Introduction

In an analysis of National Assessment of Educational Progress data, Niemi and Junn (1998) found that students in the United States know very little about politics. While this news may be unsettling to those who place a premium on engaged citizenship, it is hardly surprising given the general lack of political knowledge and civic interest among the American electorate that has been well documented within political science research (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hibbing & Thibodeau, 2002; Putnam, 2007). Many of those concerned with this lack of political knowledge believe that teaching has failed to inform the perpetually uninformed and politically lethargic 18-25-year-old voting bloc and argue that public education must do a better job of informing and engaging students in the political process (Macedo, Alex-Assaad, Berry, Bruntnell, Campbell, Fraga, Fung, et al., 2005). Already a daunting task for educators, teaching about the American political system during this era of transcultural migrations is particularly difficult. As learners from different cultural backgrounds, our students’ conceptions of citizenship differ from our own (Torney-Purta, 1998). As we prepare our students to be critical citizens, we must address the ways that culture affects and influences students’ ability to learn and connect with the American political process.

Theoretical Framework

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

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

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

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Students through a mainstream approach that often does not account for ethnic and cultural differences does little to further immigrant students’ conceptions of citizenship. Many members of immigrant groups, even if they were born in the United States or go through the naturalization process, often fail to identify with the American political process, often out of a lingering sense of loyalty to their homeland or a distrust of American politics that is fueled by the institutional racism faced by many of these groups upon entering the nation (Abu El-Haj, 2007; Mitchell & Parker, 2008).

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

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

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

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

Other theories attempt to understand the phenomenon of student “underperformance” as well, such as cultural capital theory (Yosso, 2005), student resistance theory (Kohl, 1995), and cultural differ- ence theory (Spring, 2009), all of which concentrate on how students can succeed (or fail) from the student’s and instead look at the educator, the curricula, the school, and the cultural mismatch between all three. Culturally relevant teaching, however, focuses specific attention on the role of the instructor in bridging the cultural divide.

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

Throughout history, students of color have had to compromise their cultural attachments in order to achieve academic excellence. Delph (1995) argues that much of what is considered to be underachieva- nce can be traced to the cultural mismatch attributed to a cultural mismatch between the teacher, what is valued in the class- room, and the student. Delph outlines what she refers to as a “culture of power” and how often students, particularly the least aware of this power and the most unwilling to acknowledge its existence (p. 24). However, those without this cultural power can easily recognize the ways the system operates to their dis- advantage. That is to say, culturally relevant teaching approaches understand the dyna- mic of power and argue that academic achievement is “the cost of cultural detachment for students. Demonstrably, this decision continues to be that Latinos always fail in traditionally, seemingly unapproachable academic settings.”

In public schools across the United States, pedagogies and curricula continue to reinforce an educational system that is often not inclusive of Latino and other students’ cultural knowledge and skills needed to challenge existing social orders and power structures in the public sector and in schools. Since dis- courses of culturally relevant pedagogies exist, we can infer that culturally irrel- evant pedagogies exist too. It is in this irrelevance that students of color are not given the same opportunities to connect with school life as students who are part of and more familiar with the dominant culture.

The Dimensions of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Although scholars warn against es- sentializing and prescribing a set of teach- ing methods that will invariably work to engage students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1995), pedagogies that consider the ways that culture affects and influences students’ conceptions of citizenship must work to teach the whole student, recognizing that teaching and learning are socially-situated, political endeavors, and, as such, are shaped by multiple and often competing identities. Thus, an approach that positions students as in-need and “at-risk” and instead relies on students’ cultural knowledge to guide and inspire teaching and learning. Beginning with what is familiar to students, educators work to teach the whole student, recog- nizing that culture is a salient component of the teaching and learning process. The dynamic of teaching and learning is made explicit through these practices where classroom soci- ety, instruction, and interactivity are underpinned by students’ cultural attachments in order to pursue academic achieve- ment (Kohl, 1995), and cultural difference (Yosso, 2005), student resistance (Kohl, 1995), and cultural differ- ence (Spring, 2009), all of which concentrate on how students can succeed (or fail) from the student’s and instead look at the educator, the curricula, the school, and the cultural mismatch between all three. Culturally relevant teaching, however, focuses specific attention on the role of the instructor in bridging the cultural divide.

Currently, Michelle (2009) discusses a critical media class he taught eighth grade students in Chicago. One of the
Banks (2008) notes, attempting to educate system during this era of transcultural tors, teaching about the American political (Fung et al., 2005). ter job of informing and engaging students argue that public education must do a bet- those concerned with this lack of political citizenship, it is hardly surprising given Junn (1998) found that students in the of Educational Progress data, Niemi and In an analysis of National Assessment the phenomenon of student “underperfor- Other theories attempt to understand inp broadly based, and the most unwilling to acknowledge its power frequently the least aware of this power pedagogy explicitly considers the ways that teaching approaches understand this dy- the ways the system operates to their dis- and points out that those with power are eens of underrepresented and margin- ways that culture affects and influences teaching, about the American political process. The dynamic of teaching and learning is a political undertaking in which students bring with them social and cultural experi- ences into the classroom. These experiences are useful—and arguably necessary—in cultivating meaningful educational experi- ences for all students. The idea of a cultur- ered valuable, relevant pedagogy that academic success is intimately linked to a cultural match between students and schools. Since dis- courses of culturally relevant pedagogies exist, we can infer that culturally irre- levant pedagogies exist too. It is in this irrelevance that students of color are not given the same opportunities to connect with school life as students who are part of and more familiar with the dominant culture. The Dimensions of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Although scholars warn against es- ternizing and prescribing a set of teach- ing methods that will invariably work to engage students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2009), pedagogies that are considered culturally relevant do share similar quali- ties. For example, in discussions of teacher education programs in preparing pre-service educators “to do” culturally relevant pedagogy post-graduate (Gay, 2007) specifies four themes of culturally relevant pedagogy: Drawing from a variety of educational perspectives, culturally sensitive and equity-centered teaching practices by arguing that culturally relevant pedagogy 1. Uses students’ cultural knowledge (e.g., culturally familiar scenarios, ex- amples, and vignettes) experiences, personal knowledge, and individual strengths and preferences as a conduit to facilitate the teaching-learning process (curriculum and instruction); 2. Incorporates students’ cultural ori- entations to design culturally compa- table classroom environments (classroom management); 3. Provides students with multiple oppor- tunities to demonstrate what they have learned using a variety of assessment techniques (student assessment); and 4. Provides students with the knowledge and skills needed to function in main- stream and multicultural environments, helping students maintain their cultural identity, native language, and connection to their cultural (cultural enrichment and competence). (p. 1086-1087).

Culturally Relevant Education theory (Yosso, 2005), student resistance theory (Kohl, 1995), and cultural differ- ence theory (Spring, 2009), all of which concern the power of students to make connections with high school and are practically invisible in postsecondary and graduate education. Students such as (Sho, 2009) may be wrongly assuming that their experiences in educational institutions are vastly different from their White counterparts who do not demonstrate the same statistics. Herein lies a central tenor of culturally relevant pedagogy, that academic success is intimately linked to a cultural match between students and schools. Since dis- courses of culturally relevant pedagogies exist, we can infer that culturally irre- levant pedagogies exist too. It is in this irrelevance that students of color are not given the same opportunities to connect with school life as students who are part of and more familiar with the dominant culture. Latino students, specifically, are dis- served by our public education system as they are severely overrepresented in the number of students who “drop-out” and the numbers of students who “drop-out.” These drop-out rates are far higher than those of their White counterparts who do not demonstrate the same statistics. Latino students, specifically, are dis- served by our public education system as they are severely overrepresented in the number of students who “drop-out” and the numbers of students who “drop-out.” These drop-out rates are far higher than those of their White counterparts who do not demonstrate the same statistics.

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As part of a larger study on teaching politics in secondary education (Journell, 2009), the first author observed three classes at Roosevelt from which this report is derived during coverage of the 2008 Presidential Election. A large school serving over 3,000 students, Roosevelt was predominantly working-class, urban area in the Southwest Chicago suburbs. As a single body of students, the study was representative of the socioeconomic status and racial diversity of the surrounding community—at the time of the study the student population was 43% Latina/o, 29% African American, and 27% White, and over 30% of Roosevelt students were eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Methodology
Using a case study design (Stake, 1995), the first author visited Mr. Harrison’s class three to four times per week from the start of school in August 2008 through the election in November. During these visits, he acted as a participant-observer (Merriam, 1998) in which he spent time observing classroom instruction and helping students with their homework. 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 when Roosevelt returned to school in late January. All of the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed for accuracy.

Results
Race at Roosevelt
From an instructional standpoint, Mr. Harrison relied on what he termed an “old school” approach that involved primarily worksheet and lecture instruction. Eighteen of the students in the class were Latina/o, with the rest of the class split equally between African-American and White students. Academically, the students in Mr. Harrison’s class were diverse, although many were working below grade level, and basis and appeared very interested in both the subject matter and the election, however, many of the students’ grades suffered as a result of their lack of preparedness. Surveys given to the students after each of the four political cartoons that were circulated during the Obama campaign showed that they overwhelmingly favored Obama in the presidential election.

Upon completion of his degree, he accepted an offer at Roosevelt, the same school he had attended as a teenager. As a Roosevelt alumus and an African American, Mr. Harrison maintained a unique relationship with his students. He often reminded them that he grew up in a nearby neighborhood, and that he was familiar with the home issues and concerns that many of them faced in their daily lives. At the same time, Mr. Harrison made it clear that he had the choice to pursue a better life for himself and repeatedly cited education as the key to leaving the streets and finding gainful employment opportunities.

A deeply spiritual individual, Mr. Harrison was a steady, calm force, although not necessarily from a religious standpoint. Instead, he viewed himself as a moralist, one who could take on the real-life experiences of students and transform them into understanding. His students, a group of predominantly working-class, urban area in the Southwest Chicago suburbs. As a single body of students, the study was representative of the socioeconomic status and racial diversity of the surrounding community—at the time of the study the student population was 43% Latina/o, 29% African American, and 27% White, and over 30% of Roosevelt students were eligible for free or reduced lunch.

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that sums up civic exclusion which only serves to reproduce majority, schools are promoting a culture of gainful employment opportunities.

A deeply spiritual individual, Mr. Harrison said that he was more interested in the spiritual life experiences on it takes to be successful in the "real world". As a result, in his class and one with to which many of his students could personally relate. This approach often conflicted with the information presented in the textbook, which was written for a general audience and had the choice to pursue a better life for themselves. At the same time, Mr. Harrison made sure that many of them faced in their daily lives. At the same time, Mr. Harrison likened teaching to a ministry, a mentor, someone who could share real-life experiences of many members of his students could personally relate. He was leading me in.

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As part of a larger study on teaching politics in secondary education (Journell, 2009), the first author observed three classes at Roosevelt while teaching this course during coverage of the 2008 Presidential Election. A large school serving over 2,000 students, Roosevelt’s student body is a predominantly working-class, urban area in the Southwest Chicago suburbs. As a civic body at Roosevelt, the study of the socio-economic status and racial diversity of the surrounding community—at the time of the study the student population was 43% Latina/o, 29% African American, and 27% White, and over 35% of Roosevelt students were eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Additionally, the school community has many of the problems often associated with urban schools (Fine, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2006), including a 30% drop-out rate and sanctions by the state for failing to consistently achieve Adequate Yearly Progress on several state-level benchmarks. In addition, when comparing ACT results of Roosevelt students with other students in Illinois, Roosevelt fell below both state and district averages in all academic areas.

Civics at Roosevelt was a required course for freshmen, and the focus of the present study is the regular-level civics course taught by Mr. Harrison. In his mid-twenties, but only in his fourth year of teaching, Mr. Harrison had taken a non-traditional path into education. After 20 years in the private sector and three years in the class, Mr. Harrison’s class was observed to be a place where he could separate himself from his peers at Roosevelt in his ability to respond to the real-life experiences of many students in his class and one with to which many of his students could personally relate. This approach often conflicted with the information presented in the textbook, which was written for a general audience and had the choice to pursue a better life for themselves. At the same time, Mr. Harrison made sure that many of them faced in their daily lives. At the same time, Mr. Harrison likened teaching to a ministry, a mentor, someone who could share real-life experiences of many members of his students could personally relate. He was leading me in.

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

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

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

**Mr. Harrison:** There ya go! That is the way to think.

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

**Emily:** White boy telling the truth? (prompt laughter from the class)

**Mr. Harrison:** (turning to the White students in the class): Aren’t these illegal aliens taking your jobs?

**Emily:** We are taking the jobs that they don’t want.

**Mr. Harrison:** Everyone talks about the Latinos being poor when they come over, but they aren’t given an education right away.

This is supposed to be the melting pot. We have all of these restrictions because they come here to work, then they should stay here. They work and they help the White people, kicked the Indians out, so why should we restrict?

**Mr. Harrison:** Then you are a weak man! (prompt laughter from the class)

Emily: But they come here because they don’t have nothing!

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

**Alberto:** What if you have a sugar mama?

**Mr. Harrison:** Then you are a weak man! (prompt laughter from the class)

Emily: But they come here because they don’t have nothing!

**Mr. Harrison:** Is there an issue that you think is important to you as Hispanic-American? What are your thoughts?

**Alberto:** I don’t think im- 

**Mr. Harrison:** Should affirmative action be used there?

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

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

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

**Mr. Harrison:** That is a good point. Ter- rence, what does this mean for African-Ameri- cans?

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

**Mr. Harrison:** How so?

**Teresita:** Taking jobs.

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

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

**Edgardo:** Mexican immigrants should give more because they work hard.

**Alberto:** People talk about Mexicans and say they are lazy, but it’s because they can’t get jobs because of the economy and government.

**Beth (Latina student):** I don’t think lazy in the word, but they come here with nothing.

**David:** But they don’t pay taxes, so what- ever they do make they get to keep.

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

**Betsy (Latina student):** Same thing as Bush.

**Mr. Harrison:** Ok, what is that?

**Betsy:** Where he is building a fence for immigrants.

**Mr. Harrison:** So you see how this issue affects everyone, all of the young Afri- can-American and White kids who want those jobs will be in trouble. Competition is competition.

**Rick:** They will go with White people because Republicans are White.

**Mr. Harrison:** Go Mexicans! (prompts laughter from the class)

**David:** Mexicans here get a bad rap because of a few bad Mexican-Americans that ruin the image of everyone.

**Teresita:** It makes me feel guilty that I am White!

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

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

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

Final exam survey data suggest that the students seemed to gain an appreciation for politics over the course of the semester. Table 1 provides the results of both the pre and post surveys. As the table shows, the mean responses for both of the state- ments were higher on the post survey than on the beginning of the semester. While we hesitate to place too much stock in these results, the general trend is obvious. Finally, these data provide a large amount of criticism for the election, and the issues discussed in Mr. Harrison’s class and related to media and other media during this period, the results may also reflect, at least partially, the nature of students’ experiences in the government class.

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

Discussion

By using immigration as a catalyst to better understand the American political system, Mr. Harrison provides an excellent example of using culturally relevant pedagogy as a medium for increasing students’ political awareness and civic dispositions. Clearly, Mr. Harrison recognized the cultural identities and interests present in his classroom and intentionally chose a topic that elicited passionate feelings among many of his students and, in some cases, represented a lived experience of
Mr. Harrison used these cartoons and similar prompts throughout the semester to transition from civics to discussions about public policy and economics. For example, conversations like the one described above often led to discussions of immigration policy, such as border security and illegal immigration. Many of these conversations were lighthearted, as when Alberto jokingly stated that he would like the government to remove all border control in the United States. His classmates were quick to criticize the logistics of that notion.

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.

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

**Mr. Harrison:** Is there an issue that you think is important to you as Hispanic American and White kids who want those jobs will be in trouble. Competition is competition.

**Mr. Harrison:** We will go with White people because Republicans are White.

**Mr. Harrison:** Sounds like an obstacle course.

**Mr. Harrison:** It takes the fun out of politics. When some people talk about politics, it is really boring, you don’t really want to listen. But he makes it exciting and he gets your attention.

**Mr. Harrison:** Because he makes it fun to learn about politics.

**Mr. Harrison:** I often talk about politics with my family and friends.

**Mr. Harrison:** I consider myself knowledgeable about politics.

**Mr. Harrison:** Money.

**Mr. Harrison:** Do you have a sugar mama?

**Mr. Harrison:** Then you are a weak man!

**Mr. Harrison:** You can’t do that!

**Mr. Harrison:** If they made it over here get a bad rap because of a few bad apples. Let them be immigrants. The immigrants are fair because the Mexican government won’t let them be immigrants. The immigrants here get a bad rap because of a few bad Mexicans here that ruin everyone.

**Mr. Harrison:** That is a good point. Teresa, does this mean for African-Americans?

**Mr. Harrison:** That was right a long time ago, but the only minorities are illegal immigrants.

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

**Ms. Washington:** It makes me feel guilty that I am White!

**Mr. Harrison:** After interviewing the students in Mr. Harrison’s class, it appeared that the diversity and cultural differences of the students appreciated the opportunity to discuss these issues over the course of the semester. When asked why she considered Mr. Harrison her favorite teacher, Sarah stated, ‘Because he makes it fun to learn about politics. When some people talk about politics, it is really boring, you don’t really want to listen. But he makes it exciting and he gets your attention.’

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

Final survey data suggested that the students seemed to gain an appreciation for politics over the course of the semester. Table 1 provides the results of both the pre and post surveys. As the table shows, the mean responses rose for all of the statements in the post survey relative to the beginning of the semester. While we hesitate to place too much stock in these findings, these small gains in scores indicate that students’ passions about immigration and 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.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Pre-Survey</th>
<th>Post-Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I often talk about politics with my family and friends</td>
<td>2.16 (1.20)</td>
<td>2.78 (1.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider myself knowledgeable about politics</td>
<td>2.16 (1.30)</td>
<td>2.65 (0.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The economy is a big thing</td>
<td>2.16 (1.02)</td>
<td>2.65 (1.02)</td>
</tr>
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<td>2.16 (1.02)</td>
<td>2.65 (1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour current political events in school</td>
<td>2.16 (1.02)</td>
<td>2.65 (1.02)</td>
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**Discussion**

By using immigration as a catalyst to better understand the American political system, Mr. Harrison provides an excellent example of using culturally relevant pedagogy as a medium for increasing students’ civic and 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...
his students or their families. As Swatoo (2007) and others (e.g., Ogbo, 1992) have noted, using culturally familiar approaches to teaching can help with the influx of immigrants. The abstract concepts encourages students of ethnic minority groups to take interest in their culture, allowing them to feel connected to the curriculum being taught.

While garnering interest is certainly important, Mr. Harrison extended his use of immigration as a way for his Latino students to better understand the continued struggle between the civic education presented in the classroom and the lived experiences of many of his students who often contradict the traditional civic narrative presented in school. For students who may have experienced the racism that is often present in school, for students who may have experienced the racism that is often present in school. For students who may have experienced the racism that is often present in school.

Finally, by using immigration as a backdrop for his instruction throughout the semester, Mr. Harrison was able to maintain the delicate balance of teaching about American citizenship while simultaneously discussing the backgrounds of his students. The underlying purpose behind a course on American government is to promote civic unity through an appreciation of the structure and scope of the American political system. However, the traditional curriculum often does not accommodate everyone. Author of Invisible Knapsack argues an effective way for students to uncover the truth about American history and culture.

This critical response is perhaps best represented by Beth’s comparison of the melting pot metaphor offered by the textbook and the political cartoon welcoming immigrants to the United States with a bar and a brick wall. The fact that she was able to recognize the hypocrisy behind the textbook’s portrayal of immigration shows that Beth has a basic understanding of public policy that she may not have realized 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 a continuing theme seemed to increase their civic and political awareness. For the African-American students in the class, Mr. Harrison used immigration as way of providing a real-life economics lesson by showing how increased numbers of non-skilled laborers entering the workplace would reduce job opportuni- ties and cut wages for individuals having to compete with the influx of immigrants. For the White students, the immigration focus seemed to serve a social justice function in their lives. Mr. Harrison was able to personalize his teaching, and federal policies can be viewed as fur- ther racial stereotypes and maintain- ing traditional societal power roles. Mr. David’s admission toward the end of the semester that he felt guilty for being White and participating in public policy may have uncovered some of his students’ awareness (McIntosh, exper- tise in society, a revelation that most likely would not have occurred using traditional forms of civic instruction.

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

Note

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

References


his students or their families. As Sitwatu (2007) and others (e.g., Obgu, 1992) have noted, using culturally familiar approaches to teaching about differences, with the influx of immigrants from the White students, the immigration focus seemed to serve a social justice function in their studies by allowing them to feel connected to the curriculum being taught.

While garnering interest is certainly important, it is not always the most important function that Mr. Harrison extended his use of immigration. Within the formal definition of citizenship, many of his students that often contradict the traditional civic narrative presented in school. For students who may have experienced the racism that is so often present in the United States or have seen the government that they have been told is supposed to protect its citizens actively seek to arrest or deport individuals who do not fit within the formal definition of citizenship, the idea of “life, liberty, and property” or Jefferson’s assertion that “all men are created equal” may come across as very hollow promises. By using immigration as a way to contextualize the traditional canon, Mr. Harrison was able to separate his students from the mainstream narrative and see race as a theory from democratic reality while at the same time providing a platform for students to explore their own personal experiences and opinions.

The resulting instruction appeared to foster personal and civic engagement among his students and the teachers, not just the Latinos in the class. Instead of taking their textbook at face value, the students began actively questioning Mr. Harrison’s accuracy of the claims being made by the authors, who were more likely making generalizations that he argued is an effective way for students to uncover the truth about American history and culture.

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Culturally relevant teaching grew out of a concern for the educational experiences of underrepresented and marginalized communities within schools. As a way to understand student performance, the concept of culturally relevant teaching argues that in order for students to be successful in school, they must be given the opportunity to relate to the things that are familiar to them. Other theories attempt to understand the phenomenon of student "underperformance" as well, such as cultural capital. MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION 10.