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## Developing Civic Identity Amongst Middle School Students in Northern Chicago

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# Developing Civic Identity Amongst Middle School Students in Northern Chicago

## **Cover Page Footnote**

Summer Civic Academy would not have been successful without the dedication and passion of all the wonderful educators who provided us with guidance. We have the most sincere gratitude towards Dr. Diane Schiller and Jon Schmidt, the directors and pilots of the program. They provided us with the curriculum, activity ideas, and background necessary to make our classroom successful. This program truly would not have been possible without their leadership. Acknowledgement also needs to be given to Jessica Chethik and the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago, whose Action-Based Communities curriculum became a base of our civic engagement curriculum, as well as to Ms. Madeline Kobayashi, an English teacher in Chicago Public Schools who guided us through professional development on the value of reading counter narratives with middle school students.

## **Developing Civic Identity Amongst Middle School Students in Northern Chicago**

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### **Introduction**

Loyola University's School of Education launched a four-week program entitled Summer Civic Academy in July of 2017. The goal of this program was to encourage civic engagement amongst middle school students through critical citizenship education. In alignment with the Loyola School of Education's mission of social action through education, coordinators of the program wanted to work with students in the community enrolled in Chicago Public Schools. Fifteen seventh- and eighth-grade students were chosen from public schools in Rogers Park and Edgewater, two neighborhoods on Chicago's north side. The schools, Armstrong, Hayt, Kilmer, Peirce, and Swift, have diverse student bodies. Between 60-90% of each school's population are identified as low income (Chicago Public Schools, n.d.). Social Studies teachers from each school identified two to three students from their classes who showed an interest in civics or social justice.

The curriculum integrated literature, math, and civic education to inspire students to be involved, collaborative problem solvers in their community. Students worked with counter narratives in literature (which they connected to their own lives as first-generation citizens and Students of Color) and statistical analyses which they used to gather baseline data on their chosen issue. They then melded the two together to create presentations on a proposed policy change. Through a series of exercises and activities, students examined the various communities that are a part of their lives. Ultimately, the students chose issues that affected their communities, whether it be the school, neighborhood, or city. Students researched the issues, developed solutions to address the identified problem, and presented their projects to local decision makers in hopes of carrying on the ripples of change.

The focus of this essay reflects on how Summer Civic Academy's curriculum encompasses the attributes of critical citizenship education. DeJaeghere (2009) explains the studies of citizenship education in America and cites four facets of critical citizenship education: (a) incorporating marginalized voices within curriculum, (b) examining one's own identity in relation to citizenship (double consciousness), (c) engaging in intercultural learning experiences, and (d) utilizing strategies for collective social action.

We, the program instructors, also come from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Three of the instructors are in the school of education at Loyola: one in special education, one in secondary history education, and one in elementary education. One instructor comes from the school of nursing and another from the school of business. The coordinators of the program, two faculty members in the school of education, also acted as our advisors throughout the duration of the program. Not only did we have the opportunity to work directly with the students, but we were also able to assist in developing the curriculum to reflect the students' needs. We describe how our literature circles, field trips, class activities, and group projects effectively began the transformation of students from inhabitant to active citizen. After describing how our curriculum assisted in continuing to develop civic identities within our students, we reflect on our personal experiences. By employing the ideas of critical citizenship education, we demonstrate how

students can be advocates for political change in their local community. We hope students continue to engage with all levels of community and government in the future.

### **Marginalized Voices**

DeJaeghere (2009) discussed “how mainstream literature creates a particular narrative of society’s history” (p. 228). When only mainstream literature is taught, students may miss out on different perspectives. Recognizing this, each instructor selected a piece of literature that runs counter to the mainstream narrative to work with. Counternarratives seek to tell the perspective of marginalized voices within society to highlight multidimensional complexities in societal movements. In the first two weeks of the program, we read *March* by John Lewis as a class and discussed how the Civil Rights Movement, and the concept of civil rights, are taught in their own schools. Discussion focused on the realization that dominant narratives are often those taught in the school curriculum and provide an insular view of history—they are not showcasing the various marginalized voices, perspectives, and ideas present within the same context. Students may only be analyzing history from one perspective, the dominant narrative (the one most often taught). We facilitated discussions with students about similarities and differences between civil rights movements in the past and those that are ongoing in our society today. After reading and discussing a book as a class, students broke into small groups of three, each reading a different novel that introduced them to narratives that contrast the dominant narratives they have been exposed to in the past.

During our professional development sessions, we were able to sit down with Ms. Madeline Kobayashi, a teacher in Chicago Public Schools who had experience using these texts in her freshman English class. She was open to sharing the challenges and strengths of literature circles and the chosen texts, allowing us to better understand where to be proactive when implementing our own literature circles with middle schoolers. We began the literature circle process by doing quick book talks to introduce the counternarratives, providing students with time to explore the books and pick their top three choices, and modeling what a good book circle would look like within each group. We worked on releasing control of the literature circles by facilitating the first discussion, then having students rotate facilitating the sessions to come.

#### ***March: Book One* (Lewis, Aydin, & Powell, 2013)**

Our entire class broke up into small groups, reading and analyzing the graphic novel *March*, which depicts the struggles and triumphs of Congressman John Lewis. We were able to explore topics such as racism, national identity, and protesting. John Lewis, born into a poor family in rural Alabama in 1940, grew up in an environment where segregation and racial discrimination were the status quo. Critically analyzing brutal scenes of racism and hatred provided students with insight into the civil realities of the time. This made students think critically about democracy in the world they live in today, and realize that exclusion and discrimination still exist in the 21st century. John Lewis’s pivotal transformation—from bystander to mover-and-shaker, from acceptor of political circumstances to active participant in boycotts and sit-ins—showcases the potential power of civic engagement for youth everywhere. This realization of the potential to create waves of change through civic action provided students with a sense of empowerment, hope, and excitement.

#### ***March: Book Two* (Lewis, Aydin, & Powell, 2013)**

In the individual literature circles, one group read the sequel to Lewis' book. *March 2* highlights the struggles of fighting oppression nonviolently and maintaining stamina in the long and grueling process for equal rights. *March 2* showcases the path to equality and emphasizes the amount of time it took to finally reach a more equal nation. As highlighted in this novel, African Americans faced beatings and arrest for voicing their opinions and fighting for their rights; they did so with confidence and pride, for they knew they were fighting for the rights of all Americans. Reading a novel of this level really resonated with students, as they realized the path to change is neither direct nor simple. Although students were not going to face ridicule and lashings for their beliefs in class, they still had to face their fears of public speaking and learn to speak in a manner appealing to the stakeholders to effectively cause change with their projects. At the end of *March 2*, students were amazed that the Civil Rights Movement was still alive and well. The emphasis on perseverance greatly impacted how students approached their class projects, to which they dedicated two weeks of challenging work to complete.

### ***The Rock and the River (Magoon, 2009)***

One group read *The Rock and the River* by Kekla Magoon, exploring the lives of two young black brothers in the 1960s struggling to understand the social action theories of Kingian nonviolence to the Black Panthers Party. The group was comprised of one Black male student, one Hispanic female student, one Pakistani male student, and one Pakistani female teacher, all of us being People of Color who read the text. Reading the sincere struggle of a thirteen-year-old male being in between his father, an advocate of nonviolence, and his brother, a member of the Black Panthers, allowed our discussions to float between the dichotomies of good versus evil, right versus wrong, action versus engagement, and making choices for oneself. We were able to tie the experiences of the main character, Sam, not only to ourselves and the personal struggles we have faced, but also to movements happening within Chicago, whether it be the Black Lives Matter protests or the presence of gangs in neighborhoods, and how we could connect across racial and ethnic boundaries.

### ***The Absolutely True Story of a Part-Time Indian (Alexie & Forney, 2015)***

A group of three students chose to read this graphic novel by Sherman Alexie. This counternarrative depicts the life of Junior, a Native American freshman who chooses to leave his school on the Spokane Indian reservation and attend an all-White school where he will receive a better education. He faces bullying from both the students at his new school as well as the people of his reservation, who perceive him as a traitor to their community. The novel explores the discrimination and hardships of the Native Americans, and the problems that seem ingrained in their world: alcoholism, poverty, and violence. Junior struggles with his obligations to his reservation community, and with his ambition to escape and pursue a better life. The novel explores his attempt to figure out who he is as he straddles these two distinct worlds. Junior begins to identify with the groups where he does find acceptance: his family, his new friends, and his basketball team. He finds his identity by making connections within his communities. Students were able to relate to Junior with their personal experiences of being bullied or being an outcast. However, they found solace in the same things that Junior did: art, sports, friends, and family. Junior's bildungsroman allowed us to see the ways that young adults are able to overcome the hardships in their lives and develop who they are by building relations with others.

### ***Silver People: Voices from the Panama Canal (Engle, 2014)***

In this literature circle, students worked with a novel told in verse from multiple perspectives. The Panama Canal is often perceived as the Seventh Wonder of the Modern World for its revolutionary engineering, and its ability to connect the world by sea. What is often overlooked are the thousands of People of Color that lost their lives digging the Panama Canal, as well as the animals that lost their homes due to deforestation. This novel, told in verse, gives a voice to those who experienced the building of the Panama Canal from different perspectives, whether it be a worker, an engineer, the trees, or a spider monkey. Students discussed times where they have felt powerless due to inequality in the same way that the workers had to risk their lives every day for a few silver coins a week. In addition, students talked about topics of pay inequality based on race in the book and how the same issues affect our society today.

***Darkroom: A Memoir in Black and White (Weaver, 2012)***

A group of three students chose to read this graphic novel by Lila Quintero Weaver. This memoir follows Lila throughout her childhood as a young Latina immigrant growing up in the segregated American South. Neither Black nor White, Lila occupies an uncertain place in her community. As she struggles to define her identity, her community is also struggling with extreme inequality and discrimination. Middle schoolers related to Lila's story of uncertainty and self-discovery, and the book offered a unique perspective on challenges of the Civil Rights Movement which built on what we had already read about and discussed in our whole class literature circle.

Focusing on counternarratives for the literature component of our curriculum allowed our students to hear the voices of the marginalized. Not only did they listen, but they engaged in critical analysis of the problems—specifically inequality and discrimination—that existed in the character's world. The injustice of the situations prompted them to want to take action! Students applied a critical lens to their own communities and defined the injustices that affected them personally. Creating an open classroom environment and studying counternarratives is a key factor in encouraging students to be active, inclusive citizens in the future who are willing to engage in dialogue with all members of their community.

**Double Consciousness**

Students were first introduced to the concept of civic engagement through in-class activities where the class explored vocabulary terms and learned about different players involved in civic processes. Using activities provided by the Action-Based Communities curriculum from Chicago's Constitutional Rights Foundation, we explored the impact that students have at each level of community. From there, we took students out into the field to gain hands-on experience and bring their in-class activities to life. Students conducted community walks in the Rogers Park and Edgewater neighborhoods to gain spatial awareness and examine institutions that made up the community. They visited nonprofit organizations such as health clinics, soup kitchens, and shelters. Through this, students were able to see their communities from a new perspective and gain a deeper appreciation of how communities develop. The students were then asked to think about their day-to-day lives in order to realize the roles they play in their own communities.

As students explored their communities, discussion was sparked about how each student fits into the community at each level: their family, their school, their neighborhood, their city, and their country. Students began to realize that they have the potential to be decision makers,

since they are stakeholders in their own communities! No longer limiting themselves, students began realizing their right to make change in their communities. This development allowed them to continue building upon their civic identities.

According to DeJaeghere (2009), “Teaching from the perspective of W.E.B. DuBois’ ‘double consciousness’ aims to have teachers and students understand issues and views of the ‘world both from the main stream and from the margins’ (Merryfield, 2001, p.189)” (p. 229). This concept was integrated into the framework to help students create and understand their own unique identity. The students were guided to use their personal beliefs to drive their projects and future experiences. DeJaeghere (2009) explains, “Intercultural experiential learning goes beyond the traditional intercultural understanding of the ‘other’ or about respecting ‘others.’ This approach involves a deep understanding that people in our societies have different values, beliefs, and constructions of meaning” (p. 230).

### **Intercultural Learning**

Intercultural learning focuses on taking experiential learning to a level of critical reflection by understanding how varied beliefs, opinions, and values intersect within a community. It takes the foreign idea of the “other” and makes it familiar. As a class, we engaged in Diversity Step-In, an activity in which a series of statements are read and students must step in if they identify with the statement. For example, the facilitator would read, “I believe gay marriage is all right,” and a few people would step in to acknowledge who was standing with them and who was not. This activity encourages students to step across their own cultural perceptions and assumptions to connect with others both in the class and across cultures. We chose to do this activity with the hopes of capitalizing on the idea that “schools and the education processes within them can be spaces in which conflicts and inequality among diverse students are perpetuated, and in which perspectives about assimilation of diverse peoples into a singular meaning of citizenship are indoctrinated” (DeJaeghere, 2009, p. 225). Students were asked not only to be vulnerable, but to look to see who was with them within the circle sharing in that vulnerability. To make activities of this nature successful, students must feel that they are in a space where they can share these thoughts with the knowledge that everyone may not always agree, but will respect those views.

Leading up to the Diversity Step-In, students and instructors engaged in multiple team-building activities (see Figure 1) to develop and build trust amongst the group and create a safe space for dialogue and discussion. During our debrief of the activity, many students connected the activity and the concept of identity with other parts of their lives. For example, students led the discussion towards how identity and other factors played a role in the election of Donald Trump. Our discussion allowed students to take the values, beliefs, and opinions showcased in the Diversity Step-In and contextualize them in a democratic example of citizenship.



*Figure 1.* Team-building activity.

Another activity the students engaged in was creating protest posters in which they connected their own passions and desires into a poster. A group of boys came together and created a poster to abolish military drafts because of the strong pull they felt between their identities as males and the requirement to be enrolled in a draft. Here the students were able “to address civic realities of exclusion and discrimination, two factors that prevent the full enactment of democratic citizenship in multicultural societies” (DeJaeghere, 2009, p. 226). They were able to understand how their identities were being discriminated against and excluded, since women do not need to enroll, and, more importantly, how to connect this concept to civil rights and display their disapproval through protest artwork.

The presence of a diverse group of peers provided the students with the opportunity to listen to many perspectives. For example, as one group of boys displayed their protest poster against male-only military drafts, the female-identifying students had not thought of this as an issue of sexism before, and the male-identifying students questioned the inequality from both the men’s and the women’s angles. Although the draft is not a contemporary concern, the students initiated the conversation. To ensure their feelings and identities were being validated, we felt it important to continue the dialogue, as “young adolescents are eager to learn about topics they find interesting and useful—ones that are personally relevant” (Caskey & Anfara Jr., 2014, para. 9). Similarly, during our discussion about the election, students were forced to think of perspectives different from their own in order to learn the overall complexities involved in decision making. Furthermore, social identity also came into play when engaging with the community organizations, as the organizations catered to specific social identities such as women or those who are able-bodied. This caused students to reflect on how their identities intersect with that of the community as a whole and what their needs look like compared to the people that local community organizations are helping.

### **Collective Social Action**

The fourth facet of creating an empowering critical citizenship education is collective social action. The final goal of Summer Civic Academy was to have students choose an issue they are passionate about and create an action plan to begin solving it. Research supports that

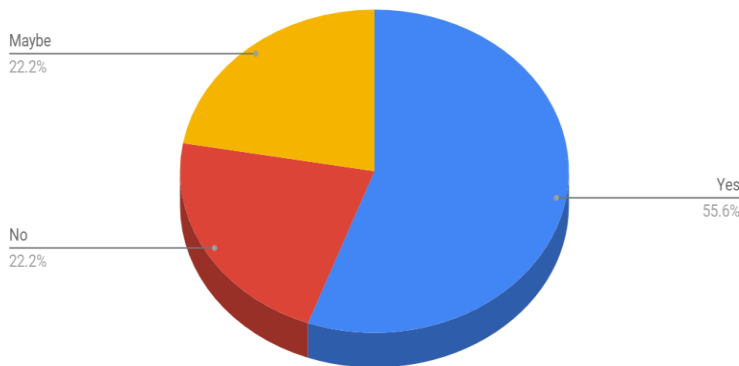


“during early adolescence, youth are more interested in real life experiences and authentic learning opportunities; they are less interested in traditional academic subjects,” hence the focus on a project touching on these ideas (Caskey & Anfara Jr., 2014, para. 11). Collaborative engagement allowed students to mobilize and rally around an issue in a way that they normally are not able to in a traditional school environment. Students utilized their newfound knowledge of civics, quantitative skills, and revitalized optimism to spearhead a project to improve their community. Our students chose school discipline, homelessness, and gun violence as points of focus for their projects. Each group crafted an innovative plan to raise awareness, raise money, or facilitate dialogue around the issue.

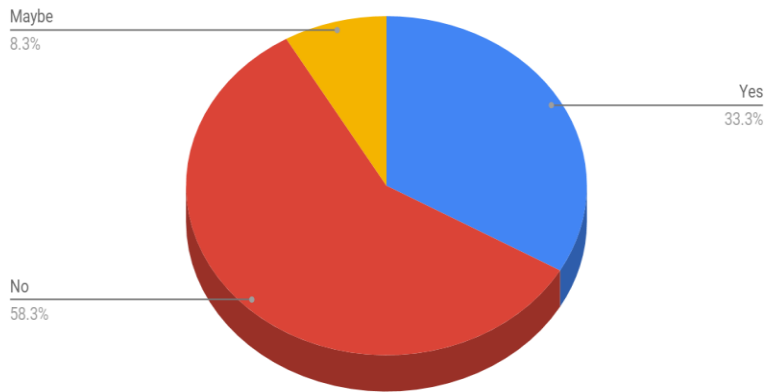
### School Discipline Project

By fostering an understanding that our democracy still has imperfections, we were able to empower students to question the imperfect systems that affect their lives. One group chose to bring attention to the inefficiencies and problems that existed within their schools’ disciplinary systems. Students recognized the inefficiency that existed in their schools’ check system. The check system attempted to discourage bad behavior by punishing students with warnings and detentions after a certain number of transgressions. However, the students felt that the check system was not being taken seriously by many of the students, and the continual bad behavior of some students served as a distraction to others. Students identified faults of the current system and proactively researched systems that focused on positive reinforcement. They used their new survey skills to find data about students in their schools and their feelings towards the check system. Each student was responsible for interviewing four classmates. They combined their data and created pie graphs about student safety, fighting in school, and whether students believe the current discipline system is effective (see Figure 2).

Do you feel safe at school?



Are punishments working at school?



*Figure 2.* Pie graphs from Discipline Project.

They integrated these into their presentation to give their audience a holistic perspective of students' feelings; this allowed students to more confidently speak to the school's authority figures when pointing out the flaws of the discipline system. Then, students spoke to their principals to advocate for their ideas to improve behavioral issues, such as fighting in schools. Moreover, the students proposed and designed a student delegation to improve relations between staff, teachers, and students in hopes of continuing civic engagement in the future (see Appendix). The student delegation would act as a liaison between students and faculty to improve the school environment by working together to make policies more effective.

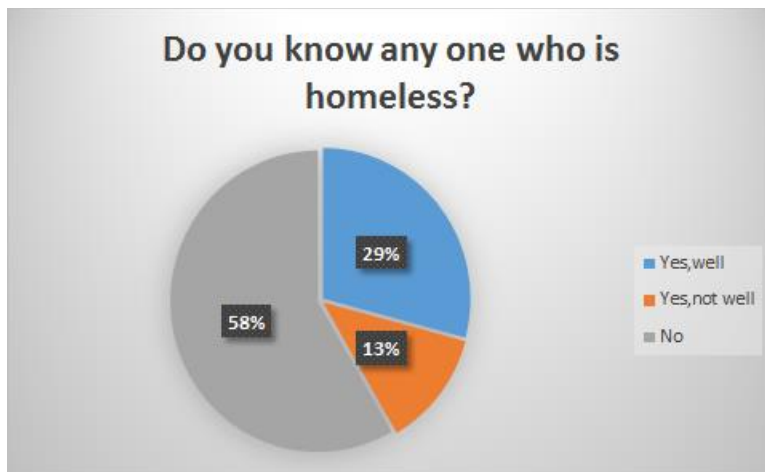
### **Homelessness Project**

Another group looked beyond the classroom and onto the streets of Chicago—where homelessness affects many. Students visited three local organizations: the Howard Area Community Center, A Just Harvest, and Gale Elementary Community Garden (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Students visiting Gale Elementary Community Garden.

Students were concerned by the lack of resources as well as the negative attitudes felt towards those experiencing homeless. They chose to create an informative website and teach others in their community about why people experience homelessness, and ways that community members can give aid. Students interviewed members of their community in order to gather data about people's perspectives on homelessness (see Figure 4).



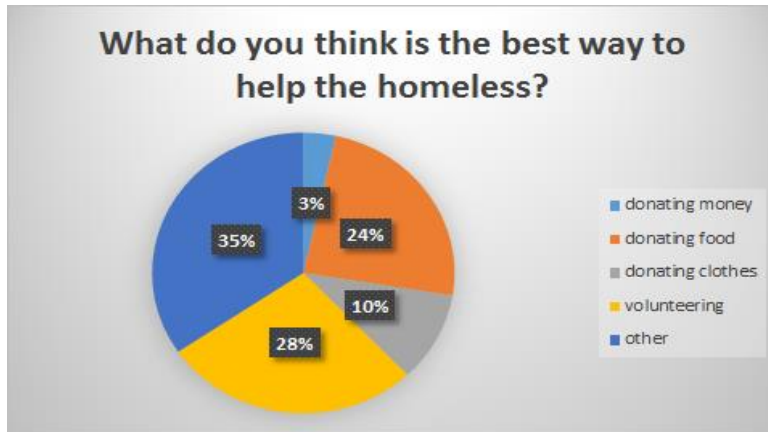
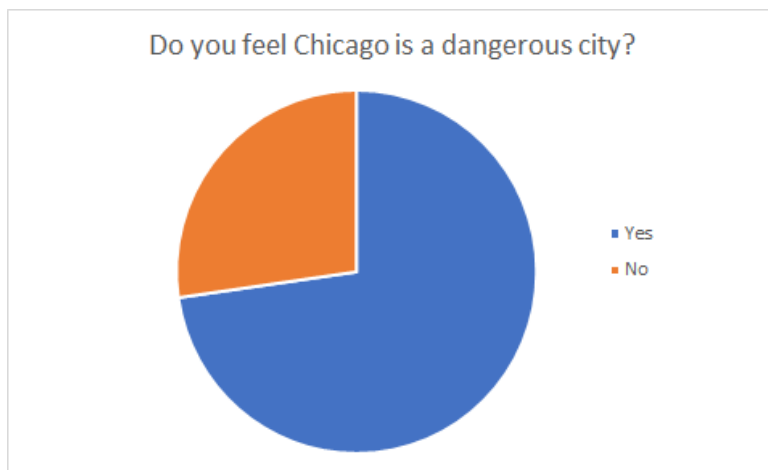


Figure 4. Pie graphs from Homelessness Project.

They asked their community members whether they know of any people experiencing homelessness to determine how widespread this issue is in Northern Chicago. Their survey also asked people what the best ways are to help those experiencing homelessness to gather ideas to research. Helping marginalized members of the community gave students the chance to address real-world problems in their local vicinity. Engaging hands-on with issues that are so close to home creates a context for their impact to be explicitly acknowledged.

### Gun Violence Project

The third group chose to address an issue that has been associated with the city of Chicago for decades: gun violence. Two students at the Summer Civics Academy had been personally affected by gun violence, and they sought to raise awareness about the realities of this issue amongst their peers. After examining statistics on gun violence and surveying local stakeholders such as police officers and neighborhood residents, the group affirmed that gun violence in the Rogers Park and Edgewater neighborhoods is a problem that deserves to be addressed. Students surveyed neighborhood residents on whether they felt safe in Chicago, and whether they have ever been a victim to gun violence crimes (see Figure 5).



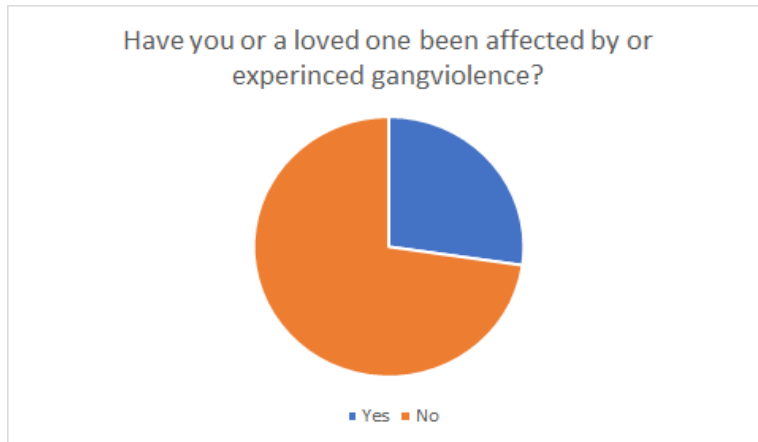


Figure 5. Pie graphs from Gun Violence Project.

They used this data to create pie graphs and raise awareness of the gravity of this issue. This group of students proposed a policy to require classes on gun awareness in K-12 education, with the rationale that creating a space for youth to examine the causes and effects of gun violence could lead to fewer young people being injured by guns. Gun awareness classes would include lessons on what to do if ever put in a dangerous situation with a gun, or what to do if one sees a gun in the open. These lessons could be supplemented by readings from *The Rock and The River*, where the main character faces similar situations. Educating students about gun violence gives them the power to make informed choices if faced with a dangerous situation.

As instructors, we learned what it truly meant to let the students guide the classroom—they were able to say what activities worked well for them, when they needed more time to research, and were able to voice their needs. DeJaeghere (2009) wrote, “Young people in our schools are not often given the opportunity to collectively mobilize around an issue of importance to them” (p. 230). We did not specifically tell students what to research, what their research organization methods needed to look like, or what their final product had to be. Rather, we suggested various ways to go about it and allowed them to choose what worked best for their group.

There were moments of stress in hoping to get everything done, tension between what the students wanted and what the teachers could see as realistic, and frustration at ourselves for wanting to step in and take charge rather than allowing the students to stumble along the way. Nevertheless, the four weeks spent discussing civic engagement with middle school students is an opportunity that ought to be offered to all students, across all geographic locations, and must be prioritized within education as a “collaborative engagement of students, teachers, schools and communities to create social change,” needed now more than ever (DeJaeghere, 2009, p. 228).

### Development of Quantitative Skills

Mathematics was incorporated throughout this program in order to have students practice quantitative skills and gain a more complete understanding of the research they were conducting. Every day, students were introduced to math concepts that worked with statistics to find significance within the data they discovered. Students learned how to interpret data by depicting it through pie charts, bar graphs, and histograms. Students found that they were able to better

understand their data when they could see it laid out in front of them. Students were able to see how data can be presented and why research is conducted quantitatively. This guided them in their own data collection and in deciphering what the data was telling them. This introduction to data analysis allowed students to comprehend the work required of research and offered clarification as to why someone cannot go ahead and just make a policy—data must support one's decisions.

With activities inside and outside of the classroom, students were able to have a hands-on learning experience. They were given various activities to encourage development of critical thinking and math skills. For instance, students were asked to use Microsoft Excel to find the mean, median, range, and mode of a set of data. Through this activity, students practiced using technology to analyze quantitative data. As students worked on their final projects, they reached out into their communities, gathering quantitative data through surveys. Students developed questions they believed would offer insight to the solutions they hoped to propose to their selected social causes. Once they were able to compute statistics on their data, instructors worked with the students to facilitate their understanding of what the statistics meant holistically. We did this through practice with probability and proportion problems in order for the students to gain a comparative understanding.

At the beginning and end of the program, students were given the same math exam in order to see whether or not their math skills had improved. The results from the Wilcoxon signed-ranked procedure indicated that students made significant gains on the postassessment,  $z = -2.807$ ,  $p < .01$ . Our z-score allows us to reject the null and provides evidence that the students' quantitative skills improved within a 1% Confidence Interval. The mean score on students' pretest was 3.90, versus 8.95 on their postassessment (Schiller, 2017). This demonstrates the importance of incorporating math throughout the curriculum rather than isolating it. Having math embedded in other subjects brings math into the real world. Furthermore, students used their new analytical skills and applied their own data from field surveys to support their research projects.

### **Reflection**

Many Americans seem to have lost faith in the modern democratic process. The simplest evidence of this may be our dismally low voter turnout rates in national elections. When something as simple as casting a ballot no longer seems worth it to a great number of people, civically minded educators must ask themselves: *Why?* Like any good question, this could have a myriad of answers, but one in particular deserves attention: Americans do not feel like their voices matter. The political world is not always easy to navigate, especially in an era of sound bites, social media bubbles, and fake news. Understandably, many people feel like they do not have the tools or the time to educate themselves on the many complicated matters, both domestic and international, that could affect American society. However, when American citizens are uninformed or become marginalized in political discussions, we lose a valuable perspective and our democracy is weaker for it. This needs to change.

The students that participated in this program are growing up and developing their identity during a tumultuous and pivotal point in history. In today's age, with advanced technology and multiple media outlets, opinions are given and spoken at every angle. Middle school students are going through a stage of rapid growth and development in their personal and social lives as they "form impressions of themselves through introspection and possess keen powers of perception" (Caskey & Anfara Jr., 2014, para. 10). As young people learn to navigate

the world and find their own voices, they are at the perfect stage to begin reflecting on what it means to be a democratic participant. In this sense, the students in this study were agents of their own learning and used the curriculum as a way to explore their own beliefs and begin to question institutional realities within our society.

After four weeks of engaging with students in Loyola University School of Education's Summer Civic Academy, our overall belief in contextualized learning was reaffirmed. Summer Civic Academy students were challenged to identify and research a problem currently facing their community, develop solutions to address that problem, and propose their solutions to community decision makers. Physically going out into the Roger's Park and Edgewater communities to gain spatial awareness and really see what institutions make up the communities, talking with organizations about the work they are doing to help fulfill the needs of the community, having to stop people to ask survey questions, and reaching out to stakeholders for their research on their final presentations were moments when the students not only felt the most engaged and most passionate, but as teachers we felt the greatest clarity in the mission and vision of what we hoped the class would accomplish.

The students consistently brought depth, gravity, and passion to the table day after day. Students learned to trust one another, but also learned how to disagree and work constructively to compromise with one another, "requir[ing] consensus building and application of democratic principles (Caskey & Anfara Jr., 2014, pp. 15). The student group working on the issue of homelessness in the community had very contrasting ideas of how they wanted to construct their campaign. Two students in particular could not see eye to eye, with one focusing more on direct action, while the other wanted to focus on policy implementation. I observed as students within the group tried to make the two work their differences out by reaching a compromise in which both of their ideas could be represented in some way.

As the weeks went on, students came to love activities in which they could debate particular policy issues or court decisions. They worked together to find empirical evidence to support their claims, and maintained a respectful atmosphere while still arguing their respective points. The Summer Civic Academy's curriculum built on each week in a way that gradually released responsibility to students so that they could successfully implement their community projects with minimal teacher help. By prompting students to focus on smaller, more localized issues, this program demonstrated manageable ways that anyone, including youth, could become engaged in civic life and make a difference in the lives of others.

## **Conclusion**

This program invited students who showed promise and leadership qualities to participate in a program providing experiences in civic engagement. Students thrived in an environment where they were allowed to take their learning into their own hands, with facilitators to guide them. Through in-class simulations of different facets of government and field experiences, students were able to make their voices heard and commit to the process of enacting change.

Not only did the understanding of diversity, acceptance, and respect increase; this growth was accompanied with feelings of responsibility for others in their community. Students learned about civic participation by engaging through hands-on learning experiences, learning to develop their own voices, and finding the power to institute change within their communities. Field trips to homeless shelters and soup kitchens helped students to observe the hardships that their fellow citizens faced. Compassion and empathy followed. They saw and realized the injustices that

remained in their communities, managed to develop their own identities, and, best of all, cultivated a moral sense of duty. This program has already created a ripple effect, as one student has taken her new sense of civic responsibility to advocate for her school's girls' basketball team. She used social media to reach out to friends and family in hopes of fundraising enough money to purchase new basketballs that will benefit "the school teams AND the entire student body" (Guerrero, 2017, para. 3). She used her resources to reach out to as many people as possible and incorporated tools learned throughout the program. As newly empowered citizens, these students are now unafraid to critique these problems and challenge the status quo.

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## *Appendix*

### Student Delegation Handbook from School Discipline Project

#### **Student Delegation Handbook** **2017-2018**

##### **Statement of Purpose**

This summer students from, Hayt, Armstrong, Field and Swift have come together to discuss a common issue between our school, Fighting. We all want our school to succeed and prosper but we've noticed fighting in school has become a major setback. We all noticed in our schools the punishments aren't as effective as we'd like it to be. A common disciplinary act was the check system. Eager to change this situation we have created an alternate system to lessen fighting in school, A Student Delegation. A Student Delegation would act as the liaison between teachers and students. It would be a new improved version of a student council. The Student Delegation will be more effective as we give the students more power and more of a student's insight.

##### **How to Start the Delegation**

1. Five Students per grade(6th-8th) will be nominated by teachers
2. Classmates will vote three students from their grade into the committee which will lead to 9 participants
3. Students in the delegation will then elect a President and Vice President among the delegation
4. Then the remaining 7 students will be split into two groups, Congress and The Supreme Court. With Congress consisting of four of the delegates and The supreme Court consisting of three delegates

##### **How the Delegation will work**

1. Meetings will be held two Fridays of each month for an hour after school.
2. The delegation will have a google classroom to update delegates who missed the meeting and also to communicate on urgent matters/news.
3. Counselors of the School, Principals, and the student delegation shall attend the meetings.
4. Student delegation will work alongside with counselors
5. The Congress will communicate with counselors and principals to create a bill.
6. The bill will be passed on to the President and the Vice President to decide if the bill shall become a rule.
7. If the bill does not pass the President and The Vice President the bill will go back to congress for revision.
8. If the bill does become a rule, the Supreme Court will decide if it's reasonable or not. Giving The Supreme Court the final say.
9. In any case of the absence of the President the Vice President will take over the President's role
10. If a member leaves or can no longer be in the delegation the two other nominees for that grade with the higher vote from the first election will become the replacement.

##### **The Roles Of Student Delegates**

1. The responsibilities of the President is to decide which weeks the meetings are held; to notify principals, counselors, and the student delegation of the meeting dates; to turn a bill into a rule or to kill it ; to lead the meetings and take notes.
2. The responsibilities of The Vice President is to assist the President in making decisions. To post updates and news on Google Classroom. To take attendance.
3. The duties of Congress is to address student concerns and recurring problems to the principals and counselors. They must negotiate with the principals and counselors to create a new policy to solve the problem. They must pass the idea or “the bill” to the president with an explanation as to how it is the right solution.
4. The duties of Supreme Court is to create guidelines the rule must follow by. The Supreme Court will decide if a rule is reasonable according to the guidelines they made. The Supreme Court can pass the rule or kill it giving The Supreme Court the final say .

**Ex.** The Supreme Court decided one of their guidelines would be, *the rules must apply to all students*. However the bill states *Students in 105 must wear uniform*. The rule does not follow the guidelines so the Supreme Court would kill it.