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Deanna Woodman

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Abstract: This research explores how the civic learning model could be used to increase student engagement in all school subjects, given the lack of student interest and engagement in high school learning. The model of civic learning has been shown to be successful in increasing student interest in subject material and participation in the civic sphere. Three fundamental elements of the civic learning model can be adapted to other subjects in order to increase students' general interest and rate of class participation. By showing how each aspect of the civic learning model has been implemented in the past, the current research shows that that this application of the civic learning model would increase overall student engagement and interest in high school education.

The nature of student engagement in the classroom is multifaceted. Students can engage in school behaviorally, through active participation in classroom discussion and activities; emotionally, by reacting to classroom settings and finding the motivation to do class work; and cognitively, by investing the effort necessary to understand a subject in all of its complexity (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). The level of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement has a profound effect on a student's learning outcomes (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). Yet, despite a plethora of research pointing to the importance of student engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004), 1.3 million high school students in the United States of America continue to drop out of school every year (Washer & Mojkowski, 2014). As Washer and Mojkowski (2014) point out, high school dropouts are not the only problem: many high school graduates also lack the interest and motivation to continue their education. Teaching methods that fail to challenge students and neglect to show them the relevance of coursework cause disengagement and hinder learning. As a result, students may see no benefit in continuing their education. Since there is a strong correlation between academic achievement and classroom engagement (Marks, 2000), it is necessary to restructure the United States' education system and create one that is focused on promoting interest and motivation among students. The question driving this research is as follows: in what ways can the model of civic learning be used to combat the issue of disengagement among high school students?

This research will begin with an assessment of the need for student engagement in schools and outline the potential benefits of interventions directed at increasing student engagement. Next, this paper will introduce the civic learning model and its successes in increasing students' civic engagement. Finally, drawing on components of civic learning programs, this paper will present theoretical educational reforms aimed at increasing student engagement in all areas of schooling.

Marks (2000) asserts that student disengagement has practically become an epidemic. Marks contends that student disengagement has been on the rise since the mid-1980s, citing that "[c]hronic disengagement reportedly afflicts 40% to 60% of secondary school students" (p. 156). To this day, students lack the motivation to learn or to participate in their respective high schools' activities, and remain emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally disengaged. That being said, blame for the lack of student motivation should not be placed on the students, but on the structure of the school system itself. As Fallis and Opotow (2003) point out, while student disengagement does have an individual component to it, the main, unaddressed causes of student disengagement are systemic and structural. Schools are not structured in a way that is conducive to student engagement (Fallis & Opotow, 2003). The findings of Fallis and Opotow reveal that most students cut classes "as a reaction to educational structures that are sterile, bureaucratic, [and] disrespectful of student's pedagogical preferences or goals" (p. 108).

Evidently, if national leaders and policymakers truly aim to make college- and career-ready citizens, they must focus on restructuring the education system (Pinkus, 2009). Students cannot be college ready if they do not see the benefit in continuing their education. Similarly, students are not career ready if they drop out of high school, as completion of high school is often a minimum requirement that a job applicant must meet before being considered for hire. If the goal of a high school education is to create college- and career-ready citizens, then it is important that school is structured in a way that encourages student participation and engagement.

In regard to civic learning, the necessity of motivating students to become more involved in their education has been written on extensively. Civic learning is a model of struc-

turing classroom curricula that focuses on combating the lack of civic participation and civic knowledge among youth (The California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning, 2014). Since civic learning focuses on increasing students' participation and knowledge in the civic sphere, it could serve as an example of a curriculum that would get students more involved in learning.

In order to increase the civic engagement of students in high schools, The California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning (2014) offers six main practices to include in a civic learning program. However, there are three key practices of civic learning programs in particular that are of relevance to this research: discussion in groups and classrooms, participation in service learning activities (i.e. engaging in community service and then discussing the service in class), and personal curriculum development. Classroom discussion is a crucial component of civic learning programs because it encourages teachers to facilitate dialogue, as opposed to lecturing at students (The California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning, 2014). If students are allowed to discuss a subject, rather than simply listening to their teacher talking about it, they will be more focused and attentive. Service learning is another important feature for a civic learning program, as studies have shown that service learning contributes to improvements in students' grades, school attendance, class participation, and civic engagement (Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; Billig, 2000). Another key aspect of a civic learning program, as put forth by Kirlin (2002), is allowing students to develop their own curriculum. Based on a review of the documented benefits of service learning, community service, and volunteer work, Kirlin argues that allowing high school students to design and organize their own service learning activities is the best way to promote long-term civic engagement. Kirlin (2002) contends that simply engaging in volunteer or community service activities is not sufficient to develop civically engaged citi-

zens. Kirlin argues that service learning programs will fall short of this goal if they do not involve collective decision making in regard to the project a student will be working on. By developing their own curriculum for service learning courses, students would be able to personalize their learning and begin to see the relevance and impact of the service on their own lives.

Several studies have shown that civic learning can be an effective means of increasing civic engagement and knowledge. Niemi, Hepburn, and Chapman (2000) explored the community service being performed in high schools and whether it affected students' political engagement. Their research indicates that, in regard to the service learning aspect of civic learning programs, civic learning "stimulates greater political knowledge, more political discussions with parents, and the feeling that one can understand politics and express one's concerns publicly" (p. 46). Gainous and Martens (2011) focus on whether civics instruction increases students' political knowledge and engagement. They argue that civic learning can increase a less privileged student's "democratic capacity," which encompasses a student's political knowledge, participation in the electoral process, and belief in their ability to affect the political system (p. 2). Finally, the California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning (2014), which, along with providing examples of proven practices of civic education, also discusses success stories of civic education, states that "membership in civics-related clubs jumped from 27 to 140" after Brawley Union High School expanded their civic education and utilized the civic learning model (p. 28).

Given the success of civic learning programs in developing engagement and understanding of the political sphere in high school students, it is perhaps the case that, if the same structure of curriculum were implemented across all classes, student engagement in every subject would improve. If standard curriculum courses, including English, foreign language,

mathematics, sciences, and history were structured more like civic learning programs, we might see an increase in students' overall engagement. Just as civic learning addresses the "crisis" of civic disengagement (Ehrlich, 2000; Saltmarsh, 2005; Guarasci, 2012), perhaps using some of the same strategies when developing curricula for all classes would help combat the epidemic of student disengagement in school. In fact, many of the methods that scholars have proposed to promote student engagement closely align with the civic learning model, even if they do not draw a direct connection to the model.

One of the key features that could be adapted from the civic learning model to all subjects in high schools is classroom discussion. A classroom discussion can be one-sided, in which a teacher simply answers students' questions (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003). Peer-to-peer discussions are a much more effective means of encouraging students to explore their own ideas (Applebee et al., 2003). Small, peer-to-peer classroom discussions in which students are able to debate with one another and come to their own understanding of course material are the most beneficial to students (Applebee et al., 2003). When students are able to discuss what they have learned with one another, they are able to improve one another's understanding of the material. They are also able to internalize the material and, as a result, increase their emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement. Engaging in classroom discussion in all classes, therefore, is an effective method of combating student disengagement. A study by Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Shneider, and Shernoff (2003) illustrates the importance of classroom discussion and its ability to combat student disengagement. In order to identify conditions that were most conducive to classroom engagement, Shernoff et al. (2003) surveyed 526 high school students across the United States to determine how they spent their time in high school. Results re-

vealed that students showed increased engagement when they were able to discuss what they learned with their classmates, as opposed to when they were listening to lectures, watching films, or taking tests. These results uphold the idea that incorporating classroom discussions into the curriculum for every class and subject would increase students' engagement in their schooling.

Service learning is another key aspect of civic learning that could be applied to all school subjects in order to increase engagement. Incorporating service learning into all classes could expand the benefits associated with traditional applications of service learning and promote higher overall student engagement. Fredricks (2014) discusses popular myths regarding student engagement, contending that, "one reason why many students are disengaged is that the structure of school bears little resemblance to how learning happens outside of the classroom" (p. 55). Incorporating service learning into courses is one way to address this issue. Service learning allows students to involve themselves with organizations that perform real-world work relevant to course material. For instance, if a student is learning biology, the school could require students to volunteer in a biology lab or an animal conservation center. If a student is studying classical literature, he or she could volunteer at a local theater where an assigned play is being performed. While the specifics would differ depending on the subject, adding a service learning component to all high school courses would have a positive impact on student learning and engagement. Based on the evidence that service learning activities can promote real-world civic engagement, a similar approach may help students connect coursework in other subjects to the real world, leading to improvements in students' classroom performance, participation, and school attendance (Markus et al., 1993; Billig, 2000). Moreover, service learning activities could help students to understand the relevance of what they are learning and may increase their engagement in their education.

Finally, a key civic learning strategy of that could be applied to all school subjects is student involvement in the curricular decision-making process. This does not mean that students should decide every aspect of their education; rather, how and what a student learns should be personalized. Teachers could provide multiple options to students, such as whether the final project will be a paper or a video; talk to the students about their personal goals and attempt to tailor assignments to students' interests; or provide opportunities for students to contribute to the development of the curriculum. Just as Kirlin (2002) argues that service learning is only effective if students have some ability to decide what they will do and how they will do it, students may be more engaged in all of their courses if they have autonomy over what they learn.

In addition to showing that classroom discussions can increase student engagement, Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Shneider, and Shernoff (2003) also assert the importance of students' autonomy and influence over their own educations. The authors state that "teachers may be able to enhance engagement by supporting students' sense of competency and autonomy, such as providing tasks that offer choice, are connected to students' personal goals, and offer opportunities for success" (Shernoff et al., 2003, p. 171). If students are permitted to guide their learning, then they are able to personalize their education in a way that is most interesting to them, and are, therefore, more likely to be engaged in their education. Students may be more motivated to participate in their education if this element of the civic learning model were applied across academic subjects.

Adopting civic learning practices in all school subjects could mitigate the issue of student disengagement and lack of interest in education. This research shows that student behavioral, emotional, and cognitive disengagement may be alleviated by restructuring the education system to include such practices as classroom discussion, service learning, and collective cur-

ricular decision-making. Although one of the stated goals of the U.S. government is to create an educated populace, student disengagement in school is a widespread issue throughout the country. So far, much work has been done to increase the civic engagement of students both during and after high school. In regards to service learning alone, one fifth of high schools in the United States require community service, and over one half encourage it as part of their basic curriculum (Hoffmann & Xu, 2002, p. 569). Yet, even though there has been a movement to include a service component in high school education, the need for a complete reform in how education is implemented has not yet become a popular sentiment, much less a national priority. However, if the goal of the United States education system is to create college- and career-ready citizens, as policy-makers and national leaders contend, then student disengagement must be alleviated. The plague of student disengagement in United States schools can be cured by restructuring the education system to allow students to become more involved in their own education.

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