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Increasing Inclusion and Recognition in Education for Democracy

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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I serve as Professor of foundations and social studies education at Utah State University in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership. My ultimate goal is to help social studies educators identify perspectives in curriculum and instruction in order to build democratic communities in their classrooms and beyond. I am interested in understanding the characteristics of critical democratic education and ways to increase it in educational spaces for social justice. This involves a focus upon classroom discussion and deliberation. I often ask what perspectives, individuals, groups, and issues are excluded from considerations during such discussions. My own professional development efforts have been focused on understanding different perspectives on social issues. Outside of professional pursuits, I enjoy raising chickens, gardening, and cooking with my partner, Darrin, in Salt Lake City, Utah. I am a former elementary school teacher. For more information about me and my work, please visit stevencamicia.org.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusion is fundamental to the legitimacy of democratic communities. During the process of collective decision-making, all those who are affected by decisions need to be included in the decision-making process. Education for democracy requires that teachers and students identify perspectives that are excluded in curriculum in order to increase inclusion

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and social justice. This involves an ethics of recognition Camicia (2012, 2016), which means that all those within democratic communities and classrooms make an ethical agreement that they will seek to recognize all perspectives. Dominant perspectives perpetuate powerful exclusionary narratives in subjects ranging from mathematics to social studies. This makes recognition of marginalized perspectives especially important because they are rendered unrecognizable by the power of dominant perspectives. In an education that teaches students how to strengthen democratic communities, teachers and students increase recognition and understanding of inequitable power relations.

THE RESEARCH

Content analysis of instructional materials helps identify the range of perspectives in curriculum. This can involve counting words and images or interpreting the dominant and marginalized perspectives within instructional materials. As an example of counting, Camicia and Zhu (2019) searched for the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) in state social studies standards. After we searched using the "find" function in document apps, we recorded our counts on an Excel spreadsheet to measure the frequencies of terms. A low or nonexistent frequency of terms would indicate exclusion of these terms. This method is made easier with the increasing availability of electronic media and texts.

The second method is more interpretive and digs below the surface of a text by locating a pattern of dominant and marginalized perspectives. This involves defining concepts that help identify inclusion and exclusion of perspectives. For example, Camicia (2007, 2009). examined instructional materials that provided students with multiple perspectives when they deliberated immigration policy. One set of materials was from the Choices Program (https://www.choices.edu/), and the other set of instructional materials was from the National Issues Forums (https://www.nifi.org/). In order to identify perspectives, I first defined a monocultural perspective (issues are only viewed through a dominant, mainstream perspective), multicultural perspectives (issues are viewed from multiple cultural perspectives), a nation-bound perspective (issues are only viewed from a national perspective), and global perspectives (issues are viewed from multiple locations and cultures around the globe). I next matched each main text heading with one of these perspectives as shown in Figure 1.

As I moved to closer readings of sections under each heading, I confirmed or adjusted my initial interpretation concerning which perspective a section of text would match best. The circles in Figure 1 represent different perspectives in the Choices materials, and the squares in Figure 1 represent the different perspectives in the National Issues Forums (NIF) materials. The result was a pattern of what perspectives were included and excluded from the materials.

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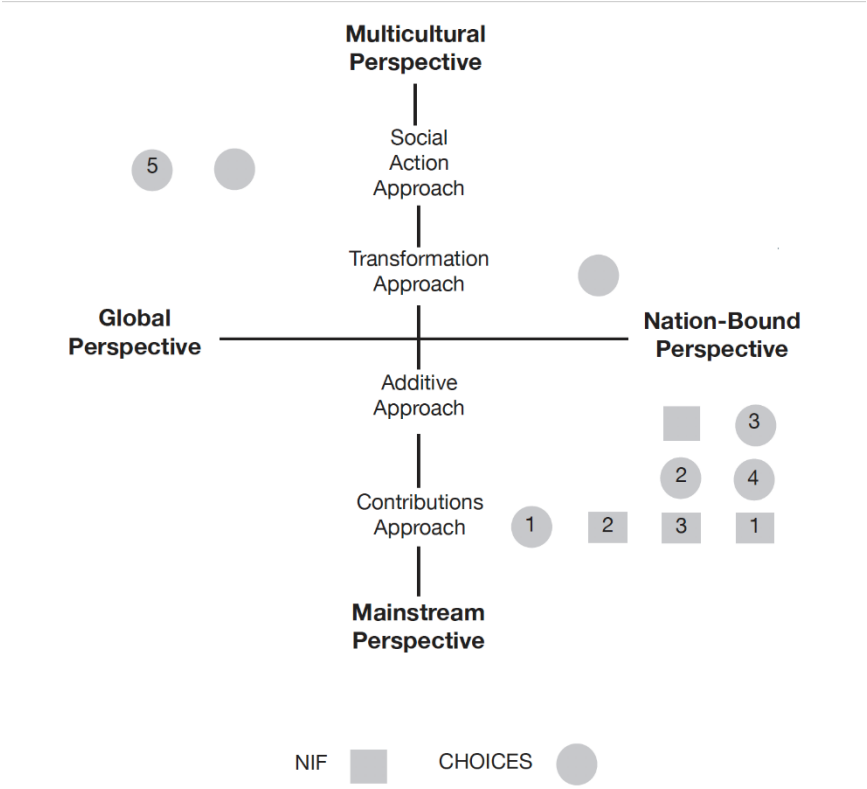

Note: Numbers represent policy options. Shapes without numbers represent other textual elements.

Figure 1 The range of perspective in deliberation (Camicia, 2007, p. 109)

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The frequency and interpretive content analyses indicated that students are presented with a narrow range of perspectives in these social studies standards and instructional materials. In our study of LGBT terms, we found that most states did not mention these terms. Although teachers can make their curriculum more LGBTQ-inclusive, they can also be apprehensive to do so in communities that want LGBTQ people and issues to be hidden. This can inhibit student inquiry into historical and contemporary LGBTQ issues and render LGBTQ people unrecognizable.

In my content analysis of instructional materials on immigration policy, I found that there was a narrow range of perspectives. The publishers of these materials privileged monocultural and nation-bound perspectives. I also found that a discussion in the texts connecting racism with immigration policies was limited, meaning that these perspectives on immigration policy failed to acknowledge inequitable power relations. Findings from both examples demonstrate how students' access to perspectives is frequently limited to dominant ones. This works against an ethics of recognition in democratic communities because there are structural components of curriculum that influence what can and can't

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be said when students engage with different issues. A lack of recognition of perspectives is antidemocratic and erodes education for democracy because the work of inquiry, discussion, and deliberation are missing essential perspectives.

Limited choices also work against education for democracy insofar as they communicate sentiments like, "you are free to choose as long as you choose what I want you to choose." This idea represents only a façade of democracy; it isn't democratic. An ethics of recognition requires that teachers expand choices in curriculum. In addition, the general public often assumes state standards and instructional materials present a neutral perspective on individuals, communities, and issues. Left unexamined, these materials can lead students to believe that inaccurate and incomplete portrayals of historical and current events are authoritative and comprehensive. Inequalities are downplayed or left unexamined under a veil of neutrality. For example, when perspectives of LGBTQ individuals are excluded from instructional materials, the materials reflect a version of history that downplays the inequalities that LGBTQ individuals have experienced. Recognition requires that we not only acknowledge as many perspectives as possible, but we also locate each of the perspectives within the context of inequitable power relations.

In sum, these findings imply that teachers and students need to critically examine sources such as primary sources, instructional materials, media, and state curriculum standards. By identifying the perspectives that are missing from these sources, they can increase recognition and understanding of how power functions to render some people and perspectives unrecognizable.

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR TEACHERS

The words and perspectives that we provide in curriculum and instruction send powerful messages to students about what perspectives are recognized and valued. In order to increase recognition, I refer to Young's (2002) elements of inclusion as a guide to design and implement curriculum. These elements include greeting, rhetoric, and narrative. The element of greeting implies that teachers and students form an agreement to recognize each other. Young writes, "At the most basic level, 'greeting' refers to those moments in everyday communication where people acknowledge one another in their particularity" (pp. 57-58). In classrooms, this can also include acknowledgement of people and perspectives that are not represented in our classroom or curriculum. Next, Young writes that "rhetoric fashions claims and arguments in ways appropriate to a particular public in a particular situation" (p. 67). I have extended this to mean the ways that dominant discourses structure what can and can't be said in inquiry, discussion, and deliberation. In classrooms, for example, students can examine the ways that a discourse of consumption influences what is and isn't deliberated about sustainability. In the example of immigration policy, instructional materials need to help students examine how the discourse of racism structures deliberations of policy. The history of immigration policy in the United States illustrates how racism has structured immigration policy, and student inquiry can focus upon the ways that rhetoric structures what questions and perspectives are considered. Teachers and students can ask

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the questions that Gibson (2020) asks when they deliberate immigration policy:

> Whose perspective is missing in our public debates about immigration? Who benefits from current U.S. immigration policy? Why do we talk almost exclusively about Mexican and Central American migrants when we debate immigration policy? Are borders fair? What's more important—human rights or national sovereignty? Can we have a just immigration policy? Why do people migrate? Should refugees be considered immigrants? (p. 93)

The last element that Young (2002) provides for increasing inclusion is narrative. She writes, "Storytelling is often the only vehicle for understanding the particular experiences of those in particular social situations, experiences not shared by those situated differently, but which they must understand in order to do justice" (pp.73-74). Narratives and counternarratives from teachers, students, and instructional materials can increase recognition for marginalized individuals and groups. After dominant narratives are identified, students can identify marginalized narratives that counter dominant narratives. My students and I have also used autoethnographic tools, which involve us examining how our individual and group narratives and counternarratives influence our own understanding of issues. In coordination with Ryan Knowles, I further develop these ideas to show how we implement this work in instructional methods courses (Camicia & Knowles, 2020). With antidemocratic discourses and authoritarianism on the rise around the world, the need for education for democracy is becoming increasingly urgent. When students are better equipped to identify dominant and marginalized perspectives, they are better able to increase inclusion and fight the forces that are currently undermining our democratic communities.

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