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Critical Inquiry, Conceptual Clarity, and Contextual Limits

A Response to *Re-centering Civics: A Framework for Building Dispositions and Action Opportunities*

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Abstract

In *Re-centering Civics: A Framework for Building Dispositions and Action Opportunities*, the authors presented a framework to help social studies teachers in any subject or grade level re-center civic education. The authors' article draws from the C₃ Framework and C₃Teachers.org to offer six civic dispositions teachers might focus on cultivating with their students, and the article highlights ways in which student engagements with any historical inquiry might be steered toward real-world civic action. In this response, we underscore the strengths of *Re-centering Civics* while also outlining a necessary, critical attention to the concepts undergirding the authors' framework. Our response builds from *Re-centering Civics* by offering examples of how the concepts at play in the initial article might be reconfigured, how teacher questioning can be made more critical, how issues of diversity and power can be more effectively attended to, and how the everyday, contextual limitations of teachers might affect their ability to carry out this framework. Our response aims to strengthen the authors' admirable project, one we are fully aligned with: integrating thoughtful, critical, and deliberate civic education—and meaningful action—into social studies education writ large.

This article is in response to

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Introduction

IN *RE-CENTERING CIVICS: A Framework for Building Dispositions and Action Opportunities* (2022), Muettterties et al. proposed a framework for civic learning dispositions that draws upon the College, Career, and Civic Life (C₃) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. Among the objectives of the C₃ Framework are enhancing the rigor of social studies education by fostering inquiry, critical thinking, and problem solving and cultivating participatory skills that provide students with tools to become engaged citizens and democratic

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decision-makers (see www.socialstudies.org/standards/c3 for the complete standards).

Re-centering Civics (2022) focuses primarily on the parts of the C3 Framework that pertain to building civic dispositions and action opportunities for students within the “regular” social studies curriculum. The article provides “a set of civic dispositions that can be operationalized by teachers and instructional designers to support students’ civic learning and engagement within existing social studies curricular content—serving as a practical heuristic for amplifying authentic civic learning and engagement” (p. 2). In a particular reference to the C3 Framework’s emphasis on inquiry as a means to enhance and deepen social studies education, the authors suggested that “at the heart of inquiry learning is the belief that students do not become engaged citizens through diffusion but rather through educating with a deliberate focus on developing students’ civic knowledge, democratic skills, dispositions, and applying those learnings in a democratic experience” (p. 2).

The authors’ vision of social studies education, one that is (re)-centered on a civic education that demands action—the real-world application of democratic skills—is a necessary and welcome focus. It is not hyperbolic to suggest that we are living in a unique moment. Tenets of pluralistic democracy—free speech and equal and uninhibited access to voting, to name just two—are under fire, and as existential threats like the climate crisis worsen, thereby threatening the stability of political systems around the globe, it is more crucial than ever that civic education is made to matter in concrete ways. The authors of *Re-centering Civics* (2022) understand this, and so the aims undergirding the paper are necessarily provocative: A civic education that does not compel action, movement, is useless. Moreover, civic education is, for the authors, and we tend to agree, the unifying purpose of social studies education. *Re-centering Civics* provides a heuristic for how civic education—and the civic action it necessarily compels—can be re-centered in social studies education, regardless of topic, discipline, or grade level.

Our response to *Re-centering Civics* (2022) begins with a brief overview of the article itself, highlighting the authors’ primary aims and the many strengths of their project. In short, we discuss what makes *Re-centering Civics* such a necessary contribution to civic education in this unique political moment, a landscape that could be characterized as both violent and apathetic, a moment in which the future of democracy in the United States is called into question with every election (Kleinfeld, 2021). The bulk of our response builds upon and alongside the authors’ article because—in the interest of moving beyond simple critique—we want to offer different ideas for how the authors’ framework might be strengthened and made more impactful. As our title suggests, our response focuses on concepts, inquiry, and action, and we aim to provide concrete extensions for how teachers (of all school subjects) and teacher educators might embrace the authors’ framework in their classrooms in critical and meaningful ways.

An Overview of *Re-centering Civics*: Strengths and Contributions

As social studies researchers, teacher educators, and field instructors who have studied civic education, who teach prospective teachers about the importance of fostering more meaningful civic education in classrooms, and who regularly visit schools and, thus, witness social studies education in middle and high school social studies classrooms, we embrace the ideas undergirding this article wholeheartedly. We believe this article shines a light upon an important missing link in how civic education is considered, and taught, in public schools. That is, and as the authors suggest, while there are currently increasing efforts and initiatives to enhance civic education with students, such efforts often take place on the margins of the regular, ongoing social studies curriculum rather than as an active element of it. While these initiatives have many merits, the fact that they are not core to the curriculum renders them peripheral to what students do on a regular basis. We join the authors of this article in warning that if in-depth, continuous, integral civic education—as proposed in this piece—is not adopted, students (and teachers) may continue to disregard civic education, and, consequently, the opportunity to forefront real-world action in all social studies subjects will be impeded. Indeed, only when civics is re-centered in social studies curriculum can it become central to teaching and learning.

We particularly appreciate how the article operationalized the stance it proposed by providing examples for teachers, demonstrating how an action-oriented civic education can be infused into curriculum. Significantly, the authors helped teachers see how civic elements are already present in their curriculum, readily available for them to take up with their students. In addition, the authors’ examples (drawn directly from the C3 Framework, see C3Teachers.org for complete inquiry modules) modeled how civic understandings can help connect explorations of the past, like in a world history course, for example, with issues of morality, ethics, and civic responsibility and ways of taking civic action in meaningful ways, a shift that can make the curriculum as a whole more engaging and relevant for students.

In our view, the authors accomplished this through their expert attention to the necessity of action, a focus they cited as being grounded in Dewey’s (1916/2012) call for students to actively tend to democratic life. “Tend” is a crucial word, here, implying that “democratic civic life” requires attention and maintenance, or tending; democratic civic life is not a natural state of society, guaranteed to persist as a static status quo—the rise of autocrats around the world, as well as prevalent antidemocratic sentiments in the United States, demonstrate the need for a civic life that is both vigilant and active (Applebaum, 2021). The bottom line is that articles like *Re-centering Civics* (2022) are needed right now in the field of social studies education. As the authors alluded to time and time again—civic education demands action, and civic education cannot be confined to a civics or government class; it is a through line that ought to be taken up by social studies teachers in all disciplines and subject areas. As the authors put it, “civic learning and supporting democratic practices is a central purpose of

modern schooling” (Muetterties et al., 2022, p. 4), and *Re-centering Civics* is guided by this commitment.

Accordingly, the authors’ focus on civic action in social studies informed their methodical analysis of the C3 Framework and specifically its inquiry database (C3Teachers.org), a trove of 120 inquiry blueprints that span the field of social studies and range from kindergarten to high school. The authors asked: “What democratic dispositional outcomes can civic learning opportunities build toward?” (Muetterties et al., 2022, p. 2), and they condensed their findings into six thematic categories that effectively shape the core of their article. Helpfully, the six categories (knowledge-building, fairness-building, community-building, care-building, freedom-building, and democracy-building) cut across every social studies subject, whether a curriculum is nominally United States history, world history, geography, or whatever else. We believe the authors’ framework, particularly their simple yet profound use of the suffix “-building,” is a generative way of helping teachers forefront action in both their planning and delivery of a given lesson. As the authors pointed out, it can be difficult for a teacher to build connections between a school subject like geography and meaningful civic action in the real world, but the authors’ generous provision of themes like “community-building” and “care-building,” to name just two, are open and nonprescriptive, allowing individual teachers to think creatively about how they might get their students acting and moving in new ways, regardless of a lesson’s topic. And this is important because meaningful civic action is necessarily contextual and it is local (even civic action that is “national” in its scope and aims occurs in a specific time and place), and the authors’ attention to pedagogical freedom demonstrated a certain faith in teachers’ abilities to think critically about how they might re-center civics within their own classrooms and communities. In short, the authors’ civic dispositions framework alone—even without inquiry examples—is a useful tool for teachers. Just as Bloom’s Taxonomy’s provision of myriad verbs can help teachers think differently about what their students might do, the *Re-centering Civics* (2022) framework can rejigger how teachers think about civic action in relation to their teaching.

Building from this, the core of *Re-centering Civics* (2022) works through tangible examples of how all six civic dispositions can be “centered” in any social studies classroom, regardless of topic or curriculum. Significantly, each example can be found on C3Teachers.org—the inquiry database—and the authors methodically demonstrated how their framework is grounded in concrete curricular examples that require student historical inquiry and conclude with student action: the taking of a theme that is grounded in a historical topic that is then brought to bear on a real-world contemporary issues and in the everyday experiences of students, concluding with some form of action in the world beyond the classroom.

Following examples for all six of the civic dispositions that shape their framework (all drawn from C3Teachers.org), the authors offered examples of their own, focusing on four dispositions, what they titled their “Application of Framework” (p. 9): knowledge-building, fairness-building, community-building, and

care-building. They proposed ways in which these civic dispositions might be cultivated that follow a similar pattern to the inquiries cited from C3Teachers.org.

Digging Deeper: Building Upon, and Alongside, *Re-centering Civics*

In this section, we highlight some areas in which, we believe, the article could have gone further to better ensure the heuristic it provided for civic education in classrooms could take root in more substantive, comprehensive, and inclusive ways. We say this not to dispute what is already well-stated in the article but, rather, to extend the thinking already inherent in it. Our intent, then, in what follows, stems from our invested engagement with this article—along with our admiration for the aims of the authors—and so our response aims to build with, and alongside, the authors’ core project: *Re-centering Civics* (2022). To this end, while some of our comments speak to aspects the authors directly discussed in the article, other comments, which we frame as “building alongside” *Re-centering Civics*, move beyond the scope of the authors’ article. Of course, the authors wrote their article with clear and concise purposes, and our suggestions are aware of the inherent constraints of any study and article. Thus, our suggestions aim to be a conversant extension of their work into new areas we might consider, and possibly move toward, as a field.

Contesting and Reimagining Concepts

First, we want to explore the relationship between the concepts that serve as the bedrock of the authors’ framework—as well as the inquiry examples they cited and offered—and the civic actions they imagined students taking. We start with a straightforward question: What happens when the concepts guiding the civic actions we want our students to embody remain the same or are not thoroughly discussed, contested, taken apart, and, crucially, reconfigured? One thing we noticed as we engaged with *Re-centering Civics* (2022) is that most of the concepts undergirding the authors’ framework (e.g., democracy, care, fairness, community) escaped thorough critique and discussion. By this we mean that the concepts undergirding many of the questions students are asked to inquire about in the article’s example inquiries remained conceptually vague, or, at the very least, the definition of a concept undergirding a given inquiry was assumed, taken as given. In short, it was not contested. This, we believe, is problematic because a concept like democracy, for example, is shot through with varied interpretations and real-world appearances, mis-appearances, and disappearances. So, while a concept like democracy might refer to (in a social studies classroom) a governmental system similar to the one seen in the United States—a representative government comprised of elected officials—there are alternative conceptualizations of democracy that can illuminate its presence or absence in society.

As an example, let’s look at democracy more closely. Following Graeber (2007) and Chomsky (2004), whether we live in a democracy is an open question—it is not a static fact—and perhaps the elusive nature of democracy itself might be seized upon by civic educators. For example, Graeber (2007) defined “democracy” as

decentralized and consensus-based, and argues that, historically, democracy “has nothing to do with electing representatives” (p. 3). Settling on a definition is not the issue here because what “democracy” means has changed over time; indeed, for most of history, democracy was equated with disorder and factional violence, a phenomenon warded off against by society’s aristocrats and ruling elites, including Thomas Jefferson and other “Founding Fathers.”

The notion that democracy is “a system in which citizens of a state elect representatives to exercise state power in their name” is only a recent phenomenon, and Graeber’s (2007) point was that most conceptualizations of “democracy” demand a performance of democracy, an idea not dissimilar from the vision undergirding *Re-centering Civics* (2022). Democracy appears—coalescing, assembling, before disassembling—in “the spaces in between” (Graeber, 2007, p. 1), spaces of improvisation and messy consensus-building. Crucially (and provocatively), democracy cannot be embedded, or made real, in an institution or an elected, representative body. As Graeber (2007) said, “States cannot, by their nature, ever be truly democratized. They are, after all, basically ways of organizing violence” (p. 30).

Instructively, this is a far cry from social studies curriculum that equate democracy with the periodic election of a governing body like a state legislature, and it works alongside Wolin’s (1994) notion of “fugitive democracy” and Xenos’s (2001) “momentary democracy,” both of which view democracy as necessarily experienced as opposed to a static political system. Or, taken in an entirely different direction, “democracy-building” is what President George W. Bush called his administration’s largely failed aims in Afghanistan and Iraq: the creation of democratic institutions to make democracy flourish, what amounted to a sort of “cart before the horse” error (Carothers, 2003, p. 97). Once again, we can glimpse the tension between democracy as an institution or as experienced and practiced, a differentiation we argue is crucial for civic educators to work through with their students.

Our primary point, here, is not to recommend one conceptualization of democracy over another but rather to demonstrate how “democracy-building” can not only mean many different things but also be acted upon in various ways. Crucially, we are highlighting this as an opportunity for social studies educators, an opportunity that is aligned with this article’s focus; the fleeting nature of democracy—its “happening” is necessarily about civic action, about movement, an essential theme running throughout this article. For instance, in the example the authors cited for democracy-building, students explored apartheid in South Africa with “political participation [being] the central focus” (Muettterties et al., 2022, p. 9). This is an admirable focus, and it is an instructive example of how a nominally “democratic institution” like the South African apartheid state can be simultaneously racist, inequitable, and antidemocratic—an ideal opportunity for students to encounter, and grapple with, anti-state conceptions of democracy, for example (Graeber, 2007). But while the authors encouraged students to look at the “democratic practices” citizens employed to end apartheid, the practices themselves were not discussed, and no clear action concluded the inquiry module. We suggest that opening up democracy conceptually might illuminate what these

practices might be, perhaps even turning students away from the notion that legislation enforced by state power is the only way to bring about change (although it is certainly one important method!). The authors were right in citing apartheid as a compelling example of this truth, and we imagine alternative versions of this activity challenging students’ imaginations of what collective civic action can do.

Generally speaking, we are suggesting a more critical attunement to the concepts that are foundational to civic education, the concepts that will inform future action. And because all actions are informed by concepts, it is essential that K–12 students—as well as teacher candidates—are encouraged to contest and deliberate these concepts in an intentional manner, a sort of supplemental but crucial activity that can fit nicely into the authors’ framework.

Critical Questions

Second, and building from our discussion of concepts, we explore how guiding questions function in *Re-centering Civics* (2022). Here we want to look more closely at the interplay between the civic disposition invoked and the historical inquiry suggested, offering a few of our own ideas for how learning activities might be enriched. As an illustration, we use the example offered by the authors about a historical inquiry grounded in the global slave trade and the commodification of sugar, which asks: How did sugar feed slavery? The inquiry highlights connections teachers might elucidate for their students, through lines that stretch from sugar plantations in the Caribbean in the 18th century to our current landscape of global trade, the habits of consumerism, and the ethical questions entangled with issues of production and mass consumption. Students were then asked to explore whether the products they consume on a daily basis are produced through “inhumane means,” and after determining “the severity of the potentially inhumane production practices for the popular consumer products they identified . . . (they will) create a commercial to raise awareness of inhumane production practices. Students, and their audience, can decide to support or stop use of the product” (Muettterties et al., 2022, p. 8). Here, we want to highlight the inquiry’s concluding focus on action, the taking of a theme that is grounded in a historical topic and then brought to bear in the everyday habits of students.

We find the example of the sugar and slave trade illustrative of other inquiries offered in the article and how it/they might be strengthened. Specifically, our main aim here is to focus on what questions teachers are asking their students to grapple with. First, we suggest that for this activity to be most effective in how it literally moves students to take meaningful action, a teacher might encourage their students to drill down toward some core questions, ones that could disclose problematic values or dispositions we often do not interrogate because we view them as norms. In other words, and to paraphrase Greene (1978), is the world presented to students (and teachers) as given, or is it open to being changed? In this vein, the questions teachers ask might aim to draw out fundamental issues: Is it possible for a factory to be a humane space? What do we mean by “humane,” and who decides this? The factory owner or the workers? Finally, are we really free to work

where want to work? Who is freer to make these decisions and why?

Here, we are building upon the example of inquiry regarding sugar and the slave trade by highlighting how the concepts at play are embedded in guided questions, concepts and themes extending from the 18th century to today. It is critical to note that this intellectual work—the uncovering of concepts, the writing of good questions—while difficult, is one job of the teacher, and it is essential this work is a part of the activities the authors outlined. Otherwise, an exemplary activity like this could become just another lesson, void of inquiry that can compel movement and fueled, instead, by explicit, easy “connections,” that evoke presentism. But executed well, the historical inquiry around, for example, the “sugar plantations and the global slave trade” could be made to matter in a radical, affective sense. The content should not become an end in itself but rather a jumping off point for students to consider their own ethical, or unethical, participation in globalized trade and our problematic habits of mass consumption, waste, and ignorance of exploitation. Ideally, this will be a complicated discussion, one that is filled with nuance, contradictions, and the painful recognition of how hard it can be to extricate ourselves from the unjust webs of which we are a part. We suggest this activity, in its best form, can end with neither (a) a performance of sadness that stays in the classroom before evaporating at the bell nor (b) a collection of student-made commercials that radiate with naïve optimism and impossible promises. As the authors suggested, connecting historical topics or inquiry with particular civic dispositions will, however slightly, shift how students see themselves in the world in relation to one another, showing them how the effects of their actions and choices far exceed their own bodies, school, and communities.

We presume the authors already expected these sorts of “deeper,” conceptual discussions to occur in a classroom where a teacher is looking to implement this work, to re-center civics, and it is beyond the scope of *Re-centering Civics* (2022) to go into further depth regarding the nature of what this inquiry could look like. Moreover, it is important to reemphasize that the example here (sugar and the slave trade) is drawn from C3Teachers.org, but it is similar to the authors’ own offerings and, in our view, serves as an instructive example of this style of deeper questioning that might benefit their framework. And, of course, the inquiry will look differently in every classroom, depending upon the teacher, the students, and the community in which a given lesson takes place. This is a good thing! But our extension here is to call for a critical attention to the concepts at play, how these questions are framed to students as guiding questions *and* as the ensuing action. Our hunch is that a thorough, and critical, exploration of a given concept, combined with provocative, affective questions, might open students’ civic actions to alternative possibilities.

Evaluating Action

Third, we’d like to note that, as the authors point out, not all civic actions are inherently good, an important distinction for teachers thinking about how their students might engage in “freedom-building,” for example. Indeed, plenty of recent civic actions in the

United States have been decidedly antidemocratic; for example, one could imagine the rioters on January 6, 2021 arguing they were “fairness-building,” correcting an unfair election result. And so, just as learning a skill in social studies requires a next step, examples of how that skill might be used in ways that are ethical, or not harmful, while learning a given topic does not mean students will engage in civic action that is necessarily just, right, or good. Again, we are homing in on what is now a familiar focus: a necessary attention to conceptual clarity, critical questions, and crucial, evaluative discussions regarding future action. While the authors’ framework does not preclude these foci, we are suggesting their framework would benefit from a more intentional focus on these necessary precursors to civic action that is not only meaningful but just and humanizing.

Later in the article, the authors clarified that “what the themes [e.g., fairness, care] do provide is a reminder of the shared dispositional values and ethics that are expected of individuals living in a civil democratic society and, likewise, connect those dispositions to the necessary rigorous process that informs how we interpret and assess ‘the facts,’ whether in the ancient past or in modern contexts” (Muetterties et al., 2022, p. 11). Surely, teachers ought to expect these “shared dispositional values and ethics” (Muetterties et al., 2022, p. 11) to be contested, and we suggest this is a good thing. We are suspicious of any set of “values” thought to be above critique, let alone deliberation, and we commend the authors for addressing the necessity of a “rigorous process that informs how we interpret and assess ‘the facts’” (Muetterties et al., 2022, p. 28), a process they situate as a necessary precursor to any action that will be both meaningful and just. But crucially, the authors’ attention to this “rigorous process” does not appear until the article’s conclusion, and we found ourselves looking for an earlier discussion of how deliberation and discussion, for example (the “rigorous process” the authors mentioned is never defined), are an integral part of their framework. And indeed, it is evident these practices are valued by the authors—they are embedded in the article, however implicitly—but we suggest they might be highlighted more explicitly throughout, especially since it pertains to issues of diversity.

Though there is some focus on diversity in *Re-centering Civics* (2022), mostly with regard to curricular aspects inherent in the inquiries proposed, there is minimal engagement with diversity—of bodies or opinions—within the student body comprising the classroom in which such inquiries are to take place and the ways in which those elements of diversity, and the power relations undergirding them, position students to voice (or withhold) particular views as those inquiries unfold. Much like the need to critically engage the concepts comprising the heuristic offered in the paper, we suggest that more attention should be given to the fact that students in classrooms are raced, gendered, and classed and that they are always already positioned by these categories of difference in ways that often preclude them from sharing their views regarding a particular inquiry with others, especially when the latter touch on core aspects of one’s identity that are, at times, marginalized in the broader discourse that takes place in classrooms. Attending to such matters, we argue, should

be part and parcel of a plan to engage students with difficult topics, particularly ones that ask students to share their own realities and act in the world.

Sociopolitical Constraints

A final point—and a caution of sorts—pertains to the relationship between a problem the authors identified at the outset of the paper and the solution offered to that problem through the heuristic provided in their article. Part of the premise of the paper is that social studies teachers currently do not engage civic education in the comprehensive manner it deserves. In the section titled “Civic Learning Opportunities” (Muetterties et al., 2022, p. 3), the authors attributed this to a variety of reasons: teachers neglecting the civic action component even as they promote inquiry in classrooms; teachers using civic learning opportunities that are insufficient in developing students’ civic competences; civic learning that is inequitably distributed; and civic education that emphasizes content but “does not necessarily lead to students meaningfully applying content to their civic lives, developing civic dispositional commitments, or critically assessing previously held beliefs” (Muetterties et al., 2022, p. 3). As our observations in public school classrooms have illustrated over and over again, there is little we can say to dispel those statements. Still, we would suggest that the reasons for teachers not implementing the kind of civic education the authors advocated for are complex. In the current climate of a divided politics that has rendered classroom discussions about diversity problematic, in some states even becoming “punishable,” and where Pulitzer Prize-winning authors—from Toni Morrison to Art Spiegelman (1980/1997)—are removed from school libraries, and where school board meetings are beyond contentious, teachers may have other reasons, other than an unavailable new heuristic, to avoid meaningful civic education in classrooms.

This is not to suggest that the heuristic proposed in this article is not important and potentially generative. We have faith that teachers who are already inclined to incorporate civic education in their classroom will embrace and use this heuristic to enhance and deepen what they already do or wish to be doing. We also know we will be introducing our own preservice teacher candidates to this framework, encouraging them to adopt it in their classrooms. But we—or anyone—cannot assume it will serve as a remedy for the myriad reasons teachers have for not centering civics, a few of which we have speculated upon. That, having read this article, they will suddenly “see the light” and begin to teach differently. To state the obvious: teachers—like all of us—will continue to find ways to avoid teaching that they might perceive as dangerous and contentious and, in some cases, approaches that demand a new way of thinking, that complicate the curriculum, that find them falling behind pace in “covering” the curriculum as they—or their department colleagues, district, or state—perceive it. All this is to suggest, and as so much research over decades has illustrated, that for a new curricular and/or pedagogical approach to be rooted meaningfully, more needs to occur than providing teachers with a tool—as great as it may be—that they could use in their classrooms.

Moreover, it is essential to remember that, although our response followed the spatial contours of the article to which

we responded—an article focused on social studies curriculum specifically—re-centering civics most effectively must become a schoolwide effort, one that takes place in all other subject area classrooms as well as on school grounds. After all, civics is inherent to all school environments. Explicitly, implicitly, or through its problematic omission, civics—and the desire, ability, and/or disposition to enact it—is part and parcel of the many lessons that students learn throughout the school day. Civics is inherent to the kinds of responsibilities students are invited to assume, in the connections made between school and the outside world, in the questions students are asked in classrooms and who is invited (or feels they have the authority and power) to respond to those questions, or in how teams are organized in the school grounds and how rules for engagement are constructed and by whom. Indeed, all that occurs or is dismissed in the various spaces of the broader school community is a lesson in civics, one that impacts what students understand civics is and could be, as well as defines the kind of agency they might have in making the necessary changes for the common good, however they choose to define it.

Conclusion

Re-centering Civics (2022) offers teachers and teacher educators an important, thoughtful, and, in many ways, innovative approach with which to consistently and meaningfully engage civics education as a core element of the “regular” social studies curriculum, regardless of what topic is being discussed. We believe such an approach is much needed in social studies education and has the potential to not only make student engagements with the curriculum more connective, interesting, and relevant by exploring issues of ethics and power but also, and ultimately, contextualize them in the lived world of students and the kinds of impactful civic actions students could take to make a difference today in their own communities and beyond.

Pushing for a more nuanced pedagogical stance to this approach, we have suggested adding critical classroom deliberations of the concepts underlying the heuristic the authors proposed, and we have highlighted the crucial role of teachers’ questions in helping students encounter new, alternative conceptualizations of those concepts as they undergo the kind of inquiries *Re-centering Civics* (2022) suggested. Additionally, we call for more attention to be paid to issues of diversity in classrooms where such inquiries are conducted and how existing issues of power and positionality may saturate—indeed, impede—both the nature of these inquiries as well as their outcomes. Finally, we caution that, as wonderful as the authors’ proposed approach may be, the road to teachers embracing and/or implementing it (or any other curricular or pedagogical innovation) is never smooth or easy, especially if it requires a major shift in what and how teachers teach, in how students are invited to learn, and in how they are expected to apply that knowledge both to and in the real world.

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