

Editors' Note to the Special Issue

Critical Multicultural Citizenship Education: Student Engagement Toward Building an Equitable Society

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ABSTRACT: In this special issue we call attention to the role of "Critical Multicultural Citizenship Education" (CMCE) in schools, societies and global contexts. The fundamental goal of CMCE is to increase not only the students' awareness of, and participation in, the political aspects of democracy, but also students' abilities to create and live in an ethnically diverse and just community. CMCE challenges and transforms existing ways in which students engage civically and democratically in local, national, and global contexts. Ten articles in this special issue are grouped by three categories: (1) social studies classrooms and citizenship; (2) community and citizenship; and (3) global contexts and citizenship.

KEYWORDS: citizenship education, social studies, critical multicultural education, diverse youth, critical pedagogy

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Global migration and increasing diversity within nations are challenging conceptions of citizenship all over the world. The percentage of ethnic minorities in nation-states throughout the world has increased significantly within the past 30 years. The United States Census, for example, projects that 50% of the population will consist of culturally, linguistically, racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse groups by 2050. Despite increased growth in diversity within

national borders, issues concerning educational equity, equality, and civic engagement have not always been well attended to in educational and societal contexts. Growing ethnic diversity in schools/society has not automatically led to a dismantling of persistent educational barriers or structural inequalities.

In the past decade, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse populations have faced barriers impacting their rights as citizens in the United States and internationally. Citizenship and the rights that are associated with being a citizen are re-framed when these students seek equality. In 2015, many urban cities in the United States witnessed Latino, Black, and other culturally and ethnically diverse youth demonstrating peacefully, guided by social justice and their civic responsibilities. Similarly, in international contexts students have demonstrated civil disobedience by expressing concerns about their rights as citizens and the disempowerment of communities.

In this special issue, we call attention to the role of “Critical Multicultural Citizenship Education” (CMCE) in schools, societies, and global contexts. The fundamental goal of CMCE is to increase not only students’ awareness of, and participation in, the political aspects of democracy, but also students’ abilities to create and live in an ethnically diverse and just community. CMCE challenges and transforms existing ways in which students engage civically and democratically in local, national, and global contexts.

According to Castro (2012), CMCE draws from the intersection of multicultural education and critical pedagogy. We use and are guided by Freire’s (2007) notions of critical consciousness in discussing CMCE. Within CMCE, students are able to name issues impacting their lives and begin to reflect on ways to improve communities and societies. Further, CMCE emphasizes critical activism that centers on transforming institutional barriers. Youth are able to develop critical citizenship thinking and skills in order to enact their civic identities in local, community, and global contexts.

Teachers that use CMCE have a significant role and are essential in creating an optimal learning environment where students can develop skills to critique and challenge oppression in local, community, and global contexts. We believe that teachers are essential in this process and argue that the dialectical process between teachers and students is key to reframing citizenship. A range of empirical studies have drawn from a CMCE framework to document the way teachers, students, and communities interpret citizenship to seek equality in their schools, classrooms, and communities. This volume will add to and expand on CMCE.

The special issue addresses major issues associated with the active citizenship of diverse youth in schools and communities. This issue names matters impacting Latinos/as, African-Americans, immigrants, and refugees in the United States and other contexts. We emphatically believe that students in K-12 settings must begin to understand their rights as citizens and also advocate for the rights of others in order for domestic and international communities to achieve democracy. The articles are organized by three categories.

Social Studies Classrooms and Citizenship

The first four articles elucidate the manner in which CMCE is enacted in the classroom contexts. These articles draw from citizenship education to forward discussion on how social studies teachers use CMCE to empower youth in the educational system.

In the first article, “Beyond the English Learner Frame: Transnational Funds of Knowledge in Social Studies,” Dafney Dabach and Aliza Fones draw from a qualitative study to illustrate how a high school social studies teacher created space for students’ transnational funds of knowledge in the classroom, focusing on a Pakistani student’s return visit to his country of origin. The authors argue that the teacher’s orientation toward students’ transnational funds of knowledge served to counter assimilationist discourses while teaching U.S. civics.

In the second article, “I Worry about my Community: African American Women Utilizing Communal Notions of Citizenship in the Social Studies Classroom,” Amanda Vickery uses a qualitative multiple case study drawing from the Black feminist ethic of caring (Collins, 2009; Thompson, 1998) to explore how three African American women social studies teachers draw on their personal and community knowledge to conceptualize and teach the construct of citizenship to their students of color. This study sheds light on how critical notions of citizenship may be presented and utilized in classrooms.

Next, Pablo C. Ramirez and Ashley Taylor Jaffee examine how two social studies teachers in New York and Arizona engage newcomer youth in active citizenship education in “Culturally Responsive Active Citizenship Education for Newcomer Students: A Cross-State Case Study of Two Teachers in Arizona and New York.” Using a framework of culturally responsive active citizenship education, the 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 communities.

Finally, in “Exploring the Civic Identities of Latina/o High School Students: Reframing the Historical Narrative,” Cinthia Salinas and Jeannette Alarcón use a qualitative case study to focus attention upon the teaching and learning practices and experiences in a social studies classroom serving late arrival immigrants (those children who arrive after the age of 14). The teacher and students willingly trouble the existing historical narrative and consequently insert other perspectives and civic identities into it. The authors’ findings suggest that using more critical notions of historical inquiry and knowledge of the historical narrative as a cultural tool is vital in disrupting traditional histories and themes, and promoting the civic participation of marginalized communities.

Community and Citizenship

The second group of articles in this special issue examines the way in which teachers and students enact CMCE in community contexts. The first article, “Sowing the *Semillas* of Critical Multicultural Citizenship for Latina/o Undocumented Youth: Spaces In-School and Out-of-School,” by Maria del Carmen Salazar, Lisa M. Martinez, and Debora Ortega, examines how in-school and out-of-school spaces support or constrain undocumented Latina/o youths’ development as critical multicultural citizens. The authors use a multi-phase, qualitative study to show the ways in which they developed critical multicultural education through their activism inside and outside school.

Next, in “¡Ya basta con la Ciudadanía Restrictiva!: Undocumented Latina/o Young People and Their Families’ Participatory Citizenship,” Leticia Alvarez Gutiérrez describes a community-based participatory action research (PAR) project. In this PAR project, undocumented young people and their families challenge the notion that legal citizenship alone provides educational rights and equity. Central to this study is how participants troubled the racialization and gendered components of citizenship. This article discusses how young people and their families view the juncture between “illegality and citizenship” while highlighting the participatory moves that they discuss and put into action.

In “Going Global and Getting Graphic: Critical Multicultural Citizenship Education in an Afterschool Program for Immigrant and Refugee Girls,” Jie Yie Park’s qualitative case study reports on the experiences of six recent-arrival immigrant and refugee girls as they participated in an afterschool program designed to promote critical multicultural citizenship through graphic novels. Analysis of discourse data revealed how the girls explored the interdependence among nation-states and wrestled with the complexities in their new home country. The study’s findings challenge the deficit perspective that immigrant youth, who are learning English, are not ready to engage in deliberative discourse around social and global issues

Global Contexts and Citizenship

The final three articles in this special edition address issues associated with citizenship education in global contexts. In “Civics Is Largely About Politics: The Possibilities and Challenges of a Citizenship Education Pedagogy that Embraces Democratic Politics and Affirms Diversity,” L. Alison Molina-Girón draws from classroom observations and from teacher and student interviews in four multicultural Grade 10 civics classrooms in Ottawa, Canada, to discuss one teacher’s unique citizenship education pedagogy, an approach that embraces democratic politics and affirms diversity. The author contends that a critical

multicultural citizenship education must have a strong political orientation and, additionally, be responsive to the existing social and cultural diversity that defines a democratic community.

Alex Kumi-Yeboah and Patriann Smith examine the challenges faced by Black immigrant youth in “Critical Multicultural Citizenship Education among Black Immigrant Youth: Factors and Challenges.” The authors suggest that class discussion, influence of social media and technology, non-educational practices, and cultural and language differences are the leading factors that promote the advancement of critical multicultural citizenship education. Findings support the need for teachers and educators to understand the cultures and best practices for teaching immigrant youth

Finally, in “Building a Bridge to Cultural Citizenship: Responses to Islam in the Classroom: A Case of Muslim Girls from Minority Communities of Interpretation,” Natasha Merchant investigates how Muslim girls from minority communities made sense of and responded to a curriculum on Islam in their social studies classes. The findings describe how students responded to Islamophobia in the classroom by building bridges across differences. This study aims to learn from the experiences of students and advocates a curriculum on Islam honoring complexity.

We trust that the research articles that have been included in this special issue will encourage continued conversations and scholarship regarding Critical Multicultural Citizenship Education in teaching and learning contexts that value a more democratic and pluralistic society.

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