A Renewal of Civic Education in the United States: Committing to Multiculturalism and Media Literacy

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In a recent issue of *Essays in Education*, one of us argued that civic education needs to be taken more seriously in K-12 schools. This essay elaborates on that argument. In this essay we further explain the pressing need for a renewal in civic education in the contemporary United States and what we think that should look like. More specifically, we emphasize that a robust contemporary civic education program in our schools must pervasively emphasize both multiculturalism and media literacy. It is our hope that this essay enlivens the conversation amongst ordinary citizens, school practitioners, and policy makers on what constitutes a dynamic public K-12 school experience that addresses our country's current needs. We hope to initiate a conversation that spills over into civic action, eventually better policy making, and most of all a more rich and synergistic democratic way of life – all fueled by a more meaningful commitment to civic education in our public schools.

The Civic Mandate of the American Public School

The explicit purpose of the American public school system revolves around supporting the country's democratic way of life (Ravitch, 2013). The common school movement of the mid-nineteenth century, progenitor to the American public school, was born out of a resolve to support our burgeoning democratic republic (Kaestle, 1983). Some state constitutions use eloquent prose from that era to stake the contemporary claim for a civic mandate for their public school system. For instance, the oldest state constitution comes from Massachusetts, primarily authored in 1780 by John Adams, one of the key architects of the United States. In it Adams articulated the purpose for public education (Chapter V, Section II): "Wisdom, and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties …" Similarly, in 1857, the state of Minnesota ratified its constitution with the following civic claim for public education: a "general and uniform system of public education" was necessitated because "the stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people" (Article XIII, Section 1). However, like a neglected book on a dusty bookshelf, this civic mandate sometimes gets overlooked as we consider improving the American public school system. Civic educator Walter Parker (1996) has even staked the claim that "democracy has not seriously been undertaken as a curriculum project in this society" (p. 11).

This civic mandate for schools takes a back seat to the public's cry for more vocational and college preparation (Kozol, 2005). Most recently in 2009 the national effort toward reforming schools led many states to adopt some or all the Common Core Standards. These standards focus on college and career readiness with its motto explicitly stating: "Preparing America's Students for College and Career." While economic and post-secondary opportunities for students are worthwhile goals, it is dangerous to continue to allow these to drive curricular practices of schools. It is important that we revert the American public school back to its common school roots and emphasize it as a public good that supports democratic citizenship. The reason is simple: we have nothing else in place other than the public school to teach us to behave as a citizenry. The difficult truth is that education for democratic citizenship teaches individuals and societies to do something wholly unnatural: to consider the good for others and

society rather than exclusively self. According to Walter Parker (1996), democracy "does not arise spontaneously but in institutions – democratic institutions – and then only with difficulty" (p. 3). Philosopher John Dewey (1916/2005) claimed democracy as a habit of living together in such a way that propels society forward. The notion of living together in such a way runs contrary to what ancient Greeks referred to as idiocy, or self-centeredness of individuals. Parker (2003) explained the nature of idiocy:

> Idiots do not take part in public life – do not have a public life. In this sense, the idiot is immature in the most fundamental way, his or her life fundamentally out of balance, ajar, untethered, and unrealized: The idiot has not yet met the challenge of 'puberty,' the transition to public life (p. 3).

Idiocy is more natural for individuals to embrace whereas democratic citizenship brings forth a daunting challenge for a society that strives to be democratic. This challenge has increased exponentially in contemporary times with the scarcity of opportunities for individuals to be meaningfully connected as in past times. No longer do individuals connect with one another in groups as they once did (Putnam, 2000). This leaves the public school system serving the unique role as the lone vehicle to connect individuals in such a way that seeks to improve the greater good of society as opposed to fanning the flames of self-interest.

Public schools traditionally cultivate democratic education in the social studies curriculum. Social studies education is a broad field that includes history, government, geography, economics, sociology, psychology, and other disciplines related to the study of society. The field is an American invention intended to nurture problem solving and decision making amongst individuals with an emphasis on contemporary issues that prepare students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that make them effective democratic citizens. However, even the social studies curriculum has gravitated toward a purpose that diverts it away from its original purpose of civic education. The rise of AP® courses in the curriculum result in academic segregation of students and an emphasis on college preparation that leaves little room for deliberation over current issues in a public environment. It is also a mistake to leave civic education exclusively to the social studies curriculum. We believe that the entire school experience should reflect a commitment to civic education. All curricular areas should take into consideration how the school equips students to be cooperative with one another, to deliberate over public issues with one another, to actively participate in collective decision making, and to advocate on behalf of individuals who may be subjected to marginalization within the school community.

Proposed Civic Education Program

In a previous essay published in this journal, one of us (Schul, 2020) proposed an approach that public schools should consider in their attempt to bolster their commitment to civic education at the high school level. This plan is multi-faceted in that it stresses a rigorous series of social studies courses but also elements of the entire school curriculum that centers itself around a commitment to civic education. This plan first emphasized that public high schools should offer a rigorous social studies curriculum specifically designed to develop democratic minds. Schools should ensure, minimally, a U.S. Government course and a general U.S. History and World History course in their general curriculum. Fortunately, those courses are traditionally offered in a school curriculum. The plan also laid out the importance of a cultural studies course

to develop students' global perspectives, which is crucial for our citizenry to succeed and lead in our increasingly interconnected world. The proposal also suggested that students should take at least one issues-based social studies course that explicitly engages students in the issues and challenges of contemporary life.

Second, the proposed plan reflected the importance for schools to integrate certain socio-civic skills pervasively throughout their curriculum. Such skills as critical inquiry, problem solving, discussion, deliberation, tolerance, cooperation, and political and social agency and/or advocacy should be taught in nearly any course in the curriculum regardless of the subject matter (i.e., mathematics, language arts, science, physical education, etc.). For example, a mathematics class might integrate critical inquiry and problem solving but also discuss and deliberate on the use of statistics to defend or oppose various policy proposals set forth by legislative bodies or even political candidates. Students could conceivably analyze how statistics were used in relation to issues addressed by policies and examine if the statistics accurately support public claims on that issue.

The final facet of this proposed civic education plan was for certain civic oriented projects to be conducted by the entire school. Schools traditionally have some of these already in place, namely student government and extracurricular programming such as clubs and team sports. However, Schul (2020) emphasized that these projects should be much more intentional with implementing these projects as tools to improve education for democratic citizenship. For instance, it would be helpful to the democratic cause if advisors or athletic coaches were properly educated on the civic contributions that their respective activities make to our democratic society, namely cooperation and tolerance, as opposed to strictly being focused on the activity itself or it exclusively existing to defeat an opponent. Additionally, schools should extend such large projects to also include mock legislations and trials that mobilize the student body to become more familiar with democratic governance. Schools should also tout a robust, student-driven voter registration drive, during election seasons. Service activities should also be emphasized to further develop students' patriotic resolve to help others, serve their community and country, and to develop teamwork for a civic cause.

This paper is the culmination of a year-long reflective journey centered on this proposed civic education program. We believe it is a sturdy, practical, and forward-thinking program that schools should embrace. In sum, we wholeheartedly support the proposal. However, we believe that recent events have shed light on areas of improvement in our country's efforts toward civic education. We fear that unless a civic education program explicitly addresses these concerns, they will continually be either ignored or suppressed to an ineffective role in the civic curriculum. At front and center of these areas for improvement is a need to explicitly emphasize multicultural education and media literacy. While neither area is necessarily absent from the curricular proposal, it is not explicitly stated and therefore could easily be glossed over or ignored altogether. Therefore, we decided to alter the curricular proposal from a year ago to explicitly include these two areas of emphasis. As you can see in Table 1, we added a curricular wide emphasis on both multiculturalism and media literacy that should encompass a school's entire program for civic education. This means that all courses should embed these two themes and that these two areas should be taught in such a way where pervasive skills, such as critical inquiry, continue to be emphasized.

Table 1. Proposed Civic Education Program for High Schools (Revised)

Courses	Pervasive Skills	School-Wide Projects
U.S. Government U.S. History World History Cultural Studies Contemporary Issues	critical inquiry problem solving discussion deliberation tolerance cooperation political and social agency/advocacy	Student government Mock legislations Mock trials Service activities Voter registration Student clubs and team sports Social justice advocacy project Civic education website
Curricular Wide Emphasis: Multiculturalism & Media Literacy		

As you can also see, we added two school-wide projects that we believe directly reflect our addition of multiculturalism and media literacy. First, we included a social justice advocacy project and second, we included a civic education website. We will discuss these two projects and how they fit in the scope of promoting multiculturalism and media literacy later in this essay.

The Hope of the C3 Framework

There is reason to hope that civic education will improve in the United States. In 2013, the National Council for the Social Studies put forth the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. It was the culmination of a three-year collaborative effort to uplift civic education from the mires of marginalization it had been experiencing. The intended audience for the C3 Framework were two-fold: states to enhance their social studies standards and local practitioners in schools and school districts to bolster their social studies program. The C3 Framework lays out a blueprint for instilling meaningful rigor in the social studies curriculum. At the heart of this rigor is critical inquiry, problem solving, and participatory skills. Rather than conceptualize a social studies curriculum as a series of unrelated courses that focus on cultural transmission and rote memorization, the C3 Framework positions a social studies curriculum around an inquiry arc of four interconnected and mutually reinforcing dimensions (see Table 2) that coherently tie a social studies curriculum together in a way that aspires to foster a reflective and engage citizenry.

Table 2. C3 Framework Organization

Dimension 1: Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries	Dimension 2: Applying Disciplinary Tools and Concepts	Dimension 3: Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence	Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action
Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries	Civics Economics	Gathering and Evaluating Sources	Communicating and Critiquing Conclusions
	Geography History	Developing Claims and Using Evidence	Taking Informed Action

These four dimensions are as follows: 1) Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries; 2) Applying Disciplinary Tools and Concepts; 3) Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence; and 4) Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action. This framework should permeate throughout students' social studies experience as the dimensions "center on the use of questions to spark curiosity, guide instruction, deepen investigations, acquire rigorous content, and apply knowledge and ideas in real world settings to become active and engaged citizens in the 21st century" (NCSS, 2013).

As you can see in Table 2, the C3 Framework emphasizes the application of disciplinary tools and concepts of four areas of study: civics, economics, geography, and history. This differs from our proposed civic education coursework at a surface level, but not necessarily in practice. The C3 Framework does not propose specific courses but rather disciplinary tools that should be emphasized within the courses. Courses that we propose such as Cultural Studies and Contemporary Issues could very well emphasize both geography and economics in a meaningful and dynamic way. For instance, it is nearly impossible to effectively examine cultures without thoroughly considering the geographic components to that culture. Geography, in fact, is more than physical location but is also about the cultural make-up of regions and the people who occupy them. It should also be pointed out that the very center of all cultural activity is the economic forces at play.

We believe that our proposed civic education program for schools (see Table 1) fits well with the C3 Framework organization. Both emphasize inquiry-based learning and civic engagement. Why then focus on the themes of multiculturalism and media literacy when renewing our country's collective efforts toward civic education? Frankly, it is because the need is apparent and without explicit direction, our civic society is on the verge of continuing to take a turn for the worse. The recent events surrounding police brutality toward African Americans, particularly since the murder of George Floyd in the summer of 2020, prompted the type of social unrest that promises to foster more anti-racist initiatives and a concerted effort to transform our society into one that is more inclusive and open to multiculturalism. In sum, it very well may be that significant change can occur on this front because more people desire for such change. While multiculturalism is something that a civic education program should have cultivated long ago, the reality is that K-12 students are not being taught a curriculum that is necessarily dedicated to multiculturalism. This needs to change and perhaps this is the perfect moment to make this change happen.

The rise of social media and widespread propaganda efforts to sway the electorate has divided our society in such a way that is leading to the fraying of our social fabric. We lack trust in our institutions, we are continually moving away from civic norms that hold our democratic society together, and our capacity toward reflective thought is increasingly narrowing. The result is a democratic society teetering on the verge of totalitarianism and civil discord. The recent insurrection at the U.S. Capital testifies to this grim reality. We believe that we are on the verge of losing our democratic way of life without a firm curricular commitment toward media literacy in our public schools. A commitment to media literacy is necessary for the survival of our democratic way of life.

In the remainder of this essay, we make the case why and how multiculturalism and media literacy should be explicitly emphasized in any sturdy civic curriculum. First, we focus on multiculturalism by providing its historical context, its situatedness in a public school curriculum, and how it ties to a program for civic education.

Multiculturalism

As our country continues to grow more diverse and pluralistic, multicultural education grows in importance as a means for our country's ideals of equality, justice for all, and socio-economic opportunity for all to become fully realized. Multicultural education, therefore, is naturally tied to our country's renewal of civic education. Multicultural theory and practices in the United States have historically been connected to civic education in that the former's growth paralleled the social, cultural, and political tensions that gripped the nation. This section provides the historical background and context of multiculturalism to set up our later explanation as to how it ties to civic education within the American public school.

James Banks (2013), in *The Construction and Historical Development of Multicultural Education, 1962-2012*, explained the multicultural education movement emerged from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s – 1970s as African Americans raised the nation's consciousness to the racial inequalities they were experiencing in the very country that prided itself as the beacon of freedom and democracy. While the roots of multiculturalism are arguably centered in antiracism efforts, this field of study has both historically and contemporarily examined additional issues of demographic difference that have marginalized groups in North American schools. The initial efforts by African American reformers to challenge racial inequalities in schools gave way to the efforts of other groups to also push for educational reform. For instance, Gorski (1999) argued that the women's rights movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s offered its voice to the push for educational reform efforts as they challenged sexism in educational opportunities, employment, and earning potential. Throughout the 1970s, individuals who identified as gay and lesbian, as members of the elderly, and as those identified with disabilities pushed to challenge the institutional and systemic barriers that marginalized them in workplaces, communities, and educational institutions (Gorski, 1999).

Each following decade brought further evolution to the field of multiculturalism. Scholars in multiculturalism throughout the 1980s, broadened this field of study by offering theoretical frameworks and practices that explored the intersection among school reform, equal educational opportunities, and broader social change (Gay, 2000; Gorski, 1999; Grant & Sleeter, 2003; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 1996). Such reform efforts emphasized practices in schools such as curricular tracking, pedagogy, standardized testing, and classroom climate (Gorki, 1999). Throughout the 1990s, multicultural theory and practice shifted towards sociocultural criticisms of the role that educational structures and systems played in the economic and social inequalities experienced by marginalized populations in the global arena (Banks, 2013; Gorski, 1999). Scholarship in this era explored the intersections of geographical place, social positioning and privilege, and socioeconomic power from multiple demographic perspectives, most prominently race, class, and gender (Banks, 2013; Gorski, 1999). Now, in the first decades of the 21st century, multicultural theory and practice must continue to examine how racism and other forms of discrimination and marginalization pose a threat to the very ideals of democracy that we demand schools emphasize. In the next section we look at how multiculturalism should be infused in the school curriculum and, in turn, pragmatically cement the necessary wedding between multiculturalism and civic education.

Multiculturalism in the School Curriculum

An examination of scholarship by Banks (1996, 2004) and Banks & Banks (2009) provides five theoretical dimensions that serve as the historic foundation of multicultural theory

that help us to understand the multi-faceted role that multiculturalism should play in a school's curriculum. The dimensions are Content Integration, Knowledge Construction, Prejudice Reduction, Equity Pedagogy, and Empowering School Culture. These dimensions should not be thought as separately distinct from one another, but rather they evolved from one another's conceptual silences (Alghamdi, 2017; Banks, 1996). These dimensions can also inform the use of civic coursework to critically interrogate the ways that intersections of race, class, and gender, for example, shape structural and systemic inequalities on a local, national, and global scale.
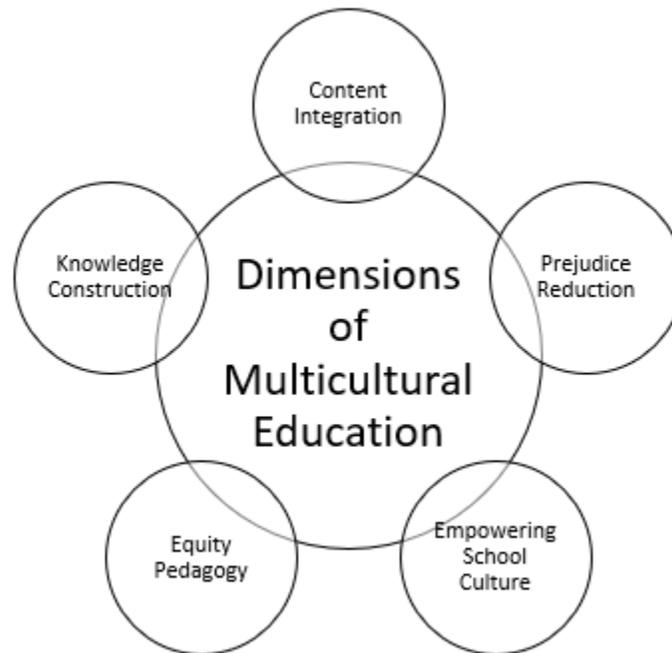

Figure 1. Dimensions of Multicultural Education (Banks, 1996,2004; Banks & Banks, 2009).

The first dimension, Content Integration, refers to the ways that teachers can use sources and examples from a variety of cultural groups to teach principles, concepts, and theories in their subject area. Using a World History course as an example, what might historic events look like from the perspective of different cultural groups sharing the same geographical space as the Gaza Strip? How might literature from different ethnic groups reveal different understandings of historic events like the period of Jim Crow or immigration waves to countries like the United States, France, or Spain for example? One strength of content integration is that teachers can meet the increased demands of learners from marginalized communities to have their histories, voices, and perspectives included in the curriculum. The criticism of this approach is that mainstream curriculum remains unchallenged or untransformed in terms of privileging the histories and voices of dominant status groups (Banks, 2013).

Knowledge Construction, as the second dimension, involves helping students recognize and examine how social norms, ideologies, and biases held by members of a society or group are shaped by social institutions like family, religious institutions, media sources, and educational institutions (Alghamdi, 2017; Banks, 2013). Cultural Studies courses in 2020 have no shortage of controversial issues to examine, making use of this dimension, such as police-involved shootings, athletes kneeling during the Pledge of Allegiance, and the Black Lives Matter movement. Advantages of this approach include providing students with the tools and skills to

think critically about controversial topics or events. The challenge of this approach for teachers is developing a safe environment for students to both hold and express strong opinions that will no doubt oppose one another. This dimension presents a wonderful opportunity for teachers to both teach and model the skills of civility and respective listening as these differing opinions are expressed.

The third dimension, Prejudice Reduction, helps students both recognize their implicit biases towards demographic differences like race, class, and sexual orientation, for example, and develop more democratic attitudes that lead to anti-discrimination efforts. How may a Contemporary Issues class, for instance, make use of texts like Ibram X. Kendi's, *How to be Anti-Racist* (2019) or Beverly Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility* (2018) to discuss historic and present racial inequality? Challenges for the teacher with this dimension include creating the ideal learning conditions that really help students confront both the existence and sources of their biases. Opportunities exist with this dimension to help students recognize the historic and contemporary consequences of biases at the cultural, social, political, and economic levels.

Equity pedagogy, being the fourth dimension, involves teachers differentiating their instructional strategies to meet the academic needs of students coming from marginalized demographic groups (Alghamdi, 2017; Banks, 2013). Teaching practices that characterize this dimension can include culturally relevant teaching, differentiated instruction, and the Funds of Knowledge approach (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll, Amanti, Ness, & Gonzalez, 1992; Tomlinson, 2003). Both the commonality and advantage of these instructional approaches is the effort of the teachers to include the cultural perspectives, strengths, practices, and learning styles of learners, their households, and communities, into the classroom so that students learn from and with one another (Alghamdi, 2017). Teachers in civic education courses like U.S. Government, World History, Cultural Study, and Contemporary Issues can ask how these equity approaches both engage students and develop their skills in discussion, active listening, tolerance, cooperation, and advocacy. The criticism of this approach is that institutional practices and policies that marginalize specific demographic groups go unquestioned and unchallenged, and this critique leads to the importance of the final dimension of Empowering School Culture.

This last dimension involves all school personnel, namely administration, teachers, and staff investigating and transforming institutional policies, practices, and procedures that marginalize learners from various demographic groups. These policies and practices can include ability tracking, disproportionality in discipline rates, inequitable participation in academic or extracurricular programming, and instances of individual or institutional discrimination that create unsafe learning environments for students (Alghamdi, 2017). The challenge of this dimension is organizing a collective effort to develop an institutional culture that is committed to creating an equitable learning environment for diverse groups of learners with different, and sometimes, competing needs. The advantage of this dimension is that all aspects of education, including curriculum, staffing, instructional methods, assessment practices, and student activities are continuously and critically examined to ensure equity as both the demography and circumstances of the student populace change.

The following section focuses on a remaining question posed by multicultural theory and practice: How can these five dimensions be useful in guiding the efforts of teachers to develop students' civic skills and civic-related projects?

Multiculturalism and Civic Skills

Stephen Steinberg (1989) in *The Ethnic Myth*, argued that the roots of ethnic and racial pluralism in North America are rooted in the contentious institutional practices of enslavement,

territorial annexation, and labor exploitation. Multiculturalism that effectively addresses ethnic and racial pluralism helps students to develop an historical understanding of self and others. Possession of this skill is an important starting point for students to garner other skills they can put into practice such as tolerance and eventually cross-cultural deliberation. This is particularly important as the United States becomes increasingly more diverse. How then can students experience a curriculum that meaningfully engages them in historical understanding of other cultures in ways that yield tolerance and cooperation? We believe this responsibility falls on the shoulders of teachers.

John Dewey (1933) defined a teacher as an "intellectual leader of a social group" (p. 337). As an intellectual leader in a pluralistic democracy like the United States, teachers should take the initiative to maturely counter the prevailing misrepresentation and alienation that marginalized populations commonly experience by crafting and enacting a curriculum that provides students with a wider and deeper cultural knowledge that takes into consideration students' own cultural experiences and understanding. Kamisha Childs (2017) argued that teachers who privilege cultural diversity when planning and enacting their curriculum may likely set themselves on the pathway toward pedagogical renewal. What does this mean? Childs argued that multicultural approaches direct teachers to naturally provide a curriculum that is both experiential and encourages critical thinking about demographic differences and the feeling, opinions, and biases associated with them. This approach also encourages teachers to reflect about and understand the intersectional identities and the social circumstances of the students they educate. As a result, teachers who engage in multicultural approaches are more likely to develop students who are aware of cultural differences as well as the social mores and social differences they will encounter in communities, schools, and workplaces.

Childs (2017), citing Durden and Truscott's (2013) work on developing teachers' critical reflectivity for culturally relevant teaching, presented a discussion of six additional multicultural skills that may be developed among teachers who practice multicultural education. The first skill is the development of a critical theoretical lens that questions if diverse student and community voices are respected and affirmed in schools. The second skill is the ability to ensure that students see their images, perspectives, and stories reflected in the curricula. The next skill is the development of a learning environment in which students may better understand the cultural values of others with whom they come into contact in their schools, communities, and workplaces. The fourth skill is a capacity to develop classroom lessons and discussions around the perspectives, circumstances, and challenges of the culturally diverse populations present in our social and academic environments. Next, an especially challenging skill is to choose a curriculum that is developed around both the culture of various demographic groups as well as the shared national culture. The final skill is a commitment to seeing the language and culture of individuals who are emergent bilinguals and their immigrant communities, as a positive learning resource for improving teaching and learning.

Multiculturalism and Civic-Related School Wide Projects

The previous sections offered ways for multicultural theory and practice to inform civic coursework and skill development. This present section offers suggestions for developing these skills through civic-related projects. As we wrote this essay, our nation experienced both civil unrest and increased activism in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Some of this activism revolved around enhancing multicultural education in schools.

Educational publications like *Education Week* and *Edutopia* featured articles offering strategies to teachers wishing to engage students in social justice efforts. Lorena Germán (2020)

authored one such article, titled "Using Social Justice to Promote Student Voice," and she presents some ideas that should inform civic-related school-wide projects. Such projects may include policy advocacy, anti-bias messaging aimed at educating the public, and cultural pride demonstrations. Germán argues that these types of projects should help students know where and why they stand on a specific issue, and these projects should provide them with the language to articulate their thoughts solicitously. Similarly, teachers should give students the space to safely think, process, and ask questions as they develop their positions on these issues. Germán (2020) argued that it is important that students' voices are centered in these projects by giving them choice of what projects are important to them and how they wish to present their information. An examination of her article offers questions like the following: 1) What do students care about? 2) What issues do they want to learn more about? 3) How do these issues impact their households and communities? 4) What tasks do they want to take on to better understand these issues? What opportunities exist for them to demonstrate leadership in these projects? Most importantly, Germán argued that these projects should give students the skills to develop a deeper understanding of socially divisive issues by engaging in the types of research that uncovers the "gray areas" that reveal this issue to be more complex and nuanced than adults would like to them to be.

Media Literacy

Just as multiculturalism must be stressed in contemporary civic education, media literacy must also play a prominent role in renewing our civic life. Democracies in the Western world are increasingly decaying due to the rise of hyper-partisanship and a lack of trust in our democratic institutions (Applebaum, 2020). At the epicenter of this decay is the rise of propaganda on social media, Internet, radio, and television venues that fuel civil discord. Recent revelations of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election demonstrated how other countries recognize the power civil discord has with fraying democracies. However, such foreign interference would not be successful if our country's electorate was literate in media messaging and critically reflective in general. This is deeply concerning because a democracy is dependent on an informed and engaged citizenry. Without such a citizenry, democracies succumb to tendencies of autocratic governance (Applebaum, 2020).

Our collective capacity to dissiminate and collect information has rapidly increased in recent times, yet our capacity to critically reflect and discern truth has not kept up this same pace. Social media platforms such as Facebook®, Twitter®, and Instagram®, allow "for the repetition of untruths within self-selected echo chambers" (Journell, 2019, p. 3) and empower political figures and their surrogates to conjure up fear and anger so to jolt their own grab for power. This problem is escalated when platforms, such as Facebook®, use algorithims to trace user behavior and thus blaze a virtual path for users to be delivered content that matches their own interests. In turn, users easily share this content with like-minded individuals who are busily doing the very same thing. As a result, ideological silos are formed among our citizenry that essentially strangles reflective thought among those caught in such silos. This phenomenon has culminated in what writer David Roberts (2017, 2019) coined as tribal epistomology (the belief that truth is bound by what one's affiliations or groups believe is to be true rather than an objective analysis of facts and evidence).

According to recent work by political scientists, emotion rather than reason is central to individuals' development of their tribal epistomological affiliations (Garrett, 2019). One key characteristic related to tribal epistomology is motivated reasoning where individuals, once they

develop a particular tribal perspective, are very resistant to information that would require them to change that perspective (Dusso & Kennedy, 2015). As the name suggests, motivated reasoning is a process where individuals seek a rationale or external support that validates their tribal perspective as opposed to gaining an accurate understanding of a particular issue at hand. If motivated reasoning fuels individuals' desire to resist information that does not validate their world view, what happens when these individuals actually do encoutner information that runs contrary to their tribal perspective? Usually, these individuals engage in an activity called confirmation bias. Confirmation bias involves individuals' interpretation of information in such ways "that are partial to existing beliefs, expectation, or hypothesis at hand" (Nickerson, 1998, p. 175). It is important to note that both motivated reasoning and confirmation bias occur unwittingly to individuals (Garrett, 2019) and pose extreme dangers to democracies' reliance on a reflective citizenry capable of deliberating with one another in the spirit of mutual tolerance. If left unchecked, motivated reasoning and confirmation bias can fuel further civil discord that leads to the further fraying of our democratic way of life. Democracy requires an intelligent citizenry that is compelled by evidence-based truth as opposed to a truth that is relevant to preserving one's tribal identity. It is essential, therefore, that our country take seriously a civic education program that seeks to deconstruct individuals' motivated reasoning and confirmation bias as a means to preserve our democracy and avoid autocratic rule.

Media Literacy in the School Curriculum

Civic education in most K-12 schools currently fails to include digital media (Stoddard, 2014). Fortunately, the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) addressed this problem publicly in 2016 by issuing a position statement on media literacy that asserted: "social studies educators should provide young people with the awareness and abilities to critically question and create new media and technology – essential skills for active citizenship in our democracy" (NCSS, 2016, p. 183). This position statement included a series of central questions that NCSS suggested should be asked by both teachers and students when analyzing forms of media. These questions revolve around three areas:

- Audience and Authorship (i.e., Who made this message? Why was this made?)

- Messages and Mearnings (i.e., What ideas, values, information, and/or points of views are overt? Implied? What techniques are used? What is my interpretation of this and what do I learn about myself from my reaction or interpretation?)

- Representations and Reality (i.e., Is this fact, opinion, or something else? How credible is this and what makes you think that)?).

We will return to these central questions later in this essay as they offer much for us to work with in developing a curricular strategy that effectively addresses media literacy.

We do not believe that an emphasis on media literacy in the school curriculum will cure all that ails our body politic. There is much to be said for the need to improve the psychological, spiritual, and economic conditions of individual members of our citizenry. However, we do hold fast to the belief that a serious infusion of media literacy in a school curriculum can greatly improve our current situation. In fact, our beliefs are supported by research. One study (Kayne and Bowyer, 2017) revealed that students who are taught lessons in media literacy can better navigate information and are less prone to succumb to interpretations pushed by the media

messaging that are biased and manipulative. In sum, schools must empower their students to analyze media propaganda for the sake of the betterment of our democratic society.

Propaganda, as defined by Merriam Webster's dictionary, is the spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person. What sets propaganda apart from messaging that seems impartial is its partiality with the intent to persuade its consumers to accept the message. Propaganda is a morally neutral device. It can serve forces of good or bad, depending upon the intent of the messenger who uses it. For instance, the Declaration of Independence is filled with propaganda such as categorizing life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as "inalienable rights" that, along with equality, are "self-evident" truths. Propaganda is a natural form of communication, intended either to help or injure. In fact, it can be rightfully argued that most forms of rhetoric and poetry are forms of propaganda. The concern with the consumption of propaganda by the public, however, is when the message is misleading or deceptively discreet in how it shields the public from knowing the truth due to its support of an agenda that may serve the self-interest of an individual or group of individuals. For instance, in 2018 alone, nearly 40 percent of total political campaign contributions came from people who donated $10,000 or more. These donors comprise a mere 0.01 percent of the U.S. population. Their aim is to push for policies that benefit them such as tax cuts, uplifting of government restrictions such as those that pertain to environmental protections (Reich, 2018). Unfortunately, a significant amount of these donations is funneled to media messages aimed to persuade potential voters to believe that anyone who disagrees with the policies are either evil, stupid, or both. Such messaging, when deeply rooted in our collective psyche, threatens our democratic way of life.

This is not the first time our country faced emerging challenges from media communications. In the 1930s, the rise of radio communications – something new at the time – swept the media landscape in new and unprecedented ways. With nearly 28 million people owning a radio by the end of the decade (Hobbs & McGee, 2014), a new medium for influencing the masses right in their homes emerged. Not surprisingly, with the rise of media communications also arose political demagoguery. After all, this is the period when some of the most notorious demagogues the world has ever seen rose to political prominence. As a case in point, Germany's Adolf Hitler used media outlets such as radio and later film to portray his political agenda as wholesome and to belittle any who may criticize it. Hitler even attacked media outlets who challenged him, such as the Munich Press (which he called a "poison kitchen") as members of the "Lügenpresse", which means "lying press" in English (Snyder, 2019). At this same time, the United States faced demagoguery of its own in the form of the efforts of Father Charles Coughlin, aptly nicknamed the radio priest.

Coughlin was a member of the Roman Catholic clergy who achieved notoriety with his popular radio program entitled *The Hour of Power* and later founded, in 1935, an influential action group called the National Union for Social Justice. Coughlin appealed to a populist zeal that arose in the 1930s in the wake of the Great Depression. He appealed to left-wing populists who sought to use the federal government to enhance the American economy. He also appealed to right-wing populists with his scapegoating of "international bankers" who, he argued, harmed the lifestyle of the ordinary American citizen. Coughlin's right-wing populist message was peppered with anti-Semitism and he defended actions of the Nazi regime of Germany (Warren, 1996). His influence was widespread as membership in the National Union for Social Justice reached one million by 1936 (Warren, 1996). A key contributor to Coughlin's popularity was his charismatic flair and clever use of rhetorical propaganda.

A response emerged against Coughlin's propaganda that gained traction in the school curriculum. This response was spear-headed by the Institute of Propaganda Analysis (IPA). The IPA, founded by Clyde Miller, a teacher educator at Columbia University's Teachers College, and Edward Filene, a well-known businessman and philanthropist, began in 1937 with its mission to create classroom materials designed to assist teachers with empowering students to identify and analyze propaganda. Most of these classroom materials consisted of articles and books that were distributed to schools throughout the country. The goal of these materials was to provide students the necessary skills that would empower them to both identify and analyze propaganda that they encounter via the new media landscape where they lived. We believe these materials should resurface and be resynthesized in a contemporary commitment toward enhancing media literacy in the school curriculum. In the following section we focus on the nature of civic skills necessary to be taught in a curriculum dedicated to media literacy, with an emphasis on how some of the materials created long ago by the IPA remain relevant and effective with addressing current forms of propaganda.

Media Literacy and Civic Skills

While instruction in media literacy may empower students to be better consumers of media messaging, what type of skills should be harnessed to effectively do this? There are several approaches to enhance media literacy. One common approach is to help students produce more information using various digital technologies. This approach emphasizes students' competency with navigating the Internet and gathering information to support a position the student may have or perhaps to compile a series of diverse sources for a research project. This is not the approach we take. Instead, we take the position that individuals do not necessarily need more assistance with finding sources to support or validate their stance on an issue or their ability to enhance a research project. Instead, individuals need assistance with knowing about the quality of the sources for their information as well as better understanding the purpose and intent of the information itself.

The advent of the Internet changed how individuals encounter the world around them. Rather than rely on reading newspapers or watching news programs, usually associated with journalistic norms, young people rely on their social media news feeds, often provided to them via algorithms used by social media outlets such as Facebook® to cater to the individual's interests (American Press Institute, 2015). The void left by the absence of journalistic gatekeepers of authority and credibility makes it essential that students be able to decipher what is and is not reliable information upon which to base their opinions and decisions (Metzger, 2007). Unfortunately, studies have shown that young people seldom consider the source of their information when deciding to trust it (Barzilai & Zohar, 2012; List, Grossnickle, & Alexander, 2016). The work of the Stanford History Education Group, led by history educator Sam Wineburg, emphasize that civic reasoning in contemporary times require individuals to possess certain knowledge, skills, and dispositions that help them answer three key questions: 1) What is behind the information; 2) What is the evidence?; 3) What do other sources say? (McGrew Breakstone, Ortega, Smith, & Wineburg, 2019).

It likely is tempting for individuals to focus more on the content of media messages they encounter as opposed to focusing on their sources. This is particularly true if the messaging contains multimedia propaganda in the form of imagery or video because of its emotional appeal to viewers. It is therefore imperative that teachers model for their students how to question sources of messages they encounter. We believe that propaganda education material produced in the 1930s by the IPA provide a nice foundation for a contemporary effort to empower our

burgeoning citizenry to be better consumers of media messages and generally better reflective inquirers. The best starting point for this effort is the well-known propaganda framework called "The 7 Types of Propaganda" produced by the IPA in 1936. Many generations that followed came across this framework in their government or civics courses and it is still widely disseminated on the Internet.

Table 3. The 7 Types of Propaganda

Propaganda Type	Description
Card Stacking	Focuses on the best features and leaves out or lies about problems.
Testimonial	A well-known person endorses the product or service.
Glittering Generalities	Uses words or ideas that evoke an emotional response.
Flag Waving*	Relates a product to someone or something, such as a flag, that we recognize and respect.
Plain Folks	Uses regular people to sell a product or a service.
Bandwagon	Asks people to "join the crowd" and take action because "everyone" is doing it.
Name Calling	Connects a person, product, or idea to something negative.

Source: Miller & Edwards, 1936
* Some renditions (i.e., Lee & Lee, 1939) of this propaganda type use the word "transfer" rather than "flag waving."

As you can see in Table 3, the general concept of media messaging propaganda is divided into seven separate categories: card stacking, testimonial, glittering generalities, flag waving, plain folks, bandwagon, name calling. We believe that these categories remain pertinent to modern manifestations of propaganda and they also allow individuals to better identify and analyze messaging they encounter.

However, identifying propaganda is merely a first step toward media literacy. We consider media literacy to extend beyond mere knowledge and toward reflective practice. In sum, being literate must alter one's behavior in ways differently than how those who are illiterate act. Otherwise, literacy is irrelevant. With that said, literacy requires practice with using newly developed skills in both a meaningful and useful way. This should come as no surprise for those who study media literacy, particularly when it comes to individuals' encounter with propaganda. In fact, researchers, and critics of the efforts of the IPA, reflected this important point as far back as the 1930s when it was amid producing classroom materials. One study conducted in the late 1930s by Wayland Osborne (1939), for instance, concluded that students in the study who were faced with propaganda would not critically analyze it, despite having the tools to do so, unless faced with it in a larger curricular effort that promoted critical thinking and the use of their new knowledge in problem-solving situations. "It is just possible," Osborn wrote, "that the way to teach critical thinking is to give pupils long-term practice in it" (p. 16). In this same spirit of tying propaganda identification with critical inquiry, Bruce Lannes Smith, a political scientist, and propaganda specialist in the 1930s, made a compelling argument that propaganda education must position students to critique the motives of the propagandists and that doing so required an education in social stratification. Smith (1941) claimed that "certain social divisions habitually use certain propaganda devices and not others" and that "the reasons for this may be given by the teacher" (p. 256). Smith's decades old message fits nicely with the NCSS (2016) position

statement on media literacy that suggested teachers and students alike should focus on audience and authorship as well as messages and meanings behind media being analyzed. As a contemporary case in point, wealthy corporate executives such as Charles Koch with oil refinery, may have private incentive to maintain their business interests and invest in propaganda messages that employ such techniques as card-stacking, glittering generalities, or name-calling to persuade the public to denounce critics or politicians who support policies that may limit their economic production. In fact, according to recent reporting (e.g., Mayer, 2016; MacLean, 2017), this is exactly what Koch does toward promoters of environmental protection initiatives.

Smith's concerns parallel NCSS' position statement on media literacy that urged students to consider audience and authorship, messages and meanings, and representations and reality. To be fair, the IPA did create a framework that addressed Smith's concerns called "Find the Facts" that was embedded in a larger analytical tool it called "The ABC's of Propaganda Analysis" (Lee & Lee, 1939). "Find the Facts" sought to position students to not only identify the type of propaganda before them but also the identity of the propagandist, their purpose with using the propaganda, and the possible motivation or interest of the propagandist. A prominent feature of "Find the Facts" was its emphasis on requiring students to first pause and reflect prior to making a conclusion. This is important to note because it signals the IPA had the foresight to acknowledge the emotional appeal that propaganda has on the citizenry long before we knew anything about the pitfalls of motivated reasoning or confirmation bias.

We thought that this past work on propaganda education created by the IPA along with the areas of media inquiry proposed by NCSS in its more recent statement on media literacy may help to provide a powerful tool for teachers and students alike to use in the classroom to enhance media literacy in nearly any lesson that includes an encounter with media messages. Figure 2 represents our combination of these efforts in what we believe is a practical and easy to use tool for teachers to help develop students' media literacy.

Table 4. Propaganda Analysis Tool

What techniques are used? (Check all that apply):		
____ Card Stacking ____ Testimonial ____ Glittering Generality ____ Transfer/Flag Waving		
____ Plain Folks ____ Bandwagon ____ Name Calling ____ Other		
Audience and Authorship	Messages & Meanings	Representations & Reality
• Who made this message? • Why was this made?	• What ideas, values, information, and/or points of view are overt? Implied? • What is my interpretation of this and what do I learn about myself from my reaction or interpretation?	• Is this fact, opinion, or something else? • How credible is this (and what makes you think that)?

The top section of Table 4 asks students to identify the propaganda technique used with a particular media message provided to them. A listing of the options crafted by the IPA (see Table 3) is provided to select from. As you may notice, the option of "Other" is among the list to provide teachers and students the flexibility to devise their own propaganda type if they believe the provided lists does not satisfactorily identify the technique used for a particular media message. Below the listing of propaganda types are three sections, slightly modified from the NCSS position statement on media literacy, that consist of a series of questions. These sections are as follows: (1) Audience and Authorship, (2) Messages and Meanings, and (3) Representations and Reality. The first section, Audience and Authorship, includes questions centering on identifying the propagandist and their interest. The second section, Messages and Meanings, includes questions centering on the intent of the propaganda messaging and the potential effect of this message on the person who receives it. The third section, Representations and Reality, centers on the analyzing the credibility of the propaganda message and whether it is based on fact or opinion. We believe that teachers across the civic curriculum, regardless of the course, should familiarize students with Table 4 and use it occasionally when addressing media messaging. Of course, teachers should first explain Table 4 to their respective class and then collaboratively apply it to a media message prior to setting students free to use the tool on their own. It is our intent that Table 4 be used with any media message whether it be an image, meme, video, or written text.

Media Literacy and Civic-Related School Wide Projects

In line with the fourth dimension of the NCSS C3 Framework (see Table 2) that emphasizes both communication of conclusions and taking informed action (NCSS, 2013), we believe it is important that a healthy civic education curriculum includes at least one school-wide civic related project that incorporates media literacy. There are numerous ways teachers, and their respective schools may position students to take civic action regarding media literacy. For instance, students may be positioned to create a voter's guide during an election season that

includes propaganda education materials such as Table 4 with a detailed explanation on how citizens can employ it when barraged with propaganda-filled campaign material.

Another civic-related school wide project that schools should consider using to enhance media literacy of the citizenry is for a particular class or perhaps a civic-minded student organization to craft a website dedicated to civic education that prominently features propaganda education. This website could include Table 4 along with a detailed explanation of how to use it to analyze propaganda messaging. It could be continually updated with fresh examples of propaganda-filled messages (i.e., imagery, video, memes, written text, etc.) alongside student commentary about this messaging and how reflective citizens should intelligently and responsibly conduct themselves upon encountering such imagery. This website should also include some examples for its traffickers to analyze propaganda for themselves. It should be the hope and mission of the creators of such a helpful website that it is widely disseminated across the social media landscape much like the propaganda messages themselves.

Conclusion

There is no singular cure for what ails our country. We face economic challenges as individuals from lower and middle-class backgrounds continue their struggle to find sustainable and steady career opportunities. We continue to see a rise in concentrated poverty yet also see a proliferation of more billionaires amongst those in upper class circles. We have a fractured political culture where hyper-partisanship, fueled by propaganda in our media messaging, dampens hopes for policies that help the entire public good. We also face spiritual challenges as the rise of individualism compels much of our citizenry to focus inward as opposed to being engaged in helping the greater good of society, particularly those who are historically marginalized. These challenges are daunting as there is much work to be done but seemingly no coherent and cohesive plan to move us forward. Yet our country is no stranger to trying times. We faced political upheaval, civic unrest, and economic disparities in the past and have worked to solve those problems (Putnam, 2020). However, this is no cause for any of us to sit comfortably on the sidelines and be rest assured that all will soon be well. Solutions to our problems exclusively depend on our diligent action.

Unlike those who chastise public education for failing to meet our collective expectations, we believe that public education plays a central role with improving our situation. John Dewey (1897) spoke of the public school as "the fundamental method of progress and reform." With this, Dewey meant public education is a platform that our society should use to tackle social problems amongst us. This has always been the case. The progressive era of the early twentieth century saw the public school used to uplift our country as it was divided during an economic transition that paralleled a rise in immigration. The civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century saw the public school used to counter the dark forces of racism and segregation. It was also the public school that we used in the 1970s to bring women and individuals identified with disabilities to the table of democracy. The list goes on. Yet, the public school is only able to do what we support it to do. The public school, in essence, reflects our own commitment to progress and reform. It is one thing to desire the public school to support our democracy, it is an entirely other thing to be willing and able to support the public school to meet that challenge. We wrote this essay as a call for change among those who want to see our public schools meet the challenges set before us in these times.

We are living in a time that is fertile for the rise of authoritarian rule. Democracy, with its knack for allowing protest, deliberation, and other social freedoms, can be discouraging for those among us who expect peace and calm. Indeed, there is a certain lure to authoritarian rule

(Applebaum, 2020). It is a lure, however, that we must resist. Democracy is difficult as it requires constant nourishment. Yet we believe that democracy is worth this effort because of its emphasis on liberty, human rights, and general social progress. A sturdy civic education in our public schools is necessary for supporting our democracy. We wrote this essay to compel you and other readers toward a path for a civic education that resonates with the challenges facing us.

It is time for our country to come to grip with the stronghold that White supremacy has on all of us. The logical place to initially confront the evils of White supremacy is with a bold curricular commitment to multiculturalism in our schools. If we fail to do so, then we continue to fail to aspire to meet the goals of equality and public ownership of the government that are imbedded in the United States of America's mission. The recent social upheaval is a jarring reminder to all of us that our democracy needs to embrace its cultural plurality and prominently put matters of race in the school curriculum. It is also cause for optimism that now may be the time when this is done if we proactively and swiftly respond.

It is also time for our country to proactively confront the rise of tribal epistemology that continues to fracture our democratic way of life. Authoritarianism preys on a citizenry's disregard for truth and reflective inquiry. The recent insurrection at the U.S. Capital building is a sad reminder of the threat tribal epistemology poses to our democratic institutions, norms, and our constitutional government. The hope of our democracy rests almost exclusively with the public school as it uniquely serves as a gathering place for the entire body politic. We hope that public schools across the country make a concerted effort to teach their students to analyze and reflect upon media messages they encounter as opposed to accept and spread the message as a badge of individual identity. If we do so, our society will live up to Dewey's (1933) stated characteristics of a reflective inquirer: open-mindedness (to approach matters openly rather than ideologically), whole-heartedness (to pursue truth of matters with zest and energy), and responsibility (to accept truth of matters regardless of identification with prior beliefs). This challenge and hope for the future of democracy rests on our action at this present moment.

Democracy in the United States of America is in dire need of a citizenry that is active, engaged, culturally aware, willing to advocate on behalf of others, and reflective. It is crucial for all who are involved with American public education to meet this need boldly and swiftly. A renewed commitment to a civic education that emphasizes both multiculturalism and media literacy is the most logical, and most crucial, direction the American public school system should take to save and perpetuate democratic life.

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