Banks (2008) notes, attempting to educate lethargic 18-to-25-year-old voting bloc and the perpetually uninformed and politically engaged in the United States point to those concerned with this lack of political and civic interest among the American citizenship, it is hardly surprising given of Educational Progress data, Niemi and in the Department of Educational Policy Studies

Already a daunting task for education and Erin L. Castro is a doctoral candidate details the efforts of one teacher, Mr. Harr...• alized communities within schools. As a way to understand student performance, the concept of culturally relevant teaching arg...• and behavioral failure away from the foundation of this teaching approach is

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The dynamic of teaching and learning is a political undertaking in which students bring with them social and cultural experi...• concerns of academic success is closely tied to a student's ability to understand and connect with the cultural and political order. 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, 2003), pedagogies that are considered culturally relevant do share similar qualities. For example, in discussions of teacher education programs in preparing pre-service educators "to do" culturally relevant pedagogy post-graduation, Brière (2007) specifies four themes of culturally relevant pedagogy. Drawing from a variety of educational and political perspectives, 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, perspectives, and values as a starting point for dialogues and student and teacher understand that culture is a salient component of the ways in which they engage and understand one another.

2. Incorporates students’ cultural orientations to design culturally competent classroom environments (classroom management).

3. Provides students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned using a variety of assessment techniques (student engagement, participation, and teacher observations).

4. Provides students with the knowledge and skills needed to function in mainstream employment and life, critical to helping students maintain their cultural identity, heritage, and connection to their cultural (cultural enrichment and competence). (p. 1065-1067)

Additionally, Gay (2000) argues that culturally responsive teaching “teaches to and through the strengths” of students and “culturally validating and affirming” for them (p. 29). Importantly, Gay and others committed to a social justice approach to education, such as Hooks (2003), Ayers et al. (2004), hooks (2003), and Ayers et al. (2008), argue that cultivating a critical consciousness that fosters examining and changing social and economic structures is desirable outcome of cultural relevant pedagogy.

For example, Gay proposes that “…the knowledge and skills needed to challenge existing social orders and power structures that may be internalized in schools” (p. 38). 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 and complicit in and through these practices where classroom social structures favor the dominant identities over those of Latinx students, specifically, are disenchanted by this mismatch, and are practically invisible in postsecondary graduate and professional education. (Yosso, 2005; 2008), argues that cultivating a critical consciousness that fosters examining and changing social and economic structures is desirable outcome of cultural relevant pedagogy.

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Context of the Study
As part of a larger study on teaching politics in secondary education (Journell, 2009), the first author observed three classes at Roosevelt High School during the 2008 presidential election. A large school serving over 2,500 students, Roosevelt is located in Illinois, Roosevelt fell below both state and district averages in all academic areas. Upon completion of his degree, he accepted an offer at Roosevelt, the same school he had attended as a teenager.

As a Roosevelt alumna and an Afri-
can 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 “in the same shoes” as many of them. On several occasions, he offered his students the opportunity to have a discussion about what it takes to be a mentor, someone who could share real-
life experiences on what it takes to be a mentor, someone who could share real-
like tips on managing, living, and surviving in the urban environment. He encouraged these discussions often, as he believed that the students had the opportunity to share their own stories and ideas with others.

The use of qualitative data, surveys were given to Mr. Harrison’s stu-
dents at the beginning and end of the study. As a result, in the fall of 2008, he was able to see how his students carried themselves as on their academic performance. Failure of the reengagement hypothesis suggests a problem in the way the mes-
tative television. He argues that, “Some
tudents who feel that they are not wanted in school, or that their lives are not valued, may be more likely to disengage from school and society.”

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, he separated himself from his peers at Roosevelt when he was able to respond to the students in a more personal way, after his instruction to his students’ interests and understandings. In our initial interview he observed that “I dis-
agreed with the statement in the book? (about European immi-
igrants constituting the majority of immigrants in the United States).CHARLIE (African American student): I dis-
agree because America is the great melt-
ing pot. MATT (White student): I disagreed because the Europeans weren’t really immigrants be-
cause they were born here. Therefore, they are still considered immigrants. ALBERTO (Mex-
ican-American student): I think that in the United States, Mexican Americans are also immigrants. But I’m not sure if they can be considered immigrants. RUTH from Roosevelt High School: The students were given a choice between the choices of Mexican Americans and those of Mexican origin. By the end of the study, they were asked to choose the correct answer. The results showed that many of the Latino students in the class were Mexican Americans, and in those 150, just from eyesight alone, I speculate that there are probably 80-90 kids that are Hispanic and 20-30 that are Black and 20 kids that are White.

When asked whether those demograph-
ic categories were useful for classroom instruction, Mr. Harrison replied, “In a class that is so diverse, I think that it is useful to have a diverse set of students from different cultural backgrounds. It helps me to better understand how the students are thinking and what they are experiencing.”

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 actively observed and participated in the classes. Marriam (1998) in his book entitled “Gaining Observing Classroom Instruction and Help-
ing Students to Think More” (1998). 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 were from the same neighborhood as Roosevelt. All of the interviews were audiorecorded and transcribed for accuracy.

The mood of Mr. Harrison’s classroom, and the overall mood of the school, often revolved around dynamics of race. At times, Mr. Harrison realized that his students were not always ready to engage with the material. At other times, Mr. Harrison observed that his students seemed to be interested in the material, and that they were willing to participate in discussions. Mr. Harrison’s classroom was often described as a “melting pot” of different cultures, with students from various ethnic backgrounds interacting with each other. He often reminded his students that they were part of a diverse community, and that they should be proud of their heritage.

Immigration as a Catalyst for Civic Understanding
Throughout the semester, Mr. Harri-
sion engaged his students in discussions about immigration, and his students could better understand the often abstract civic concepts discussed in the classroom. He often referred to the fact that many people come to the United States from different countries and that this is a part of what makes the United States a “melting pot.” He also emphasized that immigration is a complex issue, and that it is important to understand the perspectives of different people.

Mr. Harrison often referred to the fact that many of his students had family members who had immigrated to the United States. He encouraged his students to share their stories with each other, and to learn about the experiences of their classmates.

Students who were from families with recent immigrant backgrounds often shared their experiences with their classmates, and Mr. Harrison encouraged them to share their stories with other students in the classroom. Mr. Harrison often asked his students to consider how immigration affects their lives, and he encouraged them to think about the ways in which immigration has shaped the United States.

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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 text of the class. An 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.”

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.

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, these data give some hope that our efforts may be having an impact on students 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 recognized the value of examining political issues in the context of the classroom and 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 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 student 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 immigration-related issues. This approach has allowed Mr. Harrison to avoid alienating students who have different cultural backgrounds while still providing an opportunity for students to explore their political views and to critically examine immigration policy in the United States.

Table 1: Student Survey Responses

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Student Survey Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey Item</td>
<td>Pre-Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I care about politics more</td>
<td>3.12 (1.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I pay attention to politics</td>
<td>2.16 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ask my parents about politics</td>
<td>2.16 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy discussing politics</td>
<td>2.04 (0.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I bring up politics in conversations</td>
<td>2.12 (1.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think about the elections</td>
<td>2.38 (1.13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 can help bridge the index of inequity. By connecting the White students, the immigration focus seemed to serve a social justice function in which students were better able 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 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 text and the lens through which it was presented. This was an effective way for students to uncover the truth about American history and culture.

This critical perspective is perhaps best represented by Beth’s comparison of the melting pot metaphor offered by the textbook and the political cartoon presented by the immigrants with students who had barbed wire and a brick wall. The fact that she was able to recognize the hypocrisy behind the text’s portrayal of immigration shows that Beth had a basic 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-Latino in the class, the use of immigration as an ongoing theme seemed to increase their civic and political awareness. For the African-American students in the class, Mrs. 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 opportuni- ties and cut wages for individuals having to compete with the influx of immigrants. The White students, the immigration focus seemed to serve a social justice function in which students were better able 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 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 text and the lens through which it was presented. This was an effective way for students to uncover the truth about American history and culture.

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