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Rubin, Beth C. (2012) *Making Citizens: Transforming Civic Learning for Diverse Social Studies Classrooms.* NY: Routledge Education.

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Can the U.S. History II class provide meaningful civic learning and still cover the required content in the era of standards based reform? This question, which haunts many a social studies educator, is tackled by Beth C. Rubin, Associate Professor at Rutgers University, in her book, *Making Citizens: Transforming Civic Learning for Diverse Social Studies Classrooms.* The book is designed for social studies educators who wish to invigorate their classrooms through a renewed emphasis on civics. It focuses on three high school US History II teachers, who are engaged in a year- long curriculum redesign research project in conjunction with a university research team led by Rubin. Throughout the book, Rubin, artfully blends

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theory and practice and provides concrete, practical ideas that pre-service and in-service educators can use to transform their classrooms.

Rubin believes that engaged citizens who care and think deeply about civic matters must be "created" (p.4). She draws upon sociocultural theories of situated learning and her previous research on civic identity formation among diverse youth to develop a foundation for a more meaningful civic curriculum.

According to Rubin, civic identity is rooted in students' daily experiences and their definition of what citizenship entails. When the civic ideals and civic realities correspond, students experience congruence. If they are dissimilar, they experience disjuncture. Students also vary on their views of "good citizens". Some believe the social contract obliges one to pay taxes, vote and obey the law, while other students believe that good citizens should also work to improve issues of public concern.

Based on her research, Rubin divides student responses into four groups: aware students, or those who experience congruence in their daily lives, but are aware that equity and fairness are not universal and believe in the need to take action for social change; empowered students who have experienced disjuncture, yet believe that they can enact change; complacent students who experience congruence and believe that all is well in the US and no real change is needed; and discouraged students, who have experienced disjuncture and believe that no real change is possible. Rubin believes that the "primary purpose" of civic education should be to help students move from complacent to aware and discouraged to empowered (p 7). She found that providing students with opportunities to identify and explore civic problems is critical to altering civic identities and sense of empowerment.

In her current study, Rubin attempts to develop a new approach to integrating civic learning in middle and high school US History II classes. She claims that her approach, based upon her research and the Freirian notion of "problem posing," is a departure from traditional models of civic education and research.

The research team included Rubin, a doctoral candidate, 3 teachers and three undergraduate interns. They used a design based research framework wherein a new approach to learning is introduced and systematically studied in context.

Rubin selected three diverse communities in the northeast as research sites that she believes are typical of the various forms of diversity found in American communities. She provides them with the pseudonyms Allwood, Oak Knoll, and Surrey for research purposes. In 2007 when the study was conducted Allwood's population was 100,000 with a median family income of $80,000. The population breakdown was 46.6% White, 35.1% Asian-American, 8.5 African American% and 8.4% Latino. Of the three communities studied, Allwood was the safest with a violent crime rate well below the state average. There are two high schools in Allwood and the families at the school where the study was conducted had lower median income of about twenty per cent. Fourteen percent of the students in that school were eligible for free lunch (p11).

Oak Knoll is a suburb of 44,000, located just outside of an urban area. Its population was 53.9% White, 21.6 % African- American, 15.2% Latino, 7.6%Asian and 1.3% other. The family median income was $90,000 in 2007. However, the demographics of the high school did not reflect the community as many of the white residents sent their children to private religious schools. In the high school, the population was 42% African -American, 28% white, 21.5% Latino, and 8% Asian. The crime rate, while below the state average, was slightly higher than Allwood. Twenty- seven percent of the students received reduced free lunch (p12).

Surrey is a densely populated city of 80,000 with a family median income of $23,154 in 2007 and a violent crime rate well above the state average. Its population was 53% African American, 38.8%, Latino, 16.8% White, and 2.5% Asian. Approximately, 48.7% of the families with children under 18 lived below the poverty line and 65% of the students in Surrey High School received free/ reduced lunch (p12).

The three teacher participants, whose names have been changed, were all committed to the civic mission of Social

Studies. At the time of the study, Jill Tenney, a White woman in her late twenties was entering her 5th year of teaching at Allwood High School. She taught the experimental curriculum to three classes that were in the second highest level in a four tiered tracking system. Like Jill Tenney, Bob Banks, a white male in his late twenties, was entering his fifth year of teaching. Two of his classes, both in the lowest level in a three tiered tracking system, participated in the study. Ken Brooks an African-American male in his late twenties, was entering his third year as a teacher. He taught the experimental curriculum to his two special education classes.

During the first phase of the research the three teachers met frequently with the other members of the research team. Their goal was to restructure the US History II curriculum so that civic learning is built upon the students' own civic experiences and the discussion of critical issues is a central focus. In addition, they worked to reorganize the curriculum to build the students' discussion, analysis and research skills. The subsequent chapters of *Making Citizens* describe the implementation of the transformed curriculum and pedagogy in conjunction with the data and findings.

Chapter 2 examines the restructuring of the curriculum. The research team decided to move away from teaching history chronologically and develop a thematically organized curriculum connected to essential questions. Rubin cites research that indicates that thematic organization can improve instruction by: allowing for more in-depth analysis and understanding, providing a frame by which teachers can investigate more recent history and current issues and concerns earlier on and in more depth, and as a consequence make the curriculum more relevant to students' lives.

The team also drew upon the Understanding by Design framework, developed by Wiggins and McTighe, to redesign the curriculum. They decided to use the question "What is an American?" as the overarching question to structure the curriculum. They then identified five themes: government, economics, conflict and resolution, movement of people and social change. Each theme was linked three to five essential questions. For example, the conflict and resolution theme was linked to the following

essential questions. What is America's role in the world? Why does the US go to war? When should it? Can nations cooperate? The content for the unit included World War I, World War II, the Cold War, Vietnam, Korean Wars, Middle East Gulf War, Iraq, War on Terror, and Genocide. The students used the same question to analyze each conflict.

The restructured curriculum was enhanced by the by the integration of pedagogical approaches that would foster civic competence. Chapter 3 focuses on adding strategies that replace teacher centered question and answer sessions with more in depth discussion (Socratic seminar, take a stand, structured conversation). Strategies enhancing writing (persuasive essays, journals) and expression (simulated newscast, roundtable or talk show), are explored in the fourth chapter. Both chapters provide in depth descriptions of the strategies and demonstrate how they were used in context. Teacher and student commentary highlight the triumphs and challenges.

Another, important feature of the curriculum redesign was the integration of current events in the curriculum. According to Rubin, research on teaching current events indicates that current events are generally taught in isolation from the history curriculum as a separate add-on. The curriculum redesign team sought to reframe traditional approaches by connecting current events to the curriculum themes and the essential questions. For example, design of the unit on the movement of people made it easy to examine current immigration policies in a historical context. The unit included study of immigration and the migration of Native Americans, African Americans, Puerto Ricans and the Japanese internment. Contemporary challenges such as deurbanization, suburbanization, gentrification and globalization were also analyzed. Students were asked to consider the following essential questions. Who is an American? Why do people come to America? How do different groups define their American identities? This design made it easy for the students to connect the past to the present and to relate it to their own experiences.

The final phase of the curriculum redesign project, the youth action research project, is described in chapter six. Youth action research is student centered and allows

students to identify, research and take action on a civic issues of the classes' choosing. The design team drew upon research and models that indicate that this type of project has the potential for developing more aware and empowered civic identities among youth. The teachers in Allwood and Surrey both embraced the project. The issues their students selected reflected the congruence and disjuncture in their respective communities. The students in affluent Allwood decided to challenge the no backpack rule in their high school, while the students in impoverished Surrey focused upon drugs and murder as their primary concern. The backpack issue was resolved in Allwood due to a change in administration and the students experienced "victory" with little effort. Although the Surrey students could not resolve the serious problems in their communities, Ken Brooks encouraged the Surrey students to get involved and required them to attend meetings of the school board and town council. In addition, he helped the students create a class scrapbook where their research and reflections were recorded; giving voice to their concerns.

While both teachers tackled serious issues of civic concern throughout the school year, Jill Tenney's students did not transfer this new awareness to their civic action project. When it came time for the students to take action, they seemed unable to move beyond the world they knew. If the purpose of the curriculum is to move students who experience congruence to take action, then the problem posing phase of the youth action research project needs to be altered to move students in this direction.

Throughout the project Jill Tenney and Ken Brooks embraced the thematic approach developed by the design team. Bob Banks, however, decided to stick to a chronological framework, integrating the themes and essential questions when possible. This difference in approach had the potential to provide a window that would allow the researchers to see if their proposed redesign could work in a chronological setting. Both of the teachers who used the thematic approach felt that it deepened their students' understanding of the material. Jill Tenney stated that with the chronological approach too much class time would pass between teaching conflicts such as World War I and World II for the students to retain enough material to make the connections, whereas the thematic approach

allowed in depth investigations. In addition, both teachers were able to examine the recent past and make present day connections to each conflict. Through an analysis of students' responses Rubin found that they also felt that the structure was provided them with a deeper understanding and more meaningful experience.

Bob Banks found it difficult to integrate the themes and questions into the chronological sequence and was unable to get beyond the Carter era by the end of the school year. While he expressed frustration at not being able to move the curriculum to the study of the recent past, it is unclear, if his difficulty in integrating themes and questions is due to his adherence to chronology or more deeply rooted in his epistemic stance. He appeared to view the goal of Social Studies education as transmission or coverage of information and view activities that deviated from this model as a poor use of valuable classroom time. He expressed concern in relation to discussion and questioned the "curricular value" (p 50) of spending time on discussions that were geared towards helping students make connections between their own experience and the issues under study. As a consequence he did not do as much discussion as planned. When it came time for the youth action project, Bob Banks did not see the project as a culminating activity of a civic oriented curriculum and stated concern that project would take away too much time from " the curriculum." Rather than having his students research, discuss and vote on a class youth action project, he allowed them to do small group projects, with a product, like a power point or a pamphlet as the end result. Bob's continued reluctance to embrace core tenets of the redesign project causes one to question whether it was his adherence to chronology or his underlying belief in transmission and coverage that made his program less successful. Many social studies teachers may be reluctant or unable to move to a thematic approach due to external constraints. However, if their epistemic stances are compatible with the philosophy inherent in the redesign project, it is more likely that many of the innovations proposed in this book could be instituted, and used more effectively, despite external constraints.

I read Beth Rubin's book when it was first published in 2012, and I immediately assigned it to the graduate students in my Methods of Teaching Social Studies class. I

have been frequently told it was the best book that they have read throughout the semester. While they find the issues and debates Rubin poses intriguing, what they appreciated most is being able to see how teaching techniques and frameworks such UbD can operate in real life contexts to enhance the civic mission of Social Studies. In contrast to decontextualized methods texts they often encounter, they find the detailed description of technique embedded in context most helpful, both as a guide to practice and a way to evaluate what they see in the schools.

Beth C. Rubin makes an important contribution to the field of social studies education in *Making Citizens: Transforming Civic Learning for Diverse Social Studies Classes.* Her research demonstrates the importance of developing curriculum that takes into account and builds upon students' "lived" civic identities. In addition, she provides a viable model for redesigning the curriculum that is grounded in research and fully and richly described in the text. The book is invaluable to researchers and practitioners alike.

About the Reviewer



Linda Kantor Swerdlow is an Associate Professor of Education at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. She specializes in Social Studies and History Education. Her research focuses on global studies and youth activism. Her book *Global Activism in a US School: From Empathy to Action* will be published by Rowman and Littlefield in 2014.

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