Q & A with Steven Camicia on ``Increasing Inclusion and Recognition in Education for Democracy''
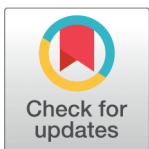
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven P. Camicia

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.

QUESTION #1:

Teacher's Question

What advice do you have for teachers who work in schools, districts, or communities (e.g., parochial or Catholic schools) in which the dominant narrative is explicitly hostile to marginalized perspectives?

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Steven Camicia's Response

If we see school communities as comprised of multiple stakeholders that experience curriculum and instruction differently, we can develop strategies for increasing inclusion of marginalized perspectives. Change can occur when learning objectives are framed in a way that different stakeholders can understand. (Benford & Snow, 2000). The degree to which a dominant narrative is seen as explicitly hostile or not depends upon where a stakeholder is located within a network of power relations. One of the qualities of a dominant narrative is that it obscures marginalized perspectives and counternarratives. I first need to ask, for example, how my identities and experiences as a white, cisgender, gay male influence my perspectives. With the exception of my identity as gay, the social studies curriculum that I grew up with privileged my identities. This made it difficult for me to see beyond dominant, oppressive narratives.

The methods that I described in my article serve as tools to help teachers identify perspectives. Once teachers identify places where perspectives are marginalized, they can communicate this to other stakeholders. As I have written in other work (Crocco & Camicia, 2018), one of the ways to understand how to engage with different stakeholders is to refer to the strategies of successful social movements. Successful social movements are able to frame their rationales for change in a way that aligns with the views of stakeholders even if some stakeholders are explicitly hostile. Dialogue is central to democracy, change, and education for democracy. In conversations with different stakeholders, teachers can frame learning outcomes that favor inclusion such as:

1. Increasing students' abilities to engage in conversations where different perspectives are involved. This ability can transfer to solving authentic problems that students experience in a range of communities and work. Benhabib (2002) writes that even when agreements can't be reached, "societies in which multicultural dialogue take place in the public sphere will articulate a civic point of view and a civic perspective of "enlarged mentality." (p. 115)

2. Increasing student understanding of democratic principles such as fairness, inclusion, transparency, and legitimacy. Expanded perspectives provide more choices for a course of action, and this increased awareness is central to education.

3. Increasing students' ability to interact with different types and scales of community. When curriculum and instruction limit perspectives, they limit perspective consciousness. In other words, an increased awareness of ways to understand the world can increase the ability of students to interact with people who have different perspectives.

QUESTION #2:

Teacher's Question

In your article you discussed monocultural, multicultural, nation-bound, and global perspectives. When thinking about these terms, do you think of them as a hierarchy where one builds toward more nuanced conceptions, or just a taxonomy to identify their unique features?

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Steven Camicia's Response

Identifying the relationships between these perspectives is a very useful way to understand the different perspectives. In one study (Camicia & Zhu, 2012), we asked teachers, who were known to have a curriculum with multicultural, global, and civic perspectives, if there was a hierarchy of these perspectives in their curriculum and instruction. Although teachers had different answers to this question, the question itself helped to clarify relationships between the perspectives. As dimensions and perspectives are linked conceptually, curriculum and instruction can increase in authenticity, inclusion, and recognition. As I approach these perspectives, the notion of community is central. Civic perspectives can drive an ethics of recognition among all members of multicultural, global, and democratic communities.

QUESTION #3:

Teacher's Question

When thinking about these categories, should teachers include resources that fall into each or should there be an emphasis on just one or two of the categories? In other words, does using all four categories become too overwhelming for students?

Steven Camicia's Response

One of the aspects of inclusion that I didn't emphasize in my article is that of intersectionality. Intersectionality is the idea that we have different aspects of our identities that are located differently within networks of power relations. In the example I gave earlier, my identities based on my race and gender place me in a position of dominance compared to others, while my identity as gay places me in a marginalized position compared to others who identify as straight. The layers of identity that intersect to make each individual who they are is expressed through the concept of positionality, which Maher and Tetreault (1993) describe as:

> Gender, race, class, and other aspects of our identities are markers of relational positions rather than essential qualities. Knowledge is valid when it includes an acknowledgment of the knower's specific position in any context, because changing contextual and relational factors are crucial for defining identities and our knowledge in any given situation. (p. 118)

Although increasing perspectives and dimensions in curriculum and instruction adds complexity, this complexity is what we experience every day. Authenticity emerges from this complexity, and recognition can increase. By examining counternarratives, students can identify the ways that power functions in society. The elements of greeting, rhetoric, and narrative are vehicles for examining intersecting categories. For example, students and teachers can identify intersecting categories when they write biographies and autobiographies. The narratives that emerge can illustrate intersectionality and how oppressive hierarchies affect everyone differently depending upon their positionality.

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QUESTION #4:

Teacher's Question

How would you suggest teachers could use your analysis to design or modify their resources to present a wider range of content over which to deliberate?

Once the range of perspectives in curriculum are identified, teachers and students can include counternarratives that expand perspectives in content. Curriculum and instruction from sources such as Teaching Tolerance (https://www.tolerance.org/) and Rethinking Schools (https://rethinkingschools.org/) help expand perspectives. The biographies and autobiographies of students and teachers can also widen the range of perspectives. In our new book, Education for Democracy: A Renewed Approach to Civic Inquiries for Social Justice, we provide an appendix with more resources for increasing inclusion (Camicia & Knowles, in press).

QUESTION #5:

Teacher's Question

Wayne Journell advocates for "committed impartiality," where teachers disclose their own positions on these topics but remain impartial arbiters of deliberation of legitimate (i.e., defensible perspectives). How do you see this applying (or not applying) to the approach suggested in your article?

Steven Camicia's Response

One of the most important aspects of recognition and inclusion is understanding how power shapes our perspectives. Power and knowledge are related, and we are all positioned differently in relation to them. Claims to neutrality obscure the relationship between power and knowledge. If teachers do not disclose their own positions, curriculum and instruction perpetuate exclusionary dominant perspectives under the guise of neutrality. In my article, I discuss ways that teachers and students can increase inclusion through greeting, rhetoric, and narrative. The point of departure and return during inquiry and discussion is located in the situated knowledge of both teachers and students. This increases authenticity, transparency, and recognition.

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