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“SHOULDN’T EVERYONE KNOW ABOUT THEIR GOVERNMENT?” AN EXPLORATION OF CURRICULAR VALUES IN ADVANCED PLACEMENT GOVERNMENT CLASSES

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“SHOULDN’T EVERYONE KNOW ABOUT THEIR GOVERNMENT?” AN EXPLORATION OF CURRICULAR VALUES IN ADVANCED PLACEMENT GOVERNMENT CLASSES

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To those who teach so that we may live in a kinder world.

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ABSTRACT

Prevalent models of secondary education in the United States have tended to privilege the acquisition of knowledge of scientific disciplines that is often peripheral to the experiences of students. My Advanced Placement Government classes were no different, and this caused me to wonder whether my classes were meeting the often-stated goal of the social studies – citizenship education. This situation, along with anecdotal evidence of disconnection, led me to wonder what, if anything, my students were taking out of my classes. The purpose of this teacher action research study was to better understand what students found valuable in our AP Government classes. I used an interpretive framework and qualitative methodology to study the thoughts and actions of forty-four students, including how the transactional nature of our experiences interacted within our situation. Data collection involved the use of a Likert-scale survey, an open-ended questionnaire, field notes, and in-depth group and individual interviews. Findings indicated that students expressed that there was value in our course, and I categorized findings of value as primarily passive, academic, or active. The first two categories were more prominent in the findings and often revealed less of a connection to lived experiences. Other students communicated value in ways that actively connected content knowledge beyond the school setting. Students' reactions to some assignments helped me realize that we often had mismatched goals for the course, and this seemed to distance my students and me from better knowing each other. With these findings in mind, I conclude that we must create more spaces for educative experiences that might foster citizenship growth while cultivating situations where students and teachers may better know each other.

CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM

My Dissatisfaction

I can see the worn out looks on my students' faces. I can see that they are counting down the days, the hours, the minutes until this all ends. Or maybe I'm projecting my own feelings on them. Maybe I am the one that is worn out. I am tired of playing this game and I feel guilty about making them play it too. I feel like I am cheating my students by just preparing them to pass the AP test.

- Personal journal

I wrote these words just days before the students in my Advanced Placement (AP) U.S. Government and Politics course were about to take the big test. AP classes are college-level classes taught in high schools across the United States. If a student meets the minimum score set by their college of choice on the end-of-year standardized test they can earn college credit for that class. The continual growth of the AP program (Lacy, 2010), both in terms of courses offered and the number of students taking them, was reflected in my teaching career. I was asked to teach a different AP course in each of my first three years in the profession. Teaching a new AP class required a lot of effort and preparation time. While I enjoyed teaching my first two AP courses, I was pleased to finally settle into teaching AP Government for the last four years.

Once students shuffled into my classroom and the bell rang to start our class, I knew we would need every minute. I felt the pressure daily because there never seemed to be enough time to effectively cover the extensive content. We had a little less than an hour together and I constantly thought of ways to maximize the efficiency

of class activities. It was not unusual for me to still be yelling out reminders concerning the content or homework as students were on their way out the door. Official AP curricula in the social studies demanded that students learn massive chunks of information as determined by the College Board. Both my students and I put in a tremendous amount of work throughout the year so they might score well on the final exam.

While the College Board (2010) has maintained that there is no official AP curriculum that teachers are to follow, I believe this to be a disingenuous claim. The official curriculum is well known to students and teachers of AP. The AP Government course consists of content students are expected to know, and teachers are supposed to teach, for the AP exam. This content is reaffirmed through AP recommended textbooks, study materials aligned with the curriculum, and previous exams released by the College Board. The amount of content to be known by students is so detailed and meticulous that teachers are left with minimal space to follow the College Board's (2010) recommendation to "develop or maintain their own curriculum" (p. 2).

Before I move forward I will clarify a couple of terms that I have just used. First, when I refer to spaces that exist in educational settings, I am including, but not limiting myself to, factors such as the amount of time that can be afforded a subject of study, the overall flexibility of the curriculum considering external pressures, and the ability of teachers and students to make real decisions about the direction of learning. If teachers are to prepare students to score well on a detailed test that consists of externally developed predetermined content, then there are likely to be fewer spaces for exploration. Teacher must instead stick close to the content that I call the official

curriculum, which fills most of those spaces that exist within my classes. The role of teachers as thoughtful developers of curriculum is thus reduced to merely adding content that fits within the structure of the College Board's curriculum. For the purposes of this paper, I will distinguish between the official curriculum that must be taught to prepare students for the AP test and the additive lessons and content that I brought to the course.

I constantly thought of ways to prod my students to learn the official curriculum, which demanded they know terms as obscure as "rule 22," "multiple referrals," "frontloading," and "the Budget Reform Act of 1974" (Dilulio & Wilson, 2005). There were hundreds of these terms to be remembered, and even though I taught the course for four years, I still had trouble remembering some of them. Over the years I developed a number of strategies to compel my students to remember the details. Once or twice a week class began with me announcing, "Take out a piece of paper and put everything else up."

My students knew a pop quiz was coming half way through the first syllable. One student recently confessed that simply hearing the phrase triggered physiological symptoms of anxiety. The questions for these quizzes came from readings assigned for the previous night. Homework assignments usually took about a half hour to complete, but my questions were infamous for their detail. Remembering the details was the name of the game in AP, and my quizzes were just one way I coerced students to remember facts that often seemed irrelevant to their lives.

I wanted my students to take something of value from our class, but it was difficult to know how much, and to what degree, that was happening. There was surely

some content within the official curriculum that would provide value for students, but I did not know what it was, how much of it was retained, or whether they would ever utilize it in any meaningful way. Students received college credit if they met the score required by their college of choice on the AP test. This was a tangible result that could help their lives, but it was not why I became a teacher. I did not spend nights at school preparing lessons long after others had gone home because I wanted to help kids pass a standardized test. I also did not want to solely teach them the tricks of how to pass difficult tests in school, which seemed to merely prepare them for more schooling in college. I wanted my students to leave my class as better citizens who might make the world a better place.

Citizenship education has long been the professed raison d'être for social studies classes among scholars (Barr, Barth, & Shermis, 1977; Beal et al., 2009; Evans, 2004; Hertzberg, 1981, Vinson, 2006). I continually searched for ways to make the AP curriculum more relevant and meaningful for citizenship by supplementing the official curriculum with an enacted curriculum that also consisted of current events, controversial questions, and active projects. I hoped that these additions might foster responsible citizenship in some ways, but it always felt like an uphill battle with so much content to cover.

I hoped my students were taking something of value from the class, but my biggest fear was that for all our work, we were largely wasting our time. I encountered mounting evidence, even if some of it was anecdotal, that students did not retain much of our course content. Students often admitted that they remembered little from previous social studies courses. I was excited when a former student told me she was

interning for a U.S. Senator, but deflated when she confessed, “I wish I remembered something from your class.” My fear seemed to be further substantiated when a student walked in immediately after completing the AP test and belted out, “Woo hoo, no more government ever again!” It was as if he was announcing – we can now start forgetting everything! This was not an uncommon reaction once the test was completed.

A lot of students acted as if they would never again encounter the subject matter we spent a year studying. They would ask questions like, “Because the test is over, can we just watch movies?” They may have just been worn out by the time the test was completed. The reality was that even I was tempted to “blow off” the last few weeks of school. I, too, was worn out by this point in the year. The weeks preceding the AP test consisted of a grueling study schedule that reviewed the entire AP curriculum in just a few weeks. When I heard students shout celebratory remarks because the burden of my class was lifted, I did not celebrate. I was concerned with where I, and we, seemed to have gone wrong.

However, it was possible I misread the meaning behind my students’ comments and actions. Maybe my feelings excessively affected how I interpreted their words and actions. Did I really know what was of value to my students in our curriculum? These were the questions and concerns that prompted this study. I wanted to better understand what my students found valuable in our class and to investigate the implications of their perspectives. To interpret what I found it will be helpful to first review how contemporary schooling, and particularly the social studies, came to be this way.

Setting the Stage: A Modernist Paradigm

This study was grounded within a schooling model largely influenced by a modernist worldview. A worldview, or what Capra (1996) called a social paradigm, is a "constellation of concepts, values, perceptions, and practices shared by a community, which forms a particular vision of reality that is the basis of the way the community organizes itself" (p. 6). The dominant modernist Western worldview emerged half a millennium ago as astonishing changes led to cultural shifts in perception. The medieval period in Europe, from about 600 C.E. to about 1400 C.E., was a time when the world was generally understood holistically. Briggs and Peat (1999) explained that at one point "the Earth was considered a living being, and the human artisan was an assistant or midwife to nature. Metals grew in the womb of the Earth. The miner, smelter, metalworkers and goldsmith engaged in the sacred tasks of helping nature reach perfection…" (p. 148). The Universe was seen as whole – "organic, living, and spiritual" (Capra, 1996, p. 19).

This more holistic medieval worldview extended into many aspects of life, including what ways of knowing were used to make sense of the world. For example, the protosciences of antiquity had considered insight and revelation as legitimate sources for understanding complex phenomena (Laszlo, 1996). People of this time concurrently held mystical and religious beliefs aside logical-rational comprehensions of the world, and these different ways of interpreting phenomena were viewed as complimentary (Davis, 2004). Even the word consciousness, today considered the essence of individuality, referred then to what people knew together (Briggs & Peat,

1999). The Enlightenment era in Europe[1] ushered in a paradigm shift that rejected this wholeness for more mechanistic and reductionist understandings.

The changes associated with the rise of Enlightenment thinking in Europe had been "on a slow simmer for centuries" and was helped along by numerous events and developments (Davis, 2004, p. 63). The invention of the printing press made books increasingly available so that individuals might better develop their own answers concerning questions of the universe. The European Renaissance, via the translations of Islamic scholars, brought about a return to the analytic and absolutist philosophies of ancient Greece (Webb, 2006). By questioning divine revelation and the authority of the Catholic Church, the Protestant Reformation also encouraged an increase in literacy so individuals might read and study the Christian Bible. Galileo Galilei's support of heliocentric views cast further doubt upon the authority of the Church, but his methods also "banned quality from science, restricting it to the study of phenomena that could be measured and quantified" (Capra, 1996, p. 19).

This emerging scientific ethic often devalued other ways of knowing and relied on a mechanistic worldview that assumed the universe worked like a machine (Laszlo, 1996). The natural laws discovered by Galileo and Newton were meant to provide more reliable theories than insight and revelation could deliver. The limitations of these more rigorous scientific methods were often overlooked. There were many complex phenomena of the natural world that were not fully reducible by scientific analysis. Despite these limitations, "a profound metamorphosis of consciousness slowly but inexorably seeped into the medieval conception of reality". Individual man[2] became the "measure of all things", and he came to view himself as separate from

nature (Briggs & Peat, 1999, p. 149). Consciousness became the private property of the individual. Logical-rational thinking began to replace, instead of compliment, other types of understandings (Davis, 2004).

The rise of mechanistic thinking was most notably articulated by philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes, often dubbed the father of modernism, through his analytic method. Descartes was a mathematician who sought to attain certainty beyond the world of mathematics. He believed the human mind was separate and independent from the rest of nature (or matter) and, like Galileo and Newton, he understood the material world to function like a machine – governed by unchanging laws. Universal truths could thus be uncovered through an analytic method whereby man broke down "complex phenomena into pieces to understand the behavior of the whole from the properties of its parts" (Capra, 1999, p. 19). Similar to Euclidean geometry, Descartes argued that true knowledge could be attained if one began with dependable facts and then applied logic.

Descartes' dualistic model of separating nature into mind and matter, subject and object, observer and observed "became a built-in part of Western man's way of looking at the world" (Magee, 1998, p. 88). According to foundational Western thinkers, an ideal world existed, and by externalizing and objectifying the material world, man could uncover, and even control, it. Empiricists like Francis Bacon viewed the world analytically as Descartes had, but contended that truth must be empirically, not just rationally, verifiable through scientific demonstration. These views gradually contributed to the emergence of a modernist paradigm that perceived the world as a

mechanism operated by universal laws that could be understood by man via analytic methods.

The modernist paradigm remains the dominant worldview, and its influence is evident in many areas of society. Modernist features have long been discernible in formal schools, and the influence has grown stronger over time. Among other things, the modernist paradigm has influenced the development and composition of the social studies within American schools.

Modern Schools and the Social Studies

Frank Smith (1998) questioned the dominant school model that treats learning as something that requires hard work and determination by reminding us that authentic learning takes place inconspicuously through social interactions with those with whom we identify. The scientific model of learning that has dominated formal schooling frequently relies on external incentives to compel the short-term memorization of predetermined content. Not surprisingly, students often find the curricula developed by adult experts uninteresting, and short-term memorization is often followed by long-term forgetting. Smith pointed out that much of the learning that occurs in schools is often collateral and does not entail what a teacher likely intended for students to learn. Students may learn that they find history boring or that their teacher does not seem to like them[3]. The short-term memorization that is often equated to learning in schools does not look like, or have the same effect, of natural learning that has always been present.

For most of American history, professional teachers, textbooks, and external incentives were not the prevailing measures for ensuring that youth learned social

studies content. Instead, what was learned about history, geography, current events, and government was learned naturally among the citizens of a community. In colonial America, few children attended formal schools (Evans, 2004; Webb, 2006), but instead gained knowledge of social studies content informally through their personal study of "newspapers, imported books and magazines, almanacs, private libraries and public forums" (Roorbach, 1937, p. 16). The study of history or geography was often undertaken for personally relevant and pragmatic purposes, and content was studied holistically within its social context. Social studies topics were addressed in a variety of areas outside of schools, including the home, neighborhood, and church (Barr et al., 1977).

Smith (1998) argued that this type of learning was often natural, pleasant, and lasting. Learning was not generally a forced activity requiring external reinforcement, but something motivated by intrinsic concerns. Assistance was sought out as was deemed necessary from those who were more knowledgeable on the topic. The types of apprenticeships that were popular in early American history were emblematic of a more natural type of learning. If parents wanted their children to be farmers they sent them to live on a farm. If they wanted their children to be lawyers then they worked closely with one. Early universities also followed this pattern as they were essentially "communities where scholars who *professed* a certain way of life accepted the company of young people into the *discipline* they followed" (Smith, 1998, p. 44). Changes in society, accompanied by the rise of formal, and eventually compulsory, schools would alter how many Americans viewed learning.

The most widespread type of schools in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were Latin Grammar schools (Roorbach, 1937; Webb, 2006). Although these schools sometimes included geography and moral philosophy in the curriculum (Ross, 2006), most efforts were dedicated to a classical curriculum that largely ignored history and other social science content (Evans, 2004; Roorbach, 1937). This classical curriculum was rooted in the metaphysical assumptions and traditions of ancient Greeks like Plato, who held that eternal absolute truths, including values, could be discovered through the study of classic works of the past (Webb, 2006). These ideas would later influence analytic thinkers like Descartes. Following the American Revolution, nationalistic curricula began to replace religious studies so as to ensure the growth of devout patriots in the young nation (Ross, 2006). In the domestic sphere, mothers of the era were expected to pass along republican virtues to the next generation.

By the 1820s and 1830s, social studies courses were well established in schools, but there was great curricular variation from school to school (Hertzberg, 1981; Roorbach, 1937; Russell, 1914). Roorbach (1937) found that prior to the Civil War at least "twenty two fields of history, eleven of geography, six of civics, political economy, an array of mental and moral philosophy, and religious education" existed in American schools (p. 7). Some of the more obscure classes offered in antebellum America, due to the influence of Presbyterian churches, included the history of Scotland and ecclesiastical history. Textbooks prior to 1880 showed that social studies content inculcated students with moral and patriotic values through historical myths, moral parables, and religious stories (Barr et al., 1977). Rote memorization occurred

in these early schools, but it was commonly regarded as “mental discipline” that served to exercise the brain and instill self-control (Barr et al., 1977). These methods generally focused on developing strong, disciplined youth, not an enduring understanding of content (Smith, 1998).

The one-room schoolhouse emerged to meet the requirements of new compulsory school laws at the state level. These schoolhouses, partly because of their lack of resources, were well suited to cultivate authentic learning experiences. Unskilled and low-paid teachers, usually women, relied on older children to help teach younger children basic skills that they had learned. Learning at this time was still largely a social activity, not an individualistic or competitive endeavor. Most students did not leave these schoolhouses with an education that prepared them for the university, but this was not the goal for a student population that generally intended to do work similar to that of their parents (Smith, 1998). This state of affairs did not last long, as the late nineteenth century was a time of tremendous change in the United States.

The scientific successes of the industrial revolution further bolstered the dominance of a mechanistic worldview. In the late nineteenth century, industrialization transformed the way people lived and worked, massive immigration altered the demographics, and urbanization crowded cities. The analytic principles of scientific specialization were applied to complex phenomena like production (e.g., the assembly line; Taylorization) and human behavior (e.g., behavioral psychology). While social studies subjects existed in schools across the country, they only emerged as a more formal field because of changes that affected education during this time.

Three converging factors in the late nineteenth century that led to the rise of social studies as a field were the growth of public schools, the upsurge of universities, and the emergence of national agencies of reform (Hertzberg, 1981). Enrollment in public common schools surpassed enrollment in private schools in the 1880s, and by 1890, nine in ten students were enrolled in public schools (Hertzberg, 1981; Tyack, 2001).

The great variation of social studies courses among schools was viewed as inefficient by those who sought to centralize and standardize education in an era of increased hierarchical control (Tyack, 2001). The rise in high school enrollment was mirrored by a swell in university enrollment. The chaotic hodgepodge of courses was particularly a source of distress for university registration officials who sought a more uniform curriculum so as to better evaluate competing student transcripts (Evans, 2004; Hertzberg, 1981). The desire for a less complicated college admission process for the small percentage of students that planned to attend college, rather than an interest in the needs of students and society, appeared to be a driving force for reforming school curricula across the United States. Ideas of curricular uniformity and centralized decision-making resulted in a school model that reflected the emerging scientific sentiment of the industrial era.

The rise of compulsory schooling in the twentieth century was grounded in modernist assumptions that resulted in the proliferation of linear, mechanistic, predetermined, and scientific curricula. The scientific aims of educational psychologist Edward Thorndike were illustrative of the direction in which schools shifted in the early twentieth century. He aimed to create a science of educational practice "through experimentation . . ." and this would make it possible to ". . . discover the laws of

learning so that teachers could rely not on intuition, chance, artistry, or talent, but rather on tested principles and procedures for managing student's learning" (Eisner, 1985, p. 8). He believed that this science could be advanced through the use of mechanistic methods where "complex skills could be divided into component parts… [and] the parts were put together to constitute a complex unit of behavior" (p. 10). From this viewpoint, complex educational problems were reducible to simple cause and effect relationships, tested principles could determine universally effective teaching techniques, and student intellect and achievement could be accurately measured. Thorndike's influence on the curriculum field was evident in both the work of many future curriculum theorists and the prevailing design of twentieth century schools. While many contemporary scholars have rejected aspects of Thorndike's influential designs, many of his ideas can still be found in modern schools.

Ralph Tyler's monograph, which has long been considered the most influential work in the field of curriculum, maintained several characteristics of Thorndike's work (Eisner, 1985; Kliebard, 1977; Walker & Soltis, 2004). Tyler's rationale set forth a scientific method for curriculum development that gained popularity in part because it remained neutral by not explicitly endorsing a particular view of education. Kliebard (1977) argued that this neutrality claim was dubious because Tyler's method still required a number of value decisions be made. Eisner (1985) maintained that the tenor of Tyler's work supported a "no-nonsense, straightforward, systematic conception of what in practice is a complex, fluid, halting, and adventitious task" (p. 12).

This no-nonsense approach was evident in Tyler's linear stance that learning objectives must be determined prior to lessons and without consideration of student

interests or needs. This systematic approach valued results over processes and curricula over students. Dominant theories of education have largely followed in this tradition of "development models and curriculum structures that cast learning as an orderly and linear progression from incomplete child to completed adult" (Davis, 2004, p. 22). Lessons, often at the behest of externally-developed standards and pacing guides, are regularly executed as a sequential and efficient series of steps towards a predetermined learning outcome. This mechanistic view of learning was also evident in the separation of scientific knowledge into different areas.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, scientists in the emerging disciplines (e.g., history, economics) created professional organizations that formally divorced different knowledge areas from each other and promoted more mechanistic ways of knowing phenomena (Evans, 2004; Hertzberg, 1981). These isolated pockets of specialized knowledge were carved into curricula to be studied by university, high school, junior high and even elementary school students. High school curricula were first separated by area (e.g., English, science, math, social studies, arts) and then further by discipline. Once the social studies was separated from other subject areas, the discipline of history, driven by the scientific structures advanced by academic historians, came to be the dominant way of knowing social studies content (Evans, 2004). This historical knowledge was by and large separated from knowledge produced by other emerging disciplines, such as economics, political science, geography, sociology, and psychology. While in-depth knowledge was produced by these disciplines, there were problems in such mechanistic organization.

Laszlo (1996) contended that the problem with "such specialty barriers are that knowledge" provided only "fragments – remarkably detailed but isolated patterns," not a "continuous and coherent picture" (p. 2). Within social studies content areas, a "modern scientific history" was "held up as a model for education in schools," but Evans (2004) claimed the scientific knowledge of specialized experts "gave too little emphasis and made too little connection to the present society and to students' lives" (p. 20). Students were often expected to master material individually, not socially, and reproduce it so their acquisition of knowledge could be quantified and measured. Conceptions of learning in the modern school were not driven by students' intrinsic motivations, but were instead pushed forward by the pre-determined decisions of academic or curriculum experts. Many scholars have argued that this type of arrangement in modern schools is not conducive to authentic, meaningful, or lasting learning experiences (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970; Smith, 1998; Whitehead, 1929).

The arguments that have characterized current social studies debates arose as the field emerged as a more formal content area in schools around the turn of the twentieth century. From the outset, the social studies have been highly influenced by the prevailing modernist worldview, and this was only intensified as analytic scientific methods became the preeminent way of organizing an industrial society. Questions concerning what content and methods are most worthy have divided concerned groups since the inception of the field.

Defining the Social Studies

Since social studies content can conceivably consist of "an almost unbounded body of subject matter," decisions must be made as to what content is most

worthwhile to be included in the curriculum of a single classroom or all classrooms (Thornton, 2005, p. 2). The field has been defined in many ways by many people, but the criteria for definition have often been so incongruent so as to make comparison between them unfeasible (Barr et al., 1977; Hertzberg, 1981; Nelson, 2001). Hertzberg's (1981) history of the field captures the complexity well by simply asking, "What is – or are – the social studies?" There has never been agreement as to whether the social studies is one or many entities (p. 1). Varying criteria for defining the field include educational and social purposes, methods of study, anticipated outcomes, and embedded values (Nelson, 2001).

There have been areas of general agreement among scholars within the field, but some question whether these understandings are so broad as to be essentially meaningless. One general understanding has been that the social studies consisted of content from a wide variety of social science disciplines. The subjects most commonly considered part of the social studies curricula have been history, geography, sociology, psychology, economics, archaeology, philosophy, political science, and law (Beal, Bolick, & Martorella, 2009). Another area of general agreement among scholars concerned the belief that the purpose of the social studies was to provide an education for citizenship (Beal et al., 2009; Barr et al., 1977; Evans, 2004; Hertzberg, 1981; Vinson, 2006). Yet questions concerning how the different social science disciplines should be utilized and what type of citizenship is desirable remain highly contested subjects.

For the purposes of this study, I will draw on various conceptions of citizenship and citizenship education. Social studies scholars have put forth a number

of differing notions in this area of study. Although I have included several perspectives, I recognize that there are many more valuable contributions to draw on, and I do not want to limit myself to only those presented here.

Banks (2004) argued that citizenship education in schools has traditionally involved assimilating students into a mainstream national culture. As ethnic, cultural, language, and religious diversity has continued to increase, Banks questioned the appropriateness of a prevailing assimilationist notion of citizenship education that marginalized minority groups. He instead advocated a multicultural or cosmopolitan citizenship whereby students are committed to human dignity and justice for all members of the world community. This served as one of many possible critiques and descriptions of what citizenship should be in the social studies. Calls for global (McIntosh, 2009), ecological (Houser, 2009), and associated (Dewey, 1916) forms of citizenship, among others, provide a glimpse of some of the ideas of what citizenship could mean to the social studies.

Another way to evaluate conceptions of citizenship is to consider the strength of participation in democratic activities. Barber (2003) argued that liberal democracy, viewed by many of the Founders as necessary to maintain republicanism in a nation too vast for direct democracy, has resulted in a weak form of citizenship that has resulted in a "crisis of participation . . . where fewer and fewer Americans participate in public affairs" (p. xxxiii). This political crisis could be gauged by "plummeting electoral participation figures, widespread distrust of politicians, or pervasive apathy about things public and political" (xxxiii). Another symptom of this crisis has been evident in American voting rates that have consistently ranked among the lowest in

Western democratic nations (Barber, 2003; Franklin, 2004). Barber (2003) argued that a liberal system values "the conception of the individual, and of individual interest, undermines the democratic practices upon which both individuals and their interests depend" (p. 4). Barber drew on Dewey's (1916) idea that democracy does not simply entail participation in formal political institutions, but is instead a way of associated living. Barber contended that a strong democracy consists of citizens who participate in aspects of self-government as a "way of living" (p. 118). This view valued active participation as a key component of citizenship.

Beyond arguments concerning what type of citizen is preferable, broader definitions for the field have also provided an assortment of possibilities. Definitions for the social studies range from arguments that it should cease to exist to rationales that it serves as an umbrella for all social knowledge and school subjects (Nelson, 2001). Disagreements in the field concern a number of critical questions: Should the social science disciplines be maintained separately, or should content be integrated to address certain issues or social problems? What content or social science disciplines should be emphasized? Should curriculum be student-centered or content-centered? Who should decide curricula? Should the social studies be integrated with content from other areas of study like English, science, or the arts? If social studies concerns citizenship, then what type of society is desirable, and what types of citizens would this society require? Different people and groups present dramatically different answers to all these questions and have defined the social studies in dissimilar ways. With such a diversity of answers on these matters it is easy to understand why the field lacks a common definition (Evans, 2004; Hertzberg, 1981; Stanley, 2001).

Some scholars have argued that without a common definition, the field remains in a state of chaos and confusion. Some even questioned whether the field can move forward if it suffers from such an "identity crisis" (Barr et al., 1977). Yet the task of finding a common definition has proved daunting. Classical approaches include citizenship transmission, social science structure, reflective inquiry, informed social criticism, and personal development. Newer approaches such as democratic education, multicultural education, gender studies, social issues, global education, postmodernism, technology studies, history-based approaches, cultural studies, and neo-Marxism have also laid their claim to an influential position in the field (Vinson, 2006).

Understanding the social studies within a historical context can help provide a context for these concerns. It is beyond the scope of this work to provide an extensive history of the field. Nonetheless, I will offer a glimpse into some of the notable issues that have regularly concerned social studies scholars. For the purposes of this paper, I will explain the general direction of the field through the lens of the classic traditional-progressive dichotomy. Such a dualistic division presents significant limitations since its oversimplification diminishes the complexity that exists. Yet, this brief history may provide a point from which to start an exploration.

Since the formalization of school curricula in the late nineteenth century, arguments between traditional and progressive camps have been prominent in education in general and the social studies in particular (Dewey, 1938; Evans, 2004, Webb, 2006). The first section will focus on the early committees that established a traditional model for the field and then move on to those movements, which served to

sustain such a conception. I will then consider the progressive response through the Problems of Democracy (POD) course created by the 1916 Report on the Social Studies alongside the work and philosophy of Harold Rugg, among other movements. Finally, I will offer an interpretation as to why a traditional education, mired in a modernist worldview, has largely dominated the social studies in schools.

A Traditional Interpretation of History and Allied Subjects

Advocates of a traditional education in the social studies have often called into question whether the term "social studies" should be utilized at all. They have suggested that the term is unnecessary largely because they do not agree that the various social sciences should be integrated with other disciplines into something called the "social studies." They instead hold that this content should be studied separately within isolated scientific disciplines (Evans, 2004; Thornton, 2005). This interpretation is buoyed by a faith in the scientific methods of the various specialties to produce worthwhile knowledge that should be learned by students. Other traditionalists have rendered the expression meaningless by simply using it as an umbrella expression to refer to all the social science subjects. In fact, the term did not gain popularity until after the 1916 Committee Report on the Social Studies was released. Until that time, the field was often referred to as "history and allied subjects" (Thornton, 2005, p.11).[4]

Some traditional educational practices were already established in American schools when social science curricula began to be formalized through the work of national committees and groups in the late nineteenth century (Roorbach, 1937). Dewey (1938) defined traditional education as one where "the subject-matter of

education consists of bodies of information and skills that have been worked out in the past; therefore, the chief business of the school is to transmit them to the new generation" (p. 17). Learning opportunities in the area of the social studies were dominated by traditional history courses that aimed to indoctrinate pupils with patriotic tales, enshrine mental discipline through the short-term memorization of facts (Roorbach, 1937; Nelson, 2001), and pass on the legacy of antiquity (Barr et al., 1977). Critics have derisively dubbed this approach an assimilationist conception of citizenship education or a banking approach to education (Banks, 2004; Freire, 1970).

While many traditional advocates eventually recommended contemporary histories over ancient ones, their curriculum generally consisted of curricula that were predetermined, linear, chronological, and nationalistic. Teacher lecture and rote work from textbooks were prevalent methods for transmitting the predetermined, scientific knowledge from the expert teacher to inexperienced students (Evans, 2004; Roorbach, 1937). While these general trends characterized social studies education at the time, the lack of curricular continuity from school to school was a source of frustration for universities who looked to reform committees to rectify the problem.

Two national committees, the History Ten and Committee of Seven, released reports in the 1890s that recommended a more uniform K-12 curriculum to address the perceived chaos of courses offered around the country. The very idea of a uniform curriculum, developed separate from specific students, teachers, and their local situation, has been characteristic of a traditional approach to education typified by predetermined curricula. The National Education Association's (NEA) History Ten was organized to develop high school and university curriculum together, but some

believed the committee's purpose was simply to align school curricula for their own needs (Evans, 2004). This often meant that a primary aim of school curricula was to prepare students for more school. This trend has continued into the twenty-first century in preparation curricula encouraged by the AP and Common Core movements.

The NEA committee met in Madison, Wisconsin in the 1890s to sort out the chaos of the social studies curriculum. Some of the more well-known experts from social science disciplines, such as Woodrow Wilson, James Harvey Robinson, and Albert Bushnell Hart, sat on the committee. In just three days the committee claimed to "thoroughly" examine schools and generate "definitive resolutions" for what should be taught by high school social studies teachers (NEA, 1894, p. 166). The committee was confident in their capability to uniformly organize curricula for the variety of classrooms throughout the country in saying, "Without assuming to speak for the great body of teachers of history… we believe that we are acquainted with, and *fully represent*, the opinions of many thoughtful individuals in widely distributed parts of the country" (NEA 1894, p. 166, emphasis mine). Even though they purportedly spoke for all classroom teachers, no current students or teachers served on the committee. Seven of the committeemen came from universities or colleges and three were high school principals (NEA, 1894, p. 10). The History Ten set a precedent that has carried on in making top-down recommendations *for* teachers and students instead of in association *with* them.

While the committee was progressive in its condemnation of lifeless textbook work, much of their recommendations served to validate the scientific knowledge of historians as the most appropriate content for young students (Evans, 2004). The

discipline of history was viewed as beneficial to students partly because it required "skills of analysis comparable to those needed for a laboratory science" (Evans, 2004, p. 9). It is of little surprise that history played a dominant role in the curriculum as the American Historical Association (AHA) was the most organized and prepared social science agency to influence the meetings.[5] The History Ten recommended that history be studied at every level from fifth grade through high school graduation, because history held value in training the mind. Those that were dominant in society at the time – white, male, and highly educated – were sure to see that their perspectives were well represented in the curricular debates, since the recommended curriculum strongly emphasized the "development of the Anglo-Saxon race" (Evans, 2004, p. 9). The study of Greek, Roman, French, English, and American histories was also prominent in curricular recommendations (Evans, 2004).

At the request of the NEA, the American Historical Association (AHA) convened the Committee of Seven in 1896 to further clarify the recommendations of the Committee of Ten and their curricula. Once again, no practicing K-12 students or classroom teachers served on this committee making decisions for what would provide a basis for curricular alignment in schools (NEA, 1899). Of the seven members of this committee four had previous experience in schools as either teachers or principals, but they had moved on to become "research scholars and writers of history" (Hertzberg, 1981, p. 12). The Committee of Seven's recommendations were similar to those of the Committee of Ten, but they were more influential in terms of adoption (Hertzberg, 1981).

The curricular structure that emerged from the Committee of Seven was based on a classical approach to history focused on the ideas of antiquity. Most of the recommended courses were from earlier, pre-American eras of history. The four-block curriculum consisted of ancient Greek and Roman history, medieval and modern European history, English history, and finally American history and government (Evans, 2004; Hertzberg, 1981). The curricula remained heavily Eurocentric, and the committee emphasized history that was distant in time and space from the present situation of students. While a government course had been recommended by the History Ten, the Committee of Seven only included the discipline of history in their proposal, indicating that the study of government could simply be integrated into the U.S. history course. Historians argued that the intellectual study of history would in and of itself foster good citizenship, but this often translated into an enacted curriculum of rote memorization and the study of history for its own sake (Evans, 2004).

Recommendations for not only *what* to teach, but *how* to do so, ensued from the report as well. The scientific methods of the disciplines were held in high regard, and the promotion of historical thinking was viewed by the historian-filled committees as essential. Despite encouragement to teach in other ways, the implementation of this curriculum in classrooms often resulted in the continuation of prevalent transmission methods of indoctrination (Barr et al., 1977; Evans, 2004). Incorporating the interests of students and the contemporary issues of society was deemed unscientific, ahistorical, and unnecessary to the purposes of the history approach. The development of intellect via historical study was prioritized over social concerns (Evans, 2004).

The summative effect of the early committees, including the two previously discussed, was to promote historical curricula for schools that were largely in line with two prevailing educational theories of the time: mental discipline and classicism (Barr et al., 1977). The theory of mental discipline promoted the idea that pupils could strengthen the muscles of the mind through intense memorization. Thus, the historian-dominated committees encouraged enacted history curricula that focused on the memorization of facts. Evans (2004) argued that the history discipline promoted by these committees "created distance, an artificial veil of objectivity on social issues – as if objectivity was possible – and served largely to separate students from the community…" (p. 20). Classicism held that only knowledge and ideas from antiquity, which have stood the test of time, should be included in curricula (Barr et al., 1977). Evans further criticized these early committees saying that the "founders of traditional history were academic historians, elites ensconced in an ivory tower, disconnected from the masses, not educators with a broad conception of social purpose" (p.20). These recommendations were highly adopted by schools and had an enormous influence on the direction of the field (Hertzberg, 1981).

Shaver (1981) argued that university professors, who have been historically influential in curricula recommendations starting with the aforementioned committees, were likely to subscribe to an academic orientation that valued the acquisition of knowledge. This traditional proclivity, evident in prevailing curriculum content up to the present, often ignored other ways of knowing phenomena. For example, influences on behavior that were not logical or linear, like decision-making and values, have

often been marginalized in the social studies due to the focus on the acquisition of linear, scientific knowledge.

Numerous people, organizations, and committees followed in the steps of traditional visions set forth by these early committees that valued scientific knowledge of the disciplines. Regardless of intentions, these traditional movements have continued to dominate social studies teaching in the United States as the field remains committed to the transmission of factual information (Barr et al., 1977; Evans, 2004; Hertzberg, 1981). As other social science organizations emerged (e.g., American Political Science Association; American Association of Geographers; American Sociological Society), they challenged history for a place in the curriculum. Even though history has long dominated the social studies curricula of most schools, these other disciplines have made some headway over the past century (Evans, 2004).

The "new social studies" movement of the 1960s, inspired by the theory of Jerome Bruner's *The Process of Education* (1960), promoted the inclusion of the various social science disciplines and their structures in the K-12 curriculum. Although several of the ideas of this movement encouraged inquiry methods of instruction, it maintained a traditional faith in the scientific knowledge of the disciplines as the most worthwhile content for students to study. The intent of this movement was to move "beyond" the social studies "mishmash" to a "higher level of intellectual pursuit" that would concentrate on the meticulous study of the social science disciplines (Barr et al., p. 42, 1977). Students were to learn how to think like the experts of the discipline. Eventually political science, geography, and sociology

would find solid footholds in the courses of public high schools (Evans, 2004; Hertzberg, 1981).

Critics leveled a number of charges at the new social studies movement. Criticisms asserted that the projects simply aimed to guide students towards predetermined generalizations, materials were created to be teacher-proof, and the new resources frequently omitted perennial questions, student concerns, or community realities. Ultimately this movement failed to take hold in many schools and the funding that supported the development of new social studies projects dried up (Evans, 2004; Hertzberg, 1981). Despite the perceived failure of this movement, a related movement that promoted the social science disciplines took root across the country at a similar time.

AP courses emerged in the postwar 1950s out of concerns that gifted students were not sufficiently challenged in school, thus putting the United States behind the Soviets in the Cold War, and that high school curricula were not adequately aligned with university aims. The non-profit College Board's AP courses required the rigorous study of scientific knowledge from the various disciplines. Early reports that were integral to the development of the AP curriculum expressed a need for elite, predominantly rich and white, high school students to be challenged by a liberal arts education that pushed them to think objectively about certain things that "must be known" (Lacy, 2010, p. 28). The "ultimate justification" for AP courses derived from their "growth and service to universities," not necessarily in what the courses provided to students and society (Lacy, 2010, p. 19). Over time AP courses became somewhat a *de facto* national curriculum, taught in schools across the country, as the

"democratization" of the program moved to include students from a variety of races and economic levels[6]. The AP program has also served to embolden other movements, like Common Core, for standardizing curriculum across the country.

While the stated goals of the College Board encourage deep thinking, and the courses succeed in some respects, the majority of time in AP courses in the social studies consists of learning the immense amount of factual knowledge necessary for passing the test (Neutuch, 1999). Students often put in intensive study throughout the year to do well on one end-of-year exam. Lacy (2010) argued that the College Board and AP courses have changed for the worse as "students' excellence and rigor have been reduced to test-score gaming, democratization has become growth in market share, and not-for-profit public service has become an experiment in neoliberal ideology" (p. 41). The social science disciplines are studied in isolation with cross-curricular integration precluded. AP exams have always leaned towards a traditional educational model by privileging the scientific knowledge of isolated disciplines. For example, my AP Government course did not draw on content from English or science courses to investigate difficult societal questions, but instead relied almost exclusively on political science knowledge developed within the field. In many ways, the AP movement served as a harbinger for a back-to-the-basics movement and an era of standardized testing that placed value in the traditional accumulation of facts of the disciplines.

A series of conservative commissions, national standards, and federal laws pushed forth the idea that testing students over specific standards would develop better and more productive citizens (Evans, 2004). The primary effect on the social studies

was that state legislatures supported this idea and passed legislation to develop tougher standards for content (Grant & Horn, 2006). High stakes standardized tests became increasingly common in the 1990s. Even though the social studies has largely been ignored by federal legislation like No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and the nationally-administered ACT and SAT tests, approximately half of the states in the United States administer their own standardized tests in the social studies (Grant & Horn, 2006). With little academic research supporting the effectiveness of standardized testing (Grant, 2006, p. 1), state-wide achievement testing proliferated among U.S states based on the assumption that "such testing truly and accurately measures both the nature and extent – the quality and the quantity – of the historical contents of students' minds" (Davis, 2006, p. vii). Standardized testing movements also seemed to presume that a single curriculum is appropriate for all students in all situations.

The standardized testing movement gained steam over the last thirty years to the point that traditional ideas about education became almost synonymous with the social studies education that takes place in classrooms (Evans, 2004). The implementation of these standards resulted in teachers being pressured to induce their students to memorize the facts of the social sciences through traditional methods. Eisner (1985) contended that the scientific need for measurement to determine educational quality has led to the marginalization of areas of study that are not easily reduced in this way.

Many studies have shown the dramatic effect that standardized curricula have had on social studies education. For example, a study by Gerwin and Vinsone (2006) revealed the difference that state mandates can have on some teachers. They observed

the classrooms of two teachers who taught both a state mandated curriculum with specific guidelines and a non-elective course with few required guidelines. They found that the two teachers predominantly taught their state tested courses utilizing rote-learning techniques designed for test preparation, but taught non-tested elective courses utilizing more ambitious teaching activities. Segall (2006) showed that even standardized tests with little consequences for students and teachers can have a significant impact on the way that teachers teach. McNeil (2000) argued that the costs of standardized tests have often been overlooked as both teachers and students can be marginalized within this educational structure. While traditional interpretations of the social studies have been highly influential over the past century, another interpretation has long advocated for something very different.

A Progressive Interpretation of the Social Studies

Progressive movements, including efforts in education, arose at the turn of the twentieth century in response to the complications that emerged from industrialization, urbanization, and immigration (Bohan, 2004; Evans, 2004). Chief among the concerns of progressives was the development of a more democratic society. The term "social studies" was coined during this era to serve as an inclusive name for the "well-established curriculum encompassing history, civics or government, and to a lesser extent economics and sociology" (Hertzberg, 1981, p. 1). "Social" was a popular adjective at the time to convey social betterment, and some preferred the term because it implied an underlying purpose for the field that went beyond many traditional interpretations (Hertzberg, 1981).

A progressive social studies education sought to improve our democratic society through the education of citizens[7]. While there were many strands of progressive education, common progressive ideas promoted instruction advocating "student activity, participation, and growth" (Evans, 2004, p. 48). Dewey (1916), probably the single most influential proponent of a progressive education[8], argued that the true starting point of social studies instruction should be some present problem. Instead of predetermining curricular content, a progressive educator might allow teachers and students to determine what societal issues or problems are worthy of exploration. These societal problems, like the causes of war or depression, could then provide a point of departure for further investigation. The 1916 Report on the Social Studies, and the philosophy and work of Harold Rugg, provide two helpful examples in understanding progressive positions in the social studies.

The 1916 Report of the Social Studies Committee was part of the larger NEA Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, and it provided a response to the curricular recommendations of the History Ten and the Committee of Seven. The NEA arranged for another assessment of the social studies curricula because these previous recommendations were seen by some as focusing exclusively on the education of the individual, while theory and research in education were increasingly focused on a social learning (Evans, 2004). Many progressive educators were influenced by John Dewey's (2001) criticisms of traditional educational models that privileged content without consideration to the interests and needs of students.

Sociologists and classroom teachers made up a major part of this committee, and they provided perspectives that were largely absent in the earlier historian-

dominated committees (Evans, 2004; Nelson, 1994). The committee recommended that there should be greater focus on current issues, social problems, and recent history. The author of the report, Thomas Jesse Jones, asserted that the social studies should be guided by the broader purpose of good citizenship (Evans, 2004).

The recommendations of the committee delivered a compromise between the reports of the History Ten and the Committee of Seven and the aims of progressive educators. The committee rejected the four-block history curriculum of the Committee of Seven and instead proposed that students in junior high school take geography, European history, American history, and Community Civics. High school students were recommended to take European history, American history, and Problems of Democracy (POD). The committee encouraged history courses to adopt a topical approach that addressed problems, particularly those of immediate interest to students, and of critical importance to society, instead of a traditional chronological structure.

Community Civics and POD served as dramatic departures from the earlier committee recommendations. The Community Civics course largely focused on indoctrinating students into proper social behavior so they might understand their roles as citizens in society. While the Community Civics course was progressive in some ways, the POD course became the archetype for a progressive social studies (Evans, 2004; Thornton, 2005).

Problems of Democracy was recommended by the 1916 committee as the final social studies course at the high school level, and it departed from previously recommended courses in numerous ways. First and foremost, the curriculum for POD was centered on contemporary social problems instead of relying on the largely static

structure of chronological history. While a social science class would remain largely unchanged year-to-year, the POD curriculum was supposed to continually change to address student interests and the changing issues in society. The POD course also ignored the divisions between the social science disciplines by recommending an integrated curriculum that utilized the disciplines to investigate social issues. The most commonly utilized disciplines were economics, government, and sociology with history often providing a context for the issue or problem at hand (Evans, 2004; Thornton, 2005).

POD content was to be based on some combination of student interests and issues of social significance. One of the major complaints by students concerning traditional history was that the courses were either boring or irrelevant to their lives outside of school. By addressing student interests in addition to major social issues it was hoped that experiences would be more meaningful and relevant for students. While most courses focused on citizenship in some form, POD was developed with the specific intention of searching for ways to better society. This meliorist approach was undergirded by the Protestant Social Gospel movement that applied Christian morals to social problems of the Progressive era. The course also dedicated at least some attention to reflective thinking about content, which was often not deemed necessary in the traditional model that relied on predetermined curricula. Finally, the recommendations provided very little detail and examples, so teachers and students would not attempt to rely on a static, predetermined curriculum, but would instead search for those issues that best fit personal and social interests. The POD curriculum, as recommended by the 1916 committee, represented a drastic change in philosophy

and structure from the previous recommendations that were dominated by traditional history (Evans, 2004; Thornton, 2005).

While Harold Rugg was not part of the 1916 committee that created the POD course, he promoted it and was soon known as the preeminent advocate for a progressive social studies (Makler, 2004). Rugg consistently argued that the study of the social science disciplines in isolation left students unprepared for life (Thornton, 2005). Rugg and his contemporaries at Teachers College, Columbia University were the center of a progressive social reconstructionist movement that hoped to improve society by addressing social problems. Rugg's most influential contribution was the development of a textbook series with the purpose of "introducing young people to the chief conditions which will confront them as citizens of the modern world" (Evans, 2004, p. 60). The central goal of the texts, like the POD course, was to make the study of history and the social sciences relevant and meaningful to students so that they might work to improve society (Evans, 2004).

Rugg's texts and workbooks sold extremely well across the United States during the 1930s (Evans, 2004). Singleton (1980) demonstrated that by 1928 only American History had more students enrolled than the Problems of Democracy course (as cited in Thornton, 2005). This development, along with the Rugg texts, marks a highpoint for the formal adoption of progressive social studies in the United States (Evans, 2004). Unfortunately, these issue-centered social studies curricula would lose sway as conservative forces pushed for a return to a traditional model as the United States entered World War II and the Cold War. Many other forms of progressive

education have been promoted since these early efforts, but they have often made only incremental gains, if any at all, in classroom implementation.

The Dominance of the Traditional Model

With a traditional education model firmly entrenched in formal schooling since its rise to prominence at the turn of the twentieth century, progressive educators have faced an uphill battle to gain influence in school curriculum (Evans, 2004; Hertzberg, 1981; Roorbach, 1937). The modernist paradigm was evident in the traditional model as social studies content was often reduced to the analytical study of fragments of specialized scientific knowledge. Learning was not usually connected to student experience in any holistic way. Instead, content was separated several times over and often studied for its own sake.

The first national committees held that it would be unwise to recommend a curriculum that varied too much from the practices of the time (Bohan, 2004), and traditional methods have dominated classroom instruction ever since (Barr et al., 1977; Evans, 2004, Hertzberg, 1981). Instructional methods of lecture and rote work were initially undergirded by philosophies about learning that encouraged the acquisition of scientific truths passed down from the past and memorizing content to strengthen mental habits. While the reasoning for a traditional model changed some over the years, instructional methods remained fairly consistent (Barr et al., 1977; Evans, 2004, Hertzberg, 1981). New teachers often modeled their teaching after the traditional educational experience they had in school.

Progressive movements in education in the social studies had little sustained success in changing the general structure of schooling. Dewey (1938) criticized

progressive movements that grew in reaction to traditional education instead of emerging from their own philosophy of education. Progressive movements in education were even referred to as "new" education (Dewey, 1938), despite their roots in authentic learning that had been around for all of human history (Smith, 1998). From the beginning, changing the established philosophies and methods of schools and American society proved a challenging task for progressive advocates.

Societal events, conservative advocates, and educational movements that demanded quantifiable results have contributed to the continued dominance of traditional education in the social studies. The debates between progressive and traditional interpretations of the social studies were prevalent through the 1930s, but the American entrance into World War II marked a move towards a more traditional social studies. As the United States advanced the cause of democracy in World War II, there was a push for an uncritical and nationalistic history-based curriculum that espoused the superiority of the American system. Following World War II, Cold War fears of communism, exemplified by the passage of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 after the Soviet launching of Sputnik, served to maintain this traditional push. While the 1960s and 1970s saw a resurgence of progressive experiments in schools, the experiments were often limited in implementation and duration. The 1980s saw the rise of conservative backlash to the experimentation of the 1960s and 1970s with a back-to-the-basics movement. This conservative movement was expanded by a move towards standardized testing in the 1990s that focused on historical facts as the basis of instruction (Evans, 2004; Webb, 2006).

Conservative criticisms of progressive social studies endeavors have continually resonated with a public that has often responded to nostalgic calls for a back-to-the-basics approach (Evans, 2004). Historians and conservatives regularly condemned progressive interpretations of the social studies. These denunciations, coupled with sensationalized media reports about the failures of schooling, have repeatedly brought forth support for traditional measures. An article by historian Allan Nevins in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1942 provided an illustrative case of this phenomenon. Nevins claimed that U.S. history had been replaced by a "social slush" that was more concerned with the present than the past (as cited in Thornton, 2005, p. 33). He argued that schools should emphasize pure history. In a front-page article the next month, *New York Times* education writer Benjamin Fine presented the results of a study that supposedly revealed that students were not learning the basics of American history, seemingly verifying Nevins' claims (Evans, 2004).

Former National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) president Edgar Wesley organized a committee of historians and social studies educators to investigate the state of American history in schools across the country. As the committee members were beginning their work, a *New York Times* poll revealed that college freshman had scant knowledge of American history. Wesley's committee went on to complete the "most thorough and balanced investigation of American history in schools and colleges ever conducted" (Thornton, 2005, p. 34). The findings of the study revealed not only that American history was being taught, but that Nevins' and Fine's conclusions that Americans were uninformed about American history were unfounded (Barr et al., 1977; Thornton, 2005). The findings and recommendations of

the committee had little effect as the damage to progressive social studies was already done in the court of public opinion. Nevins' condemnation of the social studies serves as just one illustrative example of a recurring phenomenon that has rendered progressive social studies approaches on the defensive concerning their worthiness. Criticisms of progressive social studies from Arthur Bestor, the *A Nation at Risk* report, and Diane Ravitch among others, have served to maintain the status quo position of traditional education in the curriculum up to the present (Evans, 2004).

Finally, the emergence of the standards movement in the 1990s served to further promote a traditional model with the rise of mandatory and fact-based tests. Despite evidence to the contrary, the perceived decline of the U.S. in international economic competition was partially blamed on failing schools (Evans, 2004). It was determined that teachers and schools must be held accountable for this perceived failure and the implementation of fact-based standardized tests was submitted as the solution. After a failed attempt at national history standards (Symcox, 2002), states and local school districts developed standards and tests to assure that students were learning social studies content (Evans, 2004). AP courses continued to increase in popularity during a time when standardized testing became more prevalent (Lacy, 2010). While the testing push has largely resulted in a social studies that was reduced to the short-term memorization of facts, an entrenched cultural faith in quantifiable results has sustained a high regard for the use of standardized tests. The explicit focus on facts through multiple choice testing has had the effect of endorsing traditional interpretations of the social science disciplines.

Evans (2004) argued that what started as a struggle among interest groups grew into a war against a progressive version of social studies. With the Rugg texts succumbing to public criticism by World War II and the Problems of Democracy course giving way to social science subjects, the traditional recommendations of the early committees remain largely intact today (Bohan, 2004; Evans, 2004; Ross, 2006). It seems the traditional version of social studies education, embedded in a prevalent modernist worldview, has operated from a position of dominance since the inception of the field and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

A Social Studies Identity Crisis

I entered college with no idea of what I wanted to do with my life, but it did not take me long to figure it out. My favorite courses all fell within the disciplines of history, political science, sociology, geography, philosophy, and psychology. I was particularly influenced by several courses I took over the history of Africa and South Africa. I became fascinated by the stories of courage of anti-apartheid activists like Nelson Mandela and Steve Biko. My Kenyan professor utilized historical novels, biographies, and history texts to help us investigate the human condition. We read, and watched, gut-wrenching accounts of violence and injustice alongside extraordinary descriptions of forgiveness and reconciliation. By the end of the class I felt like I had not only learned much about an African continent I had little previous knowledge of, but it made me want to do something to thwart injustice in both the present and future. I did not know what exactly to do, but teaching social studies seemed like one way to move toward this goal.

Once I declared my major as social studies education, the professor in my methods class explained that the purpose of the field was to provide citizenship education. While there is much disagreement about what the social studies should be (Nelson, 2001; Ross, 2006; Stanley, 2001), there is general agreement among social studies scholars to support this purpose (Beal et al., 2009; Barr et al., 1977; Evans, 2004; Hertzberg, 1981, Vinson, 2006). I had not previously imagined that the field had some guiding purpose beyond the arbitrary acquisition of knowledge I had experienced in my K-12 years. The social studies classes I had taken were generally taught by uninspired teachers who required my classmates and me to memorize random fragments of information. The notion that there was a meaningful purpose behind the field made me even more excited to start my teaching career.

Yet as I had experienced in my schooling, this general agreement among scholars did not seem to amount to much in the classroom practices of many teachers. Social studies scholars, and others that influenced the field, had numerous interpretations of what citizenship education meant in theory and practice. A quarter of a century ago, Longstreet (1985) questioned whether a meaningful connection even existed between the social studies and citizenship:

> Citizenship may be widely accepted as the core of the social studies, but it is a phantom core. Whatever is happening in the curriculum – whether it be the traditional study of American history or some personally-oriented exploration of career choices or a demonstration of how to fill out Federal tax forms - the reason given for doing what we do is ultimately related to the development of good citizenship. Citizenship is the phantom figure whose form is so unclearly perceived that it may be used to encourage whatever is happening in the curriculum to go on happening (22.)

Little seems to have changed in the twenty five years since Longstreet leveled his criticism. Scholars provide many competing theories of what citizenship education should be in theory and practice (Nelson, 2001).

Shinew (2006) challenged the notion that it is necessary, or even desirable, to agree on a definition of citizenship. She argued that we should shift away from "all-embracing definitions [of citizenship] in favor of a perspective that acknowledges the validity of partial truths… and situated knowledge" (p. 82). This perspective accepts competing definitions of citizenship education and curricula because there should be no universal curriculum in a diverse and complex world. K-12 social studies is heavily influenced by a modernist mindset that habitually focuses on the details without giving larger attention to issues of connectedness. Standardized testing and rigorous curricula have only served to reinforce prevailing mechanistic tendencies because they offer jam-packed curricula that predetermine what knowledge is considered worthwhile. The lack of spaces in curriculum for students and teachers can reinforce a modernist tendency towards absolutism since content is often reduced to the memorization of predetermined facts. A postmodern critique questions the inflexibility of such curricula to meet the situational needs of students, teachers, and society.

My remaining college social studies classes further helped me to identify characteristics that I wanted students to take from my classes so they might be more responsible citizens. I hoped to instill respect for multicultural difference, an active and informed approach to democratic citizenship, and a disposition towards critical, caring, and holistic thinking. I also wanted students to practice some strong form of participatory citizenship (Barber, 2003). But once I began teaching, I was

overwhelmed by predetermined curricula with massive amounts of detailed content, pacing guides, and standardized tests that seemed to squeeze the interests and concerns of my students and me out of our classes. I made efforts to teach for citizenship, but I was worried that I was not making the difference I had hoped to make. In my third year of teaching I jumped at the opportunity to teach government courses because the focus of the curriculum on the present seemed to offer an excellent opportunity to achieve my goal of educating students for citizenship.

The AP Government curriculum was packed with a huge number of terms and theories that students needed to learn for the end-of-year test. I was again distraught that, as Longstreet (1985) argued, citizenship seemed a phantom core in my classes. The time-consuming detail of the official content limited my ability to address matters concerning democratic citizenship. Of course, there were some topics that were helpful towards these goals, but the time and manner in which they were covered rarely allowed us to dig deep into the issue at hand. Coverage of subject matter was driven by an exhaustive curriculum, not by our concerns and curiosities. I made efforts to supplement the content with current events, controversial issues, and other content that might help my students connect to the content in meaningful ways, but I always felt the official curriculum pulling us back to test preparation.

My dilemma was not altogether different from that of many other social studies teachers working within the standardized testing environment of modern schools. Since the inception of the field, the dominant pattern of social studies instruction has been teacher or text-centered work that focused on the indoctrination or memorization of factual information (Barr et al., 1977; Evans, 2004). While many

social studies teachers have made conscious efforts to teach in other ways and to explicitly teach towards democratic citizenship (Beane & Apple, 1995; Shinew, 2006), the standardized testing movement has led to an increase in high-stakes testing that can have a profound effect on teachers (Au, 2009; Segall, 2006). Many social studies teachers feel pressured by a high-stakes testing environment that "narrows the instructional curriculum and aligns it to tests" (Au, 2009, p. 45). Segall (2006) indicated that some teachers saw their state standardized test as a restricting force that prevents them from being able to "invite in guest speakers, go on field trips, engage students in time consuming activities like mock trials, and the like" (p. 116). Numerous social studies teachers have either ignored the test (Grant, Gradwell, Lauricella, Derme-Insinna, Pullano, & Tzetzo, 2002) or found ways to teach ambitiously "in spite of it" (Gradwell, 2006).

I realized, as many scholars had suggested, that the social studies suffered from an identity crisis (Barr et al., 1977), but I did not believe it was because it lacked a single identity. I had attempted to live up to the citizenship aims of social studies scholars, but my experiences indicated that this might not be happening. I therefore wondered what my students were taking from my course. There was some evidence that students did not identify with the aims of social studies courses either. For example, the AP Government curriculum focused on political aspects of citizenship, but both Hickey (2002) and Chiodo and Martin (2005) found students' views of citizenship to be grounded in social experiences, not more formalized academic and political realities often privileged in social studies curricula in schools.

Neutuch (1999), a former AP student, was asked to reflect upon his AP United States History experience shortly after graduating high school and he expressed that he saw an "inappropriate ordering of aims" and that a "narrow test-preparation aim stifled the development of skills, capacities, and habits of mind" (p. 245). While he revealed that almost all of his classmates passed the AP test, the course focused on the acquisition of historical facts at the expense of any larger purpose or aims. I was different from some of my peers in that I was both a classroom teacher and fledgling social studies scholar. I, like most scholars, believed citizenship education to be the purpose of the field and I thus aimed, to the degree that it was possible, to make citizenship a primary aim in my classes. Yet I had little understanding of how effective I was in achieving my aims.

Research Question

A modernist worldview with a faith in analytical, mechanistic, and scientific ways of interpreting phenomena has been central in the American education system. The field of social studies in particular is entrenched with modernist assumptions. These assumptions are manifested in classes that ignore natural and holistic ways of knowing and instead concentrate on the accumulation of isolated facts from specialized scientific disciplines. I suspect that my efforts to foster citizenship within my AP Government course have fallen short, but it is difficult to know whether I am right. I wondered what my students were taking from our AP Government class because, as McNeil (2000) pointed out, students "are so invisible in many of the reform debates and policies" that affect them (p. ix). I thus chose to conduct a study within my AP Government courses to better understand the views of my students, and

consequently myself. I hope that this study will provide insights into what value students take from courses similar to mine. The following research question guided my study. What, if anything, do my students find valuable in our AP Government curriculum? The ensuing chapter will provide two theoretical lenses.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Countless educational theorists have provided explanations of what is happening, and what should happen, in the field of education. Two men whose views speak particularly to the problem at hand are John Dewey and Paulo Freire. Both of these men were dissatisfied with the prevailing pedagogical practices of their time and advocated an education more suitable for democratic living. I will begin by providing a historical and epistemological context for the work of each theorist. I will then explain some of their ideas that are most pertinent to the findings and implications of this study.

Dewey's Theory of Experience

John Dewey was an influential American philosopher who wrote on a diversity of topics ranging from psychology to politics from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. He began his academic career doing much of his work in the field of psychology. His time in this discipline provided a solid footing for developing his ontological views concerning reality and, consequently, a theory of experience that would be central to his philosophy of education.

The late nineteenth century was a time when scientific methods were increasingly viewed as the most legitimate way of knowing. Many in the field yearned for psychology to gain academic legitimacy as an experimental science, not an art (Smith, 1998). In this vein, a number of psychologists advocated a physiological approach to explaining phenomena. This analytical method attempted to explicate human existence through the study of atomized sense data. While Dewey valued the

rigorous nature of this method, he argued that the field failed to recognize the limitations of such reductionist approaches. His criticism of the popular reflex arc concept helps to clarify both his critique of physiological approaches and the need for a theory of experience (Hildebrand, 2008).

The reflex arc concept held that by identifying and matching various stimuli and responses one could scientifically explain human behavior that was otherwise unobservable. A common example for this method explained that a child sees the flame of a candle (stimulus), reaches out for it (response), burns her hand (stimulus), and then withdraws it (response). Proponents of this model asserted that once the stimuli and responses are identified, all the connections between them could be substantiated. The previously unobservable relationship could now be accounted for scientifically (Dewey, 1896; Hildebrand, 2008, Menand, 2002).

Dewey contended that this premise was built upon unfounded assumptions that deeply distorted reality. Lived experiences do not happen as a "patchwork of disjointed parts," but flow in "comprehensive, or organic unity" (Dewey, 1896, p. 358). He argued that in this child-candle example the stimulus and response were only identified as such after the fact, when the act of seeing a flame and reaching for it actually happened in coordination. The named stimulus could similarly be labeled a response and vice versa. The reflex arc concept assumed that people passively experience the world and do not participate in the construction of meaning. Children who interact with their environments are not blank slates. They have preceding experiences that influenced perceptions or behavior.

Dewey determined that life does not happen in an experimental laboratory where factors are isolated and controlled. The environment within which children encounter flames affects perceptions and interpretations of situations. In fact, a great multitude of objective factors can affect situations. Dewey argued that educative learning only emerges naturally as the child reflectively attaches meaning to the flame in past and future encounters with a flame. Dewey did not refrain from labeling these events, which could serve as a tool for further investigation. His concern was with the reification of these classifications as components of reality, rather than acknowledging that they were human constructs.

Dewey refuted the ontological view of static reality championed by many scientists in psychology and other fields around the turn of the twentieth century. The roots for these theories were grounded in both the Cartesian dichotomization of mind and body, and Bacon's efforts to measure and control reality through empirical investigation. Dewey did not think that mind and body, subject and object, and stimulus and response could be separated. He argued that reality was characterized by evolutionary change and transactional relationships. The mind, body, and world existed in constant transaction with each other. A phenomenon must be understood within its environment, and to attribute immutable truths to complex and changing phenomena is to reduce reality to something it was not. Dewey thus argued that a holistic and more modest view of experience be considered. With the limitations of psychological inquiry for improving human experience in mind, he eventually turned his efforts toward the study of philosophy; a field he felt was better equipped to

investigate the complexities of lived experience (Dewey, 1896; Hildebrand, 2008; Menand, 2002).

Along with Charles Sanders Peirce and William James, Dewey was considered one of the founders of the philosophy of pragmatism. These early pragmatists held that knowledge is an activity. Hence, we can understand a phenomenon through our evaluation of its application to a problem or situation. This belief that knowledge is constructed, not discovered, rejected the epistemological assumptions of many scientists since at least Descartes' time.

Pragmatic philosophy holds that we must rely on tentative truths, derived from experience, to make decisions within the world. When a tentative truth does not work it must then be reconsidered. These truths are determined by their function or consequence as the pragmatic maxim, "whatever works," shows. This philosophy rejected the dualisms, theoretical assumptions, and scientific certainties that characterized more modernist philosophies. They instead pursue a practical and bottom-up starting point for empirical inquiry. Lived experience, not the search for absolute truths, serves as the basis for better understanding the world (Magee, 1998; Webb, 2006).

Dewey viewed the lived democratic experiences of communities as integral to pragmatism (Webb, 2006). He contended that knowledge is inseparable from doing. People attain knowledge organically as active participants in their social and natural environments. Ideas are neither infallible nor neutral. They should be subject to empirical scrutiny and utilized to improve the shifting world. He hoped that his philosophy could serve as a tool to meet social challenges.

The maturation of his own children led Dewey to see schools as appropriate settings for exploring this philosophy. Dewey reasoned that schools provided a logical place for citizens of a democracy to cultivate their participatory abilities. He therefore used schools, especially his Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, as test beds for scrutinizing pragmatic philosophy. Much of his efforts centered on the role that experience played in affording students a worthwhile education (Hildebrand, 2008; Magee, 1998; Menand, 2002).

Students face countless experiences inside and outside of school, but Dewey contended that these experiences are not all of equal value. If experiences are not equal, then what types are more worthwhile? His critique of the reflex arc concept led him away from positivistic methods that aimed to provide universal answers for all students in all classrooms. Dewey's pragmatic principle guided him to believe that any pedagogical answers must be considered tentative if they are to work in a complex and changing world. He therefore left the challenge to evaluate the worthiness of experiences to the mature teacher. He provided a theory of experience that might serve to direct teachers in this endeavor (Dewey, 1938).

Dewey (1938) argued that the difference between educative and miseducative experiences could be determined by whether they nurtured meaningful growth in further experiences. Educative experiences fostered growth, while miseducative ones stopped or distorted it (Dewey, 1938). When evaluating experiences it was imperative for teachers to consider the overall direction that they may lead. For example, a person may learn how to be an expert burglar, but moving in this direction would likely limit

further growth in many aspects of life. Determining which experiences would be more educative, and which would not, is largely a problem of direction.

Educative experiences can be evaluated by their quality both in the short and long term. In the short term, experiences must not repel students. If initial occurrences are characterized by students as boring, disconnected from life outside of school, or as mindless routine, it could deter them from the topic of study. Teachers must make efforts to identify ways of learning that are conducive to developing habits of the mind that enable a widening of later experiences. In the long term, it is important that teachers recognize the present state of immature students as fluid and moving. Individuals continually reconstruct their understandings of phenomena under examination. Therefore, experiences should not be judged as something final, but considered as part of a larger process (Dewey, 2001). If a student does not master all the facts on a test, but displays a zealous propensity for learning the subject, it seems folly to judge these class experiences a failure (Dewey, 1938). It is likewise absurd to consider the experiences of a student successful who resentfully masters the facts of the subject-matter to receive a high grade, but develops an aversion to the subject that will close off future experiences.

A great variety of experiences could be miseducative. Students might become insensitive or unresponsive towards a subject. They might find incidents pleasant in the short term, but develop passive attitudes towards the subject of study (Dewey, 1938). Even though teachers may advance learning objectives that could ostensibly be considered worthwhile, there is no guaranteeing that students will learn what is intended. For example, an American history teacher may demand that students read

out of a textbook and complete a worksheet on the causes of the Civil War. While students may learn some facts concerning historical events, the experience may prove to be boring and pointless to them. This feeling of boredom may cause students to conclude that they dislike studying history in general. This collateral learning would be considered miseducative because it hindered the ability for further growth in this subject area.

Discriminating among the quality of experiences may prove difficult so Dewey suggested teachers contemplate the continuity and interaction of lived experiences in their evaluations. He considered these two interconnected features the "longitude and latitude" of experiences because they "intercept and unite" (Dewey, 1938, p. 44). As people pass from one situation to another they rely on their understandings in these experiences to negotiate the objective conditions in their present realities. Through careful attention to both of these qualities teachers might better distinguish among what materials and methods might be more suitable in fostering worthwhile educative experiences.

Dewey's principle of continuity, or experiential continuum, stated that all experiences are affected by previous ones and will then alter future ones. Simply put, "every experience is a moving force" (Dewey, 1938, p. 35). Interactions between people and their environments in one situation can alter the world in which subsequent situations will occur. The world is not a new one, but it is continually modified.

Dewey believed that habit, a routine way of doing or thinking, helped to form the basis for the types of experiences undergone. This means that every experience undergone alters the person, and this change can, at times unknowingly, influence the

quality of later experiences. Beyond actions, habit also consists of the formation of emotional and intellectual attitudes. Habits of the mind affect the way people respond to, and are able to grow in, situations. For example, students who were pampered throughout elementary and middle school might struggle when their high school teachers do not "cater to their desires and caprices" (Dewey, 1938, p. 38). These students could then ineptly search for rescue in the face of challenging assignments. Conversely, students who were continuously confronted with tasks that were challenging and developmentally suitable in early grades would be more likely to have developed habits necessary to face such circumstances in the future.

In addition to continuity, teachers must also deliberate over the effects of interactions, or transactions, in experiences. Dewey often used the terms interaction and transaction synonymously. Some have critiqued Dewey's use of the term interaction as conveying the existence of objects in a static reality, but, as Kahn (1947) pointed out, Dewey did not generally use the term in this way. Dewey utilized both terms, often synonymously, to remind us that affairs take place within evolving systems of boundless complexity.

For the principle of interaction to be upheld one must appreciate both *what* is being taught and *who* is being taught. External factors shaped by teachers, the internal factors of students' experiences, and other dynamics merge to create situations. Through choices concerning standards for classroom interactions, the selection of materials, and the choice of instruction methods, teachers have great influence over objective classroom environments. Yet decisions of teachers cannot be made in a vacuum because there is no inherent value in any of their choices. A teaching strategy,

or content selection, that fails to connect with students, despite any theoretical value, is not worthwhile. These curricular decisions only gain merit when they expand the capacity of students for continued growth.

Prior experiences of students must also be kept in mind as curricular choices are made. To effectively plan, teachers must consider the development of students, based on experiences undergone and maturation that has occurred. If teachers taught elementary aged students a lesson on the legal implications of the due process clause of the 14th amendment, the content would likely have little value for students because they would have insufficient previous experiences to connect with the complex and legalistic content. This does not mean that the subject matter is of no use. The application of the selective incorporation of the due process clause to the individual States over the last hundred years has greatly transformed the meaning and application of the U.S. Constitution. States cannot restrict certain free speech rights, use illegally seized evidence against the accused in court, or maintain a state sponsored church because of this clause.

This clause has affected the lives of Americans dramatically and would seem a worthwhile topic of study for citizens, but the subject must be broached in way that does not distort growth. To prevent young students from rejecting the topic of study, mature teachers must present issues in a way that builds upon the past experiences, and present interests, of students. Much depends on previous experiences and the methods by which the content has been taught. Therefore, it is not only the role of students to adapt to the objective conditions presented by their teachers, but it is the role of teachers to adapt these conditions to their students. Dewey (1938) suggested

that involving students in the formation of purposes and encouraging a sharing of ideas between all classroom participants could enhance the likelihood of educative experiences.

Dewey (2001) further discriminated among the types of interactions that may take place by deliberating on whether a learning experience was primarily psychological or logical. The psychological portions of experiences consist of historical processes whereby growth transpires, while logical components are the end result of learning. Dewey's (2001) map metaphor helps to explain differences between these two components of experiences and why they are mutually adaptive.

Psychological facets of experiences are exemplified by the explorer who travels an area with the aim of creating a map. The journey will likely consist of both missteps and progress. All the while, the explorer takes notes, constantly re-organizes and integrates new information with the old, and re-draws the map until the desired features are captured to satisfaction. This process can be both torturous and rewarding, but experiences will afford the explorer deep understandings of the area. Those that view the completed map will only see the longitude and latitude of a river, while the mapmaker will know it intimately. People who only study the map can never understand that area like the explorer who has experienced it. These experiences are qualitatively different. The explorer has undergone deep, psychological growth while others that simply read the completed map only know the logical end product.

Dewey (2001) employed the logical end product to represent the content or subject matter, and psychological growth to signify the relation of that subject matter to students. While psychological growth leads to deeper understandings of

phenomena, it is not always practical. We do not always have the time and energy necessary for this type of learning. The already completed map allows one to investigate an area without unnecessary wandering and wasted effort. A completed map might allow new explorers to survey areas more adeptly, thus leading to new discoveries. Even if the logical end product that resulted in the map can never replace the depth of experiences, it can still serve to widen experiences and promote further learning. These two types of learning are mutually beneficial as both can contribute to the creation of educative experiences.

Psychological and logical aspects of experience are two sides of the same coin. Fluid development of growing experiences necessitate that students studying a subject learn from both personal experiences and the accumulated knowledge of experts. Yet, Dewey lived during a time when debates raged in the field of education as to whether to emphasize one side or the other. As discussed in chapter one, some in the field preferred a traditional curriculum-centered education, while others favored a progressive student-centered education as the best model for educating youth. Dewey argued that neither of these models was self-sufficient to cultivate an education grounded in experience.

Traditional models of education fail to honor Dewey's theory of experience because they disregard one side of an interaction by overlooking *who* is being taught for emphasis only on *what* is being taught. In an attempt to broaden experiences of immature students, traditional models also focus on logical facets of experiences at the expense of the psychological. The basis for traditional curricula is facts removed from original experiences, organized, classified, and submitted for study by others. It is

assumed that memorizing the accumulated knowledge of experts will prepare students for the future. Much like the completed map, the complex organization of information that is second hand to the expert becomes the starting point for students' learning. This curriculum, whether the course is U.S. History or Calculus, is deemed inherently valuable for study by all students. This model ignores previous experiences of students in preparation of curricula.

A multitude of problems emerge when the development and needs of students are discounted for curriculum external to their personal experiences. If there are no natural connections between subject matter and students' lives, content will seem contrived solely for school purposes. Lacking knowledge of experts, students will likely fail to see how content is useful or related to life outside of school. There may be some students with natural inclinations towards content that are able to make meaningful connections, but how often will an external academic curriculum neatly match up with the development and experiences of students? This arrangement relies on the unlikely chance that students walk into a world history class prepared to learn, and understand the purpose for learning the history of ancient peoples that are temporally and spatially distant from their own experience. Under traditional models, genuine learning becomes a result of mere coincidence.

If students see no inherent value in the study of topics, then learning can become boring, unpleasant, and seem mere accumulation of inert facts. A lack of intrinsic motivation makes it necessary for teachers to utilize external incentives (e.g., grades, discipline, promotion) to motivate students to engage with topics. Finally, when students attempt to learn end results of the logically worked out science of

experts, they often fail to grasp the logic behind the organization of materials. Content is often to be memorized without a deeper understanding of all that went into producing it. Focusing only on the memorization of the completed work of others only further reinforces the inorganic nature of content.

Progressive student-centered models can fail to uphold Dewey's theory of experience because they neglect the other side of interaction by discounting *what* is being taught in favor of *who* is being taught. Some progressive schools have been criticized for overemphasizing students' freedom to actively explore those things that are of immediate interest. The roles of teachers to guide students in certain directions are abandoned for the whims of students. Students' exploration without guidance is tantamount to the unnecessary wandering of the person that explores without making use of a completed map for the area.

Active learning is often a hallmark of progressive schools, but without direction, learning could leave students on a low plane of development. Understanding students' experiences can help learning emanate from practical starting points, but allowing students to meander in whatever direction their immediate impulses lead them is unlikely to easily result in substantial growth. Dewey (1938) argued that it is the role of teachers to guide students in directions that allow for intelligent activities and a widening of future experiences. Teachers should utilize expert knowledge, along with their personal understanding of their students, to fashion situations that are conducive to growth.

Dewey did not absolutely oppose traditional or progressive approaches. His primary concern was that either/or dichotomies often resulted in polarizing debates.

He contended that students need traditional *and* progressive educations, curriculum-centered *and* student-centered approaches, and both logical *and* psychological growth. Dewey insisted that the challenge of teaching comes in merging the needs of students, content, and society. He did not believe that this was an impossible goal because the organized and expert knowledge of content is often part of the essence of the child's experiences. The key comes in finding the common ground between subject matter and experiences. Teaching about the facts and details of the colonization of America could be so foreign to student experience so as to bore them, but surely students can already identify with the underlying issues of the topic – domination, prejudice, exploration, and so on.

Teachers can utilize present interests of students in cooperation with their knowledge of organized history to guide learning in beneficial directions. Dewey believed that the walls between school and real life should be blurred so that a holistic, integrative, and active education might transpire. He advocated learning-by-doing in the form of projects and investigations into matters that were familiar to the everyday lives of students. He also argued that teachers should approach the profession pragmatically and empirically, always keeping in mind what does, and does not, work in their situations. By paying attention to a theory of experience that values continuity and interaction, experiences should build upon one another so that students expand their capacity for future learning.

Freire's Pedagogy for Liberation

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator who is recognized as a founder of critical pedagogy. He grew up in a middle class family in Brazil, but the economic turmoil of

the Great Depression caused his family to live in poverty. Encounters with hunger and struggles in school caused Freire to identify with, and dedicate his life to, helping the poor overcome systems of oppression. Freire's work teaching illiterate Brazilian peasants to read and write laid the foundation for his theories on liberation and education.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) Freire articulated conditions necessary for the subjugation of oppressed peoples to endure. Widely considered his magnum opus, this work focused on how systems of oppression functioned in society, and the role that education played in maintaining them. When learning is defined broadly, there is little need to differentiate between Freire's observations regarding oppression in society and education because he viewed these issues as interconnected. I will begin by explaining his conception of oppressed conditions, and assumptions about reality that accompanies it. I will then highlight several of his ideas about education that remain influential to this day.

Freire (1970) contended that contradictions between the oppressed and oppressors must be resolved for all to become more fully human. He believed that oppressive situations exist when choices, consciousness, or narratives are imposed by one onto another. Oppressors habitually define the terms for reality and those who are oppressed receive them. The submersion of the oppressed in the consciousness of oppressors can lead the former to be dehumanized and alienated. Oppressed people might lack the ability to see the world through their own eyes, or even recognize their own oppression.

Those who are oppressed may become so used to an oppressive state of affairs that they might come to fear authentic freedom outside of an oppressor-oppressed contradiction. Some could maintain the contradiction by adhering to the oppressor's consciousness, while others might seek to simply switch places with the oppressor. Freire asserted that real freedom does not come in switching places because the original contradiction remains. Ultimately, oppressors are also oppressed by such an arrangement.

Because the oppressed are pressed to act in accordance with the standards of another, they can be reduced to objects to be acted upon and told what to do. They may fail to see possibilities for alternative realities and futures. An oppressive person would likely hold that absolute truths exist within a static and fatalistic reality. Those who are oppressed are expected to accept truth claims of the oppressor.

Those who are oppressed may not then consider the world for themselves because mythicized interpretations are constantly presented as reality. For example, in a class-based society, an oppressive narrative may explain away the inequities of social hierarchy as simply the result of choices made by free individuals in a meritocratic society. This principle holds that economic success can be entirely attributed to how hard an individual has worked. Behavior of the individual is analyzed according to the theory while ignoring privileges and advantages that exist in society at large. Because the system is assumed equitable failure must be attributed to futility and laziness. Once the oppressed have internalized this meritocratic myth they may doubt their abilities and self-worth, while viewing the oppressor as capable.

Those with knowledge, answers, and power are the ones that have found success within the existing system.

Those who act in oppressive ways might make use of a number of techniques to maintain their privileged positions in the status quo. For example, an oppressor does not communicate with the oppressed, but tells them things. To truly listen to the oppressed would contradict their vaunted position in society and threaten their control. Science and technology can be utilized to manipulate those who are oppressed, thus preserving power. The oppressor may even deceive the oppressed by offering false charity. This gives the appearance of generosity and compassion without reducing systemic inequity. Along with these other techniques, education can serve as one of the most powerful instruments for maintaining the contradiction of oppression.

Freire (1970) argued that those whom oppress others may utilize a banking concept of education to further an ethos of domination that maintains systems of oppression. This banking approach treats students as receptacles that have fragments of knowledge deposited into them. The relationship between students and teachers can equate to one way recitations from a narrating Subject (teacher) to a passive Object (student). The facts of study might be mechanically memorized and accepted without relation to student experiences, or the larger context and meaning from which they emanate. The teacher speaks about reality "as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable" (p. 71). This type of education turns students into automatons who are acted upon by the world, but do not act on it.

Divisions between teachers and students are fundamental to the banking concept of education. Because teachers possess knowledge and students are ignorant,

it is the job of students to adapt to teachers. Scientific objectivity and intellectualism can be utilized to control students and make them believe that they are ignorant and inferior. In an oppressive society, a charismatic leader might lead people to feel as if they are active in their world when they are not. Similarly, teachers might make students feel as if they are participating in understanding their world when they are really being told what to think and do. Any experiment in education that might arouse critical capacities is met with resistance from oppressors. Students, like oppressed people at large, are generally mistrusted because the consciousness of oppressors is not to be challenged if they are to maintain their privileged positions.

Freire (1970) alleged that people should be active Subjects in transforming their world if liberation is to occur. Authentic liberation, a process of humanizing people, cannot be accomplished *for* the oppressed, but should be undertaken *by* them. He contended that liberation could be accomplished through the continual process of praxis. Praxis involves both liberating people from the subjective consciousness of oppressors and actively working to transform the objective world. Liberation is not likely to be accomplished by addressing thought or action in isolation. He cautioned that thought without action equates to ineffectual verbalism and action without thought results in unconscious activism. Authentic revolution necessitates that both thought and action are addressed concurrently.

Freire asserted that the subjective consciousness of the oppressed must be in the process of liberation from the guidelines of oppressive forces for humanization to ensue. An oppressors' view of reality is likely a static one mired in maintaining the status quo through acceptance of their truths. This mechanistic consciousness is likely

to deny the validity of alternative interpretations of an evolving reality. Those who are oppressed should begin to see reality as something that can be changed and is always changing. Freire argued that the transition from the consciousness of the oppressor to their own can come about as the oppressed begin to actively *name* the world. In naming the limit-situations that subjugate them, those who are oppressed can begin to act towards enacting change.

This process of naming the world to change it can occur through a process of dialogue. Dialogue consists of people addressing conditions of the world by talking with each other. As oppressive conditions are named they become problems to be addressed and altered. Freire asserted that dialogue should be approached with love, humility, and a faith in fellow people. Without these characteristics it can be difficult to develop the mutual trust and hope that is indispensable to attaining liberation from oppressive situations.

No person or group should tell others what is, and should be, because that is a characteristic of oppression. Those who join the fight for liberation must avoid the "circle of certainty" and engage unassertively with others (Freire, 1970, p. 38). To exclude others from the process of communication and decision-making is to effectively alienate and objectify them. Dialogue thus entails a co-equal engagement of Subjects who seek to understand and transform the subjective and objective conditions of oppression.

Freire reasoned that for an education to nurture liberation through dialogue it must abandon the dichotomous teacher-student contradiction. Teachers should become teacher-students and students ought to conversely embrace roles as both a student and

a teacher. Teachers should no longer deposit knowledge into their students, but instead work cooperatively with them to name reality. The authority that justified the position of teachers over students can be substituted for a state of equality where they may walk jointly to critically examine the world.

Freire (1970) recommended that a problem-posing education could serve the cause of human liberation. In identifying oppressive limit-situations that exist in society, teachers should guide, not manipulate, students to critically assess reality. The selection of content of study might then emerge from the present situations within which student-teachers are submerged. Scientific objectivity and intellectualism should be avoided so as to not alienate students as legitimate sources of knowledge. Students can then be engaged in actively determining problems chosen for examination. The role of teacher-students is not simply to lecture over selected topics, but to re-present issues as problems to be solved by all class participants.

Even though they utilize different terms and focus on different aspects of problems, Dewey and Freire shared many concerns about traditional and authoritarian forms of education, the role of students and their experiences, democratic living, legitimate sources of knowledge, and the nature of reality. Several of their ideas offer a theoretical framework to analyze the findings and implications of this study. The ensuing chapter will review the research methods that were utilized to ascertain my findings.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

My aims for my classes were to foster citizenship while also preparing my students for the AP exam, but I was concerned, for all our work, that we were not accomplishing the former goal. The purpose of this study was to ascertain what value students found in my classes so I might improve my craft and provide some insights for other social studies educators.

This chapter describes the research methods used to gain insights into the question: What, if anything, did my students find valuable in our AP government curriculum? I will begin this chapter by describing the research setting, including the course curriculum and materials. Second, I will discuss the philosophical and theoretical assumptions that guided the study. Third, I will profile the student-participants of this study. Finally, I will explicate what procedures were utilized for data collection and analysis.

Research Setting

Eisner (1991) argued that appreciating what happens in a classroom must be understood within its larger context. I will therefore begin by explaining the research context of the local area and the school. This study took place at a large high school in a major city in the state of Oklahoma. The school, which I will call Mooney High School, was located near the city limits and actually fell within the boundaries of a large suburban school district. The study took place during the spring of 2011 and included all five sections of AP Government that I was teaching. Forty-four students chose to participate in the study, but there were forty-nine students in my classes.

Voluntary individual and group interviews took place at the school. Pseudonyms were used for all study participants, except me, to assure anonymity.

The school fell within the boundaries of a city with a metro population of over a million residents. The effects of suburban sprawl of the 1970s and 1980s resulted in a population that was exceptionally spread out for a metropolitan area. Only in recent years did the city start to see serious revitalization of its core. The government is the largest employer in the area, and this included a large air force base. The oil and natural gas industries were a major source of local employment. The state commonly fell in the bottom third of national rankings in terms of annual income and the percentage of people living in poverty, even though this was slightly offset by a low cost of living. The poverty rate for children was well above national averages and approximately one third of state residents received either food stamps or Medicaid in 2010 (Pearson, 2011).

Geographically, Oklahoma lies in the middle of the Bible belt, an area known for socially and politically conservative views rooted in a high proportion of residents who self-identify as evangelical Protestant Christians. Conservative Republicans recently gained control from Democrats of both houses of the state legislature for the first time in history, and this has led to the passage of a number of socially conservative laws concerning issues like immigration and abortion. While local politics had shown occasional support for tougher accountability measures in education (e.g., back-to-the-basics, compulsory standardized state exit exams), recent changes in state officials has resulted in increased support for charter schools, vouchers, and free market solutions to educational problems.

Mooney High School served grades nine through twelve and had a student population of slightly over 2,000 during the 2010-2011 academic year. The ethnic make-up of the school was 59% White, 13% Native American, 11% Hispanic, 10% Asian, and 8% African American. The socioeconomic status for Mooney students was generally higher than most other schools in the area. Only 27% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. The faculty, administrators, and staff at Mooney were overwhelmingly white and the social studies department was no different. All eighteen social studies teachers self-identified as white. Our department consisted of eleven males and seven females.

Mooney High School opened in 1988 as the second of three high schools in the district. Even though Mooney was a relatively young school, there was a strong sense of community because of staff stability and historical events. A number of staff members had strong ties to the local community and have worked at the school since it opened. These staff members provided a sense of continuity between the past and the present for generations of students and new faculty members. The head principal had been in his current position since 1998 and my social studies department chair had taught in the district for eighteen years, with twelve of those at Mooney. Many of the faculty members were present when the school and the area were devastated by a F5 tornado in 1999 that produced, by some measures, the highest winds ever recorded. The school building faced considerable damage that resulted in the school year being completed at a local community college. A number of residents in the district lost their houses.

The high school was located off a major street, but a small hill off the front of the property hid most of the building from view. The school property was reflective of a sprawl mentality typical of the area as the campus was extremely spread out. Most students and faculty members travelled to school in their own car, a sign of the wealth of the school. A sizeable parking lot wrapped around almost the entire building. While some students rode buses provided by the district, other forms of transportation were fairly rare as there were not even sidewalks connecting to the school. The campus also consisted of baseball and softball fields, a football practice field, and an enormous empty field that was sometimes used for practice by the golf team.

The building was made up of a single ground floor that was also considerably spread out. The different academic subject areas were physically separated within the building. Each area could be identified by the color of the lockers in the hallways. World language classrooms were located in the red hallways, science and math in the yellow hallways, and social studies and English in the blue hallways. The arts, physical fitness classes and extracurricular sports, and special education classes also had their own spaces in the building. These physical divisions resulted in limited contact among faculty in different subject areas. I worked at the school for five years, and even though I knew my social studies colleagues well, it came at the expense of developing relationships with teachers in other subject areas.

Mooney was a typical suburban school in some ways, but exceptional in others. The school year lasted from August to May and the school day from eight fifteen in the morning until two fifty-six in the afternoon. The school day was broken into six class periods that lasted just under an hour each. Students in the district scored

well above state and national averages on standardized tests. High numbers of students enrolled to take both the ACT college admissions test and the end-of-year AP tests. Mooney even conducted a semester-long class with the sole purpose of increasing student scores on the ACT test.

The school offered nineteen AP courses during the 2010-2011 academic school year. The five AP courses in the social studies were World History, U.S. History, U.S. Government and Politics, Psychology, and Human Geography. This was a sign of high student enrollment and a faculty willingness to teach demanding AP courses. It was not surprising that a high number of Mooney students were enrolled in AP classes as a majority of students intended to attend a four year university.

New requirements for the state meant that students had to pass four of seven standardized exit exams in various courses to graduate. U.S. History, a course usually taken by juniors, was the only social studies course included among the seven, but there were other ways the curricula were standardized beyond this test. Our school district developed pacing guides with content to be covered for periodic standardized exams. These exams were administered every six or nine weeks depending on the course and school year. There were not high stakes tied to these tests, but scores were reported and some teachers felt pressure to induce their students to score well. Because AP courses already consisted of a meticulous curriculum and had a standardized test, students and teachers in these classes were exempt from district pacing guides and tests.

I found Mooney to be an outstanding place to teach for several reasons. First, our social studies department faculty consisted of a number of exceptional teachers

who were cooperative and supportive of each other. This created a positive intellectual environment within which teachers could grow. Our department chair was both imaginative and inspiring in her teaching and leadership. She created and taught an elective class called International Studies that helped to set the tone for our department. The course helped students understand world conflicts, international organizations, humanitarian law, aid agencies, human dignity, and a variety of other topics through the use of lecture, simulations, and illustrative media. This course, along with others, generated a mood where critical and meaningful instruction was encouraged. A number of teachers in our department developed close friendships that helped to create a positive working environment.

Mooney was also an easy place to teach because we were furnished resources that made our jobs easier. All students in my classes were provided a personal textbook along with the classroom set I already had. We also had a virtually unlimited supply of paper, a SMART board in most classrooms, and any ancillary books, videos, or supplies we requested. I was even afforded the opportunity to travel to American historical sites along the east coast with other district teachers for eleven days. We were provided money to buy supplies, pay for meals, and pay for hotels courtesy of a federal grant won by the district.

Finally, Mooney was a gratifying place for me to teach because the student body was involved and respectful. I was the monitor for several clubs, two of which dealt with social justice issues, where student dedication and involvement helped cultivate a vibrant school environment. My students inspired me by dedicating their free time to participate in activities like raising funds to help end the use of child

soldiers in northern Uganda and starting a successful school recycling program. Students not only made a positive difference in a variety of areas, but they rarely made negative ones. In my five years at Mooney, I had to deal with very few serious discipline issues. I do not want to romanticize our situation. It was not perfect, but I often told my colleagues that if I left Mooney that I would look back at it as a golden age in my professional career.

Aside from curricular or testing requirements, I found my teaching situation to be particularly conducive to creating meaningful learning experiences. A recently passed state law, along with other factors I will discuss later in this chapter, resulted in a lower enrollment in my AP Government classes. My spring semester teaching schedule consisted of five sections of AP Government with only forty-nine students enrolled. The students who remained in the class were generally committed to our course. The small class sizes allowed for a more intimate environment and it was easier to involve everyone in discussions and activities than it might be with larger class sizes.

My students generally got along with each other and walked through the door prepared to engage in class activities. The typical friendliness among students was, at least partially, attributable to their familiarity with each other. A number of students had known each other since elementary school and some had developed friendships in other AP classes or extracurricular activities (e.g., band, environmental club). I sometimes had to energize my quiet first hour and settle down my energetic sixth hour, but this was not surprising behavior from classes during those times of the day. Overall, my students were prepared on a daily basis to participate in whatever

activities that were planned. They also understood the demands of honors or AP courses as most of them had taken a number of these types of courses throughout their school careers.

AP courses generally consisted of the meticulous study of a discipline (e.g., World History, Biology, Calculus) that covered vast amounts of content. This was how the College Board (2010) described its AP program:

> For over 50 years the College Board's Advanced Placement Program (AP) has partnered with colleges, universities, and high schools to provide students with the opportunity to take college-level course work and exams while still in high school. Offering more than 30 different subjects, each culminating in a rigorous exam, AP provides motivated and academically prepared students with the opportunity to earn college credit or placement and helps them stand out in the college admissions process. . . . The AP Program unequivocally supports the principle that each individual school must develop its own curriculum for courses labeled 'AP.' Rather than mandating any one curriculum for AP courses, the AP Audit instead provides each AP teacher with a set of expectations that college and secondary school faculty nationwide have established for college-level courses. AP teachers are encouraged to develop or maintain their own curriculum that either includes or exceeds each of these expectations… Credit for the success of AP courses belongs to the individual schools and teachers that create powerful, locally designed AP curricula (pp. 1-2.)

Having taught three different AP courses, and completing the recently introduced AP audit for two of the courses, I was baffled by the claim that I was to develop my own local curriculum for an AP class. If the established expectations were not closely followed then students would not be prepared for the incredibly rigorous end-of-year AP exam. Textbooks produced specifically for AP courses often served as a *de facto* curriculum guide for myself and many other teachers attempting to prepare students for detail-oriented tests. The College Board (2010) went to great pains to establish that AP courses and exams were the equivalent of college courses. A built-in assumption of the AP program was that high schools should simply mirror what was happening at

the university level. Preceding the full course description the College Board (2010) explained:

> The material included in this Course Description and the two exams is not intended as an endorsement by the College Board or ETS of the content, ideas, or values expressed therein. The material has been selected by political scientists who serve as members of the AP Government and Politics Development Committees. In their judgment, the content reflects important aspects of college courses of study. The exams are representative of these courses and are therefore appropriate tools to measure skills and knowledge in the fields of government and politics (p. 4.)

Again, this content was not only recommended, but served as the basis for the test by which success in AP courses were ultimately judged. The College Board's claim that teachers should develop their own curriculum was dubious. If teachers made significant decisions about what content to include in their curriculum then their students would surely struggle on the end-of-year exam.

The primary units of study in the official AP Government curriculum, and the percentages for each unit that will appear on the end-of-year exam, were as follows: Constitutional Underpinnings of the United States Government (5-15%); Political Beliefs and Behaviors (10-20%); Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Mass Media (10-20%); Institutions of National Government: the Congress, the Presidency, the Bureaucracy, and the Federal Courts (35-45%); Public Policy (5-15%); and Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (5-15%). For most AP teachers, including myself, this meant allotting approximately 10-20% of our course time before the AP test to studying political parties, interest groups, and mass media. In fact, in my first year teaching AP Government, I added up the total number of school days available prior to the test, afforded each unit the approximate percentage listed above. I used this information to create the homework schedule, which consisted of reading the

textbook. I even pointed out on the first day of class that students could look at my reading schedule and determine what they would be reading in six months.

Because collecting data from the entire AP course would likely prove overwhelming, I chose our Congress unit to serve as a starting point for heavy data collection. I selected this unit because dating back to the Founders the legislative branch has been touted as the branch of government most closely tied to the people. Simply put, it was to be the most democratic branch of government and the one most connected to citizens. I reasoned that if students did not see much value in our study of Congress, then what hope existed for units like bureaucracy and federalism?

I was able to spend approximately a month on this unit, which was a larger amount of time than most AP teachers were able to spend for a couple reasons. First, my school district dedicated an entire year to the study of government. Many schools only afford giving a semester to this course. I therefore began with fifty percent more time than a lot of other AP Government teachers. Secondly, I dedicated more time to this unit of study than I had in other years so that students would have full exposure to the topic. I had dedicated additional time to other units in previous years. Aside from a snowstorm that resulted in the cancelation of four days of school, the amount of time dedicated to coverage of this unit was well above average.

As I already mentioned, textbook companies designed books that aligned with specific AP curricula and these texts often served as a *de facto* curriculum for many AP classes. Our district purchased *American Government* (2006) for all AP Government classes in the district. With little knowledge of the official curriculum prior to my first year teaching the course, I leaned heavily on the text to know what

content to include in the course. The structure and organization of the textbook provided the structure and organization for my class. Utilizing the textbook as the primary source of information was effective in achieving AP "success" (e.g., scoring highly on the test, earning college credit) for most of my students.

The Congress chapter in our textbook was 50 pages long and consisted of 35 vocabulary terms, and students could be assured a fair number of these would show up on the AP test. Specific vocabulary words were often grouped with those that were related to them. Some examples include: standing, select, joint, and conference committees; multiple and sequential referral; closed, open, and restrictive rule; and voice, division, teller, and roll-call votes. Other terms included discharge petition, double-tracking, and franking privilege. It was difficult to remember many of these terms, and I found myself returning to their definitions yearly.

The AP test consisted of 60 multiple choice questions and four essays that were scored according to precise lists of guidelines. The following sample multiple choice question released by the College Board (2010) was typical:

> 13. A member of the House of Representatives who wishes to be influential in the House itself would most likely seek a place on which of the following committees?
> (a) Agriculture
> (b) International Relations
> (c) Transportation and Infrastructure
> (d) Rules
> (e) Veterans' Affairs (p. 15.)

The following essay question appeared on the end-of-year AP Government examination (College Board, 2011) and combined information from two areas, the Congress and Political Beliefs and Behaviors units. It was also representative of essay questions that appear on the AP test:

2. Public opinion polls are a way to link the public with elected officials. Members of Congress often use polls to understand the views of their constituents, but they must also pay attention to other political considerations.
a. Identify two characteristics of a valid, scientific, public opinion poll.
b. Explain why each of the following enhances the influence of public opinion on the voting decisions of members of Congress.
- Strong public opinion as expressed in polling results
- Competitive re-elections

c. Explain why each of the following limits the influence of public opinion on the voting decisions of members of Congress.
- Legislators' voting records
- Party leadership (p. 2.)

A standardized list of acceptable answers was created so AP graders could objectively determine students' scores. These sample questions were characteristic of the type of detailed scientific knowledge represented in the official curriculum.

I supplemented the official curriculum with content I hoped students might better relate to their personal lives. We watched news coverage of related current events and briefly discussed connections to our curriculum. Students also listened to an interview with a senator concerning his crusade against legislative earmarks. Students were asked to watch the 2011 State of the Union address for one of their homework assignments. In the aftermath of the tragic shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ) and others, we watched a debate over federal gun legislation between Senators Tom Coburn (R-OK) and Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and then conducted a mock Congress over the same issue. This was the first time I had attempted to create a mock Congress, and it showed as several aspects of the simulation did not go as planned. I also required students to choose an issue of interest, research it, and eventually call the office of a member of Congress to ask a question or advocate a position. All of these assignments and projects were part of my

attempt to ensure that students would grow as democratic citizens by connecting our course to their personal lives.

I found the overall setting and circumstance in which I taught the AP Government course well suited to meet my two goals for the course: Helping students score well enough on the AP test to receive college credit, and fostering growth as citizens among my students. I cared far more about the latter, but felt institutional pressure to succeed on the former. I taught in a suburban area where most of my students had already attended schools that were considered academically successful. Most of my students challenged themselves academically by taking tough classes like AP Government. There were no behavioral problems that seriously impaired student learning in my classes. Class sizes in the spring were extremely small, allowing for close interactions. I had three years of experience teaching the course. It is difficult to imagine a better situation to teach AP Government classes than existed at Mooney in the spring of 2011.

Assumptions and Approaches

Any work of inquiry is rooted in assumptions and interpretations concerning reality. I abided by a philosophical lens that rejected the quest for absolute truths, but instead pursued a view that was perspective-seeking. I also held an ontological view of reality that regarded the world as shifting, thus requiring us to constantly reevaluate what we know. There were a variety of research designs available that could be utilized to investigate what, and why, students valued within the context of our AP Government class. I searched for a design which was intentional, congruent, and flexible. A qualitative teacher action research design, along with some methods

borrowed from constructivist grounded theory, was congruent with the aims and assumptions of this study.

A qualitative spirit and design was appropriate to better understand the views of my students within our complex environment. Marshall and Rossman (2006) argued that qualitative inquiry is appropriate when context, settings, and participants' perspectives are critical to the research. Qualitative designs are able to address tacit knowledge, subjective understandings, and inquiries that challenge organizational goals. These types of studies largely reject the objective step-by-step models of research design that have long characterized quantitative research, but instead maintain flexibility. Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006) said that qualitative work enabled "analysis and interpretation of the text to be more fluid to reflect a state of emerging rather than being focused only on fixed categories… it is this process that allows for the voices of participants to be heard and for new understandings to emerge" (p. 87).

An interpretive approach allowed my students' voices to be heard within the context of our classroom. This outlook was "more concerned with culture-bound frameworks of particular schools and the way individuals understand and act in specific social contexts than with finding general laws or all-encompassing explanations" (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004, p. 79). There was no expectation to create objective knowledge about students' perspectives in general, or even in my class. I conceded that if someone else undertook my exact project, they would likely generate different findings. The descriptions of my findings were interpretations, or social constructions. I entered this study with the understanding that there is no "correct or

true portrait of someone or some school" to be discovered (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004, p. 80). I did not believe that it was possible to reduce context-specific, complex, and transactional human behaviors to objective truths.

This study also rejected assumptions of modernity that are often evident in more quantitative designs. Positivist research, or what has been deemed by some as real "science," assumes that an objective and static reality exists "out there." It presumes that if a researcher follows the proper procedures, and maintains an objective perspective, an experimental design can discover definite knowledge. These ideas are rooted in the analytic legacies of Descartes and Newton, which presume reality consists of static and absolute truths that can be uncovered through logical-rational methods. This tradition was intensified as experimental laboratory designs proliferated at the turn of the twentieth century. Behaviorist approaches often isolated decontextualized variables, and quantified objective truths, to produce reductionist cause and effect explanations. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, Dewey resisted these cause-and-effect explanations, which he believed to be based on faulty assumptions about reality.

The epistemological assumptions of more positivist approaches have also had an immense effect on schooling. Outside researchers have long searched for what works in schools. Their findings have been used to make decisions about what methods and strategies teachers should employ in their classrooms. The ethic of generalizability has been favored over the insights of teachers working within complex situations. This faith in the ability of scientific methods to inform schooling has been evident in a steadfast adherence to the study of the knowledge and structures of

disciplines, the adoption of standardized curricula for diverse situations, and the obsession with quantifying academic achievement. The official AP Government curriculum, which provided a backdrop for this study, is characteristic of this line of thinking.

More recently, post-positivist researchers have operated under similar assumptions as positivists. Unlike positivists, post-positivists concede that one cannot be absolutely certain, or positive, regarding claims about human actions and behavior (Creswell, 2003). Despite this concession, post-positivism "reflects a deterministic philosophy in which causes probably determine effects or outcomes" (Creswell, 2003, p. 7). In line with modernist traditions, this approach reduces variables so that they may be quantified, and testing may uncover objective truths about learning. This general method has often been used to determine what "works" in schools, or how to "fix," education.

Problems with this view are manifested in two primary assumptions. The first is that generalizability is suitable for all educational situations. Local contextual factors are essentially ignored. The second assumption is that complex interactions of teaching and learning can be easily reduced to isolated variables. This approach is evident in educational research that views teachers as technicians who are simply expected to act as the "alienated executors of someone else's plans" (Apple & Teitelbaum, 1985, p. 373). Due in part to these misconceptions, the post-positivist search for generalizable truths about education is largely incongruous with the aims of this study.

Because it I did not see it as possible, or worthwhile, to generalize my findings to other classrooms, I instead sought to utilize a design that might provide deep insights into the contextualized and transactional situations of my classes. The most basic assumption of interpretivist inquiry is that humans are agents. They are intentional beings who construct meaning through experience and actively pursue their own aims and intentions. I therefore held that my students were capable of complex and evolving interpretations of the many situated experiences of our classroom. I aspired to hear my students' hopes and fears, named and unnamed, and to understand their perspectives in ways I had not considered. I also aimed to continually relate what they were saying and doing to my own aims, thoughts, and actions, and vice versa. Because I was conducting a study with my own students, it was critical that I honestly recognize, and reflect upon, my own positionality and reflexivity.

I aimed to bolster trustworthiness of this study in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to, addressing issues concerning positionality and reflexivity. It was important to address positionality to ensure that students felt comfortable sharing their thoughts with me, their teacher and an authority figure within school settings. I encouraged students to speak honestly by creating a class environment that was a safe place for all students. Early in the year, as I always had done, I spent a lot of time modeling, and encouraging, all class participants to respect each other. I hoped that our work to build a respectful classroom community would also embolden students to speak honestly with me throughout the school year, including when I was collecting data. I also assured students that I wanted their honest opinions and there would be no penalty for any responses they might provide. I often invited critical feedback, stating

that “it helps me become a better teacher.” Finally, I assured students that their opinions would not affect their grades in any way, and their responses would remain confidential through the use of pseudonyms.

It was also important to address reflexivity so I was able to hear what students had to say (Salzman, 2002). Although my interests motivated me to address this topic, this reality could prove detrimental to the design. I had to be sure that my values and concerns did not cause me to misinterpret students’ actions and comments. I am very passionate about the social studies and my teaching. It was thus important to remain humble so that I was able to accept critique or criticism during the study. Findings seem to indicate that I was able to reflect over unwise curricular decisions and my own shortcomings. Because this study emanated from my own dissatisfactions, and my hope that I might better understand what my students found of value, I believe I was open to examining data without sullying my students’ perspectives. The detailed portraits of me and our settings were written in the hope that readers would have enough information to develop their own judgments concerning the quality of this research.

In addition to providing insights that will help me improve my own teaching, I also hoped that this study may provide insights to others in education, including students and teachers, that will help them reflect, and act, to better their situations. Many interpretive researchers believe that “understanding one classroom helps us to understand better all classrooms” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1991, p. 15). I did not aim to find answers that would “fix” schools because schools, and all the students within them, must be understood as institutions full of complex meanings. I instead utilized a

research model that might provide deep insights to further a thoughtful conversation about what could, and should, be in our classrooms and schools.

Teacher Action Research

The top-down approach, which has been prevalent in many aspects of modern schools, has also characterized much of the research conducted for the teaching profession. A product-process research model has maintained widespread popularity as a method of studying what should happen in education. This design regards teaching as a linear activity where cause (teacher behavior) and effect (student learning) variables can be isolated and analyzed to produce generalizable truths about what works in education (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Zumwalt (1982) argued that the development of general laws is not appropriate for the study of educational phenomena that arise within contexts as dynamic as classrooms (as cited in Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1991). Attempts to reduce teaching and learning into objective science are entrenched in modernist and positivist assumptions about reality. Lawrence Stenhouse's assertion that "researchers [should] justify themselves to practitioners, not practitioners to researchers" reveals a radical rejection of these assumptions (as cited in Rudduck & Hopkins, 1985, p. 19).

In determining an appropriate design for this project, I drew on, and synthesized, facets of two approaches. Teacher action research means different things to different people, but I used this terminology to denote an amalgam of teacher research (TR) and action research (AR). My designs were not identical to either theory, but instead a combination of them. Both approaches suppose that it is likely that many teachers share similar concerns, and studying one situation might provide

insights for others. It could even be held that by critiquing what is happening in schools, those utilizing TR might link "the improvement of practice with emancipation," a characteristic of AR (Burgess & Newton, 2008, p. 20). For this study, I embraced practical aspects of TR that placed the classroom teacher at the center of the development and implementation of the design, while also adopting the emancipatory call by AR for larger structural change. I will describe aspects of each of these two models that influenced my inquiry.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1991) defined teacher research simply as "systematic and intentional inquiry carried out by teachers" (p. 7). TR presumes a qualitative or interpretive approach that holds teaching to be "a highly complex, context-specific, interactive activity in which differences across classrooms, schools, and communities are critically important" (p. 6). Concerns that drive teacher research emanate not from a base of theoretical or empirical literature, but from the day-to-day questions that arise from "discrepancies between what is intended and what occurs" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1991, p. 14). The questions that drove this study were undertaken with the hope that I might improve classroom practice, while also critically analyzing the larger structures and assumptions that underlie, and affect, my situation.

One strength of a TR model is that classroom teachers have access to information traditional research might miss because of the amount of time and varied contexts within which they are able to work with students. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1991) clarified the unique position of teacher researchers:

> Teacher researchers are uniquely positioned to provide a truly emic, or insider's perspective, that makes visible the ways that students and teachers together construct knowledge and curriculum. When teachers do research, they draw on interpretive frameworks built from their histories and intellectual

> interests, and because the research process is embedded in practice, the relationship between the knower and known is significantly altered (p. 43.)

There has been some debate concerning whether the unique knowledge and experience of teachers provides an adequate theoretical base from which to build a study. While I do not necessarily agree that this is an irreconcilable issue for teachers, it was not a problem for me since I was both a classroom teacher and a doctoral student. My graduate studies helped me to become familiar with traditional theoretical bases often utilized in university research. My experiences as a classroom teacher served to illuminate and expand theoretical bases that were applied to this study.

Even though teacher research has roots in, and maintains similarities to, action research, these two models are usually considered separate genres. AR was developed according to the idea that basic research techniques could be utilized to instigate grassroots and democratic social change within communities. Unlike TR, AR makes use of expert researchers, but community members are considered co-researchers who actively conceptualize and frame investigations. Both genres reject top-down models, entail active participation, and seek to improve situations being studied.

AR projects are usually aimed at affecting large-scale social or structural changes. Greenwood and Levin (1998) stated that action research "can help us build a better, freer society" (p. 3). This social justice approach is achieved through repeating cycles of research, action, and participation. The development of knowledge claims provide for "action planning, piloting of new practices, evaluation of outcomes, incorporating at all stages the collection and analysis of data and the generation of knowledge" (Somekh, 2008, p. 7). According to AR, the reason for developing these claims is "for the express purpose of taking action to promote social change or social

analysis" (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 6). While I did not draw on many aspects of AR, I pulled from its intense focus on social and structural change because I did not want this study to exist within a vacuum.

Methods for data collection and analysis were similar to those employed in many other interpretive and qualitative studies. Field notes concerning classroom dealings, interviews, and classroom documents are typical. Because teacher-researchers live daily within the environments they study, data collection is both formal and informal. The substantial amount of data collected allows for significant comparison among different data sources and for continual praxis, or critical reflection, upon practice. I built upon the notions of teacher action research while also utilizing methods of data collection from constructivist grounded theory.

Flexible Methods of Data Analysis

Grounded theory is a systemic methodology where theory emerges from rigorous analysis of data, but I did not employ any form of grounded theory as a methodology for this study. I instead utilized many of the qualitative methods of constructivist grounded theory (e.g., intensive data collection and analysis, detailed coding and comparison) to better understand phenomena. Both pragmatism and positivism were embedded in Glaser and Strauss' (1967) early conceptions of grounded theory[9], but it is the latter of these two that Charmaz (2006) rejected. I drew on Charmaz's flexible descriptions of constructivist grounded theory methods because her assumptions were principally congruent with the tenor of this work.

Charmaz (2006) argued that theory cannot truly be "discovered" in data (p. 10), and this is compatible with the interpretive framework of this study. Charmaz

conceded that researchers actively participate in the construction of theory based upon their beliefs, perspectives, and research decisions. As Eisner (1991) put it, "knowledge is made, not simply discovered" (p. 7). Throughout this study, my beliefs and biases were intimately intertwined with those of my students. I attempted to avoid positivistic aspects of grounded theory methods that might undercut this study's congruency.

Charmaz would likely concur with my positions regarding reflexivity and positionality, which hold that an investigator should develop a consciousness towards the multifaceted context of their study, and their own initial assumptions, because "we do not live in a social vacuum" (p. 129). I hence strived to make my own thoughts apparent in my writing. Richardson (1994) even argued that writing can be a "method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic" (p. 516). The writing process was not simply a way to tell others what I had learned, but it was part of searching, where I continued to discover and analyze my own beliefs and assumptions in relation to data and findings.

I did not subscribe to fixed, linear rules for data collection and analysis, but instead strove to move in directions that were appropriate to investigate my phenomena. Charmaz (2006) presented some flexible research methods that served as tools to direct much of my inquiry. Many interpretive studies begin by identifying a problem, and associated questions, that will help begin investigation. Once a study commences it is imperative to gather rich data in forms like extensive field notes of observations, open-ended questionnaires, and extensive interviews. Coding data that have been gathered then allows for analysis, and also directs the gathering of further data. As an analytic grasp of data becomes clearer, memo-writing, a process of

analyzing emerging data and codes, ensues. Data are continually flushed out to fill gaps in categories. This process continues throughout the research process and tentative categories should arise out successive codes and memos.

Several aspects of data collection and analysis procedures occur simultaneously and continuously. This is evident in the interconnected relationship between these processes. Data are not collected and then later analyzed. Instead, soon after initial data collection commences the process of analysis, through coding and memo-writing, also begins. These processes occur together throughout the project. Constant comparative analysis also takes place throughout each stage of a study. This type of analysis recurrently compares different sets of data so as to facilitate interpretations that are cohesive and remain close to data (Charmaz, 2006).

Constant comparative analysis is a method in many qualitative projects whereby categories can be developed by comparing the similarities and differences between various pieces of data. Researchers should be sure to compare incidents applicable to each category. Properties of categories are generated as researchers go back to compare new and old data within the same category. Researchers will integrate categories and their properties. Comparisons then begin to be made between fresh data and the properties of categories that have been generated. This allows for an integrated knowledge of the categories to develop, resulting in a more unified whole. Researchers will better grasp the properties of categories as comparisons are made between data, codes, and categories (Charmaz, 2006).

Theoretical sampling takes place after early coding and memo writing has resulted in the development of categories. At this point, more data are gathered that

specifically focus on categories and their properties. This process allows researchers to keep analysis focused by collecting more data on categories so intricacies may be more fully developed. The process of looking for more data concerning a category continues until no new properties emerge, and data are considered saturated. Once no new information can be ascertained for categories, a researcher will then compare and organize categories through a process called sorting (Charmaz, 2006).

Since constructivist methods generally reject positivist epistemological assertions that truth can be discovered, Charmaz (2006) encourages interpretations that recognize the existence of multiple realities and the subjective nature of the study. Constructivists encourage writing drafts in a way that data and analysis may allow ideas to emerge without structural constraint. This constructivist viewpoint seeks to gain perspectives since truth is considered unknowable. In denying the myth of objectivity, this theory encourages the recognition of the subjective self in all aspects of research and writing (Charmaz, 2006). These philosophical positions make many of the methods I borrowed from constructivist grounded theory more palatable to my research.

Participants and Context

This study was conducted during the spring semester of 2011within five sections of my AP Government courses at Mooney High School. As mentioned earlier, our situation was outstanding for achieving success within both the AP model and my own goals for classes. I had extremely small class sizes with students who were well versed in the rigors of AP courses, but many of whom had also been subject to thoughtful teaching. Students were generally motivated and brought energy to class.

The personnel at my school district, school, and department provided an environment of support in a number of ways.

Forty-nine students were in my five AP Government classes, and forty-four assented or consented to participate in this study. All activities, aside from voluntary interviews, took place within the customary context of our class. Therefore, every student participated in all class activities included within the study, but data concerning those students who did not assent or consent was excluded from this paper. Although there were notable exceptions, most students in my classes came from a privileged middle or upper class background. This was evident as most students owned their own cars, and were in a financial position to already be making plans to attend four year colleges. The make-up of my classes was similar to the general make-up of the school, except that Asian-Americans were vastly overrepresented and Native Americans and Hispanics were underrepresented. Of my forty-nine students, sixty-seven percent were white, twenty percent Asian American, eight percent African American, four percent Native American, and no students were Hispanic. There were also a few more females than males in my classes.

Even though formal data collection began with the 2011 spring semester, this study was informed by what had happened in the first semester of our year-long course. In addition to studying the official AP Government curriculum, I also added content that I hoped would push students to think about different facets of democratic citizenship. The course began with a mini-unit over their summer reading assignment, George Orwell's (1949) *1984*. Early activities and discussions concerning this novel

did little to help students to prepare for the AP Government test, but it did allow us to discuss critical issues concerning democratic institutions, fascism, and citizenship.

To encourage students to practice and test democratic principles I led our class in writing a class constitution. We spent several class periods engaging in this process of give-and-take where students and I exchanged proposals and came to agreements concerning class goals and rules. From my perspective, a lot of student proposals seemed to concern trifling issues (e.g., allowance of food and drinks in class) and did not address the structure of the course in any serious way. However, there were some exceptions. For example, one student proposed, and received some support from his peers, that we have no homework in the course. I expressed concern that if passing the AP test was to be a goal of the course, then homework would provide a valuable tool for accomplishing this goal. Students saw this as reasonable and put up little resistance. In the spirit of compromise, I conceded that they should have the right to be presented a homework schedule and to request changes. All these agreements became part of our class constitution that we were to live by. I encouraged students to maintain a participatory mindset by holding me accountable if they ever felt I violated our constitution. I hoped these experiences would ignite a spark in them to engage in political processes.

I told students on the first day of the school year that the course would have two primary purposes: (1) to become better citizens in our democratic society and (2) to score well enough on the end-of-year AP exam to receive college credit. After we concluded our study of *1984* and finalized our class constitution, most of the remainder of the semester addressed the latter goal through study of the official

curriculum. Additional content like current events, which spoke more explicitly to citizenship, was included as time was available.

I experimented, as I always had, with more meaningful ways to teach content. I developed a number of group projects that I hoped would improve what students took from our studies. For example, instead of directly covering the political participation portion of the official curriculum through lecture or text reading, I required groups of students to create pamphlets that addressed the primary issues (e.g., expansion of suffrage rights in American history, voter turnout and registration, other forms of participation). I further asked them to make value judgments and recommendations concerning how they might improve democratic participation. Extra credit was even offered to students whose project actually attempted to make a difference outside of our school walls. One student group wrote their pamphlet in Spanish, and left a stack of them in a community center in a Hispanic area of town to encourage voter registration among a typically underrepresented group. However, the active efforts of this group were an exception to the rule as most groups did not take me up on my offer for extra credit.

One project that veered considerably from the official curriculum came during the November elections of 2011. Early in the semester our classes had discussed what characteristics a responsible citizen might possess. Every AP Government section identified "being informed" about current events and political processes as vital characteristic of citizenship. The November elections consisted of races for a variety of offices, including state governor, U.S. Congress representatives, and a number of

state level offices, city council representatives, and eleven referendum State questions that, if passed, would be added to the State Constitution.

Many of these State questions were difficult to understand so we spent some time examining them in class. I decided this would be an excellent opportunity for students to find ways to ensure that citizens in our community were both informed and registered to vote. We divided the different State questions among groups, and students had a month to find ways to effectively inform citizens about the election in some way. Every few days we would discuss ideas and I would make sure they were developing a plan to be implemented. I could tell that some students were not very interested in this assignment, but I quietly attributed this to their personal defects (e.g., laziness, indifference). I saw this project as an opportunity to think creatively about our democratic processes and explore ways to affect them, so I was frustrated when students were not interested in participating.

Students developed a variety of ways to inform people about the election. Groups worked on their own, but we also collaborated and supported each other when possible. For example, one group decided to create a pamphlet with information concerning the implications of each state question. I asked them to finish it early enough so that groups who planned to distribute information in public places (e.g., the mall, local sporting events) could use their pamphlets. Other groups utilized the Internet to spread the word by creating either a website, an informational YouTube video, or a Facebook page. Some strategies were fairly effective, while many clearly made little difference, but I reasoned that at least we were able to discuss the process and, I hoped, learn from it.

A number of students dropped out of the AP Government class at the semester. This occurred for a variety of reasons. Some students only enrolled in the first semester to help improve their grade point averages (GPA) for college admissions and class ranking. Others told me that they did not re-enroll because government courses offered at the local community college was easier and college credit was guaranteed (unlike with the AP test). A new state law went into effect that year allowing students to earn both high school and college credit by passing government at a local community college.

A number of students did not like some of the projects I assigned because they saw them as time-consuming and unnecessary. This attitude was especially prevalent in my sixth hour class. This was my largest class during the first semester and I suspected a variety of reasons for the mindset. Many students were taking all AP classes and seemed to find the amount of homework stressful. Those who were perfectionists often indicated that projects took an extremely long time. Nonetheless, they often turned in projects that appeared to be professionally made even when there was no grade for aesthetic appearance. For example, in one instance I specifically instructed students not to spend their time on the aesthetic aspects of the political participation pamphlet project, but encouraged them to focus on important content. Despite my instructions, which were intended to be mindful of their busy schedules, a number of pamphlets were turned in that looked as if they were produced by an advertising agency.

The rejection of some of these assignments, and the fact that many students did not enroll in the second semester of our class, affected me. I hated to see students

transfer from my class because it felt like they did not find what we were doing as worthwhile. These experiences further bolstered my interest in conducting this study. Although I did not realize it at the time, these events would also serve as a harbinger for later findings.

The 2011 spring semester began with forty-nine students spread among five sections of the AP Government course. Our classes met for fifty-five minutes for five days a week from January to the middle of May. No changes were made in our curriculum for the purposes of this study. I developed lessons and activities as I always had. Students were treated and graded in customary ways. I enjoyed teaching all my classes and, as usual, each took on a personality of its own.

Research Protocol

The Congress unit served as the starting point for the second semester and this study. The collection of rich data began in January and continued throughout the semester. I sought to investigate students' perspectives concerning what was valuable in our AP Government curriculum, including the official AP curriculum and my additions. This initial unit spanned approximately a month, a far longer amount of time than many AP teachers have, in part because a snowstorm led to the cancellation of four of days of school in the middle of our unit. There were times during the semester when data collection was more intensive, and the Congress unit was certainly one of these instances.

I began by gathering field notes over class interactions, student responses to lessons, and my own thoughts concerning how our Congress unit was progressing. These methods led me to examine anything and everything because "all is data"

(Glaser as cited in Charmaz, 2006, p. 16). I constantly paid attention to what was happening in our class to ensure I did not unnecessarily miss data that might provide insights. I initially varied from one of the methods of rigorous qualitative methods – regularly analyzing data as they were being collected. I did not want to deeply analyze field data that might cause me to change my teaching, or our curriculum, during the Congress unit. I believed that if I tried to analyze findings too quickly I might hastily alter my teaching practices based on tentative findings because I was eager to improve my classes. I reasoned that if I wanted to understand my students and teaching then I should delay analysis until after at least one unit. After this initial unit, and for the remainder of the semester, I continually analyzed, collected, and compared data.

The day after the Congress unit ended, I distributed a survey (see Appendix A) to students to assess what they found valuable and why. The survey began with four open-ended, locally developed questions: (1) What are your thoughts and feelings on this unit on Congress? (2) Do you see value in our study of Congress? (Is it relevant to your life now? Will it be later?) (3) What did you find most valuable in this unit and why? (4) What did you find least valuable in this unit, and why? The second part of the survey asked students to rank sixteen items from our Congress unit on a one (least valuable) to five (most valuable) Likert scale.

I coded data from this survey as I searched for categories that might shed light on my question. Coding initially consisted of categorizing small segments of data, but my attention was eventually turned to more frequent codes to organize large chunks of information. I then scrutinized data and codes through a memo writing process that

involved the analysis and the development of categories. The intensive writing of memos early in the process helped to advance this process.

After the development of categories based on early coding and memo writing, more data were gathered that specifically focused on categories and their properties. The process of theoretical sampling allowed me to keep my analysis focused by collecting more information so that the intricacies of each category could be more fully developed. This cyclical process was repeated several times over, especially after the collection of large chunks of data through field observations or intensive interviews. I continued to gather information via field notes concerning class interactions and assignments, but I then set up group and individual interviews to gather more data on emerging categories (Charmaz, 2006).

I pursued gaps in data and developed deeper understandings through interviews. Approximately a month after the completion of the Congress unit I conducted two small group interviews. The students were chosen because they revealed varying perceptions of what was valuable in our AP Government curriculum. Group interviews allowed me to check these emerging categories of value and search for gaps in data.

The first small group consisted of seven interviewees and the second included five. The two groups were intended to have six students each, but a mix-up led to imbalanced groups. This was not viewed as a serious detriment to data collection. In total, the small groups contained eight white students, two Asian students, one black student, and no Native American or Hispanic students. There were four males and eight females.

Individual interviews were conducted about six weeks after the group ones were completed. These personal conversations allowed me to pursue questions in depth and in many directions. Students were chosen for these interviews according to their relation to emerging categories of value. Several students were chosen to participate in individual interviews so I could follow up on answers already elicited. The process of searching for more data in a relation to categories continued until no new properties were found. I continued collecting information from the field, and through interviews, until I considered data to be saturated (Charmaz, 2006).

Once I ascertained no new properties, categories were compared and organized through the process of sorting. Because I rejected positivist epistemological assertions that truth can be discovered, I viewed findings through an interpretive lens that recognized the existence of multiple realities and the subjective nature of the research. I also wrote drafts in a way that data and theories allowed ideas to emerge without structural constraint (Charmaz, 2006). I was able to accomplish this by utilizing the writing process as a form of inquiry (Richardson, 1994), and engaging in constant reflection. Both the triangulation of several data sources, and member checking of findings, assisted in ensuring more holistic and accurate understanding of students' actions and views.

Summary

In this chapter I described the research methodology, including underlying assumptions and procedures, which were utilized to gain insights into my question. I began by describing the setting, the course curriculum, and course materials. I then presented the philosophical and theoretical assumptions that guided this study. I

profiled the student-participants, and described our context in depth. Finally, I explained the emergent protocol utilized for data collection and analysis. The next chapter will present findings that emerged through the use of these methods.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

By doing research in my classroom at Mooney High School, I endeavored to better understand what value, if any, my students found in our AP Government curriculum. Once I got a sense of what held value for my students I strove to understand why. I continually juxtaposed findings concerning their attitudes and beliefs against my own to reflect the transactional nature of our situation. As additional findings emerged, I shifted my attention to gaps in data where unanswered questions remained. I started by procuring a breadth of information from all my students, and then narrowed the scale of my research so I could collect a depth of information from small groups and individuals.

During a group interview one student, Clayton, emphatically asked, "Shouldn't everyone know about their government?" His classmates nodded in agreement, indicating that citizens should indeed know about their government. However, I was unsure what they meant by this. I have noticed for years that students by and large praise American democracy as the best form of government, but it quickly becomes evident that most of them are at a loss to explain why or what this means in practice. The reasons students gave as to why they should "know about their government" are wide-ranging and complex.

There were a number of pivotal moments throughout the course of this study that pushed my understandings in new directions. My inquiry began with the Congress unit that started with the spring semester, but I really started collecting large chunks of

data at the end of that first unit. It was at this time that I used surveys (see Appendix A) to explicitly ask students what they found worthwhile in the unit.

Most students communicated there was value in our class, but they found it to different degrees and in different ways. This was not an unexpected finding considering the diversity of backgrounds, opinions, and dispositions that students brought to my classes. Grasping the different ways in which they expressed value proved challenging. Students found worth in content that furthered their understanding, but they sought different types of understanding. As I questioned students further I often found my initial interpretations of their explanations overly simplistic as the complexity of their thoughts became more evident. I was able to uncover more intricate and multifaceted explanations.

During the course of this study, two additional findings emerged as my own beliefs and assumptions about our class were challenged. First, I determined that the goals espoused in the official AP curriculum, those of my students, and my own were often not aligned. This became painfully evident as I wrestled with comprehending why students' found such little value in the call to Congress assignment. The misaligned goals caused both frustration and misunderstandings at various points in the course. However, at this same time I also was able to identify content, such as current events, that students found meaningful. Exploring why they found value in some subject matter, and a lack of value in other areas, helped me gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives.

Secondly, in conducting personal interviews I began to grasp how little I knew of my students. It became apparent that the rigorous nature of the curriculum distanced

my students and me from each other. Individual interviews revealed complex perspectives, but they also exposed failures of the AP course to foster citizenship growth. For example, Hunter was only marginally academically successful (i.e., grades) within the formal school structures of our AP curriculum, but his ability to connect course content to his life was exceptional. His sophisticated comments caused me to further question what students were taking from our AP Government course.

The AP test provided a paradigm shift for the course as the formal aspects of studying "government" in the official curriculum gave way to a more genuine "governing" of life. Upon the request of Baily, who up to that point had expressed value in largely passive and academic ways, the students and I co-equally organized community projects that made a difference in our communities. This shift from formal to informal interactions, predetermined to emergent curricula, authoritative to cooperative decision-making, and compulsory to voluntary participation showed that many students cared about citizenship in ways obscured by our AP course. This shift was palpable as our voluntary end-of-year school project extended into the summer, beyond the K-12 careers of my students.

In this chapter I will discuss these pivotal moments that helped to foster a better understanding of what, and why, my students valued in our AP Government curriculum. The findings presented in this chapter are intended to provide insights concerning the larger implications for educational theory and practice to be addressed in the ensuing chapter.

Students' Perceptions of Curricular Value

After completing our unit on Congress I distributed surveys (see Appendix A) to all of my students to gage what, if any, value they found in the unit. While I had already been documenting usual class interactions and their reactions to, and performance on, assignments, this provided me the first opportunity to explicitly ask students their opinions. Students were asked to answer four open-ended questions and then rank sixteen topics or assignments from our unit on a one (least valuable) to five (most valuable) Likert scale. Most students indicated they found at least some importance in what we studied. While a few students commented that they did not feel it would affect them later on, even they later admitted there was probably some worth in the content. Only two of the forty-four respondents expressed they found no value.

Several students indicated the Congress unit was not very important because they did not "plan on going into Congress for a career choice." This narrow view of Congress was frequently countered by contrary comments in which several of the same students identified examples from the unit where they found value. These seemingly contradictory statements revealed the difficulty that some had connecting this unit of study to their roles as citizens in a democratic society. Despite occasional comments to the contrary, data overwhelmingly suggests that my students expressed that there was at least some value in our study of Congress.

Although most students indicated there was value in our unit, their interpretations of what was valuable were as diverse as their personalities. While one student complained there was "too much reading," a classmate stated they would have "liked to spend more time on the [text]book." Another student indicated that the unit

was “so rushed,” while a different one thought it “dragged out so long.” These contrary opinions were prevalent on many issues and spoke to the challenges of teaching many students with disparate needs and wants. One girl captured the complexity of views when she expressed that the unit was both “very interesting and confusing.”

Despite a divergence of opinions on many issues, several larger patterns also emerged. Our AP Government course, and school in general, were largely centered on the acquisition of knowledge. Accordingly, students implicitly and explicitly conveyed value in the course by describing the purpose, or lack thereof, in content studied. The purposes of acquiring course knowledge conveyed by students were clustered into three groupings, which I labeled: passive, academic, and active. The passive grouping consisted of statements or actions that did not indicate a function or purpose to which that knowledge might be utilized in their lives. The academic category entailed students’ explanations or actions that exhibited that academic aims, like scoring well on a test or receiving a good grade, were valuable. Finally, data that fell within the active category revealed a functional and participatory utilization of content knowledge beyond school-related undertakings.

The borders between these categories were not always clear-cut because the some comments contained characteristics of more than one of these groupings. For example, one student said the most valuable concept she learned concerned “how representatives and Senators work to serve their constituents, and how Congressmen get elected.” This simple statement could be conceivably fit within all three categories. It covers academic topics from the official curriculum. It could be considered passive

because the student only mentions having the knowledge, not utilizing it in any way. It could also be considered active because the student expressly chose two items that imply an active role for citizens in shaping democratic institutions. In cases like this I often tried to address the issue in further inquiries and search out data that revealed more about the intent of the student. Despite their limitations, these categories provided a useful way to try to make sense of the complex sentiments that were expressed. These patterns also revealed a great deal concerning student perceptions of school, democratic society, and their role within each of these systems.

Value in Passive Knowledge

Students frequently mentioned they found value in knowledge that I considered to be largely passive in nature. The properties of this grouping could be regarded as passive, as opposed to the subsequent two types of knowledge to be addressed, because students did not indicate how it was applicable or might be put to use. Sometimes Congress was even described by students utilizing undemocratic terms that illustrated a view of citizens as just one of the masses who have no capacity for influencing their world. Other comments were less revealing and the knowledge gained, while expressed in a passive way, could conceivably serve as a foundation for responsible citizenship in the future. Answers within this category varied from knowledge for knowledge's sake to knowledge that might have value when they were older to knowledge that simply allowed for understanding of the content we were studying.

A number of students expressed that the knowledge gained from the course was valuable in itself, and thus, did not articulate any applicable value. Students often

described Congress by using passive language that indicated citizens had little role in legislative processes and other aspects of governance. One student indicated that Congress "is worth knowing," but he said that he didn't plan on "studying government in college." Statements like these seemed to reveal that some did not connect course content beyond our class to their roles as citizens.

Every year it seemed that students arrived to my class as enthusiastic advocates of the democratic government of the United States. They were often surprised to learn that the founders had many fears concerning the excesses of democracy and thus created a constitutional and republican form of government that checked democratic impulses. In fact, the word "democracy" does not appear in the U.S. Constitution. Towards the end of the year Shelby, a student in my first hour, thoughtfully expressed how little she had known at the beginning of the school year. She said, "it's mind boggling that I had no idea how the government worked… I just did what I was told and I thought Presidents were in charge of the world." While many students revealed a decent understanding of course content, they seemed less sure how this knowledge might be used or why it might be worthwhile.

Students indicated that acquiring knowledge was personally valuable, but when pressed as to why this was so, they often had difficulty explaining their position. Some drew upon, and echoed, class content, including some comments I made in a lecture, exposing that the general public often does not understand the slow-moving processes necessary for the functioning of the legislative branch. Others suggested they should know how Congress and our government work, but when pressed to expand on their convictions, they were unable to do so. Students frequently intimated

that it was critical to know about such things because they did not want to look ignorant. When I pressed students as to why they should know about their government, many were unable to formulate a response that moved beyond having knowledge for its own sake. This exchange between a student and me near the end of the school year illustrates how this viewpoint was often expressed:

> Me: Do you feel like you keep up much with what's going on in the world?
> Baily: Not really. No.
> Me: Why not?
> Baily: I don't like to watch the news because it makes me sad… I don't watch the news at all.
> Me: Do you think you'll watch the news more as you get older?
> Baily: I might. Maybe. I don't know. I should, but…
> Me: Why should you?
> Baily: Because I need to know what's going on. I see pop-ups on yahoo on the computer, but I don't sit down and watch it.
> Me: Why should you know what's going on? What's the value in that?
> Baily: Hmmm… (Long pause). Well, you don't want to be ignorant.
> Me: So people don't think you're ignorant?
> Baily: Yeah. And some people talk about stuff they don't really know about. That's annoying.
> Me: So, to look informed yourself?
> Baily: Yeah.

Baily had ranked current events as one of the most valuable areas of study in the unit, but she sounded utterly bewildered when I asked her why they were worth following. The inability of students to connect content that they believed had value to the reasons why this was so was characteristic of this category.

A few students expressed that there was not much significance in course content currently, but that there might be in the future. This passive deferment of knowledge often emphasized older adults as the ones that make societal decisions and are affected by the government. One student indicated that Congress might be relevant to her "parents since they work for the government," while another said "it should

definitely be important later when I have a job and a house that will be affected more." Baily even stated that she didn't see any value now, but "once I'm 18 I'll probably pay attention better to things like this that could affect me…" It was a quirky statement considering she was only a couple months away from her eighteenth birthday at the time, but it revealed the narrow association that many students identify between voting and democratic citizenship. Unfortunately, this deferment of knowledge until some later time also implies a potential weak interpretation of the responsibilities and opportunities for democratic participation of citizens. While it may not always hold true, King (1964) pointed out that sometimes "this 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never'."

The elements of study that many students found to be the most valuable overall (see Table 1) were those items that helped students understand content that may have hitherto been confusing. Direct study of the official curriculum via textbook, lecture, or discussion questions largely consisted of disconnected facts and political theory that many students found to be less valuable than other items from the unit. This was evidenced by three of the five lowest scoring items from the survey fitting this description (see Table 2). Students indicated that more direct methods of learning content were less valuable than items that provided a more holistic and understandable descriptions of processes and issues. Some students, most often those whose comments fell within the active category to be addressed later, derisively characterized this type of study as just "memorizing stuff."

Five of the most valuable items identified by students from our Congress curriculum were regularly comprehended in passive ways by students. These included

current events, the *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) movie, President Obama's 2011 State of the Union address, a National Public Radio (NPR) interview with Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) about earmark spending, and group study of how a bill becomes a law. The only four audiovisual media items from this unit were all ranked within the top five items by students. They frequently found the aforementioned matters worthwhile because they helped place content within a context they found comprehensible, even if they did not indicate how that content might be useful or relevant in their lives.

Table 1: Top Six Valued Items Means and Standard Deviations

	n	*M(SD)*
Current event videos/discussion	43	4.51(0.74)
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington film and discussion	41	4.29(0.87)
Study of how a bill becomes a law & group review	43	3.95(0.95)
Multiple choice test	43	3.77(0.77)
State of the Union speech & discussion	43	3.72(1.05)
Coburn interview & discussion on earmarks/pork barrel	43	3.72(0.85)

At the beginning of the school year students had identified "being informed" as one of the most important characteristics of responsible citizens, but after more than a semester of our AP Government course, most students indicated they did not follow the news closely outside of class. Nevertheless, they rated current events as the most valuable aspect of our Congress unit. Students repeatedly commented that regularly watching streamed current event clips from news websites, usually from NBC's TODAY show, made the AP content "more relevant" and helped them "feel more connected to what's going on." Some of the current events covered during this time

were the shooting of U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ), efforts by Congressional Republicans to repeal the recently passed Health Care law, previews of President Obama's 2011 State of the Union address, the entire State of the Union address (watched for homework), and the Egyptian revolution that was part of the larger Arab Spring uprisings.

It was clear from ratings and comments that a number of students felt current events provided context and a connection between official AP content and the "real world." While, one student, Trent, found "recent news" most valuable "because it's good to know what is happening outside of our sphere of reality," another student stated that current events "allowed the unit to be relevant to our time." Jodie commented that Obama's State of the Union "affects our everyday life and I think we can relate to that better than we can if we just sit in class and read a textbook about former presidents and their constituents." Another student found the State of the Union valuable because it is a "physical thing that you watch and can talk about, ya know?" Even though participants did not always indicate why current events might be valuable, they clearly believed that school should focus more on them. A rather quiet student keenly asked, "Why is there nothing that ever focuses on what's going on right now – history in the making?"

Watching the classic film *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* provided a visual resource to "see" Congress and "picture the things they did." I had never showed this film in prior years, and it was almost scrapped because of class time lost from several unexpected snow days, but it provided something students revealed they were missing. Even though the film does not perfectly convey how Congress works today, it

provided a holistic picture of how things get done. One student recognized that "even though it's different today…you get to see a filibuster and how it all works." Another student referenced a part of the movie where the protagonist's secretary explains how a bill becomes a law and said that "even though it was almost done cheesily it was trying to tell me, like directly to my face this is how it is." They were clearly able to connect with the film in ways that other methods failed to do. This sentiment was present as one student saw it as the "most valuable thing" because it "accumulated everything that we had been studying and made it really understandable."

One non-audio-visual item that participants found helpful was our study of how a bill becomes a law. Our initial study of this topic was somewhat mechanistic as students read through the lengthy legislative process in their textbook for homework, and then we discussed the separate parts in class. After this initial procedure, students participated in a mock Congress concerning a fictional federal gun bill proposed in response to the Giffords' shooting. I designed the simulation for this unit and utilized a vivid current event so the process would seem relevant. Many participants did not find the mock Congress particularly valuable, but this seemed to be tied to problems that emerged in attempting this simulation for the first time. Issues related to time (not enough of it), sequence (too complex), and intricacies caused the mock Congress to not go as well as hoped, but such is common in the first iteration of a complex simulation activity.

Students later worked in groups to talk through, and write out, the process of how a bill becomes a law. Small groups created their own outlines and diagrams of the process and I walked around the classroom to correct mistakes, make suggestions, and

take questions. Groups shared their explanations of this legislative process with the entire class once they were ready. Students found the process worthwhile even though this lesson was simply intended to be a summative review exercise. Several students felt they could now better understand the complex "lingo" concerning the legislative process when watching coverage of Congress on the news.

While students found these aspects of our curriculum valuable, they did not indicate how they might be utilized. For example, a number of them expressed that *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* helped to better understand how Congress functions, but very few people mentioned why this understanding might be significant to their lives. Comments rarely went further than expressing that a better understanding of content might help them comprehend the news better. An unintended consequence of the bill-to-law group review lesson was that as a high number of students began to better understand "how tedious Congress' job is," and they were able to "accept the fact that not much gets done." Students curiously showed empathy for Congress members, who often are unpopular with the public because of their inability to overcome partisan differences and pass important legislation. They felt that the process of passing a bill through committees and repeatedly securing enough votes was challenging, and people should be more patient with Congress. Some of these students implied that they were less interested in influencing legislative members because their job was already difficult enough.

All of these examples were characterized by students who found value in subject matter that helped them understand formal political processes, but they mostly did so without revealing how this knowledge might be utilized in their lives. While

better understanding different aspects of the government could lead to active participation in democratic society, students were often unable to make relevant connections even when prompted. The passive answers of students in this section revealed that students often did not think of content knowledge in relation to any possible citizenship responsibilities.

In some cases students even spoke in ways that suggested that citizens do not share democratic responsibilities in the legislative process, but are simply told what to do by legislators. One student mentioned that understanding how a bill becomes a law is valuable because it is "important to know how the rules that govern your life come into place." This comment seemed to dismiss any role that citizens might have in influencing this process. Another participant stated that Congress "presides over everyday life." Yet another stated that it was "not harmful to be aware" of Congress "because Congress dictates a lot of what goes on in our lives." The tone of these types of comments, and even the use of the undemocratic words like "dictates," seemed to suggest that some students may view their roles as those of passive observers, not active participants, in our democracy.

Value in Academic Knowledge

Most students found value in those aspects of our course that furthered academic aims, like earning a high score on the end-of–the-year AP test or receiving a good grade for the course. Of course, scoring well on the AP test was a primary reason many students enrolled in the class. Almost all students agreed that passing the AP test was personally important.

There were very practical reasons why students valued academic aims. Even Linh, who probably connected our curriculum to her personal activism more so than any other student, admitted that failing to receive college credit from such a demanding course would be very disappointing. Many students also agreed that "in the AP world" there can be lot of personal or parental pressure to succeed academically. Beyond expectations and pressures, I used questions in surveys and interviews to uncover what was personally meaningful in our course. A sizeable portion of students still described academic ends as what was personally valuable for them. While some students indicated academic objectives were part of the picture, others conveyed that these ends provided the only source of value.

The value students placed in academic ends was evident as many mentioned purely academic areas as being personally meaningful. One girl stated that she "loved loved loved the daily reading schedule" along with the vocabulary terms and test questions. The multiple choice test was cited as one of the most valuable items from our unit. One student explained this high ranking saying, "I felt like if I could pass the multiple choice test then I'm learning what I'm supposed to be learning." Comments like this revealed that content was valuable for a large number of students if it was tested.

Other students explicitly stated that the class did not really matter beyond the AP test. One girl referenced that the vocabulary terms were helpful and then said, "I think it's valuable for this class, but I don't think I'll ever use it outside of this class." Many students did not indicate that they knew of any ways the content might be

valuable outside of the school setting. Several went as far as to say they didn't plan on being a member of Congress so the test was really all that mattered.

A number of study participants expressed irritation in studying content that veered from the official AP curriculum. One highly motivated, and academically successful, student complained:

> I got a little frustrated because I felt like some of the things we did weren't relevant to the AP test. I would suggest that in future years you save some of the longer projects/simulations that don't directly relate to the AP test when we have more time.

Because the AP test is administered only a couple weeks prior to the end of the school year, this suggestion would practically mean eliminating aspects of the curriculum that did not directly prepare students for the test. Several others also recommended that non-AP content be pushed back to that final few weeks. However, most seniors understood that the last few weeks of their high school career presented a difficult time to accomplish much because they were so frequently pulled from class for various graduation activities.

Table 2: Bottom Five Valued Items Means and Standard Deviations

	n	*M(SD)*
Study of the differences between congress & parliament	43	3.49(0.98)
Study of who are the members of congress	43	3.47(0.98)
Congressperson presentations	42	3.33(1.24)
Study of how congress has changed over time	43	3.28(1.05)
Call to member of congress/elected official	41	2.49(1.33)

Students also expressed that content from the official curriculum that was taught in more straightforward ways (e.g., lecture, textbook reading) were considered some of the least valuable items we studied. Three of the five lowest rated items (see Table 2) consisted of content that helped students prepare for the test, but did so in less imaginative ways. On the other hand, the other two of the five least valuable items could be considered creative. The more creative projects, Congressperson presentations and the call to Congress, while unpopular, showed more variance as evidenced by higher standard deviations. The straightforward content that was deemed less valuable was consistently rated low by students.

Value in Active Knowledge

The most encouraging information concerning the citizenship aspirations I held for my students was evident in data indicating an active application of knowledge. The ability of students to connect course content to their potential roles as democratic citizens was manifest in the comments that I categorized within this grouping. The level of commitment to democratic action varied greatly as comments ranged from using information to make wise voting decisions to those that aimed to affect change in different ways.

One student, Rocky, revealed how his understanding of government might serve to inform others. He said:

> I come across a lot of people that think they know what's going on in government and they like to share their ideas (laughter from small group)…and before I always just listened to them and think that's just the way it was. But now I'm able to relate it to what I learn in class and realize – wow that's not really how it's going on…I can inform them on really how it works.

This comment suggested that he had moved beyond just having knowledge for its own sake, but took an active role as an informed citizen to inform others.

Most students agreed that voting was important, and many stated that course content learned would be helpful in making voting decisions. Jodie referenced that she felt "more safe in my representation in my government" and "when I am able to vote, I will be reassured that my views are considered." Whether her views are actually considered by her representative is another issue, but her active views might serve as groundwork for further involvement. Curtis said that he now better understood how to differentiate among those politicians who would "really represent us" from "those that just sound good." A number of other students made similar comments about being "more informed" when voting.

A lot of answers were vague enough that it was difficult to determine the degree to which active use of content might take place. This was represented by one student who commented that he was more "aware of how to make a difference," but said little else on the topic. Several students said that they had gained a better understanding of Congress, which would allow them to make a difference. Another student stated that after our study of Congress he knows how to "get something changed" if he does not like it.

More specific comments about how to actually make change were rare, but there were some examples. Several students said they might become involved with an interest group as a way to incite change on an issue important to them. However, only a few were able to articulate substantive and creative ways to participate and perhaps make change in our democratic society. Those students were often able to

communicate ways to relate course content to their personal lives. A few students were already actively utilizing information to try to affect change. These students and their ideas will be addressed further in the final section of this chapter, but I will now address an assignment that provided more insight into my question than probably any other aspect of the course.

The Call to Congress Assignment

Responses to my "call to Congress" assignment proved humbling as I grasped how misaligned my vision for our course was from the goals of most of my students. The assignment served as a lightning rod for criticism and brought forth underlying issues that were likely well known by many students, but had gone unnoticed by me. I developed this assignment a few years ago as a way to build upon the official curriculum with an activity encouraging democratic participation.

The assignment solicited students to pick an issue they cared about, research it, and then call the office of a member of the United States Congress to ask policy questions or advocate for action. Students were to first present their topic to me for approval, explain why they chose it, and then present what they intended to talk about during their call. They had to gain my approval at several steps in the process to ensure their call went well. They also had to justify which member of Congress they planned to call. This step was put in place to make sure they understood which members of Congress might be most likely to address their issue. I also encouraged students to call one of their three elected members of Congress, but some were able to develop good reasons (e.g., head of a committee related to their issue) for calling other

members. Once they received my approval they had a couple days to prepare for the call.

This project was completed in previous years without me noticing problems or concerns. I had hoped students would be exceedingly prepared this year because snowstorms resulted in them receiving four extra days to prepare. Despite the extra time, a number of students did not have the information ready when they returned from our unexpected break. I was frustrated that they were not prepared because I believed this assignment to be an important way to engage in democratic practice. I rationalized the weak preparation by my students as simply a result of their forgetfulness over a long snow break. It had not crossed my mind that they were not as enthusiastic about the assignment as I was.

Most students were at least adequately prepared when it was finally the day to make the call. My first hour, generally my quietest class of the day, asked me to make a call in front of them so they would feel more comfortable doing it themselves. I called my U.S. House of Representative member James Lankford (R-OK). He was a newly elected member to the House, and since I did not live in the same school district as my students, he was a different representative than most of them would call. My conversation with one of his staff members went well. I was able to discuss my concerns regarding Congressional term limits for a couple minutes. Once I finished my call it was time for my students to give it a try.

Some students seemed nervous and asked if they could make their call in the hall. They then scattered to different areas of our classroom and the hallway. I overheard some of them engage in knowledgeable conversations concerning their

issues, while others nervously stumbled through their questions. I tried not to listen to their conversations too closely out of respect for their privacy. Within ten to fifteen minutes everyone had completed their calls and we gathered to talk about how it went. Students shared several stories about their calls. Some mentioned that their concerns were not really addressed, but a few others communicated that their call went well. I was surprised that more of them were not interested in sharing information concerning the assignment, but I did not think too much of it. We moved on to our next lesson soon thereafter.

I had been excited to see my students actively participate in a democratic process by calling the office of a member of Congress. Even though it was only a small assignment, I hoped it would broaden their conceptions of how to actively participate in such processes in the future. Since I had created this project, I had always felt like it was opening the doors of democratic participation for my students. However, that is not how most of them felt. It was not until I analyzed data concerning their opinions and reflections that I realized most students assigned little value to the project. One of the gentler comments explained, "It was a good idea. It just didn't work as it was planned out." The results of the call to Congress caused me to question my own assumptions about my students and my teaching.

I had believed the call to Congress assignment was perhaps the most worthwhile lesson in the unit, but I was shocked to later find that students rated it as the least valuable item of the sixteen on our survey (see Table 2). My first reaction was to be defensive. I had trouble understanding why students would not find such an assignment valuable. I wondered why they would not want to participate in democratic

processes. In my mind, I even blamed their character. In retrospect I was being defensive to protect myself. I felt exposed because I took so much pride that my class might help to foster citizenship among my students, but I now wondered, whether that was happening after all? This consciousness brought into question who I was as a teacher and person.

Once I got over the shock of the rejection of the call to Congress, and once the unit was complete, I began to investigate why students and I had such different opinions about the project. Two primary reasons emerged. First, students' opinions of the assignment were strongly affected by their perceptions of the call experience and results. Secondly, perspectives concerning the purpose of the AP Government course heavily influenced how students understood the assignment. Three different ways of looking at the value of course knowledge that I identified – passive, academic, and active – helped to explain differing viewpoints of students.

A high number of students found their call to be an undesirable experience for one of several reasons. The most common one was that students felt they were not taken seriously. A lot of students felt "brushed away" by people that were neither "specific [n]or helpful." One boy felt that the man he talked to probably did not "take a high schooler seriously." Many students also sensed that the interns they spoke with were not well informed on issues and thus were unable to address their questions or concerns very well. One girl was told by an intern that he would "pass that note on," but she believed her concerns had likely been ignored.

A number of students were asked to leave contact information only to never be contacted. Several others noted that they were repeatedly transferred to someone else

during their class. In the end, some students were told by the interns that they had no answer, but students were then asked for their contact information or they were flippantly told to "go to the website." One student, Rocky, was perturbed by the call because he had spent a lot of time preparing his questions and he was brusquely told to look at the Congress member's official website to find information. This was something students had already been instructed to do prior to their call to ensure they were not asking a question about issues that could be easily found. Many students were directed to full answer machines, repeatedly transferred, or received little feedback. I had hoped the call might serve as an experience to crack open the door of democratic possibilities in their minds, but many felt more like a door was slammed in their face.

Not all students had negative experiences. One boy, Nate, said the person he talked with was "extremely helpful and super nice… she answered all my questions to the best of her ability, and referenced the [Congressman's] website for more information." He clearly expressed that being sent to the website was meant to be helpful, not a way to get rid of him. Another boy, Clayton, received a detailed personal letter addressing his concerns a couple of weeks later. While a few students reported positive exchanges, many felt the call was a waste of time. Even worse, some, who had negative experiences, found their call to be "disheartening." The perspectives from which students viewed this assignment affected their judgment of the worth of the assignment and also could have contributed to their negative experiences.

A number of students viewed the call to Congress from a passive perspective because they did not see a reason for it. Many of these students did not pick an issue

they were passionate about, but instead saw the call as just another school assignment to be completed as quickly as possible. One girl argued, and she was not alone, that the call was unnecessary since we had already learned about members of Congress in the Congressperson presentations. She contended that since "we already had like a pretty good idea what that person believed… I don't really think… calling that person would tell us something that we pretty much already didn't know." She construed the purpose of the assignment as an effort to gain more knowledge of the views of the member of Congress. She did not see the assignment in the manner that I had assigned it; as practice in a democratic process.

The fact that various students did not pick a topic they cared about, as I had encouraged them to do, but instead chose something just to get it done, could be part of the reason why call experiences went poorly. This perspective became more understandable when a student in my final class period informed me that a lot of their classmates had three tests in AP classes the same day of the call. It became obvious that the call did not have the intended effect I had hoped for a variety of reasons. This point was driven home by one student who explained, "I don't imagine that I'll ever call someone in Congress again."

Several students viewed the call to Congress from an academic perspective because they felt the assignment detracted from the purpose of the course, which they viewed as passing the AP test. As one student bluntly put it, "I found the calling a Congressperson least valuable because it did not help with the test!" A lot of students did not view the act of calling a member of Congress as providing information, or enhancing a skill in any way, but instead interpreted the lesson through the lens of the

official curriculum. One girl concerned about the loss of test preparation time disregarded the assignment in saying, "…if I need to call my Congress person later, I can just pick up the phone and look up their number. I don't really need practice in this." Several students recommended that lessons like this could be pushed back until after the AP test. When I asked if it was just a busy time of year, one student responded that they were "just trying to get stuff done and then apply it later." One student interestingly saw value for "life," but then emphasized that it was not useful for the AP test.

There were a small number of students who viewed the call to Congress as an active process in gaining knowledge about democratic processes and participation. One student, Clayton, repeatedly emphasized that this assignment helped him realize members of Congress are accessible, at least via their staff. He stated that "calling a Senator is normal. They aren't super humans or anything." This accessibility gave Clayton more confidence in the democratic process as he felt that if he needed to address any issues in the future he "could just call them up." One girl expressed that the call was valuable because "we can go talk to our representatives and to know we don't have to sit and do nothing or not try to make a change." Another student commented that this assignment "showed that answers to current political questions are not far away." When I designed this lesson I looked at the call to Congress through this active lens, but most students did not. This gap between our perspectives caused me to consider how our different interpretations of the purpose of our course might affect how our class operates.

My mistaken assumptions about the call to Congress pushed me to ask different questions of myself and my students. These new queries led to unanticipated findings. The reflective approach encouraged by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1991) facilitated my ability to holistically and critically analyze varied aspects of my teaching. Without engaging in the reflective aspects of these methods, I wonder how many years I might have used this assignment, and others, without searching out the perspectives of my students. Secondly, my mistaken assumptions involving the call to Congress project, in addition to other data, helped me better understand that my students and I brought very different agendas to our class. At this point, I further questioned what my students really wanted out of our class. As I continued to dig deeper, I came to the realization how little I knew my students, even those I thought I knew well. This made me wonder how well I even understood their answers to my questions. I will now address the latter two findings in more detail.

Mismatching Goals

In chapter three I described my efforts from the first day of class to communicate to students that, while passing the AP test was a goal of the course, growing as a responsible and active citizen was even more important. Through our discussions and early lessons, I assumed students shared my commitment to active citizenship as a primary class goal. Many of them expressed support for characteristics of responsible citizenship – being informed, active, and caring citizens. However, as I later reflected upon the findings of what students found valuable, I realized that most of them did not share this goal for our course in practice. In retrospect, this explains some of the frustrations students and I shared concerning disagreements and

misunderstandings about assignments. In many cases the goals that my students and I held for our class conflicted.

There were three primary contributors who brought different and complex aims to the AP Government course: the official curriculum, my students, and me. The overall purposes of these three contributors can be better understood by analyzing what content was valuable in each sphere. I will address how these groups might answer questions differently such as: What content is most valuable? How should official content be utilized, if at all? I will employ the three ways students found value in content – passive, academic, and active – to address how the transactional goals of these three contributors overlapped, corresponded, and conflicted with each other.

Despite my persistent efforts to encourage them to find meaning and application in course content, many students communicated that they found value in passive understandings of knowledge. Students who valued knowledge in passive ways were often unable to convey reasons for how, and why, content learned might be worthwhile. Students expressed this passive valuing when they stated knowledge was worth having for its own sake, that it would be valuable at some later time, or when it helped them to make sense of content. Students expressed that schoolwork was often irrelevant to their personal lives. This did not surprise me, because I had felt the same way in school.

With this passive valuing in mind, I tried to work with students to make meaningful connections between the content and their understanding of the world. I believed that forming connections would be an easy task in our course because governmental and political topics are frequently in the news, and my students seemed

curious, at least in class, to understand current events. I tried to help students by drawing on the familiar to introduce unfamiliar issues. For example, I began a unit on civil liberties earlier in the year by focusing on student liberties in school (e.g., *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969), *New Jersey v. TLO* (1985)). It does not appear I was very successful in working with students to find relevant connections to content in the Congress unit. A number of students could not explain the relevance behind items they claimed to be important. Passive explanations sometimes seemed to be caused by student perceptions that schoolwork had little to do with the world outside of school even when presented with direct connections. There was significant overlap with academic interpretations of value in many of the passive comments.

It is possible that even though students expressed value concerning certain topics that they did not hold these beliefs deeply. On many occasions, students matter-of-factly made statements like "of course you should know about your government." I presumed that many of them grew up being told that American democracy represents the best possible governmental system. They often brought this perspective to my class, even though they showed little understanding of how our system works. Many of their actions and statements conveyed that they had few plans to live in strongly democratic and active ways. While students said content in the Congress unit and course were worthwhile, it was difficult to ascertain whether this was a deeply held belief or if they were simply regurgitating a metanarrative of our culture. Regardless of the reasons for passive explanations of the value, it was frustrating when my students did not find, or could not articulate, what application content might have for our world. I am sure there are many teachers who can identify with these frustrations.

The scope and quantity of the official curriculum presented a formidable challenge to deviating far from academic aims. All three contributors – the official curriculum, my students, and I – supported the academic aims of the course, even if reasons for doing so varied. The official curriculum provided a comprehensive course with embedded academic aims that were reinforced by a high stakes end-of-year test. The College Board (2010) maintained that they do not mandate any one curriculum, but instead encouraged teachers to develop their own. Yet, it is unrealistic to expect teachers to vary far from a curriculum with such a massive amount of content. Their "expectations" for what content should be covered includes hundreds of terms that "are usually covered in all college courses," but are foreign to high school students. This includes knowing terms like amicus curiae brief, the Budget Reform Act of 1974, frontloading, and the incorporation doctrine (College Board, 2010, p. 6). These are not terms easily learned by high school students and there are hundreds of them that can be included on the test. It would be difficult to adequately prepare students for the AP test if teachers really taught a distinct curriculum in any meaningful way.

Almost all students, even those students who saw active knowledge as valuable, accepted academic aims of the course for a variety of reasons. Many of them said the incentive of gaining college credit for scoring well on the AP test provided an impetus to take, and succeed in, the class. Several students expressed a general acceptance of the fact-heavy structure of AP classes. They expected to learn large chunks of information for tests because that is what they had always done in school. The AP way of doing school had become normal for many students after years of honors, pre-AP, and AP classes. They were used to learning this way and many found

value in succeeding within this system. Some students also appreciated, and even found comfort in, the structure of academic goals found in the textbook and vocabulary terms. When we stuck closer to the official curriculum they often found the class more manageable because of its predictability.

I also supported the academic aims for the course for an assortment of reasons. First, even though I often disagreed with much of the structure and make-up of the official curriculum, I felt it would be unfair not to prepare my students for the AP test. Most students took the class with the understanding that it would help them receive college credit via a high AP score. Some students relied on the AP test to ease the financial burden of college. While I did vary from the official curriculum at times, I never veered far enough that I thought their success on the test would be jeopardized. To veer from the official curriculum in ways that would harm students' ability to score well on the AP test would be to break an understood covenant for the course.

Secondly, just as my students were assessed by colleges based on their AP scores, I was informally assessed at my school. While there were no direct punishments or rewards when students scored well, there were many indirect ones. After all of my students passed the AP Psychology test in my first year at Mooney, the principal regularly sung my praises regarding my students' scores and my teaching abilities. High AP scores by my students also seemed to result in increased trust by the administration towards my lessons in general. They never questioned my projects, or tests, and were supportive in any efforts I undertook. I did not think that the official AP curriculum was necessarily bad. In fact, I found most of the content interesting.

My biggest complaint with the official curriculum was not that it was bad, but that it covered far too much content, and this often resulted in superficial coverage of topics. For example, the Budget Reform of Act of 1974 could serve as the basis for understanding very important issues, but it was difficult to do so when such a complex bill was to be covered in just a couple minutes of class time. It was common to hear students asking each other right before the test, "what was the Budget Reform Act of 1974 again?" as if they had never heard of it before. I am sure that very few students remembered this term by the time summer break began. This was one of hundreds of vocabulary terms students were expected to be able to recall on the AP test. I taught the academic aims of the official curriculum because I was supposed to, but it often proved frustrating because I did not believe much of it was effective in helping students grow as citizens.

While the official curriculum could provide a foundation for knowledgeable citizenship concerning how our governmental and political systems function, I believe it ultimately failed to prepare students to grow as citizens. The official curriculum privileged factual knowledge of political scientists at the expense of the development of many skills and dispositions. The fact that few students expressed active ways to utilize content knowledge seems to support the merit of my concerns. The shortcomings of the official curriculum led me to make attempts to add to, and veer from, the curriculum at times throughout the course. Those attempts that students viewed as connected to the AP curriculum (e.g., current events) went relatively smoothly, but students rejected more obvious detours from our test preparation (e.g., call to Congress assignment).

Students generally rebuffed efforts that veered from the AP curriculum for various reasons. Some specifically cited the time taken away from test preparation. Even if it had been explained when the assignment was introduced, many students were unable to recall the purpose of some projects. Several comments indicated a number of students did not believe they could, or would, participate in democratic processes, beyond voting in the future. Simply put, despite my best efforts, most students did not share my goals, or at least my methods, for developing active skills for democratic citizenship. It was frustrating to find that the aims of my students and I were misaligned because it caused me to question what, and why, I teach. Did my class help students become better citizens or just better test takers?

Complex Perspectives

Once I had categorized the types of value my students found in our AP Government course, gaps remained in the data for these categories and I strove to better comprehend the perspectives of various students. Many students seemed to find value predominately in one of the categories of knowledge – passive, academic, or active – I had identified, and I suspected that their answers must be more complex than my categories made it seem. Others regularly revealed characteristics of different groupings. Some students identified the importance of preparing for the test in response to one question, and then conveyed the importance of active knowledge in reply to the next. In-depth individual interviews allowed me to appreciate the complexity of students' responses, and learn more about why they answered the way they did. I also learned how little I knew about many of them. I was generally

oblivious to critical aspects of their lives and I began to wonder how I could know so little about students with whom I spent so much time with daily.

The following vignettes provide depth and complexity to categories of value that emerged. Students were chosen for these interviews because their views had largely fallen within one of my main categories (see Table 3). I will begin by profiling a student who had predominantly revealed value in passive knowledge. I will then discuss one who largely communicated that she found significance in academic knowledge. I will finish by describing three students who consistently valued active knowledge, but in very different ways. I chose to interview more students whose answers were categorized as "active" because I wanted to explore what insights I could gain about why they were able to connect course content to their lives. Finally, I will consider what can be learned from this depth of information.

Table 3: Individual Interviewees' Characteristics

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Category in which student primarily expressed value
Shelby	F	White	Passive
Quinn	F	Black	Academic
Hunter	M	White	Active
Jodie	F	White	Active
Linh	F	Asian-Am.	Active

A Passive Perspective: Shelby

Shelby was an intelligent and motivated student in my first hour class. Her class was quieter than any of my other classes. They often had less intense debates and discussions on political topics, but they were usually my highest scoring class on quizzes and tests. Shelby fit in well. She was a good student who generally came to class prepared, paid attention, and maintained a high grade throughout the year. Her

curiosity led her to take discussions seriously. She contributed to our class dialogues regularly even though she seemed comfortable allowing others to take the lead. She was thoughtful yet quirky. She easily shifted from a serious statement to lighthearted joking. Her responses to my survey were illustrative as she drew imaginative cartoons around her thoughtful comments.

Shelby was able to express her opinions with confidence when she deemed it necessary. For example, one time during the semester I had posted information on our class website that was intended to help students prepare for a quiz the next day. After the quiz, and in front of the entire class, she asked whether it was fair that the information was posted when it was. She believed that it had been posted too late in the day for students to adequately prepare. I appreciated her directness as I often encouraged students to address problems or issues with me so we could resolve them. I also saw her ability to address this situation, at least upon reflection, as an important facet of a democratic classroom. Students rarely had the nerve to directly address situations, and because of this general hesitancy, I assumed she was fairly mad about the situation. However, when I asked her about it later she said she "didn't really care about that."

While I was able to get a sense of Shelby's personality in class, I knew very little about her life and opinions outside of it. I knew she was on the pom team because she would wear her uniform on game days. Because Mooney's pom squad frequently competed in national competitions, I assumed it required a substantial commitment of time outside of school. I knew little else about Shelby beyond these things.

Shelby was emblematic of the type of student who expressed value in understanding Congress better, but she seemed to do so in ways that viewed this newly acquired knowledge passively. She seemed to appreciate the knowledge she had gain about how American government when she said, "I'm really glad I took this class or I think I'd be really ignorant." While she found the unit interesting and described the content as good to know, she did not really elaborate why or how this information might be useful. She also valued academic aims as she appreciated that we dedicated time to study vocabulary terms that would likely appear on the AP test. She found the call to Congress, the most active assignment of the unit from my perspective, as the least valuable item we studied, and she implied that she did not really care about the issue she chose.

There was little evidence that indicated Shelby had a lasting interest or dedication to addressing the topics covered in class once the semester ended. When I asked her if any aspect of the course had made her more likely to get involved or participate in any way she hesitantly said, "I guess… if I felt really strongly about an issue…" Even though we had already studied a multitude of subjects and discussed many ways to get involved, Shelby's tone indicated an ambiguity about ever actually doing so beyond voting. My fear with Shelby, and other students who expressed similarly passive views, was that my class would do little to encourage her to embrace views of citizenship that were more participatory. I worried my class would help students learn a little about how our government works, but that it would not really affect their behaviors. Talking to Shelby about these issues in more depth did not allay these fears, but her comments revealed more complex views of our class.

As we talked in more detail I gained a better understanding of her life and her views. When I asked Shelby about what she did in her free time she replied, "I don't have free time." Following up on this comment, I learned that many of students had little free time. When Shelby was not in school she was usually working on homework for her numerous AP classes, or dedicating time to dance or pom practice. She loved dancing and spent at least a couple of hours a day honing her skills. Shelby believed that the busy schedules of her and her classmates affected their attitudes towards some class assignments. She said that having so much to do can wear them out, and finding ways to finish all their assignments can prove challenging.

Shelby said that she, and a lot of her peers, looked at the call to Congress assignment as "just something I have to do." This attitude resulted in students picking issues just to complete the assignment. It seemed that Shelby saw it as a waste of time, but as we talked more she suggested, "Maybe we could have decided as a class a like single subject we cared about and then like repeatedly called them for a week. And maybe then maybe they would have paid more attention to it." Her comment seemed to contradict the numerous passive statements she had made up to that point. This single suggestion at least showed she was creatively thinking about how active participation might be more effective. It was a good idea too. This suggestion caused me to wonder why I did not involve students more in designing the assignment in the first place.

Shelby showed potential for more active citizenship in other ways also. She revealed that AP classes, especially this class and Biology, had broadened her outlook, and caused her to be more curious about the subject matter. She admitted that she now

sometimes watched CNN because she better understood what they were talking about. Being "forced to pay attention" to current events in my class helped her to focus on issues beyond her day-to-day life. She expressed that she was glad learn the basics about our government and politics, because she was no longer ignorant.

She also mentioned that the class has helped her to be more critical when watching campaign advertisements, or advertising in general. She used to "believe everything" she saw on television, but now she questioned things more. Finally, Shelby indicated she has already voted and seemed excited to have done so. While she often talked about our course passively, talking in more depth indicated she possessed some of the tools necessary to be an active and responsible citizen.

I suspect that not all students who spoke passively about our class would show as many positive characteristics as did Shelby, but her overall views still indicated a passive view of citizenship. She plainly expressed this passive view concerning our course in saying, "It's definitely really important to understand. If not to use it, but to at least be able to understand what's going on. There's a personal benefit… in having the knowledge…" Once the class ends, will Shelby utilize tools for active citizenship or will just having the knowledge suffice? Did she maintain her curiosity for understanding once our class ended? Without being "forced to pay attention" to current events, will she? There are many unanswered questions, but Shelby did provide some hope that my students, even those who speak passively about their role in our democratic society, may have some of the tools necessary to be an active and responsible citizen.

An Academic Perspective: Quinn

Quinn was similar to Shelby, her first hour classmate, in many ways. Quinn was usually quiet, but she was not hesitant to share her opinion either. She was a diligent student who usually came to class prepared. She was always attentive and respectful of others. I thought I knew Quinn better than some other students because she had taken my semester-long Sociology course as a sophomore.

That sociology class was very different from AP Government because there were far fewer pacing and testing requirements. We had the freedom to explore topics deeply without rushing to cover the next content area. I remembered Quinn as being particularly mature for her grade level as she was able to articulate opinions concerning difficult issues (e.g., ethnocentrism, racism, sexism, class consciousness) very well. The class was one of my favorite to teach, and Quinn really enjoyed it because, as she said, it "was more laid back. We didn't have a test we specifically had to study for." Quinn excelled in Sociology, but our AP Government curriculum provided a very different challenge. Quinn rose to this challenge academically by putting in the necessary time to maintain a good grade throughout the year.

Quinn's initial answers to questions conveyed that she found value exclusively in academic aims. She said the Congress unit was "valuable to know for this class but I don't think I'll ever use it outside of this class." She disclosed that the vocabulary terms, and the subsequent quizzes over them, were the most valuable items in our Congress unit to her. She did not see a point in the call to Congress, and did not think most people accomplished anything during their calls. Quinn did not indicate that she found any value in the course content beyond achieving academic objectives.

Her personal life helped to explain why she prioritized academic goals. She was very busy during her senior year. Her part time job, soccer, and homework load took up most of her time. Quinn's mother raised her and her four siblings on independently. Quinn supplemented her family's income by working roughly thirty hours a week at a fast food restaurant. She was also passionate about playing soccer. She played for Mooney's varsity team and this took up a considerable amount of time during the week.

On top of all these responsibilities, she had a great deal of homework because she took all AP classes (besides soccer). Quinn took the challenge upon herself to take on such a difficult course load. Her mother always encouraged her children to excel, but she allowed Quinn and her siblings to choose to do so. Quinn's ambition to succeed academically and financially, along with her passion for playing soccer, left her with little free time. She said that she often turned down invitations to go to the movies because she would rather "sleep or do her homework."

While Quinn continued to express that she valued academic aims, when we talked in more depth, her personal life provided a context that helped me better understand why she held her views. Quinn said she found value in subject matter that helped her succeed on tests, but she made it clear that she did not agree with how tests are used in school. She said that she did not like how in "AP classes we're working towards one specific test," because the content on the test might not assess the strengths of a student. She felt "tests just decide everything," but "you can still be smart and be well educated" and perform poorly on a test.

Quinn's apprehension about the privileged status of high stakes tests over other types of assessment seemed to explain why she may have focused so much on succeeding academically. She was never a great test taker in class, yet, she felt like much of her future could be determined by her scores. While she disagreed with the emphasis put on tests, she valued succeeding within this system because she saw no other choice. Because her mother did not have enough money to pay for college, it was important to Quinn to do well academically so she might receive scholarships and "test out" of general education classes via AP tests. She eventually chose to attend a historically black university a couple states away because she received a full scholarship.

Quinn's focus on academic aims makes more sense to me in light of her circumstances, but it does not explain why she conveyed little value in course content beyond that which was academic. She echoed Shelby's comments that our course helped her understand the news better, but she neither kept up with current events, nor revealed an interest in doing so, in her personal life. She also said that AP Government broadened her horizon, but she was unable to articulate any way it might change her behavior or increase the likelihood that she might participate in society.

Most of her comments indicated disconnections between course content and her present and future lives. Because she planned on going into the medical profession, not politics, she did not see how the course would be relevant. She stated, "…Not most people are going to know much about Congress because most people aren't going to go into a profession that deals with all that." It seemed that neither our class discussions about citizenship, nor our brief discussions about the effects of recent

health care legislation, resonated much with Quinn. She saw being a Congressperson as a job for a select few, but indicated that citizens had little to do with the legislative process. She then restated what she believed was the purpose of our class, at least for her, "There's nothing I can use [the course knowledge] with besides to pass the course…" She also admitted that she expected to quickly forget most of the information.

While Quinn's comments almost exclusively focused on academic aims of the course, she did describe one issue that went beyond these aims. She explained that she liked our unit on social welfare best "because I can kinda understand that stuff – like when we watched that video about Tamarla Owens and her son…" I was surprised that she remembered the name of the mother from a ten minute clip from the movie *Bowling for Columbine* (2002). I used the clip to discuss positive and negative effects of welfare reform laws. It was one of my lessons that briefly veered from the official curriculum to encourage students to think seriously about welfare issues in our communities. Quinn said her mother was on welfare when she was younger because her family "needed it to survive." She continued, "It kinda gets to the heart – cause some people say you should take away money because people are just using it, but when you come from a background when you know people who really needed it..." I could hear her voice breaking as she discussed her opinions. When I asked Quinn if there were any ways this class might help her get involved in an issue she cared about, like welfare, she responded that she might be able to vote for something related to this issue in the future. She did not mention any other ways to get involved and then reiterated that passing the test was her chief goal.

Active Perspectives: Jodie, Hunter, and Linh

Jodie, Hunter, and Linh represented the few students who found value in knowledge that could be actively utilized in their lives. I had many exceptional students who mastered the academic aspects of my class. They aced tests and completed projects that appeared to be professionally done. Yet, only a few truly embraced the aspects of the course that veered from academic aims and focused on active citizenship. I chose to profile these three students because their stories and perspectives were all unique and I expected them to offer some insights and hope.

Before I began to interview them in-depth, I wondered – what is it about these particular individuals that caused them to view knowledge as something that could be utilized to affect their world? I found that their backgrounds were foundational to their views. This might indicate that maintaining these types of aims may not be something that a teacher can instill in her or his students, but recognizing how and why these students connected and applied their education outside of the school setting could prove valuable.

Jodie was a quiet member of our first hour class who spoke with a Minnesotan accent. She was an excellent student who was reliably prepared and paid attention to everyone in our classroom. It took Jodie a while to speak up in class, but once she did, she made valuable contributions. She had previously taken my Sociology class, but I did not learn much about her because of her quietness. She liked our small AP government section because she "participates more" and it allowed her to "become closer to the teacher and the students so you feel more comfortable and confident."

When we were able to talk for an extended period of time I learned a lot about her life that I did not know previously. Jodie's father had died two years earlier, when she was enrolled in my Sociology class. Even though I remember her missing class for a funeral, Jodie never mentioned it. It was a tough time for her because she was very close with her father. She explained that "he was a lot like me…I guess I'm a lot like him." He believed in education and taught her to work hard for what she wanted.

Jodie did work hard in school and planned to attend college despite the challenges of her home life. She spent most of her free time, around four hours per night, preparing for her four AP classes. Her academic success earned her several scholarships that were to help her pay for college. It was crucial she received scholarships because she obtained no financial support from anyone in her family. Her father also taught Jodie to be selfless. He told her that "life is temporary and we're all in it together and you shouldn't just choose your selfish dreams. You should help out others as much as you can." After her father passed, she went to live with her mother, who Jodie said did not like her. She "had to kinda step up and take care of the house" because her mother was disabled. Eventually, Jodie's mother threatened her and she was placed in foster care. She turned eighteen in March and exited the system, just a few weeks after we finished our Congress unit.

Jodie had to grow up quickly because of her situation and it showed at times in class. During both our bureaucracy and social welfare units she was able to connect our course content to her troubles dealing with the bureaucracy of the Social Security Administration. This was not a problem that concerned most of her eighteen year old peers. Maybe it was her maturity, or maybe it was the influence of her father, but Jodie

was frequently interested in the possible implications of course content for herself and others.

Instead of simply explaining that it was good to understand how Congress works for passive or academic purposes, Jodie indicated that she valued content related to her role as a citizen in a variety of ways. She revealed that she does not keep up with current events as much as she would like, but said she hopes to pay closer attention as elections draw near. She stated, "I've been getting excited to vote, ya know? That's always such a big responsibility in my family and it's something we got really excited about…"

Jodie identified other ways to participate in democratic processes besides voting. She recognized learning about how "Congress members receive input from constituents" as the most valuable aspect of this unit because she "used to think they just did what the President told them or what they wanted to do." Many students mentioned voting as important, but few identified other ways to influence legislators once they took office. Jodie also mentioned that she could affect change by working with an interest group to address an issue. She said that this unit helped her realize influencing a legislator was something she could actually do and it was not just "something everyone else did." Affecting legislators became meaningful to her as she identified an issue she cared about for her call to Congress.

After integrating her knowledge from AP Government and her AP Human Geography course, Jodie chose to address agricultural issues. She initially stated that the call to Congress was the least valuable item of the unit because she was nervous

and received little feedback from her call, but she had changed her mind when I talked to her later in the semester. She described her change of heart:

> …looking back I think it like helped because if I really do wanna get involved I have to, ya know, learn to be more confident and stand up for what I believe in and so I think it really would help me in the future…but in that moment it really scared me.

She asserted that the call assignment made her "actually go through all the steps and apply what I learn. I can't just sit there and memorize…I have to actually go through and do it." She said she envisioned making a call to Congress again in the future. Jodie expressed that the AP Government course will help her alter existing situations because she better understood "who's in charge of what" because "the initial step is finding out who you need to talk to."

Jodie valued active aims for the course and realized she differed from many of her peers. "I've heard some people say, oh ya know, we need to focus on the AP test, and I'm like – why? It's just one test! But oh well. That's me." She further stated:

> I don't want to just know how to do well on a test. Yeah that's important…but I want to know like what I'm learning how that's gonna affect my life. Like how I can use that information and actually do something with it.

She recognized why many of her classmates did not value some of the projects that veered from the official curriculum as she did by disclosing:

> There were times where I thought the projects were a little much. But honestly if this was my only class it would be fine - but it was just time consuming and it's not just the projects themselves it's on top of all the other classes. And for me, it wasn't all that bad because most of my other classes weren't that bad, but I know for a lot of people in physics and calculus they just thought it was horrible and I was like, well, it's not the project it's everything else. But I think it's great.

Jodie was also generally critical of grades and testing in schools. She complained that "grades only reflect what you don't know" and questioned whether grades and tests helped students fulfill their potential.

Hunter was a sharp, outgoing and humorous student in my small sixth hour class. He was a Canadian citizen who moved around frequently because his father was in the military. Hunter always participated in class discussions and displayed knowledge about a wide variety of topics. He often informed our discussion with stories or issues related to course content. Hunter was inconsistent academically as he showed the ability to score very well or poorly on assessments.

He started the year as an attentive contributor to our class, but as our class became more comfortable with each other, he increasingly became more of a class clown. I appreciated humor in our class because I like students to feel comfortable and enjoy themselves, but I had to talk to Hunter several times that his joking was sometimes distracting other students and me. It was difficult to determine when Hunter had crossed the line because his lighthearted approach also made our class enjoyable. There were days when his temperament affected other students, especially his male peers whom, I believe, saw him as a leader in our class. There were other days when his attention and contributions were exceptional. Hunter had a keen interest in how things worked and was an active member of the school robotics club.

Talking to Hunter in-depth helped me to better understand several aspects of his personality I only saw glimpses of in our class. I knew Hunter had moved around a lot during his life, but I did not realize the extent of his mobility. He was born in

Canada and then lived in Germany, France, Oklahoma, Ontario, Toronto, Colorado, and Oklahoma again. He never lived in any place for more than three years. This continuous movement made it "hard to keep in touch with friends." His parents were "somewhat restrictive" on the amount of time he could spend with classmates outside of school "because our family is the one constant thing, so they don't want to put that in jeopardy…They want to have a lot of family time." Class time served to meet social needs for Hunter and helped to explain why he could become a source of entertainment for his classmates.

Like other students in AP classes, Hunter said the amount of time required to complete homework meant he did not "have time to do as much anyways." He believed it was important to maintain balance within his life, He tried to find time for running or working out so his "body is fit like his mind is." Hunter described his parents as "strict with [his] schooling" because they demanded he spend four hours every day to prepare for his four AP classes. For a while he came to resent these demand and he would not prepare for his classes if he could get away with it, but after his grades dipped, he tried to take more responsibility for his academic success.

Hunter viewed knowledge as a tool that could help people understand and affect systems. He said:

> If you know how a system works, if you know the basic dynamics of how things work, then you can plug your own ideas in there. You can change it. Make it better. You can just become a player in that system. Just change things.

He further stated that a government class should "focus on like what you can do, and like how you can affect the system and how you can like change things. So that like in the future if there's something you don't like about government you can change it."

He called this type of active knowledge "applicable knowledge." He enjoyed "hands-on projects like the phone call, mock Congress, and other projects that helped gain an understanding of the system in place and how it works."

Unlike many students, Hunter picked an issue he cared about for his call to Congress. He called Senator Tom Coburn's (R-OK) office with specific questions about proposed net neutrality legislation. He compared a bill that would require Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to constantly monitor what their customers are doing online to the totalitarian government in Orwell's (1949) *1984*. Even though he was disappointed that he was "sorta brushed away" by Senator Coburn's staff, he said the call to Congress assignment was "great," because "to actually be able to talk to the office was a really, really great way of showing that people can change things."

Hunter had a talent for holistically connecting different things he learned and applying that knowledge. He believed that "you can't just stay in your little bubble" because all the things that are happening "have an effect on everything else." He regularly was able to make connections like the one where he related our summer reading assignment to his call to Congress issue. He was interested in world conflicts, largely because of his fathers' work, but he did not want to just know what is happening now, he wanted to understand the origins of such struggles. He also talked about how *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* "really captured like all the different units that we're going to be covering over this year." Off the top of his head and unsolicited, he described how the film connected to five different units from the course. These were the types of connections I hoped my students would make.

Hunter stated that a lot of students were not really challenged to think about why they learned what they did in schools. He said the average student left high school with "all this knowledge, with all these random little things and they have no idea how to put it together." He said that a government course should encourage "a high sense of political efficacy" because a lot of people think they cannot affect a huge system, but "the government is supposed to work for the people. If you turn around and don't think you can change it, or change anything, or make the world a better place, then what's the point of it?"

Hunter was one of the few students able to articulate ways a citizen could actively participate in democratic institutions that connected with course content. Most students mentioned voting, but very few bought up other ways to participate. Hunter, on the other hand, said:

> For example, PACs [Political Action Committees] and interest groups are all really great organizations if used correctly. You can join a PAC or you can join an interest group or you can go out and protest on something or demonstrate. You can even lobby legislature at a state level or a federal level. It's really important to go out and affect things and there are a lot of ways you can do that.

He also explained that he tries "to stay as informed as I can," but he did not want to merely keep up with the news. He helped to disperse important stories through the website reddit.com. Reddit is a social news website that is driven by users who post stories and links. Users can specialize what type of information they follow and popular stories are profiled. Hunter posted a video link that his International Studies teacher showed in class to raise awareness about the hazards of landmines. The link was viewed by thousands. He saw this use of the internet as a way to inform others about an important issue.

Linh was an outspoken and academically successful classmate of Shelby and Quinn in my first hour class. She was of Vietnamese decent and this was an important part of her identity. Linh kept up with current events nationally and internationally. She held strong opinions and was not afraid to express them in class. When the 2011 Egyptian revolution broke out, I asked students in first hour if they knew what was happening in Egypt. Even though it was the leading story on national news programs at the time, only two students knew about it prior to our class discussion. Linh was one of the two and she later mentioned that she had re-tumbled articles about Egypt. Tumblr is a microblogging website where users can post information or re-post (or re-tumble) information or stories posted by others.

Every so often Linh expressed her political frustrations in class. At the beginning of one class Linh conveyed infuriation at Congressional attempts to cut funding to Planned Parenthood as part of larger budget cuts in the federal government. She believed it to be an unjust effort, but her passion seemed to fall on deaf ears as none of her classmates responded to her concerns. It was doubtful that many of her peers knew much about the issue.

Linh's active use of knowledge was evident far before I began questioning students. She was an active member of STAND – a student anti-genocide club at our school that I monitored. She was always concerned with ways the club could encourage awareness and make a difference through fundraising or contacting elected officials. Linh was inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 and she wanted to do something to contribute to the cause of the revolutionaries. She used her own money to print and buy t-shirts (see Illustration 1) that showed support for people challenging

totalitarian regimes. She sold the shirts around school and attended community events to sell them. She took a loss on the shirts so she could donate more money to charity. Linh's enthusiasm inspired me and I tried to support her efforts by making announcements about her project, or selling her shirts. Linh's ability to use her knowledge of the issue and do something about it was something that I wanted all my students to aspire to.

Illustration 1: T-shirt produced by Linh in support of Arab Spring protestors.

I knew a lot about what Linh believed both from class and STAND, but I did not know why she believed what she did. Like Jodie and Hunter, her parents and past were influential in her active outlook. Her mother was from South Vietnam, and her father was from North Vietnam. Both of them had immigrated to California after the American war in their country. Her father was a Prisoner of War (POW) and dramatically escaped the country for a better life in the United States. Her parents met in college. When they were laid off as engineers they moved to Oklahoma when Linh was only eight months old.

While her parents left their native country behind, they brought their culture and beliefs with them and passed them on to their daughters. Linh said her mother "instilled in me to be grateful for everything I have." Part of this comes from her family's Buddhist beliefs. Her mother donated five hundred dollars every year to Vietnamese temples that take care of orphans. Linh pointed out that she does not follow the passive teachings of Buddhism because she could be considered an activist in regards to many issues. When I asked Linh why she cared so much about what happened in the world she said:

> I always get surprised when people are surprised at me, that I know so much about the world. We live in a world that is so technologically advanced and you're connected to everything and everything in the world affects the rest of the world whether you want it to or not. There's also a lot wrong with the world. I really want to focus on stuff that's really awesome, but all the things that go wrong in the world really bother me. I want to make a difference in some way that will influence outcomes of other things. Very un-Buddhist, but that's okay.

She appreciated a project from the previous semester where students had to find a way to help citizens become more informed about confusing state questions on the ballot during the November elections because, as she said, "it got me thinking on how I could get issues out there."

Linh was not only concerned with an active use of knowledge, she also wanted to have academic success. She said it would be frustrating to take "an entire year of a class that's really hard and [not] pass [the test]." She therefore valued those things that helped her pass the test. She found the vocabulary terms, group work concerning how a bill becomes a law, and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* valuable for her academic understanding. Even though she wanted to succeed academically she declared that "standardized testing is terrible," including AP testing.

She mentioned that she took AP classes because she had a "thirst for learning" that she hoped would continue throughout her life. She believed that AP Government could also help students to think for themselves and not just vote the way their parents did. The Congress unit specifically helped her realize how significant a role Congress plays in national policymaking. Linh particularly enjoyed keeping up with current issues via current events or the State of the Union speech. She found the call to Congress assignment somewhat discouraging because the interns were unable to constructively respond to her questions about term limits. She mentioned that talking to her actual representative might have been worthwhile though.

She stated that it is important to "know what our government is doing and how it works although a lot of it can just be disheartening." As the semester progressed, she became increasingly concerned with the amount of corruption she believed existed in our government. She also voiced frustration with issues like the considerable size of the national defense budget and the limited options presented by the two party system. Even though these were vexing topics, she still appreciated learning about them because "seeing problems is what motivates people to fix things."

These in-depth interviews helped me to better understand the complexity of student perspectives. As it turned out, I knew surprisingly little about my students and their lives. I had believed that Quinn had little interest in anything other than passing the test and then moving on with her life. Initial surveys had certainly substantiated this belief, but once I talked to her in more detail I learned her views were more complicated. Shelby's initial answers indicated that she viewed knowledge gained in the course passively because she showed little inclination to utilize it in her life.

Further discussions revealed that she had developed an increased curiosity that might serve as a foundation for future involvement. She also mentioned creative ways that sustained activity (i.e., making calls regularly) might make the call to Congress more effective. While she still exhibited a largely passive view of knowledge, she showed inklings of something else also.

To my surprise, Quinn, who had expressed value solely in terms of her academic aims, actually resented high pressured tests and her struggles on them likely pushed her to focus on them more. She revealed that studying social welfare was important to her because her mother benefitted from the program and Quinn thinks a lot of people have misconceptions about it. While Quinn still did not articulate a strong desire to become a more active citizen, she did show concern that I had not seen previously.

Three students, Jodie, Hunter, and Linh, expressed value in knowledge that could be used. Their backgrounds, probably more so than anything I did in class, contributed to their perspectives. Jodie's father, Hunter's military life, and Linh's parents' Vietnamese heritage and Buddhist beliefs, influenced how they looked at the world. All these students brought their active views of knowledge to our class and were more inclined to appreciate subject matter that clearly veered from the official curriculum in favor of fostering some kind of stronger form of citizenship.

Several other findings emerged from the in-depth interviews. First, student after student indicated that the workload of their AP classes left them little free time for a personal life. Every student I interviewed was enrolled in three to five AP classes. They repeatedly mentioned bypassing invitations from friends because they did not

have enough time. After having taking three AP tests in one day, Hunter walked into my room and wrote a funny, but telling, note on the board (see Illustration 2) that seemed to reiterate that students often were consumed and stressed out by their AP classes.

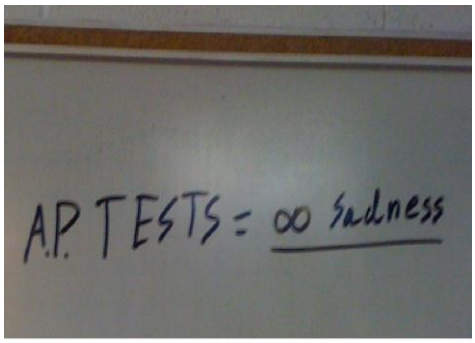

Illustration 2: Hunter's note

Students also indicated that they often did not have the time necessary to truly learn the content. Shelby mentioned that a lot of the content does not "stick until you learn it a second time," but then revealed that students are rarely able to come back to that content because of the amount of curriculum that must be learned. Students all agreed that they retained very little of the information learned in their AP classes. It was very difficult to ascertain what students found personally valuable within a system with built-in tangible rewards (e.g., grades, college credit, GPA), but in-depth interviews helped to better understand some students' perspectives.

A Paradigm Shift

A story about Baily, a student from my fourth hour class, further spoke to the complexity of students' perspectives. She was the student profiled earlier in the chapter who could only articulate not being "ignorant" to explain why she should keep up with what was going on in the world. Baily had sent me a respectful e-mail revealing her concerns about the call to Congress assignment. She said:

> I am starting to get worried about not being prepared for our AP test, and I believe we need to spend what time we do have on only the items that will be on our test. Activities like this call to congress can wait until after the test…

Her rejection of an assignment that veered from the official curriculum, which she viewed as something that could be put off until later, concerned me. I assumed "later" meant never.

Every indication revealed that Baily maintained primarily passive and academic views of course content because she seemed to have little concern with any type of stronger citizenship. However, this did not turn out to be the case. The time prior to the AP test was consumed by intensive review of the entire course. This, coupled with the fact that students were regularly missing class for other AP tests, led me to decide that students deserved a break. After students returned from the AP test I told them we could watch *A Few Good Men* (1992) to unwind a little bit. This would allow students to both relax after weeks of intense test preparation and discuss issues addressed by the movie (e.g., military courts, national defense, ethical issues). As we started this assignment Baily confronted me.

To my surprise, she told me she did not want to watch the film because she wanted to do something to make a difference. I had never believed that she really would want to engage in projects after the AP test. She knew that past classes had done end-of-year civic projects of their choice, like voter registration drives, food collections, school supply collections, and other activities that might help their communities. There were few days left in the school year, and I was worn out by the time the AP test had passed. My students seemed worn out too. I had promoted these end-of-year projects in previous years because I believed they were important for my students to grow as active and caring citizens. Yet, I was considering bypassing them this year.

Baily's comments motivated me to encourage all my classes to pick a project that would make a difference in their community. I told my students there would be no grade and they were not required to participate, but I said that if we started a project that we needed to finish it. With the exception of just a couple students, they readily embraced the idea. Students chose similar projects as previous years. One class organized a voter registration drive at the school. Another class made and sold paper birds to raise money for relief to Japan after a major earthquake-tsunami. In the middle of their project a tornado devastated Joplin, Missouri and they decided to work with other classes in our school to make relief donations for the devastated town. Another class organized a food drive at Mooney and donated the food to the regional food bank. After some discussion, we decided we would take the collected cans to the food bank and also volunteer for a few hours while we were there.

All the projects were immensely successful and, in my opinion, made a difference within our communities. The class of students who organized a food drive at our school was able to collect more than 500 food items in just a week's time. We organized two times for groups to take our collections to the food bank and volunteer for a few hours. I was only able to attend the second date, which fell on the first day of summer break. For seniors, this was the first day of their life where they were forever free from the requirements of their K-12 education, but these high school graduates gladly spent the morning participating in a school project.

Thirteen students, including Baily, Jodie, and Linh, met me to pack boxes for the food bank. This experience, and much about the group projects, served as a paradigm shift from how our class had worked all year. There was no official

curriculum and I was not in charge of directing learning. I was certainly not an expert concerning this new curricular content. All of the projects were the students' creations. These teenagers, free from high school requirements, told me when to show up at the food bank. The food bank project helped feed the needy throughout our state. This project made a tangible difference.

It was a little awkward hanging out with my students under these new circumstances. Even if I had attempted to run a democratic classroom, there were many predetermined aspects of our situation that forced me to direct class activities without students' input. I was in charge of teaching AP Government and they were responsible for learning what I taught. Despite my efforts to foster a democratic classroom, both students and I generally maintained our defined roles throughout the year. These roles had vanished as we were packing boxes of canned foods. Even though it was strange to have such a dramatic role shift, I was excited by it. All of us seemed to be learning something worthwhile. It felt like a paradigm shift had taken place.

Due to a previous appointment I was only able to stay with the students for an hour. As I was leaving for my appointment, I told the students to have a great summer and reminded them to return to Mooney to visit me. As I walked through the parking lot to my car, I couldn't help but think "what just happened?" My data seemed to indicate that my students were not very interested in government and democracy, but were they not just living democratically? I was never as proud of my students during the course of the year as I was when I walked out of the food bank. In the next chapter

I will address the implications of these findings in light of the educational theories of John Dewey and Paulo Freire.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate what my students found valuable in our AP Government curriculum. Social studies scholars have long considered citizenship education the raison d'être for the field, but I wondered whether students were growing as democratic citizens in any way in our class. The dominant modernist culture from which American schools emerged, and still endures, has resulted in schools that are often mechanistic, divided, and undemocratic. This inquiry was prompted by my fears that, for all our efforts, my students were not maturing as citizens as I would hope.

Findings indicated that while my students professed that our class was valuable, they found value to different degrees and in different ways. Value was expressed in ways that I labeled as passive, academic, and active. As I gained a better understanding of my students' perspectives, I also learned more about myself and our transactional relationships. The research process helped me realize that the goals of my students and my goals for our course were often not analogous. These differing outlooks were highlighted by the call to Congress assignment. During this process I also realized how little I knew about many of my students with whom I spent five hours every week for nine months. Several of the ideas of John Dewey and Paulo Freire provided a lens through which to analyze and interpret these findings.

Analysis of Findings

The findings of this study could be analyzed through the lenses of a number of educational theorists, but several ideas of John Dewey and Paulo Freire proved

particularly insightful. Many of the problems identified in the findings were symptomatic of modernist influences on schools. Both theorists critiqued the types of traditional models of education that have generally held sway in the United States. I will frequently refer to Dewey's discrimination among experiences that are more likely to be educative or miseducative. I will also utilize Freire's appraisal among more and less dehumanizing and liberating situations.

Both Dewey and Freire's ideas are highly complex, and therefore, not easily applied to specific situations, but I have endeavored to stay close to their interpretations. I will analyze my findings in terms of connections and disconnections concerning what were, or could be, gained from our experiences within our AP Government class. I will also analyze disconnections between students and curriculum, relational disconnections, and, finally, connected experiences.

Disconnected Experiences Between Students and Curriculum

Many of the ideas of Dewey and Freire would likely speak to findings that indicated, on the whole, that students did not connect our AP Government curriculum to their lives. Dewey (1938) asserted that educative experiences foster future growth and miseducative experiences halt it. By this standard it seemed that many of the experiences in our course were miseducative. The first finding, that students expressed value in our AP Government curriculum, became one of the most difficult ones to understand. Once students expressed that they found value in our curriculum, my task was to better understand the significance of their ideas. As a social studies teacher and scholar, I was concerned with whether students found value in curriculum in ways that might further their growth as democratic citizens.

Dewey (1938) argued that a fragmented understanding of the world, where successive experiences are not integrated with one another, can result in individuals who have divided personalities. While almost all students stated that there was value in our AP Government curriculum, further investigation did not inspire confidence that this belief was deeply held by many of them. Also, what was deemed personally valuable was both diverse and unanticipated. When I asked a number of students to explain why our class was valuable, they often uttered phrases like, "of course you should know about your government" or "you don't want to look ignorant." Yet when I requested that they expand on these statements, they were often unable to elaborate on what they meant. For example, I previously illustrated that Baily was at a loss to explain her belief that current events were important to follow. Several others indicated it was important to understand how Congress worked, but revealed little indication, especially in the call to Congress assignment, that they might have interest in ever influencing the federal legislative process. Beyond mentioning voting, students rarely articulated ways that our course might be of use to them in order to, as Dewey might say, live democratically.

While a number of students proclaimed value in our democratic government, the numerous comments and actions that contradicted these assertions seemed indicative of miseducative and disconnected experiences. For example, even though the curriculum focused on the formal processes of democratic governance, and participants in this study indicated that they found this important, they exhibited little interest in engaging in formal political processes either in our class (e.g., during the call to Congress assignment) or in their lives outside of the school setting. These

fragmented responses emanated from miseducative school experiences that were not integrated with preceding experiences. Students' answers were especially characteristic of passive, and occasionally academic, expressions of curricular value.

Contradictory comments might also reveal that many students had internalized dehumanizing cultural myths about American democracy and education that served to objectify and define their roles in society. Dewey stated that many Americans praised democracy as the best form of government, but were often unable to justify why it was so. The comments of bewilderment by Baily and some of her classmates concerning the importance of democratic participation and our course suggested an internalization of myths about democratic participation purported by those who retain real power over these processes. Many students had thus come to accept others' explanations and agency without actively participating in these processes themselves.

An AP Government curriculum where students found value primarily in passive and academic ways was evidence of miseducative and dehumanizing experiences. Both categories of value were characterized by a disconnection between content and the lives of students. There was often little or no indication from them that the curriculum would be useful beyond simply gaining knowledge or scoring well on the AP test. Even though this accumulation of knowledge was valued in the short term, often for tests, students quickly admitted that they expected most content to be forgotten. In many cases, they explicitly stated that they did not intend to utilize content information in their lives. The disconnections between my students and our curriculum revealed education gone awry.

The top-down AP curriculum served to dehumanize students by narrating reality *to*, instead of dialoging *with*, them. Baily and others had difficulty explaining why democracy was good, why current events were worth following, or why it was worth understanding Congressional procedures. This was a result of the imposition of an oppressive, objective reality. Under this arrangement, students' understandings of the world were devalued in favor of a static government curriculum. Romanticized ideas of democracy and schooling seemed to be internalized by students who utilized undemocratic language in the same breath as they extolled the virtues of our system.

The implementation of a top-down and predetermined AP curriculum where key components of experience, continuity, and interaction were not upheld revealed disconnections between my students and our curriculum. Students' experiences were fragmented in relation to our formal curriculum. This top-down way of determining curriculum, separate from class participants, was bound to result in the study of content that was not meaningful to their lived experiences. Curricula developed externally, and without consideration of students' experiences, as was the AP Government curriculum, would likely be miseducative. Dewey might ask, as I eventually did, why would we expect students to connect with formalized knowledge that was foreign to them?

The official curriculum was the logical end product of experts (e.g., political scientists, the College Board, even myself), who deprived students of the exploration necessary for deeper psychological development. The official curriculum essentially asks them to, as Dewey said, read a finished map, separate from any relevant experiences they might already possess. What spaces are left for psychological growth

when the curriculum is presented as a finished product, a static thing? Does it not diminish the agency of students when they are expected to simply regurgitate knowledge deemed important by others? Even as I urged them to think about, and discuss, the implications of content, it seems that they sometimes did so simply to fulfill the requirements of our class. Dewey might worry that studying formal processes, like the detailed procedures necessary to pass a federal bill, would produce miseducative experiences because the starting point for learning is distant from the experiences of most students.

Disconnections between students and our curriculum seemed the consequence of a banking form of education that discounted students' perspectives. Freire would assert that the objectivist narrative provided by the official curriculum dehumanized students, preventing them from knowing their world by inhibiting their input into their studies. The curriculum tended to deposit fragments of information into students' minds, causing them to doubt their own intellectual abilities as active agents in the world. This was evident when students had difficulty explaining their stated support for our curriculum and government.

A banking form of education demands acceptance of predetermined subject matter as was evident in students' acceptance, sometimes even internalization, of the structure and content of the official curriculum. Even though many of my added projects were closely aligned with the formal governmental processes embraced by the official curriculum, many students were quick to question content that veered from AP aims. The meritocratic myth that hard work in school always leads to success seemed to have led students to buy-in to traditional school assignments and structures.

Dewey might have suggested that mere habit was responsible for the acceptance of the academic aims of the official curriculum. Many students were, in fact, used to studying content in a disconnected manner. This could also be attributed to built-in incentives and rewards (e.g., college credit, grades) for academic achievement. While students did not necessarily enjoy studying for lengthy vocabulary quizzes or reading textbook material over topics foreign to their experience, they rarely questioned it.

The official curriculum relied on a dehumanizing intellectual and objectivist tenet that was typical of scientific knowledge. This prepackaged curriculum ignored certain content, such as controversial issues, because there were no right answers to questions within these areas. Yet in practice, the curriculum served to alienate students from knowing their world in comprehendible and contextualized ways. The narrative that "everyone should know about their government" was accompanied by an official curriculum that rigidly defined government as formal political processes, while marginalizing other forms of community participation.

Students could be considered objects of an oppressive narrative that was intended to fill them with isolated fragments of information that could debilitate them from seeing the world for themselves. While two students expressed serious discontent with the official AP curriculum, even they admitted that it was personally important to pass the test. Not all students expressed academic aims as the only purpose for the course, but all students accepted it as a primary goal. Even my attempts to add content and present curriculum in ways that would foster citizenship largely failed to consider the experiences of students. When I implemented projects or assignments that clearly

veered from the official curriculum, some students complained, not that the assignment was worthless to their personal lives, but that it did not help them pass the test.

Participants in the call to Congress were quick to critique an assignment that was, like the official curriculum, imposed upon them. This lesson was developed by me with the idea of applying a formal political process to their lives. By not consulting students in the development of this assignment I risked creating a lesson they found no more relevant than much of the official curriculum. Students rejected this assignment more fiercely than any other part of our Congress unit. This seems a result of imposing a lesson upon students who did not currently see a role for themselves in formal democratic processes. For many of my students, the primary reason for our course was to pass a test, not participate in democracy. Due to the dehumanizing banking tendencies of our situation, students seemed to have internalized the logic of the official curriculum.

However, it is likely not "government" that was problematic, but the miseducative and dehumanizing way in which curriculum was developed, structured, and presented to students. Dewey especially might question the formal focus of our AP Government class. He might ask, what "government" is worth studying? The official curriculum specifically concentrated on formal and political aspects of the national government. Dewey might contend that it was not simply a "government," in this case the American federal government, that should be studied, but a wide array of participatory practices and relationships. He might wonder, what is inherently valuable about studying a federal government that is spatially and experientially distant from

students? Narrow definitions of "government" should give way to a larger and more flexible study of government in its many forms. This could include local, national, international governments, and also the non-formal "governing" of groups and communities, which is likely to be more connected to the experiences and interests of high school teenagers.

Democratic living in all aspects of life, including school life, could be central to creating more educative and liberating experiences in our curriculum. The top-down curricular structure did not encourage students to democratically participate in making decisions concerning the organization of their studies, classrooms, and schools. Is it not contradictory to teach about democratic processes without allowing students to participate in at least some decision-making? Class should not be a place to simply learn about democracy, but a place to live it. Students, and teachers, should be able to work in association with each other to create a more just and humane classroom and world. Educative and liberating experiences are not well aligned with the limited conception of government and formal political participation provided by the official curriculum.

The specialized jargon of the official curriculum further dehumanized and distanced students from the general topic of study. Students unfamiliar or uninterested in this formal process might learn that they dislike the study of government and find it boring and irrelevant to their lives. These experiences could halt or distort further growth in the very areas where it was hoped students might develop an inclination towards democratic participation in formal political processes. The inability of a number of students to elaborate on the meaning of their own statements revealed

disconnections in transactional relationships between the predetermined curriculum, our class, and their lived experiences.

Relational Disconnections

Beyond the disconnection between students and our curriculum, the research process, including surveys and interviews, helped me realize that I did not know my students as well as I thought. Even though I spent a considerable amount of time with students and interacted with almost all of them every weekday, I realized that I had often made assumptions about them that were unfounded. As I sought to investigate emerging interpretations of what participants found valuable in our curriculum – passive, academic, and active – I learned a lot about my students and gained a better sense of their complexity. The ideas of both Freire and Dewey speak to the disconnections that can exist between people in situations similar to that of my AP Government classes.

Dewey's ontological viewpoint held that reality is constantly shifting and it is necessary to consider transactional relationships to understand conditions like my AP Government classes. He would not be shocked that I was largely unaware of the interests and experiences of my students in a situation where I was expected to teach a static, standardized curriculum. Because the class was curriculum-centered, not student or problem-centered, it was easy to ignore the variety of perspectives and experiences that students brought to our setting. The official curriculum drove our course. Consequently, because interactions did not emanate from genuine concerns, but predetermined topics, it was not surprising that I might not know my students well.

Similar to my students, my connection to the official curriculum in my lived experiences was tenuous. I became more interested in the static and logical narrative provided by the official curriculum as I immersed myself in the process of teaching it. However, this interest did not necessarily translate to any increase in formal political participation in my personal life. As I studied the content, I became more interested in gaining knowledge about the topics of study. The acquisition and mastering of the official curriculum proved seductive, but ultimately distracting from providing educative experiences for my students. As I was intrigued by the nuances of topics like selective incorporation, I simultaneously moved further from the experiences of my students, who did not relate to this intellectual terminology. My interest in gaining the official knowledge of the scientific discipline blinded me to the fact that, not only were my students not interested in calling members of Congress, but neither was I. While I had participated in social change and community activities in a number of ways in my life, I had never called a member of Congress outside of this assignment.

The miseducative effect of the call to Congress assignment revealed how out-of-tune I was with the experiences and interests of my students. While I reasoned that this assignment would be a valuable way to increase students' political participation, the assignment caused a number of students to declare that they would never participate in such a process again. Both Dewey and Freire would likely explain that, similar to the official curriculum, the call to Congress assignment was imposed from above, without the input of students. If I had communicated with, and included students more in decision-making processes of our class, I likely would have realized that they would not identify with this process.

The realization that I knew very little about most of my students exposed a disconnectedness that was a result of our antidialogical situation. Because students and I did not work together to make decisions about our curriculum, we were separated by it. As I gained increasingly sophisticated understandings of the official curriculum, my interest in this subject matter often took precedence over other concerns. I was sure to utilize every minute of class time to assure students understood content, but this left very little space for anything else. Because I knew so little about my students, it was predictable that even my assignments that veered from the curriculum did not relate to the experiences of many students.

The dehumanizing separation between my students and I resulted in missed opportunities to create deeper learning experiences. For example, Quinn seemed to primarily care about the academic aims of the course. Her answers to my initial survey revealed that she found value exclusively in terms of academic ambitions. However, when I was able to interview her, she shared her more complex perspective as the child of a single mother who needed welfare to support her family. If I had known my students better and Quinn had been able to express her concerns, we might have been able to build on her experiences and foster growth in areas related to citizenship. Yet, even though Quinn cared about this issue, she seemed to have little sense of how she might address it in our society. Freire might argue that Quinn and I were dehumanized, separated from knowing each other, by a static narrative that consumed our discussions and energy. Dewey might add that understanding "democracy" or "government" in terms of lived experiences, not simply formal institutions, could allow for more active views of citizenship. If terms like democracy and government

were comprehended as active verbs rather than nouns, Quinn might have seen her concerns addressed.

Instead of coming to know my students better through our course, I came to know the curriculum better. I began to think of formal political institutions in ways that most citizens do not. While a deepened knowledge of the formal aspects of the subject can help guide learning, it can also serve to disconnect me from the issues concerning my students. It is possible that I had internalized the objective narrative of the official curriculum. As I worked closely to learn and teach the content, it was easy to assume that this information was relevant for the lives of others without asking their opinion. I often found myself criticizing students, even if just in my head, which did not engage in, or understand, the content. My increased identification with the official curriculum affected the additions that I contributed to the course.

My attempts to foster citizenship education, in association with a curriculum that primarily consisted of the study of formal political institutions, resulted in my curricular additions remaining close to the formal political aims of the official curriculum. As I reflected during the research process, I was amazed that I did not realize how out-of-tune I was with the interests and experiences of students in assignments like the call to Congress. Why would I expect students with little formal political experience to identify with, and grow from, such an experience? Scholars have found that many students relate to activities that are more social, and less formally political, in addressing issues and problems (Chiodo & Martin, 2005; Hickey, 2002).

It was not until well into the writing process that I realized by working within the constraints and structure of the official curriculum, I failed to evaluate the experiences and interests of students. While classroom participants showed some interest in following political current events in class, they did not follow them much outside of class. Students frequently expressed that they had little understanding, or interest, in government and political issues prior to our class. Because students had little prior interest in even the general topic, much less the scientific study of it, it was not surprising that most students were unable to, or uninterested in, finding consequences or application of course content.

This is remarkable considering the enormous influence that government, in both formal structures and processes and informal everyday relationships, has on our lives. Yet, within a school setting we were able to study government topics in ways that seemed irrelevant. Quinn was interested in aspects of "democracy" and "governing" in relation to an important topic like social welfare. She probably would be likely to support others in some way facing the challenges associated with poverty. This would serve as a topic where we might be able to better understand each other's experiences and come together to explore possible solutions, but the official curriculum kept us from engaging in these issues. Instead we spent our time studying the details of federal programs (e.g., TANF, Medicare), which students did not see as integral to their lives. If I had not conducted this study, I would have never known about Quinn's concerns. How many other genuine opportunities for engagement throughout the semester were lost in order to focus on the official curriculum?

Connected Experiences

Despite numerous problems of disconnection and marginalization between students and the curriculum, there were instances where participants in this study revealed meaningful connections. Of course, it was difficult to determine all the ways that content might affect the lives of students. Dewey set the bar high for what was considered a worthwhile experience. He explicated that schools should not dogmatically prepare students for democracy, but they should be in the process of living democratically (Dewey, 1916). I therefore searched for data where students were either able to state or act in ways that fostered links to our curriculum and citizenship. My findings revealed curricular connections to their lives through our study of current events, a general increase in awareness and understanding of content, connected experiences of a few "active" students, and engagement with end-of-year projects.

Of all the aspects of our Congress unit, students found the highest level of value in our study of current events, an aspect of our studies that veered from the official curriculum. As Baily demonstrated, not all students were able to explicate why current events were valuable in their lives, but there were many who were able to do so. These students indicated that it is important for a citizen to be informed. Current events might have been valuable because students easily placed them within the experiential continuum of their lives. This content was relevant to many of them because these stories dealt with real problems that were interesting and not easily solved. For example, students often had opinions concerning whether there should be stricter gun laws in the aftermath of the Gabrielle Giffords' shooting. Most students

had developed at least some opinions on gun issues and so it was not surprising that they expressed interest in learning about these issues. Content was not separated from its context and molded into a static and linear curriculum of study, but was instead evolving and complex. Current events consisted of unfolding events (e.g., Arab Spring, the Gabrielle Giffords' shooting) and controversies (e.g., political disagreements) that most students could relate to their lives in some way.

Current events helped students to understand and make sense of, and name, their world. These stories were not usually filled with as much intellectualized terminology as the official curriculum. Although there was some difficult terminology, it was often explained in simple terms to increase audience understanding. These stories also emerged from the realm of lived experiences, not the reconstructed knowledge of a discipline. A number of students indicated that following current events would be useful for making voting decisions or fostering dialogue about these important issues. Freire could reason that an understanding of current events could empower students to take an active role in their world.

A number of students indicated that the AP Government course had helped them gain a better understanding of how our government worked and this caused them to be more interested in understanding, and possibly, affecting government. This revealed that some of our class experiences were educative as further growth was evident in some students. Several students indicated that they knew little, and some were even misinformed, about how our government worked and our study helped to lay a foundation for further exploration. A few students mentioned that when they previously heard about politics they did not understand many of the formal processes.

Furthermore, developing further understanding helped students to name problems and structures that they previously could not. Some classroom participants indicated they now followed current events, discussed politics, and had even voted in their first election. These were just some activities in which students had not previously engaged and now did.

A few of those in the study, whose words and actions were often characteristic of my active category, identified with the curriculum in ways that connected to their lived experiences in deep and meaningful ways. These experiences were likely educative as students seemed to show growth, and a propensity for this to continue. These students were able to describe and demonstrate active participation within their lives, and even utilize content from our class to engage in democratic processes. A couple students within this category indicated that the class helped them to further democratic dialogue through websites like reddit.com. These individuals indicated that learning some of our content helped them make decisions about what stories to post for others to view that might address critical issues (e.g., Hunter's landmine story) in our democratic society.

Unfortunately, the educative experiences of these "active" students might be a product of lucky coincidence. When I was able to interview these students they all revealed that their upbringing, primarily their family, was highly influential on their tendency to follow issues related to politics and government. While it was encouraging that these students were able to connect content to their lived experiences through a variety of ways (e.g., on-line activism, political dialogue), teachers should not count on students arriving in their class with experiences that already match the

predetermined curriculum. That seemed to be the case with these students. Their experiences and interests aligned with the official curriculum in a number of ways and this helped to foster educative experiences. Yet, students who fit this description were few in number. While it would be easy to take lessons from these, it would be precarious to just hope that students come to class with a burgeoning interest in a subject as complex as my AP course. I was fortunate to have a few students whose interests matched up with the predetermined official curriculum, but this happy accident did not make up for all the miseducative experiences of the far greater number of students whose experiences did not mesh with our curriculum.

Dewey and Freire would likely agree that students have substantial lived knowledge in important aspects of "government," "politics," and "democracy," but that the nature of an externally imposed curriculum marginalized, instead of embraced, their experiences and interpretations regarding these issues. This was evident once the AP test was completed and, at the urging of Baily and others, we decided as a class to develop end-of-year projects. With me serving only as a guide, students willingly engaged in a variety of projects that I believe related to citizenship as much as anything else from our nine months together. The actions of the group of students who volunteered at the food bank spoke to strong political beliefs about societal poverty and their role as democratic citizens in combating it. While this project seemed to provide an invaluable experience for students in governing, democracy, and politics, it was an experience that did not help any of them score higher on the AP test. However, I believe that it provided more opportunity for growth than almost any experience within our entire curriculum.

The end-of-year project consisted of learning experiences that were driven by students' interests, not the official curriculum or my ideas. This curriculum, including our relationships, was more democratic and, consequently, more educative. Dewey would likely view these projects as practical ways to experience a participatory activity in ways that were attentive to both continuity and interaction. This was largely accomplished because students were able to choose projects that fit their interests. Projects like this were humanizing and liberating because students were active participants in determining issues and making plans to change their world. He might argue that because relationships were more dialogical, this situation allowed students to be truly human and know each other. Under these circumstances, we were united in actively addressing problems of the world together.

While the end-of-year projects, particularly volunteering at a food bank, would not be viewed by many as a prototypical topic for an AP Government class, this experience had as much to do with "governing," "politics," and "democracy" as any other content that we addressed throughout the year. I did not have to coax students to engage in this project, and the benefits were tangible as these high school teenagers packed boxes of food for those that needed it. It was humbling that students' suggestions were able to foster a learning experience that was as valuable as anything I had come up with in hundreds of hours of planning during the year, but Dewey could have predicted it.

If Dewey were to analyze our class experiences from a pragmatic perspective, I imagine he might ask, "What was the outcome of the course?" He would want to know whether the course achieved my goal, and the professed goal of the social

studies, of helping students grow as democratic citizens. Freire might wonder whether students were afforded an education that helped them become actors who influence their subjective world. It was difficult to determine the long-term outcome of a course where the primary aim, at least from my social studies perspective, was for my students to grow as citizens. While there were certainly signs of growth within our course, miseducative experiences were evident at least as often. If, as Dewey believed, citizenship should consist of on-going development, not preparation for some distant future, then our curriculum seemed inadequate to meet such lofty standards.

Implications for Theory and Practice

What do these findings mean for social studies educators and schools in general? If our social studies classes, in particular my AP Government course, might not foster growth in democratic citizenship, how might this be remedied in the future? What type of classroom or curriculum might better meet the needs of students and society? Also, how can we better know ourselves and our students within the context of our classrooms? How might stakeholders foster both situational and radical change that could result in classes where citizenship growth is a priority? I will attend to both of these types of change as I first address how teachers, and social studies educators in particular, can create spaces for more educative experiences. I will then examine the latter question concerning how we can better know ourselves and our students within the context of our classrooms.

Creating Spaces for Educative Experiences

The summer after I completed this study I found out that my students scored far above the national average on the 2011 end-of-year exam. I was pleased they did

well on the test and I felt validated by their scores. However, once I returned to the data of this study I was forced to grapple with findings that indicated many of these students who had scored so well were also unable to articulate how much, or in what ways, the content we studied might be relevant to their lives. Even worse, a number of them regarded much of our curriculum as irrelevant beyond the school setting. Eisner (2003/2004) spoke to this problem in saying, "preparation for tomorrow is best served by meaningful education today" (p. 9). I was worried because, aside from a few exceptions, there was not much evidence that my students had related to, and grown as citizens, from our class.

In meeting the extensive obligations of the official curriculum, the interests and concerns of my students and I seemed to have been squeezed out of our classroom. I believe that we need to search for ways to create spaces where more educative experiences might occur. Three ways this might happen are through an ongoing re-conceptualization of the field, by honoring varied visions of citizenship education, and by including students in democratic curriculum development and class decision-making.

Before I share these suggestions, it is important to note that these ideas are not meant to be prescriptive recommendations for all teachers in all situations. To presume that these notions will be universally beneficial would be to endorse a modernist drive towards certainty that I believe has led to disconnected experiences in many classrooms, including my own. Instead, I hope these suggestions might provide some insights and further a dialogue concerning the purposes and means for furthering citizenship growth among students.

One possible way more educative experiences might occur is if those in classrooms, teachers and students alike, are afforded more spaces for curricular explorations and decision-making. However, before these spaces can be created in classrooms, it is necessary to attend to the worldviews that are largely responsible for the interests and concerns of teachers and students being squeezed out of it in the first place. Over the last century, a modernist and scientific paradigm has served to limit the types of situations and experiences that exist in social studies classrooms, including my AP Government courses.

Because the influence of a worldview can be so pervasive so as to be almost unnoticeable, it is important to continue re-conceptualizing the purpose of schooling in general, and social studies in particular, so that other possibilities might emerge. In regards to the findings of this study, it seems worthwhile to ask why miseducative experiences occurred, and whether they were interconnected with unexamined assumptions about schooling. Dewey (1910) spoke to the challenges, and possibilities, of seeing beyond entrenched ways of thinking:

> Old ideas give way slowly; for they are more than abstract logical forms and categories. They are habits, predispositions, deeply engrained attitudes of aversion and preference. Moreover, the conviction persists, though history shows it to be a hallucination, that all the questions that the human mind has asked are questions that can be answered in terms of the alternatives that the questions themselves present. But, in fact, intellectual progress usually occurs through sheer abandonment of questions together with both of the alternatives they assume, an abandonment that results from their decreasing vitalism and a change of urgent interest. We do not solve them, we get over them (p. 18.)

Much of the debate in this country has recently centered around plans to improve education by increasing students' achievements on standardized tests (Kohn, 2000) like our AP test. Dialogues concerning the *why*, not just the *what*, of curricula must

become more commonplace if social studies education is to be more educative. Social studies educators, students, and other stakeholders, should address purposes for learning that are meaningful for life, not just school.

Opening spaces for educative experiences can only come to fruition once we get over the pursuit of objective "scientific" knowledge like that in the official curriculum, and search for more organic possibilities. Dewey turned his focus away from psychology because he felt that many in the field ignored the limitations of scientific investigation. They attempted to provide answers for questions by explaining the relationship between variables, but in doing so, ignored other variables. Similarly, social studies content that predetermines specific content is akin to a doctor planning a surgery without yet knowing a patient and their medical history. Many people have strived to reduce education into a science of certainty (Eisner, 1985), but we must recognize that our subject and students are infinitely too complex to be accurately reduced (Palmer, 1998).

Those in the social studies, scholars, teachers, and the public alike, should resist a status quo that privileges scientific knowledge of the disciplines over other ways of knowing. A high quality education has not necessarily been achieved just because experts create a curriculum, and students score well on multiple choice tests covering content. Similar to Dewey's critique of the reflex arc, those in the field should resist the reduction of the many complex facets of citizenship education to a precise science that should be universally studied. Educators should evaluate content of any curriculum with an eye towards whether it fosters citizenship growth, not as an end in itself.

It can be difficult to challenge the status quo when there are so many incentives in the current system. For example, even parents who may recognize the flaws of AP curricula are often happy to see their children succeed within this system. There are tangible (e.g., college credit) and personal (e.g., validation) rewards that serve to keep many people from changing something from which they may find benefits. On a larger scale, all stakeholders must demand curricula that provide for educative and liberating experiences that will strengthen our communities and democracy.

Those in the field must continue to envision diverse, creative, and holistic purposes in the face of pervasive modernist influences that narrow conceptions of what social studies education is and can be. We must address our cultural "crisis of perception" (Capra, 1996, p. 4), which has resulted in many possibilities and connections going unconsidered, if citizenship education is to be vital in a world that is constantly shifting and changing. Citizenship is a complex concept with powerful theoretical and practical implications for our democratic society. It becomes even more intricate when we consider the vast array of interpretations that are held by dissimilar students, teachers, and communities around the country.

More specifically, we should rethink what we want our students, and our society, to gain from a class like AP Government. If we want citizens who develop the creativity, compassion, and determination, among other assets, to face the challenges of a complex and interconnected world, then we must begin this process in our classrooms. The purpose of the official AP Government curriculum is to familiarize students with formal political and governmental processes that function at the federal

level. There is some content within the official curriculum that I believe many students are likely to find both valuable and interesting. However, there is much more content that does not connect with the experiences and interests of students. Social studies educators cannot leave the curriculum that is supposed to foster citizenship development to chance. It is key that we instead continue to ask questions like, what about "government" is worthy of study for students and society?

Educators must work with students to break down barriers between official and unofficial knowledge, formal and informal curricula, and school and life. Dewey might argue that "governing," for example, should be studied in all its complexity, not exclusively in formal and linear ways. Students and teachers should explore informal participatory processes like coordinating a food drive or organizing an ecologically conscious farmers market, as much as they should dedicate time to understanding formal political processes like calling representatives or making informed voting decisions. Class participants should investigate how the federal government works just as much as they ought to learn how to speak at a city council meeting. None of these activities are inherently superior, and so a mature teacher should help find which ones might foster the most educative experiences for their unique situations.

My findings indicate that social studies educators, and their students, need to continue to re-conceptualize the purposes and means for fostering educative experiences for citizenship growth. The narrow scientific focus of our curriculum left much to be desired in regards to what my students took from our AP Government course. Even though my class was considered successful by many of my administrators and colleagues because my students garnered high test scores, it might

be worth our efforts to raise the standards in our classrooms higher than that which can be reduced into a multiple choice format.

Another way to create spaces for more educative experiences is to honor a variety of visions for citizenship education. Honoring differing visions often involves recognizing ways of knowing besides the dominant logical and linear knowledge characteristic of scientific disciplines. These prevailing ways of knowing often do not mesh with the experiences of students who struggle to understand the logical end results of curricula predetermined by others.

A prerequisite to honoring a variety of visions is for educators, and the public, to resist attempts to excessively impose standardized curricula upon teachers and students. The standardization movements of the last thirty years have increasingly filled the spaces of classrooms with predetermined content that often do not meet the needs or interests of students or society. *De jure* standards, often at the state level, and *de facto* standards via movements like AP and Common Core, have combined to limit the abilities of classroom participants to engage in worthwhile content. Not only do standardized curricula primarily present a limited conception of knowing (e.g., scientific knowledge acquisition), but when they cover huge swaths of content, as is done in the AP curricula, there is little room for much else.

Questions concerning values, decision-making, artistic sensibilities, and other ways of knowing, should be prized as areas that are worthwhile for citizens. These ways of knowing often address some of the aspects of "governing" that might interest students. Current events frequently posed difficult political or social questions, and students identified these as the most valuable aspect of our Congress unit. It should be

expected that they were often curious about these topics. Rational-logical-scientific ways of knowing have a place in schools, but students and teachers will learn better through a variety of ways of knowing just as they often do in their personal lives.

Alternative visions for citizenship education are often devalued because they draw on disregarded ways of knowing, but they should be viewed in terms of what possibilities they make available for educative experiences. Many scholars have maintained that the field has long suffered from an identity crisis (Barr et al., 1977), but instead of asking, "How do we define the social studies?" perhaps we should ask "would the social studies be better off with a common definition?" Nelson (2001) suggested that a lack of conflict might serve as a signal that something is wrong. While definitions for the field can serve some purpose, it is important that a topic as multifaceted as citizenship education is left open so it may include many visions of, and adapt to, a complex world.

Social studies teacher Ron Briley (2000) provided one of many possible alternative visions for the growth of students that should, at least, be held equal to more scientific curriculum. Briley refused to teach AP courses because they did not fit with the philosophy and mission of his school to foster "growth toward human as well as academic excellence" (p. 528). Their curriculum sought to prepare students to succeed in traditional academic areas, but they also emphasized students' participation in athletics, arts, and school activities so students might mature as well-rounded citizens.

Briley's school avoided AP classes because the rigid schedules that these courses demanded did not allow for the flexibility to take, for example, a week long

educational trip into the wilderness. Even though the easing of the admissions process was a primary reason for creation of the early committees that sent the social studies down a path of increasingly standardized curricula, Briley indicated that students from his school were not hurt academically during the college admission process by the unique curriculum. Of course, not all schools or classrooms need to look like this model. The problem is not that all schools do not look like this, but that this seems an unrealistic option for the great majority of schools today. One way of doing social studies education, a linear and scientific approach, should be challenged as room is cleared for alternative visions.

Despite the efforts of the early committees, Edward Thorndike, the College Board, and various other educational reformers, the intricate task of teaching cannot be reduced to a precise science. What Dewey, Freire, and many educators like Briley recognize is that a worthwhile education consists of meaningful experiences. What makes an experience meaningful and worthwhile differs from person to person, class to class, school to school, and community to community. This study indicates that without flexibility in schools, teachers, despite their best efforts, are doomed to only occasional success in providing educative experiences. There can be no prescription for citizenship education. It requires thoughtful decision-making concerning the needs and interests of specific students in unique situations. If fostering citizenship is to be a goal then who is better equipped to explore such a complex topic than those who are to be affected?

Another possible way to create space for educative experiences is to include students in more democratic curricular and classroom decision-making. This is one

way to closer align the experiences of students and teachers with a worthwhile curriculum. Including students as co-investigators in their education could greatly increase the likelihood of educative experiences because they are far less likely to find content irrelevant that they helped to determine. Both Dewey and Freire might argue that if we are to nurture democratic citizenship in our students then we must start by living democratically in our classrooms. How can we fail to model democratic interactions within our classrooms if we hope for students to grow as democratic citizens?

This study has afforded me a greater appreciation of the possibilities for democratic processes in classrooms, including my own. While I attempted to make my AP Government classes democratic in some ways, I also realize areas where I made top-down decisions that did not prove to be educative. Aside from teaching about democracy, social studies educators should continue to explore ways to live democratically within their classrooms. Of course, these explorations are only possible if all classroom participants are afforded spaces within which to make genuine decisions and have authentic interactions.

If students had a voice then teachers would not have to find out, like I did, that they were not necessarily interested in calling a member of Congress. If I were engaging in our projects *with* my students then maybe I would have realized that it was not something that made much sense to me either. Students' experiences and perspectives could be authenticated by a curriculum that was responsive to their, and even my, needs. The end-of-year projects provided a poignant example of the advantages of students engaging in curriculum development. This project was

voluntary, yet, almost every student participated, and some continued their participation past their high school careers.

Of course, many teachers will face formidable structural and organizational barriers that will make it difficult to revolutionize their educational setting, but even if restrictions are too great in their present situations, that does not mean that teachers could not still search for places to create openings. In situations where curricular decision-making is limited (e.g., state standards, district pacing guides), curricula should at least retain enough flexibility that it can be tailored to the needs, interests, and conditions of particular classrooms. The ways in which these open spaces are filled will likely look different for dissimilar teachers working with diverse students in unique contexts. Allowing room for genuine negotiation with students will likely demand courage on the part of teachers who may face pressure to teach-to-the-test. Yet, this seems like a risk educators must take if citizenship growth is to be the purpose for the field. If many of our efforts are resulting in miseducative experiences, as were mine, do we not owe it to our students to try something else?

Knowing Ourselves and Our Students

Opening spaces for more educative experiences should go hand-in-hand with creating an environment where students and teachers know each other well. Both Dewey and Freire would likely say that knowing one another is a necessary component of achieving learning experiences that are democratic and worthwhile. The top-down model of curriculum development did not result in noticeable citizenship growth for most students in my AP Government classes partly because I did not know my students well enough to know what they needed or had to offer. The curriculum

dominated our class and distorted our abilities to relate to each other. My attempts to imbue meaning into the static official curriculum often fell flat because my efforts were not aligned with student experiences or interests. How then can we know students and ourselves better within the educational context?

If the deposits of the objective, official curriculum dehumanized and separated my students and me within our class, then it seems that subjective experiences might help to bring us together. There were some instances of possibilities evident in our course. The end-of-year projects certainly brought my students together for a common and worthwhile cause. When my students and I were packing boxes full of canned food for the needy in our community, the dichotomy between students and teacher dissolved. We listened and learned from each other easily. It was a strange feeling after a year of particularized roles, but it was refreshing nonetheless.

As was evident in the end-of-year project, teachers must leave room for students' voices to be heard in meaningful ways if relationships are to be developed. Under the traditional model, teachers act as experts who are responsible for disseminating knowledge, while students receive it. Freire would say that this leaves students in a passive state of dependence. The lines between the roles of teachers and students must be blurred if we want to better know each other.

Once teachers relinquish their role as the sole source of knowledge and decision-making, space is opened for students to convey their thoughts and interests. Opening these spaces for students is necessary if we are to understand how to foster citizenship growth, but it is also necessary for appreciating who they are. If I had provided more room in my class, Quinn's concerns about welfare might have been

heard, and investigated by our class. This could have challenged our class to think about important issues related to this topic from a new perspective. This environment must be nurtured and developed from the first day of class, and it is necessary if we are to know the students we teach and they are to know us.

Both Dewey and Freire advocated some sort of decision-making role for students. Dewey argued that students cannot just be told about democratic processes, they must live them. Our topics of conversation, driven by the official curriculum, were often so formal that we were able to talk without really knowing each other better. Instead of conversations flowing naturally, they stayed close to topics concerning the official curriculum that were often not of much interest to students. This may be why it can be so awkward to see students in public places, outside of the sterilized school setting. Because we do not really know each other it becomes difficult to interact without the wall that separates us and defines our roles.

While I knew my students, I realized during individual interviews that we never knew each other deeply. I knew all my students' names and we often laughed in class, but the curriculum always seemed to pull us back apart. Once I indicated the start of a lecture or project, I demanded that students get on task and the doors to our personalities swung shut. If we were engaging students in educative experiences that emanate from their lives then maybe we would not have to coerce them to get on task. The transformation from a curriculum-driven class to one where transactional relationships are respected would allow for teachers to better assess what students are learning and need to learn.

If dialogical relationships can be formed in a classroom of co-investigators then experiences can more naturally be aligned with the goals and interests of students. This was usually not the case in our AP Government class as I was trying to create learning experiences for students who were not necessarily engrossed by the subject matter. Because we were separated within the classroom, I was able to get through most of the year without realizing how different our goals and interests for the course were. Worse yet, I did not even address topics I believed were worthwhile because I became interested in intellectual aspects of the official curriculum.

It might then be worthwhile for social studies educators and students to raise critical consciousness concerning interpretations of our situation, curriculum, and purposes. Once a school day began, and the immediate goals of the official curriculum stared me in the face, I often forgot why I became a social studies teacher in the first place. Keeping a critical eye towards the reasons for doing what we do should eliminate some of the divisions that drive students and teachers apart.

The process of engaging in continual reflection during this study ultimately resulted in a better understanding of my students and myself. I had asked my students to complete the call to Congress assignment for years without a suspicion that students did not find value in it. It was humbling to find out that my students considered it the least valuable activity in our entire unit. Without partaking in this process I am unsure how long I might have gone before coming to this realization.

Engaging in this reflection also provided a sense of humility about my own teaching. Since my students had scored high on the AP test every year it was easy to assume that I was doing things the right way. Of course, this study provided an

invaluable critique of my beliefs and practices as a teacher. I recommend that every teacher find a way to participate in this type of reflection. While the time constraints on teachers make this a difficult proposition, I have found it well worth the time and energy to create spaces necessary for this to take place.

Summary

The disconnections that existed between my students' lives and much of their educational experience in my class must be addressed by finding ways to ensure their experiences are educative. Dewey would likely argue that many of their experiences were miseducative because their past and present experiences were not spoken to in the predetermined official curriculum. Freire might contend that both my students and I were dehumanized by the imposition of an objectivist and intellectualized curriculum that did not allow us to partake as active subjects in making sense of our reality.

I identified several possible implications of these findings for theory and practice. For one, those involved in the social studies must continually re-conceptualize the field so as to ensure that what happens in it is worthwhile. Teachers must find ways to create spaces for educative experiences that include students as co-investigators of a shared curriculum. These changes might be achieved by creating more holistic experiences that honor different visions and ways of knowing. As findings showed, externally imposed curricula, by either outside experts or the classroom teacher, runs the risk of not connecting with students. These disconnections were evidenced by prominent passive and academic interpretations of values and assignments like my call to Congress assignment.

Returning to the question Clayton asked can help when thinking about what all this means. He asked, “Shouldn’t everyone know about their government?” It was a great question. I think we can all agree that we should know something about our government, but what did it mean to my students? I quickly learned that many of the things they deemed worthy of learning had little impact on their lives. Aside from a few students and bits of curriculum, many students were content with passing the test and moving on with their life, largely unchanged by our curriculum.

As I think about Clayton’s question I cannot help but think back to my students packing boxes of food for the needy the day after they graduated high school. I do not want my students to see the AP test as the endpoint of their involvement with governmental or democratic processes. I do not want them to run into me later and confess, “I wish I remembered something from your class.” And as I was working in association with them on a project of their choosing, I could not help but think that they would not forget this experience nearly as quickly as they would forget all those vocabulary terms they spent so many nights studying. I cannot quantify this claim like the College Board did with my students’ AP exam results, but maybe the most worthwhile lessons are not so easily reduced.

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APPENDIX A:

SURVEY PROTOCOL

Congress Unit Survey

Directions: Please answer the following questions honestly and in as much depth as possible. Please do not attempt to answer in one sentence. You will not be graded for your opinions. I am looking for your honest feedback to better understand your perceptions of our previous unit of study. Thanks.

1. What are your thoughts and feelings on this unit on Congress?

2. Do you see any value in our study of Congress? (Is it relevant to your life now? Will it be later?)

3. What did you find most valuable in this unit? Why?

4. What did you find least valuable in this unit? Why?

Directions: Please rank the following items from our Congress unit from 1 (least valuable) to 5 (most valuable) based on how valuable you found each item.

	Least Valuable				Most Valuable
Constitutional Convention Debate over Article I	1	2	3	4	5
Study of the Differences between Congress and Parliament	1	2	3	4	5
Study of how Congress has changed over time (e.g., power in House& Senate over time, filibuster, 17th amendment…)	1	2	3	4	5
Study of who are the members of Congress (e.g., career politicians?, demographics)	1	2	3	4	5
Study of the different ways a member of Congress can vote (e.g., org., rep., attitudinal)	1	2	3	4	5
Study of the Organization of Congress (e.g., party and caucus organization…)	1	2	3	4	5
Congressperson presentations	1	2	3	4	5
Current Event Videos/Discussion (New Congress, Gabby Giffords tragedy, Situation in Egypt…)	1	2	3	4	5
State of the Union Speech and Discussion	1	2	3	4	5
Coburn Interview & discussion on Earmarks/Pork Barrel Spending	1	2	3	4	5
Study of How a Bill Becomes a Law and Group Review	1	2	3	4	5
Mock Congress over Guns Bill	1	2	3	4	5
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington film and discussion	1	2	3	4	5
Call to member of Congress/elected official	1	2	3	4	5
ID test	1	2	3	4	5
Multiple Choice Test	1	2	3	4	5

Use the space below to explain any high or low rankings:

ENDNOTES

[1] The ideas of the Enlightenment derived from Greek and Roman knowledge that was preserved by scholars in the House of Wisdom in Baghdad during the Abbasid dynasty.

[2] I used masculine pronouns and nouns in this section to reflect the patriarchal mindset of male superiority and dominance that accompanied modernist worldviews (Capra, 1996).

[3] This concept is similar to what Eisner (1985) refers to as the implicit curriculum.

[4] Bohan (2004) pointed out that history was not a universally established field in traditional, classical curriculum. Classes that would later fall under the social studies moniker were sometimes excluded altogether.

[5] Watras (2004) pointed out that historians did not consist of one uniform group that agreed on what social studies curriculum should be in schools. While this is true, the AHA still pushed for history as the focal point of any new social studies curricula.

[6] AP "democratization" refers to the increase of diverse students, racially and by income level, that have taken the AP test in recent years. Critics have charged that

this term is misleading because taking the test is insufficient to claim the closing of an achievement gap in any way if these students are not scoring well on the test.

[7] There were significant differences in the "progressive education" movement. The social efficiency beliefs of progressive reformers like David Snedden emphasized "tracking" and the heavy use of scientific objectives. This was vastly different than the pragmatic social efficiency of John Dewey. For the purposes of this paper, I primarily refer to the progressive education movement that is more closely associated with the works of John Dewey.

[8] Dewey (1938) rejected the progressive label that was often attributed to him because he felt that progressive movements in education sometimes consisted of dichotomous reactions to traditional education. He felt that a philosophy of education should not be reactionary, but maintain a purposeful basis from which to move forward. However, in many ways Dewey has helped to define progressive interpretations of education. This term, even if sometimes problematic, can be useful.

[9] Glaser and Strauss' 1967 book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* established grounded theory at a time when qualitative inquiry was a second class citizen in the research world. Qualitative explorations often consisted of studies that simply described phenomenon Glaser and Strauss (1967) sought to provide a more rigorous methodology that would yield "the discovery of theory from data

systematically obtained from social research" (p. 2). Charmaz's (2006) theory draws heavily from Glaser and Strauss (1967), but her approach is epistemologically more appropriate for my study.