Part IV

Sections of Formal Institutions, Classroom Practices, and Public Pedagogy
Bienvenidos, cabrones y cabronas! Aquí, right here, right now, vamos a cantar Los ABCs. Do you remember your ABCs? I think you do! Orale, let’s get singing! Con ánimo, todos and everyone together!

Los ABCs

A is for Abu who gazed at his reflection
B is for Bethlehem who escaped inspection
C is for Coyolxauhqui who fell from the sky
D is for Dow caught in a toxic lie
E is for Emilio thrown into the sea
F is for Fredrick hung from a tree
G is for Guillermo asphyxiated by gas
H is for our Homey capped in the ass

Los ABCs: ¡Qué Vivan los Muertos!

Los ABCs: ¡Qué Vivan los Muertos! is an animation that pays homage to under-recognized victims of war and empire. View and listen at http://leanos.net/ABC.html
¡Qué vivan, qué vivan los muertos de la guerra!
Qué lástima, qué pena, qué gracia me dan

La I es para Isabel cruzando y perdida
La J es para Juarez y sus desaparacidas
K is for Kenny who failed to pass the term
L is for Lequoia diseased by the Man’s germ
M is for Manuel olvidado sin un Purple Heart
N is for Natalia lost in a Wal-Mart
O is for the Other who tripped a wire
P is for the Pacifist consumed by fire
Q is for Quantos fallen to friendly fratricide
R is for Rwanda afflicted by ghastly genocide
S is for the Sikh gunned down at the station
T is for the Territory of Western Civilization
U is for Umito reduced to an apparition
V is for Violence of a slave expedition
W is for Walid tortured by a chain of command
X is for Xochiquetzal uprooted from her land
Y is for Yucca who irradiated away
Z is for Zuzuela quien canta night and day…

¡Qué vivan, qué vivan los muertos de la guerra!
Qué lástima, qué pena, qué gracia me dan
This chapter focuses on the deep potential of providing practicing and pre-service educators with experiential learning opportunities within a Social Action Curriculum Project (SACP) framework in a college classroom curriculum course. After being provided with a theoretical scaffold for engagement in active democratic participation, the possibilities of curriculum in public engagement, and specific examples of such engagement, the college curriculum course allowed its participants to experience a SACP based on their priority concerns. A clear departure from theory-driven coursework, this course offered college students the opportunity to wrestle with the complexity of an ever-evolving school experience that pushed learning into public spaces in natural, fluid ways. During a visiting professorship at University of Illinois at Chicago, the first author of this chapter designed the course to provide theoretical underpinnings while encouraging such induction for the students to learn skills through direct practice in justice-oriented teaching and learning. The second and third authors were both students enrolled in the course. Together the three of us describe this induction-oriented learning experience as the class engaged in SACPs that highlight the potential of a curriculum in the making revolving on social issues centered on the college students’ interests, thus, challenging normative approaches to schooling in both P-12 and college settings.

Active Democracies and the Reality of Schooling

The argument that active democracies require sustained dialogue and debate has long been recognized by educational theorists. For instance, John Dewey argued that one of the tenets of public schooling should be to teach the practices, habits, and ideas that support democratic processes. Dewey (1916) contended that the “ideal may seem remote of execution, but the democratic ideal of education is a farcical yet tragic delusion except as the ideal more and more dominates our public system of education” (p. 98). Public schools, he purported, ought to be spaces that support teaching and learning that engenders critical thinking rather than the far more commonplace practices focusing on rote memorization, and acquisition of compartmentalized facts. Schools have the “chance to be a miniature community, an embryonic society” (Dewey, 1899, p. 32) if immediate participants act to ensure that collaboration, collectivism, and democratic practices are infused in daily classroom life. Dewey’s argument is also seen in contemporary curriculum
literature. More recently, James Beane (1993) building on related ideas of Dewey and L. Thomas Hopkins (1937) contends, “A curriculum developed apart from the teachers and young people that must live it is grossly undemocratic” (Beane, 1993, p. 18). If the skills supportive of these democratic processes were readily inducted in schools, then this ideal has the potential of permeating society.

Unfortunately, in most P-12 schools today, there is a severe lack of engaging curricula promoting such democratic decision-making and authentic problem solving. Rather, the current ideological movement associated with accountability and top-down mandates from district, state, and federal governments promote scripted curricula and endless hours of standardized test preparation. As a result, there is very little local control of what happens in classrooms between students and teachers. Under threat of school reorganization, closure, and teacher reassignment, educators, especially those in low-income communities of color, are often under the greatest pressure to conform. This seemingly never-ending assault on learning through the use of fear tactics in the name of raising achievement not only uses a deficit lens to view students, but also highlights the gross disparity of an expectation of equity (measured through high-stakes tests) without a foundation of equity (via resources, school funding, etc.). Reminded of Kohn’s (1999) decade-old argument that “Holding schools ‘accountable’ for meeting ‘standards’ usually means requiring them to live up to conventional measures of student performance, and traditional kinds of instruction are most closely geared to—and thus perpetuated by—these measures” (¶ 31), we challenge this misplaced accountability in order to rethink how education can be.

In this chapter we are most interested in analyzing the ways that democratic skills practiced through a SACP framework can push schooling beyond “the tired walls” of the schoolhouse, out into the public sphere—a place where we believe authentic, integrated, emergent, organic, and rigorous learning can take place. By using a college classroom curriculum course to experience induction into this approach, the opportunity to further understand how teachers can utilize such a framework is described. The problem solving, decision making, and political action associated with such public learning through SACPs is ripe with challenges and barriers to overcome, controversy and differing perspectives to both negotiate and engage, and a plethora of consequences.

Social Action Curriculum Projects

A social action curriculum project allows immediate classroom participants to determine what is most important and relevant to them. By focusing on a community or societal problem that the students deem worthwhile, the SACP forces students to grapple with their needs and desires as those interests become the centerpiece of the curriculum. As students and their teachers engage in SACPs, they not only identify relevant and pressing issues, they work through possible solutions, which, in turn, provides chances for engagement in contingent action planning to solve their identified issue.

When a social action curriculum framework is utilized, it affords the learner and teacher alike opportunities that resist the current “educational reforms” for an alternative—direct engagement in active democratic participation, thus, transforming the curriculum and themselves. No longer does a cultural literacy-based canon, or scripted knowledge (e.g., Hirsch, 1987; Success for All, 2008) drive content in classrooms. Rather, students’ own problem-posing initiates a curriculum of consciousness where classroom participants become readers of their world, working to make their immediate environment a better place (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970). Further, the potential associated with such a curricular approach diminishes the shackling effects
of public schooling as usual where benign, fact-based learning is simply done for its own sake. Instead, learning can be an enriching and invigorating space that realizes the potential of an out-of-school-curriculum (Schubert, 1981) because the curriculum will need to push beyond the classroom.

We borrow from Ellsworth’s (2005) “learning in the making,” to develop this student-focused curriculum in the making not simply to follow the whim of students (the often misunderstood “progressive” or “student-centered” classroom), but instead leveraging participants’ interest to engage in real world problem solving as a basis for challenging expectations, content-oriented teaching, and emergent possibilities. Allowing college students, especially those who teach or will teach in lower socioeconomic class neighborhoods of color, to experience this kind of curricula offers multiple lines of inquiry related to matters of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and evaluation. It also illustrates a rethinking of how we approach schooling that highlights practical life skills associated with explicit societal participation.

While we readily see such opportunities associated with enacting SACPs, we embrace Delpit’s (2006) imperative that for poor students of color “to affect change which will allow them to truly progress we must insist on ‘skills’ within the context of critical and creative thinking” (p. 19). We believe that within this alternative framework our future P-12 students “must be taught the codes needed to participate fully in the mainstream of American life, not by being forced to attend to hollow inane, decontextualized subskills, but rather within the context of meaningful endeavors” (p. 45). To do so, these meaningful endeavors must come from the students, be intellectually rigorous, associated with standards of excellence, and be culturally relevant as purported by curriculum theorizers over the last century from Dewey (1929), Hopkins (1954), and Alberty (1947), to those more recent ideas generated by Beane (1993, 2005), Schubert (2007), or Ladson-Billings (2006).

A SACP framework requires that students, whether in college or P-12 settings, immerse themselves in the practice of democratic engagement by learning content-specific as well as transferable skills as they navigate the world around them. They learn to participate in mainstream aspects of participatory democracy while also learning “to challenge that mainstream and engage in a concerted public campaign” (Schultz & Oyler, 2006, p. 424). And, although there is an assumption that public education should prepare students to become productive citizens, the typical P-12 school environment does not provide many opportunities for children to practice this preparation. These schools do little more than pay lip service to this democratic ideal. With so little attention in most schools (or schools of education) to such a curricular orientation, the majority of practicing educators do not have direct experiences of doing such work; thus, they lack the capacity to scaffold this kind of learning for their students.

Many colleges of education teach about theories of engagement, but more often than not, they fail to encourage students to practice or apply these theories within the college classroom context. This translates into teachers often forcing students to memorize political factoids (i.e., the functions of the three branches of government, state capitols, the number of representatives, etc.), but this kind of learning does not readily encourage participatory engagement. As Westheimer and Kahne (2004) explain, most education for democracy focuses on creating citizens that are personally responsible—promoting charity, service, and character—instead of encouraging more participatory or justice-oriented conceptions that focus on promoting change and taking action. It is little wonder that young people and most adults are disenfranchised, disillusioned, and apathetic toward the democratic process. How can we expect students to acquire the necessary skills of democratic participation if we do not provide teacher induction in these processes within college classrooms so that opportunities to develop and refine these skills are then fostered in children?
Out-of-School Curricula and Leveraging Public Space for Knowledge in the Making

In 1970, Ivan Illich’s controversial call to “deschool society” challenged the status quo trajectory of schooling. His questioning of whether schooling was appropriate and meaningful for those who attended was based on his argument that schooling was not serving individual needs, had misconstrued notions of progress and achievement, and inevitably was a manifestation of consumption and the corporate state. Although our ideas about schooling may not be as radical as Illich’s, we resonate strongly with them and think schooling can offer more to its immediate participants. Connecting Illich’s call to what Schubert described as the possibilities of “deschooling schooling” (Schubert, 1989a), we begin to not only rethink what can be done in schools today, but embrace the Schubertian (1981) idea that “life continuously enables reconstruction of our experiential maps of the world...[and] the development of such understanding is never fully made and always in the making” (p. 186). Schubert’s contention that the myriad of curricula extraneous to what is found within schools has tremendous potential—an out-of-school curriculum—comprised of the societal elements that students come into contact with beyond classrooms. These very elements can become a part of school curricula through concerted efforts of teachers using SACPs that transcend schools and move into broader areas of educational inquiry.

Teachers, alongside their students, can develop the required frames of learning as well as gather the necessary experiences for the development of political and civic participation to practice curriculum in public spaces through SACPs. Engaging in the public domain demands that educators reconsider the long held perspective of teacher as the gatekeeper of knowledge. Curriculum cannot always be preplanned since it emerges as project goals are pursued with authentic, outside audiences. This approach also views alternative public spaces as ripe for pedagogical exploration. As the SACP pushes learning into the public sphere, we may abandon our tendency to “center pedagogical practices in schools in a close and regular orbit on curricular goals and objectives, as well as measurable, verifiable educational outcomes” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 5). With this liberation from the controlling facets of traditional school practices, and resistance to the often bastardized interpretation of the Tyler Rationale (Schubert, 2007; Tyler, 1949), a multiplicity of pedagogical opportunities emerge beyond curriculum and pedagogy’s myopic view (Schubert, this volume). This may lead us to “the outer fringes of education’s charted solar system and beyond” and into “other systems of practice and thought” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 6).

Furthermore, challenging the traditional conception of knowledge as a “trafficked commodity of educators and the educational media,” and as a “decomposed by-product of something that has already happened to us” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 1), provides a powerful hinge for the argument of emergent SACPs. The learning self, as Ellsworth calls it, posits that authentic learning results from our constantly changing self in relation to time, space, and experience, a similar argument to Schubert’s (1981) reconstruction of life experience. The virtually limitless of this idea shifts our understanding of when and where this learning self emerges. Ellsworth’s theorizing of knowledge in the making and the learning self represent a fundamental challenge to long-held beliefs about how and where learning takes place, or should take place. Knowledge is redefined not as a means to predict, control, and objectify, but rather as a vehicle through which exploration of the sensations and emotions are evoked. These explorations are “invented in and through its engagement with pedagogy’s force” (p. 7) becoming a result of that new experience, particularly in the space where schooling might transcend the schoolhouse.

Methodology: Side-By-Side Narrative Ways of Knowing

Narrative inquiry provides a means for us to examine how teaching the framework of a SACP through experiential induction and hands-on learning in a college classroom can be better
understood and transferred to other P-12 settings. As well, the narrative lens allows us to see how knowledge is constructed outside (school) curricula via the public sphere rather than the bounded classroom.

Multidimensional narratives emerge through storytelling—the second and third authors of this chapter provide vignettes from the standpoint of students in the college curriculum classroom. This narration of their studenting (Fenstermacher, 1986; Gershon, 2008) involves a struggle to gain new and difficult concepts, where “learning [occurs] for the sake of learning” and “an intrinsic motivation where commitments to reaching one’s highest potential are inherent and unquestioned” (Hughes & Wiggins, 2008, p. 58). Analysis and introspection of “personal practical knowledge” as the “nexus of the theoretical, the practical, the objective, and the subjective” (Clandinin, 1985, p. 361), helps to seek meaning. Furthermore, elements of teacher and student lore—the artistic practices both teachers and students engage in as they actively seek to learn from their own experiences in classrooms (Schubert, 1992; Schubert & Ayers, 1999)—offers the opportunity to get a vivid portrayal through the “practical research and inquiry” that the students conducted “through daily practice” (Schubert, 1989b, p. 282) within the college classroom, and in turn, how these induction experiences may affect their practice as teachers.

A multiplicity of data inform the following narrative vignettes and discussion including: college classroom dialogue, semi-structured interviews between the professor and the college students, student work/artifacts spanning the length of the college course, and reflective journals kept during the course by all three authors. The narratives portrayed are analyzed within the college classroom contexts, as well as through subsequent reflection. These subsequent reflections about the induction via a SACP are portrayed through students’ storytelling of points-of-entry to the experience. These points-of-entry were neither predetermined nor prescribed, rather each student chose to tell the stories of their experience in their own way.

We chose to present the side-by-side to allow for complementary and diverging multivocal portrayals of the students’ lived experience (Hertz, 1997; Lather & Smithies, 1997). Although on the surface the students had a shared experience of being “inducted” into active, democratic participation through a single college course, importantly, the experience was also individualized as each was a member of a separate, autonomous, self-selected group based on individual interests. The students’ narratives of events and depictions can speak for themselves. This polyvocality (Chandler, 2004) is intended to honor diversity and divergence of perspective, while highlighting similarities and parallels of the overall SACP induction. This side-by-side display offers the reader an opportunity to learn from the narratives in a multiplicity of ways: linearly for each student, toggling between students’ points-of-entry, or at any single point-of-entry.

Narrative Constructions of Induction through the Social Action Curriculum Project

The following side-by-side narratives offer insight into the college student SACP induction through their curriculum course experience.

**Jen’s Group: The Issue of Gentrification**

“The Issue of Gentrification

“There’s Nothing Deweyan about Teaching Dewey!”

Just prior to this course I wrote a research paper on social justice teaching. I interviewed some influential names including Bill Ayers and David Stovall as well as visited a
Two Master’s degrees, two educational certifications, and four endorsements later, I was ready to check out, move on, and be done with school. Rarely did you find a class that pushed you to push yourself, that armed you with something practical.

**Curriculum by and for Students? Really?**

“You know what really pisses me off? The fact that 140 of the 150 cars that get mileage over 50 mpg aren’t even sold in the U.S....they can still sell Joe American a $50,000+ Land Rover that gets 12 mpg, because we don't know any better or don't care. No, we haven’t forced them to sell us those cars yet—we haven’t yet given them a reason.”

—My response during whole class problem identification for SACP

My contribution, Rampant Consumerism, added to the growing list on the blackboard. How many people did I know who bought things simply because they had to have them; a newer laptop, another iPod, a bigger TV and, yes, even a gas guzzling SUV? The wanton excess literally drives me crazy.

It was an interesting activity, but I didn’t immediately grasp where all these ideas were going to lead us (some other ideas included gentrification, recycling, gang violence, rude people that didn’t say hi to you, etc.). Sure, they made you angry, and maybe even made you think, but what did this have to do with teaching kids?

Then, we were asked to think about what we would do to change these things, not as teachers, but as people. I began to realize that this wasn’t for our students—at least not yet. It was for us. And my mind began racing with all the possibilities.

How could I get others to listen to my concern while advocating for change? We would have to experience this process firsthand in this course before we could share it with our students. We were going to practice this concept experientially rather than simply learning about it from afar. Instead of retiring as we normally did each night, happy to leave all local social justice school. These experiences inspired and excited me, so the prospect of actually practicing social justice teaching within this course—something advertised on the first day—thrilled me. As a pre-service English teacher searching for her point of view, I yearned for something to hang all of my knowledge and theory on; however, I felt worn-out, frustrated, and confused because I had yet to reach, within my M.Ed. program, the lesson planning or creative thinking I craved. To make matters worse, I was extremely tired of being lectured at about theory and, in conjunction with my feelings, a fellow classmate jokingly coined a phrase that captured my sentiments: “There’s nothing Deweyan about teaching Dewey!” While theory resonates with me, I often wonder if it is all pre-service teachers can be offered? I kept asking myself, “When will I gain the experiences I need to be the educator I want to be?”

**Into This Curriculum Class and...**

I recall thinking, “Whoa, wait a minute, what we will do in here?” I am actually going to do something (that isn’t a research paper) with what I’ve learned? All I could do was hope to rise to the occasion and learn something important for my future students and myself. Throughout the course, we read a wide variety of material that was geared towards taking action in terms of curriculum development. It renewed my excitement; taking the action we read about was part of the course as we worked to build, create, and attempt to carry out our own Social Action Curriculum Projects. Finally, I was beginning to feel as though I could reach the synthesis of theory and action I had been searching for.

**What Do I Care About, and Who Is Going to Be in My Group?**

We were each asked to list three social problems, from there, we collectively compiled a list. As our class discussion ensued, the list narrowed from over 100 topics down to 6 from which to choose. I was extraordinarily passionate about the issue of gentrification,
that learnin’ right there in the classroom, we would have to take something with us.

**Contentious Negotiations and the Power of Perseverance**

“I don’t get it. I have no idea what we’re supposed to be doing. To be honest, at this point, I think we might all flunk.”

—My comment during initial stages of SACP planning

When we first met, it seemed like we were all over the place. It initially made sense to congregate; all of us interested in recycling, but it became quickly apparent that we had very different ideas about how to approach the project. I don’t think anyone, including myself, really knew what we were supposed to do. Too many voices talking about too many things all at once. Some wanted to send out surveys. A few thought to write letters to aldermen. Still others thought the point was to devise a unit to be taught in some hypothetical classroom. Our most skeptical group member questioned whether or not such a project had the academic rigor to serve as the central component of the curriculum. By the end of that first night, several were discouraged enough to not really care what we did, so long as we did something. Our first brainstorming session was at best simply chaotic and at some points downright confrontational. I left class that night discouraged and unsatisfied.

When we reconvened, we continued to grapple with the process until Brian conferred with our group. He told us that the deliberation that we were engaged in was healthy and could, under ideal conditions, take months to resolve. His encouragement led to the realization that what I thought was confusion and discord was actually a component of our negotiations, as we sought consensus, and compromise amidst potentially hostile differences. Armed with this knowledge, I began reframing our contentious deliberations. A certain momentum emerged as we began to formulate a concerted action plan incorporating all of our many ideas. This action plan and luckily, others were interested in it, too. Out of the 40 students in the class, four others expressed interest in this topic, and so my group was born. My group was made up of different personalities, majors, backgrounds, and most importantly, we all had our own interesting experiences with gentrification. For example, Lahtia and Guadalupe had family and friends being pushed out of gentrifying communities on Chicago’s South and West sides. Joseph was intrigued about the historical tenets of gentrification, and Michael wanted to investigate its affects on children. I, personally and professionally, had already seen how Chicago Public Schools’ students were affected by it, plus I had been living in a neighborhood where gentrification had been happening right before my eyes (Michael was too!). We shared our stories, thoughts and feelings on gentrification, and then we began to tackle the SACP.

Taking a cue from Schultz (2008), which explains the SACP process in depth with elementary school students, we identified, in detail, the specific problem that concerned us. Our problem statement read: **Gentrification is displacing families, their roots, and cultural identities.** From here, we proposed possible solutions: 1. Stop gentrification, 2. Ease its transition, 3. Limit gentrification and its impact, and finally, 4. Do nothing. After collectively weighing each of these possibilities via some intense deliberation, we chose to focus our class policy on limiting gentrification and its impact. We felt it was where we could gain the most traction.

At that point, we knew we needed a plan. We opted to create a web of potential action plan ideas, and during this process there was much to discuss, debate, and research. We often found ourselves running overtime. Extended class conversations frequently bled into multiple email correspondences, which in turn allowed our ideas to solidify into more tangible, concrete plans. And once we had established this base and dialogue with one another, we began to choose all of the action plan activities we wanted to see through.
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The SACP and What We Found

During our initial discussions and meetings, and after we had the academic knowledge from researching journals, we surfed the Internet to find “real world” information on the history of gentrification. What we discovered was that YouTube had innumerable videos on the gentrification of Chicago’s neighborhoods. I’m not sure why we were surprised, maybe because we assumed YouTube wasn’t that serious of a source, but members of Pilsen and Chicago’s Southside communities had clearly been commenting on the gentrification happening in their neighborhoods. These videos excited us because they not only taught us about how gentrification was affecting these neighborhoods, but the videos made us feel as though we were not alone in our endeavor. Our soiree with YouTube allowed us to see its great potential as an educational tool because of its ability to portray a plurality of voices and opinions as a result of the democratization of the web.

As we engaged in our use of what we thought was an unlikely educational tool, we discussed the prospects of tapping this tremendous, public forum with future students; it would be relevant to them, and they would surely know how to navigate and relate to it. This experience triggered one of our action plan activities. Michael and I decided to make a video documentary of the effects of gentrification in Chicago’s Pilsen community. To supplement our video, Guadalupe, a lifelong resident of Pilsen, gathered pictures and documents from her personal experiences, while Lahtia did the same with Chicago’s Southside communities. Altogether, the photojournal developed a larger perspective of the problem, and our deliberations highlighted two clear reasons for digital storytelling in this way: 1. Media makes a larger impact on the public (e.g. seeing a problem versus discussing one creates different types of and spaces for learning), and 2. Media is what allowed us to combine our stories and experiences as to illustrate how gentrification is something that affects many people from all over. The anticipation of publicly sharing

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but as I turned down the aisle filled with paper plates, paper bags, and plastic silverware, I knew what I had to do. Initial uncertainty was replaced with resolve as, right there in that aisle, I whipped out my Sharpie and scribbled a note, placing it right under a shelf of paper plates. It read: “Mother earth would appreciate it if you bought a plate and washed it!”

I waited there, surreptitiously perusing the dishwashing fluid until someone came along. It was a young couple that first drew near. They read my note, raised their eyebrows quizically, chuckled, then walked off. I don’t know if the intervention stopped them from buying those plates, but I like to think so. I was suffused with a sublime sense of satisfaction and a renewed sense of purpose.

I spent the next three hours up and down aisles leaving post-its for whoever would read them. I documented everything, with my mortified wife’s reluctant assistance, and compiled a picture book to share with my classmates. This experience was like no other that I’d had before in a college course. What I was doing was something personally vital and relevant to me. In that exact moment I realized what a SACP was supposed to be; I was exhilarated.

Taking This to My Students

My mind raced, wrestling with ways my students could engage in a similar process. Earlier this school year I wandered unwittingly into the lunchroom to see (and smell) the cafeteria fare that my kids were regularly subjected to. They reluctantly poked and prodded the greasy, grubby “French toast sticks” served that day. That afternoon I asked how many days they were fed something they just couldn’t bring themselves to eat. Apparently, in an average week, 3 of 5 lunches were discarded untouched. I wondered if this happens in other schools that aren’t populated by students of color. I wanted to empower them to do something about it, but I couldn’t fathom what or how. The same helplessness that I confronted and conquered below that big box neon sign, my students felt in that moment.

our video with others excited all of us, and we couldn’t wait to get to our other action plan items.

You Can Teach Kids What? That’s Awesome!

The SACP experience allowed me the unique opportunity to occupy both the space of the student and teacher. Throughout the course of the project, our group learned, as students and as teachers, how SACP’s can promote change through empowering and instilling the confidence needed to succeed. And at the conclusion of our course, my group saw that we had accomplished a great deal in a short amount of time: letters sent to the Chicago Housing Authority as well as Illinois legislatures, correspondence and conversations with community members, personal experiences in Chicago’s Westside neighborhoods, and interviews conducted with “gentrifiers” and developers (footnote: I use “interviews” lightly because the process was uncomfortable and confrontational for both parties involved; this was not a tame situation, but one that had to be artfully navigated).

Had we had more time together, ideally, our project could have blossomed into something greater; however, we knew that this was only the beginning. Being able to create our own SACP not only changed the way I see the classroom, but it allowed me to experience and acquire knowledge and information necessary to implement an SACP with my own future students. It wasn’t until I had experienced social justice teaching that I could understand its complexity and vast potential. For example, being able to work with a diverse group of peers, who share my love for teaching, taught me things both about myself and gentrification that I didn’t know prior to this experience (e.g. just because you are white doesn’t mean you should feel guilty about gentrification—the idea is much more complicated than simple either/or dichotomies). Similarly, going into public spaces, such as where developers work, exposed the people I interviewed and me to many complex viewpoints; however, these new, multilayered perspectives happened because
Divergent Perspectives to Negotiate through Induction

The induction of college students into the process of the SACP is a vital, but normally absent link to engaging students in emergent curriculum founded in the democratic ideal. Central to this induction process is engagement in discussion amidst divergent viewpoints. The college classroom was transformed into a space where practicing and future teachers were left to deliberate as students. This deliberation may vary to a great degree. In the two narratives, it spanned the gamut from peaceable, consensus-making as experienced in the Gentrification group evidenced by Jen’s descriptions of “Extended class conversations often bled into multiple emails,” and “running overtime” to the contentious deliberations held in the Recycling group seen in Jon’s narrative describing discussions as “downright confrontational.” This debate, whatever its form, forces students to engage in cooperative inquiry as group members’ perspectives are unified by a common purpose and social interest.

Beyond the classroom group interactions, opportunities for engaging with differing outsider perspectives present themselves in varying ways. Students are forced to navigate complex systems traditionally found outside of school. Both groups’ written correspondence with local government entities, for instance, clearly gets at this idea. Further, Jen’s account of her confrontation with a real estate developer is reflective of the external negotiations that a SACP demands. These forays into environments—especially public ones extraneous to schools—required authentic, and perhaps uncomfortable interaction with people holding different agendas. They required the students to be well-informed via research and data about their issue.

The traditional school classroom limits opportunities for engagement, or even confrontation. The broader community on the other hand, offers a public square to tackle social issues. Because authentic problem solving, by its nature, cannot be conducted in the hypothetical, these spaces—traditionally seen as non-educational for school purposes—become integral. Both narratives offer insight into this phenomenon: one group enters a community to document the effects of gentrification while the other details methods of confronting consumerism. Each groups’ actions highlight how entering spaces atypical of schooling provides opportunities for challenging pedagogical assumptions. This understanding can be drawn from Jen’s group stumbling upon the practical uses of YouTube to investigate gentrification. Likewise, Jon’s group leveraged familial ties to increase awareness about recycling. These experiences typify a boundless potential of what schooling can be by escaping the confined classrooms and entering the public sphere.

Overcoming Challenges and Barriers

With the redefinition of where learning can flourish, students engaged in a SACP confront challenges and barriers as part of the process. Although traditional school settings avoid conflict by adhering to contrived textbook learning, the SACP seizes opportunities that arise from these obstacles. These potential difficulties are ripe with learning opportunities, presenting
participants with multiple challenges with which to engage. Importantly, neither teachers nor students know the outcomes prior to action. Rather, working to solve the identified issue allows for the learning to evolve in organic ways. In both narratives, we see how the groups problematize complex instances as part of their efforts. We also see how the novelty of emergent curriculum is both comprehensive and rigorous. When working to overcome impediments, both groups focused on their envisioned end result and each was able to use their abilities to overcome hurdles as fuel for their pursuits.

This resolve was evident in many different situations presented in the narratives. Overcoming time limitations was a challenge both groups identified as an issue in achieving their goals. Both struggled to fully articulate and implement parts of their action planning in the time allowed by the college course. Further, the Gentrification group discovered that developers were not responsive to written communication so they immersed themselves directly in the changing neighborhood. Quickly, residents applauded their efforts while developers took notice, responding to the group’s queries. This resulted in the developers’ willingness to answer pointed questions from group. Similarly, Jon’s convincing of his wife to participate in the guerilla communication campaign clearly indicates not only the need for persuasion, but also the necessity of content knowledge to back up one’s argument. In this case, he successfully convinced a seemingly skeptical, yet authentic audience to help his cause.

Building consensus within the groups was also a sticking point, albeit for very different reasons. In the Gentrification group, the agreement they shared may have caused them to put on “proverbial blinders,” neglecting other possible action plan activities that could have helped solve their problem. This contrasted to the frustration evidenced in the Recycling group. The disagreements inevitably slowed down progress and taking action towards their cause, especially when some students reached the point of “not caring as long as they did something.”

The emergent nature of the SACP often requires that students revisit the action plan to revise, refine, and reconsider activities. The Recycling group devised and distributed a survey that yielded little significant results. They were forced to revisit a planning stage to consider alternatives: create another survey with more thoughtful questions, redistribute the survey to a wider sample, or abandon the survey altogether. This process of refining the action plan activities was continuous and ongoing throughout the entire process. This process is key to the transferable skills that students take away from such experiences. Other obstructions-turned-prospects, were when both groups experienced similar reactions when contacting government officials. As communications to decision makers fell on deaf ears, the groups had to reconsider the effectiveness of simply writing letters. The Gentrification camp collaborated with non-profits in the community to help push their agenda. While hitting the streets to video the effects of gentrifying forces, these allies were an invaluable resource. Additionally, the Recycling group engaged in culture jamming (Sandlin & Milam, 2008) through agitation to get their point across as a supplemental idea.

The SACP is meant to drive the entirety of the curriculum in the P-12 setting. This begs the question and challenge of its sufficient academic rigor. Can a curriculum devised and articulated in this way encompass the depth and breadth of all that is worth knowing in the classroom and beyond? How will students know what they are “supposed to know?” This became part of solving the social problems as students wore hats both as students engaged in the SACP and as practicing or future teachers. Perhaps the thought from one of the most reluctant members of the Recycling group demonstrates the potential to transform how we think about classrooms: “At first I thought the SACP was indefensible…then I experienced it…and realized that I could cover all the standards for every subject area and prove it to my principal!”
As current and future teachers experientially grapple with the limitless points of curricular intersection that emerge from the SACP, the possibilities for pedagogical exploration become increasingly more apparent. Traditionally compartmentalized subject area competencies (i.e., effective persuasive writing, mathematical computations, and scientific reasoning) are transformed into an integrated toolkit capable of carrying out purposeful social action. This social imperative creates relevancy, context, and purpose.

A Plethora of Consequences

What then can be the end result of a SACP? On the most visible/obvious/concrete level, the purpose is to address social problems of immediate importance to its implementers. When examined more thoroughly however, SACPs do not necessarily restrict their implications to only these explicit, stated objectives. There are other consequences that emerge out of authentic engagement in this type of public pedagogy. By virtue of its public nature, the SACP affects all of those within range of witnessing its implementation. Within Jon’s account of his culture jamming and guerilla communications, we see people that might have had their minds changed about the implications of their consuming. The Gentrifying group’s lobbying for change may have forced one real estate developer to reconsider how he conducts business.

The message of the SACP may also speak to those for whom it was not expressly intended. As Maxine Greene (1995) contends, individuals can find themselves becoming “wide awake” where heightened consciousness furthers change. Each author expressed discomfort at points of hearing about others’ SACPs, or even while writing this chapter. Two authors reside in gentrifying neighborhoods and having witnessed the Gentrification SACP, both experienced feelings of questioning and guilt. All three authors cite a newfound awareness of their daily consumption, taking action in response to the Recycling SACP by refusing paper products in a restaurant, requesting ceramic mugs at a coffee house, or reconsidering businesses to patronize in gentrifying neighborhoods. SACPs have the great potential to affect all of those with whom they come into contact through its opening of untapped arenas of pedagogical potential.

References


