
Democracy & Education

Beyond the Invisible Barriers of the Classroom

iEngage and Civic Praxis

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Abstract

Research literature suggests students need to engage in *actual* civic experiences; however, in most cases, teachers feel unwilling or unable to facilitate experiences beyond the formal classroom setting. In this project, we sought to understand the relationship between social studies teachers' civic ideology, pedagogical approaches, and instructional decision-making through their engagement in an action civics camp. The project is part of a more significant effort to help critically minded teachers engage in more activist praxis by moving past the often-limiting ideological barriers of the classroom. By activist praxis, we refer to the ways a teacher's ideology informs pedagogy related to the ways they are able and willing to extend civic engagement into the material and social world. Activist praxis is part of a teacher's continual engagement in efforts to create the conditions for a more just and equitable public sphere.

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Introduction

IT CAN BE difficult for social studies teachers to help students experience the knowing, the seeing, and the doing of citizenship. Often, teachers feel like they can focus on the cognitive and perceptual aspects of civics but that they are challenged to experience the doing of civics with students because of real and perceived schooling pressures and norms (Magill, 2018; Segall, 2003). Some social studies teachers have commented that they are unable to engage in more transformational civic work because of the administrator gaze or because they feel unprepared to pedagogically support students beyond the immediate classroom. Naturally, teachers who believe they are unable to teach in more active ways rely on normed perceptions of teaching and civic work that imply their activities ought to remain relegated to traditional classroom instruction. However, providing a sense of community, a model for civic instruction, and a sense of solidarity might help these teachers achieve more transformational approaches to civic education. If teachers see that others are open to this type of work and will support them in their efforts, teachers might be able to achieve a more transformational and action-oriented approach to civic instruction.

In this piece, we proceed by outlining literature suggesting students need to see, know, and do civics. Then, we discuss the ways social ideologies limit what teachers believe is possible through civic instruction. We acknowledge that social ideologies and teaching perceptions often make teachers feel like they are unable to engage in certain types of instructional experiences with their students. We argue that there are ways to help teachers achieve these ends by developing spaces where they can communally cultivate civic agency. Then, we describe a potential experience for supporting these types of teachers: a civics camp designed to include spaces and frameworks through which participants can authentically connect with communities and organizations. We conclude by examining the ways that the camp was structurally and philosophically able to support the participants develop community partnerships and ultimately how or if participants would engage in transformational social inquiry with students. Our analysis considers the ideological shifts the counselors made and the likelihood that they will teach beyond the formal classroom space as they return to more traditional environments.

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Lastly, we provide our general analysis of the camp and recommendations for civic instruction.

Literature Review

Civic education scholarship has demonstrated the importance between the learning and the doing of citizenship (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Literature suggests students need to engage in *actual* civic experiences in communities; however, in most cases, teachers feel unwilling or unable to facilitate experiences beyond the formal classroom setting (Journell, 2013; Magill, 2018; Segall, 2003; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). More active, communal, and critically ideological forms of civic education are vital to promoting democratically informed civic agency. When cultural, experiential, and activist forms of civic agency are neglected, students, particularly poor students and students of color, become discouraged from engaging as citizens as they believe the community knowledge they possess is invalid in formal educational contexts (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Even when teachers have the desire to transform social relationships and are taught the need for including social justice perspectives, “norms remain the same and continued to support the hierarchy reflected in the cohort and society” (Agnew et al., 2014, p. 30).

Research also demonstrates how the relationship between authentic, experiential, and personal work can bridge the classroom and community (LeCompte, Blevins, & Riggers-Piehl, 2019; Levinson, 2012; Kahne & Sporte, 2008). Some have examined the effects of approaches like action research, community-based social justice initiatives, and meaningful civic engagement, all of which demonstrate the value of having authentic civic experiences and supporting justice-oriented civic dispositions (Blevins, LeCompte, & Wells, 2016; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). This body of work also reveals the ways these approaches can become vital to a teacher's willingness to engage and facilitate civic participation with students. Resultant ideologies inform the ways teachers' approach activating civic skills, developing civic knowledge, and engaging in civic activities toward positive community changes (Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Vaughn & Obenchain, 2015).

Teachers require models and supports for more engaged civic work. However, the ideologies regulating a teacher's social and educational consciousness sometimes cause them to censor themselves, even when they identify as critical. Further complicating a teacher's critical posture is an “identity perception gap” where

they must consider who they want to be and who they are as teachers (Toshalis, 2010, p. 15). Similarly, more community-focused engagement as praxis can sometimes become limited by the lack of opportunities to foment transformational and experiential civic dispositions. Often this occurs when teachers believe they must fit into normative ways social studies teaching has come to be understood (Magill & Salinas, 2018; Segall, 2003). A related body of literature suggests that social studies teachers may or may not have “active” civic models or mentors and therefore may fear moving instruction beyond the classroom (Journell, 2013; Magill, 2018). Teachers may also believe they do not have the content knowledge or administrative support to teach in these more active, transformational, or nontraditional ways (Rodriguez & Magill, 2017). Therefore, more conventional ideological approaches to civic teaching and activism become part of the self-imposed barriers that restrict alternative pedagogical visions. The choice to separate the classroom from the community sometimes becomes an extension of the ways these complex ideological considerations form a teacher’s identity (Magill & Salinas, 2018; Toshalis, 2010). Scholars like Giroux (2004) have argued for additional research to understand how teacher ideologies are produced, negotiated, and modified in pedagogical practice and how critical identities, interpretations, and agency are discarded or maintained. Breaking through the ideological barriers for more transformational forms of civic instruction are particularly important but requires the fortitude and vision to carry out lessons that promote and apply critical civic agency (Mirra & Morrell, 2011).

Researchers and philosophers have contributed to our understanding of the ways in which teachers, and people more generally, might overcome hegemonic ideology, limited perception, and narrow cultural experiences by using action-oriented civic curricula and taking pedagogical stances (Britzman, 2012; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gramsci, 1971; Howard, 2003; Magill, 2018; Shor, 2012). The scholarship suggests that lessons focused on critical civic agency are better able to help students attend to the individual, social, cultural, political, and economic contexts that situate their lives within a meaningful civic praxis. However, transformational approaches within the classroom require teachers to have ideological clarity about their civic acting (Bartolomé, 2004). Others have found that having critical conversations within teacher education programs about topics like racism, classism or activism can help foster more agentic ideologies in new teachers (Freire, 2018; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Macedo, 2006). We suggest that these dialogical exchanges coupled with mentorship and modeled civic experiences like Youth Engage Summer Civics Institute (pseudonym) may offer teachers a context in which to authentically explore the *doing* of civics as a foundation for theory, practice, and social analysis (Blevins & LeCompte, 2015; Vaughn & Obenchain, 2015).

Youth Engage Camp Context

Youth Engage Summer Civics Institute is a weeklong summer civics camp designed to engage students entering fifth through ninth grades in an action civics process. Action civics emphasizes

an inquiry approach to social studies education and asks students to partake in the *doing* of citizenship. Levinson (2012) has noted that with action civics, “students do and behave as citizens by engaging in a cycle of research, action, and reflection about problems they care about personally while learning about deeper principles of effective civic and especially political action” (p. 224). The camp adopted this model and uses the framing of citizens’ *see*, *know*, and *do* to help campers conceptualize the various elements of being an active and engaged civic participant. For analysis of camper data, Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) citizen typology was used to consider how camper conceptions of citizenship and civic engagement progress and transform as a result of their participation in an action civics curricular model. The model illuminates the *personally responsible citizen*, who acts responsibly in their community by voting or picking up trash; the *participatory citizen*, who participates in community-based civic efforts such as helping organize and attending a blood drive; and the *justice-oriented citizen*, who understands social, economic, and political forces and democratically acts to bring about a more just society through informed, shared analysis. The goal is that through participation in more active civic learning, camper civic ideology and practice would move from a personally responsible notion of citizenship (e.g., dropping off food to a food drive) to more participatory (e.g., organizing a food drive) and justice-oriented acts (e.g., working to understand why people are hungry in the first place) (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Camp activities were designed utilizing an action civics model and are focused on helping students and counselors experience shifts in their civic ideology and practice (Blevins, LeCompte, & Wells, 2016; LeCompte, Blevins, & Riggers-Piehl, 2019). Campers work in small groups with a counselor to identify the root cause of an issue in their community and to consider authentic and sustainable ways in which to advocate for the identified issue. By emphasizing the root cause of community issues, the goal is for camper projects to offer a sustainable solution to a civic problem. Campers are connected to community organizers and activists through a community issues fair and various guest presentations throughout the week. Additionally, campers receive feedback on their projects from local community leaders via the camp’s version of the television show *Shark Tank*. The camp’s Shark Tank is an opportunity for campers to share their ideas with adult leaders in the community. There are two parts to putting together Shark Tank; the first is to solicit at least three to five adults in the community, and the second is to prepare campers for their presentation. Similar to the television show, Sharks are active citizens in the community who are good at giving constructive feedback to our campers. Each group of campers present their community issue, the root cause of the issues, and a possible advocacy campaign. Adult citizens (Sharks) then provide positive endorsement and suggestions for improvement for each group. Thus, campers have the opportunity to refine their projects prior to the community showcase. The camp culminates with a community showcase where campers present their projects to their peers, parents and guardians, school leaders, and local community members.

Prior research on the camp has worked to understand how an action civics model may help youth broaden their conceptualization of citizenship to include those of participatory and justice-oriented citizenship (Blevins, LeCompte, & Bauml, 2018; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Longitudinal studies of the camp suggest short-term inquiry projects can help young adolescents begin to think in terms of participatory and justice-oriented citizenship, although their predominant orientations toward democratic citizenship remain personally responsible (Blevins, LeCompte, & Bauml, 2018). This study is an extension of this previous research but shifts the focus to exploring changes in counselor ideology as a result of participation in leading this action civics experience.

Participants

Preservice teachers served as camp counselors and worked with small groups of students throughout the week. The camp also employed master teachers to serve as supportive mentors to the counselors. These “master teachers” were in-service teachers who camp directors understood to be particularly skilled teachers and who demonstrated the desire to teach civics in more engaged ways. Camp counselors were recruited from within a midsize university in central Texas. For some, their participation as counselor counted as part of their coursework and university field experiences while others elected to participate in the camp. Many of the counselors had a background in education, but a few came from service-based undergraduate majors like counseling and social work.

Counselor and master teacher approaches to civic teaching naturally varied based on individual ideologies, teaching dispositions, and civic perceptions. Camp directors interviewed each counselor and master teacher prior to the camp. These interviews focused primarily on counselor and master teacher classroom experiences and their teaching dispositions. Generally, participant counselors who were studying to be teachers had experienced some pedagogical coursework related to social justice–focused teaching. In a few cases, these teachers had taken social studies coursework that included lessons focused on civic teaching. Directors relied on their interviews to understand the civic and pedagogical dispositions of those whom they had not worked with in the teacher education program. Prior to the camp, each counselor who was chosen to participate communicated that they had a “justice”-focused teaching disposition, but none of the participants described or expressed an intention to work with students beyond the classroom as active civic participants. Rather, they described their desire to train students to be active future citizens.

Counselors attended a two-day professional development workshop on action civics and the specific activities of the camp. Specifically, counselors participated in the same civic experiences in which campers would participate. The action civics cycle provided a pedagogical approach for civic engagement and guided counselors through the research, action, and reflection process. Much like Freire’s (2018) idea of problem posing, the camp curriculum began with dialoguing about issues of concern campers would like to address in their community (Magill &

Rodriguez, 2015). Counselors were trained in how to cultivate meaningful dialogue with students throughout camp. Master teachers participated in the training in a supportive and mentoring role with the counselors. The two-day training before the camp provided some of the artifacts and fieldnotes from which we could establish a baseline understanding of the civic perceptions, ideologies, and postures of the counselors (Magill, 2018; Blevins & LeCompte, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this study helps us consider the theoretical and practical aspects of the camp that provide counselors the opportunity to engage in ideological shifts to their civic dispositions, ways of connecting to the community, and creating the type of community needed for this work. We were particularly interested in how the camp might help counselors see and overcome visible and invisible barriers to the community as they engaged in more authentic civic inquiry and active approaches (Boyte, 2003). Therefore, our frame is based first on examining how the camp would foster a community-centered, action civics teaching approach. Such an approach implies that participants understood the need to know, see, and then actually do civic activities that will transform their communities (Blevins, LeCompte, & Bauml, 2018; Blevins & LeCompte, 2015; Bartolomé, 2004; Freire, 2018; Mirra & Morrell, 2011). Second, we suggest that such an approach to civics education may require what Magill (2018) has called “intellectual solidarity.” To develop intellectual solidarity is to cultivate a supportive community in which the human exchange among equals informs and supports justice-oriented communal democratic projects (Magill & Rodriguez, forthcoming). Last, because participants were exposed to Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) civic typology, we also used this framework as an additional conceptual layer for our data analysis. Similar to our research with campers, we considered how the introduction of a various forms for civic engagement shifted counselors’ thinking about what qualifies as knowledgeable, engaged, active, and transformational citizenship.

The framework for this study helped us to consider what changes to civic understandings and dispositions, if any, resulted from counselor participation in Youth Engage and how a program such as Youth Engage might support teachers in taking a more active civic approach to their in-service teaching. We sought to better understand the ways counselors conceived of civic knowing (informed, thoughtful, participatory, politically active, moral, and virtuous citizenship) (see, for example, NCSS, 2017); seeing (critical consciousness of students and dialectical tensions) (see, for example, Freire, 2018; Hegel, 1977); and doing of citizenship (i.e., teachers’ willingness to adopt community-centered critical pedagogy for supporting student active engagement as civic agents). We acknowledge that our framework may require counselors consciously transgress the visible and invisible boundaries of educational settings as they make connections in the community and do the work of the justice-oriented citizen (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). These boundaries may range from the more visible (e.g., adherence to state standards or administrative norms) to the less visible/more insidious barriers/boundaries

(e.g., hegemonic norms that maintain a neoliberal conception of citizenship or the ideologies that lead to forms of self-regulation).

Method of Inquiry

The purpose of this study was to describe the ways preservice teachers who served as counselors in a youth civics camp took up and implemented an action civics model of instruction and if the camp provided a context for understanding more active forms of civic teaching and learning. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How did participation in the Youth Engage program help transform counselors' civic understandings?
2. How were counselors able to develop civic community with other participants, and how might this help them make conceptual and material shifts to their civic teaching praxis?

In this study, we employed a longitudinal, qualitative, multiple-case study research design. The cases were bound by each of the different counselor cohorts participating in Youth Engage from 2014 to 2019. Three primary data sources informed our study: field notes, artifacts, and surveys from counselors working in Youth Engage (Creswell, 2002; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005). These sources of data were chosen because they provided a balance between counselor voice and the material evidence of the actions taken by counselors during the staff training and the camp. This is important because we are interested in the connection between counselor ideology and the material manifestations of one's ideology.

The number of counselors each year ranged from 10 to 13 with each counselor working with a group of 8 to 10 campers. Each year, there were on average four master teachers. Counselors were asked to complete surveys prior to the staff training and surveys at the end of the camp. Counselor and master teacher surveys included 17 open-ended questions. Field notes were also collected on the counselor interactions within the professional development prior to the start of the camp and as they worked with campers. Researchers remained in contact with several of the counselors as they returned to their preservice or in-service teaching experiences. Counselors were also asked to complete daily reflections in which they responded to a series of questions relating to observations of camper ideological shifts as well as a reflection on their own learning and ideological shifts in their role as the primary teacher of the camp curriculum.

We utilized a constant comparative approach to analyze data, noting similarities, differences, categories, concepts, and ideas to ensure that participant voices and ideas emerged within the patterns and themes discussed in the findings (Glaser & Strauss, 1965; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). Surveys, counselor reflections, field notes, and artifacts were coded using an open and axial coding process, keeping in mind our research frame, which included ideas of ideology and community-centered civic praxis. Codes included (1) general teaching practice, (2) appreciation for the camp community, (3) general applicability of action civics,

(4) movement toward a more critical civic praxis, and (5) barriers to implementing an action civics approach. An example of data coded as movement toward a more critical civic praxis is this:

Because of this curriculum, students have learned real tactics regarding acting out in their community. From picking up trash to hanging posters to simply realizing that it is cool to care about and help their community. (David)

Counselor David (pseudonym) began to move beyond a more traditional civic praxis by noting the need to connect students with real tactics for community activism and encouraging a belief in the "coolness" of helping community but remained confined to defining civic actions to picking up trash and hanging up posters.

Several findings emerged during data analysis related to our research questions and conceptual framework. Next, we outline these findings in more detail using data from the past several years of the camp as a way of providing a holistic picture of the general patterns we see from counselor experiences with an action civics curriculum.

Findings

Though Youth Engage was designed to help campers and counselors rethink and transform more traditional approaches to civics education, we found that many of the ideological barriers limiting counselors from engaging in more critical approaches remained intact after their experiences. Two findings emerged from our data analysis. First, participants began to demonstrate conceptual, though not material, shifts in their critical praxis as a result of the camp. More specifically, counselors showed that they understood and valued more activist civic praxis but continued to ground their understandings within the realities of traditional teaching contexts rather than reimagining how the school can be a place to transform traditional approaches to civics education. Second, the camp offered opportunities for community building and an uncommon space for interactions between teachers, students, and community actors. Counselors noted the unique power within community building, which led to more transformational civic possibility whether it was realized as transformational civic praxis or not. Now, we explore these two findings in more detail.

A Conceptual Shift Toward Active Civic Praxis

The first finding suggests that participants' ideology and their praxiological efforts were conceptually changed during their experience as a counselor at Youth Engage. However, these understandings did not immediately help them transcend the visible and invisible barriers of the classroom. We observed this conceptual transformation during the camp and in how counselors described their experiences. Counselor descriptions of the ways they believed the camp transformed their teaching and their actions revealed a range of conceptualizations for more actively engaged civic teaching. The most common changes to conceptualizations were related to counselors understanding their participation in Youth Engage in value added ways. For example, Julia mentioned:

This was my first experience working as a camp counselor, and I definitely feel I benefitted just as much as my campers (if not more) from this program.

In this example, Julia revealed that she believed her experiences provided her with new frameworks and classroom tools to work with her students. However, she did not discuss potential work in material ways with community partners or more transformational inquiry.

Other counselors, like David, described how student learning could be used to make material changes in the community:

Because of this curriculum, students have learned real tactics regarding acting out in their community. From picking up trash to hanging posters to simply realizing that it is cool to care about and help their community.

David's understanding of these approaches demonstrated increased acknowledgment of the need for more engaged civic approaches but remained tied to be traditional or personally responsible conceptualizations of citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Another counselor, Susan, offered a more transformational and complex response when reflecting on her experiences:

I think the depth [of the curriculum] was incredible. As previously mentioned, it was great to see [campers] challenge societal norms by looking at the causes instead of just spreading awareness. Awareness is great, but it often doesn't spark people's interest to truly make a change in the world. We need more people investigating WHY things are unjust in our world in order to change the cyclical cycles.

While most counselors could speak to the transformational potential of the action civics model of the camp, they did so primarily in superficial ways, emphasizing a personally responsible civic conceptualization (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Susan understood that engaged and transformational citizenship includes more than skills or participation, suggesting that citizens require forms of criticality, awareness, commitment, and active community grounded approaches.

Observations also revealed conceptual shifts in counselor thinking. During an activity where campers were asked to sort placards representing the different citizen types related to the Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) framework, counselors demonstrated that they understood more nuanced and transformational civic conceptualizations. One counselor asked her campers to consider ways active and transformational citizenship included "permanent and systemic changes." Many others emphasized to students that citizens need to engage "in civic acting" in ways that attend to "the root causes of community issues."

However, our observations also revealed that counselors understood their experience at the camp much like an in-service teacher might view a professional development experience—as a skill-building opportunity. The counselors' language in exit interviews implied that they learned the "tools" or methods needed for more active forms of citizenship education. Consider the following illustrative example:

I learned a great deal about classroom management and different models of informal education [inquiry, problem-based learning (PBL)]. I genuinely loved getting to know the kids and having the opportunity to help them learn about citizenship. (Jennifer)

Evidence of conceptual, but not material, shifts in critical civics praxis was perhaps most observed in the way counselors imagined an action civics model in future teaching. Counselors tended to mirror traditional ideologies of a teacher restricted by the neoliberal educational context while acknowledging the need to teach civics education differently. Consider the following examples:

I will try to incorporate a project that involves civics and service, however. I am unsure how much flexibility I will have regarding curriculum since it is my first year to be on the [local middle school] campus. (John, preservice teacher)

I can implement the iCivics games in my class, as I am teaching a blended learning government class this fall. I can also implement the citizen essential questions and chart of what citizens know, see, and do. These align with the government TEKS. (Kathy, master teacher)

Counselors consistently described action civics as it related to its value within existing school structures. They seemed to believe they had agency but did not really believe they would fully exercise that civic agency as teachers. Counselor comments provided insight into what counselors perceived to be the challenges and tensions of their pedagogical practice (Magill & Salinas, 2018; Segall, 2003).

Data collected from camper projects served as an artifact that nuanced the ways we understood counselors' conceptual shifts in civic praxis. Because the counselors worked with the campers throughout the week to build these projects, the camper projects were in many ways an extension of their pedagogical work. In the past, our research has shown that campers' projects reflected participatory civic acts but often remain more connected to personally responsible ideas of citizenship (LeCompte, Blevins, & Riggers-Piehl, 2019; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). For example, the following data is from a project website that the teachers and students developed:

We want to create The Mental Health Fun Run/Walk in order to raise awareness about mental health issues and at the same time raise funds to help adolescents get diagnosed and get treatment at the Klaras Center for Families in [Anonymous City].

In this example, the group's focus was participatory in nature, noting the need to "rais[e](ing) awareness" rather than attend to structural change or justice. However, this group demonstrated a shared vision that was cultivated through their efforts to develop a supportive community. Other projects demonstrated more transformational civic activities that focused efforts on creating more supportive structures to make material changes. Though the projects did not necessarily make structural changes, consider how a counselor and their campers articulated the mission of their project from 2018:

Our goal is to reduce the overall drug abuse of people in poverty in [Anonymous City] by creating a mobile educational vehicle and rehab center. We will have our vehicle go to different poverty stricken areas of the [Anonymous City] community on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

Aspects of this project represent a justice-oriented (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) approach to citizenship as both the counselor and the campers in this group began to embrace a more critical civic approach. We suggest that in this project, the counselor and students were trying to identify the root cause (e.g., lack of access) to drug abuse in their community so it could be addressed in material ways. However, as in the first example, this project did not address the structures that lead to poverty or drug use or the systems that ensure they continue to exist as they do. In this way, the projects were not fully justice-oriented.

The counselors' reflections also suggested their attention to civic skills and more active forms of civic participation increased (Blevins & LeCompte, 2018). For example, counselors made the following comments about ways they would teach civics in the future: "We will have conversations about the community"; "Youth Engage has taught me the value of creating relationships and team building"; "I will have students pick an issue and advocate for it by conducting research"; "I will definitely incorporate that [social research] into my year and allow students to choose/create an advocacy project." As is illustrated in these responses, participation in Youth Engage helped the teachers understand the need for more material and informed transformational civic experiences that includes connecting socially, developing solidarity, conducting research, and engaging in advocacy. While several counselors reflected on the knowledge they gained from participating in the camp, the details of their learning experiences often emphasized generalities, rather than a deeper call to model an activist civics approach that expresses a transformational civic ideology.

We suggest that the counselors conceptually understood that citizenship involves being active and transformational community members by attending to the root causes of social issues. However, these understandings may only encourage counselors to inspire students to become civic agents in future civic acts, rather than work with students in the moment to transcend traditional learning environments. Ideological barriers, existing schooling structures, and more traditional civic understandings appeared to keep participant teachers from more fully, critically, and actively engaging in civic engagement with their students as they become or became teachers of record.

Community and Active Civic Praxis

Our second finding reveals the importance of working as a community of professionals when implementing an action civics curriculum. In many ways, the camp served as a bridge toward teacher adoption of intellectual solidarity and community connectivity. Counselors consistently expressed an appreciation of the support they received during the camp and a level of enjoyment from working *with* campers to address a societal issue. Several counselors shared the following remarks:

I felt like I had so much support from all the [Youth Engage] staff. . . [My master teacher] was always there to offer advice, or just come in the classroom and listen to what my campers had to say. (Whitney, preservice teacher)

I would like to work with the program again because the atmosphere I was around was so energetic and full of life. I thought what the camp provides for campers is awesome and so beneficial for them. I also felt a part of a small family and learned so much from everyone a part of the camp (campers included). (Abby, preservice teacher)

The counselors' expression of gratitude and reliance on the community of support was the most consistent finding across survey data. Even counselors who were hesitant about the effectiveness of the curriculum stated a desire to continue to be involved in Youth Engage camp and an appreciation for the level of teamwork and support provided throughout the week.

Fieldnotes demonstrated the ways counselors used the communal structure of the camp to embody a justice-oriented civic disposition and cultivate partnerships needed to achieve their goals. Counselors made campers feel comfortable by genuinely getting to know them, honoring their concerns and dialoguing. When asked to consider anything their counselors taught them about being a better citizen, campers shared the following responses:

They kind of taught me to speak up for what's right because I am kind of quiet and I need some motivation to speak up. (Camper, 2019)

What I liked about them is that if we had a question or if we were confused on something, they would walk everyone through it. And they let everyone share their ideas, and not just one person and then just choose that. They let everyone share their ideas and like vote on it. (Camper, 2019)

We suggest that dialogue was an important means of developing a sense of community between the students, counselors, citizens and stakeholders. Counselors interviewed individuals who were experts in their chosen areas of inquiry and individuals who might be affected by their efforts with the help of their students. These interviews led to more community minded dispositions that helped counselors understand why more active civic ideologies involve moving beyond the formal classroom. In the most recent iteration of the camp, counselors from two separate groups reached out to camp directors to help connect their campers with additional community experts. We suggest this act demonstrated their desire to make meaningful and potentially transformational community connections and that, in part, the desire to make these connections emerged from the counselors' understanding that dialogical experiences are vital to community change. Further, we believe these understandings emerged in part from the experiences that the camp provided. Camp organizers brought in community members and activists to help counselors and students understand how to become more connected to community organizations and refine their projects:

The judge that came and spoke. He was a very good speaker. And, I liked the way [he] put out all our different rights and stuff. (Camper 1, 2019)

I liked the guest speakers. How they helped and gave you advice on your community issue. (Camper 2, 2019)

Counselors realized how these campers benefitted from this community connectivity and some mentioned “wanting to invite community leaders to their classroom” as they became teachers of record.

We observed the way community helped drive civic projects during the Shark Tank activity. Counselors played an active role in facilitating student development of skills, knowledge, and relationships, to engage community “experts.” These partnerships were demonstrative of the ethical acting that Badiou (2013) has argued is needed to support civic actors in achieving their democratic projects. Similarly, counselors helped students engage with networks of support in the community issues fair. We observed counselors model how to engage community members in conversation about pressing issues, create coalitions of support, and reflect on what experts had to say to create the conditions for shared community action. We observed that these camp structures and the counselor focus on community built spaces for intellectual solidarity, helping campers and counselors’ civic intentions become civic actions.

The camp concluded with a community showcase where campers presented their projects to family members and guardians, university faculty, and community actors. During the showcase, audience members took an active role by giving feedback to campers and counselors. The showcase served as a space for campers and counselors to highlight their work and to connect to other citizens outside of the community partners of the camp. In this way, the work done at the camp transcended *some* of the physical barriers of the camp as shared engagements with the community allowed counselors to see and understand the coalitions of support they can build to overcome the restrictive ideologies that often govern civics education.

Clearly, systems, supports, and expectations have the potential to help counselors transcend the invisible and visible barriers of the classroom by providing the conditions for developing community, professionalism, and solidarity between stakeholders in support of counselors. Even though a false consciousness can limit what is possible for teachers or citizens (Magill & Salinas, 2018; Eagleton, 2007), this condition can be overcome when teachers, students, and administrators come together in support of their educational community and actually do the work of active citizens (Gibson, 2003; Vaughn & Obenchain, 2015).

Discussion

Based on their work in the camp, counselors began to demonstrate early steps toward a more community-centered civic teacher approach, a community-centered civic teaching praxis (Bartolomé, 2004; Freire, 2018), and development of intellectual solidarity with others in support of this work (Magill & Rodriguez, forthcoming). Counselors displayed a commitment to the study of effective and

socially just citizenship and expressed a desire to embody a community-centered pedagogy. They generally revealed, in discussion and action, that they understood the need for more active and transformational ideologies and approaches. In fact, three previous participants in the Youth Engage have taken what they learned over the years and applied the action civics model in their classrooms. However, ideological transformation occurred most significantly when they worked to develop civic *ideals*, rather than to cultivate opportunities to civically *act*. This is also reflected in camper data. We observed campers effectively use the *language* of the camp and appropriate the citizenship frameworks, but they had difficulties with a deeper shift in their understandings of civic engagement after leaving the camp (Blevins, LeCompte, & Bauml, 2018).

We argue some of the reasons these counselors did not move toward more justice-oriented civic teaching experiences appeared to be related to structural issues of support and ideological issues related to fear and normed perspectives of teaching. When asked about providing more justice-oriented civic experiences in their future classrooms, many counselors commented on specific activities such as the iCivics games, camp speakers, and practice inquiries. This suggested to us that participants still understood teaching first, from the positionality of the traditional teacher. Ideologically related, some participants commented they felt it would be difficult to do this type of civic teaching because the structures of the camp “do not exist” in their school context and that they “[would not] feel comfortable” doing the type of work the camp requires as beginning teachers, educators, and mentors. Many of the counselors expressed that they would be more likely to facilitate more justice-oriented experiences if they had “more supports from other teachers or administrators [in their teacher placements]” or if they could “connect the camp” and camp experiences to the formal schooling curriculum. Therefore, we suggest that more clarity in the camp, more explicit support in schools, more seamless translations between the camp and formal schooling experiences, and an unlearning related to what civics teaching is in schools would be beneficial.

Many counselors began to understand the value in moving beyond the invisible, visible, and ideological barriers of the classroom with students, but they often remained confined to a limited view of the potential for action civics to make a *real* change in the community and how to support more justice-orientation civic conceptions (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). While counselors did demonstrate aspects of a community-centered critical pedagogy, they were also reluctant to partake in the riskier action of civic praxis. Teachers understood the Youth Engage experiences as a vehicle to prepare students for future civic efforts, rather than understanding Youth Engage as a model by which they could move their instructional practice into communities. Further, the participants were more likely to engage in civic work with students that promoted the skills of effective citizenship rather than a transformed reading of the world in which one can identify root causes of issues and work toward systemic change.

Perhaps the greatest impact of Youth Engage on pedagogy was demonstrated in the counselors' attention to team building, community issues, generative discussions, and civic inquiry. The counselors demonstrated intellectual solidarity with students and to a larger degree with their fellow teachers and other stakeholders (see, for example, Magill & Rodriguez, forthcoming). The camp community allowed for important conversation of what is possible and opened spaces for transformational thought and potential action. The experiences resulted in pedagogical shifts toward dialogue, inquiry, and participatory and justice civic orientations (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), which improved student civic experiences that had formerly place a heavy emphasis on learning government structures.

Though counselors began to superficially develop a more community-centered civic teaching approach (Bartolomé, 2004; Freire, 2018; Magill, 2018; Mirra & Morell, 2011), counselors remained tied to what we understand to be the *learned limitations of civic praxis*. Counselors appeared aware of many social tensions in need of civic address but appeared less willing or able to implement the projects they proposed as they moved to their more formal teaching experiences. Optimistically, the camp helped counselors develop projects with their students that were grounded in the issues and civic concerns of campers (Freire, 2018). However, these efforts largely ended with the camp, though the counselors used some of the materials, frameworks, and experiences in their civic teaching to a minor degree in their pedagogical practices as in-service teachers. Therefore, creating sustained environments to support more active civic ideologies may be required. It may be valuable for future research to examine those things teachers consider challenges to overcome, the ways teachers are able to traverse the ideological and conceptual barriers established in the formal schooling experiences, and those teachers who are doing more active civic work and how they achieve this with and for students.

Implications and Conclusions

While our findings indicate that counselors began to demonstrate a deeper understanding of a community-centered civic teacher approach and a community-centered civic teacher practice, the level to which they experienced and expressed an ideological transformation of their praxis varied, with most counselors expressing a *conceptual* rather than *active* civic praxis. Counselors understood the ideas and motivations of the camp but were limited in considering how these ideas can result in a transformed material reality. We briefly outline four implications from this research that might help to move teachers beyond the barriers of the learned limitations of civic praxis.

First, Youth Engage and action civics could be more explicit in advocating for activist efforts (see, for example, Magill & Salinas, 2018). We find this to be true in the ways in which we speak to civic action with campers as well. If we expect counselors and campers to genuinely embrace a justice-oriented civic posture, we need to more explicitly attend to issues of power and oppression. While the camp does emphasize finding the "root cause" of a community issue, we did not clearly structure these root causes as related to

systems of power. This is related to discussions in the literature that current conceptions of citizenship fail to account for historicity and the contemporary global nature of politics, emphasizing civic republican and liberal frameworks at the exclusion of a more critical frameworks (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006; Isin, 2009). Without attending to the historical, subjective, and relational nature of citizenship, teachers and students may struggle to find a civic identity outside of systemic and structural definitions of what constitutes effective civic engagement. We suggest this implication directly translates to in-service social studies teaching. If we believe in active civic praxis, then teacher education programs and schools can be more explicit helping teachers understand how this type of work is positive and possible.

Second, we intend to further support future counselors in their moves beyond the barriers of learned limitations to pursue more activist pedagogical approaches by creating structures where grassroots and community engagement can exist in and beyond classrooms. The neoliberal realities of the traditional classroom and standards-based educational approaches tend to force teachers to rely on safe and traditional approaches to civic teaching. However, we can continue to work with the counselors as they enter the classroom and develop communities of support with other activist teachers, so they feel supported in their efforts rather than overwhelmed by the pressures to follow a state-mandated curriculum or intimidated by bringing action civics type models to their colleagues.

Third, those working with teachers or counselors may need to trouble the discourse and ideology of limited civic engagement. Far too often, social studies teachers view students as incapable of pursuing community activism and engagement. However, if students do not have these experiences now, they are likely to understand citizenship in more passive ways. This implication was revealed in data representing both campers and counselors. Campers saw themselves as activists during their time at Youth Engage, but they viewed themselves as limited by their age as outside of the camp. A key component of action civics is considering problems within the community. While these issues may exist within the school walls, they are inevitably linked to larger social issues. As we continue to conceptualize action civics and activism as a pedagogical approach, we should consider how to express the importance of explicitly acting beyond the camp or the classroom. While the camp is vital to supporting and scaffolding notions of civic engagement, the emphasis must always begin inward but manifest outward so that students begin to see civic action as an everyday practice and not merely as part of a summer camp or unit.

Fourth, teachers might work in the community and to develop community as they implement action civics. Our findings overwhelmingly show that one of the most effective elements of the camp was the ways counselors felt part of a supportive community. The staff worked closely together to ensure both counselors and campers felt supported and valued throughout this experience. When counselors (or teachers) do not feel supported, they begin to feel overwhelmed by the "learned limitations" of pursuing activist pedagogical approaches. We, as a staff, could help in this regard by

maintaining a closer relationship with our counselors as they enter into the classroom and make a more intentional effort to check in with them and ask in what ways we might support them in pursuing an activist pedagogy. Related to our findings, we again note how the counselors felt a sense of empowerment through the community that existed in the camp. As we consider the ways in which teachers might express a community-centered civic teacher approach, we might focus on the ways in which developing intellectual solidarity (Magill, 2018; Magill & Rodriguez, forthcoming) supports teachers as they take up activist projects they know will help their students and communities. Solidarity is a powerful form of civic acting in which teachers take on the alienation of oppressed people and work with all in the community to develop the fellowship support necessary for social transformation. It is important for teachers and teacher education programs to create spaces of solidarity for teachers to work inter-discipline, inter-community, and inter-culturally with others to solve social problems through civic activism (Magill & Rodriguez, 2015).

We suggest that teachers adopted the ideological approaches, underpinnings, and willingness to act when supported by their peers, but they may require further ideological and material supports to engage in more community-centered civic work. We also suggest that teachers might benefit from contexts that ask them to think differently about the ways they understand civic spaces and civic praxis. The formal implementation of frameworks such as action civics and Youth Engage are helpful for many teachers continuing to push their activist efforts, however these frameworks and networks of support need to be extended to traditional classrooms setting. More attention is needed to the elements that limit what a teacher believes is possible and to supporting them in working beyond these perspectives (see, for example, Magill, 2018; Segall, 2003). Teachers may require more expertise or pedagogical support to transcend the visible and invisible barriers of the classroom. Therefore, developing connections between structures like Youth Engage and traditional classrooms might be a helpful way to demonstrate that others support their efforts. Explicit messaging about the benefits of soliciting community participation, incorporating community stakeholders, administrators, and families into social inquiry projects may help develop the support counselors require. Similarly, an explicit focus on activist civic praxis would have likely increased teacher willingness to more fully engage with the community. Future research will examine some of these efforts. It is clear that teachers are both gatekeepers and gateways to more authentic civic experiences, as they are conduits for meaningful classroom and community civic endeavors (Blevins & LeCompte, 2018; Mirra & Morell, 2011; Salinas, Fránquiz & Vickery, 2016; Thornton, 1991). Their engagement is based on their ideological approaches and more activist approaches, which can be supported.

Given our analysis, we suggest that there is potential for civics education to move beyond the visible and invisible barriers of the classroom and connecting social and formal/traditional classroom experiences to make civics education more authentic,

real, and impactful. It appears that ideology, time, and support structures prevent these experiences from occurring, but providing frameworks for teachers, opening up curriculum, and creating models like Youth Engage can help fulfill the promise of more meaningful civic engagement experiences. We have discussed at length how ideologies situate the ways teachers approach civics education. If we believe civic participation is important, then providing teachers and students' time to engage with more transformational and hands-on approaches to civics can and should be made a priority.

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