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*Olga Bombardelli*

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Review Essay on the Book: Ian Mac Mullen. 2015. *Civics Beyond Critics. Character Education in a Liberal Democracy.* Oxford University Press.

Thorsten Hippe

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## Editorial: Digital Tools and Social Science Education

### Keywords

Digital tools, online communication, citizenship, social science and citizenship education

### 1 Introduction

Information and communication technologies have a central place in contemporary societies. Technological developments are transforming the ways we engage with each other and with the world and impacting all our spheres of life, with consequences to how we think and act in the educational field. Particularly in the case of social science education, it is worth considering the potential and risks of digital tools and the changes they promote and/or make possible. It is exactly here that this thematic issue intends to open some ground. In this issue of the Journal of Social Science Education we explore uses of digital tools and online communication in social science education.

Seeking contributions from theory and practice in formal and non-formal educational efforts on various domains, we hope we can contribute to understanding how digital tools are transforming educational contexts and practices and foster reflection on how they could help realize the critical aims of social science education.

In the call for papers we asked different yet interconnected questions. First of all we were looking for: How do students understand their use as tools for social science education? Are these tools widening and deepening participation practices in ways relevant to social science education? Or, instead, are they supporting new participatory cultures that challenge traditional understandings of citizenship and democracy? Are they suited for empowering those traditionally harder to reach? The contributions we received do not address all these issues and cannot provide answers to all aspects of these questions but they certainly bring forward ways to better understand these matters. Taken together they provide a precious means to acknowledge significant, and current, work on digital tools and social science education on a variety of contexts. We are proud of having a varied set of papers, theoretical and empirical, coming from different countries (and continents) – Sweden, Belgium, Portugal, Canada and Mexico – that reflect the use of

different methodologies – quantitative large scale survey research, qualitative research using individual or focus group interviews, and also an example of participatory action research – focusing on various educational contexts and levels – elementary and secondary education, but also lifelong learning.

When we were planning this issue of JSSE we provided some broad guidelines, inviting for this issue of JSSE articles from a variety of perspectives, considering questions in and outside of schools, covering issues that affect students of different ages, and coming from a diverse range of countries within and beyond Europe. In this regard, our intention was fully realized.

We summarize briefly the articles that appear in this issue of JSSE. They offer a range of approaches, using insights from distinct academic disciplines (e.g. psychology; education; social studies; etc.) and focus on a variety of interconnected themes and variables. We have loosely grouped the articles into themes, in order to understand how digital tools and online communication are transforming both engagement and participation practices and educational contexts in significant ways.

### 2 Digital tools and online communication in a changing world

The issue begins with a paper by Erik Andersson where he discusses the “didactical conditions and possibilities of political controversial conversations in social science education”. In *Producing and Consuming the Controversial – A Social Media Perspective on Political Conversations in the Social Science Classroom* the author makes explicit his theoretical perspective rooted in an agonistic philosophy of education and provides clear argumentation on how democratic education – and “learning *about* and *in* democracy, *as* democracy” – should make us rethink the functions of education to include not only socialization and qualification but also subjectification and therefore embrace its political dimension. Advocating for the use of controversial conversations but acknowledging, supported by research results from the Swedish context, “that teachers find it difficult to deal with politically controversial issues” he shows how “combining face-to-face conversations with digitally mediated conversations” can be advantageous and offer a valuable set of didactical challenges, possibilities and strategies for teachers engaging in social science education.

The following paper, by Katia Hildebrandt, Patrick Lewis, Claire Kreuger, Joseph Naytowhow, Jennifer Tupper, Alec Couros, and Ken Montgomery, also recognizes the importance of the political dimension of education in their case considering treaty education in Saskatchewan, Canada. They especially affirm this political dimension since their perspective is that “treaty education is much more than teaching the facts of the numbered treaties” and takes a “anti-racist, anti-

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oppressive, and anti-colonial” stance in providing “spaces and opportunities for young people to understand contemporary issues faced by Aboriginal peoples and to consider their own responsibilities in shaping a different future for all Canadians”. *Digital Storytelling for Historical Understanding: Treaty Education for Reconciliation* presents the results of a two year research project in schools using elements of participatory action research methodology and digital storytelling methods to explore how they can contribute to further realizing treaty education particularly one that might take students and teachers to “speak back to existing narratives”.

In the third paper on this issue, *A Qualitative Study on Learning and Teaching With Learning Paths in a Learning Management System (LMS)*, Cindy De Smet, Martin Valcke, Tammy Schellens, Bram De Wever, and Ruben Vanderlinde, investigate “which conditions at the school and teacher level affect the use of learning paths” a functionality of Learning Management Systems. They focus on real classrooms in secondary schools in Belgium by interviewing teachers “on teachers’ conditions (ICT experiences, expertise etc.) and school conditions affecting their LMS use, as well as their perceptions and expectations about the LMS next to student characteristics and learning outcomes”. Highlighting the importance of conditions such as a well-functioning ICT infrastructure, technical support and pedagogical support, the reported results invite us to seriously consider the barriers that often prevent the adoption of innovative digital tools in educational contexts.

Also focusing on a Learning Management System, specifically a e-Learning Management System directed at young adults who are “affected by the lowest levels of skills and highest levels of unemployment”, the paper by Marta Pinto, João Caramelo, Susana Coimbra, Manuela Terrasêca and Gabriella Agrusti, *Defining the Key Competences and Skills for Young Low Achievers’ in Lifelong Learning by the Voices of Students, Trainers and Teachers*, takes a lifelong learning perspective and presents the LIBE “Supporting Lifelong learning with Inquiry-Based Education” project. The paper brings the results of focus groups discussions with low achieving students and with teachers of low achieving students which meant to align the online courses to be developed with the needs and expectations of those who are supposed to benefit from them. It is, in fact, possible to connect this with other papers in this issue as some of the results that emerge reinforce the potential of using “specific software and social networking applications” and the importance of investing in pedagogical support as a means of facilitating motivation, self-efficacy and participation.

In *Assessing two Theoretical Frameworks of Civic Engagement*, we come back to issues closely linked to civic education. The paper by Benilde García-Cabrero, María Guadalupe Pérez-Martínez, Andrés Sandoval-Hernández, Joaquín Caso-Niebla and Carlos Díaz takes the data from Chile, Colombia and Mexico present in the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS, 2009) to “test two major theoretical models used to

explain civic participation and civic knowledge of adolescents” - the Social Capital Model (Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley, 2003), and the Informed Civic Engagement Model (Barr & Selman, 2014, Selman & Kwok, 2009) - to investigate which is more robust at predicting and explaining civic knowledge and civic participation of adolescents in the three countries. Besides empirically verifying and contrasting theories using data from a large international survey, the reported findings are important for “designing educational policies and practices that effectively promote civic engagement”. We would particularly emphasize the results showing the need to engage with conflict in democratic education as “it requires not only learning to participate democratically, but to democratically communicate using reflective, argumentative and deliberative capacities allowing emotions to support the involvement and commitment of students.”

The above mentioned papers, read together, bring forth two questions we believe should be further explored. Specifically, we see them contributing to discussing i) how digital tools can contribute to further realize the aims of social science education and citizenship education, and ii) how using digital tools in educational contexts comes with particular challenges.

Some of the papers particularly contribute to the first question. When considering how digital tools can help transform social science education we find helpful examples in the works sent by Andersson and by Hildebrandt et al. In both accounts, results and reflections link the use of specific digital tools – social media and digital storytelling – to further social science education in its critical aims. Assuming the advantages of dealing with controversial issues in social science classrooms (may it be in citizenship education or in treaty education), they see these tools as facilitating the introduction of a political dimension in education and therefore contributing to learning about democracy in exercising democracy. Being able to disrupt dominant discourses and engaging with critical education, as Hildebrandt et al. propose, also calls attention to the need to see democratic education as including subjectification, as mentioned by Andersson, and to deal with what it takes for students to become political subjects. Some of the more optimistic perspectives on the potential of digital tools suggest that civic engagement and political participation of today’s youth could increase by using interactive, networked activities and participatory digital media (e.g. Bennett, Wells, & Rank, 2009) or that these digital media can become tools for the civic and political expression and empowerment of youth (e.g. Bleumers et al., 2012; Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2004). In line with this, the papers by Andersson and by Hildebrandt et al. can be read as providing examples of how this can be promoted and realized in social science classrooms, or, if you prefer, how these tools can in fact create the opportunities and support for new forms of participation and new participatory cultures (Kahne, Lee, & Feezell, 2011; Rheingold, 2008). Of course civic and political development are not simple

phenomena and, as Sherrod, Torney-Purta and Flanagan (2010) put it, to understand civic engagement and to understand it developmentally, we need to consider the multiple developmental influences including cognition, the emotions and the impact of social contexts. Also here one of the papers in this issue can become helpful in shedding some light. Given their results, the paper by García-Cabrero et al. is useful in understanding how these tools can effectively contribute to educational practices that support civic participation. We find significant that, in both models they tested, the affective dimensions were those more related to participation.

Some of the papers in the issue also alert us to the fact that this may be easier said than done especially when we take into account the challenges faced by schools and teachers when trying to engage with these forms of social science education and with the digital tools themselves. Dealing with conflict and controversy in the classroom is not easy, as the paper by Andersson documents, and dealing with digital tools can be a challenge in itself, as portrayed both by De Smet et al. and by Pinto et al.. Both these papers tell us from the perspectives of teachers and students and are particularly useful in letting us see how the use of digital tools – in the particular cases Learning Management Systems – encounters barriers. Understanding the barriers that obstacle the successful adoption of innovative digital tools in educational contexts is essential if we are to realistically consider their potential. The results by De Smet et al. and by Pinto et al. are congruent with a facilitative view of these tools but they both highlight the need to respond to the challenges that come with their use, especially the need to provide appropriate training and support strategies without which the expected gains in motivation and participation may never happen.

### 3 Further issues in social science education

Finally, in the article *An Avenue for Challenging Sexism: Examining the High School Sociology Classroom*, Kaylene Mae Stevens, Christopher C Martell report on the influence of teachers' beliefs on gender issues, and underline the importance of including attention to gender in the training of teachers and of future teachers.

Initiated by more than 40 professionals in social science education, most of them in academic positions, the *Frankfurt Declaration for a critical and emancipatory political education* ([Frankfurter Erklärung. Für eine kritisch-emanzipatorische Politische Bildung](#)) highlights recent critique of the so called Beutelsbach consensus. Dating back to 1976, the Beutelsbach consensus has long defined the principles of social science education in Germany. We make the Frankfurt declaration accessible to an English readership to offer some perspectives on the recent discourse on social science education in Germany. In some way this document introduces to the forthcoming issue JSSE 2-2016 on controversial issues.

Thorsten Hippe undertakes an accurate analysis of the book of Ian Mac Mullen (2015) *'Civics Beyond Critics'. Character Education in a Liberal Democracy'*, especially on two fundamental aspects: the task of education

related to the *status quo*, and the importance of character education for improving citizens' behavior. Hippe discusses the criticism expressed by Mac Mullen toward what he calls an "orthodox view" of civic education, a posture where individual critical autonomy based on reason and moral self-discipline is seen as the most important value, stressing individual liberties and assertively claiming reforms for equal opportunities. When discussed, the suggestions by Mac Mullen appear as not backed up by empirically well-founded research in the social sciences, and more often than not the existing empirical results are not in line with his ideas. The review essay facilitates a deeper reflection on the sources of social trust, and on the ability of people to apply reasonable principles of procedural justice, incentivating authorities to act fairly and to make fair legal systems; and that seems to be a priority task of civic education.

Bombardelli deals with the book by Paul Verhaeghe, *What About Me? The Struggle for Identity in a Market-Based Society* (English version), where the author investigated the relationship between identity and socio-economic systems, underlining that our psychological identity is in interaction with our surroundings. Verhaeghe calls attention to how, nowadays, the neoliberalist ideology is invading all fields and altering the way we think about ourselves. The combination of over-regulation and control systems leads results in making the moral norm suddenly once more external to the individual, and therefore the internalized authority is replaced by quantitative standardized evaluations, performance interviews, and audits. The proposals of the author are: overcoming the neoliberal ideology, developing value based citizenship, changing economy, education and living conditions. He emphasizes the responsibility of everyone, underlining that, if we want politics to be governed by the public interest we ourselves must promote that public interest, rather than private concerns, and this is a good suggestion for education.

### 4 Some final remarks

We hope that this issue of JSSE makes a contribution to clarifying some of the relevant and current issues on the use of digital tools in social science education contexts. We would especially like it to foster a very much in need reflection on how digital tools can help realize the critical aims of social science education in its various forms, and contexts. The field is broad and constantly developing and we think that a lot is yet to cover. Further work on political literacy, civic engagement and democratic learning in the Internet era will surely re-engage with the issue of digital tools, their possibilities and challenges in the field of civic activism, engagement and social science education. For now, one last and special word of gratitude to all the contributors to this issue.



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Erik Andersson

## Producing and Consuming the Controversial – A Social Media Perspective on Political Conversations in the Social Science Classroom

Teachers find it difficult to conduct political controversial conversations in the social science classroom and due to an increased use of social media in educational settings new challenges and possibilities are raised. The use of social media causes fundamental changes to the role of the learner who becomes a producer and consumer – a prosumer – of educational content. With a social media perspective and a didactical focus on learning in democracy and political action the article discusses didactical conditions and possibilities of political controversial conversations in social science education and derives a set of didactic strategies. When approaching the classroom as a diverse ideological public space, recognising the students as political agents and using a social media perspective it is possible to balance the function of education – socialisation, qualification and subjectification – and at the same time stimulate societal engagement and political action.

Los profesores tienen dificultades para llevar a cabo conversaciones políticas controvertidas en el aula de ciencias sociales y debido a un mayor uso de los medios sociales en los centros educativos nuevos retos y posibilidades se plantean. El uso de los medios sociales provoca cambios fundamentales en el papel del estudiante que se convierte en productor y consumidor - un prosumidor - de contenidos educativos. Con una perspectiva de los medios de comunicación social y un enfoque didáctico en el aprendizaje en la democracia y la acción política el artículo discute las condiciones didácticas y posibilidades de conversaciones polémicas políticas en la educación de las ciencias sociales y concluye un conjunto de estrategias didácticas. Al acercarse a la sala de clases como una diverso espacio público ideológica, el reconocimiento de los estudiantes como agentes políticos y el uso de una perspectiva de los medios de comunicación social, es posible equilibrar la función de la educación - la socialización, la cualificación y la subjetivación - y al mismo tiempo estimular el compromiso social y la acción política.

### Keywords:

social science education, controversial issues, social media, agonism, political action, prosumer

### 1 Introduction: Political controversial conversations in social science education – a social media perspective?

In order to retain the classroom as a public space of critical inquiry teachers face according to Boler (2004), a tall order: “We need to continue to improve our skills in facilitating difficult and risky conversations; we must continue to theorize our ethics regarding how to engage voices so that differences are heard” (p. x). A societal situation marked by cultural diversity in which individuals try to live together, separated by traditions, values and life attitudes but equal as humans raises democratic challenges for education and society. In this situation, the ability to deal with controversial political topics and issues are at the fore. If young people are presumed to be engaged and participate in different parts of society an educational change in social science education is needed (cf. Selwyn, 2007). Biesta (2011a) argues for a shift, from teaching citizenship to learning democracy. Learning democracy makes it possible to situate the learning in young people’s ongoing everyday lives and to address how this life is integrated in cultural, social, political and economic relations. It is in this wider context that young people are given the opportunity to grow as

democratic citizens. Young people must be given the opportunity to live their citizenship and learn from it. An opportunity, for example made possible in the social media.

Social media not only influences young people’s lives and societal change, the use of social media makes it possible for the participants to influence society (Mossberger et al., 2008; Olsson & Dahlgren, 2010; Andersson, 2013 etc.). *Social media*, a type of digital media, are systems with different types of digital content, links and artefacts which are socially and culturally embedded and based on the content production and consumption of the participants which in many cases require subject knowledge, argumentation, analytical and evaluation skills. A *social media perspective*, that is taking the perspective of the learner and the knowledge construction and communication experiences built up by participants when using social media, is one of various possible perspectives in understanding the teaching and learning practice in social science education as a process in democracy.

In social science education, the increased use of social media changes the condition for teaching and conducting *political controversial conversations* containing political interest and perspectives that can never reach consensus. When students try to understand and make meaning of the world, the changing political cultures of our societies, experiences and the everyday political life of the students need to be embraced. Thus, teachers face didactical challenges in balancing between subject specific knowledge, socialisation in to democratic citizens and the students’ needs of meaningfulness, political action and their use of experiences (cf. Biesta, 2006,

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2010a, 2011a; 2011b; Sandahl, 2015). Based on a social media perspective within the Swedish educational context, *the aim* of the article is to discuss didactical conditions and possibilities of political controversial conversations in social science education and to derive a set of didactic strategies. If the goal of democratic political classroom conversations in social science education is to allow students to openly and critically examine society, create meaning, express their own opinions and feelings, analyse and evaluate current affairs, *which didactic strategies will then be suitable for political controversial conversations?* Using a social media perspective, previous research and the theory of agonism the article contributes with didactic strategies for conducting political controversial conversations in the social science classroom.

First, a background is presented which contextualizes social science education and social media use in Sweden. Secondly, research on democratic classroom conversations with an emphasis on social media is introduced. Thirdly, a research overview regarding teachers' strategies in dealing with controversial issues is presented. Fourthly, the theory of agonistic philosophy of education is put forward. The article concludes with derived didactic strategies in teaching political controversial issues and topics for the social science classroom.

## **2 Social science education and classroom conversation in a social media perspective**

In order to be knowledgeable as a student in social science education several scholars in Sweden argue for the importance of the teachers' ability to use the interest of the students and make the educational situation meaningful (Schüllerqvist & Osbeck, 2009; Oscarsson & Svingby, 2005). Connection to the experiences of the students is a fundamental didactic reference point for achieving good outcomes. Despite this, social science education in Sweden has been portrayed as a subject in crisis because the majority of teaching has been devoted to reproduce facts (Sandahl, 2015). In national and international research it has been shown that teachers have a low level priority in regard to allowing dissident students to discuss current and controversial issues with each other (Ljunggren et al., 2015). Swedish educational research shows that students are asking for an increase in participatory approaches, such as discussions in groups combined with plenary discussions with the teacher (Oscarsson & Svingby, 2005). The students are wishing for opportunities in discussing important issues with adults who are competent and dedicated. Teachers' ability to create an open, positive classroom climate, making the content meaningful and open up for interactive forms of meaning exchange are vital factors for a positive study outcome in social science education (Oscarsson & Svingby 2005; Bernmark-Ottosson 2009).

In a changing society teachers' knowledge about and experiences of new ways of communication, like social media, raises new possibilities and challenges when approaching the interest and experiences of the students. The Swedish primary and secondary school have

since the 1950s' had a tradition of conversation and *learning about* democracy in the classroom, a tradition facing new conditions due to partly new forms of political engagement and participation in the public sphere (Andersson 2013; Andersson & Olson 2014). Schools and teachers need to manage and open up for those types of communication experiences and skills that young people, in their everyday life, cultivate and bring to school. The use of social media and digitally mediated conversations in teaching increases, challenges and puts new perspectives on fundamental didactical questions, it introduces new ways of understanding the processes of learning, socialisation, communication and becoming a person.

The classroom, as a public space for conversation, becomes more open and permissive, making time and space for all the participants to express their voice when using digitally mediated conversations (Rossi 2006; Kim et al., 2007; Andresen, 2009). New conversational patterns are created, making it possible to deepen and develop thoughts and arguments, to carefully choose the right words and develop a critical approach to the educational content (Kim et al., 2007; Guiller et al. 2008; Xu, 2008). When students use social and digital media it has been shown that the interface of the digital device and the content on the screen becomes a common concern – a third conversation space – in the interaction of the students, creating a cooperative teaching situation (Kjällander, 2011). With a careful didactical design of the 'third space' the students could become actively involved in the task of learning. This type of social media use challenges traditional ways of approaching knowledge building and learning, the content is liberated from the text book introducing different ways of dealing with the content and what should be regarded as relevant knowledge (Wang & Woo 2007; Andersson 2012b). The use of social media increases the demands on the teaching profession, as a teacher you need to be media and information knowledgeable, to be able to understand and deal with the role of media and information and their function in democratic processes and the participants' needs of expression in different forms (Forsman, 2013). Social media holds potentials and threats; the use of social media could relativize established and widely accepted truths and knowledge by challenging subject specific knowledge. This is especially challenging in social science education which deals with questions regarding human togetherness, as well as political and social relations. Having knowledge about yesterday's, today's and tomorrow's society is a complex, pluralistic and contingent task which requires extensive and continuous didactic work with framing and choosing content, choice of perspective, interpretations and evaluations. Thus, teachers face didactical challenges and possibilities when trying to deal with societal change in which social media is but one of several contributing factors.

The educational democratic assignment of our schools and the democratic paradox it entails – that is, the contradiction in, based on democratic values of freedom

and equality, foster students into becoming democratic citizenship – has long been a subject for Swedish education research (e.g. Liljestrand, 2002; Englund, 2007; Sandahl 2015). When it comes to students' opportunities of making their voices heard in the Swedish classroom research shows that the teacher dominates the conversation space in plenary activities (48 to 75 percent) (Liljestrand, 2002; Sahlström, 2008). Similar findings are reported in international research (Nystrand et al., 2003; Rossi, 2006; Michaels et al., 2008 etc.). Deliberative conversations is one example which has contributed to a change in this pattern, leading to a more student active participatory approach and practice in Swedish schools (Englund, 2007). If the purpose of conducting political conversations in school is to allow for personal positions, responsibility and valuations, the change in conversational pattern is continually needed. In a social media perspective it has been shown that participants willing to engage in political conversations online and face-to-face are the ones that express the greatest willingness to engage in political conversations face-to-face in the future (Baek et al., 2011). These findings have consequences when it comes to political conversations in the classroom.

Using both face-to-face and digitally mediated conversation could be viewed as a type of hybrid communication and learning, creating conversational patterns and opportunities which makes it possible for participants to express their voice by means of different types of communication. New public spaces for communication are created in teaching. Only choosing to employ face-to-face conversations may result in few students participating due to power relations, the dominant voice of the teacher, nervousness and uncertainty, difficulty in expressing oneself verbally and so on. Digitally mediated and written conversations allow the students to think before expressing themselves and the conversational space is not as limited as when having to express their opinions verbally. However, at the same time, according to Baek and others (2011, p. 367): "Face-to-face settings might generate empathy and increase perspective taking ability to greater extent than online settings, because interlocutors are physically present and interact on an interpersonal level". Accordingly, a hybridization of communication in the classroom – a blended learning approach – could be suggested in order to open the conversational space for different relations, communication and participation for all students. Dealing with political conversations, and especially those that are controversial, is however not an easy task. Research shows that teachers find it difficult to deal with politically controversial issues in a strategic communicative and transparent manner (Boler, 2004; Larsson, 2007; Ljunggren & Unemar Öst, 2010a, 2010b; Ekman, 2011; Arneback, 2012; Hess & McAvoy, 2014; Ljunggren et al., 2015).

### 3 Controversial conversations in the classroom – challenges and teachers' strategies

In order to promote democracy, it is important for young people to participate in passionate and heated political conversations (Hess & McAvoy 2014). In order to organize and conduct political conversations, specific skills and qualifications are required by the teacher. Regardless of the school subject, there are topics, problems and issues that oblige teachers to deal with these in a sensible way, with great caution that require teachers to think if, how and why they should be brought to the table – that is, *controversial issues*. According to Hand, "to teach something as controversial" is to:

present it as a matter on which different views are or could be held and to expound those different views as impartially as possible. It is to acknowledge and explore various possible answers to a question without endorsing any of them. The intended outcome of such teaching is, at least, that students should understand a range of views on a topic and the arguments in their support, and, at most, that they should hold and be able to defend considered views of their own; it is emphatically not that they should come to share the view favoured by the teacher. (2008, p. 213)

This is but one way to describe what it means to deal with controversy in teaching, a definition that I will contest in the final section.

Teaching controversial issues is a daunting task which teachers find difficult. They find it hard to achieve the goal of educating students to be nuanced, tolerant, empathic and listening individuals (Sandahl, 2011). Students are aware of what kinds of political views and positions are politically correct and which are not, which explains why students do not express them even if the teacher knows they exist. This kind of collective self-censorship constrains the conversations on controversial issues, making it difficult to give perspectives and qualify the political thinking of the students (e.g. Larsson, 2007; Sandahl, 2011). Other challenging aspects are when only a few students dominate the conversation and others are quiet, students that do not take the conversation seriously and students that feel that they cannot express their views because the teacher puts 'the lid' on (Boler 2004; Larsson 2007). According to the findings of Larsson (2007) teachers express two main challenges in conducting these types of conversations. The first challenge is to make space for all the students to express themselves and to balance students' views and positions which lie on the borders of what could be regarded as the democratic value foundation of society and a country's educational system. The second challenge concerns separating personal identity from the opinion or the question in itself, to separate person from action. Thus, the teacher faces a didactical challenge in making space for the individual right to have an opinion, to ensure that students do not feel offended and at the same time create a conversational space in which the students do not feel that the teacher puts 'the lid' on.



Education as a democratic institution carries the burden of having to continuously test the teachers' sensibility and ability to deal with controversial issues.

### 3.1 Teachers' strategies of communication – from debate to rejection

In a Swedish research survey it was shown that teachers deal with controversial issues in a borderland between mediating norms and teaching the right knowledge and that teachers mainly react rather than strategically act in regard to issues that bring norms to the table (Ekman 2011). Based on an analysis of empirical data from the Swedish part of ICCS 2009 (the International Civic and Citizenship Study) Ljunggren and Unemar Öst (2010a, 2010b) have identified four categories of teacher strategies when dealing with controversial issues. The categories fall within a tension field between on the one hand teachers' strategies of communication (norm dialogue or norm mediating) and on the other hand the teachers' degree of acceptance of controversies (high or low). The categories are: The Debate Leader; The Tutor; The Norm Mediator; The Rejector. Three similar but still different categories of teachers' strategies have been identified in another study: The Avoider; The Digger; The Tactician (Långström & Virta 2011). *The Rejector* and *The Avoider* are the two categories that are most similar. These teachers have different ways of dodging controversial issues, avoiding dialogue regarding issues in which they feel discomfort and that require more work and time. *The Tutor* prevents ensuing comments from the students. Instead she/he discusses the issue in private with the student after class. *The Digger* deals with controversial issues as didactical potential areas, as new exciting ways to explore human life in community. *The Debate Leader* provides opportunities for students to comment and argue for their opinions and presents her/his own opinion in a neutral way. *The Tactician* has dealt with the issue beforehand, she/he has identified advantages and disadvantages to address the issue and what could be reckoned as controversial and then chooses the 'safe path' in order to neutralize the controversial aspects of the issue. The dominant strategy used, according to the participating teachers' statements in Ljunggren and Unemar Öst (2010a, 2010b), is *The Norm Mediator*. This is a strategy which opens for discussion and at the same time makes clear what she/he thinks about the opinions and views expressed by the students. The Norm Mediator makes clear what society and the curriculum say about the students' opinions and views and what is allowed according to national law. Accordingly, there are at least seven different teacher strategies in dealing with controversial issues. Depending on the situation and context, which strategy is the most desirable in relation to its consequences? The choice of strategy is a question of what we want to achieve in political controversial conversations.

### 3.2 Education as democracy – ideological diversity and the classroom as a public space

Teachers should, according to Hess (2009), strategically activate already existing ideological differences within the class and use them as educational resources in order to make conflicts visible and show that conflicts are and should be naturally occurring dimensions in democratic life. The normalization of conflict has shown to be directly related to an increased political engagement and participation among the students. As the most important individual to secure learning opportunities, the teacher becomes the democratic political director of the public space in the classroom. If the teacher succeeds in designing a conversational space that is open for different political views and positions, it is most likely that the students develop political knowledge and understanding of democratic values and ideals (Almgren, 2006). This didactical concern is a question about making teaching relevant, meaningful and concrete – creating an educational situation that concerns the students and their everyday political life. Or as Bennet (2007, p. 62–63), notes:

Civic identifications and practices, if they are to be adopted, must have some anchors and inducements in the lived experiences of individuals both inside and outside of the education and socialization settings in which they are introduced.

Consequently, political conversations have to be anchored in the everyday life of the students in order to promote meaningful learning. That is, learning through conversation has the purpose of deepening the students' understanding of a topic, building democratic action skills and to consider alternative courses of political action. Thus, the topic and the teaching method could both be considered as educational content in a school built on democracy. When considering this type of purpose of teaching the students could be offered educational situations in which they could develop and elucidate democratic and political meaning – learning *about* and *in* democracy, *as* democracy. This raises three functions of democratic education – *socialisation*, *qualification* and *subjectification* (Biesta, 2006, 2010a, 2011b) – functions that could be understood in the theoretical light of agonistic philosophy of education.

### 4 Agonistic philosophy of education

Agonistic philosophy of education is a theoretical approach to education for democratic citizenship emphasizing the importance of conflict. This is not to say that consensus in terms of deliberative understandings of education for democratic citizenship is not needed. Deliberation and consensus-building is important in education for democratic citizenship (cf. Englund, 2000; Englund, 2007; Ljunggren, 2007; Ruitenberg, 2010 etc.), but a concept of democratic education that treats disagreement and conflict, not as a problem to overcome but as a necessary possibility, is also needed.

Agonism, in the light of Arendts political philosophy (1958/1998), sees the world as a stage where people appear, meet and confront each other. What takes place on this stage is a communication act that creates the conditions for social life and human survival (Ljunggren 2007). Agonism assumes that human life, ontologically, rests on conflict and controversy – the possibility of growth and change are produced when different forces collide. This is the basis for maintaining human and ideological diversity – the very heart of democracy. In what I label *agonistic philosophy of education* (cf. Ljunggren, 2007; Todd & Säfström, 2008; Biesta, 2006, 2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b), education is framed as a communicative practice, communication and participation are viewed as the preconditions for social life and survival (cf. Dewey, 1927). When students know what they have in common and show interest in it – *participation* (Biesta, 2007) – educational situations could arise due to the participants owning the social environment. Accordingly, as the words of Ljunggren (2007), the activities of the students have given and give rise to connections with others. This type of educational situation could be defined as *will-based* – it is carried forward by the participants, their actions, wills and abilities to cooperate and find solutions (Ljunggren, 2007; Andersson, 2013). This is, in light of Arendt (1958/1998) and Dewey (1927, 1916/2010), a situation of communication and socialisation that creates the conditions for social life and human survival – a situation in which education becomes a political and social system for conservation and transformation of human life in community. The students, as participants in the public space of school, are viewed as political subjects capable of and responsible for making their own voices heard (Andersson 2012a, 2015). Treating students as human beings, as political subjects and not objects or future citizens in the making (human becoming), makes their voices relevant in the teaching situation and acknowledges that students (and teachers) are carriers of potential controversies themselves. All participants, as individuals and citizens, represent equality and diversity not only in the way they understand and evaluate controversial issues but also in the way they relate to each other (Ljunggren et al., 2015). This shift – seeing students as political subjects – makes it possible to treat the educational content in a pluralistic and meaningful way which marks a change in the way teaching is conducted, from being taught to being educated. Consequently, the educational situation could be described as a process and situation of socialisation and subjectification and, with the addition of the subject specific knowledge content, as qualification.

#### 4.1 The function of education in school: socialisation, subjectification and qualification

*Socialisation*, based on the definition of Biesta (2011b), is a major function of education which concerns “the many ways in which, through education, we become part of particular social, cultural and political ‘orders’” (p. 20). Through its socialisation function education “inserts

individuals into existing ways of doing and being” (p. 20). The role of learning and education is one of reproduction, an adjustment of individuals into the existing society and the socio-political order (Biesta, 2011a). Thus, socialisation is the working mechanism in education for the continuation of society, its preferred and non-preferred culture and tradition. The *subjectification* function of education could be viewed as the opposite to the socialisation function, an orientation towards political agency when an individual relates to others and becomes a person. Hence, it is “precisely *not* about the insertion of ‘newcomers’ into existing orders, but a way of being that hint at independence from such orders” (Biesta, 2011b, p.21). Subjectification is a process of becoming a subject, a person, as an ongoing and future open process (Biesta, 2011a, 2011b). Thirdly, *qualification*, as a major function of organized education aims at providing knowledge, skills and understandings as preparation for working life, political literacy (knowledge and skills needed for citizenship) or other aspects of life (Biesta, 2011b). These three functions of democratic education are analytical concepts applicable in understanding the purpose, aim and content of democratic education.

#### 4.2 Controversial issues and the political

In agonistic philosophy of education *the political* is a vital dimension – an ontological condition for human coexistence. The political is constituted by different needs, life views and perspectives which force humans to make choices between competing alternatives, a process that creates groupings focused on fighting for the world that is preferred. The political is cohesive in all levels of society; it is a part of all human social organization in which every ethical, moral, religious, economic or technical conflict can be transformed into a political one if the conflict is strong enough to group humans into friends and enemies, or in an agonistic vocabulary – into political adversaries (Mouffe, 1993/2005, 2013). Something becomes political when it contains decisions and organization of human social life, competing alternatives that are not compatible (ongoing conflicts – controversy), feelings and affections of inclusion and exclusion and a divide between us and them (Mouffe 2013). In this way, the political shows that every social practice contains political dimensions and building blocks. In consequence, continuing conflicts – controversy – is a vital dimension of human life. But what counts as controversial?

A practical starting point in understanding controversial issues is the classic definition by Strandling: “Issues that deeply divide a society, that generate conflicting explanations and solutions based on alternative value systems, are considered controversial” (cited in Harwood & Hahn 1990, p.1). It is, however, contested on which grounds an issue should be counted as controversial (Oulton et al., 2004; Levinson, 2006; Hand, 2007, 2008; Hess, 2004, 2009; Ljunggren & Unemar Öst, 2010b etc.). Hand (2007, 2008) describes three different and separate criteria that could be used in order to determine if an issue is controversial: the behavioral criterion, the epistemic

criterion and the political criterion. Hand argues in favor of the epistemic criterion. I will contest Hand's position with help from Ljunggren and Unemar Öst (2010b) and the theoretical position of this article – agonism. I will argue in favor of a combination of the epistemic and the political criterion.

According to *the behavioral criterion* an issue could count as controversial when it is possible to observe a disagreement between two or more large groups of individuals. Thus, when it is empirically possible to identify the disagreement due to separate value systems, competing explanations and solutions it is possible to count the disagreement as controversial. However, the criterion, according to Hand, incorporates too much. The problem is that every little disagreement could be counted as controversial. The epistemic criterion, however, evades this criticism. *The epistemic criterion* tells us that:

a matter is controversial if contrary views can be held on it without those views being contrary to reason. By 'reason' here is not meant something timeless and unhistorical but the body of public knowledge, criteria of truth, critical standards and verification procedures which at any given time has been so far developed. (Dearden, 1984: 86 in Hand, 2007, p. 71)

Thus, differences of opinion and disagreement are not sufficient grounds to label an issue as controversial. The disagreement has to be reasonable and rational, "that more than one of the conflicting views held by parties to the disagreement is rationally defensible" (Hand, 2007, p. 71). In *the political criterion* moral questions should be counted as controversial "when answers to them are not entailed by the public values of the liberal democratic state" (Hand, 2007, p. 71). Hand questions this criterion: why count an issue as controversial based on certain rights and freedoms? Why should the state define suitable borders for what could be considered as controversial? Hand states that "important areas of moral life would simply lose their point if good conduct were enforced by an external agency" (2007, p. 74). Ljunggren and Unemar Öst argue that it is reasonable to accept the epistemic *and* the political criterion in order to count something as controversial.

When labelling an issue as controversial it is important to recognize the context and the situation. A one-sided focus on the epistemic criterion, and thereby on 'reason', excludes contextual important aspects such as human relations, experience, affections, passions and self-understanding (Ljunggren & Unemar Öst 2010b). Controversial issues are not isolated: "it cannot be true that rational solutions are at hand in all kinds of moral or political controversies" (Ljunggren & Unemar Öst 2010b, p. 14). It is not possible to reduce personal positions on a controversial issue to only being a question about epistemology, something that is supposed to be learnt and taught. It is also a question of experiencing and living controversy in a social and cultural context. It is a question of being educated, making personal statements in a complex and risky world. Consequently, it is the

situation and the context in which the issue is placed which could determine whether the issue should be counted as controversial. An issue is not controversial a priori, it becomes controversial. However, this is not to say that controversy, as a theoretical concept, cannot be defined.

Controversy could be defined as a consisting conflict, a residual difference regarding an issue for example financial situations, subject knowledge, religion, morals etcetera. Adding 'the political' brings a component of struggle between adversaries, a struggle about how society and human life in a community should be understood, organized and dealt with. Thus, *political controversy* could be described as an issue containing decisions and organization of human social life, competing and never compatible views enclosing feelings and affections of inclusion and exclusion, which creates a divide between us and them. There will always be a remaining difference, social tensions illuminating the political and ontological dimension of human social life in community. Accordingly, political controversial issues can never be solved or eliminated. What is possible, however, is to accept them in order to reduce the tensions and thereby avoiding political violence. In order to deal with the tensions without violence, a democratic framework is needed which is built on two democratic ideals, human freedom and equal human value. According to Mouffe (1993/2005, 2013), agonism provides such a democratic framework in which antagonism could be transformed into agonism. Antagonism is a combat between enemies but agonism is a struggle between adversaries. In sum, a political controversy divides humans into adversarial groups, us and them. A political controversial issue could be defined as an emerging uncertainty that arise in society which turns into a continuing conflict consisting of incompatible political interests, ideas, positions and solutions independent of evidence, knowledge claims, moral, ethical, affective, rational or irrational claims. As mentioned earlier, participation is vital in agonistic philosophy of education – that is, political participation.

#### 4.2 Political action as subjectification

The concept of action is central within agonistic philosophy of education; it has consequences for education as a practice of communication. Action, based on the political philosophy of Arendt (1958/1998), could be understood as a beginning of something new together with others. Thus, actions contain a political dimension, a responsibility by taking place in the public sphere and create opportunities together with others in order to address issues and problems which are central to the organization of society. To perform political actions is to connect to others, to be subjected to others and to act in concert.

To act is to make an appearance and to take responsibility for the world by words and deeds based on a disposition of the individual to act on knowledge-based considerations, habits, traditions and will-based motivation that cannot be reduced to a rational reason

(Ljunggren, 2007 p. 206). Moral beliefs and passions, in terms of likes and dislikes, are thus viewed as central to action. From this perspective, communication becomes a matter of exchange of meaning between the participants but also a matter of self-understanding – a communication directed inwardly and outwardly as a way to relate to oneself. Who do I become and who do I want to be in front of others, and when I view myself? This is a question about *subjectification* that is “the process of becoming a subject” (Biesta, 2011b, p. 21). When entering into communication, personal experiences are given an unfamiliar depiction of the world, an opening for new possibilities, change and influence. The participants are given the opportunity to realize that their personal experiences lack dimensions that would be possible if they were someone else (Ljunggren, 2007). Thus, the possibility of the student to define her/himself through action becomes a necessity for communication in education as a way to open for new impressions, knowledge, experiences and to become a subject – a person subjected to other persons.

Political action opens for new possibilities as a part of a person’s active membership of a society. According to Arendt, humans are free as long as they are given the opportunity to act. To be free and to act is the same thing. Political action is linked to human diversity, a basic condition of human life. This diversity rests on natality, the fact that humans are continuously born into the world as strangers and newcomers, becoming new beginners and beginners. This understanding of human life entails a vision of every individual as unique, individuals are seen as *persons*. This is also why the person her/himself is the starting point for political action: “in Arendt’s agonism the person itself, an agonistic subjectivity, is the starting point in the procedure” (Ljunggren, 2010, p. 22). It is personal affections, emotions and passions – the particular and not the general public interest – which are determinative for the starting point of the political action. This is not to say that all types of political actions are possible: “understanding oneself as a member of a specific community is similar to aspiring to certain values and virtues” (Ljunggren, 2010, p. 30). Solidarity and membership in a community, which is maintained through *socialisation*, require acceptance of human diversity and uniqueness which limit what humans could possibly do to each other. This is a double bind of political action stating that political action requires a personal beginning and completion through acceptance and actions of others – political action is always a public action which contains subjectification and socialisation, it is to act in concert with others. Thus, political action is always dependent on the constant presence of others – it comes into existence when others react to it. In agonistic philosophy of education, which builds on human diversity and diversity in thinking with an emphasis on difference and dissidence, education has to create a space for action and the possibility of renewing the world. Participating in a political controversial conversation is an opportunity to act, to be free as a

political subject. In the next section this possibility will be discussed and concluded from a social media perspective on social science education.

### **5 Didactical conditions, possibilities and strategies in political controversial conversations**

As a teacher, in order to conduct good teaching you have to be explicit in relation to others and yourself in the way you handle and view the functions of education; qualification, socialisation and subjectification (Biesta, 2011b). The problem with today’s teaching in school, according to Biesta, is its one-sided focus on socialisation and qualification. This is problematic because the meaning of being human and a democratic citizen has been determined from the beginning, before education has even taken place. The possibility for students to become independent thinkers and political agents is reduced when society (through the teachers’ instruction) tells them how they should be, think and act – that is, they are being taught. This approach is highly visible in the *The Norm Mediator* when dealing with controversial issues (cf. Ljunggren & Unemar Öst, 2010a). However, education, in agonistic philosophy of education, should be characterized by communication, relations and learning which are not possible to calculate in advance – it should be possible to learn things that you did not think were possible. Teaching has to contribute and make it possible to solve, problematize and question perspectives that the participants take with them into the classroom – bringing new and unexpected perspectives on the world. Education is not about marketing a specific world view or one’s own world view. Rather, democratic education concerns working in concert, it is a collective and thus political practice in which different world views can meet and confront each other. Consequently, it is the teachers’ task to create a safe conversation space in which questions, political preferences, feelings, affections and experiences could be expressed and at the same time offer the students resistance and perspectives. In Arendt’s terms this could be understood as freedom, the possibility to act politically, to appear on the world stage, breaking into the world and taking responsibility for it (and at the same time learning something from it). Hence, the vital didactical challenge in social science education is to allow political agency.

#### **5.1 Becoming a person – the prosumer**

A predefined framework for what it means to be a good democratic citizen is counter-productive, it does not count the experiences, perceptions, political preferences and interest of the students as important (Andersson, 2012a; Sandahl, 2015). Predefined frameworks only answer to socialisation and qualification and overlook the subjectification function of democratic education. Coarsely, teaching should ‘produce’ democratic citizens based on predefined democratic values and norms (socialisation) and students should learn proper subject knowledge and capacities (qualification) while developing a trust in societal institutions and traditions.



They should also be given the opportunity to grow as political agents with the freedom of creating their own lives and identities (subjectification). In practice, these three functions of education are (of course) interwoven but also further challenged when introducing social media and digitally mediated conversations.

Digitally mediated conversations in teaching reveal a number of changes in the teaching situation which increases the possibility for subjectification, expressed in new communication patterns, management of the educational content, user experience among the students, the depth of the conversation and possibilities in making one's voice heard (Rossi, 2006; Kim et al., 2007; Guiller et al., 2008; Xu, 2008; Andresen, 2009; Andersson, 2012b). The public conversation in the classroom faces didactical challenges when aiming at involving all students in communicative processes dealing with political controversy. Through an increased use of social media, inside and outside school, young people increasingly come to be both producers and consumers of educational content. As participants, the students become *prosumers* (Andersson, 2010), active co-creators of the educational content. Thus, a shift in communication patterns has occurred due to the introduction of digital and social media in school. The student is no longer only a recipient, consumer or user of educational content but also a participant and content producer. Consequently, a social media perspective questions what could be considered relevant knowledge, it provides new perspectives on the qualification function of education: from transmission of knowledge to construction of knowledge. A shift in teaching is then emphasized, from instructing and learning about democracy (being taught) to learning through and in democracy (being educated), a shift from a traditional teaching of information about democracy to a teaching directed towards knowledge in democracy and learning through democracy. A social media perspective could be useful to understand the teaching practices in social science education as a process in democracy directing the teachers to consider how they could use and create participatory approaches in teaching – that is, how they could increase the level of subjectification (cf. Biesta, 2006, 2010a, 2011b).

## 5.2 Blended learning and shared managements of disagreement

When teaching is a collaborative concern it is possible to learn from and in democracy. The students become participants (Biesta, 2007) making it possible to deal with the content in a pluralistic and meaningful way, opening for the use of experiences and preferences within the classroom. As participants the students are able to define themselves through action, a crucial condition for communication that could open for new impressions, knowledge and experiences which challenge individual positions and affect the person. Previous research shows that this type of teaching could be conducted when combining face-to-face conversations with digitally mediated conversations. This kind of blended learning

approach, as research has shown, makes it possible for all students to participate in the conversation which becomes characterized by genuine questions from the students, more time available to develop thoughts, arguments and deepen the understanding within agreed forms of communication. A mutually arranged digitally mediated public space for conversation may enable a safe, honest and topic-oriented treatment of politically controversial issues (e.g. Andersson, 2013) while allowing political action that could lead to more perspectives, dissent and difference – a political conversation in terms of I- and we-identifications. Thus, the didactical task of the teacher in political controversial conversations is then to arrange an open, creative and positive conversation climate, to frame a topic and make it interesting, to open for interactive and participatory forms of communication with a distinct conversation structure with pre-established rules.

## 5.3 Didactic strategies for conducting political controversial conversations

In controversial issues, teaching needs to go beyond a conversation framed as right or wrong, good or bad. Time for thinking and for the eager questions of the students is needed. It will be difficult to achieve the aim of social science education – to create opportunities that could contribute to the students' ability to critically examine, experience, analyse and evaluate complex societal issues and phenomena – if the conversation is framed and limited to what is stated as politically correct. The possibility to give perspective, challenge and qualify the political thinking of the students will then be omitted. A healthy democracy demands a shared management of disagreements (Hess, 2009). Communicating disagreement and conflict makes people knowledgeable and tolerant. Agonistically, this could be explained by the fact that powerful ideas are produced when humans reciprocally are given the opportunity to express their ideas. Schools are vital and qualified institutions and public spaces in which society's common issues can be handled reciprocally – a reciprocity which is challenged and at stake when dealing with political controversial issues.

Teachers find it difficult to conduct political controversial conversations in the social science class-room. If the goal of political democratic conversations in social science education is to allow students to openly and critically examine society, create meaning, express their own opinions and feelings, analyse and evaluate current affairs, *which didactic strategies will then be suitable for political controversial conversations?* Based on previous research and agonistic theory it is now possible to derive certain didactic strategies:

- Create, together with the students, a clear framework for participation in the conversation.
- Use blended learning opportunities in order to create a public space for conversation in which all students can make their voices heard.

- Be open for the unexpected and unpredictable, give space for action and use communicative strategies adjusted to the situation.
- Differentiate between person and action and balance the person's right to have different political views with the risk of offending other individuals.
- Make conflict a norm and use controversy and ideological diversity within the class as a didactic resource.
- Know your subject, be non-judgmental, perspective oriented and know your own discernments and political preferences.
- Approach the students as prosumers in order to increase and balance the level of subjectification.

This is not an imprint on how political controversial conversations should be conducted. It is not possible to calculate political conversations in advance, they are contingent. Consequently, the strategies should be viewed as an educational approach and attitude in balancing the educational function of socialisation, qualification and subjectification. The approach is a contrast to what Hand expresses as 'to teach something as controversial' (2008, p. 213). Teaching controversy, in Hand's definition and his defense of the epistemic criterion (2008), becomes a question of qualification and being taught. Teaching controversy is framed as a teacher's introduction and presentation of different views on an issue and their related arguments and subsequently the students are supposed to understand them and then make a choice. Thus, controversy is framed as a matter of epistemology. Students are to be taught different views that they in turn are supposed to choose from. Contextual dimensions of culture, political affection, emotions, experiences, attitudes and interests of the students are not counted as important. The teacher needs to use and be open to the questions and concerns of the students in order to create conversational spaces which encourage and support 'thinking activities' that could produce a critical dialogue beyond simple answers of right and wrong or making 'epistemological choices'. To deal with these challenges, and in order to understand the impact of social media on social science education and political controversial conversations on a deeper level, further empirical classroom research would be useful.

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**Katia Hildebrandt, Patrick Lewis, Claire Kreuger, Joseph Naytowhow, Jennifer Tupper, Alec Couros, Ken Montgomery**

## **Digital Storytelling for Historical Understanding: Treaty Education for Reconciliation**

This paper presents the findings of a research project that sought to interrogate the possibilities of digital storytelling as a pathway towards a more complete understanding of treaties and the treaty relationship in western Canada. This research is situated in the province of Saskatchewan, where treaty education (that is, education about the history of the numbered treaties signed between First Nations people and the British Crown, as well as the subsequent history of the treaty relationship) has been mandatory for almost a decade.

The paper details a two-year journey alongside elementary educators as they used digital storytelling to take up treaty education in their classrooms. We present an overview of the research project as well as the narratives of a teacher, a researcher, and a Cree knowledge keeper, all of whom were involved in and reflected on the research journey. We consider the research findings alongside these narratives in order to explore the possibilities that digital storytelling might offer as we, as a Canadian nation, move towards reconciliation with Aboriginal people within a Canadian context of ongoing colonialism.

Questo articolo presenta i risultati di un progetto di ricerca che ha cercato di indagare sulle possibilità della narrazione digitale di storie (storytelling) come percorso verso una comprensione più completa dei trattati e del rapporto fra i trattati nel Canada occidentale. Questa indagine è situata nella provincia di Saskatchewan, dove l'istruzione sui trattati (cioè, l'educazione sulla storia dei trattati numerati firmati tra la Prima Nazione e la Corona Britannica, così come la storia successiva del rapporto fra i trattati) è stato obbligatorio per quasi un decennio.

Il saggio riporta un percorso di due anni con insegnanti di scuola elementare che hanno usato lo storytelling digitale per fare l'educazione ai trattati nelle loro classi. Presentiamo una panoramica del progetto di ricerca ed i racconti di un insegnante, di un ricercatore, e un guardiano Cree della conoscenza, i quali sono stati coinvolti nella ricerca e riflettono sul percorso svolto. Consideriamo i risultati dell'indagine insieme a questi racconti, al fine di esplorare le possibilità che la narrazione digitale potrebbe offrire dato che noi, come nazione canadese, procediamo verso la riconciliazione con gli aborigeni in un contesto canadese di colonialismo in corso.

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Treaty education, digital storytelling, Aboriginal, colonization, story, primary/elementary teacher

### **1 The Context**

#### **1.1 The Colonial Landscape in Canada**

As White settler scholars and researchers committed to working alongside Aboriginal peoples as allies in challenging normative colonial discourses, we begin this paper by situating our work on Treaty 4 land in Southern Saskatchewan. We do this also to recognize the significance of histories of places whose residues and wisdoms continue to in/form contemporary understandings and engagements with the land (Chambers, 2006). This land that we live and work on, to which our privileges are directly linked, has stories to tell of colonialism, European contact, and settler invasion (Sterzuk, 2011). The history of Canada, too often represented primarily as one of patriotic and pioneering nation-building, is more accurately one of colonialism, whereby Europeans came to the land, established dominance over pre-existing Aboriginal communities, and then ensured that vast tracts of land could be “settled” in order to consolidate control from east to west, north to south. In light of this, colonialism “positions White settlers at the top of a racial hierarchy” so that we may “occupy a place of dominance, not necessarily through our individual choices but through the processes and institutions that serve us” (Sterzuk, 2011, p. 4).

The dominant nationalist narrative is that the signing of the numbered treaties in Western Canada between First Nations and the British Crown ensured that the land could be settled 'peacefully' rather than through a process of war and bloodshed that had occurred to the south of the border in the United States. This dominant narrative is simply not true, or at least, it hides some important truths about genocide, racism, and systematic plans of assimilation and destruction (Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Dashchuk, 2013). For First Nations peoples whose way of life had been irrevocably changed by European imperialism, treaties represented a bridge to the future for their children. Affected by the decimation of the buffalo by Europeans, faced with ongoing disease and starvation, and the erosion of a way of life, First Nations leaders agreed to negotiate the terms and conditions of the numbered treaties. These negotiations were not simple, often lasted days or weeks, and required compromise between the signatories. In the end, treaties allowed for the sharing of land, and depending on the number of the treaty, specific provisions or clauses with respect to the amount of reserve lands per band, annual treaty annuities, education, healthcare, farming implements, hunting and fishing rights, etc (Miller, 2009). The treaties are foundational to the history of Canada, yet most Canadians know very little about them (Miller, 2009).

Ignorance of the foundational importance of treaties can be understood as a function of colonialism, and more specifically what Calderón (2011) refers to in her scholarship as "colonial blind discourses." These discourses fail to acknowledge ongoing processes and practices of colonialism that position Aboriginal peoples as 'other', as less than, as non-citizens of the nation, despite national narratives of justice and fairness (Burrows, 2013; Tupper, 2014; Montgomery, 2008). Dominant narratives of Canada are necessary to the colonial project as they depict a history of an empty land, open and available for settlement (Furniss, 1999). There is an inherent practice of colonial amnesia at the heart of the creation and perpetuation of these Canadian "grand nationalist narratives", which begin with the arrival of Europeans, focus primarily on European (male) progress, obscure historical context, and are premised on a series of racialized exclusions (Stanley, 2006). These narratives work to affirm White settler identities as hard working, industrious, courageous, and as embodying the pioneering spirit necessary to the early economic success of Canada. Rendered absent in these narratives of course is how the land came to be available for settlement in the first place (Raulston Saul, 2014).

In schools throughout Saskatchewan, colonial blind discourses deny the continuing harm embedded in settlers' historical and contemporary relationships with Aboriginal people (Calderón, 2009). As such, possibilities for reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples become very challenging. In light of the shared history of this country and the importance of the numbered treaties to this history, the Office of the Treaty Commissioner (OTC) created curriculum materials for Saskatchewan teachers

to invite students into a different consideration of the past and present. Because of the work of the OTC, in 2008, the provincial government made treaty education a mandatory curricular initiative in the province for K-12 classrooms. Treaty education "invites teachers to include in implemented curriculum historical and contemporary stories, knowledge, and experiences of First Nations people, including those deeply connected to colonialism" (Tupper, 2014, p. 471).

As a mandatory curriculum commitment, a central goal is "the foundational entrenchment of First Nations and Métis ways of knowing, content and perspectives" (Government of Saskatchewan, 2008) in all school subjects. To be clear, and as has been described elsewhere (Tupper & Cappello, 2008; Tupper, 2014), treaty education is much more than teaching the facts of the numbered treaties. It helps teachers and their students to consider the historical and colonial context of treaty making, the spirit and intent of the treaties, treaty promises made but not always kept, and contemporary treaty issues often connected to historical failures of the government to honour the treaties. As such, treaty education provides a lens through which students and their teachers may come to re-read, re-write, and re-narrate the past, attending to a history of Canada that has not been part of the dominant story of this nation. In this sense, treaty education is anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and anti-colonial (Kumashiro, 2004; Pratt, 2004, Stanley, 2000). The work of treaty education creates spaces and opportunities for young people to understand contemporary issues faced by Aboriginal peoples and to consider their own responsibilities in shaping a different future for all Canadians.

Within the treaty education materials provided to teachers in Saskatchewan is information about the Indian Act, particularly the aspects of the Act which violated the terms and conditions of treaties and led to the creation of Indian Residential Schools in Canada. Henderson (2014) makes the argument that ignoring the history of Aboriginal-Canadian relations, and more specifically the treaties and the Indian Act, "only galvanizes this idea that Canada is a European state and foreign to oppressive practices" (p. 2). Further, Dénonmé-Welch and Montero (2014) state, "Indian Residential Schools and American Indian boarding schools were used to Christianize, civilize and assimilate the natives by immersing them in Eurocentric ways" (137). Far from fulfilling the stated aims of creating fit and healthy bodies capable of contributing to agricultural and domestic labour, the schools resulted in weakened bodies, grotesquely high rates of morbidity and mortality, and a long legacy of bodily, cultural, and psychological devastation (Kelm, 2003). Residential schools have been further described as vehicles for cultural genocide (Regan, 2010). As such, the significance of the historical and contemporary legacies of residential schools cannot be understated in the context of treaty education and in the work of classroom teachers to tell a different story.

## 2 The Research Project

Against the backdrop of colonialism and racism, our research (funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada) sought to explore with elementary teachers and their students what it means to be a treaty person in Canada. For the purposes of this paper, we focus on one classroom, one teacher, and one group of students in the second year of the project to illustrate the challenges and possibilities of treaty education to reshape understanding. We highlight the teacher's use of technology to invite her students into a treaty education inquiry and the corresponding digital stories created by the grade 3 students she was alongside. We argue that the stories the young people created through this research project are illustrative of the power of treaty education to reshape an understanding of Canada, one in which reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and settler Canadians becomes more possible.

Although this paper focuses specifically on a particular classroom from the second year of the project, it is perhaps helpful to contextualize the project by briefly describing its overall trajectory (as discussed in greater detail in Couros et al., 2013). Over the two-years of the project, we worked with four elementary classrooms in four different schools - two with predominantly non-Aboriginal student populations, and two with a large majority of Aboriginal students. Each year, there were several core visits to each classroom: an early visit with Nehiyaw (Cree) Knowledge Keeper and Interdisciplinary Artist/Storyteller Joseph Naytowhow of Sturgeon Lake First Nation, in which Joseph worked with students to establish a Circle and explain its significance; an introduction to stories and storytelling by a member of the research team; and an introduction to the iPads and to relevant iPad apps, led by another member. In all, the researchers visited each classroom approximately eight times.

During the first year of the project, the research team tried to avoid prescribing a direction for teachers and students to travel in, hoping instead to support and encourage an open-ended inquiry into treaties and treaty education. At times, this resulted in discomfort on the part of the teachers. This discomfort was, in part, a result of the teachers' struggles with the tensions of an apparent desire to engage in treaty education in the "correct" way and a fear of accidentally offending someone or disrespecting Aboriginal protocols. However, it also stemmed from the fundamental incompatibility with more traditional ways of teaching social studies and, indeed, with the ways in which Canadian teachers are discursively produced to perform particular narratives of the "good" teacher as value-free and a-political. Certainly, we are not commenting on the flawed character of any one of these teachers, but rather on the complex condition of knowledge production that produces them as subjects desiring to be good, equitable, and just in their pedagogy. Consequently, the team realized the need to include an additional visit dedicated to an overview of treaty education using resources provided by the Office of the Treaty Commissioner (e.g., maps

showing treaty lands and information pertaining to who signed and why as well as what it means to be a treaty person).

The team's work with the predominantly non-Aboriginal urban grade three class in the second year of the project began early in the school year, with the core visits described above. At this time, the inquiry focussed on the question: "What does it mean to be a treaty person." In addition, the research team worked with the teacher to create resources and lessons targeted to help students to explore the key inquiry question. For instance, team members created an age-appropriate text describing the signing of Treaty Four at Fort Qu'Appelle in Southern Saskatchewan, which the students then took up by creating Puppet Pals videos and podcasts in which they imagined themselves travelling back to the time of the Treaty signing. At the teacher's request, the research team also led the students in creating and presenting tobacco pouches to Joseph Naytowhow. Throughout the year, members of the research team paid regular visits to the classroom to support activities, to provide assistance with the technological aspects of the project, and to allow students to share their progress. It is important to note, however, that the researchers were guided by a determination to respond to the requests and needs of the teacher and her students, as opposed to imposing resources and visits. As with any curriculum, one size does not fit all; treaty education must be tailored to the abilities, needs, and interests of the learners in the classroom.

Several key elements stand out in the research team's experience with the grade three classroom. The first was the students' engagement with Joseph. Through his work with them around traditional Cree teachings, stories, and songs, it was evident that students were able to better comprehend the cultural significance of the treaties as well as the importance of storied ways of knowing, both of which translated into richer digital stories. A key moment occurred during one of Joseph's visits, when a self-identified Aboriginal student asked whether he went to Powwows. Joseph responded that he did and began drumming and singing, and the young girl smiled broadly and hugged herself, clearly responding to the affirmation of her cultural heritage. Additionally, when the students presented one of their early digital stories to Joseph, he noted that the treaties were about sharing the land, not about giving it up; this important teaching re-emerged in later projects as students created digital stories that explicitly highlighted the importance of sharing the land.

Another important element of the research that unfolded in the grade three classroom was the way in which the teacher allowed her students to direct the inquiry. After introducing the students to some general topics around treaties and the treaty relationship, the teacher encouraged students to explore their own interests, culminating in a final digital story with a student-selected topic and format. For instance, some students developed an interest in residential schools and decided to create a final video that showcased their research on the topic, while another group wanted to



learn more about the Oka crisis and eventually created a stop-motion video depicting their understanding of the event. Although the teacher expressed some concerns about the disordered chronology of students' learning about the treaties, the final products demonstrated that the grade three students developed a rich understanding of the subjects they chose to explore, creating a solid foundation for future treaty education.

### 3 Methodology and Methods of Inquiry

As we note in Couros et al. (2013), our research drew upon qualitative methodology, using elements of participatory action research to structure the inquiry. In participatory action research, or PAR, participants are involved in the research through an inquiry into both the current situation (in this case, the teaching of treaty education) and an exploration of how that situation might be improved. It utilized critical reflection on the part of the participants in order to "work toward new realizations about self and other" (Couros et al., 2013, p. 547).

Within the framework of PAR, the research team employed digital storytelling methods, that is "the use of digital tools and media to develop, create, enhance, and share stories" (Couros et al., 2013, p. 546) to support students' inquiry. While there are great numbers of devices and apps that support digital storytelling in the classroom, our team purchased a set of iPads for student use. We found that tablet devices such as the iPads were ideal for students of this age as they were mobile, easily held, intuitive, and familiar to many of the students. These iPads were equipped with cameras that allowed for digital photos and video. Apple's App Store hosts hundreds of possible apps that are suitable for digital storytelling.

While the team created a list of apps that are commonly used to create digital stories, our teacher in this classroom, Claire, introduced the research team to an app called Puppet Pals. This digital tool allows users with little technological knowledge to create fairly sophisticated animated stories. When using the app for digital storytelling, students chose one or more characters to animate on a variety of backdrops. Students could then speak through the characters by recording their voices while moving the character on the chosen backdrop. Voice, movement, interaction, and scaling of characters was recorded so that these stories could be later viewed or published to the Web.

The paid version of Puppet Pals allows users to create their own backdrops and characters. This meant that Claire could have her students create custom characters and backdrops that were relevant to Treaty Education. In one activity, students drew backdrops of Fort Qu'Appelle Saskatchewan (where Treaty Four was signed) along with First Nations and settler individuals who would have been present at the time of signing. Students used the app to record the imagined dialogue and interactions between First Nations and settlers in order to better understand the historical and foundational significance of the signing of the numbered treaties.

An Apple TV device was also adopted in this classroom. Through Apple's proprietary software 'Air Play,' students could wirelessly share their work from any iPad in the classroom to a projector connected to Apple TV. This practice replaced that of having to physically connect the iPad at the front of the room through a VGA cable and dongle. Beyond the sometimes technically frustrating aspects of the former method, the wireless method created a more seamless environment for sharing and gave more control of the learning environment to students.

While there are a host of apps that can be used for digital storytelling on the iPad, we found that the ones deemed most relevant to the students in the context of this project allowed for the capturing of audio, personal photographs, or video. In particular, students were able to employ aural and visual modalities as they gained a historical understanding of Treaties and recognized their relationship to Treaties in a modern context. These modalities, along with the intuitiveness of the tablets, provided a rich environment for sense-making and knowledge construction through the development of multimedia-enriched narratives.

### 4 Narrative Reflections

#### 4.1 What does it mean to be a treaty person?

##### Reflections from a teacher researcher, researcher and knowledge keeper

In what follows, three members of the research collaborative share their reflections on the research, students' learning, their own self-awareness and the significance of treaty education. These reflections are illustrative of the significant learning that was experienced by members of the research team both in terms of teaching treaties and the treaty relationship and using digital resources to support a meaningful and sustained engagement with Aboriginal - Canadian relations.

##### *Claire's Research Narrative: "Something to Hold on To."*

It is not uncommon for an individual to be exceptionally well-versed on the theories of cross-cultural effectiveness, possess the best of motives, and be sincerely concerned about enacting his [sic] role accordingly, yet be unable to demonstrate those understandings in his own behavior. (Ruben & Kealey, 1979)

I grew up in the multicultural suburbs of Vancouver, have lived amongst the Inuit in the Canadian Arctic and have travelled extensively. Given these experiences, I have always considered myself to be open-minded, culturally sensitive and liberal in my ideas and outlook. So it was with great surprise and chagrin that I found myself making many colonial-minded missteps and mistakes as I began this Digital Storytelling project.

Many of the mistakes that I made that first year and continue to make (although less frequently) I see now as a result of my own Euro-centricity. Over and over again, I leapt without looking, assuming that I would naturally, and without any change required within myself, land on



the right foot and march off in the right direction. That somehow, by virtue of my own innate abilities I would be able to bring a quality treaty education program to my classroom. I assumed that without doing any additional research or even looking at the treaty education outcomes, I would be able to teach this program effectively.

Complicating matters further, I misunderstood the nature of treaty education at its most basic level. I assumed that this program was all about First Nations peoples and cultures and had very little to do with myself or my predominantly non-aboriginal students. I presented my program that first year as a magnanimous offering of indigenous content. At that time, I did not realize that I too was a “treaty person” and that treaty education was also about me.

Most cringe-worthy perhaps was the disconnect that developed between what I understood about the First Nations of Canada and the failure to demonstrate that understanding to my students. I know that there are many hundreds of First Nations in Canada with vastly different cultures and histories. I know that the term “First Nations” is problematic in that it represents these hundreds of distinct First Nations as one entity. And yet, in practice I found myself frequently failing to make this distinction to my students. I fell into the “us” and “them” paradigm, using First Nations resources interchangeably, swapping Coast Salish for Cree for Saulteaux for Wendat all under the “First Nations” moniker.

After the first year of this project, and with many of these mistakes made and learned from, I realized that I was not, nor could I easily become, an expert on treaties. That was the simple truth. The challenge then became how to offer a treaty education program, knowing next to nothing about treaties and the treaty relationship. The path forward, however, was quite simple; I needed to become a learner alongside my students. So I began the year admitting to my class my lack of expertise in this area, and presenting them with a question: “What does it mean to be a treaty person?”

One of the many gifts of the treaty education program is that it provides a space and a structure for the discussion of ideas. Furthermore, these ideas tend to centre on questions of identity and belonging, something to which students naturally gravitate. With our current data-centred focus in education, sometimes we forget about ideas. And yet, I have found, that what students appreciate most is this sharing and developing of ideas or, as one student has put it, these “life lessons”.

I asked some of my students who participated what they thought of our treaty education program. Anna (9 years old) went away and took two pages to answer me. In short, this is what she said:

“I don’t know why any teacher would not teach their students treaty education in Canada where treaties are a big problem because the government didn’t keep their promises. I was inspired by the treaties. I like to think about what could have happened differently. I find that it is not as useless as fractions. It’s more of a life lesson, something to hold on to.”

Ellie, also 9 years old, wrote the following:

“Since many people don’t know about treaties, it’s important for people to respect treaties. Everyone must know that treaties were signed. The treaty was a promise. And it’s important for everyone to learn about how aboriginal people were on the land first. Teachers must teach us so we know our history so when we are older we will know more and things will be better.”

One of the pedagogical lessons that I learned as a part of this project was to step back. So often classrooms are really all about the teacher, and mine had been no different. Now suddenly, I wasn’t the expert, it wasn’t about what I wanted to teach but what my students wanted to learn. And my students did want to learn about the treaties. Many teachers avoid teaching Treaty Education for a whole host of reasons, one of them being that they’re afraid that their students will find it boring. In my experience, students are eager to learn about treaties because it affects them right now. They are on this land. They are bound by this treaty. They want to know why and how and what comes next. As Anna said, it’s not as esoteric as fractions, treaties are tangible, and references to them are constantly in the news. Last year we spent a lot of time talking about Idle No More. This year we talked about Neil Young’s Anti-Tar Sands tour. It wasn’t until the end of last year that it dawned on me that this was what inquiry looks like.

I also discovered that most of my assumptions about what an 8 year-old could reasonably comprehend and achieve were wrong. I had been setting the bar way too low. Many times I hesitated to start a given task because I wasn’t sure how to do it or how the students were going to accomplish it. One such assignment was to make iMovies. I knew nothing about iMovie. I felt like I needed to learn it first so at the very least, I could answer any questions students may have. A member of the team came in one day to do an introductory session on the program. His introduction comprised handing out the iPads and telling the students to get started. He wandered around and showed them a few tricks but by and large my students figured it out for themselves, no major lesson required! Again, it was learning to step back and let my students take charge of their own learning, and learning to trust that they could do it. Over and over again, my students showed me that not only could they accomplish what we set out to do, for the most part on their own, but they could do it better and more competently than I had thought possible.

Besides technical skills, my other concern had been whether 8 year-olds could handle the open-ended nature of our topic. There is no conclusive answer to “What does it mean to be a treaty person?” Could an 8 year-old reasonably be expected to comprehend the complexity and uncertainty of that line of thought? What if they ended up more confused than when we began? In the end, it turned out that they valued the complexity. In their final projects last year, almost every group mentioned that after a year of study they still didn’t



know what it means to be a treaty person. But they went on to talk about how they now saw it as meaning several different things and holding a number of different, often conflicting, emotions for them. It was stunning to hear 8 year-olds discuss the intricacy of their emotions and reactions to being a treaty person with such depth and with such creativity.

On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made an historic apology on behalf of the Government of Canada for the legacy of residential schools. He called on all Canadians to join First Nations on a journey towards “healing, reconciliation and resolution” and to forge a new relationship based on respect and renewed understanding. I think that teachers are uniquely placed to contribute to the building of this relationship. And that the best place to start is with giving our students a solid understanding of what it means to be a treaty person.

But it is more than that. Through treaty education and its themes of identity and belonging students and teachers alike begin to see themselves within a greater context. Looking at the treaties from multiple perspectives gives students the opportunity to “engage in honest, reflective dialogue about our shared but conflicting stories—our histories” as Paulette Regan (2010) has written in her book, *Unsettling the Settler Within*. It is only through these discussions that we can begin to see our own narrow viewpoints and how they connect, intersect and conflict with those around us. These are the first few steps towards intercultural competency, an essential skill set for successful collaboration and communication across cultures. Not only does treaty education prepare students to be Canadians, it also prepares them to become effective, more thoughtful citizens of the world.

#### **Joseph’s Narrative: Tipahamatowin / Ostisimaw- asinahikan (treaty payments /treaty, constitution**

These past three years being involved as part of the University of Regina educational research team have been insightful and filled with joy. I wouldn’t have it any other way. The research involved inquiring into treaties and the classroom. In specific, two schools had volunteered to be a part of the research, a First Nation and Euro/Canadian elementary school.

My experience as traditional knowledge keeper and a resource with knowledge of treaties comes with mixed emotions. For the past thirty years, I’ve been advocating through storytelling and cultural information the need for Canadians in general to understand the world I came from. This world is nehiyo-itapsinowin (world as seen through cree/four-bodied-people’s eyes). I feel relieved that all the years of educating Canadian children, students and adults may have had some impact in a small way within the province of Saskatchewan’s educational goals. I don’t really know.

Now with Saskatchewan Learning making it a requirement to teach about treaties in the classroom since 2007, the future generations will finally begin to live by the words the elders have spoken: words that were fundamentally saying that we need to get along and

share this land equally.

It’s a beginning.

The students from both schools, I discovered, had little or no knowledge about treaties but had the enthusiasm to begin learning about them. Teachers also had little to a fair amount of knowledge about treaties that were part of the research.

I’m happy with the outcomes of the research. It appeared at times that students and teachers were both learning about treaties at the same time.

Before all the school visits began we did the proper protocol of offering an elder tobacco and broadcloth to ask for consent to undertake the inquiry as well as too request for guidance. As a traditional knowledge keeper I understand that building a good relationship with local Treaty Four elders is paramount to this research. It was the way treaty elders had done it at the time of signing of the treaties. The treaty was a sacred covenant. There needs to be a sacred stem and pipe bowl ceremony to acknowledge the higher spiritual forces. For myself coming from the Treaty Six area I felt supported and welcomed once the ceremony was conducted.

As a traditional knowledge keeper I was both teacher and observer. I understood treaties from an oral tradition perspective. The treaty story was meant to be passed down from one generation to the next in the language of the treaty signatories, in my case nehiyowewin pikiskwewin (loosely translated as Cree language). So, I used as much of the language while talking with students to illustrate the way children might have learned about their history and their treaty. So much is missed when treaties are taught without the use of a first nation language. I felt somewhat at a disadvantage that I not know the treaty six story through the voice of the elders who still know the original story.

The children we visited in the four schools had the enthusiasm as I said previously and perhaps that is enough to create interest and a hunger for more knowledge about Treaty Four in specific. This was the treaty area for both these two communities that were involved.

It will be a long journey for treaties to be truly recognized as having meaning in their lives. We may have only opened the door to one another’s way of being and learning. I’m optimistic, yet concerned for teachers who’re not equipped with the information and traditional background to effectively teach about treaties.

#### **Patrick J Lewis’ Narrative: Researching Teaching Treaty Education 2.0**

We began our research project with the rather long title, “Storying Treaties and the Treaty Relationship: Enhancing Treaty Education through Digital Storytelling” in the late autumn of 2011. At the time I was looking forward to, you could say was excited about the prospect of working with two different groups of elementary students and their teachers, who would be able to engage in inquiry based learning utilizing storytelling as both the method of investigation and presentation of findings. Moreover, I was also anticipating working with my friend and storytelling colleague Joseph Naytowhow. Joseph worked





with the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and guided us through protocols and practice prior to and into the research project. He and I also worked closely with re/introducing and engaging the students and teachers with the importance and power of story to both inquire and to make sense of experience. Throughout this initial excitement what I didn't realize at the outset of the project nor well near the end of our first year of the two-year project is that I came to the research, and in particular the first two classroom school sites, with a large bag full of assumptions.

*What were some of my assumptions?* First, and this should have been painfully obvious, just because I perceived inquiry based learning and storytelling as somehow liberatory to mainstream notions of teaching and learning, I mistakenly assumed the collaborating teachers and their students would take up this opportunity and run with it. Second, I assumed the collaborating teachers would draw upon the Treaty Education Kits as their core resources to begin an exploration of Treaties after initial visits; rather the teachers continually deferred to the research team to initiate, lead, teach and discuss treaty education. In retrospect, we were not sufficiently clear in communicating with and providing support and guidance to the two teachers about each person's role, responsibilities, and expectations during the project. Finally, and most important as I began to perceive some of the aforementioned things emerge into the first year, I was quick to assume that it was a resistance on the part of the teachers; a resistance to taking up the mandated teaching of treaties, which was only a few years old at the time. Although, there is some resistance I came to see that it was more an uncertainty and struggle on the part of many teachers with how to best take up the teaching of treaties. Furthermore, it was a conceit, if not arrogance on my part to rationalize the less than stellar results from the first year of the research project as a failure on the part of the teachers to engage in the project in the way I imagined they should.

*What else did I learn about myself through this experience?* Talking with Joseph before one of our school visits I wanted to discuss what we might plan to do with the 11 and 12 year old children we were to work alongside for the next 6 months in our research project. I shared my carefully planned idea of how we might begin and some of the ideas we should think about introducing, he nodded thoughtfully commenting that it all sounded very interesting and would be good to share with the children and the teacher. When I asked what he thought we should do he simply paused, thought for a moment and said,

"We should smudge before we start."

I replied, "we won't be able to do it in the school because we didn't ask ahead of time. The fire regulations will prevent us from just doing it on our own."  
"Oh yes", said Joseph, unperturbed, "well let's just smudge in the parking lot, before we go in."

I like to plan ahead when I am in a teaching context and even though this was a research project it was all about teaching and inquiry. So, I pursued my line of asking Joseph what he thought we should do. He thought for a moment then said,

"What stories are you going to share?"

Oh good I thought, now we are getting somewhere and we can finish sketching out our plan. So I said, "Well I thought we would start in the circle and I would re-introduce the project and review the significance of the circle, then tell the Celtic creation story, *Oran Mor*".

Joseph smiled and said, "Yes, that's a good story. What else are you going to tell?"

"Oh", I cheerfully replied, "I thought I would tell a story called Victor the Baker and Cynthia the Cellist"

Joseph nodded his head and asked, "What's that about?"

I told him a condensed version of the story and he smiled and said,

"That's a good story, I like that one". I waited to hear what he was going to do, but he proceeded to get his smudge bowl and materials out of his pack as we continued driving down the road toward the school.

Through this experience and many more similar ones I came to recognize that although I thought I understood myself with respect to how I have been constructed as a teacher and a storyteller, I did not really. Realizing how much I am still subject to my teacher apprenticeship of observation in my need to plan and be prepared even when I think I have broken those bonds or at least transcended them in some way was brought home to me in my experience working closely with Joseph and the research project.

Being alongside Joseph in this way he taught me to let go or rather open up to what some aboriginal scholars and elders call the "learning spirit", something of which I thought I knew a little and wrote about in the storytelling context. However, I realize I did not readily take in and/or extend into the practice of my everyday life. That day and all of the other visits to the schools when Joseph and I were sharing stories in the circle with the students I came just a little bit closer to understanding the learning spirit through Joseph's quiet thoughtful guidance. The spirit of the stories guided us in our telling; Joseph helped me better understand the Nēhiyaw (Cree) term *miskasowin*, go to your origins, go to the centre of your self to find your own belonging which may include dream, prayer, and ceremony.

*What struck me the most about the experience of the research project?* What emerged throughout the project with all four school groups with whom we worked was the question of the Residential School System of Canada and its ongoing legacy. I came to see that the teaching of Treaties couldn't be done without enlightening both students and teachers (all Canadians) about the history of the residential schools in Canada. During the project students and teachers would raise questions about First Nation education and how to reconcile it as in the treaties with how it was manifested through residential



schools. Many of our undergraduate students coming into our teacher education program know little or nothing about the history of residential schools and their legacy nor do they know much about treaties. But what really brought this home to me was something that was in part influenced by this project. A small group of faculty in our Faculty of Education hosted the *Legacy of Hope Foundations 100 Years of Loss* exhibition in an effort to try and take up that need to enlighten Canadians about the Residential School System of Canada. It was at the University of Regina in the autumn of 2013 for 3 weeks

open to the public. Students from the Faculty of Education and beyond as well as upper elementary students from local school district visited the exhibition. During one of the elementary school group visits our managing editor of our journal, *in education* and the faculty's Education News was on site taking photographs. I share one of the photos below and resist re/framing it for the viewer. However, I must ask myself some questions: What is this photo? Is it a photo of hope? Is it a photo of despair? Is it a photo of resistance and resurgence? What is this photo to you?



*100 Years of Loss, The Residential School System in Canada: Boys looking at the Boys*  
The photo exemplifies for me the importance of the enormity of work that needs to be done to continue to grow the teaching of treaties in the K-12 school system, the history and legacy of residential schools, and the need to support Indigenous resurgence through teacher education and decolonisation. Photo Credit: Shuana Niessen (2013)

## 5 Conclusion

Claire's narrative demonstrates the potential for treaty education to provide an opening for a new discussion around treaties and the treaty relationship, both in the Saskatchewan context and on a national and global scale. Through a process of inquiry learning, the students in the class were frequently able to ask difficult, sometimes discomfiting questions about the treaties, questions that might begin the process of disrupting dominant discourses of colonialism. Throughout the course of the year, the research team witnessed a shift in the students' consciousness as they started to think differently about the historical and contemporary nature of the treaties and to trouble their own commonsense understanding of Canadian history; this shift in thinking is a critical first step in disrupting colonial-blind discourses in ways that unsettle the practice of "othering" that has been deeply inscribed into Aboriginal-settler relations in this country. The stories that the young people told and created are good starting places; they clearly illustrate the potential

for treaty education to speak back to existing narratives of Canada and to pave a path toward reconciliation.

However, we continue to be cognizant of the conditions of knowledge production that produce well-intentioned teachers who know very little if anything about treaty education. While this lack of knowledge may be framed as an individual deficit on the part of the teacher(s) it must be understood as representative of the power of dominant narratives to in/form teaching and learning. Like critical pedagogy, treaty education can ideally be "about changing the conditions of knowledge production so that none can find easy sanctuary in ignorance" (Montgomery, 2013, p.13). Yet, toward such an ideal teachers must move far beyond building taco tipis and other multicultural celebratory activities that they can easily and confidently implement in their classrooms which, "despite good intentions, colonize more than they liberate" (Gorski, 2009, p. 522). Teachers must be willing to take treaty education material up in complex non-linear ways that are less reflective of westernized

approaches to knowledge and the perceived need for 'expertise'. Teachers and teacher educators should consciously move beyond a notion of cultural sensitivity toward culturally responsive pedagogy. As our research has revealed, treaty education does not always (nor should it) lend itself to a pre-determined scope and sequence.

Movement toward a humbly practiced authentic engagement in treaty education, involving the deliberate, and often difficult, supplanting of hubris and egoism with a crucial commitment to understanding one's own complicity within historical and present-day imbalanced relations of power, might make it less possible for both teachers and students to claim ignorance and thus to participate in the reproduction of those colonial blind discourses necessary for colonial ontologies to persist. Crucial in this regard is the connecting of theory to practice in relation to the spirit and intent of treaties and particularly from First Nations' perspectives both historically and currently. The legacy of the colonial narrative of the making of Canada created an education system that has denied Canadians a more accurate account of the history of relations between First Nations and settler Canadians. It is a long standing position of First Nations, documented over the past 150 years, that treaties are generally seen as a covenant between First Peoples and settlers to share the land, a sharing that has been systematically dishonoured by successive Canadian governments and the people of Canada.

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## A Qualitative Study on Learning and Teaching With Learning Paths in a Learning Management System

This article presents the findings of a qualitative study (carried out between 2011 and 2013) about the adoption and implementation of learning paths within a Learning Management System (LMS). Sixteen secondary school biology teachers of the GO! Network in Flanders (an urbanized region in Belgium) were involved in the study and questioned via semi-structured interviews. Two research questions are addressed: (1) what are the perceived conditions at school and at teacher level affecting the use of learning paths? (2) how are these conditions related to the expected outcomes? Research results show teachers are satisfied with learning paths as an educational tool, but reflect mixed feelings as to the impact on student learning outcomes. Clear barriers are identified at the school and teacher level, thwarting the implementation of learning paths in secondary education. The availability of a reliable and accessible ICT infrastructure, the quality of technical and pedagogical support, teacher professional development and the mastery of teacher Information and Communication Technology competencies, among others, were found to be essential.

Questo articolo presenta i risultati di uno studio qualitativo sull'adozione e l'attuazione di percorsi di apprendimento all'interno del Learning Management System (LMS). Sedici insegnanti della scuola secondaria sono stati coinvolti nello studio e interrogati tramite interviste semi-strutturate. Si sono prese in considerazione due domande di ricerca: (1) quali sono le condizioni percepite nella scuola e fra gli insegnanti capaci di influenzare l'uso di percorsi di apprendimento (learning paths)? (2) come sono legate ai risultati attesi queste condizioni? I risultati della ricerca mostrano che gli insegnanti sono soddisfatti dei percorsi di apprendimento (learning paths) come strumento

educativo, ma mostrano sentimenti contrastanti per quanto riguarda l'impatto sui risultati di apprendimento degli studenti. Si identificano chiari ostacoli a livello di scuola e di insegnanti, vanificando l'utilizzo dei learning paths nell'istruzione secondaria. Si sono rivelati essenziali, fra l'altro, la disponibilità di infrastruttura ICT affidabili e accessibili, la qualità del supporto tecnico e pedagogico, lo sviluppo professionale degli insegnanti e la padronanza delle tecnologie dell'informazione e della comunicazione.

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### Keywords:

Secondary school, learning management system, learning path, qualitative research

### 1 Introduction

In their internationally recognized NMC Horizon Report; Johnson, Becker, Estrada and Freeman (2014) discuss several Information and Communication Technology (ICT) trends, expected to change education. They forecast Learning Management Systems (LMS) would underpin online, blended and collaborative learning in the short-term and foresee data-driven learning environments in the mid-term. According to the American technology website Techcrunch.com (Shieber, 2014), governments and venture capital firms have – to date – never invested such amounts of money in the educational market.

Learning Management Systems (LMS) are information systems running on a server, offering various tools like document publishing, assessment modules, wiki, etc. LMS can be accessed using a web browser. Within the LMS, educational material is processed, stored and disseminated; teaching and learning related administration and communication is supported (McGill & Klobas, 2009). LMS originated in the late nineties and have seen a permanent market rise since then. The latest 2014 analysis by the Edutechnica blog (2014) of LMS

usage involving all US higher education institutions, confirms that more than 90% of these institutions actively use an LMS. While the future for the LMS may sound promising, research remains scarce about the LMS learners' perception, experiences and satisfaction (Joo, Lim & Kim, 2011); their learning outcomes, as well as their teachers' motivation and training for using the system (Keramati, Afshari-Mofrad & Kamrani, 2011). In addition, recent research by Schoonenboom (2014) investigated why some tools are used more than others, as little is known about the instructional use of the LMS.

## **2 Studying LMS and learning path usage: Towards a theoretical model**

In their LMS-related study, De Smet, Bourgonjon, De Wever, Schellens & Valcke (2012) investigated the instructional use and the technology acceptance of learning management systems by secondary school teachers. In this study, an extended TAM2-model (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000) was tested, by studying LMS usage intentions in terms of social influence, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Next to the direct impact of teacher perceptions about the ease of use of an LMS and its usefulness, the researchers observed a direct and indirect impact of internal ICT support to understand LMS acceptance. The latter implies that supporting teachers at the school level plays an important role to use technology. In addition, it was found that a basic usage level (e.g. documents or exercises published by the teachers) is required before more advanced LMS functionalities (interactive activities) like collaborative writing, moderated discussions and learning paths) are being adopted.

The present paper focuses on 'learning paths', which is one of the more advanced LMS functionalities. Learning paths are described as "The LMS functionality to order a number of learning objects in such a way that they result in a road map for learners. Within a learning path, learning steps are structured in a general way (as a navigation map or a table of contents) or in a very specific sequenced way (e.g. 'complete first step 1 before moving on to step 2')" (De Smet, Schellens, De Wever, Brandt-Pomares & Valcke, 2014, p. 2). The most important building blocks of a learning path are the learning objects. Kay and Knaack (2008a, p.6) define the latter as "interactive web-based tools that support the learning of specific concepts by enhancing, amplifying, and/or guiding the cognitive processes of learners".

The latter authors report in their literature review about a robust body of research discussing the design, development, reuse and accessibility of learning objects. However, little systematic research is available covering the actual use of learning paths in classrooms. The few available studies report on student perceptions or qualitative studies about learning outcomes. Research gaps are identified in relation to teacher attitudes about the use of learning objects in a real classroom and studies investigating the actual use of learning objects in a secondary school setting. In addition, Ozkan, Koseler and Baykal (2009) stress that research addressing the

conceptualization and measurement of related learning outcomes - within educational organizations - is scarce.

To develop a theoretical base about conditions affecting the implementation of an LMS in general and learning paths in particular, we can build on the study of Piccoli, Ahmad and Ives (2001) who distinguish between a human dimension (including students and instructors) and a design dimension (including learning models, technology, learner control, content and interaction). The design dimension was examined in an earlier evaluative study, linking the design, implementation and impact of learning paths with student learning outcomes (De Smet et al., 2014; De Smet, De Wever, Schellens & Valcke, 2015). Evidence was found about superior performance in the learning path condition compared with the conventional instruction (control condition). Furthermore, it became apparent that learning outcomes are influenced by design factors, next to implementation factors such as students working in groups or individually, and the group gender composition (same-sex or mixed-gender). In the present study, we firstly focus on the human dimension as defined by Piccoli et al. (2001).

To develop a better insight into the human dimension, other researchers refer to 'barriers' hindering technology integration: external (first-order) and internal (second-order) barriers (Ertmer, 1999). According to Ertmer (1999), internal barriers are intrinsic to teachers and include their beliefs about teaching, their learning approaches and their teaching practice; external barriers are linked to computer access, training and support to help teachers becoming more effective or efficient. The external barriers hardly challenge underlying teacher beliefs. Consequently, Ertmer (1999) concludes that external barriers can be solved by providing the necessary resources, but internal barriers can only be changed by influencing a teachers' belief system and teaching practices. Research of Hermans, Tondeur, van Braak and Valcke (2008) confirms that teacher beliefs are at least as important as technology-related teacher characteristics to explain successful ICT integration. Teacher beliefs have therefore been explored by several researchers, since they play an important role in technology adoption (Smardkova, 2008) and technology integration (Ertmer, 2005; Ertmer, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Hermans et al., 2008). In this respect, two approaches are frequently studied: teacher-centred versus student-centred beliefs about instruction (Kember, 1997), referring to the beliefs teachers hold about how technology enables them to translate those beliefs into classroom practice (Ertmer, 2005). Teachers holding a teacher-centred belief (based on a traditional learning model) rather adopt traditional teaching methods such as lecturing and focus on knowledge reproduction. Teachers reflecting student-centred beliefs engage in active learning environments that permit critical thinking, discovery, and collaboration (Chan & Elliot, 2004). But, some researchers (e.g. Liu, 2011) present less conclusive evidence about the relation between teacher beliefs and particular teaching practices and



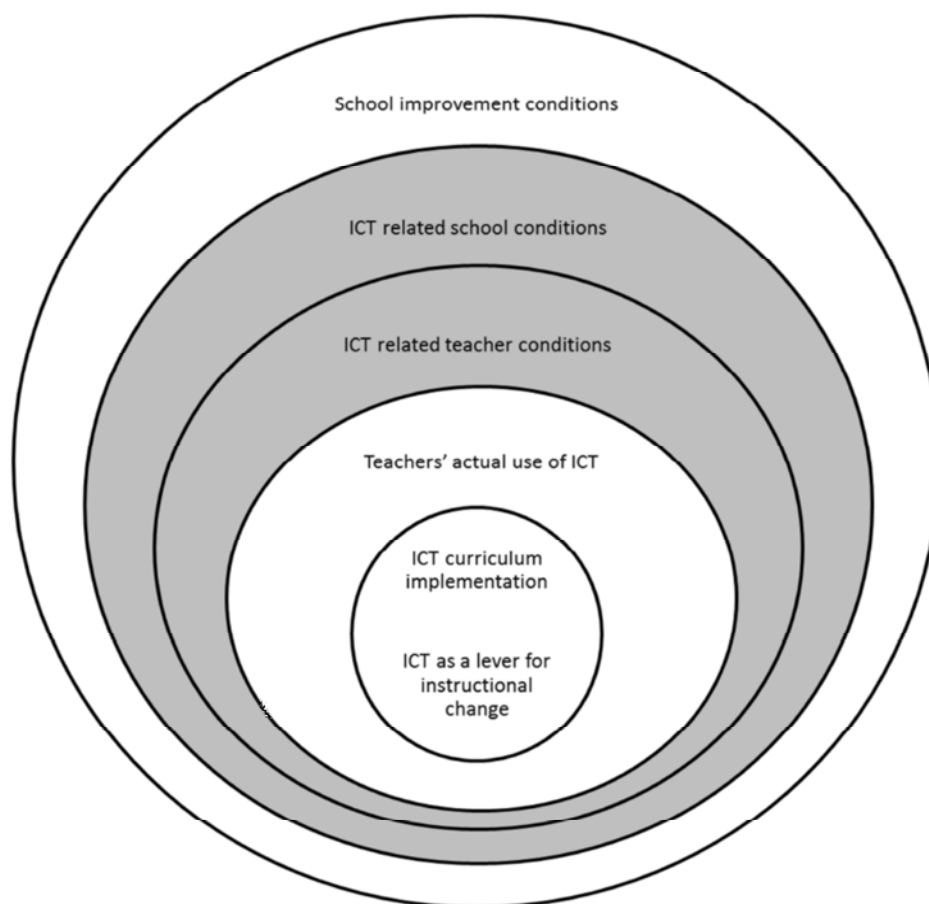
stress that the dynamics of this relationship needs further research.

Next to internal barriers (human dimension), the literature is – as already suggested above – clear about the impact of external barriers influencing technology integration; though little research is available in the domain of LMS and learning path usage. The distinction between internal and external barriers may neglect the interrelated nature of these variables; e.g., how professional development about LMS or a school level ICT-policy affects teacher beliefs. A more embracing perspective is needed. Therefore, we adopt the e-capacity framework of Vanderlinde and van Braak (2010) and

conceptions derived from the research about user perceptions of e-learning systems (Liaw & Huang, 2007; Liaw, Huang & Chen, 2007; Liaw, 2008) to attain a more embracing perspective.

The e-capacity framework of Vanderlinde and van Braak (2010) deals with “creating and optimizing sustainable school level and teacher level conditions to foster effective change through ICT” (p. 542). Figure 1 shows how consecutive circles encompass and interact with other processes and variables that affect the two central dependent variables: ICT curriculum implementation and ICT as a lever for instructional change.

Figure 1. Model based on the e-capacity framework of Vanderlinde and van Braak (2010, p.254).



The framework consists of four mediating concentric circles with conditions that support ICT uses in education. In the present study we focus on the two inner ‘circles’ (see Figure 1, grey coloured): ‘ICT related school conditions’ and ‘ICT related teacher conditions’. This particular emphasis does not neglect the potential impact of e.g., societal influences, leadership or decision-making formats, but these are less the responsibility of the teachers and/or they are less related to their professionalism and expertise.

Also the work of Liaw and Huang (2007), Liaw, Huang and Chen (2007) and Liaw (2008) helps to develop this more embracing perspective on our research problem. These authors—on the base of the analysis of teacher interviews—suggest four interrelated ‘environmental

conditions’ to develop effective and motivating e-learning environments as perceived by teachers: 1) useful environment characteristics, 2) effective learning activities, 3) enhanced environmental satisfaction, and 4) positive learner characteristics. Given our focus on the usage of LMS, we can redefine these conditions as follows:

‘Useful environment characteristics’ are related to the quality and multimedia features of the LMS. Next, ‘Effective learning activities’ provide learners and instructors with possibilities to share knowledge and experiences by using advanced LMS functionalities. Given our particular focus on learning paths within the



LMS environment, we prefer to cluster these two conditions into ‘Environmental characteristics’. ‘Enhanced environmental satisfaction’ refers to the feelings and the attitude towards the usefulness of the technology. In the context of the present study, we link this to teacher satisfaction with the student learning outcomes as a result of studying with learning paths. We therefore re-label this condition as ‘Teacher satisfaction with the learning outcomes’. ‘Positive learner characteristics’ are defined as learner attitudes, motivation and beliefs that foster learning in the LMS. In the present study,—because of our focus on teachers—we ask teachers how they perceive student participation in the LMS’.

Table 1 integrates the theoretical frameworks discussed above in view of our study. Given the lack of in-depth research about the factors that affect learning in an LMS in general and with learning paths in particular, we put forward the following two research questions:

- 1) What are the perceived conditions at school and at teacher level affecting the use of learning paths?
- 2) How are these conditions related to expected outcomes?

Table 1. Main themes, sub themes and concepts used to explore and map our research questions.

Themes	Sub themes	Concepts
<i>ICT-related school conditions</i>	ICT infrastructure	Hardware, software, connectivity, peripherals, and access to and availability of ICT-related resources
	ICT support	Technical and pedagogical support, often by an ICT coordinator
	ICT policy plan	A school’s vision about the use of ICT as agreed upon by the school team
<i>ICT-related teacher conditions</i>	Teacher professional development	Internal and external ICT training courses
	Teacher ICT competencies	Knowledge, skills and attitudes about the use and integration of ICT in the classroom
<i>Environmental conditions</i>	Environmental characteristics	The nature and quality of the LMS and/or learning paths
	Teacher satisfaction with the learning outcomes	Teacher satisfaction with student learning outcomes
	Positive learner characteristics	Perceived student participation in the LMS

### 3 Research design

A qualitative study was set up, building on data gathered during semi-structured interviews. These interviews were set up after teacher involvement in two quantitative studies about the impact of studying with learning paths in science education (De Smet et al., 2014; De Smet, De

Wever, Schellens & Valcke, 2015). In a pre–post–retention repeated-measures design, involving learners in control and experimental conditions, learning path functionalities were studied in more detail. An experimental learning path about ‘bacteria collection and growth’ and complementary didactical materials were used with secondary school students. This research context guarantees that all teachers involved in the present study have comparable experience with LMS and learning paths. The ‘bacteria collection and growth’ topic from the biology curriculum was selected in view of a planned curricular reform. As the first author works as a teacher trainer, she was assisted by two recently graduated biology teachers who created the learning materials and by 18 pre-service teachers majoring in biology under the supervision of their lecturer.

### 3.1 Sample

In view of the former quantitative studies and the present qualitative study, 13 schools of the GO! Network were contacted. All biology teachers, contracted in these schools were willing to participate in the studies. The GO! Network is one of the three dominant educational authorities organizing education in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium. This resulted in a total of 16 teachers (12 female and 4 male teachers). This gender distribution is typical of the secondary education context in Flanders where 60% of all secondary school teachers are female (Pynoo, Kerckaert, Goeman, Elen & van Braak, 2013). The biology education studies were set up with students from grade 8, who are on average 15 years old. All studies (conducted as part of the first author’s PhD thesis) were carried out between 2009 and 2013 and financially supported by the Research Fund of University College Ghent.

### 3.2 Interview instrument and procedure

Twenty pre-defined questions were presented following the semi-structured interview protocol (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The questions focused subsequently on teachers’ conditions (ICT experiences, expertise etc.) and school conditions affecting their LMS and learning path use, as well as their perceptions and expectations about the LMS and learning path next to student characteristics and learning outcomes. Teachers were also invited to bring up additional questions and remarks.

The interviews were carried out on a one-to-one base and lasted between 30–45 minutes each. All sessions were recorded on videotape and transcribed by a third person. Informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers as to the anonymous recording, transcription and analysis of the interviews.

### 3.3 Coding and analysis procedure

During the coding-phase of the analysis, the first author was assisted by a junior researcher, who is an experienced secondary school teacher. She had received training in view of the coding process.

All interview transcripts were split up into individual meaningful units. Graneheim and Lundman (2004) define



meaningful units as ‘words, sentences or paragraphs containing aspects related to each other through their content and context’ (ibid., p. 106). They also recommend ‘condensation’ as a process of shortening while pre-serving the core content, and not substantially changing this content. Next, the analysis procedure moved to abstracting the condensed text at a higher order level by adding codes or categories to the individual meaningful units. In other words, each interview was divided in shorter paragraphs, which in their turn were grouped into categories according to shared characteristics. The software package Nvivo was used for segmentation (identifying meaningful units) and categorization of the data. Results from NVivo were compared and discussed until a saturated list of codes was generated. Initially, these codes were freely generated to describe the key content of the interviews. Next these codes were clustered considering the theoretical base as reflected in Table 1 and based upon Vanderlinde and van Braak (2010), Liaw and Huang (2007), Liaw, Huang and Chen (2007) and Liaw (2008). Disagreement as to further coding was resolved after discussion. Interrater-reliability was calculated, reflecting a high level of agreement (96 %).

NVivo matrices were used to tabulate the coded units in the interviews. Following Coniam (2011), a matrix approach allows a researcher to develop a complete picture of the data, rather than selecting random quotes to suit biased ideas or presumptions. This approach also enables the researchers to develop a quantitative perspective of the qualitative respondents’ data.

## 4 Results and discussion

As summarized in Table 2 (see next page), analysis of the sixteen interviews resulted in three main coding themes. Of the themes coded, 16% were related to ‘ICT-related school conditions’, 24% to ‘ICT-related teacher conditions’ and 60% to ‘Environmental conditions’.

### 4.1 Conditions at school and teacher level

#### 4.1.1 ICT-related school conditions

Within this cluster, 80% of the responses were coded as related to the ICT infrastructure subtheme, 14% focused on ICT support and 6% on the ICT policy plan.

The importance of the availability and reliability of an ICT infrastructure can be deduced from Table 2. Because of its importance, related problems and complaints were formulated in nine out of sixteen interviews, sometimes leading to the conclusion that using LMS in the classroom might become impossible. During our two quantitative studies, we required biology teachers to work during four consecutive hours in a computer classroom, although not all teachers were able to make reservations for the acquired number of hours. Some even reported that access to the infrastructure was not admitted at all.

“The same problem always arises: computer classrooms are ample available, and if they are, it is very hard to find a classroom with a sufficient number of

operational computers with internet access.” [Teacher 6]

Moreover, being successful in making a reservation does not guarantee availability.

“I reserved fifteen laptops, but only got nine. The previous teacher didn’t properly return them as he was supposed to, and this happens all the time. That’s inconvenient.” [Teacher 8]

One teacher does only get access to a beamer in the biology classroom.

“We don’t even have a computer in our classroom. We can pick up a laptop at the office, but if we need specific software installed, we have to reinstall it over and over again, because the program uninstalls automatically every time we shut down a computer. And they don’t get it, that this is not working out”. [Teacher 12]

A report by the European Commission (2013) on the use of ICT in education shows a computer/pupil ratio of 1 to 5 in grade 8. Belgium scores above average with a ratio of 1 to 4; Flanders scores even better with 1 to 2 (Pynoo et al., 2013). However, the EC report also stresses that insufficient ICT equipment is still a major obstacle to educational ICT use and that policies at infrastructure level are a matter of urgency. The high proportion of related teacher responses about the ICT infrastructure reflects this concern. At least for the teachers involved in the present study, access to well-functioning infrastructure remains problematic.

Another conditional factor, determining the degree of ICT integration, is the availability to the teacher of technical and pedagogical support. In Flanders, support is mostly supplied by an ICT coordinator or a colleague from the same school (Tondeur, Van Keer, van Braak, & Valcke, 2008). But additional research of Devolder, Vanderlinde, van Braak and Tondeur (2010) adds that ICT coordinators adopt more than half of their time a technical role and only a third of the support time an educational role. The latter was confirmed by six teachers who mentioned technical support was provided, but none of them referred to the availability of pedagogical support. Most teachers felt well supported – at the technical level – to integrate ICT in their teaching, but some teachers nevertheless perceived the quality of the technical support as rather poor.

“I asked the ICT coordinator for a login and a password to access the LMS, but several months later, I am still waiting for it. ... Two people were supplying technical support, but only one of them was capable to help us, and he recently moved to another school. The other one has been forced to do the job, but he is still unable to answer our questions”. [Teacher 12]

In the latest MICTIVO report, which builds on active monitoring of the status of ICT integration in Flemish



education, 99% of the ICT coordinators said they offered technical support and 69% refer to pedagogical support

Table 2: Coding scheme overview and detailed percentages of categories coded.

ICT-related school conditions	ICT infrastructure	Hardware	31		
		Software	11		
		Components	6		
		Smartschool	13		
		Internet	5		
		Infrastructure failure	25		
		Access and availability	7		
		Total	Count	98	
			% of ICT-related school conditions	80%	
		ICT support	ICT support	Didactical support	17
Technical support	0				
Total	Count			17	
	% of ICT-related school conditions			14%	
ICT policy plan	ICT policy plan	ICT policy plan	0		
		Colleagues' vision on ICT	6		
		School authorities' vision on ICT	2		
		Total	Count	8	
			% of ICT-related school conditions	6%	
Total ICT related school conditions	Total ICT related school conditions	Count	123		
		% of total coding	16%		
ICT-related teachers conditions	Teacher professional development	Internal and external training courses	4		
		Total	Count	4	
			% of ICT-related teachers conditions	2%	
Teacher ICT competencies	Teacher ICT competencies	Didactical ICT-knowledge	34		
		Technical ICT-knowledge	24		
		Using new instructional methods	86		
		Class management skills to integrate ICT in the classroom	46		
		Total	Count	190	
			% of ICT-related teachers conditions	98%	
		Total ICT-related teachers conditions	Total ICT-related teachers conditions	Count	194
% of total coding	24%				
Environmental conditions	Environmental characteristics	Learning path design remarks (content, digital exercises, lab exercises etc.)	45		
		Learning path instructional remarks	39		
		Instructional wording	9		
		Estimated instructional time	54		
		Worksheets (iteration 2)	19		
		Teacher scenarios	12		
		Questionnaires used (pre/post/retention)	24		
		Total	Count	202	
			% of Environmental conditions	42%	
		Teacher satisfaction with the learning outcomes	Teacher satisfaction with the learning outcomes	Count	104
				% of Environmental conditions	22%
		Positive Learner characteristics	Positive Learner characteristics	Remarks on the learners' ICT knowledge	24
				Learners' remarks on using new instructional methods	52
Attitudes and beliefs	29				
Motivation	66				
Total	Count			171	
	% of Environmental conditions	36%			
Total Environmental conditions	Total Environmental conditions	Count	477		
		% of total coding	60%		

(Pynoo et al., 2013). Nevertheless, school principals called insufficient pedagogical support their major concern when being asked for factors that affect ICT use in their schools (European Commission, 2013). A similar

observation and a clear call for further investment in human, technical and financial resources was formulated by The Flemish Education Council (VLOR, 2013), as they state that needs with regard to pedagogical and content-related support are high and under pressure. Our observations and the reports from the Flemish Education Council consistently indicate that pedagogical support is available, at least theoretically, but that in practice this support is hardly effective or does not achieve its goal.

Although successful ICT integration is often preceded by the presence of an ICT policy plan (Vanderlinde et al., 2010), no responses in relation to an ICT policy plan were spontaneously reported. In addition, Hayes (2007) stressed the importance of the school leader's vision and support towards an ICT policy plan. In our research, two teachers explicitly mentioned their school principal during the interviews: one principal actively encouraged the teachers' participation in the learning path research; another one was very much open to new technologies and installed a (temporary) iPad classroom that was eagerly used during the LMS/learning path study lessons.

#### 4.1.2 ICT-related teacher conditions

As can be observed in Table 2, 2% of the ICT related teacher conditions were coded as indicators referring to teacher professional development and 98% referred to teacher ICT competencies.

According to Bingimlas (2009), the most cited barrier to successful ICT integration, is a lack of teacher professional development. In this study, few statements (only 2%) were made about internal (school as training location) or external (outside the school) professional development opportunities. One teacher stated, although she participated in several ICT courses, she did not feel confident to use ICT and still heavily relied on the ICT coordinator's support. Another teacher mentioned pre-service training did not pay enough attention to ICT classroom use. These observations are in line with the report of the European Commission (2013), in which Belgium was mentioned as one of the two countries where teachers reflect a relatively lower level of confidence in their ability to perform operational tasks using ICT. In the report, this result was linked to the percentages of grade-8 students being taught with the support of ICT. Whereas the average EU-number is 25%, this was only 13% in Belgium. In other words, these findings and our observations suggest an underinvestment in professional development of teachers in Belgium.

According to Drent and Meelissen (2008), innovative ICT usage implies teachers use ICT as a tool to pursue educational objectives. In the present study, the LMS tool was challenging as teachers had to teach on the base of learning paths. This LMS functionality is hardly used - i.e. 10% of all teachers indicated they ever used learning paths in their teaching - in Flemish secondary education (De Smet & Schellens, 2009). The importance of the teacher-related ICT competencies can be deduced from the high proportions of interview units coded accordingly (i.e. 98%). The following four subthemes

were identified: didactical ICT-knowledge, technical ICT-knowledge, using new instructional methods and class management skills to integrate LMS.

The most frequently mentioned feeling, in twelve out of sixteen interviews, is the loss of control when teaching with learning paths. Several teachers explained they prefer an active but more directive teaching role rather than letting students work more autonomously. Some teachers even tried to gain back some control:

"I added some work sheets... reformulated questions ... and added writing lines. I had to create structure. I just could not resist." [Teacher 9]

Another teacher was very negative in relation to teaching with LMS.

"I instructed via learning paths, but immediately afterwards, I started over from scratch, using my own teaching approach. I wanted all my students being taught the way I usually teach. Even if that meant they had to study the same material twice." [Teacher 4]

These observations and analysis results can be linked to the teacher beliefs discussed earlier. Several researchers stress learner-centred approaches (Ertmer, 2005; Inan, Lowther, Ross & Strahl, 2010). In the present study, teachers taught with learning paths that build on related student autonomy, collaborative learning, etc. As such, some of our teachers—adhering to a teacher-centred belief—were confronted with an incongruent instructional approach. Research shows that changes in teaching practice requires an extensive amount of time (Brinkerhoff, 2006) and is best implemented in small steps (Kanaya, Light & McMillan Culp, 2005). In the current study, there may have been a conflict between teacher beliefs and the research teaching approaches. Secondly, research also points at a lack of teacher competencies to explain resistance to change (Bingimlas, 2009). In this view, it is not surprising teachers have the feeling to lose control when having to teach via learning paths.

Based on the present analysis results, we have to conclude – focusing on school and teacher conditions - that the e-capacities of the schools under study are underdeveloped. Teachers referred to critical missing conditions: a reliable and accessible ICT infrastructure, the availability and quality of technical and pedagogical support, integrated teacher professional development and the mastery of critical teacher ICT competencies.

## 4.2 Teachers' perceptions and expectations

### 4.2.1 Learning environment characteristics

In total, 42% of the codes were related to environmental characteristics, pointing at subthemes such as: design and instructional remarks, estimated instructional time, etc. (see Table 2). Our learning path and the didactical materials covering 'bacteria collection and growth' was based on the official GO! biology school curriculum, and was designed and developed by recently graduated

biology teachers and revised by pre-service teachers and their lecturer. It replaced the traditional teaching materials, usually developed by teachers themselves, as most of them do not adopt commercial textbooks.

Teachers were asked to evaluate the new learning materials (i.e. learning path, lab exercises, worksheets and teaching scenarios); with respect to the way they were designed as well as to their ease of use. Teachers' input was used to improve these learning materials that were further used in subsequent quantitative studies. In addition, teacher feedback was also a way to sample data to learn whether the learning materials achieved their instructional objectives, whether they were attractive to learners and sustained their interest. In general, teachers were positive about the materials provided. The required instructional time was judged adequate.

#### 4.2.2 Teacher satisfaction with the learning outcomes

22% of the codes focused on teacher satisfaction with the learning outcomes, resulting from studying in the LMS with learning paths. Teacher opinions were mixed. Four teachers reported that the performance was lower than expected; six teachers did not mention any differences and six teachers reported higher learning results than expected.

"What I really appreciate about learning paths, is the fact they stimulate students to learn and develop essential insights autonomously." [Teacher 2]

"When average students were working collaboratively, they achieved better results than the high performing students, who usually prefer to work alone." [Teacher 9]

"A learning path is particularly suitable for high-performing students. It also works for the low performing students, but they need more guidance." [Teacher 5]

Earlier research about secondary education teachers' satisfaction with learning objects, showed positive reactions (McCormick & Li 2005; Kay & Knaack 2008b). In the present study, teachers are satisfied with the learning paths' ease of use, but doubt their adequacy to attain learning outcomes. Earlier research, e.g. De Smet et al. (2012), demonstrated the importance of both ease of use and usefulness in the acceptance of LMS. In addition, Kember (1997) stressed that teacher conceptions influence their teaching approaches, which in their turn have an impact on student learning and ultimately affect learning outcomes. As stated above, some of our teachers holding a teacher-centred belief may have felt insufficiently prepared to work with this learner-centred approach.

#### 4.2.3 Learner characteristics

Liaw, Huang and Chen (2007) emphasized that a key issue to consider when developing e-learning environments, is a good understanding of the target group. De Smet and Schellens (2009) found that teachers

make ample use of advanced LMS functionalities; e.g., 6% use the chat module, 10% learning paths, 11% wikis and 14% asynchronous discussion groups. As this study was carried out in a similar context, we can expect related remarks about learning paths, since they are new for most teachers and students. While teachers had to adjust to the new learning tool, students adapted quickly.

"These students grew up with a computer; they are very comfortable with using new tools." [Teacher 4]

"Sometimes they already know what to do before my explanation was finished." [Teacher 6]

Almost all teachers reported the same lesson 'flow': in the beginning learners were very enthusiastic to work on the computer, but after three lessons (out of four) they got bored. Teachers even reported some students were eager to return to a conventional instruction format.

"Some students, who wish to accelerate their studies, prefer lessons where I instruct them. After 3 lessons they said: can you instruct us? We think we will be able to remember it better via conventional instruction." [Teacher 1]

Kay and Knaack (2008b) found that teacher ratings of learning, quality and engagement related to learning materials were significantly correlated with student ratings. Given the mixed feelings of our teachers and an ambiguous relationship between teacher beliefs and learning approaches, it should not be surprising students expressed similar concerns. Wu, Tennyson and Hsia (2010) reported similar findings. They concluded that the more confident and accustomed students become with online learning within an LMS; the more likely they will expect benefits from using it, foster a positive learning climate, and also be more satisfied.

#### 4.3 Similar research in social science education

Finally, we want to mention examples with comparable outcomes on the adoption and implementation of technology-enhanced learning within social science education. Callahan, Saye and Brush (2014) developed online lessons on US History (1877-the present), embedding digital resources (hyperlinked textboxes and streaming video cases) to serve as scaffolds. The authors mentioned conditions on both the school and teacher level hindering the integration of these web-based educative curriculum materials in their teaching: teachers reported frustration as they were constantly interrupted while teaching (frequent school bells, intercom announcements, visits from colleagues etc.), but also felt uncomfortable using the new approach of embedded video scaffolds. In another experimental study, Huizenga, Admiraal, Akkerman and ten Dam (2009) researched the acquisition of historical knowledge of medieval Amsterdam via a mobile city game called Frequency 1550. In their conclusion, they point to



technical failures to explain the observed lack of effects on pupil motivation and the high rates of disengaged behaviour. Other research we would like to refer to are: Samuels and Berson (2012) on webquests to explore race riots; Jekel, Gryl and Schulze (2015) on spatial citizenship and Mikropoulos (2006) on personal and social presence.

### 5 Conclusion and limitations

In view of our first research question, we tried to find out which conditions at the school and teacher level affect the use of learning paths. At the school level, several problems with the availability and the well-functioning of the ICT infrastructure were reported, sometimes even leading to the conclusion that the use of ICT in the classroom became impossible. Technical support was available to some of the teachers, but the quality differed greatly. Pedagogical support or teacher training courses were almost non-existent. The role of the school principal or school management was mentioned by only two teachers. All these barriers have been identified in earlier research as factors preventing the successful ICT integration in the classroom (Bingimlas, 2009; Tondeur et al., 2008), and lead to the conclusion that the e-capacity (Vanderlinde & van Braak, 2010) of the schools participating in our study is yet not at an optimal level.

To answer our second research question, we especially built on teacher perceptions and expectations about learning paths as an educational tool, related learning outcomes and student characteristics when learning with the LMS/learning paths. According to Liaw et al. (2007), the latter are essential in order to obtain effective e-learning environments. Most teachers were satisfied with the content and the design of the educational materials provided, but had mixed feelings about student learning outcomes. We referred to a potential incongruence between current educational teacher beliefs and the learning approaches deployed in the LMS (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). Moreover, while teachers had to adjust to the new learning methods, students adapted quickly, but expressed similar concerns as their teachers.

The present study adds to the literature in several respects. Firstly, qualitative research about the use of learning paths within an LMS in a real secondary classroom setting is scarce. Secondly, this study identified several barriers at the school and teacher level affecting the successful implementation of learning paths. Thirdly, this study explored the key stones to develop successful e-learning material and provides an insight into teacher attitudes and perceptions towards using learning paths as an educational tool, on students' learning outcomes and on learner characteristics that foster learning in an LMS.

Despite the advantages of the authentic research context, this study reflects some limitations. Firstly, we build on teacher perceptions as expressed during interviews, not on their actual behaviour. Secondly, our research only involved teachers, while students were not consulted. Thirdly, our sample was small and very specific considering the stratification framework being

used. Fourthly, the expected influence of studying with the learning paths can have been partially confounded due to uncontrolled mixing with additional teaching techniques (as reported by some teachers).

We can conclude that currently barriers in secondary education prevent teachers from adopting and integrating LMS in their teaching. Given these observations, it is unlikely teachers are ready and willing to adopt innovative teaching and learning approaches based on LMS and/or learning paths; as stated also by the NMC Horizon Report (2014) doubting major progress in the short term. The implications for policy makers and school leaders are that they need to push the conditions preventing teachers from integrating ICT and LMS within their teaching. Only then will our teachers and learners benefit from technological changes and opportunities.

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## Benilde García-Cabrero, María Guadalupe Pérez-Martínez, Andrés Sandoval-Hernández, Joaquín Caso-Niebla, Carlos David Díaz-López

### Assessing two Theoretical Frameworks of Civic Engagement

The purpose of this study was to empirically test two major theoretical models: a modified version of the social capital model (Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley, 2003), and the Informed Social Engagement Model (Barr and Selman, 2014; Selman and Kwok, 2010), to explain civic participation and civic knowledge of adolescents from Chile, Colombia and Mexico, using data from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2009 (Schulz, et al., 2010). The models were used to identify factors associated with different levels of knowledge and civic participation: expected participation in legal and illegal protests, and electoral participation.

Data were analyzed using regression analysis. Results show that the Informed Social Engagement approach (ISEM), explains better the observed differences in civic knowledge and civic participation, than the Social Capital Model (SCM). That is, the expected values associated with the variables included in the ISEM are closer to the observed values, than those predicted by the SCM. This is true for the three outcomes (expected participation in legal protests, illegal protests, and electoral participation) and in the three countries analyzed (Chile, Colombia and Mexico).

Le but de cette étude était de tester empiriquement deux grands modèles théoriques: une version modifiée du modèle de capital social (Pattie, Seyd et Whiteley, 2003), et le modèle de l'engagement social renseignée (Barr et Selman, 2014; Selman et Kwok 2010), pour expliquer la participation et les connaissances civiques des adolescents en provenance du Chili, la Colombie et le Mexique, en utilisant les données de l'étude internationale sur l'éducation civique et la citoyenneté 2009 (Schulz, et al., 2010). Les modèles ont été utilisés pour identifier les facteurs associés à différents niveaux de connaissance, ainsi que des différents formes de participation civique: participation attendu à des manifestations légales et illégales, et participation électorale future.

Les données ont été analysées en utilisant une analyse de régression. Les résultats montrent que le modèle de l'engagement social renseignée (MESR), explique mieux les différences observées dans les connaissances et la participation civiques, que le modèle de capital social (MCS). Autrement dit, les valeurs attendues associées aux variables incluses dans l' MESR sont plus proches des valeurs observées, que celles prédites par le MCS. Cela est également vrai pour les trois résultats (de participation attendue à des manifestations légales, manifestations illégales, et la participation électorale future), et dans les trois pays analysés (Chili, la Colombie et le Mexique).

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Civic education, students' participation, models of civic engagement, social capital, social engagement

#### **1 Introduction**

According to data available in different democratic countries, young people do not seem to be interested in public and political life, and this is a matter of concern since young people's civic behavior, knowledge, attitudes and perceptions have been found to be a strong predictor of citizens' engagement in adulthood (Torney-Purta, Schwille, & Amadeo, 1999, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001, Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

The importance of getting involved in society has been addressed by Oser & Veugelers (2008). The authors consider involvement as a central process in becoming a human person: doing something for others allows an individual to be connected to mankind and society, and for youngsters, involvement in society facilitates the development of a feeling of agency. According to Oser & Veugelers (2008), in modern, multicultural societies, getting involved is even more important than in the traditional monoculture societies, because societies' transcendence is linked to people's connectedness.

The skills and dispositions required for democratic participation (Perlinger, Canetti-Nisim, Pedahzur, 2006), enable people to think for themselves and critically, to communicate properly, to access and use available knowledge on various topics, to work with others, to



understand the importance and mechanisms from such participation, and to understand and appreciate the differences that distinguish closed, totalitarian societies from open and democratic societies (Reimers and Reimers, 2005). These skills are learned and perfected in different social institutions: family, work, religious institutions and educational institutions (Reimers and Reimers, 2005).

It has been recognized that civic activism can be developed through different routes (Davies et al., 2013). However, fostering "a feeling of efficacy and ability to benefit from networks and individuals" (ibid, p. 6) has been pointed out as an important element to make "engagement a pleasant, and achievable reality" (ibid, p. 6).

Recent research on civic knowledge and civic engagement in schools has shown that civic participation is encouraged through class participation supported by constructivist practices. For example, Pritzker (2008) found that encouraging discussions about volunteering, increases the likelihood that students continue to participate in this type of community service. The author emphasizes that discussions allow students to become more aware of the need and value of their work, so this service can be viewed less as a charity and more like a moral or civic value. The authors point out that community service, considered as a civic duty is the only attitude that correlates significantly with the level of volunteer activity, as it allows the students to integrate it within a broader moral framework and to reflect on their future responsibilities in society.

Although civic knowledge does not necessarily lead to civic engagement, the two are interrelated (Galston, 2001). If students are well informed about the values and processes involved in democratic governments, it is more probable that they will participate in one way or another in political life (e.g. joining a political party, voting, organize civic initiatives in their communities).

The opposite also seems to be true; *ie* civic knowledge is the result of participation in civic life. In a study by Patrick (2002), the results showed that involving students in public policy analysis and decision making, is an effective way to develop their knowledge base and their willingness to participate in civic life.

In recent years, there has been a revival of interest in civic education in many Latinamerican countries; and in this sense, Colombia, Chile and Mexico's educational systems have made important efforts to promote initiatives related to the improvement of the quality of civic and citizenship education, particularly through different curriculum reforms that reveal different approaches to civic and citizenship education. In the following paragraphs we describe these differences.

In Colombia, the educational programme for Civic and Citizenship Education is focused on three competencies: *Coexistence and Peace, Participation and Democratic Accountability, and Plurality, Identity and Appreciation of Differences*. These are complemented by the cognitive, emotional, and communicative, competencies, which together form an integrated competence. Civic education

is taught from first grade to eleventh. Primary school includes children 6 to 10 years old (first to fifth grade); secondary school comprises children 11 to 14 years old, spanning from sixth to ninth grade, and high school (baccalaureate) includes children 15 to 16 years old (tenth and eleventh grades). One important feature of the Colombian Educational System is that teachers and principals, can decide together if Civic and Citizenship Education can be taught as a separate, or as a transversal subject, or rather adopt a mixed approach to teaching these contents.

In Mexico the subject Civic and Ethical Education is taught during the primary and secondary school years (9 years in total), and it comprises *three dimensions*. The first one is taught during the subject's scheduled time (from two to three hours a week); it covers the contents, and experiences lived that enable *ethical analysis about themselves, the values and responsibilities involved in their decisions; and finally the study of democracy*. The second comprises *the contribution of all subjects to the development of a civic and ethical reflection*, by establishing cross-links between subjects. The third refers to the school environment that gives meaning and enrich democratic behavior (coexistence, organization, rules, etc.), which can occur during everyday school experiences. The main purpose of the Mexican programme is to promote the ethical, personal, and citizenship development of students, through the following skills that will gradually move from the personal realms to those of participation and social interaction: 1) Knowledge and Self-care, 2) Self-Regulation and Responsible use of Freedom, 3) Respect and appreciation of diversity, 4) Sense of belonging to the community, the nation and humanity, 5) Management and Conflict Resolution, 6) Social and Political Participation, 7) Attachment to legality and sense of justice, and 8) Understanding and appreciation for democracy.

In Chile the central axis of Citizenship Education is aimed at students' development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are fundamental to participate actively and responsibly in a democratic society (Ministerio de Educación de Chile, 2012). These are approached through the subjects of History, Geography and Social Sciences, whose general purpose is to generate in students, a comprehensive view of social reality, both in historical and geographical terms, but also from the social sciences perspectives, in secondary and high school educational levels. Learning is divided into three main domains: 1) Society in Historical Perspective, 2) Geographic Area, and 3) Democracy and Development. The first two describe the progression of learning associated primarily with the disciplines of history and geography. The third one, Democracy and Development, comprises learning related to political coexistence and skills that favor a civic sense and active citizenship.

The three countries participated in the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (Schulz, et al., 2010). This study focuses on the ways in which 38 countries prepare young people to assume their roles as citizens of a modern society (Schulz,



Fraillon, Ainley, Kerr & Losito, 2010). It evaluates civic as well as citizen education; the first one conceived as the knowledge and understanding of formal institutions and processes of civic life, and the second, as the knowledge and understanding of opportunities for participation and engagement in both, civic acts and civil society. The study also included regional modules, which focused on particular aspects of the civic and citizenship education of three geographical areas: Europe, Asia and Latin America. For example, in these modules, students answered questions regarding their attitudes towards authoritarianism in government, their feelings of empathy towards classmates, the frequency of discussions about civic issues at school, among other issues. In Latin America, more than 140 thousand eight graders from Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, México, Paraguay and Dominican Republic participated in the general study, as well as in the regional module.

Results in the knowledge test for the 38 countries involved in the general study revealed that Finland and Denmark were the countries with highest scores (576 both), and the three Latinamerican countries selected for this study: Chile, Colombia and México obtained 483, 462 and 452 points respectively. These results show an important gap in achievement for these countries in the realm of civic and citizenship education.

Reimers & Reimers (2005) argue that education for democratic citizenship education in Latin America is a new research topic, and is often based on little empirical evidence. It is our contention that at present, there is still a need to reflect more on the variables involved in determining civic and citizenship participation, especially if we consider the low rates of involvement in civic life of adult citizens in many countries, and particularly of young people. Also there is a need to develop models for researching and assessing civic engagement in order to analyze the complexity of youth civic involvement.

Although advances have been made in terms of developing more accurate measurement instruments and sophisticated approaches to the analysis of data, and despite the important role Large Scale Assessments (LSA) have had in advancing our understanding about factors associated to student outcomes, and the influence this kind of studies have had on informing public policy around the world, significant criticisms regarding their theoretical, methodological, and policy commitments have fuelled a prolific debate about its boundaries and potentials. Caro, Sandoval-Hernández and Lüdtke, (2014), argue that both proponents and detractors of the use of international surveys concur that there is a lack of theory in most of the analysis conducted with LSA data. The authors mention that most of the analyses conducted at present, have as its purpose the 'fishing for correlations', without fully understanding why or how it is expected the theoretical constructs involved are to be related.

In this context, the present study explored the possibilities of the Social Capital (Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley (2003), and the Informed Social Engagement Model (Barr et al, 2015, Barr & Selman, 2014, Selman & Kwok, 2010),

to explain the differences in expected civic knowledge and participation of Chilean, Colombian and Mexican secondary school students (14-15 years old), according to the results obtained in the ICCS, 2009.

## 2 Description of the Theoretical Models

### 2.1 The Social Capital Model

The theory of social capital has been shaped by various approaches. Bourdieu and Coleman are considered the founding theorists, since they introduced the term *capital* systematically for the first time simultaneously. In his definition of capital, Bourdieu (1983) refers to the economic expression of capital (see Marx, et al, 1967). The capital is considered as the existing backlog in material form. The accumulation work itself is time consuming but it is worth the effort, because the capital produced by this work is beneficial and even grows while reproducing.

Consequently, social capital is a type of capital that is derived and can be said to be inherent in the maintenance of social relations and provides useful support when needed. Stable relationships generate honor and reputation among its members, and become thus effective vehicles to build and maintain trust between them (Bourdieu, 1984). Being a member of a group provides security and status; the relationships between group members are based in material and or symbolic exchanges. These exchanges reinforce existing relationships and can be used to provide social warranty or to be or institutionalized.

Coleman (1985) introduced the concept of social capital in the context of the theory of rational choice. He argued that social interdependence arises between people, because they are interested in events and resources controlled by others with the intention of maximizing their utility, rationally choosing the best solution for them. The establishment of permanent social relationships, such as relations of authority or trust, results in acts of exchange and transfer of control (Coleman, 1985). For Coleman, social capital remains optimally in relationships based on mutual trust or authority. Both create family networks and appropriable social organizations. The relations are characterized by the potential of information and current standards. Both concepts define social capital as a property of social relations, as resources in a social network that exists not only between close relationships, but also among the most distant or weak.

Putnam developed his concept of social capital after Coleman's (1985) idea that social networks are invaluable for individuals. Putnam defined *social capital as social networks that enable collaboration among individuals more effectively; social capital is a resource for both individuals and societies*. Trust and norms of reciprocity, two basic aspects of social capital, arise from networks Putnam argues that the existence of social capital allows the actors to act more effectively to achieve collective goals (Putnam, 1995). Under this idea, social capital is important for political stability, effectiveness and economic development. Putnam



analyzes the impact of social capital at the macro level of countries and regions (Krätke 2001), and deals with the impact of social capital in politics and in society as a whole.

According to Putnam, social capital persists if confidence prevails in relationships. The trust itself is generated in networks of civic engagement and through norms of reciprocity. Trust is very important in civic life (Putnam & Goss, 2001; Putnam, 2000). The higher the level of trust in a community, the greater the likelihood of cooperation; cooperation itself builds trust. Social trust in a complex modern environment can grow from two closely related sources: norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement (Putnam 1993). The uses and contradictions of the model of Social Capital, have recently been revised by O’Kane (2015), concluding that the foundational concepts of this theoretical model (trust and connectedness), are highly relevant to understand the way in which society behaves when forced to cope with health catastrophes, particularly with epidemic diseases.

### 2.1.1 Civic Activism as a Model of Social Capital

Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley (2003) developed a model of civic engagement or political activism, based on Putnam’s social capital thesis. In this model, they posited that Civic Activism is positively correlated to: trust in other people and institutions (T), Membership in groups (M), Networks of civic engagement (N), Years people have lived in the current address (Y), and whether people have family living nearby (F). In the model it is also asserted that Civic activism is negatively influenced by the hours people spend watching TV (TV).

The model was represented as:  $A = T + M + N - TV + Y + F$ . They used information collected from the Citizen Audit survey that took place during 2000-2001 in the United Kingdom to test it.<sup>i</sup> Civic Activism (A) was measured through asking people whether in the previous 12 months they had “undertaken any of a series of different forms of action aimed at influencing rules, laws or policies” (Pattie et al., 2003, p. 446). Civic activism was unfolded in three dimensions: individualistic activism; contact activism; and collective activism. *Individualistic activism* comprised actions such as: donating money to an organisation; boycotting a product; buying a product for ethical reasons; among others. *Contact activism* included actions that entail getting in touch with a public official, a politician, the media, an organisation, and a solicitor. *Collective activism*, embraced the following actions: participated in a public demonstration; attended a political meeting; participated in an illegal protest; formed a group of like-minded people.

Trust was a two-fold construct: 1) trust in others, meaning trust in people they are in contact with; and, 2) trust in institutions (political and non political institutions). *Trust in others* required respondents to focus on people with whom they have contact with, and indicate if they the level in which they could be trusted, helpful, and fair. It is important to highlight that they formulated these questions regarding people with whom the

respondents have contact with, since they assume that “trust is only meaningful where some form of reciprocal action is expected” (Pattie et al., 2003, p. 455). *Trust in institutions* was measured through asking the respondents to indicate their level of trust in political institutions (government, House of Commons, politicians, and local government), and state non-political institutions (police, courts and civil service).

Membership in groups (M) and Networks of civic engagement (N) are variables related to social activity. *Membership in groups* was measured through asking respondents whether in the last 12 months they had participated in formal groups such as a Youth Organisation or an Environmental Organisation. *Networks of civic engagement or informal networks* was measured through asking respondents to indicate if they belonged to an informal network of friends or acquaintances with whom they have contact on a regular basis, such as Pub Quiz Team, Book Reading Group, Parent and Toddler group, Child Care group.

The variables regarding the length of time people have lived in current address (Y) and whether they have family living nearby (F), were added to Putnam’s model, since the authors argue that “...those who are settled in an area should also have more opportunity to build social capital than those who are recent arrivals” (Pattie et al., 2003, p. 445). These variables measure social embeddedness in the local community.

The length of television watching time is claimed to influence negatively political activism, since social capital requires building community life, and watching television is generally an activity carried out individually, therefore, it seems to threaten social capital. The authors included two questions, one focused on the hours of television watched on average weekday, and the other on weekends.

In testing the model, Pattie et al. (2003) found that: a) participation in voluntary organisations and informal networks were highly significantly correlated to civic activism; b) trust was not present in the model, only trust in others was significant, but negatively signed with respect to two types of civic activism –contact and collective (“the more people trust in others, the less likely they are to contact officials or to participate in collective action” (Pattie et al., 2003, p. 457)<sup>ii</sup>; c) watching television was only significant and negatively correlated with respect to individualistic activism, but it was not associated with contact or collective activism; d) embeddedness was not related to civic activism, only the length of time living in the current address influenced positively people’s participation in individualistic civic action and with respect to family members living nearby, only was associated to contact activism.

### 1.2 The Informed Social Engagement Model (ISEM)

The ISEM (Selman, 2003, Barr & Selman, 2014), considers that students who are taught to think critically and reflectively about history, civic issues and ethics, will be better equipped to deal with analogous incidents, both in school and in society. The authors of this model contend

that informed social reflection is derived from the intersection of civic orientation, ethical awareness and historical understanding. Selman & Kwok (2010), postulate that students' civic, historical and ethical interpretations of the social world interweave and enrich each other, and thus, influence or hinders motivation for civic engagement. The informed social reflection framework considered as the epistemological foundation of the ISEM (Selman and Kwok, 2010), postulates that students' civic, historical and ethical interpretations of the social world interweave and enrich each other, and thus, influence or hinders motivation for civic engagement.<sup>iii</sup>

The informed social reflection framework helps to clarify three important situations in psychological science: 1) the opposition between cognition and affects as determinants of moral actions, 2) the dilemma of teaching civic engagement in terms of either or both: understanding and acting as ethical citizen, and, 3) the possibility of informed social reflection as integrating the ontogeny of civic orientation, ethical awareness and historical understanding.

The informed social reflection construct has recently evolved into the "Informed Social Engagement" framework (Barr & Selman, 2014). The development of this framework is a work in progress, in which the main purpose is to integrate three competencies—analysis of evidence, capacity for empathy, and sense of agency—with three epistemological content domain domains—ethical, civic, and historic—in the assessment of *Informed Social Engagement*, a construct the authors have identified as critical for the development of active and constructive citizens in a democratic society. The authors contend that expanding the scope of youth civic development research to include a focus on qualities of civic skills and dispositions, would enable an analysis of how citizens' actions are animated or inhibited (Galston, 2001; Galston, 2007; Putnam, 2000). Social Engagement results from the intersection of three different skills: a cognitive skill (Analysis of evidence), an emotional skill (Capacity for empathy), and a dispositional skill (Sense of agency). Social Engagement is demonstrated when students can critically analyze evidence, demonstrate capacity for argumentation, demonstrate concern for safety, rules, social relationships and collective actions, show concern for the well being of others, not only for those they share values with, but for those considered as different, show disposition towards affirmative actions, and can lead protest against injustice, discrimination and other social problems.

Barr & Selman (2014) argue that in order to become socially engaged citizens in a democratic society, youth must be able to: 1) analyze information from different sources and make informed decisions using critical judgment, 2) care for their wellbeing and that of others, known and unknown, and 3) feel capable of and motivated to address issues affecting their own and others' lives. According to the ISEM, youngsters must develop the following competencies:

a) *Analysis of Evidence*, a primarily "cognitive" skill referring to ways in which youth understand, critique, discuss, and synthesize multiple sources of data including contradictory information. This competency gives students a complex understanding of contextual reality, whether contemporary or historical, and affects the degree to which they make informed decisions when addressing social issues. Analysis of evidence is focused on how students: 1) analyze multiple sources of information, either supplied or needed, weighing their strengths and limitations, 2) synthesize the evidence while considering individual, group, and system level causes and contexts underlying intergroup conflict, and 3) make informed decisions based on these evidence.

b) *Capacity for Empathy*, a primarily "emotional" skill referring to ways in which youth feel motivated to consider and protect the wellbeing of actors, known and unknown, similar or dissimilar in identity and values, representing different positions in a given situation or conflict. Their capacity for empathy affects the scope of their universe of moral responsibility, or the people whose wellbeing they are willing to protect when considering social problems. Capacity for empathy is focused on how students consider the perspectives and wellbeing of a greater number of (individual or group) actors, including 1) the self, 2) one's social circle, and finally 3) individuals perceived as different, including groups they may not identify with or even hold in some disregard.

c) *Sense of Agency*. Sense of Agency, is defined primarily as a "disposition" toward action referring to ways in which students understand: 1) the range of opportunities for involvement in relation to social and civic matters, 2) the potential to effect change, and 3) the quality of different strategies they imagine using to most adequately address a given social problem. Students' sense of agency affects the quantity and quality of their civic participation. Sense of agency comprises how students consider ways in which actions taken, could address a given intergroup problem and develop potential barriers to achieving the action's aims, intergroup conflict, why they would use those strategies, and potential obstacles to effectiveness.

### 3 The ICCS

The Civic and Citizenship Education Study (Schulz, et al., 2010) encompasses both civic and citizenship education, the first one understood as the *knowledge and understanding of formal institutions and processes of civic life*, and the second one, as the *knowledge and understanding of opportunities for participation and engagement in both civic acts and civil society*.

The ICCS is based on the premise that the learning opportunities provided to young people have the potential to influence their current and future interests and behavior. The ICCS considers that preparing students for citizenship roles involves helping them to develop relevant knowledge and understanding, and promote positive attitudes towards being a citizen and participate



in activities related to civic and citizenship education (Schulz, Fraillon, Ainley, Losito, & Kerr, 2008).

ICCS 2009 was designed to report students' achievement through a test of conceptual knowledge and understandings, student's dispositions and attitudes related to civic and citizenship education. The evaluation of 2009 was conducted in 38 countries by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

The ICCS's student population comprised students in Grade 8. The samples were designed as two-stage cluster samples: first stage sampled schools within each country, then within each school, an entire class from the target grade was sampled randomly, and all students were surveyed. Teachers' population comprised all who taught regular school subjects in the target grade; up to 15 teachers were selected randomly in each school; when schools had 20 or fewer teachers at the target grade, all teachers were invited to participate in the survey.

Data used in this study pertain to the Chilean, Colombia and Mexican effective samples. The Chilean sample included 5,192 students and 177 schools. The Colombian sample was composed of 6,204 students and 196 schools. The Mexican effective sample included 215 schools and 6,576 students.

As is common in studies of adolescent political behavior (Pritzker, 2008), the ICCS used current and intended political behavior as outcomes, therefore these constituted the basis to compare the three countries selected in this study, in terms of their adolescents' knowledge and future political participation.

### 3 Research purpose

The main purpose of this work was to empirically test the two theoretical models described above using data from ICCS 2009. As we analyzed the data through regression models, we used the  $R^2$  coefficients (see the Methods section below) to evaluate which model fits better the empirical data obtained by ICCS for each of the analyzed countries.

In other words, our main hypothesis was that one of the models (either ISEM or SCM) would explain better the differences in civic engagement observed in 8th grade students. We used data from Mexico, Chile and Colombia as a means to improve the robustness of our results.

### 4 Method

In order to test our hypothesis we initially used data from the ICCS 2009 to operationalize the theoretical concepts postulated by the SCM and the ISEM (See Appendix 5). Then, we ran separate cluster robust OLS regression models for each country, for each model and for each outcome variable. All analyses were conducted using the IDB Analyzer (IEA, 2015), which is a software especially designed to account for the ICCS complex sample and assessment design.

#### 4.1 The Social Capital Model independent variables

As we mentioned above, the SCM comprises three main constructs: trust, social activity, and social embeddedness

in the local community. Trust and social activity constructs were divided into different dimensions. The first one, into: a) trust in others; b) trust in political institutions; and, c) trust in non-political institutions. Social activity was divided into: group membership and informal networks. In addition to these constructs, Pattie et al. (2003) included television watching as a variable that illustrated individual activities that could hinder social capital. Based on this, we first identified ICCS items related to each construct and dimension (see Appendix 1). In this process, we decided to add an additional dimension to the social capital construct: students' civic participation, since we considered that participating in school civic activities could contribute to define this construct better. With respect to television watching, we decided to divide this construct into two variables: watching television for enjoyment, and watching television to be informed, since we considered that these variable could have different effects on civic participation and knowledge (the first one a negative effect, while the second, a positive effect).

After having done this, we applied factor analysis, using principal axis factoring and varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization, in order to test if the variables were grouped as expected. With respect to Trust variables, we found that all items were grouped into only one component (see Appendix 2), as a consequence, we decided to use the ICCS constructed variable "Trust in Institutions" (INTRUST) as the independent variable to measure this construct.

With respect to social activity, four components emerged from factor analysis (see Appendix 3). The first factor, related to students' participation in school (SCHPART); the second one, participation in formal organizations (PARINFORG); the third one, political discussions with family and friends; and, the last factor (POLDISC), participation in voluntary activities (PARVOLAC). The third factor, was already a variable constructed in ICCS: Students' discussion of political and social issues outside of school (POLDISC). The rest of the variables were constructed applying the same methods used in the ICCS (IRT WLE scores with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10 for equally weighted countries).

To sum up, the independent variables that we included in the SCM were:

- a) INTRUST: Trust in institutions
- b) SCHPART: Students' participation in school
- c) PARINFORG: Participation in formal organizations
- d) POLDISC: Political discussions with family and friends
- e) PARVOLAC: Participation in voluntary activities (VLNPARTR). The third factor, was already a variable constructed in ICCS: Students' discussion of political and social issues outside of school (POLDISC).
- f) TVENJOY: Watching television for enjoyment
- g) TVINFOR: Watching television to be informed
- h) FAMSTRUC: Family structure index.<sup>iv</sup>

#### **4.2 The Informed Social Engagement Model independent variables**

As we mentioned above, the ISEM comprises three main constructs: analysis of evidence, capacity for empathy and sense of agency. As with the SCM, we first identified ICCS items related to each construct (see Appendix 4). With respect to analysis of evidence, we identified three indexes relevant to this construct: students' discussion of political and social issues outside of school (POLDISC), and students' support for democratic values (DEMVAL). We identified six indexes related to capacity for empathy: students' personal experience of physical and verbal aggression at school (EXPAGG); student feelings of empathy towards classmates (EMPATH); students' attitudes towards equal rights for all ethnic/racial groups (ETHRGHT); students' attitudes towards equal rights for immigrants (IMMRGHT); student attitudes towards neighbourhood diversity (ATTDIFF); students' attitudes towards gender equality (GENEQL). In this construct we created an additional index: student's attitudes towards homosexual orientations (PROGAY). Finally, we selected four indexes in relation to the sense of agency construct: students' expected future informal political participation (INFPART); students' perceptions of the value of participation at school (VALPARTS); Students' sense of internal political efficacy (INPOLEF); and students' citizenship self-efficacy (CITEFF).

#### **4.2 Control variables**

For both models, we included the following control variables: a) gender of student (SGENDER); b) national index of socio-economic background (NISB); and, c) expected education (SISCED).

#### **4.3 Results**

Our results show that for the outcomes of expected participation and civic knowledge the ISEM fit data better than the SCM in all countries: for students' expected participation in legal protests, the proportion of variance explained ( $R^2$ ) by the ISEM, ranges from 0.37 to 0.39, while the SCM only explains among 13 and 18% of the variance; with respect to the students' expected participation in illegal protests the  $R^2$  coefficients ranged

between 0.12 and 0.20 for the ISEM versus 0.03 and 0.07 for the SCM; in electoral participation ISEM  $R^2$  coefficients ranged from 0.26 to 0.29, while in SCM from 0.12 to 0.20; finally, with respect to civic knowledge,  $R^2$  coefficients ranged between 0.33 and 0.42 for the ISEM, versus 0.21 and 0.32 in the SCM.

From these results we can also argue that both models are better for predicting expected participation in legal protests, expected electoral participation and civic knowledge, than for predicting expected participation in illegal protests.

For the SCM, the variable most strongly, and positively, associated to expected participation in legal protests and electoral participation was trust in institutions (INTRUST, see Tables 1 and 2). This confirms the importance of trust highlighted in the Social Capital theory for enhancing civic activism or civic engagement. With respect to civic knowledge we found different patterns, for example, trust in institutions and participation in formal organizations, had a negative influence on civic knowledge.

For the ISEM, in predicting students' expected participation in legal protests, the most important variables were: the students' expected future informal political participation and students' citizenship sense of self-efficacy (see Table 5). The expected outcome: participation in illegal protests established the strongest associations with the students' expected future informal political participation, and it was also an important predictor (positively associated), together with the students' feelings of empathy towards classmates (negatively associated) (see Table 6). With respect to electoral participation, again the most important variables were: students' expected future informal political participation and students' sense of internal political efficacy (see Table 7). In both cases, results point out the importance of building a sense of agency in students. Surprisingly, with respect to civic knowledge, the most important variable associated with it, was the capacity for empathy: particularly student's attitude towards gender equality. We also found out a negative influence of students' expected future informal political participation for this outcome variable in all countries (see Table 8).



Table 1. Cluster robust OLS regression estimates of Expected Student Participation in Legal Protests. SCM

	Chile				Colombia				Mexico			
	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.		Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.		Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.	
<b>(CONSTANT)</b>	47.23	**		1.07	53.00	**		1.06	50.07	**		1.04
Control variables												
<b>SGENDER</b>	0.66		0.03	0.38	-0.35		-0.02	0.31	-0.33		-0.02	0.29
<b>NISB</b>	0.31		0.03	0.18	0.06		0.01	0.14	0.57	**	0.06	0.19
<b>SISCED</b>	0.79	**	0.06	0.26	0.29		0.03	0.18	0.45	**	0.05	0.15
Trust in Institutions												
<b>INTRUST</b>	2.41	**	0.22	0.21	2.28	**	0.26	0.19	2.55	**	0.26	0.18
Social Activity												
<b>SCHPART</b>	1.35	**	0.12	0.19	1.08	**	0.13	0.18	0.60	**	0.06	0.17
<b>PARINFORG</b>	0.06		0.00	0.19	0.60	**	0.07	0.18	0.33	*	0.03	0.16
<b>POLDISC</b>	1.22	**	0.11	0.19	0.93	**	0.11	0.16	1.12	**	0.10	0.16
<b>PARVOLAC</b>	0.87	**	0.08	0.19	0.47	**	0.06	0.17	0.66	**	0.06	0.17
Television watching												
<b>TVENJOY</b>	0.11		0.01	0.15	-0.21		-0.03	0.12	-0.10		-0.01	0.14
<b>TVINFOR</b>	0.92	*	0.09	0.18	0.45	*	0.05	0.15	0.54	*	0.06	0.13
Social embeddedness / Family Structure												
<b>FAMSTRUC</b>	0.09		0.00	0.33	-0.10		-0.01	0.20	0.48		0.03	0.28
<b>p <math>\leq</math> 1.96 *</b>	R2 =			0.14	R2 =			0.18	R2 =			0.13
<b>p <math>\leq</math> 2.58 **</b>												

Table 2. Cluster robust OLS regression estimates of Expected Student Participation in Illegal Protests. SCM

	Chile				Colombia				Mexico			
	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.		Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.		Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.	
<b>(CONSTANT)</b>	55.63	**		1.05	53.65	**		1.53	56.07	**		0.96
Control variables												
<b>SGENDER</b>	-1.68	**	-0.09	0.38	-1.60	**	-0.08	0.43	-2.73	**	-0.13	0.33
<b>NISB</b>	-0.70	**	-0.07	0.21	-0.45	*	-0.05	0.19	-0.17		-0.02	0.18
<b>SISCED</b>	-0.54	*	-0.05	0.23	-0.41		-0.04	0.23	-0.62	**	-0.06	0.17
Trust in Institutions												
<b>INTRUST</b>	0.53	**	0.05	0.19	0.27		0.03	0.19	1.67	*	0.16	0.15
Social Activity												
<b>SCHPART</b>	0.51	**	0.05	0.16	-0.39	*	-0.04	0.18	-0.56	**	-0.05	0.20
<b>PARINFORG</b>	0.83	**	0.07	0.23	0.89	**	0.09	0.24	0.88	**	0.08	0.21
<b>POLDISC</b>	-0.08		-0.01	0.18	-0.14		-0.02	0.20	0.15		0.01	0.17
<b>PARVOLAC</b>	-0.01		0.00	0.18	0.12		0.01	0.19	0.38		0.03	0.21
Television watching												
<b>TVENJOY</b>	0.49	*	0.06	0.13	-0.08		-0.01	0.15	0.11		0.01	0.12
<b>TVINFOR</b>	-0.51	*	-0.05	0.18	-0.68	*	-0.06	0.20	-0.59	*	-0.07	0.14
Social embeddedness / Family Structure												
<b>FAMSTRUC</b>	-0.21		-0.01	0.28	0.46		0.03	0.25	0.18		0.01	0.29
<b>p <math>\leq</math> 1.96 *</b>	R2 =			0.04	R2 =			0.03	R2 =			0.07
<b>p <math>\leq</math> 2.58 **</b>												

Table 3. Cluster robust OLS regression estimates of Expected Student Electoral Participation. SCM

	Chile			Colombia			Mexico					
	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.			
(CONSTANT)	41.19	**	1.17	49.56	**	1.03	47.17	**	0.92			
Control variables												
SGENDER	-0.20		-0.01	0.43	-0.30	-0.02	0.36	0.55	0.03	0.29		
NISB	0.91	**	0.07	0.21	0.39	*	0.04	0.16	0.80	**	0.09	0.17
SISCED	0.96	**	0.07	0.21	0.43	**	0.04	0.15	1.05	**	0.12	0.16
Trust in Institutions												
INTRUST	4.19	**	0.33	0.22	2.30	**	0.26	0.17	2.02	**	0.22	0.16
Social Activity												
SCHPART	1.13	**	0.09	0.24	0.89	**	0.10	0.13	1.14	**	0.12	0.16
PARINFORG	0.09		0.01	0.25	-0.01		0.00	0.15	-0.75	**	-0.08	0.18
POLDISC	1.61	**	0.13	0.23	0.58	**	0.07	0.13	0.55	**	0.05	0.18
PARVOLAC	0.10		0.01	0.20	0.16		0.02	0.14	0.21		0.02	0.14
Television watching												
TVENJOY	-0.08		-0.01	0.18	-0.05		-0.01	0.13	0.02		0.00	0.13
TVINFOR	1.41	*	0.11	0.20	0.82	*	0.08	0.18	0.89	*	0.11	0.13
Social embeddedness / Family Structure												
FAMSTRUC	0.64	**	0.03	0.32	-0.01		0.00	0.17	0.02		0.00	0.26
$p \leq 1.96$ *	R2 =			0.20	R2 =			0.13	R2 =			0.12
$p \leq 2.58$ **												

Table 4. Cluster robust OLS regression estimates of Civic Knowledge. SCM

	Chile			Colombia			Mexico					
	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.			
(CONSTANT)	356.72	**	9.97	396.55	**	9.41	352.52	**	7.52			
Control variables												
SGENDER	6.78		0.04	3.55	3.33	0.02	3.70	18.12	**	0.11	2.32	
NISB	25.59	**	0.30	2.19	17.74	**	0.23	1.86	17.79	**	0.22	1.99
SISCED	22.61	**	0.23	1.65	9.20	**	0.10	1.51	16.94	**	0.22	1.18
Trust in Institutions												
INTRUST	-9.82	**	-0.11	1.43	-11.13	**	-0.14	1.49	-13.24	**	-0.17	1.15
Social Activity												
SCHPART	8.16	**	0.09	1.43	17.48	**	0.23	1.44	7.60	**	0.09	1.35
PARINFORG	-15.48	**	-0.15	1.68	-14.82	**	-0.20	1.79	-11.15	**	-0.14	1.70
POLDISC	7.03	**	0.08	1.62	-0.32		0.00	1.25	-0.88		-0.01	1.44
PARVOLAC	-4.53	**	-0.05	1.61	-4.64	**	-0.06	1.59	-3.68	**	-0.04	1.31
Television watching												
TVENJOY	3.08	**	0.04	1.29	5.26	*	0.08	1.46	4.60	*	0.07	1.13
TVINFOR	12.30	*	0.14	1.35	5.64	*	0.07	1.56	6.99	*	0.10	1.18
Social embeddedness / Family Structure												
FAMSTRUC	-0.85		-0.01	2.07	3.06		0.03	1.95	2.59		0.02	2.44
$p \leq 1.96$ *	R2 =			0.32	R2 =			0.21	R2 =			0.24
$p \leq 2.58$ **												





Table 5. Cluster robust OLS regression estimates of Expected Student Participation in Legal Protests. ISEM

	Chile			Colombia			Mexico					
	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.			
<b>(CONSTANT)</b>	48.48	**	1.32	51.41	**	1.44	48.79	**	1.48			
Control variables												
<b>SGENDER</b>	0.23		0.01	0.36	-0.57	*	-0.03	0.24	-0.31	-0.02	0.27	
<b>NISB</b>	-0.16		-0.01	0.15	-0.05		-0.01	0.17	0.17	0.02	0.17	
<b>SISCED</b>	-0.12		-0.01	0.20	0.05		0.00	0.17	-0.09	-0.01	0.13	
Analysis of evidence												
<b>POLDISC</b>	-0.06		-0.01	0.14	0.16		0.02	0.14	0.14	0.01	0.14	
<b>PV_CIV</b>	0.01	**	0.10	0.00	0.01	**	0.05	0.00	0.01	**	0.08	0.00
<b>DEMVAL</b>	0.98	**	0.08	0.24	0.22		0.02	0.16	0.32	*	0.03	0.15
Capacity for Empathy												
<b>EXPAGG</b>	-0.11		-0.01	0.17	-0.05		-0.01	0.15	-0.52	**	-0.05	0.15
<b>GENEQL</b>	0.45	*	0.04	0.19	0.17		0.02	0.20	-0.25		-0.02	0.29
<b>EMPATH</b>	-0.54	**	-0.05	0.21	0.02		0.00	0.18	-0.05		0.00	0.15
<b>ETHRGHT</b>	0.15		0.01	0.19	0.16		0.02	0.21	0.22		0.02	0.19
<b>IMMRGHT</b>	0.00		0.00	0.20	0.75	**	0.08	0.19	0.40	*	0.04	0.16
<b>ATTDIFF</b>	0.42	*	0.04	0.18	0.23		0.03	0.15	0.24		0.02	0.16
<b>PROGAY</b>	0.23		0.02	0.18	-0.21		-0.02	0.15	-0.16		-0.02	0.16
Sense of agency												
<b>INFPART</b>	3.88	*	0.37	0.23	3.25	*	0.34	0.22	3.46	*	0.34	0.20
<b>VALPARTS</b>	0.58	*	0.05	0.21	0.55	*	0.06	0.20	0.54	*	0.06	0.14
<b>INPOLEF</b>	0.36		0.04	0.21	0.47	**	0.05	0.20	0.59	*	0.06	0.17
<b>CITEFF</b>	2.40	*	0.22	0.23	2.28	*	0.26	0.23	2.62	*	0.26	0.22
<b>p <math>\leq</math> 1.96 *</b>	R2 = 0.38				R2 = 0.39				R2 = 0.37			
<b>p <math>\leq</math> 2.58 **</b>												

Table 6. Cluster robust OLS regression estimates of Expected Student Participation in Illegal Protests. ISEM

	Chile			Colombia			Mexico		
	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.
<b>(CONSTANT)</b>	60.15	**	1.18	58.49	**	1.81	59.01	**	1.76
Control variables									
<b>SGENDER</b>	-0.35		0.40	-0.20	-0.01	0.38	-0.79	*	0.32
<b>NISB</b>	-0.24		0.17	0.06	0.01	0.17	0.14		0.15
<b>SISCED</b>	-0.34	*	0.17	-0.08	-0.01	0.21	-0.18		0.15
Analysis of evidence									
<b>POLDISC</b>	-0.36		0.20	-0.34	-0.04	0.21	-0.30		0.18
<b>PV_CIV</b>	-0.01	**	0.00	-0.02	**	0.00	-0.02	**	0.00
<b>DEMVAL</b>	1.09	**	0.24	0.54	*	0.26	0.37		0.19
Capacity for Empathy									
<b>EXPAGG</b>	-0.12		0.14	-0.21	-0.02	0.21	-0.20		0.15
<b>GENEQL</b>	-0.33		0.19	-1.03	**	0.25	-1.07	**	0.22
<b>EMPATH</b>	-1.65	**	0.20	-1.44	**	0.23	-1.37	**	0.15
<b>ETHRGHT</b>	-0.33		0.20	-0.68	**	0.24	-0.45	*	0.21
<b>IMMRGHT</b>	-0.34		0.23	0.14		0.23	-0.08		0.17
<b>ATTDIFF</b>	0.12		0.16	-0.15		0.16	-0.06		0.17
<b>PROGAY</b>	0.20		0.18	-0.66	*	0.23	-0.76	*	0.21
Sense of agency									
<b>INFPART</b>	2.29	*	0.24	2.06	*	0.20	2.31	*	0.17
<b>VALPARTS</b>	-0.31		0.24	-0.73	*	0.24	-0.28		0.20
<b>INPOLEF</b>	-0.26		0.20	-0.40		0.22	0.06		0.21
<b>CITEFF</b>	0.61	**	0.24	0.58	*	0.20	0.77	*	0.16
<b>p ≤ 1.96 *</b>	R2 = 0.12			R2 = 0.14			R2 = 0.20		
<b>p ≤ 2.58 **</b>									

Table 7. Cluster robust OLS regression estimates of Expected Student Electoral Participation. ISEM

	Chile			Colombia			Mexico		
	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.
<b>(CONSTANT)</b>	44.49 **		1.47	44.75 **		1.34	44.51 **		1.10
Control variables									
<b>SGENDER</b>	-0.62	-0.02	0.42	-1.04 **	-0.06	0.27	-0.68 **	-0.04	0.26
<b>NISB</b>	0.27	0.02	0.24	-0.10	-0.01	0.13	0.02	0.00	0.14
<b>SISCED</b>	0.49 *	0.03	0.24	0.05	0.00	0.13	0.24	0.03	0.14
Analysis of evidence									
<b>POLDISC</b>	0.36	0.03	0.22	-0.05	-0.01	0.15	-0.05	0.00	0.14
<b>PV_CIV</b>	0.01 **	0.07	0.00	0.02 **	0.16	0.00	0.02 **	0.16	0.00
<b>DEMVAL</b>	-0.17	-0.01	0.25	0.35	0.04	0.21	0.71 **	0.08	0.15
Capacity for Empathy									
<b>EXPAGG</b>	-0.42 *	-0.03	0.19	0.18	0.02	0.15	0.10	0.01	0.13
<b>GENEQL</b>	0.73 **	0.06	0.27	0.78 **	0.08	0.22	0.59 **	0.06	0.22
<b>EMPATH</b>	0.38 *	0.03	0.18	0.25	0.02	0.20	0.21	0.02	0.12
<b>ETHRGHT</b>	-0.03	0.00	0.24	0.79 **	0.08	0.22	0.82 **	0.09	0.22
<b>IMMRGHT</b>	0.31	0.02	0.22	0.13	0.01	0.15	0.34 *	0.04	0.17
<b>ATTDIFF</b>	0.07	0.01	0.22	0.24	0.03	0.17	0.38 **	0.04	0.14
<b>PROGAY</b>	-0.37 **	-0.03	0.19	-0.10	-0.01	0.14	0.13	0.01	0.15
Sense of agency									
<b>INFPART</b>	3.47 *	0.28	0.24	1.97 *	0.21	0.18	2.11 *	0.23	0.20
<b>VALPARTS</b>	0.85 *	0.06	0.28	0.96 *	0.10	0.17	0.62 *	0.07	0.14
<b>INPOLEF</b>	2.18 *	0.18	0.25	1.05 *	0.11	0.20	0.89 *	0.09	0.18
<b>CITEFF</b>	0.30	0.02	0.25	1.05 *	0.12	0.20	0.90 *	0.10	0.19
<b>p ≤ 1.96 *</b>	R2 = 0.26			R2 = 0.29			R2 = 0.29		
<b>p ≤ 2.58 **</b>									

Table 8. Cluster robust OLS regression estimates of Civic Knowledge. ISEM

	Chile				Colombia			Mexico				
	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.		Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.	Coeff.	$\beta$	s.e.		
(CONSTANT)	429.46	**	6.23		451.59	**	5.49	440.40	**	4.87		
Control variables												
SGENDER	-18.10	**	-0.11	3.16	-3.12	-0.02	2.98	-3.94	-0.02	2.35		
NISB	21.48	**	0.26	1.96	14.83	**	0.20	1.63	15.58	**	0.20	1.45
SISCED	17.94	**	0.18	1.61	7.82	**	0.09	1.23	9.69	**	0.13	1.22
Analysis of evidence												
POLDISC	5.89	**	0.07	1.41	-1.47	-0.02	1.21	-0.27	0.00	1.32		
DEMVAL	6.61	**	0.07	1.80	6.06	**	0.07	1.54	6.93	**	0.09	1.32
Capacity for Empathy												
EXPAGG	7.04	**	0.08	0.99	-0.98	-0.01	1.32	1.87	0.02	1.20		
GENEQL	27.04	**	0.32	1.50	26.27	**	0.33	1.56	23.96	**	0.27	1.76
EMPATH	4.19	**	0.05	1.61	3.32	*	0.04	1.40	6.25	**	0.08	1.29
ETHRGHT	6.29	**	0.07	1.48	7.97	**	0.10	2.29	7.35	**	0.09	1.41
IMMRGHT	-6.07	**	-0.07	1.73	-6.92	**	-0.09	1.57	-1.01	-0.01	1.43	
ATTDIFF	-2.09		-0.02	1.24	4.81	**	0.06	1.23	5.03	**	0.06	1.51
PROGAY	6.50	*	0.08	1.29	7.11	*	0.09	1.44	9.28	*	0.11	1.24
Sense of agency												
INFPART	-11.07	*	-0.13	1.64	-13.07	*	-0.16	1.79	-9.65	*	-0.12	1.45
VALPARTS	5.46	*	0.06	1.48	0.09	0.00	1.57	2.43	**	0.03	1.19	
INPOLEF	8.01	*	0.10	1.75	7.69	*	0.10	1.53	4.19	*	0.05	1.39
CITEFF	-5.12	*	-0.06	1.49	-5.27	*	-0.07	1.91	-8.73	*	-0.11	1.38
$p \leq 1.96$ *	R2 =			0.42	R2 =			0.33	R2 =			0.40
$p \leq 2.58$ **												

## 5 Discussion

This study contributes to fill a gap in the literature, as in Latin America there is insufficient evidence on the variables related to different types of civic participation and civic knowledge (Schulz, et al., 2008). It is also important in the quest for understanding data obtained through standardized tests re-framing them into specific theoretical models in order to have a more comprehensive view of the variables involved in the determination of students' civic engagement.

The main finding of this study was related to a better fit of the ISEM, compared with the SCM for explaining the outcomes of expected participation and civic knowledge in all countries. In the ISEM, variables included in the sense of agency construct were the most important ones for predicting expected participation in legal protests and expected electoral participation.

In the SCM, trust in institutions was the most important variable for predicting students' expected participation in legal protests and electoral participation. Trust in institutions is a challenge that cannot only be undertaken by schools, because it involves multiple organisations (for example, health, welfare, environmental and human rights, governmental and non governmental organisations).

Interestingly, the Social Capital Model does provide emphasis in participation in social networking and linkages with committed individuals and to make participation something enjoyable, meaningful and achievable (participation in formal and informal social networks). It also posits that trust, which really falls within the affective dimension, is a powerful tool for fostering and predict future participation, which was also a finding in this research.

What these results seem to suggest, is that the affective dimensions of both models: Trust in the SCM: and Sense of Agency in the ISEM are the variables more closely related to participation in legal protests. This suggests that school practices should include activities that lead students to feel capable of addressing issues that affect their own lives and those of their colleagues and family, so that in the future, these self-efficacy beliefs could become a platform for their civic engagement. However, this does not allow to the conclusion that knowledge should be shelved; what it's really required, is to measure the kind of knowledge that results from reflection, perspective taking (consideration of the views of others), and informed debate. Therefore students not only require learning to participate democratically, but to democratically communicate, using reflective, argumentative and deliberative

capacities allowing emotions to support their involvement and commitment.

These findings are fundamental in designing educational policies and practices that effectively promote civic engagement in a way that could help today's students to create a more democratic and just society and learn mechanisms to effectively influence their communities, other than just get involved in social protests. As Sant (2014) mentions, for students, society is composed of those who want to be heard, and those – perhaps the politicians or to a wider extent, the status quo elites – who do not want to hear them. Hence, for students, participation in protests, whether legal or illegal, and other actions included in what could be called activism, become almost the only ways to ensure their voices are visible to others.

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> The Citizen Audit Survey of Great Britain (2000 -2001) was a national study conducted in 2000 and 2001 in Great Britain. It was aimed at analyzing citizenship practices in British adult population. It comprised both, the description of citizenship and the analysis of the factors that influence it. It covered the following areas of study: political participation, voluntary activity and the beliefs and values of individuals related to civic society. Three main strategies for collecting information were applied: a face-to-face survey covering all the areas of interest; a panel survey component with the aim of re-interviewing a sub-sample of respondents to the face-to-face survey one year later; a mailback survey conducted at the same time as the face-to-face survey regarding the same issues in the same local authorities. Informants according to each strategy for collecting information were as follows: face-to-face survey, 3,140; panel survey, 804; mailback survey, 8,564, informants respectively.

<sup>ii</sup> Trust in institutions was not significant with respect to all types of civic activism.

<sup>iii</sup> This variable was used as proxy for social embeddedness.

<sup>iv</sup> This variable was used as proxy for social embeddedness.

## Defining the Key Competences and Skills for Young Low Achievers' in Lifelong Learning by the Voices of Students, Trainers and Teachers

Europe has stressed the importance of lifelong learning as a way for its citizens to enrol and to engage fully in day-to-day demands of work and citizenship life events. Support is more urgent for those who are at risk of social and educational exclusion. This paper presents an overview on the goals of the European project LIBE "Supporting Lifelong learning with Inquiry-Based Education", that aims at designing, developing and trying out an innovative e-learning management system devoted to develop key information processing skills for ICT with an inquiry-based approach to learning, focused on the young adult population (16-24) that have low levels of competences regarding literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. Additionally, it presents the results of a content analysis of focus groups sessions, carried out with Portuguese teachers, trainers and students, aiming to identify the key competences and skills most needed by young low achievers. The Portuguese results integrate the alignment of the proposal of the LIBE framework for the learning outcomes, instructional objectives and ICT key information processing competencies. Results highlight literacy skills and social competence as the most relevant for the target audience, adding ICT competences as very important in developing literacy skills and self-efficacy. Pedagogical support is considered a significant part of the students' successful learning, both in face-to-face or e-learning environments.

### Keywords:

Low achiever, competences, skills, lifelong learning, e-learning, information and communication technology

### 1 Introduction

In the Renewed Lisbon Strategy (COM 2005/24) it is considered that the growth of productivity in the European space has markedly slowed, stressing the

importance of stronger investments and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) across the economy in order to regain better levels of productivity (Commission of the European Communities, 2005). Simultaneously, the document points towards ICT as the backbone for the knowledge economy, although European investment in these technologies has been "lower and later" than in the United States. Therefore, the Renewed Lisbon Strategy stimulates the use of ICT both in public and in private sectors to continue the eEurope agenda (Commission of the European Communities, 2005).

Technology has been integrated into most aspects of work and life in the 21st century. To engage fully in day-to-day demands of work and life events, many of which already integrate ICT, citizens need specific set of competences and skills such as information processing, literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments. These concerns are stressed by European discourses, when reporting the need of Lifelong Learning (LLL) of citizens, particularly those considered to be low achievers, typically 16 to 24 year olds (and to a lesser extent 25-30 year olds) who face higher unemployment rates (OECD, 2013a). Additionally, it is stressed the need to promote and to master "generic" skills such as communication, self-management, critical thinking and the ability to learn, assisting citizens in a better integration into all areas of information and into a rapidly changing labour market (Berger & Croll, 2012; OECD, 2013a).

Therefore, in the perspective of promoting a digital democracy or digital inclusion, it is important to consider the specific barriers of access and the quality experiences with ICT that may affect the educational and lifelong learning paths and employment opportunities of all citizens of all ages. In particular of those who are economically, socially and culturally most vulnerable.

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### 1.1 Demand for skills in lifelong learning for young adults

At all levels of life, changes regarding technological advances are demanding to all citizens and organizations, requiring the development of a set of cognitive skills that potentiate an adaptation to a guaranteed continuous evolution of technology. Those skills are required for rapidly changing activities that demand higher-levels of understanding, interpretation, analysis and communication of information, overcoming the skills needed for routine cognitive and manual tasks (OECD, 2012). This demand is most strongly made by the international labour market in order to prepare for the current and future needs of the workforce, and thus, it is acknowledged in the Europe 2020 by Europe and its Member States, towards the implementation of policies that improve employability, social inclusion and personal fulfilment of its citizens. Europe is giving special focus to citizens from a disadvantaged background, young and young adults with low basic skills or that constitute early leavers from education and training (Urban, 2012). It is in fact a political commitment of the European Union member states, to reduce the proportion of *low achievers*, defined by OECD as the pupils who scored below level two on the combined mathematics, reading and science literacy scale of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA test) (LIBE, 2014a). In this paper, we add to this definition, young adults who are in regular schooling paths but have low success rates in school or have dropped-out from regular schooling paths due to low success rates and social exclusion. These pupils generally have greater difficulty in completing more complex tasks and understanding more complex concepts, and most can be expected to continue facing those difficulties throughout their lives, because they are not expected to continue with education beyond compulsory schooling (European Commission, 2005; OECD, 2013a).

Therefore, they maintain poor levels of literacy and numeracy, the essential skills that allow for a full participation in modern societies. These poor levels also affect the mastery of ICT in the workplace and daily activities (e.g. online banking, e-government, electronic shopping according to OECD, 2012). Furthermore, in order to successfully participate and integrate work and society, they need to master literacy and numeracy skills (highest levels) that appear to be a pre-condition for key information-processing skills (average levels) and for undertaking more complex problem-solving tasks. The key skills adopted in this paper are those of defined by OECD for the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (PIAAC) as follow (OECD, 2013a, p. 59):

*“Literacy is defined as the ability to understand, evaluate, use and engage with written texts to participate in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential. Literacy encompasses a range of skills from the decoding of written words and sentences to the comprehension,*

*interpretation, and evaluation of complex texts. It does not, however, involve the production of text;”*

*“Numeracy is defined as the ability to access, use, interpret and communicate mathematical information and ideas in order to engage in and manage the mathematical demands of a range of situations in adult life. To this end, numeracy involves managing a situation or solving a problem in a real context, by responding to mathematical content/information/ideas represented in multiple ways;”*

*“Problem solving in technology rich environments is defined as the ability to use digital technology, communication tools and networks to acquire and evaluate information, communicate with others and perform practical tasks. The assessment focuses on the abilities to solve problems for personal, work and civic purposes by setting up appropriate goals and plans, and accessing and making use of information through computers and computer networks.”*

Given that written information is present in all areas of life in which people participate in society—as citizen, consumers, parents or employees—it is crucial for individuals to master literacy skills, to understand and respond to textual information and communicate in written. Literacy skills intersect with numeracy and ICT, enabling performance on tasks that, in part, depend on the ability to read and understand text (OECD, 2013a, 2013b). In text it is distinguished between digital text and print-based text, and the domain to master reading these two different types of texts that differ in: reading of printed texts; reading digital texts in simulated websites, search engines results pages and blog posts (OECD, 2013a).

Data collected in 2013 with the PIAAC survey indicates that in OECD countries, young adults (age 16-24) regarding literacy proficiency levels are on average at level tree (scores from 276 points to less than 326 points) broadly meaning they can: understand and respond appropriately to longer texts and of several types; to make appropriate inferences of text structures and of one or more pieces of information; identify and formulate responses. Regarding the proficiency in numeracy, they are on average at level two (scores from 226 points to less than 276 points), meaning they have the ability to: navigate within digital texts, access and identify information from different sections of a document; to integrate two or more pieces of information, compare and contrast about information; make inferences (low-level). Regarding proficiency of problem solving in technology-rich environments, in all countries 16-24 year-olds reach higher average levels of proficiency than the older adults, having lower chances of having no prior computer experience, or failing the ICT core test (OECD, 2013a). It is important to support those affected by the lowest levels of skills and highest levels of unemployment, in a process of lifelong learning.

LLL is benefiting from e-learning being integrated into all levels of education and training, and benefiting the diversity of attendees of learning activities. Online





learning initiatives such as online courses or Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) have emerged as attractive solutions for free access to LLL. MOOCs can be defined as "(...) online learning environments that feature course like experiences - for example, lectures, labs, discussions, and assessments - for little to no cost" (DeBoer, Ho, Stump, & Breslow, 2014).

These online courses are instructor-guided and designed to scale up to support large numbers of learners and combine the offer of various topics and depth of learning. MOOCs also assist in answering the need of students engaged in LLL to learn anytime/ anywhere by using course content asynchronously and unconstrained (DeBoer et al., 2014), to which is added the possibility to obtain a certification of course completion to prove their acquisition of new skills, for employment purposes or other. MOOCs in their nature have unrestricted registration and no differentiation according to participants level of education (e.g., degree desired, age cohorts, or prerequisite knowledge), leading to a diversity of participants backgrounds, age, schooling, country of origin and ultimately of intent for registration.

Online learning is also supported by Virtual Learning Environments (VLE), Learning Management Systems (LMS) or Course Management Systems (CMS), frequently used in conventional face-to-face learning restricted to classrooms and with differentiating instruction (DeBoer et al., 2014; Everett, 2002). VLE, LMS and CMS support interactions between registered users allowing the teacher to guide and monitor learners' progress, granting a controlled access to elements of the curriculum, that can be separately assessed by tracking student activity and achievement (Blin & Munro, 2008; Everett, 2002).

Online courses, whatever the learning systems, have created the opportunity to collect unprecedented volumes of data on students' interactions with the systems, and to gain insight and create a potential for personalized human learning through machine learning to gain insight and create a potential for personalize human learning (Cooper & Sahami, 2013).

The need to master these sets of skills and therefore become better prepared to fully participate in life and work events are concerns central for the European project LIBE "Supporting Lifelong learning with Inquiry-Based Education". The project aims to design, develop and try out an innovative e-learning management system devoted to develop key information processing skills for ICT, with an inquiry-based approach to learning with a high level of personalization in learning, targeted at low educational achievers age 16-24. The e-learning system will support six online courses offered in four languages: Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese and English languages. The courses were developed by three partner countries: Italy, Norway and Portugal.

In order to plan the pedagogical approach and framework of the learning objectives of the LIBE courses, it was necessary to align this with the actual needs of the low achievers in the three countries. Being this an unfamiliar social context, the methodological approach proposed was to promote focus group discussions with

teachers of low achievers and students low achievers. The topics that served as a support to create the discussion guidelines were (LIBE, 2014a):

- a) "Supporting the identification of the prominent target group learning needs, in terms of transversal skills [...];
- b) Collecting possible areas of interest for young people age 16-24 and most suitable activities for e-learning;
- c) Identify teachers' and learners' expectations in the use of ICT for educational and occupational purposes (i.e. job search);
- d) Learning from teachers' and educators' successful experiences with low achievers or with blended / e-learning;
- e) Allowing a better understanding of the teaching/training needs in different educational settings (school education, professional/vocational education, and initial/continuing education)."

Guidelines were created within LIBE project and applied by all countries in the focus group sessions. This paper presents the content analysis of the focus group sessions developed in Portugal.

## 2 Methodological approach

This section offers an overview of the research goals, methodological approaches and data collection method.

The first step was to *design the focus group guide, define and clarify the concepts* that would lay out the set of topics for the group to discuss. As listed previously, the topics focused on the need to establish and understand the skills, competencies and learning needs of low achievers, concerning literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

The second step was to define the expected sample of participants for the focus group sessions. In the year one of the project, it was agreed that participants should be teachers and students, representatives of high school and professional/vocational education.

A focus group discussion is a group interview, where a small number of participants are invited to share their opinions and experiences on specific topics. This approach was chosen because it can be used to grasp a better understanding of a social context, to identify nuances of research setting that could impact upon the research, and to serve as a source for grounded theory application. The researchers invited a small number of participants to share their opinions and experiences on specific topics, and acting as moderators led the discussion ensuring that all participants were included in regular turn taking. Generally, focus group takes place in a formal, prearranged setting, having between five to seven people sitting around a conference table, and lasts between one and two hours (LIBE, 2014b).

In Portugal, researchers performed three focus group sessions: one with school teachers of four urban secondary schools, working with students that have below average grades in national standardized exams in different curriculum subjects such as Mathematics and Portuguese language; one session with trainers in



vocational training centres, with experience in working with students considered to be low achievers, notably migrants and students that drop out from regular schooling paths; one session with low achiever students with ages between 16-24, all attending training vocational courses (VET) at one training centre (part of the European Association for Cities, Institutions and Second Chance Schools).

### 2.1 Focus group topics and questions

The guidelines were developed around five well-developed topics, described in the previous section, through multiple questions and follow-up questions that can be used if the topic is more complex to answer (LIBE, 2014b). The focus group had a semi-structured question format for exploratory purposes. Questions were kept as open as possible, in order to stimulate useful “trains of thoughts” among the participants. The guidelines for the focus group with teachers/trainers were defined by all the partners of the LIBE, and in a co-related set of topics the Portuguese research team developed the focus group guideline for students.

The guidelines for the focus group discussion with teachers and trainers (LIBE, 2014b) presented a set of topics and questions centred on the experience teachers and trainers had with low achievers: topic 1 is about low achievers knowledge and skills; topic 2 reads, activities and topics in learning; topic 3 explores successful teaching and learning experiences with low achievers. Introductory questions help to set the stage, allowing participants to reflect on their experiences and followed by the probes were launched by the moderator, aiming for more specific and critical areas that are central to the purpose of the study.

The participants, teachers and trainers, were asked to share their personal experience, rather than to state expert opinions, in designing, constructing or developing any type of solution. Questions determined for teachers and trainers, within the three topics were:

- a) *Topic 1 questions:* Which knowledge and skills low achiever students achieve with more difficulty? What do you feel are the most important skills low achiever students should learn?
- b) *Topic 2 questions:* On the basis of the table that we handed you (table 1 “Which are the most important skills low achievers should achieve?”), do you think that contents envisaged are relevant for low achievers? Which topics, other than those already included, could be added? For each domain, which activities are more suitable for an e-learning course? Please fill in table (table 2 “Summary of OECD PIAAC and IEA ICILS domains included in LIBE learning outcome framework”). [...] Could you briefly indicate them?
- c) *Topic 3 questions:* At your school, are there specific courses/programs devoted to foster computer and information literacy, i.e. the ability to retrieve information in internet and to use them for study and personal development? If yes, which pedagogical approaches are implemented and on which specific

contents? Do you have successful teaching/learning classroom experiences related to the use of internet for retrieving and communicating information? If yes, which methodologies did you use and which contents did you deal with? When students (broadly speaking) make researches on the Internet, which skills are involved and which of these are prerequisites for a good search?

Questions determined for students, within the three topics derived from the guidelines of the teachers and trainers set of questions, and centred on the personal experience of students in formal learning context (school) (LIBE, 2014b): learning experiences, general knowledge and skills, ICT skills and competences and expectations for the future. Questions determined for students, within the four topics were:

- a) *Topic 1 questions:* What is most important to learn in school?; Which were the most important learning experiences you made in school?; Indicate three of those learning experiences and explain why you consider them the most important; At the school you are in today, which learning experiences did you like the most?; Which learning experiences do you consider most important for your future (school, professional, personal)?; How do you achieve good results in these learning experiences?; What have been the greatest difficulties in achieving good results?
- b) *Topic 2 question:* When you search or browse the Internet, what knowledge and skills do you use (give examples); Those knowledge and skills are learned in school or out of school?; Do you consider the content in Table 2 relevant for you?; Which other topics could be added?
- c) *Topic 3 questions:* At your school, are there courses/programs where you can learn how to search the Internet, use a computer or present a school work based on ICT (if so, how does it work, and do you consider it is necessary or effective?); In the other classes, have you had learning experiences related to searching on the Internet, using the computer or present a school work based on ICT?; For you future (school, vocational, personal) how useful is it to know how to make a good use of ICT?
- d) *Topic 4 questions:* What are your expectations / plans for the future?; Thinking about the contents in Table 2, which are most important for your future (personal and professional)?

### 2.2 Participants

The three focus group sessions involved a total of 18 participants from Portuguese education system. The sessions summed six hours of records. A detailed report is presented here.

The sessions with teachers involved six participants (three women and three men) from 4 Secondary schools. Participants were reached following two contact strategies: invitation made to the director of the school who

reached out to the teachers; invitation made directly by LIBE researchers who had personal contact with teachers. All teachers taught different curriculum subjects, (Biology; Project of product Design; Geometry; Graphic Arts; Physics and Chemistry; Information and Communication Technology; English) guaranteeing a diversity of experience and teaching and learning approaches.

The focus group session with trainers involved six professionals (three women and three men) of three Vocational training Centres. Participants were reached following the two contact strategies described previously for the teachers FG session. All trainers taught different curriculum subjects (Wood, Textile, Portuguese Language, ICT, Mathematics, Psychology and Parental training and social support) guaranteeing a diversity of experience and teaching and learning approaches.

The focus group session with students involved six participants (five young men and one young woman) with ages between 17 and 25. These students were low achievers at risk of social exclusion, all previous dropouts of the regular education system, before integrating the Vocational Training School. Participants were invited to participate in the study, through the mediation of the school director and a teacher. All the students were attendees in the first year of a vocational course ("Wood and carpentry" course: three students; "Textiles" course: three students; "Kitchen" course: one student).

## 2.3 Procedure

### 2.3.1 Procedures for data collection and analysis

The sessions with teachers and trainers were carried out at the facilities of the university. The session with students was implemented in the school they attended. The sessions were scheduled after a contact with the institutions where these professionals and students worked/studied, and agreed upon the schedule and place more convenient for each group of participants. Each session lasted about 1-2 hours, in a room with a video projector to show power point slides to stimulate the discussion, and with light refreshments (e.g. coffee, mineral water and cookies) in order to create a comfortable environment, while the participants sat around a conference table.

The focus group approach followed was starting with a welcome presentation of the moderators and project LIBE aims, followed by information about the guidelines of the session and the expected outcomes of this participation for the LIBE courses design. The participants were informed about, and agreed with, the audio and video recording of the sessions for posterior transcription and analysis. After the sessions, the full transcripts were made and sent to the participants for validation. All transcriptions were validated and constitute the empirical data for analysis.

### 2.3.2 Thematic content analysis (deductive and inductive)

The content analysis of the focus group sessions transcripts were supported by categories of analysis that emerged both from deductive and inductive process.

Deductive categories were obtained from project LIBEs' framework used to create the focus group guidelines, and concerned the basic skill domains (LIBE, 2014a):

- Literacy (see section 1.1 of this paper for the definition);
- Numeracy (see section 1.1 of this paper for the definition);
- ICT competences: "ability to access, use, interpret and communicate mathematical information and ideas in order to engage in and manage the mathematical demands of a range of situations in adult life (OECD, 2012)." and "the ability to use computers to investigate, create, and communicate in order to participate effectively at home, at school, in the workplace, and in society (Fraillon, Schulz, & Ainley, 2013)."

An inductive approach of the empirical data analysis, and that emerged from reading the transcripts, added three new categories:

- Social competence: "the ability to manage thoughts, feelings and behaviours in order to cope efficiently with the demands of the context and of interpersonal situations, taking in consideration one's and reference group's values and goals" (Dodge, 1985; Trower, 1995)
- Pedagogical support: "individual or peer support during the learning process, given to students by a teacher or colleague" (OECD, 2007; Vaux, 1992).
- Self-efficacy: "the perception of personal competence to succeed in a specific activity or domain in a prospective situation. Previous experiences in specific domains, and in particular the interpretation of previous success or failure, are the most important sources of self-efficacy beliefs Self-efficacy is one of the most important motivation theories. Motivation is the dynamic and energizing dimension of the action: it determines the initiation, sustainability and perseverance of an action or set of actions to reach a specific goal" (Bandura, 1995, 2006; Maddux, 1995).

The results of the analysis are greatly useful for the team of researchers of LIBE project, because they will serve as guides of topics and approaches to activities to design the e-learning courses targeted for young people (16-24) low achievers. The results of the content analysis are discussed in the next section.

## 3 Key Competences and skills of low achievers

The participants in the FG sessions were inquired following the guidelines described in section 2.1, concerning the skills considered the most important for low achiever students to achieve. In total there were 6 categories of analysis: the predefined categories defined by the LIBE framework (LIBE, 2014a) - Literacy, Numeracy and ICT competences (composed by 'Computer and information literacy', and 'Problem solving in technology-rich-environments'); and three categories that emerged from the first analysis made to the transcripts of the FG sessions - social competences, pedagogical support and self-efficacy.



The next sections are structured by categories or group of categories most noted to the less noted in the analysis. The names of the participants were coded to guarantee anonymity.

### 3.1 Literacy and social competences

Two main categories emerged as the most significant skills and competences that student low achievers should learn: literacy and social competences.

*Literacy* was considered as the most important skill for low achievers to learn by a total of 12 participants (n=18) – three teachers, three trainers and six (total) of students. Teachers, trainers and students were consistent in identifying reading and interpretation of written texts as fundamental activities that require these skills. The development of literacy skills was highlighted as having influence in the successful development of other skills, such as numeracy, ICT and also social skills.

The majority of participants' voices echoed the perception that literacy skills are the most relevant for students' lives, and therefore revealed concerns related to deepening students motivation to develop their literacy skills and to become aware of how relevant they are in their lives:

“Teacher C1: How can I reach them (students) in a way that they see, understand, interpret, think about written information? Because this is very difficult to get through.”

In fact both groups recognized the importance of literacy. Students were very much aware that literacy skills are very important in their everyday life: in communication activities, both written and spoken communication, in school, and in work situations. Students were able to identify several real life situations that either could benefit or had already benefited from the development in school of their literacy skills:

“Student F: Portuguese (language) for me is the most important: reading, writing and talking correctly. (...) we are not going to go to an interview and say ‘Hey dude!’”

When teachers and trainers were required to describe the most adequate activities performed with students low achievers in order to develop their literacy skills, six main activities emerged:

- Read;
- Write;
- Integrate and interpret related parts of text to one another;
- Access and identify written information;
- Evaluate and reflect about written information;
- Make semantic and lexical inferences.

A strong and effective strategy, described by teachers/trainers, was to adopt a learner-centred approach and choose topics connected to daily issues of students' lives:

- Create a *Curriculum Vitae*;
- Fill out an application;
- Read and interpret receipts;
- Evaluate and reflect about information in the news;
- Write an email to communicate with others in school of work.

The analysis yet revealed that many of the activities performed by students or planned by teachers for students for the development of literacy skills, correlated with the category of “*ICT competences*”: nine participants (n=18) described “*literacy*” activities that involved the use of ICT and web environments, because to develop this last set of competences, students were required to access, use and interpret written text:

- Web search for information with the goal to develop reading and interpretation;
- Web search for various texts with the goal to identify and extract the most relevant information;
- Write an email;
- Write a *Curriculum Vitae* using an online tool (Europass tool was frequently mentioned);
- Use software (desktop and in the cloud) to make writing exercises appealing.

These detailed activities and topics would be explored by the researchers in the determination of the activities for LIBE online courses. The category of “*ICT competences*” will be explored in further detail in section 3.2.

This analysis revealed that all the participants have a great awareness about literacy as a central skill for low achievers, and that their knowledge and how they apply those skills has a major impact on their opportunities in life. According to the results of the PIAAC, in all OECD countries, the impact on those with low literacy proficiency are linked to a higher unemployment rates - twice more likely to be unemployed -, being more likely to report poor health, and to have a no or little participation as active citizens—believing that they have little impact on political processes and not participating in associative or volunteer activities (OECD, 2013a). The activities described both by teachers/trainers and students revealed this awareness that literacy proficiency is crucial for an engaged citizenship.

The second category that emerged as core for students was “*social competences*”, where a total of 4 participants (trainers) considered social competences as the most important to be achieved by low achievers: managing thoughts, feelings and behaviours in the school and training contexts, as well as in interpersonal situations, taking in consideration group's values and goals. Although the number of participants was less than half the total number of participants, it becomes relevant to notice it was because it was exclusively mentioned together with literacy. The participants grounded their choice stressing that, according to their experience, the lack of these skills and competences influence students successful development of other basic skills such as



literacy and numeracy, and may jeopardise their professional future opportunities.

“Trainer M: Yes, those are the skills that will allow them (students) to approach any area, profession, interest areas, any tool, much more than content”.

“Trainer A: These young people, from the group that are unsuccessful in school, we highlight: how to be in a classroom, know how to listen, respect rules and limits. These are very basic competences that come from basic socialization.”

The group of teachers agreed that social competences are important, despite recognizing that students had more difficulty in achieving them (3 teachers), they also pondered about the frequent difficulty to verify in a school and classroom context if low achiever students have effectively achieved the basic social competences. On the other side, teachers also shared their frequent surprise when the same group of students who reveal a lack of achieving social competences, are frequently the students who in a traineeship context, apply the social competences needed to have success in that work experience. The basic social competence mostly referred by teachers and trainers was having and showing respect between peers and towards student/teacher, and compliance with the basic rules of attendance and punctuality.

“Teacher A1: Because social competences in a classroom will be the same that will be demanded from them (students) in the world outside. (...) I think that in school we assess competences in a very different way from the assessment where he (the student) is working in an institution with elders or with children.”

“Teacher A3: (...) we had several students who arrived late to class, had some misbehaviour problems towards teachers, mainly teachers from social and cultural learning units such as Portuguese (language), English (language), which are units to which they relate less. We thought this will be a calamity (when they go into to traineeship). The companies we have had protocols with for years, we knew that when something went wrong it would go wrong for them (students) and for all the other students to come! But in truth it didn't happen.”

It is relevant to highlight that in FG discussions with students there was no mention of social competences, although all students talked about the importance of having a relationship of trust with teachers, revealing an effort to apply the values and goals within the context of a school and classroom. In contrast, the teachers/trainers strongly grounded their choice stating how crucial are social competences for students' successful development of other basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. In most OECD countries, there was a correlation between the lower literacy proficiency and negative social outcomes such as less likely to trust others and to other indicators of social well-being: low levels of political

efficacy, non-participation in volunteer activities, lower levels of health (OECD, 2013a). This meets the emphasis given to this category.

### 3.2 ICT competences, pedagogical support and self-efficacy

Participants were directly questioned about *ICT competences*, focusing on the most relevant for students to learn and learned by students, and about the type of teaching and learning activities developed. The aim was to obtain inputs through a set of examples further useful for project LIBE courses. There were 32 activities described, of which were listed the main activities performed with/by students that focus on computer and information literacy:

- Using search engines (mainly Google, and others)
- Using video and image sharing sites (YouTube)
- Using web tools to communicate, mainly email
- Using computer software in the desktop (e.g. Microsoft Word, Excel, Power Point) and in the cloud (Google Drive).

The activities described by the participants were organized in 6 main types (Table1, next page), of which are highlighted:

- Accessing, using and evaluating information (e.g. text, video and image format): correlated to literacy, and computer and information literacy domains.
- Searching for information using search engines (e.g.: text, video, images): correlated to literacy, and computer and information literacy domains.
- Using software to process text, creating graphs and making presentations (desktop and in the cloud): correlated to literacy, numeracy, and computer and information literacy domains.

From the total of 32 activities related to ICT competences described by the participants, 10 correlated with the category of literacy skills and two with numeracy skills.

Some of the topics of the activities described comprise the list below, to which were added some comments of the participants:

- Culture - literature, cinema: “Student V: In Portuguese (language class) when we see a movie, in order to make a summary of it the internet is useful. The teacher tells us to use the internet and search for a summary, or to see the movie again.”
- Curriculum vitae: “Trainer M: Send an e-mail, write an e-mail, because it's related to writing. But thinking about competences more adequate for their need to enter the labour force, it's the cover letter, sending a curriculum (...).”
- Construction industry and carpentry (specific training courses): “Student F: We want to build a table or a chair. We go to the internet, see what we want and take some images to try and make our project better”;



“Student A: (...) Yes, in YouTube. There, the videos show better what you want to do (tutorials), step by step. It’s much better. If it’s in an image, you just see the image, but if it’s in a video it shows step by step and it’s much easier to understand.”

Table 1: Number of participants that described activities for the category ICT competences.

ICT competences: type of activities	Nº of participants		
	Teachers	Trainers	Students
Access, use and evaluate information (e.g. text, video and image format).	3	3	3
Search for information using search engines (e.g. text, video, images).	3	2	4
Communicate using email for class work purposes.	0	2	0
Communicate using social network groups for class work purposes.	1	0	0
Use software to process text, create graphs and make presentations (desktop and in the cloud).	0	4	4
Use web tools (e.g. Google translator, Europass).	0	1	2
Use information safely and securely (e.g.: copyrights restrictions; manage personal information on social networks).	0	1	3

ICT competences were described to be widespread in students learning activities, some of which foreseeing the need to use ICTs in looking future for employment. Indeed ICTs are changing the way services are provided and consumed and therefore it has become almost a prerequisite for accessing basic services (for e.g.: public services, taxation, health, online shopping) via the Internet (OECD, 2013a).

The content analysis revealed two additional unexpected but relevant categories: “Pedagogical Support” and “Self-efficacy”.

Trainers and students gave extensive examples of pedagogical support during the learning process that, according to their experience, could benefit learning. Trainers revealed that pedagogical support is very important for low achievers, both when given individually by the teacher to a student and also when given between students in activities that involve pair or group work (Table4).

“Trainer T: Work in pairs is essential in this type of training. They (students) work much better and feel more at ease when working with someone.”

“Trainer A: It depends on the learning unit. They need care (...) they want caring attention, which sometimes is a way for them to feel supported, to believe that they can do it. (...) they need presence. Presence (of a teacher) is fundamental for them.”

The same experience was shared in the statements of the students:

“Student F: (...) I work in the carpentry workshop, and like it mainly because of the teacher, who is very cool. Whatever I need he is there for me...I’ve never seen a teacher like him, I was really amazed. I like him and like this school because it’s different.”

“Student V: (...) the teacher motivates me, motivates all of us and never gives up on us. It’s something I think is good.”

“Student R: For me was gym class, because we are more close to each other, more united.”

Table 4: Number of participants who considered pedagogical support important.

Type of pedagogical support	Participants	
	Trainers	Students
Individual (teacher to student)	5	5
Peer (student to student)	4	3

The analysis revealed a correlation between pedagogical support and individual social competences, highlighting that when students have mostly individual pedagogical support, they are able to compromise with their own learning experiences. In the discussion with teachers, they did not emphasize examples of pedagogical support, but reported to prefer students to be involved in group work activities and benefiting from peer support.

During the discussion sessions, the researcher questioned about the need of pedagogical support of these students both in a face-to-face learning and in at a distance e-learning environment. This generated reflection but not clear answers. The participants had some difficulty focusing on the idea of students doing only online study. Nevertheless two of the participant teachers, clearly stressed the idea that, according to their experience, they did not consider low achievers able to develop an e-learning course without face-to-face pedagogical support.

Pedagogical Support was very linked to face-to-face settings: a teacher/trainer who provides support to students in their instructional program, or a teacher/trainer who nurtures the right conditions for students peer support. An effective pedagogical support regarding an online/distance learning environment was more difficult for teachers/trainers to foresee. This may be a result of the lack of personal experience in online/distance teaching and learning. Only one of the teachers/trainers had participated in an online course. A first perspective meets the international research community concern about the difficulty in identifying the positive influence that learning in online/distance environments, more recently MOOCs, may have on students. The second perspective relates to the overlapped vision teachers/trainers revealed about pedagogical support in face-to-face and online settings. It was consensual that pedagogical support in a face-to-face setting has a positive impact on low achievers learning. In contrast,



teachers and trainers did not envision, what some researchers state as, the existing and powerful disruptive change in the roles of teachers and students when working and interacting in an online environment (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Bielaczyc & Blake, 2006; Siemens & Tittenberger, 2006). Additionally, there is a growing recognition that technology alone cannot change education, but technology and pedagogy will form a pair for success: "the technology sets the beat and creates the music, while the pedagogy defines the moves" (Bielaczyc & Blake, 2011; Garrison, 2011, p. 81).

*Self-efficacy* was the final category that emerged from the content analysis. This category relates to the perception of personal competence to succeed in a specific activity or domain, and the motivation to initiate, sustain and persevere in an action or set of actions to reach a specific goal (Bandura, 1995, 2006; Maddux, 1995). The content analysis revealed that the category of self-efficacy correlated with the category of pedagogical support by five participants (4 trainers, 1 student), describing the enrichment of proposing activities with a learner-centred approach, in order to foster students motivation, sense of worth and success. This fosters the perception of personal competence to succeed in a specific activity.

"Student R: (...) Carpentry marked me because I had no idea I could do it (the work), and I can do it!"

When participants (total 6) discussed the type of activities and topics more relevant to work with students, there was a clear relation with their day-to-day needs, previous experiences in specific domains and their need to enter the labour market. Activities described by 6 of the participants (4 students):

- Fill out an application;
- Communication in a work situation;
- Knowledge for a work situation;
- Write a cover letter and a CV to apply for a job.

"Student D: In this (school) it's kitchen because it can be an opportunity for my life. I can work in other countries and make money doing this."

The analysis also reveals that self-efficacy correlates with social competence, focusing on the role teachers and trainers have in helping students build their self-efficacy, enhancing the development of individual and social competence. By proposing to students activities in which they recognize their interests and experiences and relate more significantly to them and to others, it may help students gain confidence in their work and become better integrated in school and society.

"Student V: I liked this school because it gave me the will to study again. In other schools, I didn't do anything, I was always leaving (class). In this school I gained the will to study again, to learn again."

Low achievers have, by definition, a past experience of academic failure and discouragement feedback by relevant figures such as teachers. Previous experiences and social persuasion are two fundamental sources of self-efficacy. In order to construct self-efficacy, teachers and trainers rather than simply verbally transmitting the message that low achievers are able to do something, they should concentrate their efforts to structure learning situations in which to experience success is probable (Bandura, 1995). To have the opportunity of experiencing mastery and to be reinforced by it is decisive to build efficacy beliefs, personal trust, and resilience. Therefore, in particular during the transition to adulthood, it may represent a turning point, shifting from at risk trajectory to a recovery trajectory (Rutter, 1990; Werner & Smith, 2001).

#### 4 Conclusions

The qualitative and exploratory information collected through the focus groups sessions, was undoubtedly relevant for the proposal of activities and topics to explore in LIBE online courses. Teachers, trainers and students conveyed with strong voices, their view about the key skills and competences for low achievers, the target audience of LIBE courses.

The content analysis revealed literacy skills as the most important for low achievers. Developing literacy skills enhance their ability to communicate effectively with others, to read better and interpret what they read in all activities of life, both in a face-to-face setting and an online environment setting. This is an output for LIBE courses, have a stronger series of activities for this domain.

In the ICT domain, which also integrates literacy skills, the needs of low achievers were specifically focused on the ability to access, retrieve and evaluate the information on the Internet. A common lack in distinguishing trustworthy from unreliable information was pointed by participants as difficulties observed in low achievers. The need to develop ICT competences was very much related to the need to read and interpret information online related to various tasks of work and day-to-day life events, but also to gain awareness and learn about how to communicate and manage information online.

From the discussions also emerged the need students low achievers have of pedagogical support from teachers and trainers and between peers. This support was conveyed as relevant and determinant of students' self-efficacy. The more students feel confident, motivated and supported, the more enhanced is their participation in school and learning. This is unquestionably relevant for the proposal of LIBE courses that will need to ponder the type of support given, although it is foreseen, in the project, to produce courses a high level of personalization in learning.

Many examples of successful learning experiences with low achievers were approved. Nevertheless, the learner-centred approach where commitment to learning is mainly due to the motivation towards the activity is based on different topics related to students' day-to-day



lives. The use of specific software and social networking applications was also recurrently suggested. The above-mentioned, together with the results of analysis of the focus groups from other partner countries (Italy, Norway) will have implications in the developed learning activities for LIBE courses.

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Kaylene Mae Stevens, Christopher C Martell

## An Avenue for Challenging Sexism: Examining the High School Sociology Classroom

In this interpretative qualitative study, the researchers investigated the beliefs and practices of six high school sociology teachers in relation to the teaching of gender. Using a feminist lens, this study employed mixed methods, analyzing teacher interviews, observations, and classroom artifacts. The results showed that the teachers viewed sociology as different from other social studies courses, because it serves as a more intentional way to reduce sexism and gender stratification. As such, the teachers saw the sociology classroom as a place for students to grapple with issues of gender stratification and inequity. Teachers' beliefs related to gender and sexism strongly influenced what they saw as the purpose of sociology class, and it influenced the instructional practices that they used. Recommendations are made related to professional development around issues of gender equity.

### Keywords:

Gender inequity, sociology, sexism, feminism, teacher beliefs, instructional practices

attitudes towards women (sexism) at the end of the course than comparable controls, and significantly lower than their own sexism levels at the beginning of the semester. (p. 620)

### 1 Introduction

Gender inequity continues to be a prevalent problem in the United States. While women have made some gains both socially and economically, in the 21st century, inequity persists both in the workforce and at home. In the United States today, women earn 77 cents on the dollar compared to men, and the wage gap has barely narrowed since the mid-1990s (Hegewisch, Liepmann, Hayes, & Hartmann, 2012). While women are advancing in undergraduate college attendance, this has not translated into high status positions in business, law, science, and government. Women make up 60% of U.S. college graduates, yet only twelve Fortune 500 companies had women CEOs, and women held only 20 of 100 Senate seats and 84 of 435 House of Representatives seats in the U.S. Congress. It is widely argued that institutional sexism is an explanation for these gender inequalities (Fisher, 2013).

Learning about gender and conducting courses from a feminist lens might help to bring awareness about gender inequity and, in some cases, reduce sexism. In their study on college coursework and student attitudes, Jones and Jacklin (1988) found that

students enrolled in an introductory course in Women's and Men's studies scored significantly lower in sexist

The researchers concluded that there is "strong evidence that the experience of a Gender Studies course leads to a reduction of sexist attitudes towards women" (p. 620). Pettijohn, Terry, and Walzer (2008) found that students in a course on prejudice showed a significant reduction in racist, sexist, and homophobic attitudes; specifically, the students showed 68.8% reduction in their modern sexism scores. Through a case study, Guiffre, Anderson, and Bird (2008) specifically examined the teaching of the wage gap to sociology students. While the students felt depressed after learning about gender disparities, they also were able to think critically about inequality, specifically in the work place. These studies show that sociology course work and course work that deals directly with gender discrimination might be vehicles to raise awareness and reduce prejudice.

While coursework can help play a role in reducing sexism, there is also evidence that women are often underrepresented in the curriculum and textbooks (Avery & Simmons, 2001; Commeyras, 1996; Feiner, 1993; Schocker & Woysner, 2013). Additionally, research on teaching gender in social studies, which includes the discipline of sociology, is relatively scant (Crocco, 2008; Noddings, 2001; Pajares, 1992; Schmeichel, 2011). By examining sociology teachers' beliefs and practices related to gender inequity, it might help provide clarity on how gender is addressed, or not addressed, in the social studies classroom. Moreover, the sociology classroom is an important space to study the phenomenon of gender inequity, because it is one of the few places where a direct examination of gender inequity is explicitly part of the curriculum. For example, many introduction-to-sociology textbooks include a chapter on gender. Furthermore, most high school sociology curricula specifically include gender as a standalone unit. Even though the sociology curriculum may be fulfilling a need addressing issues of gender, social studies teachers and educational researchers have largely neglected the subject matter of sociology (DeCesare, 2008). To fill this gap, this study examined the beliefs and practices of six high school sociology teachers in relation to the teaching of gender. The research questions posed were: (a) What

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do high school sociology teachers perceive as the purposes for their high school sociology courses? (b) What is the influence of their beliefs on their practice? and (c) How do their beliefs of gender relate to what and how they teach their sociology courses?

## 2 Theoretical framework and review of recent research

This study operates under the premise that gender bias exists in schools and women are underrepresented and misrepresented in the social studies classroom (Crocco, 2008; Noddings, 2001; Sadker & Sadker, 2010; Schmeichel, 2011). Sadker and Sadker (2010) have documented how the U.S. school system is failing young women. In particular, social studies curricula are failing to equally represent women in textbooks and in classroom discourse (Commeyras, 1996; Feiner, 1993; Schocker & Woysner, 2013). Additionally, when women are represented they are often portrayed as being valued for stereotypical female traits, such as beauty (Commeyras, 1996). Beyond this, repeatedly, the same women are being sprinkled into the curriculum without much depth of coverage (Noddings, 2001). Feminism takes the approach that women should be valued equally to men both in school and in the curriculum.

This study used critical feminism as its theoretical lens. hooks (2000) argued that critical feminism challenges gender inequity through the following assumptions:

1. People have been socialized by family, school, peers, and media to accept sexist thinking.
2. Gender stratification occurs when gender differences give men greater power over women, transgender, and gender nonconforming people.
3. In our society a system of power patriarchy is in place based on the assumption of male supremacy.

To better understand teachers' instructional choices related to gender within the high school social studies classroom, critical feminism offers an important lens through which to examine gender inequity. This framework allows for better understanding of how schools may or may not socialize students under a system of patriarchy.

Although there is a significant amount of research from feminist scholars on how women are mistreated or underrepresented, a gap in the research exists on what schools and teachers are doing well. In her book *Toward Gender Equity in the Classroom*, Streitmatter (1994) followed eight teachers, all of whom believed deeply in gender equity, and whose beliefs translated into their practices. Her book used these teachers as models, providing concrete examples of how to create a classroom that strives for gender equity. For Streitmatter, this included calling on each gender equally, avoiding stereotypical gender roles, such as having girls play with dolls and disciplining students in equitable ways. For others, gender equity in the classroom is focused more on curriculum. For the purposes of this paper, a gender equitable social studies classroom focuses on both curriculum and classroom discourse. Classroom discourse is defined as

communication between teachers and students in classrooms. As Streitmatter argued, gender equitable discourse operates under the premise that women have been disadvantaged historically and therefore need extra resources or supports. Equitable treatment in the classroom may mean providing more opportunities to at-risk groups to equalize the playing field. Using a gender equitable approach, females (since historically disadvantaged) may need to be called on more or encouraged in different ways than males. Curriculum is generally defined as the course of studies provided by the state or school for the students. Gender equitable curriculum involves teaching about women where they have been left out. Crocco (2008) and Noddings (2001) both suggest including women much more often and in less stereotypical ways than the traditional textbook.

Several textbook analyses have shown that women are underrepresented and undervalued (Avery & Simmons, 2001; Commeyras, 1996; Feiner, 1993; Schocker & Woysner, 2013). For example, Avery and Simmons (2001) found that women were mentioned 258 times in social studies textbooks, while men were mentioned 1,899 times. In another study, Feiner (1993) examined several economic history textbooks and found that stereotypes of women were prevalent. Women were also often left out of the discussion on income inequity and unemployment. The exclusion of women in social studies curricula presents a major problem; as young men and women learn about history and the social sciences, they subsequently learn little about women's roles within them, and this reinforces norms and conditions that underlie gender inequity.

Beyond the lack of representation of women in textbooks, the way in which women are represented in the larger history curriculum can be problematic. Recent research on gender and human rights in world history classrooms and curricula present a dismal picture of women's place in history (Crocco, 2008). Both the perspective presented and the language used in the social studies curriculum are used to reflect and maintain the dominant values of patriarchy. For example, Sanford (2002), in her work observing social studies classrooms, found that the language of social studies reflects male dominated values: "While curriculum documents do not exclusively/specifically refer to males, reference to 'government', 'political parties', 'military', and 'church' serve to exclude females as having little or no place in these structures" (p. 2). If teachers are following this exclusionary curriculum, schools may be contributing to the problem of gender inequity; however, if their curriculum is inclusive, then the opposite may be true. There is some research on how education in both psychology and women's studies can reduce sexism (Jones & Jacklin, 1988; Pettijohn et al., 2008). This study attempts to build on previous work by examining the beliefs and practices of sociology teachers to better understand if sociology teachers, and the course itself, can be a means to achieving gender equity in the classroom.

### 3 Methods and data sources

#### 3.1 Participants

The participants in this study comprised six high school social studies teachers who teach a sociology course. The first author interviewed each teacher twice (an initial interview and a follow-up interview) and observed, two or more times, each teacher’s sociology classroom teaching. One teacher was not observed, because, due to personal reasons, she went on long-term leave before an observation could be done. The participants were purposely selected using maximum variation sampling. The six teachers’ demographics were racially and gender diverse. The participants’ teaching experience varied

from 1-10 years. The participants worked in both suburban and urban school districts. The participants also had a range of educational backgrounds in their study of sociology, with one participant holding a doctorate in sociology, several participants having taken sociology coursework in college, and one teacher who had no coursework in sociology. This study had a relatively small sample size as a result of the difficulty in finding participants who both taught sociology and were willing to partake in the study. Despite this, there was a high level of data saturation across the participants.

Table 1: Participants

Participant	Background	Prior Course Work in Sociology & Teaching experience	Views on Gender	Teaching Environment
<b>Mr. Bob Williams</b>	White male in his 40s. Teaching is his second career. He previously worked in sales.	2 classes in college in sociology. 10 years teaching experience. 8 years teaching sociology.	Describes himself as gender and colorblind. Does not see sexism as a large problem today.	Teaches at a large racially and socially diverse urban-suburban high school in MA.
<b>Ms. Liz Ram</b>	White female in her late 20s. Prior to teaching worked for the U.S. military for department of defense in Iraq as an interrogator. Worked in a male dominated field.	3 sociology classes in college. 1st year teaching.	Describes herself as a feminist. Believes sexism and gender inequalities are very prevalent in our society.	Works in a large urban-suburban district with racial and economic diversity in MA.
<b>Ms. Tina Smith</b>	White female in early 30s. Has been a career-long teacher teaching both in NC and MA.	2 sociology classes in college. 8 years teaching experience.	Describes herself as a feminist. Believes our society has a long way to go before equality between genders.	Works in a large urban district with racial and economic diversity in NC. Describes her school community as socially and politically conservative.
<b>Mr. Jay Bold</b>	White male in his late 20s. Previously worked and interned in law and banking, which he described as a male-dominated field.	Enough classes in college for a sociology minor. 4 years teaching experience.	Believes that we have advanced in some gender equality but not to the point that most of his students believe.	Works in a large urban-suburban district with racial and economic diversity in MA.
<b>Ms. Michelle Law</b>	African American woman in her late 30s. Worked in the high school she grew up at as part of the Teach for America program. She has recently left teaching, citing the excessive state testing stifling her ability to be creative in the classroom.	Had one introductory college class in sociology. Has 12 years of teaching experience. Has taught sociology for 8 years.	Believes that we have advanced in some gender equality but is concerned with the lack of equal pay and treatment of women in the workforce.	Works in a large urban district with racial and economic diversity in NC.
<b>Ms. Diane Kelley</b>	White woman in her mid-30s. Prior to teaching received her doctorate. Decided to teach high school after getting her doctorate because she wanted to have a daily impact on her students.	Ph.D. in sociology. Conducted her dissertation on the division of work between men and women in the household. Has 5 years teaching experience and 3 years teaching sociology.	Believes that gender inequality exists in society. Believes strongly in the concept of doing gender, which is that gender is a social construct in Western society.	Works in a suburban affluent district that is predominately White in MA.

#### 3.2 Context

All of the teachers in this study teach high school sociology in addition to history. High schools in the United States typically do not require sociology as a course; it is primarily an elective commonly taught in the junior or senior years (final two years of secondary schooling). Yet, sociology may serve as a valuable tool in supporting disadvantaged youth (El-Mafaalani, 2009), as well as serve as a place to challenge social problems and unravel prejudices along with civic education (Katunatic, 2009). However, even though sociology courses provide a pathway to citizenship education, sociology is

marginalized in social studies. In the last national survey of high school sociology courses in 2005, less than 40% of high schools in the United States offered a sociology course (DeCesare, 2008). This may explain why social studies teachers and academics have largely neglected the subject matter of sociology (DeCesare, 2008). Over the past two decades, there has been a discussion by the American Sociological Association around creating an advanced placement (AP) high school sociology course and test (Howery, 2002; Persell, 2001). This discussion and possible movement towards an AP curriculum has sparked controversy and interest amongst scholars.



Currently, the research on teaching high school sociology is sparse, and, in the last 20 years, there is only one known study of high school sociology teachers (DeCesare, 2007). This study attempts to fill that gap.

### 3.3 Data collection and analysis

During data collection, interviews lasted approximately one hour. Questions focused on the participant's background and beliefs on gender, the purpose of their sociology class, and the use of instructional methods in regards to teaching gender (see Appendix A). During observations, the first author took field notes and recorded the classroom dialogue for transcription. Additionally, she collected all of the teachers' lesson plans, student work, and curricular materials that dealt with gender.

During the analysis, we used the work of Erickson (1986) for guidance. Our data analysis involved making assertions within each case and then testing the assertions against the data corpus. We then engaged in a process of coding that data for each individual teacher and drawing themes from the data. In the first stage of qualitative analysis, the first author read and re-read the transcription of the interviews and created a coding scheme which was based on the research questions. The second reader engaged in a secondary coding, examining the codes and re-coding. During this process, we reworked our codes to ensure a level of inter-coder reliability. Codes were organized into two major categories: teacher beliefs about sociology and teacher beliefs about gender. The teachers were then placed into two groups: gender-focused teachers and gender-blind teachers. From there, each teacher's teaching practices in their sociology class were examined through classroom observations and collection of artifacts that related to teaching gender, such as student work, lesson plans, and curriculum maps.

## 4 Results

After an analysis of the data, three major themes emerged related to the beliefs and practices of the teachers in this study. First, the teachers' perception of gender inequity (i.e., if they were gender-focused or gender-blind) influenced both what they saw as the purpose of sociology classes and their instructional choices. Second, the teachers often ignored or found it difficult to cover women and women's issues regularly in their history classroom, while their sociology elective classes allowed for greater emphasis on gender and women's issues. Finally, the teachers found that high school sociology is a valuable course, because it was specifically designed to challenge students to reduce sexism and gender stratification.

### 4.1 Teachers' Backgrounds and perspectives

The sociology teachers' backgrounds influenced their beliefs and, subsequently, their goals for a sociology course as well as the instructional methods they chose. The teachers varied in what they thought the purposes of a high school sociology class were. These variations,

especially in how the teachers taught about gender, directly related to their own views and beliefs about gender.

#### 4.1.1 Gender-focused teachers

Gender-focused teachers were more likely to see a sociology class as a means to reduce sexism and focus more on teaching about gender roles, stereotypes, and feminism. For this study, we defined gender-focused teachers as those who believe strongly that sexism and gender inequity are serious problems in society, and teachers translated those beliefs into their teaching practices or philosophy in different ways. All but one teacher in the sample was gender-focused. For example, Liz Ram, a gender-focused teacher, considered herself a feminist and believed strongly that the United States is a male-dominated society. As she described, the purpose of sociology is "to leave your students with tools that can help make them better citizens" (Interview, November 19, 2013). This finding was corroborated by classroom observation data. For example, during the observations of Liz's classroom, the students were analyzing song lyrics and what messages those songs sent about gender. Liz described her lesson:

So they looked at songs and the first one I played was Beyoncé's "If I Were a Boy" where she basically explains like if she were a man, how life would be different because she was previously a female and that she would know how to treat women. All the songs were basically about women who didn't have any self-confidence because of their life. We did that and we looked at the lyrics to deconstruct the songs, once you step back and actually print other lyrics and read them, you see what they are calling women. And women get called names in the songs and we just notice that men were really not called anything besides the N-word. There was no derogatory word for any guys, and there were so many derogatory words for women, and why is the guy just called N-word or a hustler, a player like nothing more negative than that. (Interview, November 2, 2013)

After the lesson one student commented, "I never thought that way about the songs I listened to before" (Observation, November 4, 2013). During this lesson, Liz allowed the students to deconstruct the way in which popular music portrayed women. This allowed the students to begin to see the stereotypes associated with women in the media.

Gender-focused teachers were also more likely to spend substantial class time on gender. From classroom observations, it was apparent that teachers who believed in gender equity would use entire class periods to discuss women's issues. Other gender-focused teachers in this study spent several classes discussing how women were misrepresented in the media and degraded through language. In fact, many gender-focused teachers used the power of language as a starting point to teach about patriarchy. One participant, Tina Smith, explained,

Language is very interesting to me. If you ask students to like make a list or just think about words that are used to hurt girls, like, what's the worst thing you can say to a girl? And if you ask them to think about those words to hurt males, they all have to do with being female. The most offensive things you can say to boys, those all have to do with being female also. And I think that if they can understand the importance of language and why words have meaning and mean something, then I think that's often-times a good start. (Interview, September 29, 2014)

Gender-focused teachers thought deeply about how to make women's struggles real to their students. Another participant, Diane Kelley, explained that she needed to do a better job teaching gender because she owed it to the young women of today. Reflecting on her own life, she felt unprepared for the difficult choices women must make. She described how one of her goals, as a sociology teacher, was to teach about social expectations for women. She said, "So, I do feel like there's a need to do gender better—for young women who are going out into this world. That's sort of one thing that I don't feel like I was ever exposed to" (Interview, November 14, 2013). The more teachers described their experience with or awareness of gender inequity, the more time and curriculum they focused on women in the sociology classroom.

Many teachers in the study saw sociology as a place for women's voices to be heard. For instance, Diane Kelly, a gender-focused teacher, commented:

Actually, we talked to our students about that [sexism], and if we have moved far away from that. And even my students are conflicted with that answer, which is they'd like to believe that we have moved away from that sort of a setting but the reality is when we start seeing films in class and learning in sociology. I think, unfortunately, they come to the realization that we haven't really moved that far away [from sexism]. (Interview, October 29, 2013)

Diane Kelley echoed her sentiments when asked what is important for students to learn in the sociology classroom:

I think it's important to expose children to how the pendulum swings, how a radical feminist was very valued for a while and then all of a sudden it swings back, the ideas and then the negativity that comes along with it. So I think it's really, really important for them to understand that. (Interview, November 14, 2013)

Teachers, like Diane, who believed in sexism and gender stratification saw the sociology classroom as an important place to teach about these issues and bring awareness. Through classroom observation, it was evident there were numerous discussions of unequal pay, women's treatment in the media, lack of women in

power, and the use of language to perpetuate male dominance.

#### 4.1.2 Gender-blind teacher

Bob Williams was the one gender-blind teacher in the study. Bob did not view sexism as a problem and spent little time on issues of gender inequity in his sociology classroom. He described himself as gender-blind and did not view sexism as a major problem in society. He described sociology class as an elective "that should be on the lighter side" (Interview, October 17, 2013), rather than a place to reduce sexism. Bob explained what he covered in his class:

we have the frameworks that we're supposed to cover. So I cover the frameworks. I want them to have a lot of fun, and I'm hoping that they'll take more of an interest in sociology. (Interview, October 17, 2013)

Bob did not spend as much time on gender in his sociology class as the gender-focused teachers, possibly because he was unsure if society was still male dominated, as he stated in the interview:

Interviewer: Do you think that we live in a male-dominated society or not so much anymore?

Bob: That's a tough one. Yes and no. I hate to be sexist, but it's like I think, yes, there are certain male things. I think that's changing a lot. But I don't know to what degree.

You know what I mean. I think it's changing. It's more towards the middle.

[Bob went on to explain that he sees himself as gender, race, and class blind]

Interviewer: Do you see yourself as sort of color-blind? Class-blind?

Interviewee: I kind of do. I mean, hopefully I'm not being naive and altruistic, but I kind of do. I kind of feel that I just see people for people.

Interviewer: And with gender?

Interviewee: Yeah, the same thing. (Interview, October 17, 2013)

Bob went on to describe how he does not think about race, class, or gender, because he would not want to only be thought of as a White, middle-aged man. However, by choosing to be gender, race, and class blind, he also chooses not to delve as deeply into those topics in his curriculum. Therefore, the purpose of his class is very different from that of gender-focused teachers. Gender-focused teachers saw the sociology classroom as a place to challenge cultural norms and male domination. However, if one operates under the lens of not recognizing differences, then the desire to teach about those differences and the ramifications of sexism disappears.

#### 4.2 A Place for Women's Voices

##### 4.2.1 Extending gender in the social studies curriculum

The gender-focused participants believed that women and the study of gender were undervalued and under-



represented in the social studies classroom. They described sociology as being a place that specifically dedicated curriculum space to women, women's issues, and gender. Through classroom observations and the sharing of their curriculum, there was evidence that women's issues and sexism were covered much more in the sociology classroom compared to the other social studies subject that the teachers taught. As one participant, Jay Bold, noted, the textbooks in the world history class have left out women. Jay said:

[Besides sociology,] I teach world history and it is clear who is writing history and how it is being written. There's definitely an undercurrent when we're talking, unfortunately, about in world history. To date, what is mostly written is about a male view of world history, and finding resources [on women] is difficult because most of the content that we cite and we source is being written by a male. So in sociology it's easier to delve into those topics and unearth certain nuances of gender typing and roles between males and females. (Interview, October 29, 2013)

Many participants echoed similar sentiments. Liz Ram explained,

Yes, so the difference between teaching women's experience in the history classroom versus the sociology classroom is in a history classroom, even when you have a woman's perspective it's still using the context of a larger narrative that's a White male bias. But, in the sociology class that's where I think you are outside of that White male bias and we can do the women's experience as a standalone story. (Interview, November 14, 2013)

Liz felt the sociology classroom allowed women's issues to have their own significance outside the traditional male context. In one lesson, Liz Ram took two class periods to examine the gender bias for female politicians in the media. She had the students look at clips on the treatment of women in politics. The clips ranged from overt to subtle sexism towards female politicians in the media. The students responded with gasps from watching the video of the clips. One female student responded that she "can't believe the media focused so much on what women politicians were wearing." Another male student responded saying, "When you compile these clips altogether you can clearly see the gender bias and understand why we have so few women politicians" (Observation, November 19, 2013). The lesson Liz Ram put together appeared to have a profound impact on her students, yet it took considerable class time (a block period of 90 minutes and a regular period of 60 minutes), because she stopped the video often to highlight points and solicit student feedback. Liz felt a lesson like this was only possible in an elective class, because she had time and curricular freedom. The gender-focused teachers in this study found it easier to teach about gender in the sociology classroom because it

was a safe and open space to move away from the patriarchal framework found in the history curriculum, textbooks, and, sometimes, classrooms. In sociology, the teachers believed the curriculum allowed women to have a voice.

#### 4.2.2 The power of an elective

As a result of being an elective, sociology allowed for more content flexibility and time in the curriculum to address issues of sexism and gender. When Tina Smith was asked about how she has taught gender in the sociology classroom, she responded by explaining, "I think it's easier in sociology to do. It's just like topics allow you to. I think my goal in the class is to break down a lot of gender boundaries" (Interview, October 21, 2013). Jay Bold echoed a similar sentiment:

It's a pivotal part. It's a core component of sociology, the interactions between people. Understanding the differences between 50% of the population and being okay with accepting differences, but not pigeonholing a particular gender as a type and not allowing them approved mobility or the freedom to feel and be who they are based upon preconceived notions or being reared in the family that reinforces those types and being around peer groups that reinforce those types. (Interview, October 29, 2013)

Jay often used his sociology lessons to challenge cultural norms. In one lesson, Jay was discussing the wage gap with his students. He asked his students if cultural biases play a role in unequal pay between men and women. One female student responded, "I think there is a lot of pressure for women to stay home. Traditional gender roles still expect women to cook and clean," and, after a lengthy discussion, Jay then asked his students, "What can we do to promote gender equality?" One student responded, "I think we should make a social movement to have men taking on stereotypical female roles. We should use social media to breed acceptance for stay-at-home Dads" (Observation, November 15, 2014). Later, the students started to debate if government intervention was necessary to stop the wage gap. While students disagreed about whether the laws were necessary, they all appeared to agree that education promotes change and that more people need to be aware of the pay gap between men and women. In this lesson, Jay motivated his students to acknowledge gender inequity and search for solutions. This both brings awareness and empowers students.

The gender-focused teachers in the study believed it was easier to teach gender stratification in sociology, because the curriculum encouraged the teacher to address more current events. One teacher stated that she enjoyed teaching sociology more than her other classes, because there are many more opportunities to relate the material to the students' lives. For example, Michelle Law said,

Well, one thing is I feel like the curriculum allows you to have more time. Sociology lends itself for interpretation, bringing in different examples and bringing in even real up-to-date examples of what's happening that allow the students to connect with it. And I think that helps a lot with Sociology and allows you to go in deeper with these issues. (Interview, November 7, 2013)

Michelle mentioned how she had a very powerful class discussion with her sociology class around hair. The students' discussion of the hair sent powerful messages about gender divides and racial divides:

The girls really did a great job in explaining to the boys what it means to them in terms of having a good hair and how their hair defines them. I have one girl who's a mixed [race] student and she would explain to them [that] she has naturally curly [hair]; usually she wears it curly, but needs to straighten to seem more classy. Conversations like this on hair are very valuable because the students are exploring racial and gender norms. (Interview, November 7, 2013)

The teachers in this study repeatedly mentioned how the sociology classroom was a special place for discussion and exploration, because there was more time in the curriculum, the material could be connected to the students' lives, and it was a place to address sociology-related current events. The teachers also mentioned that, because there was not a state assessment or common exam at the end of the year, they had more time to focus on student exploration and discussion. These factors made it easier and more natural for teachers to discuss and teach about gender.

### 4.3 A Mechanism to Reduce Sexism

#### 4.3.1 Sociology class as a mechanism for change

By spending more time on gender and women's issues, the gender-focused teachers were able to use the sociology classroom as a place to reduce sexism. In many ways, they took an activist stance and saw the sociology classroom as a way to fight sexism. Tina Smith explained,

I think a huge part of something I'm trying to do, in order for us as a society to grow, is to get rid of the sexist feeling, that even though these kids may not think they're sexist, they actually are in the ways that they've been socialized and the way they think or even like the small little jokes they'll make about women in the kitchen. There is still this sexism. And the only way for our society to move forward is to eliminate sexism. And I think sociology helps with that because we'll show gender inequality and why that keeps us behind other countries of the world. (Interview, September 29, 2013)

Observational data corroborated that Tina was actively advocating to reduce sexism in her classroom. For example, she often made references to inequality between

men and women in her classroom. In one instance, Tina told the class, "Ladies, pay attention! Women make up 51% of population, but only 20% of government, and we have never seen a woman president" (Observation, November 20, 2014). The female students reacted to this with shock, and this provided a starting point for Tina to discuss systematic sexism. Similar to other gender-focused teachers, Ms. Smith brings awareness to her students about gender inequity and encourages them to discuss this issue further.

The gender-focused teachers in the study believed that the students were unaware of gender inequity and male dominance in American society. They believed their students were uninformed about the reinforcement of sexist values by the agents of socialization in American culture. Liz Ram described how agents of socialization reinforce gender roles:

We haven't been able to see cases of men and women behaving in ways that challenge those norms. They are provided with information such that women are just naturally better with kids. I'm trying to get them to break down how that's socially constructed. (Interview, November 14, 2013)

Some teachers even felt their students held onto a system of power in patriarchy without realizing it. Tina Smith commented,

It is in a lot of cases a male-driven society; what is expected of a young female is that she is supposed to be married by a certain age and have children. So I think those kinds of expectations, even the females do it, show sexism as well from the students. (Interview, September 29, 2013)

The gender-focused teachers believed sociology class was a chance to expose their students, who weren't aware of the sexism they displayed, to different cultural norms and, specifically, norms that valued women equally in society. Because the sociology classroom can become a mechanism for many teachers to reduce sexism and bring awareness, it becomes a unique place, and it can have a substantial value for students. Jay Bold explained,

I like to joke around and when they ask me what is sociology is about, I just say, 'Oh, it makes you a better person.' And it's sort of a lofty and silly thing to say but the people who know most about sociology, it probably resonates more with them at how simple the phrase is, but how probably how true it is. (Interview, October 29, 2013)

The gender-focused teachers in this study viewed sociology as important, because it challenges students to break cultural norms and begin to think about inequity. They described how, for many high school students, the sociology classroom might be the first time they question not only cultural norms but also their own values and



assumptions. The sociology curriculum gives students the time and ability to challenge personal notions about gender and sexism.

### 5 Significance

Research on the role of gender in the social studies classroom is limited (Crocco, 2008; Noddings, 2001; Schmeichel, 2011), and this study begins to fill that research gap. As we see in this study, the sociology classroom may be (or may not be) an avenue to teach about this marginalization and a place to discuss sexism and overcome patriarchal thinking. However, teacher beliefs play a key role in this. Additionally, this study helps further our understanding of the impact teachers' beliefs about gender have on their practice. Helping social studies teachers understand their own personal biases can help improve the teaching of gender and hopefully promote awareness of how teachers' views might influence their curricular choices. There is evidence that social studies teachers' beliefs on gender influence not only what they see as the purpose of high school sociology classes, but also the time they spend on gender issues in their curriculum.

While this study focused on in-service teachers, it has implications for both pre-service and in-service teacher education. Teachers might not naturally think about gender when planning their curricula, but they could be encouraged to do so. Although sociology teachers may be more aware of the role of gender and sexism in society, due to the course content, this study showed that some sociology teachers might still take a gender-blind perspective. Both in-service and pre-service social studies teachers need appropriate preparation on how to teach sociology (DeCesare, 2008) and, more broadly, gender. It may be beneficial to require pre-service teachers to take sociological courses on gender or methods around teaching gender, so that more teachers would be prepared to teach this valuable elective. Yet, it is unlikely that districts will increase the number of sociology courses offered to high school students. However, social studies scholars are pushing for more inclusive curricular choices (Crocco, 2008), and this could include more sociology among the traditionally offered history and social science high school courses. Another avenue for teacher preparation and professional development programs is to educate teachers on the implementation of curricula that directly examine gender bias. It is crucial that social studies teachers better understand how gender and sexism should be addressed across the social studies discipline, which will give gender a more prominent role in the curriculum. Doing this may help lead to a greater awareness of sexism and gender inequity.

This study contributes to research on social studies education and highlights evidence of the value of sociology as a high school course. Sociology, an often-undervalued discipline of social studies, is a central place to examine gender inequity and women's issues, which are traditionally overlooked in history and social science courses. It also serves as a place for students to challenge

gender stereotypes and become aware of structural sexism in American society. It is clear that social studies teachers have largely neglected the teaching of gender in social studies (Crocco, 2008). At the same time, sociology provides an important opportunity for a direct examination of gender inequity, especially since, for some high school students, a sociology class might be the first time they have a chance to think deeply about sexism or challenge male dominance.

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## Appendix A: Interview Topics

### Research Question:

What do high school sociology teachers perceive are the purposes for their high school sociology courses? What is the influence of their beliefs on their practice? Do the teachers' beliefs of sociology relate to their teaching of gender? If so, how?

### General Information

1. Record the participant's name
2. Why did you decide to be a teacher?
3. What courses and levels of those courses do you teach?
4. How long have you taught sociology? What are your favorite qualities of the sociology course? What struggles do you have with the sociology course?

### Teaching Philosophy/Beliefs

5. If you were to describe one of your typical sociology classes, what would students be doing? Describe for me what good teaching looks like.
6. What do you think the main purposes or goals of a teacher should be? When you teach, is there a specific perspective that guides your teaching?
7. Probe: Do you see the role of a teacher to reduce cultural bias?
8. What is your general philosophy of teaching?
  - a. Probe: Does your philosophy include reducing sexism or others isms?

9. Do you think your prior experiences have an impact on your teaching or teaching philosophy? How? Can you describe?
  - a. Probe: If you have had prior experience with sexism, gender inequity, how does that impact your teaching?

### **Teaching Philosophy as It Relates to Sociology**

10. What do you see as the purposes of high school sociology classes?
11. Do you teach (using the same instructional methods? about the same subject matter? perspectives? from the same teaching philosophy?) the same in your sociology class as you do in your other classes? If not, what do you do differently?
  - a. Probe: Any time the interviewee mentions gender or sex, ask them to elaborate on the above questions.

### **Curriculum**

12. Can you describe your sociology curriculum? What main themes or topics do you cover in the class? What main activities or projects do the students engage in?
13. What are your favorite topics to teach and what are your least favorite topics?
14. How do you teach about gender in sociology class?
15. How does your teaching philosophy have an impact on how you teach these topics?
16. How does your background have an impact on how you teach these topics?  
Probe/Reminder: Ask for documentation, aka lesson plans, student work (consider asking teachers to e-mail you some recent lesson plans, activities, student work after the interview)

### **Beliefs of Sociology & Gender Inequity**

17. Are you familiar with the term “agents of socialization”? If no, explain to participant what the term means. Do you believe agents of socialization (media, schools, peers, and family) socialized us towards sexism?  
Probe: If so, how? If not, why not?
18. Do you believe there is gender stratification? Do we live in a male dominated society?  
Probe: If not, why do you think this isn’t so? If so, can you provide examples?
19. Do you believe it is your role to teach to reduce sexism? If so, how? If not, why not?
20. Do you challenge sexism in your classroom? If so, how do you, or how do you try to, challenge sexism in your sociology classroom? Is this different than how you would do it in a general social studies classroom? Can you supply some examples?

### **Demographic Questions**

21. How do you identify racially? How do you identify in social class? How do you identify in gender? How do you identify in sexual orientation? Name, gender, class, race, sexual orientation.
22. Why did you decide to be a teacher?
23. What courses and levels of those courses do you teach? How long have you taught sociology? What are your favorite qualities of the sociology course? What struggles do you have with the sociology course? How long have you been teaching for? Have you taught in any other schools or districts?
24. Describe the student demographics of your current district and school. What is the best quality of your school and/or department?



## Appendix B: Classroom Observation Sheet (Streitmatter, 1994)

### General

What did I notice about the lesson, content, or curriculum in terms of gender?  
What were the main issues that struck me during my visit?

### Curriculum

How long was spent on each topic?  
How were events portrayed?  
What was the language used around gender?

### Classroom Discourse

Who is the class by gender?  
Who is called on by gender? Record time with each gender.  
Describe non-verbal contacts.  
Describe verbal contacts.  
Who is disciplined? Who is praised?  
What topics are discussed? At what length?  
Who does not talk at all?  
Who talks the most?  
What is not taught?

### Methods

What instructional methods are used?  
What is the organization of the classroom? Does this seem to facilitate gender equity or hinder it?  
What words does the teacher use during instruction or interaction? Are the words gender-neutral, gender bias, or promote gender equity?  
Who does the teacher monitor? How?



## **FRANKFURT DECLARATION:**

### ***For a Critical Emancipatory Political Education, June 2015***

Political Education (or Citizenship, Social Science or Democracy Education) is delivered, on the one hand, through different school subjects as well as through cross-curricular practice. On the other hand, Political Education is also practiced outside of schools in different non-formal contexts: in educational institutions, through youth associations, political foundations and NGOs, as well as in informal settings, for instance, participation in social movements and other grass-roots initiatives.

Power relations, domination and social inequalities are changing and with them the conditions of political socialization. Meanwhile, new actors approach schools and provide them with educational materials. In this context, principles and standards of Political Education must be constantly thought anew. With this declaration the authors want to articulate important positions for a critical-emancipatory Political Education, as contributions to current discussions.

*1 Crisis: a Political Education that focuses on the democratization of societal relations deals with the radical changes and multiple crises of our time.*

Changing times require new political alternatives for collective learning processes. As the crises of capitalism, ecology, democracy and reproduction deepen, questions of socio-ecological transformations are of increasing importance to Political Education. A world of changes and crises cannot be grasped with standardized models. An approach based on measurable competencies will be meaningless if political knowledge and skills are not dedicated to the political agency of contemporary and future societal questions.

*2 Controversy: Political Education in a democracy should reveal conflicts and dissent, and fight for alternatives.*

Society is the theatre of opposing interests and relations of domination. In accordance with the fundamental components of democracy, contestations and social conflicts should be articulated and politicized. Controversy, understood as principle of teaching and learning, is not only the documentation of different positions alongside already existing and influential perspectives, it deals with contentious issues and underlying dissent, reveals opposition and encourages critical thinking. A genuine political controversy unveils different interests, ways of thinking and practices and highlights possible alternative societal developments for the future. The political is not reducible to an understanding of politics as a process of problem-solving bound by an outcome of law-making. Thus, Social Sciences should not be reduced to an education in governance and management.

*3 Criticism of power: autonomous thinking and action are limited by dependencies and structural social inequalities. These relations of power and domination should be detected and analyzed.*

Debates and controversies in society are determined by power inequalities and the unequal distribution of resources. These phenomena are often not sufficiently reflected upon. The responsibility of a critical and emancipatory Political Education is to reveal dynamics of exclusion and discrimination. Which societal problems are being debated, which voices are being heard and which actors impose their understanding of the common good? What are the reasons for social- and self-exclusion of groups and individuals from social and political participation? Political Education discusses how exclusions are produced and how barriers are created: between the private and public sphere, between the social and the political, legitimate and illegitimate, experts and lay people.

*4 Reflexivity: Political Education is itself part of the political. Learning relations are not free from power structures, Political Education reveals this.*

Learners and political educators are part of social and political discourses which influence their perceptions, ways of thinking and actions. The neo-liberal approach of the 'self-entrepreneur' or 'self-responsible' consumer imposes itself within educational institutions. Furthermore, power structures continue to be reproduced along dominant gender and ethnic categories. Critical-emancipatory Political Education starts where these kinds of normative constructions are made visible, criticized and questioned. Political educators are conscious of their social embeddedness and take a critical-reflexive stance, which they make transparent and therefore open to criticism. In doing so, they offer learners protection against being subdued by the ideas of the educator, whilst reinforcing the right of the student to self-will and self-determination.



*5 Empowerment: Political Education provides an empowering learning environment within which experiences of power and powerlessness are scrutinized and challenged.*

Political learning and political action are not based solely on rational analysis and decisions. They are also linked to concrete living conditions including struggles for material goods and social recognition. Political judgement is also embedded in society, it arises in social interactions and contains, beside cognitive elements, also physical-emotional components. Political positioning reveals itself through anger, enthusiasm, rejection and engagement. Social orders are also inscribed in bodies. A crucial condition of successful Political Education is the perception of these experiences as being both sources and obstacles of learning processes. This implies the participation of the learners in planning and reflecting on their own learning processes. The complexity of issues in Political Education as well as students' resistance towards education should be considered as productive sources of learning and political empowerment.

*6 Changes: Political Education creates opportunities to change society, both individually and collectively.*

Individuals are subordinated by societal structures and relations, but at the same time they are also in a position to shape these relations. Political Education allows the individual to perceive of heteronomy and self-subjugation. It instead enables people to make self-determined decisions and to participate in society. Political emancipation enables the expansion of individual and collective ways of thinking and spheres of action in a given situation. This takes place through criticism, opposition and protest against the existing social relations of domination. Political Education opens up spaces and experiences to all children, adolescents and adults through which they can appropriate politics as a social field of action. It enables learning processes of self-appropriation and adaptation to the world through confrontation with others in order to find ways not only to reproduce, but also to change the existing order through individual and collective action. Political action gives rise to new possibilities of experience, of thinking, and of establishing (new) political alternatives.

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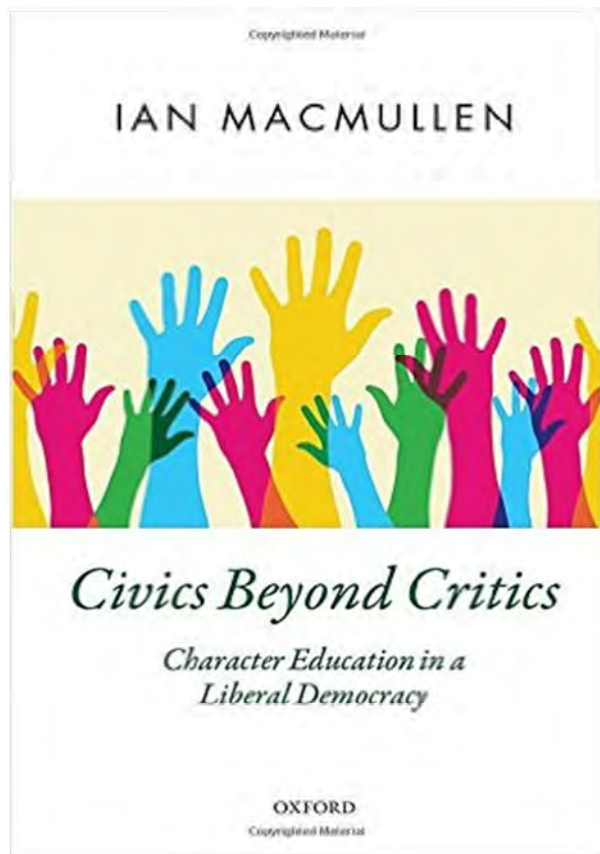
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**Civics Beyond Social Science? A Review Essay on Ian Mac Mullen, *Civics Beyond Critics. Character Education in a Liberal Democracy*. Oxford University Press 2015, 288 pp., £30.00. ISBN: 9780198733614**

towards fundamental institutions of a nation's polity, causing too quick support for radical change (Part III).

Overall, he admits that his proposal(s) for (an) alternative(s) is well developed only with regard to alternative goals, but hardly so with regard to concrete prescriptions of how exactly to achieve these.

**1 Part I: Compliance with the law – an individual or a social phenomenon?**

According to the orthodox view, education should avoid habituating as well as teaching compliance with any law just based on a certain degree of general trust in the democratic legislator and / or the collective legal wisdom of democratic ancestors or today's public. Instead, the merit of laws should be openly discussed and individually evaluated based on plain facts (reason) and basic universal values (morals).

Mac Mullen criticizes that such a strategy puts not only an unrealistic faith in the intellectual ability of children as well as young people to make qualified judgments but also puts too much faith in the individual's capacity of moral self-restraint (actually acting according to one's theoretical moral conclusion). The "orthodox view" would expect them to be "gēniuses" and "saints", but it would be "pure fantasy" (p. 81) to expect that such a pedagogical strategy would produce the high level of compliance which is needed to safeguard liberal democracy. Thus, according to him, the orthodox view suffers from "lofty expectations" (p. 81), because students' assessment of the necessity to comply with a particular law would always be prone to "self-deception" (p. 82) and "self-interested biases" (p. 87), leading them much too often to break it.

Instead—within the context of a long-established liberal democracy like those in many Western countries—it would be much wiser to cultivate "non-autonomous motives for compliance" and to "encourage non-autonomous compliance" (p. 80). Educators should instill the belief in a "prima facie duty to obey the law" (p. 72), inculcate defeasible trust in unseen reasons for a law (especially social coordination), and form a habit of compliance in order to create an inner discomfort not so easy to overcome when breaking a law. Later on, he advises to "routinely" use stories and examples which portray compliance as wise, admirable and which depict illegal acts "almost always" as morally wrong. This "encourages that [educated] person to feel and express disapproval of others who do break the law (and thereby strengthens the social stigma...)" (p. 258).

This book undertakes a fundamental critique of a theory of civic education which its author calls the "orthodox view" of civic education. Ian Mac Mullen, associate professor at Washington University in St. Louis, defines the "orthodox view" as a theory of civic education which argues that normative civic character education a) is necessary for the flourishing of democracy, but b) that its content should be strictly limited to very basic and universal (not particular) moral values because otherwise the ability to think and act as critically autonomous citizens would be undermined. In the "orthodox view", individual critical autonomy based on reason and moral self-discipline is seen as the most important value. According to the author, though the "orthodox view" does not dominate the educational reality of parenting, schools etc., it constitutes a theoretical ideal popular especially among academics but whose full implementation would entail dangerous consequences.

It is the second part b) of the "orthodox view" which attracts the critique of Mac Mullen. His central claim is that character education must go notably *beyond* teaching basic universal moral values. He criticizes that the orthodox view heavily overestimates the benefits and potentials of individual, critical autonomous reasoning and that it neglects its negative side-effects and disadvantages: "crude moral relativism, subjectivism, nihilism, and skepticism" (p. 34). Thus, the orthodox view is said to engender dangerous societal consequences in three central areas around which the book is structured: (too low levels of) compliance with the law (Part I), (too low levels of) voluntary political participation (Part II), and (a too negative) attitude

He openly admits that his alternative approach may come with a price to pay, i.e. to promote compliance even in those kinds of situations when non-compliance would be due even in liberal democracies: unjustified acceptance of unjust laws, refusal of civil disobedience even when justified and needed. But he argues that such trade-offs (critical autonomous learning but more law-breaking versus more non-autonomous learning but more compliance) cannot be fully circumvented. To a certain degree, the potential costs of his approach, which should be applied carefully with these potential drawbacks in mind, would be a price worth paying.

The argument in Part I is based on a certain premise: that the order of liberal democracies is significantly endangered by citizens' (potential) non-compliance with the law, and that the most important cause of this (potential) non-compliance lies within the individuals themselves: their potential for reason and moral self-restraint is allegedly in many cases not sufficient for preventing them from breaking the law, because the lure of self-interest is often too intense to hold them back. This is at least the narrow focus of his argument. According to this premise (focus), within liberal democracies, the cause of crimes has to be looked for (predominantly) within the individuals themselves, but (mostly) not within the social system, because it is liberal and democratic, so we can normally expect that it treats its citizens in a fair manner.

Potential critics could ask on which kind of social-scientific theory in sociology, social psychology or criminology and on what kind of corresponding empirical studies and results about the causes of compliance and non-compliance with the law (in liberal democracies) this premise is based. Is the author's premise (focus) in line with central scientific findings about the causes of crime established by these scientific disciplines? Such a scientific grounding of the argument is important, even indispensable, because Mac Mullen's premise (focus) is not "self-evident" or a "matter of fact", but would instead by many educators and academics be seen as a rather controversial (maybe some would even say ideological) hypothesis about how the social world works. I cannot find any explicit mention of such empirically well-founded theories in the book.

There is at least one empirically well-founded theory in the social sciences about the question why people comply with the law or not, which is not in line with Mac Mullen's premise (focus). This is the comprehensive theory and empirical research of Tom Tyler, Professor of Law and Psychology at Yale University about the question of "Why People Obey the Law" (see especially Tyler, 2006a + b).

According to Tyler, (the huge majority of) people obey the law when they regard institutions, authorities and rules as legitimate: legitimacy leads to compliance. And this perception of legitimacy is dependent on procedural justice: people see laws, institutions, authorities and rules as legitimate when

these act according to fair procedures. So the message of Tyler's research is: if you want more compliance, take care that legal institutions and organizations adhere to lay principles of procedural justice. If you think there is not enough compliance, reform the institutions. Look for the fault not (only or predominantly) in the alleged moral deficits of individuals and their alleged proneness to illegal self-interest and self-deception, but look (equally or mainly) for the unfairness of the institutions. Their fairness, even in contemporary liberal democracies, cannot be taken for granted. According to Tyler, (most) people are able to critical autonomous compliance. They are competent to apply reasonable principles of procedural justice. And this competence is an important incentive for organizations and authorities to act fairly and to make fair laws and fair legal systems.

A civic education based on Tyler's research (with Mac Mullen's goal of stabilizing the liberal democratic order in mind) would try to teach pupils the importance of procedural justice for social order, what acting according to procedural justice means, how exactly to do it, whether today's authorities and institutions in the US and elsewhere actually act according to them, what could be done to improve on that, and so on. Of course, this may also be too narrow an approach, because there may be other scientific theories about why people comply with the law. But Tyler shows at least very important aspects of law compliance which are not taken into account in Mac Mullen's proposal.

Mac Mullen could object that people's conception of procedural justice would be prone to self-serving distortions, i.e. that they would perceive something as "just" if it serves their interests. But nowhere does Tyler write that people's understanding of procedural justice would be distorted in such a manner. Rather, he documents people's understanding of procedural justice as sufficiently reasonable and well-suited for a well-functioning, just social system. If anything, his research overview shows that most people tend to see the procedural justice of their society in a too rosy manner because of conformism. So, according to Tyler, if there is a subjective distortion in people's minds, it more often leads to an overlegitimization of society (law) because of conformism than to an underlegitimization of society (law) because of self-interest, as Mac Mullen asserts.

Hence, Tyler's theory and results is in many ways contrary to Mac Mullen's premise. If Tyler is right, Mac Mullen's pedagogy (if successfully applied) may be a rather problematic approach: people could lose (some of) their competence to critically evaluate the legal system and the law in the light of procedural justice and could more often comply simply out of unreasoned habit, beliefs, and trust. Thus, the incentive for organizations and authorities to act fairly and to make fair laws and fair legal systems may decline (further). The potential for misuse and unfair distortions of the legal system may increase. Perhaps some powerful interest groups with such intentions in

mind might be delighted, but would this serve the long-term stability of the liberal democratic order, which is so strongly emphasized by Mac Mullen?

The role of power of different interest groups to shape the legal systems, the power balance in democratic systems, especially in the political system of the US, where money plays a crucial role for getting elected and making laws (e.g. Gilens, 2013, Bartels 2009), and the consequences of this for teaching about the law is hardly taken into consideration in Mac Mullen's plea for pedagogical methods which promote non-autonomous compliance with the law. What should pupils learn about the role of illegitimate power in the legal system? Is this unimportant, because we can simply trust liberal democracies that power will mainly be used in a legitimate manner? Amongst others, Matsueda & Grigoryeva (2014) are not so sure: "the powerful have more input into the content of criminal law, a point illustrated by the relatively soft penalties for white collar and corporate crimes compared to the harsh penalties for street crimes typically committed by the less powerful." Should teachers downplay that in order not to endanger pupils' compliance with the law and to stabilize the order? Whose interests could this serve? Contrary to this perspective, Mac Mullen explicitly bases his argumentation on the premise that the relevant "rules treat all members with roughly equal concern and respect; (...) and that [these] are made using ... a procedure that affords each adult member of the population an equal opportunity to influence the decision." (p. 46f) I suppose that scientific critics of the discriminatory "carceral state" in the US (e.g. Gottschalk, 2014; Lerman & Weaver, 2014 a + b) would not accept that as an appropriate description of the actual state of affairs.

Mac Mullen might argue that people's competence to procedural justice (as documented by Tyler) would be a result of the fact that the "orthodox view" of civic education does not dominate in the reality of parenting, schools etc. Only if the "orthodox view" would gain the upper hand, anomie would spread. The dominance of non-autonomous methods to teach law compliance in the real world of education would be the reason for Tyler's humane research results. But that objection would not be convincing: Tyler shows people's competence to reason, that is to *autonomously* differentiate between procedural fairness and unfairness. I cannot see how this competence could have been furthered by the rather undifferentiated, *non-autonomous* habit of compliance, beliefs and trust in the just legal system which Mac Mullen advocates.

Mac Mullen might also object that only adults would be competent to evaluate procedural justice, but not young people. For children this may be true, but it would be a bit surprising if the contrast between adults and young people would be so stark. If contemporary adult citizens are competent to evaluate procedural justice, why should young people not be able to learn it? Even if this would be the case, there would be no danger that teaching according to the

orthodox view would cause a fall of compliance with the law among adults, as Mac Mullen fears (as long as the procedural justice of institutions remains the same).

It is not my intention to assert that Tyler's theory is definitely right and Mac Mullen's premise (focus) is definitely wrong (though Tyler provides a huge amount of empirical evidence, whereas Mac Mullen does not). Every scientific theory is fallible. Maybe there is another social science theory XY of law compliance which can support Mac Mullen's premise (focus). In this case, Mac Mullen would have to explain why we should believe only in theory XY instead of Tyler's theory or another theory ABC. Thus, my main point is to show by example that it is important to ground pedagogical reasoning of law education in an adequate examination of social science theories about law compliance (sociology, social psychology, criminology), carefully balancing their theoretical perspectives, arguments and empirical research results.

The importance of considering social science theories about law compliance is furthermore shown by other social scientific empirical research into the causes of delinquency. Much of this research shows that the educational style of the family has a very important impact on the probability to become delinquent (Uslucan, 2012). Especially, experiences of violence within the family during childhood and adolescence promote the formation of aggressive, delinquent, violent characters which turn a blind eye to the law (Wetzels, 2009). Central risk factors for antisocial behavior are the negativism of parents towards their child, complications during pregnancy and at birth, "coercive parenting", and the like (Fend 2000, 442ff.). The most important protective factor is having an emotional relationship to at least one person during childhood and youth, who deeply cares about one's wellbeing (Fend, 2000, p. 451). Interventions in early childhood in disadvantaged social backgrounds like the Perry Preschool project, despite being very time-limited, strongly reduced crime rates in comparison to control groups (Berth, 2013). Especially non-compliance with the law in the form of violence is, as neuropsychology shows (Bauer, 2011), usually an emotional reaction to enduring social exclusion, dis-respect, neglect etc.

Tackling these kinds of social factors is possibly much more potent and more important for reducing delinquency (especially in its most severe form, i.e. violence) than instilling a prima facie duty to obey the law, inculcating defeasible trust in unseen reasons for a law, and forming a habit of compliance, as Mac Mullen advocates. Do his strategies work against the potent, deep-seated socio-emotional causes of deviance shown in the last paragraph? He provides no empirical evidence for the potential efficacy of his suggestions. Although I do not want to maintain that teaching young people about the causes of delinquency mentioned in the last paragraph would reduce delinquency rates (for example by better parenting), I think it is important that young people



understand these socio-emotional and social causes of crime (which are often neglected in the political discourse of some countries), so that they can call into question simple theories which “explain” crime as a consequence of self-interest and so that they are able to understand how social and societal factors impinge on individual behavior: civic education is about young people understanding their society, not only about making them fit into society, as in Mac Mullen’s character education.

If you instead “routinely” use “stories and examples which portray compliance as wise, admirable and which depict illegal acts “almost always” as “deviant” and “morally wrong” in order to “encourage that [educated] person to feel and express disapproval of others who do break the law (and thereby strengthens the social stigma...)”, as Mac Mullen (p. 258) advocates, you are at risk to convey a rather different, unintentional message to pupils (especially if they are hardly capable of autonomous critical reasoning, as Mac Mullen thinks). Such a narrow, focused “routine” –at least if not carefully balanced by other “routines”– may promote one-sided individualized theories about crime among children and students, which may develop their lay theories on such “routines” and think: “the cause for delinquency is in the individuals themselves and their unmoral “natural” inclination to pursue self-interest. So what must change in order to reduce the problem? Of course the individuals themselves have to change, what else?” Social stigmas may be targeted at social groups with an above-average crime rate. Students may think: “Why are so many individuals of group XY unmoral law breakers, in contrast to group ABC? I disapprove and stigmatize them. Something must be wrong with this group XY.” Dolovich (2011), Professor of Law at UCLA School of Law, argues that an unscientific ideology of “radical individualism” in the public is one important cause of the dysfunctional development of the criminal and penal system in the US in the last decades. According to this popular narrative, crime is purely a product of an individual choice and free will of the actor (Dolovich, 2011, p. 26f). Should “character education” about the law also involve some critical analyses of those ideologies? If so, then Mac Mullen’s approach hardly makes a contribution to that; maybe the recommended “routine stories and examples” (p. 258, see above) may unintentionally further strengthen this “radical individualism”.

## **2 Part II: Civic engagement – an individual or social phenomenon?**

In part II of the book, Mac Mullen deplores the problem of low political participation and civic engagement (low turnout, low participation in social movements, low willingness to inform about politics, etc.). Again, this is said to be due to citizen’s “human nature” (p. 149), i.e. her / his inclination to be self-interested, which causes a free-rider problem: the polity’s prospects for realizing moral goods increase when many citizens use their democratic oppor-

tunities, but the individual citizen has little motivation for such actions. For Mac Mullen, this means that a central task of civic education is to increase the level of civic engagement, because “without widespread and vigorous popular participation ..., a society will never come close to realizing the liberal democratic ideals of individual freedom and equality.” (p. 143, footnote 6)

According to Mac Mullen, the “orthodox view’s” concept of civic education is far from being able to accomplish that, because it relies only on highlighting strong moral reasons for participation, but leaves it to the autonomous reasoning of the student. This reliance would be “naïve in the extreme” (p. 149), because such autonomous moral reasoning would hardly be able to overcome self-interest.

Instead, he believes that cultivating non-autonomous habits of and tastes for political participation and civic engagement (for example via activities like service learning) could be more successful. But even these two ideas would not suffice. Most important of all would be to promote “civic identification” with one’s nation’s polity, i.e. an individual sense of responsibility for its flourishing, an emotional sense of “my-ness”. This is meant not to be the same as “patriotic love”, because this feeling would be too uncritical towards the polity. Instead, civic identification means feeling pride when a polity acts in a human, reasonable, just manner and feeling shame when this polity acts in a problematic, bad and unjust way. So, civic education has to cultivate both of these feelings, and pride shall not dominate.

This kind of civic identification is said to enhance political and civic engagement.

To promote feelings of responsibility, pride, shame, and the corresponding civic identification, teachers and other role models should for example model these emotional reactions for students appropriately and use the language of “our country” and “we” as often as possible (p. 255).

In short, the claim is that a “good society” is dependent on *widespread and vigorous* participation of the citizenry, but that this is hampered by individual free-riding. Civic education has to trick these individuals into such participation by promoting civic identification.

Again, one could ask if these suggestions can be backed up by empirically well-founded research in the social sciences.

Indeed, a review of empirical studies by Youniss et al. (1997) has shown at least for the US that students who participated in high school government or community service projects in their youth are more likely to join voluntary associations and are politically more engaged later in life than those students who did not (even if one controls socioeconomic status, etc.). This can be interpreted as evidence for Mac Mullen’s claim that habituating participation in youth can overcome low civic engagement. One can regard this as a worthy goal in itself. However, it is a different question whether fostering widespread participation

in voluntary associations and political engagement is a reliable instrument or even the main gateway for preserving / achieving the good society (i.e. "realizing the liberal democratic ideals of individual freedom and equality", p. 143, footnote 6), as Mac Mullen suggests. Cross-national empirical research in political science has identified a central causal factor which is very important for the "good society" (peace, liberty, equality, provision of public goods, high degree of well-being, and the like): social capital / *generalized* social trust. This is also revealed as the decisive factor for overcoming exactly the kind of free-rider problem which Mac Mullen worries about (Rothstein, 2012, 147f.). In the narrow sense, generalized social trust is operationalized as whether citizens think that most people in their country can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people (the international range is very wide: from 60% trust in Scandinavia to 10% in Brazil). Beyond that, generalized social trust constitutes according to Rothstein (2012, p. 147) "*a source of social solidarity, creating a system of beliefs asserting that the various groups in society have a shared responsibility to provide public goods*". Moreover, empirical research has shown that social capital / generalized social trust brings with it all the good things Mac Mullen strives for: trusting people are more inclined to have a positive view of their democratic institutions, participate more in politics, give more to charity, and are more active in civic organizations. Cities, regions, and countries with a high share of trusting people have better working democratic institutions and less crime and corruption (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005, 41f.; Rothstein, 2012, 146f.).

Thus, social capital / generalized social trust is very similar (if not identical) to what Mac Mullen has in mind when he speaks of civic identification, although he lays weight on the rather vertical, hierarchical identification of the citizen with the state whereas the scientific concept of social trust shows the importance of the horizontal identification of the citizen with his / her compatriots for overcoming free-rider problems (this *horizontal* dimension is crucial for the cause of social trust / civic identification, see below): vertical identification arises mainly out of horizontal identification.

How do we "get" social capital / generalized social trust? What is its origin? Mac Mullen's claim that cultivating civic engagement and political participation among citizens (for example promoting habits by for example service learning) is the key has a parallel in social science as there is a theory in the tradition of Robert Putnam which argues that more civic activity in voluntary associations would lead to more social trust/ social capital because of their socializing effects on cooperative values and norms. But this theory is refuted by a host of empirical studies (see references in Rothstein, 2012, p. 149): Trusting people join voluntary associations more often than other people (self-selection effect), but it is not the other way around: more participation does hardly add to

*generalized, society-wide* social trust (Rothstein, 2012). "*Thus the idea that adults' membership in associations creates social capital that can be used in the wider society simply does not hold.*" (Rothstein, 2012) At least, the forefront of political science researchers in this domain (Bo Rothstein and others in The Quality of Government Institute at the University of Gothenburg) does not see promoting widespread and vigorous participation as a promising strategy to foster social capital / social trust.

Instead, their comprehensive empirical research locates the roots of social trust not in the educable character traits of individuals (the importance of which is stressed by Mac Mullen), but in the A) political and B) social structure of societies: A) political structure means that social trust is cultivated by seeing trustworthy, honest, incorrupt, impartial government institutions exercise power (note the similarity to Tyler's theory of procedural justice outlined above). B) social structure means that social capital / social (dis)trust is—theoretically and empirically—strongly causally related to two types of equality: economic (in)equality and (in)equality of opportunity promoted by (non-)universal social policies. This holds internationally as well as over time and across states in the US (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005, 48).

"The distribution of resources and opportunities plays a key role in establishing the belief that people share a common destiny and have similar fundamental values. When resources and opportunities are distributed more equally, people are more likely to perceive a common stake with others and to see themselves as part of a larger social order. If there is a strong skew in wealth or in the possibilities for improving one's stake in life, people at each end may feel that they have little in common with others. In highly unequal societies, people are likely to stick with their own kind. Perceptions of injustice will reinforce negative stereotypes of other groups, making social trust and accommodation more difficult." (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005, p. 52)

Of course, one can try to combine the research results of Rothstein & Co. with Mac Mullen's pedagogical approach by suggesting a) that students should learn to exert political engagement in favor of impartial government institutions and social equality (of opportunity), and b) that the teacher should cultivate feelings of pride and shame depending on the degree to which their society lives up to these ideals or not. However, despite the ample empirical evidence provided by Rothstein & Co., such an approach may be partly regarded as "partisan"; at least some fractions of the political spectrum will reject the egalitarian spirit of such a kind of civic education. Moreover, according to the research of Rothstein & Co., there is no easy solution to deliberately "creating" more social capital (civic identification) by political engagement for better institutions, because reducing inequality by social policies is dependent on citizen's trust in the

competency and impartiality of the bureaucracy, which is present in rather equal societies, but lacking in rather unequal societies. Thoroughly fostering real, socioeconomic (not only formal) equal opportunity in the education system from kindergarten up to universities, which also brings together children and young people from very different groups and backgrounds (instead of tolerating socioeconomic segmentation), is held to be the most meaningful approach to foster social capital in unequal societies which lack it.

So, despite (theoretically) possible combinations (see above), there is again a contrast between Mac Mullen's focus on individual character traits as the central cause of a social problem (here: low civic identification and engagement) and the diagnosis of an empirically well-founded theory in the social sciences, which sees political and social structures as the main cause of this problem. From the viewpoint of this scientific theory, trying to change character traits alone is far from being able to tackle the problem, because it does not change the social structure, which is the pivotal factor. For civic identification to emerge, people of group A must perceive a common fate, a common lived-in world with groups B, C, D etc. In a highly unequal society (for example like the US), this is unlikely (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). Thus, trying to "manufacture" civic identification by talking about "our country", "we" (Mac Mullen, p. 255) and the like may be experienced by students (in unequal societies) as something artificial, as "empty talk", which lacks a solid socioeconomic foundation: it is being talked about a common destiny which is hardly experienced in the real world. To use a rather extreme example: how would young French Muslims, who are on average heavily discriminated against in France (Adida et al., 2016) and who on average hardly have real equal economic opportunity, respond to such teacher talk of "our country", "we", "identification", and the like? In many French schools with a high share of Muslim pupils, the atmosphere is very tense (Wiegel, 2015).

In the worst case, trying to change character traits (if successful) in such a social situation by manufacturing feelings of responsibility via education may amount to (unintentionally) legitimizing a possibly unjust, unequal socioeconomic structure which violates the reasonable interests of many disadvantaged people (those structures exist not only in autocracies, but in liberal democracies, too).

Again, I do not want to suggest that the empirically well-founded scientific theory of Uslaner, Rothstein, the Quality of Government Institute in Gothenburg and many other political scientists (see references in Rothstein, 2012 and Uslaner & Rothstein, 2005) is definitely right and that Mac Mullen's ideas are definitely wrong. Rather, the contrast is meant to show that civic education proposals need a solid basis in social science research. Science is fallible, and there may be another scientific theory XY which may be able to support Mac Mullen's ideas. But then we also

would have to answer the question why we can be so sure to believe only in theory XY and not at all in the theory of Rothstein (2012) and others.

At least, I think that all students should know about theories like the one of Rothstein, in order to understand that a flourishing society is *not only* a question of "inner" individual morals, but that it may *also* be strongly dependent on genuinely social phenomena like generalized trust which in turn may be dependent on a certain degree of economic equality (of opportunity) and the procedural justice of the state and its bureaucracy.

### 3 Part III: Political institutions – accumulated wisdom of the ages or subject to political decay?

Mac Mullen states that civic education is often (unintentionally) biased in favor of the status quo, i.e. in support of the existing laws and national institutions of one's own country, even when fully informed, completely reasonable and neutral people would agree that a different, negative opinion could be scientifically as legitimate as a positive one. As reasons for this status quo bias he points to cognitive phenomena like adaptive preferences of citizens (teachers, parents), their better knowledge of their society's institutions and of arguments in favor of these, confirmation bias (non-rationally sticking to one's belief despite empirical counterevidence), and so on.

The "orthodox view" rejects such status quo biases and argues that one should try to minimize these as far as possible, because they detract from pupils' autonomous, critical reasoning. From this viewpoint, status quo biases are appropriate only with regard to very basic institutions: civil rights, democracy, right to a subsistence minimum, and the like. Insofar as these principles are not violated, open discussion is advocated.

In contrast, Mac Mullen sees status quo biases in favor of "fundamental political institutions" (p. 2, p. 39, p. 42) which go somewhat *beyond* the core of liberal democracy (like f.e. favoring a *particular*, national form of democracy, like parliamentarism in Germany and presidentialism in the US) in a much more positive light and defends educational status quo biases in favor of these *particularistic forms* (though he does not completely endorse them). Educators should use these status quo biases consciously. So they should cultivate a "low but non-negligible degree" (p. 189) of general trust in the status quo ("Burkean trust") and supplement this with "particular trust", i.e. a bias favoring selected institutions.

Concerning "Burkean trust", he raises the question "Should educators encourage children to be impressed by the longevity of law?" and answers it with "a heavily qualified yes" (if democratic standards are met). To "teach Burkean trust", Mac Mullen considers that one could praise the polity's founder for their wisdom, assert the principle of "collective wisdom", tell children that what was a good solution in the past can be expected to be a good solution today, and teach them that lots of particular existing laws are

good and to avoid teaching them that (m)any existing laws are bad (p. 193). However, he admits that cultivating “general trust” has also drawbacks (supporting all features of one’s polity despite the possibility that a few of them may be very problematic). Therefore, he advocates a rather “low degree” of general trust.

Concerning particular trust, i.e. favoring particular, selected laws and institutions, he concludes that “the best civic education will typically include significant elements of such bias” (p. 211).

However, he admits two important objections against status quo biases: fallibility and legitimacy. Fallibility means that the favored particular laws and institutions are unjust or turn out to be disadvantageous, problematic etc. in the future, so that such an education may act as a barrier against social progress. Legitimacy means that a polity should not be allowed to “manufacture” the societal consent on which it depends, but should be based on the autonomous approval of the governed. But for Mac Mullen, these two objections do not nullify the justification of status quo biases, they only limit their justified range.

To separate justified status quo biases from those who are not justified, he presents five indications, which warrant status quo bias in a particular, specific case:

- longevity of a particular law / institution (“at least a generation”)
- support of an “overwhelming” majority of adult citizens for a particular law / institution
- these adult citizens must not have been educated in a biased fashion
- opposition against the law / institution is permitted
- a majority of those citizens who are disadvantaged by the law / institution believe in its justification

One could critically ask why the assessment of a particular institution / law in science, especially in the social sciences (political science, economics, sociology, and others) is not mentioned at all as a topic to be considered in this list. At least, these are the experts for those issues which civic education deals with. Surely they are not infallible, but normally more competent than the population. If for example I ponder whether I should teach my class that the reform of economic institutions – abolishing the institutional status quo of tax-free CO<sub>2</sub>-pollution, thereby restricting the institution of economic freedom – for combating climate change is definitely necessary for preventing dangerous climate change although it may place a substantial financial burden on the population, do I look to the opinion of the huge majority of scientists or do I look to the majority opinion of the (American) population, which is swayed by the “merchants of doubt” in the fossil fuel industry? (see for example Maibach et al., 2013 for the stunning contrast between popular doubts and scientific reason at least in the US). If a political institution is endorsed by an overwhelming majority of

the population, but most political scientists view it as outdated and detrimental, should we nevertheless apply status quo bias instead of debating it controversially with students? What is more, populations may not only err sometimes, as Mac Mullen admits, they may moreover have *systematically biased* beliefs (e.g. Caplan, 2007).

It is also noteworthy that Mac Mullen immediately qualifies that not all the five conditions enlisted above (which he terms “content-dependent reasons”) must be met in order to allow a status quo bias (p. 220). He does not specify whether four, three or two of these specific reasons and which (combination) of these are sufficient and to what degree they must be fulfilled, because an algorithm could not be specified. Less than five may be acceptable, because status quo bias can, according to him, additionally be justified by four further, general, so-called “content-independent reasons”:

These “content-independent reasons” for justifying status quo biases in education are: political stability, contentment, compliance, and civic identification. Political stability means that adhering to the status quo is a good thing in itself as it strengthens law compliance because of trust in old laws and out of habit. Moreover, continual political and legal change discourages private investments and exacts transaction costs. Contentment means that approval of the status quo is a good thing in itself because people’s subjective well-being is lower when they are opposed to institutions under which they must live – some critics might regard that argument as a bit ideological and cynical: beware of becoming a critic, because it makes you feel so bad! Compliance means that those who support the status quo are likelier to comply with its laws, thereby stabilizing the social order and social peace (see Part I). Civic identification means that people who support a polity are likelier to identify with it, thereby promoting political engagement (see Part II).

Mac Mullen does not precisely articulate when the advantages of political stability outweigh the possibility of social progress and the intensity of societal disagreement. But he gives an exemplary impression of what he has in mind: in Germany, civic education should encourage support for its system of proportional representation, in the US, the election system should be taught with a bias favoring its majoritarian system, but in Britain, the matter should be openly debated because in this country the question is very controversial in its political discourse. The main intention of Mac Mullen is to reject the “orthodox view”: open, evenhanded, critical pro-conversations about fundamental, long-lasting political institutions (even if they only constitute a possible form of liberal democracy and not a core part of liberal democracy itself) without status quo bias education are said to give rise to the danger that future citizens will support “radical proposals for change” (p. 253), overturn and abandon good existing institutions and supplant them with bad ones. It would

threaten people's support for established institutions that served their parents and ancestors well in the past. Thus, a (partially) status quo biased education (beyond the core of liberal democracy) acts as a very important "bulwark against regression" (p. 225). So again, he is deeply skeptical about the probability that enough (young) people will arrive at sound conclusions by openly, autonomously weighing the pros and cons of "time proven" laws and institutions. They are insufficiently able to appreciate the "wisdom of ancestors", the "wisdom of ages" (p. 223). For him, even teaching young people the value of social stability directly (as an argument in a controversial debate) is far from being an adequate substitute for status quo bias because he thinks that young people are not able to appreciate the value of stability sufficiently, as the costs of political change seem too abstract and remote for young people (p. 231). But if this would be true, does this argument of intangibility not also hold as severe (or even more) for the difficult imagination of alternatives to the status quo, of possible future positive consequences of political reforms? Common biases in human perception and thinking such as the availability heuristic, loss aversion, etc. might further strengthen an (rational or irrational) hold-on to the status quo, so that it at least should perhaps not be further intensified through biased education.

Mac Mullen's theory of civic education can be seen in light of the analytical distinction between "allegiant citizenship" and "assertive citizenship" made by Welzel & Dalton (2014). Allegiant citizenship is defined very similarly to what Mac Mullen favors for liberal democracies: confidence in institutions that constitute the pillars of state order, law abidance, norm compliance, and the like. Assertive citizenship is defined very similar to the ideal of the "orthodox view", which Mac Mullen views skeptically: a posture that encourages people to be critical in general, stressing individual liberties and assertively claiming reforms for equal opportunities, and the like. Mac Mullen contends that (too) assertive citizenship is likely to lead to predominantly negative consequences, whereas allegiant citizenship is likely to lead to predominantly positive consequences. He does not provide empirical evidence for this claim in his book. But Welzel & Dalton (2014) have examined this question empirically in a profound cross-country study. Their empirical results are not in line with Mac Mullen's claims: assertive citizenship has outright positive consequences for effective governance (allegiant citizenship has none), and this effect is not limited to non-democracies. Of course, there may be other scientific studies, but again, one should not construct civic education proposals without considering scientific evidence.

It is not easy to evaluate Mac Mullen's deliberations in Part III, because the text is, in the aggregate, rather ambiguous. On the one hand, there are many passages in favor of heavy status quo biases (see above). On the other hand, there are also some

passages where this stance is markedly qualified: so he declares dissent, protest, and civil disobedience as "vital" (p. 248) and argues that status quo educational bias could be sometimes "worth combating" (p. 250). Even in those cases where he sees status quo bias as strongly justified, he rejects not only indoctrination, but also explicitly rejects the idea of omitting counterarguments and –evidence or presenting them too unfavorably (p. 249). Older students should even possess familiarity with the strongest argument against their polity's institutions and in favor of alternatives (p. 256, footnote 3). So, what clever, subtle instructions should we then use to apply status quo bias in a controlled manner? In a footnote on page 209, he writes that the most defensible forms of status quo educational bias will "rarely" involve concealment of alternative political arrangements, because contrasts are instructive. Instead, status quo bias should be put into practice through the "manner in which alternatives are presented". But if this "manner" should not include omitting or skewing arguments against the status quo (see above), then how should this "manner" exactly look like? Where is the line drawn? Of course, an "algorithm" may be impossible to specify, as Mac Mullen says – but everybody knows that the devil is almost always in the details.

Despite the ambiguity, overall the emphasis of the book seems to be rather on promoting the status quo, fostering political stability and conserving the political heritage of wise ancestors. One can question if such a strong emphasis on conservation is appropriate. Mac Mullen's focus – as in Part I – is again on the probably misguided, inept individual who tends to cause social trouble and endangers the social order. I can find no scientific empirical evidence for this premise in the book, but I do not exclude that it may be found somewhere in the social sciences. More important is that there is a different, scientifically well-founded perspective based on empirical evidence which diagnoses *exactly the contrary* problem, which Mac Mullen hardly gives the equal weight which it deserves, namely the problem of politically self-detrimental social conformism and system justification:

"A number of studies in recent years document the pervasiveness and importance of the human desire to make sense of existing social arrangement by endowing those arrangements with the assessment that they are appropriate and reasonable. This motivation is found among those who benefit from and, more paradoxically, those who are disadvantaged by those arrangements. (...) People are found to be motivated to believe that (1) existing social arrangements are just; (2) they have not personally suffered from discrimination; and (3) harboring emotions such as resentment is socially inappropriate. These cognitive and motivational factors generally encourage deference to existing social conditions. Why are people motivated to

engage in system justification? Studies suggest that system-justifying ideologies decrease anxiety, uncertainty, guilt, frustration, and dissonance, and increase satisfaction with one's situation in life. Interestingly, this is true for both the disadvantaged and the advantaged." (Tyler, 2006a, 394, 388)

Should educators reinforce this deference, this propensity to system justification as would be likely under Mac Mullen's approach? Which social groups could profit from that? As an alternative, a more balanced approach to civic education might at least *not only* ask what pupils have to do for their country in order to safeguard social order (Mac Mullen's focus), *but would also* have to ask what the country has to do for each individual (but does not do at the moment) and what each individual can rightly claim from the system (but often does not do because of emotional pain). Thus, a more balanced approach might *also* ask how we can strengthen individuals to realize, defend and pursue their interests against systems, *fundamental* rules, *fundamental* institutions, powerful interest groups, *fundamental* "carceral states" (as some scholars denote the US, see Lerman & Weaver 2014a, 2014b and Gottschalk, 2014 among others), and the like, that disadvantage them. As the quote from Tyler makes clear, this would have to include irritating a sizeable amount of status quo justifying biases of individual citizens. You do not read very much about this in Mac Mullen's book. Of course, Mac Mullen may object that he does not definitively exclude irritating a few status quo biases. However, at least in civic education in schools, teaching time is scarce. I wonder for what that scarce time would be disproportionately spent in practice if a teacher puts so much emphasis on the benefits of the status quo as Mac Mullen advocates.

A further problem with regarding an overwhelming majority opinion in favor of the status quo as a probable justification for status quo bias is what especially (but not only) Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1980), a renowned scientific expert for public opinion and communication, has termed the "spiral of silence": people are social beings who strive for social approval as an end in itself and fear social deprecation and isolation. People have a "natural tendency to conformism" (Fukuyama, 2014b). Because of the spiral of silence and the tendency of conformism, most people back off from uttering or even exploring, thinking earnestly about unconventional opinions which they think are socially non-accepted, for example which are widely held to be "un-american" or the like. Probably such tendencies may be reinforced by pedagogical approaches like Mac Mullen's. Is such reinforcement necessary? Should it be welcomed?

The spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann), system justification (Tyler) and the natural tendency to conformism (Fukuyama) means that informal civic education in places out of school is already in many instances tilted in favor of the status quo. Thus, one could argue, at least the school should try to be the

one exception, the singular place in which all citizens once in a lifetime encounter and *controversially debate* rather unconventional, little-known *scientific* viewpoints which challenge some status quo ideas, instead of – once again – hammering the status quo into their heads. Then, the school could be the one, singular single place which can irritate status quo bias as much as possible to provide at least a little bit of a counterweight to society's status quo bias.

But Mac Mullen declines this. Contrary to the empirical evidence provided by Tyler and others, Mac Mullen (p. 257) just "doubt(s) that this [a strong status quo bias in informal civic education out of schools] is often the case". He does not let the reader know on which empirically well-founded scientific theories his personal "doubt" is based. His fear of a politically inept youth forming problematic beliefs, rejecting and abolishing supposedly good old institutions, which were built by our (allegedly) wise ancestors, is too strong. But how realistic is it to expect that a few hours of civic education taught according to the "orthodox view" per week in schools may spark so much trouble? Empirical evidence shows that (mostly status quo biased) parents have by far much more influence on pupil's political beliefs than has formal civic education in schools (Fend, 2000). Furthermore, fundamental political institutions are very sticky (Fukuyama, 2014b, see below) and very resistant to change.

Despite this, one can argue that teaching students the possible pitfalls of revolutionary change, which Mac Mullen fears, is indeed a meaningful goal. But his status quo biased education is not the only way to do this, and it may even not be the most effective, impressive one to do it. An alternative way could be to critically dissect revolutionary ideologies directly and to investigate selected detrimental revolutionary changes in human history directly (for example the disappointing and cruel consequences of socialist revolutions in Russia, Kuba, Latin America and elsewhere, the derailment of the French Revolution under the Jacobins in 1793/94, and the like). By this, students could *directly* see the possible difference between good intentions ("equality") versus bad outcomes (poverty, violence) and could understand how easily humane ideas and good intentions can fundamentally err, can go awry, can be misused and perverted.

However, fears of the pitfalls of social change must not blind us to the possibly severe malfunctioning of our current institutions. An important implicit premise of Mac Mullen's book and his plea for (many) status quo biases is the assumption that current liberal democracies in the West, including the US, are all in all trustworthy political systems which may have some notable, but clearly limited single deficiencies here and there, but overall they function quite well, so that a deeply critical, controversial examination of their fundamental political institutions and an exploration of profound, democratizing reforms of them is neither advisable nor necessary (so that educational status

quo bias is justified with regard to fundamental national political institutions even beyond the core of liberal democracy). However, this is a quite uncertain, contested assumption, because some comprehensive empirical studies in political science provide ample and detailed evidence for the conclusion that (at least) the US today is in a very important sense in fact mainly a democracy for rich people, but hardly so for other people:

“Can a country be a democracy if its government only responds to the preferences of the rich? In an ideal democracy, all citizens should have equal influence on government policy – but as this book demonstrates, America’s policymakers respond almost exclusively to the preferences of the economically advantaged. (...) With sharp analysis and an impressive range of data, Martin Gilens looks at thousands of proposed policy changes, and the degree of support for each among poor, middle-class, and affluent Americans. His findings are staggering: when preferences of low- or middle-income Americans diverge from those of the affluent, there is virtually no relationship between policy outcomes and the desires of less advantaged groups. In contrast, affluent Americans’ preferences exhibit a substantial relationship with policy outcomes whether their preferences are shared by lower-income groups or not. Gilens shows that representational inequality is spread widely across different policy domains and time periods.” (Gilens 2013: <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/9836.html>)  
“Using a vast swath of data spanning the past six decades, Unequal Democracy debunks many myths about politics in contemporary America, using the widening gap between the rich and the poor to shed disturbing light on the workings of American democracy. (...) Bartels demonstrates that elected officials respond to the views of affluent constituents but ignore the views of poor people. (...) Unequal Democracy is social science at its very best. It provides a deep and searching analysis of the political causes and consequences of America’s growing income gap, and a sobering assessment of the capacity of the American political system to live up to its democratic ideals.” (Bartels 2009: <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/8664.html>)

Of course, again, there may be other scientific theories which disagree with these studies. However, it is noteworthy that both books were widely appraised in the scientific community: f.e., Bartels’ book was the winner of the 2009 Gladys M. Kammerer Award of the American Political Science Association, and Gilens’ book was the winner of the 2013 Woodrow Wilson Foundation Award of the American Political Science Association. There are also other books of renowned political scientists which arrive at similar conclusions (Hacker & Pierson 2010). Therefore, and because of their serious implications, which concern a central

pillar of liberal democracy, it is reasonable for civic education to take these findings into account.

“Taking into account” does neither mean that the basic decision between liberal democracy and a socialist dictatorship of the proletariat should be taught in a controversial way. (History has shown which is better to protect human rights and foster prosperity). Nor does it mean that civic education should teach that Gilens and Bartels have “revealed the truth” and other authors, who disagree with their argument, are wrong. Instead, “taking into account” means a) to refuse gullibility, i.e. to scrutinize Mac Mullen’s assumption of a quite well-functioning liberal democracy and b) to assemble material and data from divergent scientific sources and then examine and debate controversially in class whether a “democratic deficit” (in the sense above) exists in the US (and elsewhere) or not and if so, whether *democratic* reforms even of fundamental national political institutions in the US (and elsewhere) are advisable and manageable to cure these (possible) democratic deficits.

Or should we instead heavily bias such debates in class in favor of the status quo – if we dare to hold them at all – just because a) non-biased debates could possibly stir up a destabilizing socialist revolution by today’s young people in the future, because b) we should trust the wisdom of the founders of our polity that all will surely be fine as in the past, because c) exposing the possibly strongly biased influence of rich people on the law-making process could reduce compliance with the law, and because of d) contentment (“beware of becoming a critic of our system, because it will make feel you bad”)?

Would Mac Mullen choose this thorny topic raised by Gilens, Bartels and others in the US as a part of his preferred civic education curriculum and would he teach it without status quo bias and without exuding “Burkean trust”? One cannot know for sure because he does not address this topic. But given his socio-evolutionary optimistic assumptions about the accumulated “wisdom of ages”, this would be a bit surprising.

A further problem of Mac Mullen’s argumentation is his balancing of the costs and benefits of political stability and political change. He admits that clinging to the political status quo has the potential cost of foregoing the opportunity of further improvement, but that reforming the status quo has the potential cost of regression, which he thinks is in many cases much higher – a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. And the “orthodox view” would risk promoting regression. This balancing leaves a further important potential cost of clinging to the status quo out of consideration: political decay (Fukuyama 2014a, 2014b). Firstly, fundamental (political) institutions do not exist in a social vacuum, but are subject to an ever rapidly changing social environment, so that needs, challenges and requirements on the institutional system change. Secondly, even if there is no deliberate, radical change of a fundamental (political)



institution from the outside, it develops in a path-dependent manner subject to its own internal logic and interests, so that there is incremental change over the times. One or both of these facts taken together can lead to political decay, which means that an existing (political) institution (or a system of it) fails to adapt to the demands of changing circumstances and instead becomes increasingly rigid, petrified and snarled in its own logic and vested interests.

This is exactly the critical diagnosis of the political system of the US today made by some political scientists like Francis Fukuyama (he thinks the EU is on a similar way, see also Majone, 2014, for an analysis of the decay of the EU):

“The very stability of institutions, however, is also the source of political decay. Institutions are created to meet the demands of specific circumstances, but then circumstances change and institutions fail to adapt. One reason is cognitive: people develop mental models of how the world works and tend to stick to them, even in the face of contradictory evidence. Another reason is group interest: institutions create favored classes of insiders who develop a stake in the status quo and resist pressures to reform. (...)

Political decay thus occurs when institutions fail to adapt to changing external circumstances, either out of intellectual rigidities or because of the power of incumbent elites to protect their positions and block change. Decay can afflict any type of political system, authoritarian or democratic. And while democratic political systems theoretically have self-correcting mechanisms that allow them to reform, they also open themselves up to decay by legitimating the activities of powerful interest groups that can block needed change. This is precisely what has been happening in the United States in recent decades, as many of its political institutions have become increasingly dysfunctional. A combination of intellectual rigidity and the power of entrenched political actors is preventing those institutions from being reformed.

The U.S. political system has decayed over time because its traditional system of checks and balances has deepened and become increasingly rigid. In an environment of sharp political polarization, this decentralized system is less and less able to represent majority interests and gives excessive representation to the views of interest groups and activist organizations that collectively do not add up to a sovereign American people.” (Fukuyama, 2014b)

The provocative title of Fukuyama’s article in *Foreign Affairs* is “America in Decay”. In contrast, Mac Mullen (p. 223) often leans on Burke and rather tells a story of continuous “incremental improvement” of people’s political beliefs and institutions, resulting in the “wisdom of ages” (endangered mainly by the “orthodox view” of civic education). Political decay plays hardly any role in this model of political

evolution and the importance of asymmetric power distribution for the development of a political system is also hardly considered appropriately.

It is interesting to see how strongly Fukuyama accentuates sticky, dubious mental models and intellectual rigidities as causes of political decay. So, should civic education strengthen and deepen these mental rigidities even further? Should civic education instill even more “Burkean trust”, as Mac Mullen advocates? Should we really consider teaching that “a good solution in the past can be expected to be a good solution today” (p. 193)?

Again, I strongly emphasize that this is not to say that civic education should side with Fukuyama’s position in anyway, because there may be other, different, equally well founded scientific opinions. But why should civic education (subtly) disadvantage or even ignore Fukuyama’s argument (or similar scientific contributions)? Why should we not openly debate the challenging, well argued position of Fukuyama in class, who has comprehensively studied and written about the historic development of political systems, political order, and political evolution around the world since the beginnings of humanity (Fukuyama, 2011 + 2014a)? My intention is not to reject the possible value of political stability – it is in every case a serious argument to be considered, but not more. Mac Mullen may significantly underestimate the potential costs of institutional stability, which Fukuyama lays bare.

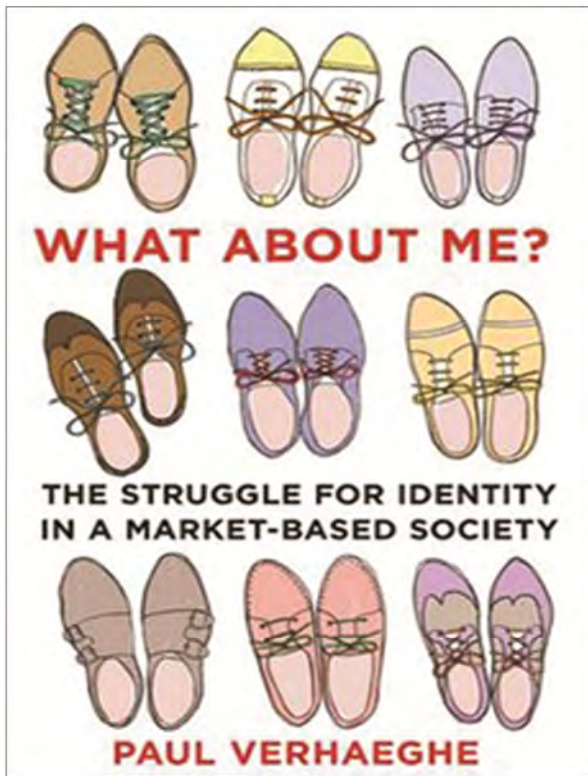
#### 4 Conclusion

Proposals for civic education should not be designed *solely* based on political philosophy and civic education philosophy. It is important to check whether such proposals can be backed up by well-founded empirical research in the social sciences (political science, economics, social psychology, sociology, and the like). Moreover, character education should not overly concentrate on fostering (minor) individual virtues, but should also promote the capability to scrutinize fundamental (conformist) popular ideologies and myths as well as fundamental political institutions (not in an arbitrary subjective way, but based on respected scientific theories). Students should understand that many social ills can have their origin at least as much in social structures as in character traits. And if character traits are held to be very important for civic education, then one should try to curb bad character traits *not only* of ordinary people (incompliance with the law, low political engagement, missing appreciation of fundamental national institutions), *but should also include* possible bad character traits of future elites (procedurally unjust leadership and governance, indifference against poverty and social inequality, succumbing to the temptation of interest group capture and corruption, intellectual rigidity, and the like), which also endanger the social order (as argued by the social science theories presented above).



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Paul Verhaeghe, professor of clinical psychology at Ghent University has published *'Identiteit'* already in 2012 in Dutch, but the book became well known at international level after its translation in German (*Und ich? Identität in einer durchökonomisierten Gesellschaft* 2014) and in English (2014). From his clinical experience as a psychotherapist, he investigated the relationship between identity and socio-economic system, making connections between apparently distinct phenomena, and allowing sudden new insights into what is happening to us nowadays.

Verhaeghe argues that the neoliberalist ideology invades all fields, from economy to daily life, school systems, university and science, health sector and media as well, altering the way we think about ourselves. He touches several topics, addressing ethic, and educational issues as well, offering examples from the health and university systems, concluding with the search for solutions about what needs to be done to improve the future.

### Identity

Verhaeghe traces notions of identity historically, providing an overview of the shifts in Western thinking about the self within an accessibly written historical discussion of the philosophical and social scientific debates. This long part seems digressive in relation to the book's declared subject-matter, anyway it provides a convincing view of the tight link among identity and social historic development. Ultimately, those debates concerning the nature of identity are resolvable into the familiar binary juxtaposition of nature versus nurture.

The author explains that identity is shaped by two basic urges: the desire to merge with the other, and

### Review of the Book:

**Verhaeghe, Paul. 2014. *What About Me? The Struggle for Identity in a Market-Based Society* Translated from Dutch by Jane Hedley-Prole, Scribe, 272 pp; \$29.99  
ISBN-10: -1922247375  
ISBN-13: -978-1922247377**

the desire for autonomy, distancing ourselves from the other; both need to be kept in balance. We are the product of constant interaction between our brains, or, broadly, our starter kit of genes, neurons, and hormones – and our environment.

Our psychological identity is in interaction with our surroundings because we are always mirroring (Lacanian notion of the mirror) what we encounter in our environment. *'What about Me?'* maintains that identity is interpreted as a construction, and that we build it by accepting or rejecting identity-conferring messages. The process of identity formation will therefore vary with the nature of society. We are all unique because we have been exposed to different mirroring and have made our own choice; and yet to a degree many of us are similar, because the mirrorings of particular groups and particular cultures are to a great extent shared.

To the question of whether human beings are inherently good or inherently bad creatures, he suggests that altruism as well as aggression inhere to higher primates and the cultural environment determines whether empathy or egotism predominates. Verhaeghe expresses the opinion that the neoliberal obsession with the individual at the expense of the community ignores the fundamental human craving for love and hospitality.

The biggest danger is, according to the author, that people internalize neoliberalist views as common sense and apply them in all fields of life, according to the concept of a hegemonic ideology of the Italian social-theorist Antonio Gramsci.

Ethics is effectively about the essence of human nature, and therefore also about who we are. Changes in the ethical sphere spark changes on the sphere of identity and vice versa. For centuries, religion and ideology provided a source of common identity, centring on ethics and a shared sense of meaning. Throwing traditional norms and values overboard results not in perfect freedom, but in chaos and fear, says Verhaeghe.

### Neoliberalism

In economics, neoliberalism promotes the radical programs of deregulation, privatization, marketization, and globalization. The Dutch philosopher Hans Achterhuis is quoted, who highlights an important difference between classical and neo-liberalism. Classical liberals want a strict division between state and society, limiting the intrusion of the state into private

life, while neoliberals seeks to subordinate the state to the supposedly free market, ascribe to the state an activist responsibility to promote the market not merely as a fact of life but as a *way* of life.

Verhaghe cites a case, to exemplify the new working conditions and a dangerous concept of meritocracy: the “Enron society”, a company in which concepts such as “the public interest” and “social service” are displaced by the profit motive, where only very few winners (in predecided percentage) are possible, mortifying the other ones, which are considered guilty because of their lack of success.

He states that ‘meritocracy’ is not bad in itself but how it is applied nowadays is bad, for several reasons: it is only for a few, it forgets that people do not start at the same level and do not have the same opportunities, is decided wrongly and the process has negative consequences. The combination of over-regulation and control system leads to less productivity and less creativity, and in destruction of intrinsic motivation; workers have to devote more time to prove their results than to work, and the quality is lowered further.

The essentials of the new comprehensive value system are competitiveness, the primacy of contractual over all non-contractual human relationships, speed, innovation, interconnectedness, and the casting off of the shackles imposed by traditions.

Neoliberalism has successfully advanced those values that serve its purposes, while suppressing those that confront it with obstacles. The result is a values revolution which has wrought profoundly detrimental changes in our individual identities and personalities and, at the same time, weakened society.

The moral norm is suddenly once more external to the individual. We lose internalised authority; just like toddlers, adults need to be incentivated to follow the rules by means of material reward. Organisations must therefore carry out surveillance, frequent evaluations, which soon come to resemble controls.

The Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre is quoted, who reminds us that even the word ethics *sounds passé*. In his magnum opus *After Virtue*, MacIntyre explores, among other things, the myth of modern moral freedom.

Autonomy and individual control vanish, to be replaced by quantitative evaluation, performance interviews, and audits. Deprived of a say over their own work, employees become less committed (‘They don’t listen anyway’), and their sense of responsibility diminishes (‘As long as I do things by the book, they can’t touch me’).

Disoriented citizens of neoliberal societies may look for satisfying and durable identities in, for example, nostalgic, reactionary, nationalist, or fundamentalist ideas and movements. More commonly, they seek solace in consumerism, increased consumption as a road to happiness. Instead, it results in what Verhaeghe calls “depressive hedonia.”

The neo liberal meritocracy can only function through a centrally directed and rigidly planned

system that measures ‘production’. Anything that doesn’t fit within rigid parameters, anything that falls outside the measuring system doesn’t count anymore, and is deemed unproductive. The yardstick must apply equally to all, measurement must be standardised, and everything is sacrificed to the juggernaut of measurability.

In the contemporary neoliberal meritocracy, a sense of humiliation and hopelessness can lead to despair, more aggression, less confidence, more fear and less participation in community life, revenge and violence stems.

### **Some examples: education, university and health**

The author cites examples from the areas known to him: research/ university and health sector, explaining that today’s pay-for-performance mentality is turning institutions such as schools, universities, and hospitals into businesses. Schools are ‘competing’ against each others („top-schools”, „top-teachers” etc.), even individuals are being made to think of themselves as one-person enterprises.

University education was valued largely for its social relevance, besides the contribution of the scientific research. The aim was to develop critical, highly educated citizens who could place their talents at the service of society. Nowadays the efficiency of education, research, and healthcare is supposed to be measurable; it isn’t easy to measure intellectual work, however much of the new buzzwords (such as educational performance, output, ranking, and benchmarks) might create this impression. The surrender of academic and clinical independence goes hand in hand with an increase of supervision.

About education, instead of moaning about how egoistical and materialistic the younger generation are, we should be seriously questioning current educational theories. The influence of parents and family has shrunk to a fraction of what it once was; while norms and values were once predominantly mediated by the parents, the media today play a greater role.

Excluding the idea that a school can be value-free as every form of education convey values, the author underlines that we need to be more aware of the fact. He describes the biggest difference among the contemporary goals of competence oriented learning and the traditional form of education writing: the *Bildung*, intended as a process of education and maturation, in which an optimally rich culture guarantees a rich palette of potential identification (p.152).

The dominance of neoliberalism is evident in the educational jargon; there are economic terms popping up in educational texts, as well as in the sphere of relationship: ‘knowledge is human capital’, ‘competences are a capital that young people must learn to maintain and develop’, ‘learning is a long term investment’.

About health and disorders, Verhaeghe puts forward crucial questions: Depression often results from a sense of impotence, when people feel powerless to

change their lives; powerlessness and helplessness are among the most toxic emotions, and the first reason of work-related depression is a lack of respect and lack of recognition.

Too much inequality leads to a loss of respect, also towards themselves, resulting in a warped view of the self, disorientation, and despair; high inequality in nations is associated with a laundry list of health and mental disorders.

The last 50 years have witnessed a staggering proliferation of psychiatric disorders. The neo-liberal ideology has harmful consequences on the identity of the individual, and on mental health, even affecting the nature of the disorders from which we suffer: burnout, depressions and performance anxiety, fear of failure, eating disorders, sex addiction, etc.

Many children are diagnosed with ADHS, autism and other DSA. Ellen Key considered the XX century 'the century of the child', and we witness that the XXI century seems to be the 'century of the disturbed child'.

Verhaeghe deplores the socially destructive effects of over-treating deviation, and that psychopharmaceuticals are overprescribed. He sees a resurgent model of standardised medical "illnesses" in psychiatry, with a bloated - Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders - (DSM) that has both reflected and caused the over-diagnosis.

The 'illness model' is widely accepted; it lets everyone off the hook; no one needs to feel responsible for problems. You might even feel a sense of reliefs, and less guilty, argues Verhaeghe, to be diagnosed with an illness, and to incorporate it into your identity in order to excuse your inability to measure up. With so few options and so much pressure to fill the very limited number of slots designated for "winners," having a neurologically determined ailment often feels better than being a failure.

### **The good life**

The book does have a clear thesis: shows the profound impact that social change is having on people and on their identity. Verhaeghe deals with proposals for improvement in the last chapter 'The good life', inviting us to think through a solution. His suggestions are: overcoming the neoliberal ideology, developing value based citizenship, changing economy, work, education and living conditions. The author declares that we need the independent thinking, and individual responsibility in order to change overcoming the risk of the syndrome TINA - (There Is No Alternative).

He is sure that it is incumbent upon us all to reexamine the claims of neoliberalism, to see them for the ideological assertions that they are, and to stop internalizing them as common sense. It is up to us to reengage as citizens, in looking for alternatives, to demand better political choices, and to hold politicians accountable, in order to create a healthy society. It means becoming citizens not just in the voting booth, but above all in the way in which we lead our lives, taking the first steps towards creating that social polity

through the choices that we make.

A new economy should be developed, which must shed the idea of quantitative growth as fast as possible in favor of qualitative sustainability, establishing a new balance between difference and equality, fostering sense of belonging and autonomy, so that values like solidarity move to the forefront.

The author underlines that, if we want politics to be governed by the public interest, we ourselves must promote that public interest, rather than private concerns. I appreciate very much that the author suggests changes to and through values, although it may be not enough.

- 'What about me' is interesting as proposal for interpreting our lives in the XXI century, as it high-lights the possible big risks of our society, and emphasizes the responsibility of everyone of us; it is helpful in educational field because of the concept of identity, of the offered explanation for health disorders, and for citizenship education.

To support his ideas, Verhaeghe quotes a number of authors and researches, novel, films etc., mostly in an appropriate way; in some parts we are expected to believe him on the basis of his experience, because some statements are impossible to be proven in a few pages.

Of course, this book fits first of all for the western industrialised societies, there are differences in the different places. It is never possible to find one only reason for all the problems; the faults are never unilateral, anyway denouncing the distortions is the best premise to resize the system. In some countries it could be challenging to think about the role of the justice systems, of the Churches and of the politicians as well, in engaging for a better society.

The book is written in an accessible style, it is aimed at a wider public, not just for specialists; it looks informative and thought provoking, succeeds in addressing common feelings, and in attracting attention. Clear examples are given in order to explain the main arguments and that implies sometimes the need for oversimplification, and of referring to common places, moreover, argumentations are consistent and not superficial.

The conclusion is an optimistic message; the reader gets new insights into the current society, and knows that revolutions of habits are possible, with big common efforts. The book reaches the goal of warning, inviting people to prevent a worsening of the situation, and to engage in improvement.

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