed similar experiences, communities, and cultures, stating, "It is like one thing we *all* have in common." He continued by sharing an example: "It doesn't matter if your mom makes tamales in corn husks or banana leaves, you know? They are tamales." He was proud to share this ethnic identity with his students.

Mr. Vega studied history and Spanish in college. After graduating he worked for a year, obtained U.S. citizenship, and joined the Peace Corps. Following his service in the Peace Corps, Mr. Vega received a Master of Arts and certification in Social Studies Education. Mr. Vega explained that he had "wanted to be a teacher for a long time." He reflected in an interview that past teachers influenced and supported his initial interest in becoming a teacher, and while he thought fondly of these teachers, it was his desire to teach newcomer Latino/a youth that drew him to education. Mr. Vega had taught Global History at NIHS for over two years.

Culturally Responsive Active Citizenship as Awareness, Discussion, and Inquiry

Mr. Vega's identification with and admiration for his Latino/a newcomer students, experiences in the Peace Corps, and passion for teaching social

studies influenced his conceptualizations and implementation of social studies pedagogy for Latino/a newcomer youth. Mr. Vega's conceptions supported an orientation toward developing a community of learners in the classroom by building relationships with individual students. The foundations established when building a community in Mr. Vega's classroom fostered and encouraged an implemented social studies pedagogy that focused on culturally responsive active citizenship that involved two key elements: a desire to "make things better" and an awareness of issues in the community.

"Civic Engagement...it is Not Just an Individual Thing, it is a Community."

Mr. Vega conceptualized teaching social studies as "building civic engagement" for his Latino/a newcomer students. He defined civic engagement as:

Being aware of what is going on...being aware of issues, problems that we encounter—as not only individuals, but groups, society as a whole.... I think I would define it more about being involved in your community, understanding each group—if you belong to a certain group—just trying to make things better.

Mr. Vega desired to move away from normative notions of civic engagement or, as he noted, "participating in, you know—voting, and stuff like that." He emphasized civic engagement that focused more on community issues, and issues that involved "a certain group: *your community*." The goal for civic engagement, according to Mr. Vega, was "to make things better" by understanding what the issues are in your community or "problems we encounter," understanding how to take actions on these issues, and beginning to take action to improve "society as a whole."

These notions of civic engagement are deeply personal and connected to what Mr. Vega experienced growing up. He does not necessarily see himself as "civically engaged" in the political sense, but does see himself engaged in what is going on his community through teaching/acting as an ally for his students. Civic education, for Mr. Vega, should be attainable, not hypothetical or theoretical, but include examples of actual civic activities in which students can participate. He explained:

Having them, at least, know part of what it means to be civically engaged...I think some of them are just like, "Okay, I'm here, and I am here because I want a better future".... But then they don't make the leap that to have a better future, things have to change—like my community has to improve, they think it is an individual thing. So maybe the social studies, in having them realize that it is not an individual thing, it is a community.

Mr. Vega desired to help his students "make the leap" from already knowing that it was important that they were "here" in school because they "want[ed] a better

future,” to using their new experiences and knowledge to “mak[e] things better” and learn that “things have to change.”

What was critical for students to achieve in Mr. Vega’s social studies class was the ability to bridge one’s individual inclinations, and a desire to make things better for themselves/their family, with a commitment to changing their communities and perhaps larger society. These conceptions also supported culturally relevant notions of encouraging a community of learners in which “students work against the norm of competitive individualism,” and instead “have to care, not only about their own achievement but also their classmates’ achievement” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 69). It is these notions that influenced Mr. Vega to implement a social studies pedagogy that was built on creating a community of learners and developing an understanding of active, community-based citizenship.

“I Think Discussions Are, to Some Degree, Community Involvement.”

Mr. Vega implemented his social studies curriculum for culturally responsive active citizenship in two ways: engaging in discussion and promoting inquiry. Both of these pedagogical methods fostered students’ academic, linguistic, and cultural assets as well as supported learning key skills for active citizenship in a democratic society. Mr. Vega implemented these methods through his lens of citizenship as “community understanding and involvement” (as discussed in an interview). He explained that community understanding was, “Being aware of what is going on around you, whether it be your community, like your school.” Mr. Vega described that involvement in the community can take on various forms, saying:

I think if you’re aware of the problems, it doesn’t necessarily mean you need to be out protesting. I think discussions, like if you’re talking about—in the hallway—all of the trash that is out on the street and I think that is to some degree, community involvement. You are aware of what is going on. And ideally you would go a little bit further and actually address the issue.

For Mr. Vega, discussion about issues in the community outside of the classroom was a form of active citizenship. In order to be prepared for these discussions, he frequently implemented various discussion-based strategies inside the social studies classroom. When asked what factors contributed to classroom discussions, Mr. Vega responded:

I think for the most part, we have this relationship where the kids feel comfortable enough to say things that are on their mind. Sometimes somebody will say something and maybe somebody is completely opposed to that, and of course they will start yelling at each other, but once they get quiet I think we can have a discussion, we can talk about it.

Building a classroom community and relationships with his newcomer students, therefore, was a key element to having class-wide discussions about

controversial issues. The safe and open environment encouraged conversations about difficult issues as well as offered students a place to practice discussion skills. Mr. Vega hoped these skills would transfer to real life scenarios and situations regarding civic/political issues that affected their everyday lives and experiences.

Discussions implemented in Mr. Vega's classroom ranged from class-wide discussions on conflicting viewpoints drawn from historical content and student-generated contemporary issues, to "pair-shares" and small group discussions about project items or concept understanding. For example, in multiple instances, Mr. Vega incorporated students' academic and linguistic assets to promote classroom dialogue and teach discussion skills using group work, explaining:

Something we do is we try to do a lot of group work. I think, I still have a long way to go in making that ideal group situation—group work, but I think we do take advantage of the fact that they are always talking, everyone. So getting them into groups, and if we can give them something interesting I think that they do have that open conversation about things. And the great thing is, if you have a discussion, they are not shy about telling you what they are thinking- so that is really good.

"Open conversations," according to Mr. Vega, helped further support skills for democratic conversations. If students are willing to have conversations about items they might disagree with, be able to constructively discuss these items, and come to a consensus, then they are building skills for active citizenship. In one particular instance, I (the second author) observed Mr. Vega discussing a current events article about women's rights. The discussion of the issues presented in the article supported his notions of wanting his newcomers to be aware of what is going on in the community and, in this example, the local, national, *and* global community. I observed him engage students in an inquiry process about the topic and issue from multiple perspectives:

Mr. Vega: Look at the title, so what is this article going to be about?

Students: Rights.

Mr. Vega: Okay, whose rights?

Students: Women's rights.

Mr. Vega: So, this is about women's rights, when did women get the right to vote?

Students: 1920.

Mr. Vega: Interesting, this is not the same everywhere else?

Natalia: [Reading] In Saudi Arabia, women will get the right to vote in 2015.

Mr. Vega: So when are they going to be allowed to vote?

Students: 2015.

- Mr. Vega: So who is deciding this?
- Natalia: Abdullah?
- Mr. Vega: [read a portion of the article] What does this say? What is the Shura Council? What is an advisory?
- Natalia: Advisory, consejeros...
- Students: [asking simultaneously] Why? Why is it like that? Why would they determine this?

After the lesson, when Mr. Vega was asked about his inquiry process and was encouraging one student, Natalia, to ask further questions and participate in the discussion, he explained:

Most of the kids, I think, given the right questions and something they really actually care about, would ask the same thing, but they are not really—they are not aware that, that is a good thing. They don't understand that, that is part of the whole education thing, it is okay to think that way—not just like, “well I don't know why that is, so...” [and] leave it alone. It has to be something that they are interested in, obviously, to ask that question. And I was trying to kind of get Natalia to read that part, because I knew she would be interested in that.

This example shows how Mr. Vega used inquiry to help encourage his newcomer students to think further about a historic/contemporary issue by tapping into students' interests and prior civic engagement. In this example, Mr. Vega knew that Natalia was interested in the rights of women, and wanted to engage her in the national/global issues presented as well as support her developing skills for “questioning things” and critically analyzing texts. As he mentioned, his students were not used to questioning written texts, and he felt as though this was one of the essential goals for teaching social studies and a critically important skill for his newcomer students to have for engagement in active citizenship.

Ms. Kayla Brown and Esperanza High School in Arizona

The site of the second study was an urban high school in Arizona. Esperanza High School had a student population of 1,500 students. In terms of student demographics, 70% were Latino, 5% White, 8% Black, and 10% “Other.” Furthermore, 13% of the student population were classified as English Learners. In the past five years, Esperanza High School has had low achievement scores on state standardized tests, including Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS). In reference to newcomers or newcomer programs, Esperanza follows a four-hour English instructional model for all newcomers. Further, students receive some or no support in their primary language. According to Ms. Brown, newcomer students are placed in ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms for four hours and then have two content area periods. She received her newcomer students in the tenth grade US History course.

Ms. Kayla Brown

Ms. Kayla Brown is a 28-year-old White educator. She has been teaching high school social studies and literacy courses for the past five years. Her students considered her a “community teacher” as she lived in the community for the last 10 years. Ms. Brown has rich experiences teaching secondary English Learners.

Ms. Brown has always been passionate about education and about providing the best educational services to all youth. In her autobiography, she described her views about teaching at Esperanza:

I really love teaching about social justice issues that are always present in Arizona and this community. My students and families are representative of a group that has been marginalized for so long. It is my duty to provide access to vital information through my courses.

Ms. Brown’s comments reflect a passionate teacher concerned with social justice issues in education.

For the past five years, Ms. Brown has been responsible for providing classroom instruction for newcomer students. Newcomer youth attended her class during the sixth period of the school day. According to Ms. Brown, the majority of students have limited English and Spanish literacy skills; some students have an understanding of US history and issues concerning citizenship. Ms. Brown commented on her student population, stating:

In the past five years, I got students from Sonora, Central Mexico and other areas from Mexico. I love them all. They bring so much rich experience to our class. As tenth graders they have seen a lot and are very inquisitive. Many of my students that recently arrived hold on to their Mexican roots.

Classroom Environment and Instruction

Ms. Brown taught tenth grade US history. Her classroom was decorated with a variety of culturally rich artifacts. She had a poster of Rigoberta Menchu displayed on the back wall of her classroom and had several pictures of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, Jr. Moreover, she had pictures/ photos of each student in her classroom. Her classroom environment was reflective of the cultural backgrounds of many of her students.

Ms. Brown was conscious about issues and current events in the community. Her classroom had a special section by the library dedicated to the community. It was decorated with community art and illustrations associated with the neighborhood. According to Ms. Brown, she had students place flyers,

posters, and other artifacts in her classroom that were important to students and their families.

Ms. Brown had a challenging time balancing the mandated social studies curriculum and culturally responsive social studies instruction for newcomer youth. According to Ms. Brown, the social studies curriculum has improved, providing classrooms with culturally relevant material to use with newcomer youth; however, her students' lived experiences are always excluded from history books. Further, she affirmed that she is conscious about making sure that students' lives and cultures are respected and honored, and that youth are able to challenge and question ideas and concepts presented in social studies textbooks.

Ms. Brown believed that social studies or active citizenship education should focus on honoring the daily experiences of students and their community. She commented:

I truly feel that I have a moral obligation to make sure youth know they are valued. Students have a lot of talent and their voice matters. I want to make sure they understand I care about them.

In addition to student validation, Ms. Brown believed that students' voice and activism were essential when learning about citizenship and social justice. Further, she expressed that many of her students have lived in extreme circumstances and, consequently, have a need to share their stories and views about their community. Ms. Brown noted:

Some of my students have witnessed violence and experienced oppression in their country of origin. They understand what inequality is. Many of my kids and their families are being oppressed now. I mean, in this community, many Latino/a students and parents are always under the microscope. The stories they bring to our social studies classroom are authentic. My kids are concerned citizens.

This comment by Ms. Brown reflects her passion for social justice and illustrates a commitment to understanding student's lives and struggles. Further, she is reflective of a culturally responsive educator (Lucas et al., 2008) in that she cares deeply about her students.

Ms. Brown is committed to providing newcomer students access to content they will encounter in her social studies class (citizenship/project). Moreover, she spent time providing students with vocabulary activities associated with citizenship education that supported learning key concepts in the classroom. She enacted these activities (e.g., word wall, vocabulary journal, community journal, etc.) to enrich their language development. Ms. Brown also articulated that she does let students speak in Spanish or their home language(s) in class, as using bilingual practices encourages students to learn and comprehend new information associated with social studies/citizenship content knowledge.

Active Citizens: Towards Transformation

Ms. Brown developed an eight-week project that emphasized citizenship skills, literacy, and community activism. According to Ms. Brown, student validation and transformation are key concepts that guide her work with youth. She named the project, "Project Comunidad."

I, the first author, observed and documented the citizenship project she conducted with her newcomer group. Ms. Brown began the unit by presenting key ideas associated with being a citizen in Arizona and in the United States. Further, she commented that classroom conversations, instead of direct lectures on citizenship, guided her teaching practice. For example, on one occasion Ms. Brown had a group conversation with her students about the role of voting in the United States and Mexico. The following is an exchange between Ms. Brown and her students:

Ms. Brown: You know voting is key to making changes in communities in Arizona and Mexico.

David: Yeah, but I can't vote because of my papers. I can't. I want to vote in the future but how?

Ms. Brown: But, how can we change that or what can be done? What if other people feel the same?

Cornelia: Aya en Mexico la gente vota y pues no pasa nada. Sigue aveces lo mismo. (In Mexico people vote and nothing happens. Everything stays the same).

David: Sometimes things change and the neighborhood is different. But, it is different here. Maybe voting is important. But, I still can't vote.

Ms. Brown: Voting then is complicated because everyone should have a way to vote....

Cornelia: Si pues...pero de esto casi no se habla. (Well but...this is just not talked about).

The conversation Ms. Brown had with students is reflective of a critical group conversation where students had opportunities to express their ideas in any language and, consequently, youth were able to be critical about the voting process. Moreover, students were able to speak about issues relative to their lives and experiences. Ms. Brown guided students to reflect on the role of voting and challenged students to think beyond voting.

Project Comunidad

During the enactment of the project, students had opportunities to examine and reflect on issues that impacted the Centennial community. Further, Ms. Brown insisted that while teaching this unit, community issues and current topics related to her students guided the conversations with youth inside and outside of the classroom setting.

The community project asked students to select an issue or issues that impacted them as community members. Moreover, students were asked to problematize the issue using a critical citizenship lens to guide their inquiry and to seek possible solutions. Ms. Brown expanded on this process:

The student is able to engage with topics that are relative and meaningful to their lives. So we take the content from the social studies books and curriculum and apply this to Esperanza. Students get to see things as a concerned community member. Many of my students from Sonora already have a good understanding of pertinent issues to explore since they have lived near the border region for a long time.

The newcomer students in Ms. Brown's classroom were encouraged to discuss their lived experiences and background knowledge in relation to being a community member. I observed and documented students describing and presenting their final projects associated with being a citizen in Arizona. Students used PowerPoints, posters, group posters, and diorama boxes to describe their ideas and solutions. The following is an example of an exchange between Ms. Brown and two students during the final presentations.

Ms. Brown: What did you learn about your topic and about being a citizen?

Saul: I just learned that some students can't be here legal[ly]. Like they/we don't have rights. Aprendi de DACA². Some people think that we can't live here, but we have DACA. If I am a citizen of Esperanza, I should know more about these programs and I should get help. But, I found out that it is not that easy.

Ms. Brown: Being a citizen is complex.

Luz: In Esperanza, if you get sick, sometimes you can't get to see a doctor because of your papers. This is really important. What happens if you get really sick? Many people like us don't get treated like citizens.

Saul: Pues es como lo de DACA. Mucha gente cree que no merecemos derechos pero yo lei que el president dijo que si. Aprendi tambien que hay confusion como ciudadano. (Well it is like DACA. Many people believe that we should not have

rights. But I read that the president said yes. I also learned that there is a lot of confusion about being a citizen).

Ms. Brown: So then, does being a community member mean equal opportunity?

Saul: No, because you don't have rights. Like my parents can't vote or march because they were not born here. So it is confusing. We should all have [the] right.

Luz: It is like we have like two meanings for being a citizen. One is good and the other is bad.

Ms. Brown: What does that mean. Two sides?

Saul: There are like two different worlds and two citizens here in Esperanza. One is free and the other is like in the shadow.

This dialogue exchange between Ms. Brown and her students is symbolic of the open conversations Ms. Brown had with her students. Both students were challenging the notions of citizenship in Arizona and reflected on the contradictions that existed.

Project Comunidad Outside the Classroom

Ms. Brown articulated that being a concerned citizen meant always sharing information with the community. She explained to her students that it was important to communicate with families/ students about community members' ideas and issues impacting Esperanza. During the final days of the project, Ms. Brown and her students developed a showcase where students presented their ideas and projects to community members. The showcase was provided on a Saturday morning in a nearby community center. Ms. Brown explained:

The showcase is very significant for my students. They are able to express their ideas and views to parents and other folks that care about Esperanza. My students get to practice speaking up and articulating ideas about the community that may be new to the neighborhood. Many parents and community members show up and really get involved. They have real conversations about issues in the neighborhood.

Ms. Brown understood that her students needed to have an audience for their project, and at the same time this process strengthened students' voices and their understandings of being an active and critical citizen of Esperanza.

The youth that participated in this showcase were able to articulate their ideas in Spanish and English. Ms. Brown made it very clear that students needed to convey their message so all community members could understand it. The following is an example of a presentation by students:

- Student A: In my project I really learned that we have some rights that we have to know about especially if we don't carry paper[s]. Like we can live here and be a community person that cares for things. So if you are a kid or teenager, DACA is for you, and if you are a parent and your kid is born in the U.S. DAPA is the information you need. It is hard to understand these two laws especially when things are always changing.
- Student B: Much gente no recibe ayuda medica en Esperanza porque no trae papeles y porque no tiene much dinero. En esta comunidad hay gente que necesita ayuda para sobrevivir. Cada miembro de la comunidad debe ayudarse como buen ciudadano. Este pojecto me hizo pensar en muchas mas cosas que podemos hacer para tener derechos como todos los demas. (Many people do not receive medical attention in Esperanza due to not having papers and not having money. In this community, there are many people that need help in order to survive. Every community member must help each other out. This project helped me think about many more things we can do so we have rights like others).

The ideas expressed by students in the showcase reflected a deep concern youth had about their community. In addition, their presentations were focused on providing critical information to community members that are most vulnerable. Both students are representative of an active critical citizen (Epstein, 2001).

The showcase and student presentations given to the community represented a process Ms. Brown believed fostered active citizenship education for her newcomer students. Students' presentations and discussion with community members were important since many newcomer students did not have the platform to speak up and articulate their ideas in English or Spanish. Thus, this showcase was the beginning of future student activism in their community(ies). According to Camarota and Romero (2012), student activism is fundamental in transforming conditions that impact historically marginalized communities.

Discussion

Mr. Vega's and Ms. Brown's implemented social studies pedagogy showed that they possessed the knowledge and skills (e.g., inquiry, cooperation, research, and discussion) associated with teaching for culturally responsive active citizenship by supporting students' interrogation of current community and society issues. They both fostered an open classroom community, wherein students were able to critically inquire about what it meant to be part of a community and the decisions that you have to make while living in that society.

Mr. Vega also acted as an advocate educator for his Latino/a newcomer students and possessed qualities of a caring teacher, or one who embodies the word *educación* (Valenzuela, 1999). *Educación* is a cultural construct foundational for Mexican culture that “provides instructions on how one should live in the world” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 21). It emphasizes “respect, responsibility, and sociality” and is the foundation for Mexican youths’ school-based relationships (p. 21-22). *Educación* does not solely refer to learning, academically, but also includes family- and community-based “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) involving moral, social, and personal goals, as well as responsibilities and competencies.

CRT also guided Ms. Brown’s social studies teaching practices with newcomer youth. Her work demonstrated CRT in that she created an inclusive and caring environment for students. She also embodied notions of *educación*. This is significant since newcomers require a space to have critical conversations about social studies concepts. Ms. Brown demonstrated a key characteristic of CRT, validation and transformation in the school and community setting. The community project aligned with issues concerning citizenship education and student action. For example, the lesson plans/ project group conversations centered on students developing an understanding of social activism and advocacy/ voting rights.

Ms. Brown’s extraordinary work in the classroom helped establish a foundation for learning about active citizenship in Arizona. Students reflected characteristics of emerging active citizens by the way in which they reconciled notions of equality and discrimination with activism for the community. Students validated each other’s views/ opinions and at the same time were able to name injustices impacting them. Furthermore, students began to demonstrate a deep understanding for why citizenship is important in their community. Newcomer students used this knowledge to reframe community activism as it related to their lives.

Ms. Brown and Mr. Vega demonstrated a deep commitment to helping students develop active citizenship skills. The community project Ms. Brown developed with students provided an opportunity for students and parents/community members to discuss important community topics shaping Esperanza. The project also provided a space for youth to name issues impacting students and parents and seek ways to transform conditions. The critical work displayed by newcomer youth aligns with characteristics of an active citizen. For example, Esperanza students presented major problems and ideas associated with their community. Youth were able to present their ideas in multiple languages to include a broader audience. Ms. Brown’s students emerged as advocates for the community.

Mr. Vega also prepared students for their future civic participation and engagement by encouraging his students to “question things” and develop skills for democratic discussions. Scaffolding and supporting collaborative group work, cooperative learning, inquiry, and discussion involving multiple perspectives and experiences prepared his newcomer students for their civic life beyond school.

Furthermore, his re-conceptualized notions of citizenship as “community understanding and involvement” focused on his newcomer Latino/a students’ civic assets, which made the social studies class even more relevant and culturally responsive to his students’ needs and experiences.

Implications: Newcomers as Active Citizens

This article has potential implications for teachers, researchers, and teacher educators regarding how best to teach social studies and active citizenship education for newcomer students. In our growing culturally and linguistically diverse public schools in the United States, teachers must consider how to engage newcomer students’ social, cultural, political, and economic backgrounds and experiences. Teachers in this study might provide some insight for K-12 educators on how best to approach and re-conceptualize active citizenship for their immigrant youth. Open, critical discussion about how newcomers conceptualize citizenship is a great way to begin rethinking and reimagining how new immigrant youth engage in challenging normative notions of citizenship in their daily lives. Social studies teachers should consider incorporating community-based notions of citizenship either through case studies of active citizens in their communities, community-based projects, or research/analysis of social issues they hope to address in their communities.

Furthermore, this study hopes to further the research on culturally responsive teaching and active citizenship education, specifically in regards to social studies curriculum and pedagogy and teaching culturally and linguistically diverse youth. The culturally responsive active citizenship education framework used in this study would further benefit from research with newcomer youth and their families about how they might conceptualize what culturally responsive teaching looks like and how this teaching might promote active citizenship in their school and local communities. Teacher educators might also use the findings in this study to help pre-service and in-service teachers in educational foundations, social studies education, and curriculum and teaching, among other disciplines, to help understand how to employ culturally responsive active citizenship education. Using the case studies presented in this article, teacher educators might have their students read, analyze, and interpret how to use the case study teacher’s ideas and pedagogies in their own practicum and student teaching experiences. Providing pre-service teachers with the opportunity to operationalize the ideas and projects articulated in this study, juxtaposed with their own philosophies and pedagogical goals, would be a useful endeavor for pre-service teachers.

Notes

1. The teachers, students, and school sites from both cases are pseudonyms.
2. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

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