Education and the Resurrection of the New Civil Rights Movement

DEBORAH WILCOX

Confluency Consultants & Associates

Meira Levinson, an Associate Professor of Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, has made a bold and urgent call for a new civil rights struggle in the 21st century with education at the helm. During her teaching tenure at a predominantly African-American middle school in Atlanta, Levinson was awakened to the fact that many poor, African-American students and youth of color are suffering in this country because they are attending schools that teach them to fail, treat them as inmates, and marginalize them within the broader society. In No Citizen Left Behind (2012), Levinson provides a compelling and piercing examination of present day state-of-the-education tragedies that contribute to what she referred to as a *civic empowerment gap*, tragedies that have been fueled by recent educational policy.

Levinson calls for recovering the civic purposes of public schools and for developing them into centers of political education, authentic community engagement, and democratic activism. While the author recognizes the merits of closing the academic achievement gap, she also argues that it is more critical to dismantle the established social structures that have reproduced patterns of inequality. Her claim is that current educational inequities are both the cause and consequence of the broader economic, political, and social injustices that exist within this country.

Books Discussed

Levinson, M. (2012). *No Citizen Left Behind*. Cambridge, MA & London, England: Harvard University Press.

In the Prologue, Levinson brings to light her personal sense of agency and cultural encapsulation (Wrenn, 1962, 1985), acknowledging that educators often define reality according to one set of cultural assumptions and stereotypes, which then overshadows the real world. She openly states:

> I want to acknowledge that I am a White, upper-middle-class, highly educated woman writing about how we should educate poor youth of color. This likely, and appropriately, raises some red flags. Low-income students of color in the United States have in general been poorly served by the over-whelming White, middle-class men and women who have controlled and served by taught in public schools over the past century or two. These students have been condemned as "uneducable," pitied for suffering from a "culture of deprivation," … assigned schools and teachers that were vastly inferior to those enjoyed by wealthier and Whiter students and told that their knowledge and skills were unimportant or even disreputable (p. 17).

The author further discloses that her writings are an integration of her academic training as a political theorist, urban middle school teacher, and educational scholar. She also pointed out that her book includes biased misperceptions and mistakes, making it known that by writing this book she wants the readers to acquire tools that will enable them to appraise her arguments on their own terms. Levinson further states that the "long history of White educators making declarations about how we should educate "other people's children" stands as a troubling reminder of the risks I take venturing down the same path. Nor are good intentions sufficient" (p. 17).

Levinson argues that the nation should be concerned about persistent disparities between different peoples' degree of civic and political power because such inequities are extremely detrimental to constructing a fully engaged active democratic public. In Chapter 1, "The Civic Empowerment Gap," Levinson defines the *civic empowerment gap* as having an influence on civic and political deliberation and decision making and provides research that demonstrates the impact this gap has on political participation, stable democratic practices, civic engagement, community involvement, voting, and advocacy. Levinson points out that this empowerment gap is a serious problem in all of the society, across race and class, and states, "people's capacities for civic empowerment are simply greater if they know about political structures and institutions as well as contemporary politics, than if they don't" (p. 33).

This first chapter opens with the story of the author's highly charged and spirited conversation with her students during the 9/11 catastrophe. The majority of the students expressed the belief that President George Bush was behind the attacks for the sole purpose of having an excuse to go to war in Iraq. Levinson expressed her strong disagreement with her student's views on this issue and discussed how race and class privilege created a large chasm between her perceptions of this national crisis and that of her students. Levinson understands that she grew up learning to trust the government and primary institutions, and that many of her students and their families experienced a very different life in the same country; often exemplified by having negative interactions with representatives of governmental power such as the police, social workers, probation officers and teachers, which were often laden with racism and mutual mistrust.

Levinson's major concern is that the evidence appears clear that her students, who were attending de facto segregated urban schools, were unlikely to become active participants in American civic and political life, and it would be more difficult for them to navigate the civic opportunity gaps they would face outside of school and for the rest of their civic lives. The author made a direct correlation between overall quality of education and specifically civic education as the key to closing the *civic empowerment gap*. The author also called out to the public school and other public institutions and proclaimed that it was every school's obligation to help all children achieve civic empowerment. Levinson reminded the reader about the historical origins of public schools and why they were created:

> Public schools were founded in the United States for civic purposes. We must hold schools to account and hold ourselves to account for achieving civic outcomes for all children that are as high quality as the academic outcomes we now claim to expect (p.48).

Levinson further argues that there is not enough discussion about what citizenship means nationwide, using the term citizenship in a very broad, inclusive manner, and challenges educators to set the legal status of young people aside and give them positive regard and acceptance whether they are citizens, green card holders, temporary residents, refugees, or undocumented persons. She stresses that educators need to dedicate themselves to teaching and educating all young people.

Levinson understands that closing the *civic empowerment gap* will not be an easy task and that many people would like to stay in denial about these injustices; however she sees this work as necessary if we want to support our claim to be a democratic nation. The challenges will involve exposing the nation's hypocrisies and structural inequalities, including the ways in which public and institutional policies, practices, procedures and cultural representations work to reinforce and to perpetuate structural oppressions such as racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism and more.

> But the task is not without danger. It risks exposing fissures in our national identity and democracy that many people would rather keep under wraps. It also risks upending our collective understanding of who we are and who we hope to be, even potentially revealing that no such collective understanding exists. We must confront these risks with clear heads and honest hearts if schools are to tackle the civic empowerment gap in a meaningful way (p. 54).

The Rites of Passage: Rudiments of Civility

Levinson's argument and call to schools and other public institutions to assist youth in the achievement of civic empowerment and to close the civic empowerment gap is exceedingly important and well founded. However her premise is curtailed in that she does not address one of the most important root causes for this pervasive civic disconnection, and that is the failure of Western culture to establish a youth rites of passage tradition within the fabric of the societal milieu. Sustained civic engagement and taking care of one's village can be instilled in youth during

Rites of Passage initiation processes, which have been a practice in all traditional societies since antiquity.

One of the most egregious deficits that exist within mainstream Western society is the absence of a collective social method to support young people through life transitions and to initiate them into their greater society. Adolescence is a turbulent time for young people, no matter their ethnicity or culture. It is a time of rapid physical change, intense feelings and emotional ebbs and flows. It is also a time that is often misunderstood and misinterpreted by Western society, particularly in relation to youth of color.

In the African-American community, the African-Centered Rites of Passage movement has been gaining momentum for the past 50 years. Belinda Thompson (1992), founder and director of the Roots Learning Center (elementary and middle school), Washington, D.C., pointed out that the African-American community must mobilize and become the guiding force for the healthy move of African-American youth from childhood to adulthood. Mensah (1993) defined Rites of Passage as:

> Those structures, rituals, and ceremonies by which age-class members or individuals in a group successfully come to know who they are and what they are about, the purpose and meaning for their existence, as they proceed from one clearly defined state of existence to the next state of passage in their lives (p. 62).

Akoto (1994) has pointed out that in Western society, children are handed over to formal educational institutions for extended periods of time, and emphasis is placed on academic, vocational skills training and testing rather than on developing social relationships and building community. In most traditional African societies, children had models for their behavior all around them, which included both the immediate and extended family along with the entire community that showed an interest in their progress. Youth rites initiates returned to their village to celebrate their transformed identities as young adults along with their newly acquired self-knowledge and insight into their cultural heritage, a sense of spiritual purpose, and a commitment to take care of their family and their village.

The Rites of Passages movement in the African-American community (Wilcox, 1998), is representative of the return to traditional practices and ancestral values for the education, socialization, and the holistic development of African-American youth, families, and communities. This phenomenon is best described as *Sankofa*. The concept of *Sankofa* is derived from the Akan people of West Africa and literally means, *it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot*. Visually and symbolically, *Sankofa* is expressed as a mythic bird that flies forward while looking backward with an egg (symbolizing the future) in its mouth (W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center, 2011). *Sankofa* speaks to the need to return to one's cultural roots and values in order to move forward. Whatever we have lost, forgotten, or been stripped of, can be reclaimed, revived, preserved and perpetuated. The African-Centered Rites of Passage process is a means for the African-American community to return to the essential rudiments of African culture.

Though Levinson's recommendations are solid and viable, they represent a mainstream view and do not consider the importance of a deeper cultural socialization or the role such a socialization process might play in shaping a young person's civic identity and engagement.

Identity and Cultural Socialization

In Chapter 2, "At School I Talk Straight: Race Talk and Civic Empowerment," the author argues that schools should educate all students to assume a kind of *double consciousness* that would teach them perspective-taking and power analysis, foster empowerment and support them in overcoming discrimination and injustices. Levinson is persistent in her argument that the role of educators is to equip African-American youth with specific skills to work through the barriers to civic equality and civic empowerment by suggesting that they should also be taught *codeswitching*. The author states:

> If civic empowerment is our goal, then educators need to teach minority students to "codeswitch"-to represent and express themselves in ways that members of the majority group those with political privilege and power will naturally understand and respect. Students should learn that in every community there is a language and culture of power (p. 87).

Levinson quotes at length from the *double consciousness theory* derived from W.E.B. Du Bois' distinguished text *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois (1903, 1996) clearly depicted the lived experience of African-Americans in the United States and the contradiction between the nation's democratic values and African-Americans' traumatic encounters with racial terror, lynching, and contempt by a dominant White society, and pointed out that assimilated African Americans either totally lose a sense of connection to their cultural heritage or struggle with combining the two cultures. White and Parham (1990) more recently revealed in their work, *The Psychology of Blacks: An African-American Perspective*, how African-American youth are confronted with a set of dualities defined by being part of, yet apart from, American society, in it but not of it, included at some level and excluded at others:

> This duality is at the heart of the identity struggle and generates powerful feelings of rage and indignation…the inclusion-exclusion dilemma is further complicated by their exposure to two different value systems, world views, and historical legacies. A double consciousness created by a confluence of African-American and Euro-American, Black and White realities going on inside of that person at the same time (p. 47).

While Levinson has the best of intentions in wanting her students to learn the skills of *double consciousness theory* and *codeswitching*, she fails to appreciate the extent to which African-American youth do not have a choice in their development of a *double consciousness* and that *double consciousness* and *codeswitching* are cultural socializations rather than skills that can be taught. These cultural adaptations, which are passed down to African-American youth through their families and the broader African-American community, are vital for young people's psychological

wellbeing and overall quality of life. For example, White, et al. (1990) emphasized the critical need and function of a double consciousness in the lives of African-American youth:

Each Black adolescent must make an attempt to set up some workable balance between Afro-American and Euro-American values within his or her own life space. Complete denial of either frame of reference will restrict choices and personal growth, interpersonal relationships, and economic opportunities (p.47).

African-American psychologist Na'im Akbar (1981) stated, "African-American youth who experience these types of disconnections may also be relegated to a life of confusion and alienation because their attitudes and behaviors are inconsistent with their cultural essence" (p.18). This declaration is relevant to all young people across cultures and human differences whose identities are not aligned with dominant mainstream values.

A number of studies indicate that parents, guardians, and siblings act as role models of appropriate civic behavior (Andolina, 2003). Other research has agreed with these findings, showing that parental involvement in political and social causes is associated with children's greater participation (Youniss et al, 2002). Taylor, Chatters, Tucker, and Lewis (1990), in their 10-year review of African-American family research, revealed that racial socialization is an important aspect of child rearing. That is, parents must help their children accept, understand, and cope with their status as Blacks in a White-dominated society (Carter-Black, 2003, 2005; Harrison-Hale, 2006; Harrison et al, 1990; Peters, 2002; Jarrett, 1994; McAdoo, 2002).

The findings of the Taylor et al study demonstrate that contemporary African-American parents find that they still must teach their children how to manage in a world and community where racial prejudice and discrimination are likely to be aimed against them. Black parents recognize the double burden of preparing their children like all other parents to function successfully in society, and in addition, preparing them to function in a society that often operates against them. African-American children cannot simply be brought up as American children. They must be brought up as American and as Black in White America.

Sánchez-Jankowski, Martin (2002) established in their research on race and youth civic engagement that race prevailed as an organizing principle and that theories of systematic exclusion influenced the content, amount, and intensity of the civic engagement patterns of minority youth. They also established the importance of group history as a "filtering device" mitigating the influence of both formal and informal institutions in socializing young people toward civic engagement (p. 243).

American educators can further support these longstanding efforts of the African-American community by frankly teaching about this nation's troubled and enduring legacy of slavery and about the contributions that African-American activists, specifically, have made toward realizing the nation's founding ideals of freedom and equality for all. African-American youth stand on the shoulders of an enormously powerful historical legacy of freedom fighters, from slave insurrections to the American Civil Rights Movement (Carson et al, 1991), which has helped to bring greater

justice and democracy to the United States and has provided the foundation for antiapartheid and other global social justice movements.

A Personal Journey through the Rites of Passage and the American Civil Rights Movement

My rites of passage journey led me through the years of the American civil rights movement, and my identity as a citizen in this country was greatly shaped by that furious fight for social justice and equal opportunity for African-Americans and for all peoples. I was raised in small town in the Midwest, and so I did not actually see the police let the dogs loose and spray fire hoses full blast on the civil rights marchers and activists; however I watched it attentively with my parents on the nightly news. I would constantly hear of the stories the elders would tell about how their family members were being mistreated by the police, in the work place, in the courts, and about how their children were constantly degraded by teachers and guidance counselors and told that college was not in their futures. My parent's primary concerns for me during those critical years in my development focused on instilling the values of justice and respect for all people, which supported me in growing up with a purpose to correct injustices and to make a difference.

My parents spoke to me about hate, and told me many stories about how hate produced more hate. Despite the covert hatefulness directed toward people of color and youth in this country, they did not want me to have such hatred ingrained within my heart and soul. My parents fought for social justice every day of their lives: they loved me and the community and taught love through their demonstrated deeds. Due to my parental guidance and involvement as a young person in the community, I learned to confront injustices and to respect and regard all people, and how to construct a meaningful life for myself, my family, and village. The elders in my immediate family, along with the elders in my broader circle, were constantly involved in confronting racial injustices and discriminations that were prevalent in my home town in the areas of employment, education (schools and districts), unions, criminal justice, housing, and within youth service and senior-citizen organizations. They always strove to bridge community disconnections based on race, class, religion and economic disparities.

My village elders worked daily and tirelessly within the community for social justice, and they made sure I had a youth division membership in the NAACP by the age of 9. Working in the community for social justice and change was simply a way of life throughout my formative years. Due to my dedication to making a difference I was appointed to the Mayor's Youth Affiliate Commission on Human Relations, and joined with other young people from the community who were African-American, European-American, Jewish, Asian, Latino, and represented diverse religious denominations, and neighborhoods. We developed a youth cadre and traveled around our city and county hosting panels on race relations for the purpose of community education, helping people unlearn stereotypes and working to bring people into unity across their differences. Due to my involvement in my local community's Sing Out, an *Up With People* affiliate, I was recruited right out of high school to became a member of the *International Cast of Up With People*, which provided me with the opportunity to travel all over the United States and internationally; more importantly

it provided me with a compelling initiation rite moving me rapidly from childhood to adulthood and into a global citizenry beyond my wildest dreams!

Constructing Counter Historical Narratives

Chapters 3 and 4, "You Have the Right to Struggle: Constructing Historical Counternarratives" and "Rethinking Heroes and Role Models", call out to educators to recognize that students' own understandings of U.S. history, civic membership, political legitimacy, and power relations are often in conflict with the content they learn in schools. Levinson argues that U. S. history, as taught in most schools, fosters alienation and disempowerment because the customary practice is to emphasize the dominance and exceptionalism of the U. S., which in fact supports the continuance of ethnocentrism. Levinson believes we should stop searching for or assuming the truth of one unified American story, and emphasizes the importance of opening a space so that students can center themselves within their own educational process.

For example, Levinson suggests constructing counter historical narratives that display the evolution of the U. S. from multiple lenses and that affirm the contributions of notable postmodern historian Howard Zinn (1980) in his work, *A Peoples History of the United States: 1492- Present*. Zinn's work tells the story of American history from a grassroots point of view and discusses how the fight for fair wages, labor laws, health and safety standards, universal suffrage, women's rights, and racial equality were carried out among diverse groups of people. Zinn states that the "cry of the poor is not always just, but if you don't listen to it, you will never know what justice is" (p. 11).

Ronald Takaki (1993, 2008) provides powerful counternarratives in *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, where he asks the very potent question "will Americans of diverse races and ethnicities be able to connect themselves to a larger narrative?" and then responds:

> …Whatever happens, we can be certain that much of our society's future will be influenced by which "mirror" we choose to see ourselves. America does not belong to one race or group, the people in this study remind us, and Americans have been constantly redefining their national identity from the moment of first contact on the Virginia shore. By sharing their stories, they invite us to see ourselves in a different mirror (p. 17).

Levinson summed up by pointing out that historical narrative alone would not lessen the civic empowerment gap. While such narratives provide a means to look at power and at change movements, they do not necessarily shift people into action and cause them to connect with their communities in a way that would make a difference. Levinson notes that teaching her students about the great achievements of national leaders like Washington, Lincoln, Chavez and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, "a civic leader in whose "dream" the whole nation can seemingly find itself," her students were still not motivated to behave differently on a daily basis, and asks the question, "why think that they would be inspired to emulate other historic figures?" (p. 142).

Levinson therefore emphasizes the importance of teaching students to appreciate the civic contributions of ordinary people and the ways in which everyday actions can make a significant difference within their communities. She concludes Chapter 4 by emphasizing that young people must be given opportunities to learn from the practice of civic engagement and to make an effective difference in the community beyond school.

Civic Engagement and Skills for the 21st Century

In Chapters 5, 6, and 7 "How to Soar in a World You've Never Seen: Making Citizenship Visible in Schools," "The Case for Action Civics," and "Democracy, Accountability, and Education," Levinson further develops her argument about what it means to prepare students for ongoing civic engagement and to provide them with the 21st century skills that will prepare them for life in and out of the classroom. She makes it clear that shifting the power from teachers to students within the school environment, although challenging, is essential to increasing student empowerment.

The author describes the current school experiences of students of color as being inundated with daily unacknowledged *microaggressions*. She describes students being searched for weapons as a daily ritual upon entering their schools, subjected to harsh punishments, suspensions, and criminal charges. Levinson notes that poor children of color, especially African-American boys, were subjected to these ruthless policies and cruel punishments at alarming rates and acknowledges that she also colluded in such mistreatment of students while teaching at Walden, the predominately African-American school in Atlanta:

> I think back guiltily to my own missteps in this regard: the time I emptied a girl's purse in front of the whole class because I was sure she had stolen an item from a classmate; my policy one semester was disallowing students from purchasing snacks if they were with me for silent lunch even though I knew the school provided lunch was virtually inedible; other random acts of humiliation and disregard that I have forgotten but I'm sure still live on in students' hearts (p.173).

Levinson stresses the importance of students being involved in diverse school organizations and collective work with peers and being given a chance to demonstrate their leadership and develop friendships across differences if they are to forge a long lasting sense of civic identity and engagement. Levinson argues that it is vitality necessary to create new educational strategies that facilitate civic engagement, address the multidimensional aspects of youth development and peer culture, and stress the importance of viewing young people in multiple contexts. She also argues that attention should be given to the influences of "multiculturalism" in educational and community settings, and how these approaches impact young people in general and specifically African-American youth.

Levinson cites Verba, Sidney, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) who assert that participatory experiences in schools are among the most important predictors of future civic engagement and provides a number of valuable examples of socially engaged projects such as mock trials and youth

participatory action research, where students learn to investigate relevant history and their own power dynamics, and to develop collective action plans to create social change. Levinson states:

> When youths' own cultural knowledge, habits, and practices are affirmed as having value, they can see themselves as valuable members of the polity more broadly; they also gain confidence in their capacities to navigate obstacles and challenges that arise both inside and outside of school (p.241).

While most would agree that participating in school activities helps students to develop leadership skills, the author might also have emphasized the importance of building healthy, engaged, and bidirectional school-to-community connections that include students, teachers, administrators, parents, and other family members, along with others from the community as an invaluable means of bridging the civic empowerment gap.

I would emphasize that such activities are most effective when educators learn the cultural civic legacies of their students and build upon these cultural contributions within their curriculums and within the broader school community. For while existing research indicates that levels of civic competence are lower among urban youth (Hart and Atkins 2002), national surveys also suggest that African-American adolescents show greater interest than White adolescents in issues related to social justice and community leadership (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Mark Lopez (2002) in his research on civic engagement among minority youth discovered that volunteering had increased among African-American youth, that more African-American youth had donated to a church or community organization than their White or Hispanic counterparts, and that African-American youth more strongly supported high school civics courses as a requirement for graduation (Lopez 2002). Levinson's underlying assumption that students of color, based upon their social economic status, have fewer opportunities for civic engagement is simply unfounded.

Levinson notes that many civics educators have advocated for mandatory standards, assessments, and accountability (SAA) measures in civics education in order to achieve high quality civic education. Levinson animatedly disagrees with high-stakes testing as a solution and states in no uncertain terms that these are inappropriate tools for promoting democratic civic education:

> For every democratic public good that standards, assessment, and accountability systems promote, however, there is a correlative potential harm. SAAs may be based on collective prejudice and ignorance rather than wisdom; they may elevate public input to such a degree that they inappropriately discount expert knowledge; and they may promote consensus by preserving an exclusionary status quo rather than incorporating diverse voices. (p. 268)

Most of the civic engagement literature focuses on schools as a potential avenue for promoting civic engagement through civic courses, service-learning, or other initiatives. However, there is very little research charting the ways that bad or ineffective schooling can act as a barrier to civic participation. The work of Michelle Fine and her colleagues at the City University of New York

has suggested that badly run schools can jeopardize the "likelihood of democratic engagement by reproducing and exacerbating existing social inequities that continue to disadvantage poor and minority youth" (Fine, Burns, Payne, Torre, 2004). This kind of research is significant because it extends the discussion of civic engagement and education beyond matters of curriculum and school mandated community service to more fundamental considerations of both educational disparities and the overall quality of education as potential impediments to the civic lives of youth.

Since the fight for civil rights of the 1960s led to legislation that made it illegal to segregate students by race, color or creed, testing remains the only legal way to discriminate in American schools (Goodman, et al., 2004). Levinson proposes a different assessment practice within schools, one that builds capacity, motivation, and public support for high-quality civic education practices, along with holding schools, teachers, and students accountable and offering the public a democratic voice in shaping public school policy (p. 288).

In her Epilogue, "Standing Up, Talking Back," the author presents a number of significant accounts of civic actions on the part of youth and discusses the ways in which these actions benefitted the students, their schools, and their communities. She claims that these actions demonstrate some of the ways in which young people can make a difference and reminds the reader that most young people want to change the world and all they need are the resources, opportunities, and support and guidance of adults to do so.

Let us not forget the role that young people—African-American youth in particular—played in the American Civil Rights Movement. The Little Rock Nine (2001) were African-American high school students from Little Rock, Arkansas, these young prophets took a stance and put their lives, along with the lives of their families and community members, on the line for equal rights in education and made democracy work on behalf of the nation. In 1957, Governor Orval Faubus called on the Arkansas National Guard to prevent these young students from entering their assigned school, a direct order against the U.S. Supreme Court's desegregation ruling. President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered federal troops to Central High School to protect the rights of these African-American students.

Structural Oppression and Public Policy

Laws and public policies have institutionalized structural oppression and racism in this country for generations, such as: The Black Codes of 1800-1866; The Jim Crow Laws of 1876-1965 (Tischauser, 2012); Plessey v. Ferguson, 1896 (Anderson, 2004), and the Moynihan Report of 1965, which focused on the deep roots of Black poverty in America and concluded controversially that the structure of family life in the Black community constituted a "tangle of pathology." Some of these policies have helped to relegate African-American communities to the lowest strata in the society.

This history has not been entirely done away with, but instead continues to promote entrenched structural inequality, racism and oppression and to allow privileges associated with "Whiteness"

to endure and adapt over time in this country (Aspen Institute, 2012). The schools in this country that serve our poorest and most vulnerable children are in a dreadful state and crumbling before our eyes. The public school was designed to bring people together across differences into the great American democratic experience, instead we have constructed what Michelle Alexander (2012) described as *The New Jim Crow*.

Throughout her book, Levinson argues for the critical need to bridge the civic empowerment gap and schools have the responsibility for teaching students the necessary skills that will build their capacity to confront and deal with contemporary injustices within their schools and within their communities. She further argues that the injustices that currently exist within public schools represent both the cause and the consequence of the broader political, economic and social inequities that exist within the United States stating, "It is utterly appropriate that we wage a new struggle for civil rights with education at the core" (p.293).

Is Levinson calling here for the resurrection of the suppressed American Civil Rights Movement as a transformative means for moving the country into achieving sustainable equal rights and justice for all people within the society? If so, would closing the civic empowerment gap enable teachers, administrators, students and other stakeholders in the school community to acquire the necessary tools to dismantle deep-rooted historical structural oppression and inequities that currently exist within schools and within the broader society?

The dismantling of structures of oppression occurs when all voices are invited to the table and acknowledgement is given to those persons who have not historically been included. The ideal approach is to open up public spaces wherein everyday people can engage civically in Sustained Dialogue (Saunders, 1999) and work through the complex and difficult issues confronting their communities. Sustained public dialogues permit all involved parties to talk and listen to one another as a means of facing the issues confronting them and, hopefully, discovering common ground for sustained action and for constructing an improved quality of community life for everyone.

No Citizen Left Behind is a well written portrayal of the injustices that characterize the current state of public schools within the United States and the overall impact these injustices have on the country and its democratic ideals. Levinson concludes her impassioned argument for transforming those realities with the following words:

> Tackling the civic empowerment gap today expands the ranks of active citizens both now and in the future. This long-term, communal, and equitable engagement is essential for achieving the "more perfect Union" to which we all aspire. It is time for us to move forward together (p. 296).

Endnotes

[1] The Big Picture Company (2013) and the World Peace Game (2004) are two additional 21st century holistic educational approaches that place students in the center of their own learning and involve the family and community

in the educational process. Authentic family and community connections provide the fertile ground that contributes to student achievement and civic engagement beyond measure. As noted earlier, I am also suggesting that school systems, communities and youth serving organizations make it a priority to engage in comprehensive reform, and support the holistic development of youth by adopting the Rights of Passage process and other progressive educational pedagogies.

Dr. Deborah Wilcox is the Founder/CEO of Confluency Consultants and Associates - Multicultural Education and Organizational Development consultancy with a specialty in Deliberative Organizational Development. She has been practicing for over 20 years, and has provided services for more than 100 organizations, and conducted professional presentations on local, national and international levels. Dr. Wilcox has worked extensively with community-based organizations and initiatives involving community services, mental health, multicultural competency, wellness, recovery, and social justice. She is dedicated to building communities of wellness through sustained deliberative dialogue, civic engagement, and developing relationships across human and cultural differences.

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