



Politics and the Citizenship Curriculum: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Texas Government Standards

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Abstract

This analysis examined the Texas government standards after their revision in the spring of 2010. Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS, are the learning standards Texas public schools are required to use as the curriculum. James Gee's framework for critical discourse analysis was used to 1. uncover the ways in which the language in the document defines citizenship education in Texas, 2. determine if the language creates an imbalance of power among participants in education, and 3. determine if the learning standards agree with educational philosophers' construct of citizenship and democratic education. The critical discourse analysis revealed a heavily biased set of learning standards. The implications of this bias is discussed and suggestions are offered for ways in which teachers and teacher education programs might address the government standards.

Key words: citizenship education, critical discourse analysis, Texas, government

1. Introduction

In the United States, a foundational purpose of public education has been to prepare citizens for self-government. From Thomas Jefferson's (Jefferson 2014) pleas for a system of public schools that would ensure that all citizens could read and were exposed to enough history to judge the character of potential leaders, through to Horace Mann's (2014: 45) promotion of public schools, early advocates sought to prepare youth for 'the adequate performance of their social and civil duties'. Such arguments have continued into more recent reform efforts. In the 1980s, for example, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education 2014: 334) argued that 'A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture'. Consistently, the argument in favor of public schooling has focused on the importance of education and an informed citizenry to maintaining democracy and human freedom. However, the nature of the education required to adequately prepare students for citizenship has

been as continually and contentiously debated as the nature of the terms 'citizenship' and 'self-government' themselves.

Historically, there have been noteworthy efforts to introduce students of all ages to the political structure of the United States (Evans 2004; Gerson, McCurry, Francis and Bridgeland 2011). This study focuses on the efforts of the state of Texas to assimilate older students into the current political structure by means of the high school government standards. This study involved a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the government Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), the curriculum standards mandated for use in Texas public schools by the Texas State Board of Education and the state legislature. Texas has long had political debates over the content of the history and social studies curriculum (King 2010; Collins 2012). The Texas State Board of Education (SBOE), the agency authorized to set curricular standards and approve textbooks used in the state, insists that their goal is to provide ideological balance in the curriculum (Rogers 2011; Henry 2010). However, using Gee's (2006) seven building tasks of CDA, this study uncovered implicit ideologies and power structures within the standards that demonstrate a clear preference for conservative ideological perspectives and contradict the vision of democratic education developed by educational theorists.

2. Existing Theories and Models of Citizenship Education

2.1 Education for Democracy

Despite the societal goal to create educated citizens, a consensus as to the nature of citizenship education does not exist. Evans (2004: 2) notes that traditional views of citizenship focused on 'development of old-fashioned patriotism through filiopietistic history'. Since the early Progressive era, citizenship education also has been presented as education for democratic participation. This shift fundamentally reconceptualized the nature of education required to promote good citizenship, with the focus shifting from patriotism, the affection and support of a nation state, to democratic participation. Democratic participation refers to the active engagement in the political process in a nation-state where the citizens are allowed and encouraged to express their concerns through interest groups, grassroots movements, voting, and elections. The educational theorists of the time promoted a conceptualization of citizenship education as democratic education that can only take place in an educational system that allows for the development of the student as a whole person (Dewey 1916). Further, students cannot learn to be democratic citizens in autocratic institutions. Therefore, democratic education is not a system in which the curriculum and knowledge worth knowing are dictated to students and teachers, but a collegial, communal process of growth and development (Dewey 1916, 1938; Freire 1970 [2009]; Levinson 1999, 2005; Lave and Wenger 1991). A key component of democratic education is a flexible curriculum co-created with students. When curriculum is enforced from the top down, teachers and students miss the opportunity to work democratically in the classroom to construct joint goals and understandings. Through this cooperative process, students build upon their existing knowledge in order to make meaning from the content

they study, which should be relevant to their present lives. Without meaning, the learning becomes irrelevant and students become disengaged. Democratic education is meant to help teach students how to become self-directed life-long learners and full participants in their communities, not experts at passing standardized tests (Apple 2005, 2011; Levinson 2005; Bandura 1997).

2.2 Business Models of Education: The Free Market Individual

In contrast to this conception of democratic education stand recent efforts to base public education on a business model (Smith 1992). The business model of education seeks to obtain proof of learning in much the same way that businesses report proof of success through profits. In this model, student learning is treated as a commodity measured by results in examinations. The current educational model in Texas reflects a national shift toward conservatism in the 1980s. Smith (1992) noted the conservative movement's success in shaping views of curriculum and the purpose of education. Smith further suggested this paradigm shift in the curriculum is also a response to the emergence of postmodernism. He identified two dominant perspectives on education: the educationist and the anthropological. Anthropological education includes the development of the whole student through a focus on the relational components of education, which Smith suggests provides a more enriched perspective of education. He points to the conservative movement, led by President Reagan and his Secretary of Education, as a pivotal moment in the educationist effort. Educationists' primary concern lies with testing and identifying students who learn and who do not learn. Smith points to this business model philosophy of education as a catalyst to the prevalence of standardized testing.

Advocates of democratic education persist with efforts to influence discussion about the goals of the public education system in the United States. Apple (2011) notes that more people in the United States are beginning to reject the idea that a high-stakes economic model of education is the only manner in which reform might occur. Many educational theorists share Levinson's (2005) perspective that models of democratic education in other countries serve as examples to help return a sense of social justice and perhaps even equity to American schooling.

2.3 Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to describe the current status of democratic education, consider the balance of power that exists between teacher and students and among students, and critically consider how the learning standards for government influence or create these educational constructs in Texas, (USA). The following questions guided the research:

1. How do the government TEKS promote democratic education?
2. How do the government TEKS promote citizenship education?
3. How does the language of the government TEKS encourage a balance or imbalance of power amongst students and teachers?
4. How does the language of the government TEKS encourage a balance or imbalance of power among students?

To answer these questions, we conducted a CDA of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills TEKS. Because the TEKS represent the formal discourse establishing the mandated curriculum standards for the state, CDA allowed us to uncover the power structures inherent to the curriculum (Rogers 2011; Henry 2010, Aug. 22). Our discussion includes a critique of the current government learning standards and the conception of citizenship promoted therein, and offers suggestions for teacher and teacher educators on how to teach within the legal confines of the Texas standards.

3. Methodology

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA provided an excellent fit for analysis of the Texas government curriculum due to its focus on the power of language. CDA views language as a tool with which to gain and exercise hegemonic power. Frequently, people are unaware of the power that language encompasses and fail to realize the ways in which language represents a tool for social control. CDA is a form of qualitative research that may best be described as '[emphasizing] the role of language as a power resource that is related to ideology and social-cultural change' (Bryman 2008: 508). Further, this method uses the study of related texts to disseminate, regulate, and interpret the social reality created in the documents. Rogers (2011) explains that CDA is a research methodology that provides the necessary tools to explore and address issues of power and inequality in the modern world. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000) list several key topics that are the focus of many CDA studies. These topics include politics, ideology, racism, economics, advertisements, media, gender, institutional language, education, and literacy. CDA also examines matters of power, inequality, and other issues of rights and freedoms. Moreover, CDA functions to reveal meaning behind text and is a way for scholars to reveal meaning and power struggles from documents (Bryman 2008; McGregor 2004).

3.2 Procedure

For this study, the government TEKS were analyzed using Gee's (2011) seven building tasks. Gee's framework for CDA includes significance, activities or practices, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and signs, systems and knowledge. Gee (2011: 30) suggests that 'language-in-use is a tool, not just for saying and doing things ... but to build things in the world'. Language use creates 'social practice' (Rogers et al. 2005: 369); the process by which language produces social interactions among people. Rogers et al. (2005: 369) point out that 'language cannot be treated as neutral, because it is caught up in political, social, racial, economic, religious, and cultural formations'. Therefore, all of Gee's (2006) building tasks and the language in the texts represent the process of building the power structures for control of the political and educational discourse in Texas. Although other factors play a role in determining the taught curriculum in schools, we delimited this study to the government standards, or TEKS (Lakshmanan 2011: 369), due to the accessibility of the entirety of this document and its importance in setting the

curriculum for the state's public schools. As we read through the text, we looked for the 'social practice' created by the texts and the relationships that build an identity of democratic participants in education. This process helped to make meaning of the impact on education these curricular standards will have in Texas (Rogers et al. 2005).

The document analysis focused on answering the seven questions Gee (2006) asks in relation to the seven building tasks.

1. **Significance:** How is language used to denote significance or insignificance of aspects of the curriculum? What words or phrases are used to indicate significance in the documents?
2. **Activities:** How does the language used encourage actions (Gee 2006: 11)?
3. **Identities:** What identities of students and citizens are being constructed from the language used in the learning standards?
4. **Relationships:** What relationships between the government and the curriculum are the documents seeking to create?
5. **Politics:** 'What perspective on social goods (public goods, available resources for all people) is this piece of language communicating?' (Gee 2011: 31). For example, Lakshmanan (2011: 90) suggests this implies 'what is being communicated as to what is taken to be normal, right, and good, appropriate...high or low status'.
6. **Connections:** How do the learning standards connect or disconnect students to the curriculum?
7. **Signs and systems knowledge:** How do these documents create 'different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief' (Gee 2006: 13)?

To answer each question, the researchers read through the government curriculum several times, in order to become familiar with the content of the document. Next, we read the document, carefully considering each question and looking for language that would provide answers to the questions posed. For instance, as we read through the curriculum, considering the first question of significance, we looked for words that appeared to be important through repetition, placement in the text, or verb usage. Verbs were important in the analysis because they imply action necessary from students or teachers. After reading for answers to each of the seven building tasks, we made notes, jotted down what seem to be key words, and wrote down emerging themes or patterns. Eventually, we returned to the research questions, and using the notes, themes, and observations collected, began to form answers to each research question from each of the seven building tasks analyses. Once we put together an outline of results, we began to review the data and develop emerging themes.

4. Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Using CDA as the methodology for this study demands that we consider the roles we play with respect to civic education generally and the Texas

government curriculum in particular. To ensure the validity of this work, it is imperative that we address our own worldviews, personal biases and experience with the Texas government standards and the Texas SBOE (Bryman 2008; Fairclough 2008).

Abbie Strunc taught government and economics to Texas public high school seniors for ten years. The high school where she worked has a large, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body. The revision and subsequent adoption of the social studies TEKS coincided with her course work for graduate studies. As she watched these events unfold, and read the reactions from around the world to the new standards, she began to reflect over the ways in which her students did not interact with the curriculum. She considered the role she had in the classroom. She worked hard to develop relationships with her students over the course of a school year, and as she began to more closely pay attention to the feedback of her students, she consistently noted that students did not see the relevance of the government curriculum. This is consistent with the findings of numerous studies that seek to determine why young adults consistently reflect the demographic with the lowest participation in politics (Andolina et al. 2002; Kahne and Sporte 2008; Kahne, Chi, and Middaugh 2006; Knight Abowitz and Harnish 2006; Wiseman 2003). Strunc's experience as a classroom teacher – which involved watching firsthand as the government curriculum disengages students from political participation – coupled with her graduate school coursework – where she learned the theories of civic education promoting democratic participation led her to a critical analysis of a curriculum and policymaking board that do not reflect the democratic ideals they espouse. She is currently an assistant professor of education.

Kelley King taught for ten years in the public schools of Texas before becoming an associate professor of Curriculum and Instruction. She teaches courses on the social and historical foundations of education and conducts research on the history of education in Texas and the United States as well as education for democratic citizenship. She attended public schools in the Midwest and finds the curriculum politics of Texas both fascinating and disturbing. Her bias is against biased instruction and in favor of consideration of multiple sides of an issue. She is interested in having students consider the implications and outcomes of key policy and practices from various sides of the political spectrum. This is a liberal bias in the sense that individual reason is a liberal practice.

5. Analysis of Texas Government Standards

5.1 Summary of the Texas Government Standards

The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for government is divided into eight parts, or strands. At the beginning of the curriculum, there is a seven-part introduction to the learning standards, which offers an explanation of the course. The purpose of the course introduction is to offer some rationale for the course, explain the assumption that students enter this course with broad content knowledge in civics and other social studies content, and

finally, explicitly state the knowledge that a majority of board members believe students in Texas should know about government.

A final component of the introduction includes a section regarding ‘Celebrate Freedom Week’ (Texas Education Agency 2011, 113.44, (c) 7). According to the TEKS, this week is a celebration of significant events in U.S. history and government. Participation is compulsory, required by federal laws and Texas Education Code. This particular section holds two interesting interpretations of United States history. The first espouses the belief in the connection of the Declaration of Independence to the rich diversity of the United States. The curriculum further suggests that the ideas in the Declaration of Independence are the genesis for many significant changes in U.S. society. Two notable events this curriculum which directly relate to the beliefs in the Declaration of Independence include ‘the abolitionist movement, which led to the Emancipation Proclamation, and the women’s suffrage movement’ (Texas Education Agency 2011, 113.44, (c) 7 A). This is a wildly optimistic view of the Declaration of Independence. This viewpoint implies that the goal of equality found in the Declaration was achieved as a result of these events. The text does not provide room for questioning the concept of equality found on paper versus reality for formerly enslaved people after the Emancipation Proclamation. At the same time, it de-emphasizes political agitation for women’s suffrage and the struggle for social and political equality of all.

The second piece of this mandatory, week-long celebration is the requirement that ‘students in Grades 3-12 must study and recite’ the first lines of the Declaration of Independence (Texas Education Agency 2011, 113.44, 7 B). The required text ends with the phrase, ‘That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed.’ It is noteworthy that the curriculum introduces the notion that a government has authority from the people. This theme is reiterated throughout the document. The last sentence of the introduction requires students to evaluate the successes or failures of all levels of government in the United States at living up to the values found in early American government documents, such as the Declaration of Independence. As Rogers (2011: 1) notes, ‘critical approaches to discourse analysis recognize that inquiry into meaning making is also an exploration into power’. The Texas curriculum uses the language within the introduction of the learning standards to provide a framework for the power structure which is created throughout the rest of the document.

After the introduction, the standards break down the information students should attain during the course. There are eight strands: history, geography, economics, government, citizenship, culture, science and technology, and social studies skills. Each strand has learning statements describing the information and skills students should be able to demonstrate. There are 22 standards that structure the curriculum. These learning statements are also broken down into 81 sub-strands. The main learning statements are numbered from one to 22, and each sub-strand follows the numbered learning statement and is labeled with an alphabetic character. The government course contains two history strands, two geography strands, two in economics, six strands categorized as government, four labeled as citizenship, one designated

culture, two listed as science and technology, and three referred to as social studies skills.

5.2 Significance

Using Gee's (2006) building tasks as the framework for the analysis of the Texas government curriculum, the first component we identified was language that served to build or lessen the significance of 'certain things and not others' (Gee 2014: 98). In the introduction to the course, the standards assign greater or less significance to certain knowledge through the use of the words 'including' and 'such as' (Texas Education Agency 2011, 113.44(b) 2 C). Both terms seem to highlight the significance of specific facts and concepts by singling them out as worthy of explicit mention in the standards. However, the words are used to rank some knowledge as more significant than other knowledge. The curriculum states that '[s]tatements that contain the word "including" reference content that must be mastered.' This language directs teachers and students to place greater significance on content standards where they read the word 'including' (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44(b) 2 C). This emphasis on mastery directs teachers to ensure that students thoroughly understand the information contained in one of these learning standards. Other learning standards may be used to provide examples or may be overlooked in favor of emphasis on the standards in which mastery is expected. The Texas Education Agency (2011: 113.44 (b) 2 C) explains that TEKS 'containing the phrase "such as" are ... possible illustrative examples'. This further delineates the significance of certain learning standards. Learning standards with 'such as' are worth considering as a potential example, but they are not required and through the use of the phrase 'such as' are denoted as holding less significance. It is a phrase that at once highlights this information and denotes its lesser significance. The language of 'including' and 'such as' creates the state mandated curriculum for secondary students in Texas, USA. The emphasis on particular learning standards delineates the Texas State Board of Education's 'knowledge worth knowing' and creates a power structure of one particular perspective through these language choices (Freire 2009; Rogers 2011; Gee 2006).

The bias of the curriculum becomes evident through careful examination of the TEKS that contain the word 'including,' the word that indicates information of great significance. There are 12 learning standards that present specific information or skills that must be mastered as a result of a student's participation in this course. The language present in these standards promotes American Exceptionalism, the view that 'the United States avoided the class conflicts, revolutionary upheaval, and authoritarian governments of 'Europe' and presented to the world an example of liberty for others to emulate' (Tyrell 1991: 1031; Ross 1984). Gutek (2004) writes that this ideology supports freedom of choice, the rights of the individual, and limiting the authority of the national government. The text of the learning standards which contain the word 'including' use language similar to the word choice used by the Republican Party, as found on the summation of party beliefs, noted in Table 1. For instance, the TEKS that require mastery contain several

Democratic Party	Republican Party
Civil rights – support the current movements to end discrimination in areas of race, gender, and sexual orientation	Economy – support the idea and practice of a free market economy with limited government regulations in the marketplace
Education – emphasis on student loan legislation, along with reforming <i>No Child Left Behind</i> , but importantly notes that accountability of teachers is a priority.	National defense – support the ability of the United States to defend itself, claims to follow the “peace through strength” foreign policy approach used by President Regan. Additionally, acknowledges the need for working with other nations to achieve success.
Energy independence – interested in pursuing all natural resources to move away from dependence on foreign energy.	Healthcare – support healthcare reform to lower costs, eliminate lawsuit abuses, but does not support government run healthcare programs. Support choice in healthcare for patients.
Healthcare – Affordable Healthcare Act will expand coverage, reduce health care discrimination, end insurance abuse, and reduce Medicare/Medicaid fraud.	Education – support quality education programs for all students. Believe in school choice.
Immigration reform – support immigration reform with provisions for border security, people living in the U.S. illegally can a path to citizenship, and impose penalties on businesses which employ undocumented workers.	Energy – support an all-encompassing approach to energy, using all energy sources available to power the United States. Oppose a national energy tax.
Jobs/economy – believe the economy will improve and jobs will be created through ending corporate tax loopholes, and cutting taxes on small businesses.	Courts – support the belief that judges are to interpret the law, nothing more. Judges should use the Constitution to interpret the law.
National security – prevent terrorist acts and activities through information, intelligence, and international cooperation.	
Open government – the U.S. government should have open, clear lines of communication with the people. Lobbyists should not have as much influence, and more accountability in national spending.	
Science & technology – support this through expanding college access programs, such as through student lending, stem cell research, and emphasis in school in science and math.	
Retirement security – believe social security is a major instrument of retirement security, strengthening Medicare is important, and the government should provide a system in which Americans may have “pension portability” (Democrats, 2013).	
Voting rights – still progress to be made to allow all Americans cast their vote easily.	

Table 1. Summation of Democratic and Republican Party Beliefs. Adapted from the Democratic Party’s (2013) and the Republican Party’s (2013) websites.

words and phrases that demonstrate a preference for natural rights accorded by a creator to the individual and limiting the authority of government: ‘the laws[sic] of nature and nature’s God, unalienable rights, the rights of resistance to illegitimate government, and separation of powers’ and responsibilities of the individual (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44. (c) 1 A, B, 7 D). Language choice reaffirming the importance of the individual is present in many of the government TEKS, but those TEKS denoted as most significant emphasize individualism through language such as ‘individual rights ... identify the individuals ... voluntary individual participation ... issues of liberty, rights, and responsibilities of individuals.’ Thus the TEKS promote a view of government as an effort of many individuals making separate decisions about the way in which the government may act for a single person’s benefit (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c) 1 A, B, C, F, 7 D).

Equally important is the more frequent appearance of historical persons claimed by the right, who in the United States are conservatives that typically identify with the Republican Party, as representing their beliefs in the TEKS than persons understood as promoting left-leaning perspectives. In the United States, the left are liberal and progressive and generally associate with the Democratic Party. To illustrate, one of the 12 required TEKS directs students ‘to identify significant individuals in the field of government and politics, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Ronald Regan’ (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c) 1 F). All of these historical figures contributed to U.S. history, but only two represent the American political left (in this paper the political left is defined as those who align beliefs with liberal or progressive ideology), while three represent conservative beliefs. Initially, this seems of little consequence. However, these small discrepancies may represent the desire of some Texas SBOE members to infuse the standards with a conservative bias.

Throughout the TEKS, the word ‘including’ denotes the learning standards considered the most important for students to learn. In the introductory text of the TEKS, the curriculum notes the learning standards which contain the word ‘including’ require student mastery and present ideas which support right-wing policies. Ideas or issues supported by the American political left are generally noted, but are made optional by the phrase ‘such as.’ Thus, these learning standards are not part of the standards the board requires students to master. They are separated to signify a level of importance not afforded to the learning standards without ‘including’ or ‘such as.’ However, they are at the same time de-emphasized as merely ‘possible illustrative examples’ (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (a)(b) 3 c). To illustrate, some of the TEKS ask students to consider the impact of important court cases such as *Baker v. Carr*, *Hernandez v. Texas*, and *Grutter v. Bollinger*. These potential examples address concerns of equity and social justice associated with the progressive left (Apple 2006). However, because these cases are preceded by ‘such as,’ they are made optional instead of required.

Similarly, government policies and interest groups that seek the expansion of voting rights and social equity and that embrace the notion of a collective good in governance are noted in the Texas government standards. However, these topics are also categorized as potential examples, and students are not

required or expected to leave the course with a mastery of associated policies and groups, namely, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, the League of Latin American Citizens, or the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c) 3 C, 16 A, 17 A, B). The distinction in word choice between 'including' and 'such as' that distinguishes what students must learn from information that may be used as an example consistently demonstrates a preference for conservative values embedded within the curriculum. The power structure created through the specific references to what students should learn promotes a perspective of government that is not inclusive of the narratives experienced by minority groups in the United States. Instead, it emphasizes a conservative, right-leaning interpretation of historical events and addresses modern day concerns through this viewpoint. Gee (2006), Fairclough (1993), and Rogers (2011) acknowledge that discourse, such as this curriculum, reproduces societal norms and the reproduction of this government curriculum creates students who have potentially not been exposed to the power structures which promote conservative/right political perspectives, while ignoring the liberal/progressive/left views, and, at the same time, limit the importance of the minority experience in the United States.

5.3 Activities

Gee's (2006) second building task is activities, specifically the kinds of action that the language in the curriculum promotes. The Texas government standards are heavily weighted toward individual cognitive processes. The TEKS ask for only three non-cognitive activities. First, the introduction states that students should recite the preamble to the Declaration of Independence during the required 'Celebrate Freedom Week.' The second and third instances of action urged are found at the end of the curriculum in the learning standards labeled 'social studies skills.' The standards suggest that students demonstrate the ability to transfer information as part of a presentation on a social studies topic, while also asking students to create a product to use in conjunction with their presentation (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c) 22 A, B). All of the other verbs use in the curriculum ('analyze', 'describe', 'discuss', 'identify', 'explain', 'evaluate', 'compare', and 'understand') direct students to perform cognitive activities as part of the consumption of new information. The introduction to the course refers to government as a culmination of knowledge students gain throughout their schooling, asserting the expectation that students are both reviewing and learning new information. The curriculum reinforces this notion as students are asked to understand, identify, explain, evaluate, examine, analyze, give examples, compare, and describe, repeatedly throughout the course. These are not unexpected terms for curriculum standards and potentially suggest academic rigor and the exchange of ideas. However, they do not fully reflect the practice of democratic citizenship. Missing are standards or directives that promote social interaction, group dialogue, or collaborative work, which contradicts the vision of democratic citizenship education as developed by educational theorists (Dewey 1916; Freire 2009; Levinson 2005). Instead, the emphasis is on individual comprehension and individual tasks rather than groups in participatory tasks.

5.4 Identities

We implemented Gee's (2006) third building task by examining the identities constructed by the TEKS for both citizens and students. In this case, we ask, 'What does it mean to be a citizen according to the TEKS?' The curriculum constructs a citizen whose identity is that of an individual who (1) embraces a capitalist market structure in the economy, (2) supports a republican form of government, (3) questions the authority of government, and (4) values the authority of Judeo-Christian texts and traditions (as interpreted from a right-wing perspective) (The Republican Party 2013). The government TEKS suggest students to '*analyze* historical and contemporary conflicts over the respective roles of national and state governments' (Texas Education Agency 2011, 113.44 (c) 9 C). In addition, the curriculum constructs an identity of a citizen who also continually questions the authority of the government and its place in their life, for the most part on a daily basis. It is necessary that students 'understand the roles of limited government and the rule of law in the protection of individual rights' (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c) 13 A). Gee's (2011) construct of identities indicates that the identity created in the Texas government curriculum favors the student who agrees with the conservative identities created in the language of the document.

5.5 Relationships

Gee's (2006) fourth building task is relationships. One important relationship for our analysis is the relationship constructed between the curriculum and government, particularly the way in which the curriculum attempts to create a connection between civic education and the government through this required government course. The government TEKS emphasize the importance of republicanism and federalism, particularly the notion of shared powers. The text highlights the limits on the government through checks and balances, the distinction of separate powers, and the rights of individuals. Thus, the standards incorporate an underlying theme of questioning the authority of the national government. One way this is accomplished is through repeatedly stressing the limited authority of the national government. Directing students to 'identify the freedoms and rights guaranteed by each amendment in the Bill of Rights' is an understated method of accentuating the boundaries of the national government's ability to restrict individual liberties (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c) 13 C).

The standards, then, are useful tools for teaching students how to navigate the current system of government. Much of the language is used to describe the cognitive tasks students must complete as part of the curriculum. Students are encouraged to continually question the authority of the national government (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c)). At the same time, the course reinforces the idea of accepting the current system of government and traditional understandings of the history of the nation. To illustrate, the introduction to the government TEKS states that a large portion of the course 'is on the U.S. Constitution, its underlying principles and ideas, and the form of government it created' (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c) 1). This relationship dictates, in a top-down manner, the knowledge worth knowing for teachers and students alike. The preference for language that reflects

personal political views removes educational freedom from teachers and students in Texas. The relationship between the curriculum and the government develops a notion of politics that embraces the status quo and reinforces the idea that fundamentally, the United States government was created with concern for individuals and the desire for a small national government.

Finally, the citizen produced through the curriculum is one who professes a belief, either through moral support or religious faith, in the importance of the Bible and biblical teaching in the history of the United States. Some of the moral teachings of the Bible are overtly reinforced through the emphasis of the role of Moses and the Ten Commandments as an influence on the United States Constitution. To illustrate, the first learning standard asks students to ‘identify major intellectual, philosophical, political, and religious traditions that informed American founding, including Judeo-Christian (especially biblical law)...as they address issues of liberty, rights, and responsibilities of individuals’ (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c) 1 A). This is despite the fact that the influence of Christianity on the Founding Fathers is debated by historians and constitutional scholars (Flax 2012).

5.6 Politics

Discovery of the ways in which societal norms are cultivated by language serves as Gee’s (2006) fifth building task, politics. The nature and subject matter of a government course ensure that politics is a key concern. The Texas government curriculum reinforces political norms through the use of mostly cognitive verbs (analyze, examine, evaluate, explain, understand, compare, categorize, and identify) in the learning standards. These verbs reflect a preference for critical thinking, where students are asked to evaluate and analyze information presented to them and then make determinations regarding the validity or acceptability of the material. However, the cognitive verbs ask for no action toward social change on the part of students. Rather, they direct students to understand the existing system and to evaluate its fidelity to the Republican ideals of limited government. The standards promote political norms that include patriotism, a free enterprise economic system, and an appreciation of basic democratic values, such as popular sovereignty, election of public officials, and elected officials that abide by the wishes of the people (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (a)(b) 5). Underrepresented – almost absent in fact – is the notion that citizenship and patriotism can be demonstrated through peaceful civil disobedience. Protests, important in American political history, are not referenced as an example of citizenship. Were those who participated in the Million Man March on Washington not fully embracing their citizenship? Were the women who, for decades, actively sought the right to vote not embracing their citizenship?

Moreover, the learning standards explicitly promote American Exceptionalism. References in the TEKS to the foundation of the United States embrace the past as crucial in the continuity of the current government structure. This TEKS indicates a belief that is in line with a strict, constitutionalist perspective. A constitutionalist perspective interprets the United States Constitution through a narrow reading of the language in the document, ostensibly to reconstruct the exact form of government outlined

therein. Strict constitutionalists do not accept many implied powers of government as permitted under the Constitution. The standards also promote belief in the importance of the Judeo-Christian faith, and that religious freedom is evident in the Constitution. The standards direct students to “The student is expected to: examine the reasons the Founding Fathers protected religious freedom in America and guaranteed its free exercise ... “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion ... compare this to the phrase, “separation of church and state”” (Texas Education Agency 2011: 7 G). The influence of Christianity in American government is emphasized in the first learning standard. Students are directed to understand how the creation of American government was affected by Biblical law. The learning standards specifically mention the impact of Moses and the Ten Commandments. At the same time, in another standard, students are asked to ‘examine the reasons the Founding Fathers protected religious freedom in America and guaranteed its free exercise’ (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c) 7 G). Immediately after students are instructed to identify why Congress cannot establish a national religion or deny people the ability to freely exercise a religion, students are required to ‘compare and contrast this to the phrase ‘separation of church and state’ (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c) 7 G). Thus, the Texas government TEKS use language to implicitly reinforce the notion that authentic government in the United States supports the right-wing conservative political ideas of limited national government authority and freedom of religion but acknowledges the historical influence of Christianity on the development of the United States. The way in which the curriculum addresses the size of the government, the interpretation of the Constitution, and the role of the national government refer back to a narrow reading of the founding documents of the United States. Conservatism embraces maintaining tradition and the status quo (Apple 2006). This is precisely what the language in the TEKS attempts to create and support as the political norm in Texas (Gee 2006).

The Texas standards also address the issue of the size and scope of the national government by suggesting both overtly and subtly that the appropriate size of the national government should be small, and its authority, as granted by the Constitution, limited. For example, in TEKS 9 A- D, the main learning standard and the four sub-standards emphasize the division of power in the national government. Students are asked to examine how this political structure is different from other forms of government. The focus is on understanding ‘the limits on the national and state governments in the U.S. federal system of government’ (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c) 9 D). The preference for small national government is also evident in the standard that guides students to analyze ‘judicial activism.’ This word choice is important to note because ‘judicial activism’ is a term used primarily by conservatives to express displeasure at the role judges assume in their rulings and interpretations of the law. Again, not only do the content and word choices of the TEKS tilt right, other perspectives, particularly those of the left, are omitted without acknowledgement. For example, instead of asking students to consider the ways in which court rulings have enforced, protected, or implemented civil rights and liberties, students are required only to study the role of the courts from the perspective that judges occasionally err and overstep their proper sphere of influence to create policy rather than correctly

interpret laws to ensure they abide by the narrow reading of the Constitution favored by the political right. In addition to omitting the cases in which civil rights – particularly of minority groups – were assured through the intervention of the courts or the federal government, the TEKS focus narrowly on the rights of the individual to be free from government oversight. Toward the middle of the curriculum, the citizenship strands explicitly state that ‘the roles of limited government...in the protection of individual rights’ are important for students to appreciate (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c) 13 A). The government TEKS thus imply that a strong national government will abuse the rights of the individual and impinge upon individual freedoms, and therefore it is important to limit the size of the national government.

Finally, it is worth noting that all suggestions or illustrative examples for participation in government reflect activities that can be linked to the interests and concerns of the right. As an example, TEK 14 C, part of the citizenship strands, asks students to learn about the tasks associated with citizenship, ‘such as being well informed about civic affairs, serving in the military, voting, serving on a jury, observing the laws, paying taxes...’ (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c)). Although the curriculum encourages students to identify opportunities for people to participate in government, it does not require, or even encourage, students to participate in civic action, only that they learn of the opportunities for participation.

5.7 Connections

The sixth building task identified by Gee (2006) is connection. For Gee (2014: 132), this means considering how the words and grammar used in a communication ‘make things relevant or irrelevant to other things or ignores their relevance to each other’. For our analysis, this means considering how the learning standards create connections or disconnections between the government curriculum and students. As previously mentioned, numerous studies find that young adults are the age group least engaged in political activities (Andolina et al. 2002; Kahne, Chi and Middaugh 2006; Kahne and Sporte 2008; Knight, Abowitz and Harnish 2006). By specifying a great deal of the content covered and limiting the types of student outcomes expected to the cognitive realm, the Texas government curriculum creates a top-down power structure that likely disconnects students from the content. Dewey (1916) and Freire (2009) both discuss the need to allow for civic education to be a democratic practice by allowing all participants in education, particularly students and the teachers who work closely with them, to choose the knowledge worth knowing and to participate in ‘the naming of the world.’ Texas’ required government curriculum does not represent democratic education in this sense. Instead it constructs the course (and the world) for students.

By emphasizing conservative beliefs and American Exceptionalism throughout the curriculum, the TEKS disconnect some groups of students from both the curriculum and from civic participation. Edwards, Wattenburg, and Lineberry (2008) explain that the strongest influence in the political socialization of young adults is the family. In Texas, government is generally taught at the senior level. Students arrive in a class at age 17 or 18, and by that time, whether they recognize it or not, have generally aligned their political beliefs

with their family's. Students who do not identify with conservative and American Exceptionalist beliefs could easily disconnect from a curriculum filled with obvious or indirect preference for these ideological perspectives. While the TEKS ostensibly allow for the inclusion of other perspectives, this is not required or encouraged.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, the TEKS directly mention the influence of the Judeo-Christian faith in the curriculum. Students are required to 'identify major intellectual, philosophical, political, and religious traditions that informed the American founding, including Judeo-Christian (especially biblical law)' (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c) 1 B). This learning standard is one of the 12 that students are required to master throughout the course. The use of the term 'identify' here, as opposed to 'discuss' or 'evaluate,' indicates that this highly contentious connection between biblical law and the founding documents is a matter of accepted fact. This is noteworthy because only mentioning one major religious tradition connects the foundations of government to that set of beliefs and potentially disconnects students and citizens of other faiths or no faith at all from the philosophical foundations of government, from history, and from the government curriculum.

TEK 1B, referring to Judeo-Christian historical influences, also highlights the right-wing bias in the Texas learning standards. Apple (2006) notes that the neo-conservative and authoritarian-populist right sees 'return' to traditional religious values and a (fictional) common culture. By omitting discussion of current social problems and the potential for social change, the curriculum implies that there is nothing further for students to contribute. This omission disconnects students by discouraging questioning the current social and governmental structures. The students' civic duty is to embrace the current structure, which in many aspects does not represent the majority of students. The TEKS do not allow or acknowledge the passion and interests of students, nor do the TEKS draw current events into the content. For example, despite the fact that this curriculum was written and adopted in 2009- 2010, there is no mention of President Obama who campaigned as a progressive Democrat and made history as the first African American elected President of the United States. Further, there is an assumption at the beginning of the curriculum that all students have an equal knowledge base of social studies concepts. The introduction to the government standards explains, 'Throughout social studies in Kindergarten-Grade 12, students build a foundation in ... economics; government; citizenship; and social studies skills. The content...enables students to understand the importance of patriotism, how to function in a free enterprise society, and appreciate the basic democratic values of our state' and nation (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113(c) 5; Texas Education Code §28.002(B)). Students are expected to be able to 'focus ... on the U.S. Constitution, its underlying principles and ideas [at the same time] students [are also instructed to] identify the role of government in the free enterprise system' (TEA 2011: 113.44 (a) (b) 1). Students without the prior knowledge will disconnect from the curriculum as it will not be relevant information. Dewey (1916) advocates allowing students to build from their common experiences so that learners form connections and assign meaning to their education.

The standards exclude references to people and groups who believe, act, and in some instances, look differently than the majority of the Texas State Board

of Education members. To illustrate, there are only five references to minority groups or past areas of discrimination in the government TEKS. The only references to the civil rights movement found in the government curriculum gloss over the abuses against African Americans' civil rights and liberties. In fact, these are hardly referenced: 'recall the conditions that produced the 14th Amendment and describe subsequent efforts to selectively extend some of the Bill of Rights to the states...evaluate a U.S. government policy or court decision...affected a particular racial...group, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964' (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (c) 13 F, 17 A). Although nothing is explicit in the standards, the absence of the voice of minorities perpetuates the position of non-white voices being unseen and unheard. Democratic education simply does not exist when there are groups of people whose perspective is not valued and included.

Lastly, the government course promotes patriotism and equity, and yet it does not ask students to consider the contended meanings of these terms or find examples in current society. The TEKS also do not ask students to consider how the government affects them. Furthermore, there is no acknowledgement of students' ever-changing perceptions of government. Instead, the expectation is that students recognize the benefits of the current system and embrace a small national government as best (Andolina et al. 2002).

5.8 Sign Systems and Knowledge

Gee's final building task is sign systems and knowledge (2014: 142). By this he references the way in which words and grammar used in a communication privilege or de-privilege specific sign systems. The use of academic and highly technical language in documents meant for the public can exclude some participants from the process due to the inability or frustration associated with comprehending documents seemingly meant to confuse. Additionally, the standards use language of academic rigor but forego critical thinking at a deep level. For example, Texas government TEK 9 A says 'Government. The student understands the concept of federalism. The student is expected to: (A) explain why the Founding Fathers created a distinctly new form of federalism and adopted a federal system of government instead of a unitary system' (TEA, 2011). The language assigns privilege to those students who can perform the assigned tasks in the TEKS, but does not allow room for other discussion of related problems or concerns within the government. Much of the TEKS follow the same pattern. The 'knowledge worth knowing' is assigned in the learning standard, and students are asked to demonstrate that they know the knowledge. Students are not asked or encouraged to question or bring in outside information from the TEKS. Sign systems and the Texas standards are written in English, and while a Spanish translation of the standards can be found, they are not available in other languages. This makes it difficult for any participants whose first language is not English to easily engage in the conversation, unless they fluently understand written, academic English (Gee, 2011).

6. Discussion

After careful review and consideration of the government standards, one of the most important ideas to consider is the TEKS' attempt to influence what students know and believe (Gee 2006). The standards represent required information that students must study and demonstrate successful completion of in order to receive a diploma in Texas (TEA, 2011). Because these standards are presented as a mandate from above, the knowledge worth knowing – what is important to learn about government – is pre-determined for teachers and students.

The Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) distinguished the ideas that are most important using 'including' as a signal to teachers and students that those learning standards require mastery. Government TEKS include many ideas embraced by the political right. The board, comprised at the time of ten Republicans and five Democrats, interjected many implicit and explicit values of limited government, rights of the individual, and the benefits of a free enterprise economic system. At the same time, the standards lack any significant mention of diversity or the role of government in the expansion of civil rights or civil liberties for many underrepresented groups in the United States. To illustrate, there are other economic systems, such as a centrally-planned economy, in which the state owns all resources and then, theoretically, equitably distributes resources to the population of the state. This prevents, or corrects for, the extreme gap between what exists in capitalist, free market and capitalist, unregulated market economies.

The phrase 'such as' reflects another way in which the board attempts to exert influence over student beliefs. The learning standards that contain this phrase propose that the information after 'such as' could be considered important in the context as a meaningful example. There are few examples of diversity, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, these learning standards are described as 'possible illustrative examples,' implying that the information is not substantial enough to require mastery (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (a) (b) 3). The most significant repercussion is that conservative values and American Exceptionalism are emphasized. What, then, of the other learning standards? If those TEKS contain neither required information nor potential teaching examples, then what value is associated with those parts of the curriculum? Is that information worth considering?

The Texas learning standards require the antithesis of democratic education. The standards are a top-down mandate that forces teachers to teach specific content without allowing students a voice and offers teachers minimal choice in the decision regarding instruction of required curriculum standards. Three themes emerged from the CDA of the Texas government TEKS: the Texas learning standards have a clear bias toward a national government with limited authority, importance of the individual over the collective good, and a distinct preference for a free market, capitalist market structure. The government TEKS are currently in use by public schools throughout the state of Texas, as required by the Texas Education Agency and Texas Education Code. Additionally, these learning standards hold significance in the instruction of students throughout Texas because state law requires that the standards adopted by the SBOE are required to be used in classrooms

statewide. Further, Texas is a major consumer of textbooks, and textbook companies often use learning standards from larger states, such as Texas. The textbooks in other states occasionally reflect learning standards that are similar to learning standards found in Texas. As such, the Texas government learning standards have the potential to impact a large student population throughout the United States (Collins, 2012). At the same time, the numerous responses to the curriculum's passage indicate there are problems of equity and power structures within the curriculum.

One of our primary concerns involved comprehending what democratic and citizenship education represent in Texas. The government standards demonstrate a minimal commitment to including all students in democratic and citizenship education. The basic structure, function, history, and philosophical influences of the U.S. government are in place. However, we uncovered in the standards considerable preference toward conservatism and American Exceptionalism. If the notion of democratic and citizenship education created by educational philosophers such as Dewey (1916), Freire (2009), Bandura (1993), Levinson (1999; 2005), Levinson and Brantmeier (2006), and Apple (2005, 2006, 2011) is to be realized, then the standards must be more inclusive of teacher and student opinions. We would like to see the Texas government standards be revised to include, at the very minimum, a much more balanced approach to different perspectives in U.S. politics. Fairclough (1993) would argue that it is not possible to produce a bias-free curriculum, but policymakers, teachers, students, and the people of Texas can fashion a more inclusive curriculum that acknowledges the complete past of the U.S, the accomplishments made toward fulfilling the ideas espoused in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and most importantly, the areas in which we still lack equity.

Given that the Texas SBOE is unlikely to revisit the standards within the current decade, what can teachers and teacher educators do to ensure that Texas public school students experience democracy as they learn about government in high school? The Texas standards, though biased in what they require, stop short of prohibiting discussion of diverse views. As we have argued, the biases are subtle. The Texas SBOE's unwillingness or inability to ban wider discussion of issues leaves space for educators to be more inclusive than the standards require.

Democratic education in the United States, particularly in Texas, is not possible until the curriculum is inclusive and not only acknowledges, but celebrates, the contributions of all members of society equally. Issues of exclusion must be addressed in order for a system of education to be democratic. A democracy embraces the notion of majority rule with minority rights, which is not possible with the exclusion of certain groups from participation (Edwards, Wattenberg, and Lineberry, 2008). This issue is of particular importance in Texas where the state standards omit the contributions of important historical figures who do not represent the right's view of government. Key figures and events in American history, such as Gloria Steinem, the Stonewall Riot, and many contributions of Tejanos at the Alamo, are absent from Texas standards (Muñoz and Noboa 2012; Stuz 2010, Jan 9). In addition, the roles of men and women are narrowly traditional and fail to acknowledge many significant contributions of women in government

and civic education (Texas Education Agency 2011: 113.44 (a) (b) (c)). A democracy in which the majority tries to minimize or eliminate important contributions from the minority is not a democracy at all. To promote democratic education in government classes, educator preparation programs must ensure that teacher candidates themselves hold a broad and deep understanding of the debates surrounding the theory and practice of democracy in the United States and the world. Given that graduates of Texas public schools may enter Texas universities with gaps in their knowledge, educator preparation programs will need to ensure that teacher candidates participate in extensive theorizing and discussion of what democracy looks like in practice governmentally, civically, and educationally. Although the Texas standards fall short of this goal, educators have an ethical obligation to bridge the gaps between the standards and students' abilities to comprehend, debate, and participate broadly in democracy.

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