

Teaching Civic Engagement through Literature

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ABSTRACT:

Teaching civic engagement through literature can become a pedagogical tool that allows instructors to turn the literature classrooms into a model of a community devoted to participatory democracy and to change students from the apathetic disengaged and self-interested persons to active, motivated and engaged citizens. This paper explores different means for advancing a culture of civic engagement through teaching literature. It also elucidates how the activities of civic engagement pursued by students through the literary texts they study can produce civic capacities that nurture their growth.

KEYWORDS:

Civic engagement, Teaching literature, Democratic classroom, Civic-engagement pedagogies

تدريس المشاركة المدنية من خلال الأدب

يقصد بالمشاركة المدنية مشاركة طلاب الجامعة في أعمال جماعية داخل الصف الدراسي وفي الأنشطة الصفية واللاصفية وذلك لبناء جسور من العلاقات والمفاهيم المشتركة والتبادلية والتي تهتم بالارتقاء والنهوض بالعملية التعليمية كعملية مترابطة تهدف الي تفعيل الدور الذي تقوم به المؤسسة التعليمية في خدمة المجتمع من خلال أنشطة تعليمية يقوم بها الطلاب تحت إشراف أستاذة مادة الادب (الإنجليزي). تلقي هذه الورقة البحثية الضوء على أهمية تأصيل فكرة المشاركة المدنية من خلال تدريس النصوص الأدبية – نصوص روائية او مسرحية او شعرية – بحيث يتم التركيز على بناء قدرات الطلاب وامدادهم بالمهارات اللازمة للمواطنة ولمهارات القرن الحادي والعشرين وذلك من خلال ربط بعض القضايا المجتمعية بالنصوص الأدبية. فقرأة وتحليل النصوص الأدبية تزيد من وعي الطلاب بالعديد من القضايا الاجتماعية والثقافية والسياسية سواء علي المستوى المحلي او الإقليمي او العالمي، علاوة علي ذلك فإن مهارات التفكير النقدي، وحل المشكلات، وطرح الأسئلة، والانخراط في المناقشات، والتعبير عن الاحترام لإسهامات الآخرين وأساليبهم المختلفة، والمقدرة على الاستماع لاحتياجات الآخرين وظروفهم وتفهمهم والتعبير عن هذا التفهم، ومهارات التفاوض وغيرها من المهارات التي يمارسها الطلاب عند قراءة وتحليل ودراسة النصوص الادبية هي نفس المهارات الحياتية المطلوبة في سوق العمل وأيضا مهارات المواطنة.

و لتعزيز مشاركة الطلاب وتشجيعهم علي المشاركة في عملية صنع القرار تقترح الباحثة ضرورة خلق بيئة صفية تمتاز بالديمقراطية واحترام الآخر، بيئة تمتاز فيها العلاقة بين الطالب والأستاذ بالاحترام المتبادل، بيئة تسمح للطلاب أن يناقش الآراء والأفكار التي يطرحها الأستاذ والتعبير بحرية عن آرائهم وأفكارهم مما يساعد على نمو شخصياتهم وزيادة ثقتهم بأنفسهم. كما تؤكد الباحثة علي ضرورة استخدام استراتيجيات تعليم وتعلم نشطة متمركزة حول الطالب في تحليل النصوص الأدبية وربطها بالقضايا المجتمعية.

الكلمات الرئيسية:

المشاركة المدنية – تدريس الأدب - الصفوف الدراسية الديمقراطية – استراتيجيات التعليم والتعلم النشط

INTRODUCTION

This paper responds to the growing desire of connecting higher education to the civic sphere. Higher education, as the last stage of formal education for most students, should play a pivotal role in shaping the students' characters and developing them as ethical and engaged citizens. Education should turn students from the passive recipients of knowledge to active, responsible participants in the development of their communities. It must go beyond imparting information to the active engagement of analytical and communicative skills that will allow them to participate fully in their fast-changing world.

But because many universities are often disconnected from the communities of which they are an integrated part; and many instructors and students live in ivory towers; hence, my conviction is that we must build civic engagement into the hearts of the undergraduates' learning through literature. Two questions are posed here: firstly; why specifically literature; and secondly, how to bridge the gap between literature and civic engagement. The answer simply lies in the fact that literature allows students to see people like themselves represented in the curricula and allows them to witness their struggles for freedom, improving society, finding solutions to problems, etc. Such perspective helps prepare students for the real-world problems and relate the values and ideas expressed in the literary works of art to their own lives. Thus, literature can broaden the students' understanding of shared struggles and problems. In addition, "it is through literature" as Judith Langer states in *Envisioning Literature* (1995) that "students learn to explore possibilities and consider options; they gain connectedness and seek vision. They become the type of literate, as well as creative, thinkers that we'll need to learn well at college, to do well at work, and to shape discussions and find solutions to tomorrow's problems" (59).

Furthermore, through reading and analyzing literary texts, students can be encouraged to address questions of social justice and explore how structures of injustice and inequality are institutionalized and reproduced locally. Studying literature enhances their sense of identity and self-empowerment. It also heightens their awareness and increases their interest in participating in current issues taking place in their local communities, nation, and the world in a responsible way. Besides, the critical thinking skills, problem solving, asking questions, engaging in debates, and developing empathy that students practice while reading, analyzing and writing about literature are the same skills required in other facets of life which allow them to utilize their voice as a means of solving their communities' problems.

RATIONALE

My contention is grounded on both John Dewey’s vision of the classroom as a “site of civic engagement in its own right” (qtd. in Spiezio, et al. 275) and on Paola Freire and Donaldo Macedo’s views of teaching and learning as a “relationship of learners to the world” (viii). From here, the literature classes can be metamorphosed into an ideal location to foster the growth of the students into citizens capable of contributing to the common good of their communities through listening, interacting, and solving problems which come naturally both in the literature classes and the civic engagement activities.

This paper seeks to explore how to expand opportunities for teaching civic engagement in the literature classes and how literature classes can be used as a tool for the students’ active engagement. The paper advocates for the literature classroom to be a site where students learn how to develop their civic capacities and civic efficacy. It also places an emphasis on the necessity of instructors to connect the social issues inherent in the literary texts they are teaching with the current events and incorporate some forms of civic engagement in their literary courses. To that end, some civic-engagement pedagogies, which stimulate the students’ civic agency and trigger their reflection; and finally, empower them to become civically engaged citizens, will be elaborated.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a descriptive, qualitative, data-driven approach done without conducting experiments or analyzing questionnaires. This approach – which is non-empirical and which regards reflection, personal observation and experience as valuable sources of knowledge – has been utilized to explore civic engagement concepts and to provide not only a practical roadmap of how to integrate civic engagement into the literature curriculum, but also to provide a wealth of examples of successful practices and techniques.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Numerous studies have chronicled comprehensive guides to developing high-quality civic engagement experiences for university students. Others have defined civic engagement and explained why it is central to higher education. In addition, many other studies have described the state of the art of education for civic engagement and provided frameworks for designing programs that encourage students’ civic engagement. Many publications also help create a campus-wide culture of civic engagement. Examples include “Identifying Best Practices in Civic Education: Lessons from the Student Voices Program” by Lauren Feldman et al., “General Education and Civic Engagement:

An Empirical Analysis of Pedagogical Possibilities” by Kim E. Spiezio et al, “Employing Civic Participation in College Teaching Designs” by David L. Palmer and Christina Standerfer, “Civic Pedagogies and Liberal-Democratic Curricula” by Joe Coleman, “Promoting Civic Agency Through Civic-Engagement Activities: A Guide for Instructors New to Civic-Engagement Pedagogy” by Carolyn Forestiere, and “Teaching Civic Topics in Four Societies: Examining National Context and Teacher Confidence” by Theresa Alviar-Martin et al., “Understanding the Relationship between Civic Skills and Civic Participation: Educating Future” by Mary Kirilin, and “Voice in the Classroom: How an Open Classroom Climate Fosters Political Engagement among Adolescents” by David E. Campbell explain how an open classroom climate has a positive impact on adolescents’ civic knowledge and skills. Moreover, there are examples of integrating civic engagement with social sciences like “Doom and Gloom”: Empowering students in Courses on Social Problems, Injustice, and Inequality” by Brett Johnson” and “Dialogue, Discussion, and Democracy in the Social Studies Classroom” by Rory P. Tannebaum.

However, very few writers have addressed the issue of using the literature classes to empower students and engage them civically like “Liberating the Classroom: The Artistic Teaching of Gender in Nineteenth-Century Literature Courses at An-Najah National University” by Mohammed Hamdan, an article which focuses on gender issues in 19th century literature. “Their Eyes Sparkled: Building Classroom Community through Multicultural Literature” by Julia Lopez-Robertson touches upon the issue of building community using multicultural literature; but focuses on the elementary stage and not on the university level. “Towards a Civic Education in a Multicultural Society: Ethical Problems in Teaching Literature” by Peter Smagorinsky tackles the ethical problems that teachers and students encounter while analyzing literary texts written from a particular cultural perspective; and the misrepresentation of some racial, ethnic groups in some literary texts.

It is here that the contribution of this paper lies as it provides a framework to create civic engagement activities in the literature classroom through which students can become civically engaged in achieving their communities’ common good. The paper also chronicles how to provide students with the knowledge, skills, values, and confidence they need to be engaged citizens who make a meaningful difference in their communities.

DEFINING TERMS

In *Civic Engagement in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices* (2009), Barbara Jacoby defines civic engagement as “a heightened sense

of responsibility to one's communities" (9) which includes a wide array of activities like participation in community organizations, volunteering, or any other form of being engaged in solving the communities' problems. Civic engagement encompasses "learning from others, self, environment to develop informed perspectives on social issues, valuing diversity and building bridges across difference, behaving, and working through controversy, with civility, participating actively in public life, public problem solving, and community service, developing empathy, ethics, values, and sense of social responsibility (Jacoby 9).

In keeping with Dewey's constant reminder that civic engagement should be informed by education, students have to be fully equipped to participate in their communities' common good. Instructors need to cultivate not only the students' civic knowledge and capacities but also their civic efficacy and civic agency which allow them to participate fully in the wellbeing of their societies. Civic capacities include civic knowledge, civic skills, agency, processes, and values (Johnson 45; and Domagal-Goldman 1). Civic knowledge refers to the foundational information that is useful for the activities of citizenship; many of which are encountered while reading and analyzing literary texts like justice, equality, freedom, essentialism, hegemony, the Other, diaspora, ethnicity, hybridity, and the like. Digesting these entire new and sometimes complicated terms that literature students encounter throughout their journey is not an easy task, but the classroom discussions and activities can contribute tremendously to their understanding. It is indispensable to emphasize that having information and understanding the importance of this information are two different things. In preparing our students for their active roles as citizens, they have to integrate knowledge into an understanding of their rights, duties, interests, and affections. As Benjamin Barber declares, "give [students] some significant [civic] power and they will quickly appreciate the need for knowledge but foist knowledge on them without giving them responsibility and they will display only indifference" (234).

In addition to civic knowledge, Kimberley P. Canfield asserts the importance of developing what she calls the "social skills of the citizen" which include the art of conversation, the ability and propensity to be honest, and a sense of multicultural tolerance (217). Suzanna W. Morse in her book *Renewing Civic Capacity: Preparing College Students for Service and Citizenship* (1989) also supports the same idea to enhance the skills and values that develop the students' abilities to be able to talk, listen and act together with a group of other citizens for the public good (vi). Civic attitudes/values also "combine social concern for others and a moral duty to become involved in community affairs to try to better one's

surroundings” (Johnson 45). This means that literature students should become aware not only of the dynamics of race, class, and gender they encounter while reading and analyzing literary texts, but they also should act upon any form of injustices like racism, classicism, anti-naturalism, etc. which they might face in their daily interactions. As for the civic capacities, they refer to processes such as how to register to vote (Domagal-Goldman 3). Civic agency can be broadly defined as “the capacity of each individual, working alone or in groups, to view what happens in the world in a critical way and to think about how to bring about positive change” (Forestiere 456). Finally, there is the civic efficacy which is advanced through repeated experiences of successful performance as well as the anticipation of competent performance (qtd. in Johnson 46). This clearly refers to the students’ genuine belief in their capabilities to make a difference in their communities and to address the social problems they encounter in their everyday lives.

To university instructors who wish to incorporate civic engagement activities into their courses but unsure how to begin, I propose the following path that can empower students, embody the ideas they study; and consequently, help them act as citizens.

CREATING A DEMOCRATIC CLASSROOM

Literature classes can be transformed into fertile learning environment and rich sites for community responsibility and applied knowledge in which the students’ awareness of the social issues can be enhanced as they start examining their own social interests in relation to the literary texts they are studying. For this to happen, the classroom has to be democratized, which means giving the students the freedom to learn and choose, to be responsible for themselves and for others, and to work together toward achieving one goal.

This approach to learning was described by Joe Coleman in his article “Civic Pedagogies and Liberal-Democratic Curricula” as “democratic learning” which he defines as a form of pedagogy that reflects the introduction of democratic modes of decision making into the classroom (751). This approach stimulates students to participate collectively in the governance of the course including rules/protocol of behavior, the construction of the syllabus, the types of assessments, activities and/or projects. It gives them the space to contribute, discuss, and decide whenever possible; it also provides them with opportunities to take responsibilities and to demonstrate what they have learned—thereby, creating horizontal power relationships in the classroom.

Building a democratic classroom takes place when instructors engage students in a number of socially meaningful activities which encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning. This can be

achieved in several ways like the selection of the types of assignments required and the selection of a favorite literary text to analyze, present, or speak about, which empowers students and nurtures their abilities and self-worth.

Literature classes like all classes can be democratic or undemocratic. If lecturing is the only mode of instruction, facts and tests are the primary concerns, and students are safe in their comfort zones, then the classroom is an inhospitable terrain for the promotion of engaged citizenship. But if we invite students to participate in discussions and accept the conflicting points of views that come from multifaceted readings, we “legitimize a democracy of voices” (Pradl x); and, consequently empower them and encourage their assertive ways of expression.

USING CIVIC-ENGAGEMENT PEDAGOGIES

Since the goal of this paper is encouraging students to be civically engaged through literature, the question then becomes what are the pedagogies that instructors can utilize in order to achieve this goal. For many instructors, the answer lies in incorporating some forms of civic engagement through adopting “civic instruction” (Palmer and Standerfer 126), which can be defined as pedagogical strategies and instructional techniques that are student-centered, participatory in nature and dedicated to the promotion of students’ engagement in the classroom and the local community. Many of the skills necessary for civic engagement are not cultivated through authoritarian teaching methods, but through active and innovative teaching methods that enhance active citizenship inside and outside the classroom. Wilbert J. McKeachie et al. have pointed out that teaching methods that actively involve students in the learning process and provide them with opportunities for interaction with their peers as well as with faculty enhance the students’ content learning, critical thinking, transfer of learning to new situations, and such aspects of moral and civic development as a sense of social responsibility, tolerance, and nonauthoritarianism (70)

“Civic instructions” incorporate a considerably broad range of instructional practices. In addition to what Joe Coleman described as “democratic learning,” he adds “cooperative learning” and “constructivist pedagogy” (749) as two more examples of the civic-based instruction. Cooperative learning refers to a variety of teaching methods in which students work in small groups to help one another learn academic content. As James C. Hendriz has explicated in his article “Cooperative Learning: Building a Democratic Community,” cooperative learning increases student achievement, promotes positive attitudes toward learning, improves student self-esteem, and improves race relations (335).

Newman et al. in their article “Authentic Pedagogy and Student Performance” have highlighted that constructivist pedagogies share a similar interest in the students’ abilities to construct meaning “grounded in their own experience rather than simply absorbing and reproducing knowledge transmitted from subject-matter fields” (280-81). They have also added that constructivist pedagogies may be conducted through small group discussions; cooperative learning tasks; independent research projects; using arts; using of computer and video technology; using community-based projects such as surveys, oral histories and volunteer service (281).

The above-mentioned theoretical background supports the necessity of utilizing instructional strategies that are interactive and hands-on, which include – but not restricted to –the following strategies. “Democratic conversation” is a collaborative strategy which “begins with students listening to themselves” (Pradl 51) and then explore new possibilities. Gradually, students – according to Pradl – discover that a single reading stimulates diverse responses, which open up new meanings for them. Consequently, “literature classrooms might be caldrons of democracy;” and, hence “legitimize a democracy of voices” (ix, x). Debate is another teaching strategy that develops the students’ skills related to conducting good research, analyzing the topic under discussion, finding alternative approaches, and presenting different solutions, in addition to tolerance of opposing ideas and civic skills. Role playing is a third teaching strategy that can engage students because as Erich Mistrik has highlighted in his article “Art/Aesthetic Education in Civic Education” when students play the roles consciously, they put their own attitudes and emotions unconsciously (4).

Furthermore, the employment of the internet technology plays an important role in promoting students’ civic engagement. Digital pedagogy, which includes digital portfolios and blogs, are imperative to cope with the digital culture we all experience. In her article “The Digital Imperative: Making the Case for a 21st Century Pedagogy,” J. Elizabeth Clark has referred to the fact that digital portfolios or e-portfolios encourage students to make connection between their academic and lived lives, which is a major tenant in civic education (29-30).

Furthermore, students are motivated to keep personal blogs or contribute to a class blog, which focuses on the social issues related to the class themes. They are also encouraged to interview their parents or grandparents to solicit and discuss their views on some public issues related to the literary texts they are analyzing. In this case as Margaret Stimman Branson has asserted in her article “Education for Informed, Effective, and Committed Democratic Citizenship,” “all generations

make civic gains.” Moreover, in engaging students in the social issues discussed in the classroom, they can be asked to find articles related to the course and to provide critical commentary on them in the course blog.

Using such student-centered cooperative approaches foster toleration and equal respect by exposing students to the diversity that already surrounds them in the guise of their classmates; a virtue which is required for citizenship (Coleman 754). Exposing students to the civic sphere through the literary texts allows them to inquire, discover, and learn with and from one another and understand the civic knowledge in more practical and thorough terms than they would if their educational activities have been confined only to the classroom environment.

INTEGRATING CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN THE LITERATURE CURRICULA

As literature instructors, we have the responsibility not only to teach our students that social problems are ingrained in the fabric of our society but also to keep them informed of the current events and social issues; and finally, to prepare them to respond to real situations in the present – thereby creating citizenry. By bringing contemporary issues and problems into the curriculum and into the students’ classroom experience, instructors can transmit content knowledge and inspire a sense of civic responsibility and ownership for community problems. For instance, if there is a problem in the campus, students should learn how to dialogue with authorities, stakeholders, colleagues in framing and defining the problem and the action to be taken. In his article “Citizenship Courses as Life-Changing Experiences,” William Coplin proposes an ice-breaker activity which he describes as “the awakening” (68). He suggests that the instructor chooses a relevant issue that has meaning to the students and at the same time related to the topic discussed (such as gender issues, discrimination, etc.); then the students are asked to take a position about that issue and defend their viewpoints.

There is also the idea of keeping a minimum of requirement for volunteer work, which can be optional. Despite my awareness of the difficulty of asking students to participate in community service, this activity can be an ungraded requirement; but for those who can do it, they can get extra credit. For students who are disinterested in off-campus volunteering, they can be encouraged to perform a service to someone in the campus community. This limited use of community experience, as Coplin mentions, has the purpose of awakening the students to the needs of their communities. However, Benjamin R. Barber has emphasized the fact that students should be aware that “serving others is not just a form of do-goodism or feel goodism, it is a road to social responsibility and citizenship” (xiii). The success of this activity is dependent on proper

preparation and adequate academic reflection in the form of essays and journals.

IN-CLASS APPLICATION

Before embarking on the mission of integrating civic engagement in their literature classes, instructors should take some strategic decisions concerning many issues like course intended learning outcomes (ILOs), the scope of the civic engagement activity, and the grading strategy for the students' activities.

Most academic courses have among their ILOs developing communication skills, critical thinking, and leadership skills. So, when the instructor designs the civic engagement activities, these goals should be integrated in both the academic work and the civic engagement activity, which means that academic activities should go hand in hand with the civic engagement activities. Carolyn Forestier has illustrated this point by stating that the academic activities usually involve critical thinking (through research paper), oral and written communication (in-class presentation, term papers, or letter writing), and leadership development (in-class or community projects) (467). Then, every topic covered in the literature class should have some civic engagement components. As for diffusing civic engagement activities as part of the course curriculum, the scope of the activity varies from one instructor to another. One instructor may use civic engagement activities as a supplement while another might prefer a larger scope which makes the content of the whole course revolves around the civic engagement activities. That depends on factors like the experience of the instructor and the flexibility of the system that allows the instructor to make specific changes in the course. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the grading strategy for the civic-engagement activities, it is worth noting here that since it is difficult to evaluate students on the civic engagement activities, instructors should agree with the students from the beginning on the nature of the civic engagement activities that can be graded. Students can reflect on their civic-engagement activities using reaction paper, journal, blog, presentation, poster, etc. which can be graded according to certain rubrics.

After taking these strategic decisions, instructors – through mindful selection of the literary texts that are reflective of the students' life experiences or through highlighting new focal points in the literature courses, in addition to the reconstruction of classroom interaction and incorporating, and using a variety of appropriate civic-engagement activities – can allow their students to embark on the journey of becoming civically engaged.

In redesigning the course to incorporate civic engagement activities, it does not matter whether the texts selected are old or new and it does not matter if the course covers Elizabethan, Jacobian, Victorian, modern, or contemporary writers. What is crucial; however, is that the instructor uses the text(s) to engage the students in timely and recent topics. So, for example, when studying and analyzing William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), emphasis can be given to "the ancient grudge" between the two families and how it is turned into "mutiny" where "civil blood makes civil hands unclean" (Shakespeare 3). This is also a very timely angle that can be highlighted with reference either to the local or the global feuds and their tragic implications on the society. *Othello* (1603) – another Shakespearean tragedy – can also be read and discussed from the perspectives of race, representation, and the "Self"/the "Other." Additionally, Desdemona can be analyzed as an early prototype of a feminist heroine who defies the patriarchal authority and marries outside her class and race. The theme of bonding too, which is manifested in the relationship between Desdemona and Emilia and the bond between the two soldiers (Othello and Iago) that separates them from the civilians, can also be analyzed using feminist and psychoanalytic approaches. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) can also be tackled from a postcolonial perspective in the sense of analyzing the dichotomy between home and abroad, center and margin; and drawing similarities between Heathcliff and any other marginalized person/group in the society. Moreover, the novel can be discussed from a feminist perspective which allows the readers to view Catherine Earnshaw as a powerful example of the feminist revolt against the Victorian idealization of the angel in the house.

To make the proposed path more concrete, we can take "gender issues" as an example. The classroom as a liberating space for discussion can open multiple horizons for the students. While reading and analyzing women's gender-injustice issues in literary texts like Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), Kate Chopin's "A Story of an Hour" (1894), Suzan Glaspell's *Trifles* (1916), Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976), Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl" (1978), David Mamet's *Oleanna* (1992), etc., students are encouraged to find links between the protagonists' limitations and misfortunes and the status of women nowadays with special emphasis on women's position in their communities. To utilize the hallmarks of "civic instruction," students are asked to listen, interact, deliberate, and to be responsive to certain gender issues with which they can identify personally and socially.

To create civic-engagement atmosphere, students in groups can be asked to identify a contested issue of importance to them and then select a

text or an angle from a text; and try to “engage” through it in any creative way they see possible. All forms of intellectual potential are allowed and welcomed. So, a group can create a wall magazine taking the literary text as the point of departure. Another might work with community members to create digital stories. It is equally important for students to appreciate the power of photographs. That is why a third group might collect some photographs related to the major issue they want to “engage” with and explain why they matter. A fourth one might interview some community members in an issue related to a major theme they are discussing, then they can give a presentation. A fifth can invite a guest to shed light on any of the issues raised or have a debate. A sixth group – inspired by ecofeminism – may create green spaces in the campus. Such civic-engagement activities closely reflect Dewey and Friere’s views on the objectives of education that should be grounded on the interests of community and its renewal and development. This is also similar to Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s conviction that the classroom “not only serves as a formal center for the process of knowledge production, but also as a catalyst for social justice through the challenging of both injustice and unequal power arrangements (57).

CONCLUSION

When instructors engage their students civically in issues related to the literary texts they study and encourage them to discover solutions not only through discussions but also through active participation in their local communities, they mirror Dewey’s and Friere’s miniature community approach to teaching, which entails transforming the pedagogy of the classroom by extending its boundaries. Literature classrooms can be a rich, productive site that encourages students to develop their civic capacities for civic engagement that might persist for the rest of their lives. As literature instructors, it is our role to assist our students in developing a more complex understanding of the world and nourish their realization that through their active engagement, they can positively make a change in the world around them. This can be achieved through creating a civic-engagement atmosphere in the literature classroom, embracing instructional practices that explicitly emphasize the significance of civic engagement which focuses on multiple perspectives, active voice student-centeredness and empowerment; and, finally connecting the course content to issues in the local or national communities.

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