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# Beyond Political Neutrality and Impartiality: Towards Transformative Civic Education in Undemocratic Times

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## ABSTRACT

This paper responds to the question of should civic education still aim to be relatively politically neutral and impartial in undemocratic times? It first introduces the theoretical debate regarding the place of political neutrality and impartiality in civic education. It then dicusses the challenges that civic education faces in the current global environment and why political neutrality and impartiality should not be considered as antidotes. We argue that political neutrality and impartiality are insufficient in the undemocratic times we face for preparing students to be effective and engaged citizens. A more powerful response to our global undemocratic reality is needed to realize the transformative nature of civic education.

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## Intruduction

Conflicts related to social difference are commonplace around the globe. Civic education is often seen as a crucial channel for citizens to learn about different ways to live with others and deal with diversity (Jackson, 2019; Lin & Jackson, 2019a; Macedo, 2000). Notably, civic education is an umbrella term that contains different schools, branches, and arguments. Some have argued for a neutral civic education that does not favour any conception of good (Brighouse, 1998; Callan, 2000). Many others, however, have defended a civic education that gives preference to liberal democratic values and beliefs (Gutmann, 1999; Macedo, 2000). Meanwhile, others have proposed communitarian, republican, or Confucian versions of civic education, which emphasize particular knowledge, skills, and values that are seen as fundamental to their society's survival. These include community, responsibility, and duty in communitarian civic education (Annette, 2011; Nederman, 1992; Paul et al., 1996); freedom as non-domination, solidarity, civic engagement, and civic virtues in republican civic education (Dobuzinskis, 2008; Peterson, 2011, 2017); and harmony, unity, and order in Confucian civic education (Bell, 2008; Chan, 2014; Chen, 2018; Chia, 2011; El Amine, 2015).

Can civic education be politically neutral and impartial? Arguably this is an impossible mission in civic education. As Ben-Porath notes, "The topics chosen, the amount of time and space devoted to national struggles and triumphs, and the curricular focus on other groups within and outside our borders all reflect values endorsed and instilled in the process of [civic education]" (2012, 393). Civic educators are influenced and shaped by families, communities, and societies. Every civic educator has their preferences in the teaching and educational process (Reich, 2002). For example, civic educators that support political neutrality and impartiality favour the value of suspending judgment, even if they have their own personal judgments outside the classroom.

*Should* civic education still aim to be relatively politically neutral and impartial? This paper seeks to respond to this question by engaging with literature and referencing some recent examples around the globe. The paper first introduces the theoretical debate regarding the place of political neutrality and impartiality in civic education. It then elaborates on the challenges that civic education faces in the current global environment and why political neutrality and impartiality are not antidotes. We argue that political neutrality and impartiality are insufficient in the undemocratic times we face for preparing students to be effective and engaged, capable of safeguarding democratic society and institutions against anti-democratic ideas and actions. A more powerful response to our global undemocratic reality is needed to realize the transformative nature of civic education.

## Political Neutrality and Impartiality in Civic Education

Political neutrality is generally understood as requiring civic educators to remain neutral on disputed questions about controversial topics and not promoting certain political stances, values, and ideologies, etc., over others (Cordelli, 2017; Gaus, 2009; Patten, 2012). It is closely connected with political impartiality, which means teaching both sides equally and showing no political preference. Civic educators support neutrality and impartiality to avoid indoctrination and enable individuals to decide on important social issues for themselves (in other words, facilitating autonomy). For example, Brighouse (1998) argues that civic education should only focus on knowledge and skills students are free to use regardless of their conceptions of the good. Meanwhile, it is commonly held that civic education should cultivate critical and independent individuals who have the freedom and capacity to live authentic lives based on their free will (Gutmann, 1995). Another rationale for political neutrality and impartiality is their alignment with and potential contribution to enabling pluralism and anti-oppression (Gaus, 2009; Patten, 2012, 2014). Given the state (at least in the liberal tradition) has no authority to judge one conception of the good as intrinsically better than others, civic education should not promote any political vision based on a particular conception of the good, because this violates respect for pluralism and risks oppressing minority dissenters (Patten, 2012, 2014; Young, 1990).

However, neutrality and impartiality have been seriously challenged (Cooling, 2012; Merrill & Weinstock, 2014; Tamir, 2015). Not all conflicts and disagreements are deliberative or deserve a deliberate approach. One example is disagreement about a policy to legalize discrimination against people of color and women. In this case, as such a policy would violate universal values and human rights, it is not eligible for reasonable discussion or open debate (Merrill & Weinstock, 2014). Likewise, taking a neutral stance to Nazis and religious fundamentalists who do not value the basic rights of others damages the fundamental undergirding of democratic society, which requires at least a minimal form of tolerance for others and mutual respect (Macedo, 2000). In this sense, Gutmann and Thompson (1996) summarize that, “When a disagreement is not deliberative, citizens do not have any obligation of mutual respect towards their opponents” (p.3).

Moreover, although the rejection of indoctrination and the cultivation of autonomy are worthwhile, they do not imply civic educators should recognize all views as equal or avoid all political judgements (e.g., declining to respond to the view that women are inferior to men). In fact, all societies enforce some ideologies and associated knowledge, skills, and values foundational for their maintenance (Callan, 2000; Levinson, 2016); plus, purely politically neutral or impartial views, expressions, or actions could be misleading in the human world, as nearly everything related to politics are not neutral or impartial, but always irritating or provocative in the eyes of some citizens. As civic education serves the purpose of maintaining

and developing society, it should promote and defend particular political ideologies and not be neutral when they are in danger. In relation, being critically autonomous requires citizens be active, make evidence-based arguments and stand against what is wrong (Parker, 2023; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Unfortunately, the overvaluation of political neutrality and impartiality discourages students from making arguments or standing against wrong. These risks encouraging citizens to be passive, political apathetic, and avoid controversies (Tamir, 2015).

## The Failure of Political Neutrality and Impartiality as Antidotes for Challenges Facing Civic Education Today

Although the specific forms that civic education takes differ across different eras and societies (Jackson, 2019), with the rise of global trends such as conservatism, nationalism, and right-wing populism, civic education in many societies today share common challenges (though their concrete forms and severity could vary). Here we list some significant challenges and use the cases of diverse societies as examples to elaborate on how political neutrality and impartiality fail as antidotes.

### Civic teachers are vulnerable

Civic teachers are those on the frontline who practice civic education in class. Their work, to a certain degree, determines the effectiveness of civic education. Hess (2009) points out that there are three types of topics that civic teachers can choose to discuss in their classroom: "closed" topics that are beyond dispute, "open" topics that are matters of reasonable controversy, "in the tip" topics that are flexible between closed to open. Studies have shown that in many political unsafe circumstances, civic teachers tend to avoid controversies and only focus on the "closed topics" that are widely considered as free of ideological and political bias (Hess, 2009; Ho et al., 2014).

For example, Tamir (2015) observes that in Israel, because of the unstable political environment,

> civic teachers are walking a thin line, one which they are likely to trip and cross over. In order to feel safe, they often try to find shelter under the umbrella of "neutrality". … Schools are often advised to position themselves in this neutral, seemingly non-ideological, space (Tamir, 2015, 126).

Similarly, Ho et al. (2014) points out that in Singapore, civic teachers need to differentiate between controversial-taboo topics and controversial-appropriate topics; and when the government position is ambiguous, they become more conservative in teaching controversial issues due to a heightened sense of uncertainty and insecurity. Other research note that due to recent attacks on critical race theory (e.g., calling it a divisive concept) and the vague legislation

of restricting or banning education on it in at least 35 states, civic teachers in the United States live in a climate of fear: they are scared, confused, and doing self-censorship due to the potential prosecution or punishment of teaching it and other similar concepts related to race, racism, gender, and the U.S history in classrooms (Alfonseca, 2022; Meckler & Natanson, 2022).

The vulnerability of civic teachers is responsible for this phenomenon. They are politically vulnerable and have neither the political power nor the political status to convey their own political messages. In societies wherein states promote a national version of civic education, teachers are much more powerful as delegates and much less powerful as individuals. They have the authority but lack the freedom to define their own set of knowledge, skills, and values that they believe civic education should achieve. If they conform to the states, they are potent and authoritative. Yet, if they contest, they lose their jobs. For example, in Mainland China (hereafter refers to "China"), teachers who touch sensitive and controversial civic topics (e.g., national education, Hong Kong identity, and the Taiwan issue) but express opinions that are not favoured by the government risks being reported by students, parents, other teachers, school administrators, and members of the inspection team sent by local or central government (Hessler, 2022). Possible results include being removed from the teaching position and issuing public apology (Hessler, 2022).

Meanwhile, the social environment in many societies is hostile to civic teachers who express their personal views on open topics in class. Research shows that in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Israeli, civic teachers are criticized, judged, or even threatened for expressing their opinions on political sensitive topics like abortion, sex orientation, patriotism, and the Israeli–Arab conflict (Ho et al., 2014; Martens & Gainous, 2013; Sim & Print, 2009a, 2009b). Parent resistance and student complaints (even reports) also contribute to the teacher's reluctance of discussing controversial political issues, especially those involving the judgement of the current government (Chong et al., 2022; Cohen, 2016; Hess, 2009). For example, in the United States and Australia, teachers are encouraged (and sometimes required) to bring controversial topics into classrooms, but their expressions and approaches are often criticized by stakeholders (e.g., students and parents) and the public (e.g., those from other political sides) (Levinson & Fay, 2016, 2019; McPherson et al., 2022).

In this context, aware of their vulnerability, teachers prefer to adhere to topics shielded by political neutrality and avoid "open" topics. However, the question is: could this end their struggles and reduce their vulnerability? Unfortunately, the answer is negative. The following example illustrates the dilemmas that civic teachers face when they attempt to maintain neutral and impartial:

> You want to be neutral, making sure that all sides are heard, and no side is favoured, but toward the end of discussion, you are disturbed: should you tell

> them the truth, as you see it...You want to be fair, but on the other hand, you do not want to condone Nazism (Furlong & Carroll, 1990, 157).

In cases similar to this, the degrees of struggles and despair civic teachers face are not decreased. Meanwhile, in the contexts wherein the endless political and ideological battles largely occupy teachers' daily lives in schools, civic teachers often face ethical dilemmas in teaching civic topics and are criticized by different stakeholders anyway, regardless of whether trying to keep political neutral or not (Levinson & Fay, 2016, 2019).

### Civic education maintains the status quo and reinforces injustice

The second challenge closely links to the first one, that in many cases civic education fosters conservatism and contributes to the consolidation of a certain political order and the maintenance of the existing unequal power relationship and historical and institutional injustice. In the cases where the messages delivered in schools and by civic educators are limited to conservative and "closed" ones ("in the tip" topics at best), unequal power relationships and unjust situations are intensified as educators are too afraid to challenge the authority by touching "open" questions and saying things that go against the government position. This is particular the case in contexts like China, where the government stipulates the goals, contents, and pedagogy for civic education, and teachers are required to act as delegates, use government-authorized textbooks, and directly teach for whatever the government promotes (Lin, 2022b; J. C. Lin & Jackson, 2022a). A similar situation is also happening in Hong Kong, that civic education has been put into a position of promoting the government's views without raising dissent or challenges, and civic-related curricula and textbooks are censored by the government and asked to be amended whenever necessary (Lin & Jackson, 2019b; Lin, 2022b; Vickers & Morris, 2022).

However, it is those "open" topics and the associated diverse perspectives and opinions expressed in classrooms that are most efficient and helpful for students to develop critical thinking and other crucial civic knowledge, skills, and values so that they can effectively participate in civic life and fulfil duty to make the society better (Hand & Levinson, 2012; Hess, 2011; Parker, 2023). Avoiding discussing them in classroom or afraid of expressing diverse views due to the concern for offending the authority is avoiding an effective and critical civic education (Hess & Avery, 2008; Parker, 2023). Promoting political neutrality and impartiality in these cases limits the power of civic education in condemning undemocratic phenomena and promoting democracy (Parker, 2023; Tamir, 2015).

Here we give one example. Today, one of the challenges in any democratic and multicultural society is "to provide opportunities for different groups to maintain aspects of their community cultures while constructing a nation into which these groups are structurally integrated and to which they develop allegiance" (Banks, 2017, 369). Civic education plays an important role in

equipping students to find solutions for balancing unity and diversity in an inclusive and just way (Ben-Porath, 2012; Parker, 2003). This, sometimes, requires civic educators to challenge the status quo or even break the unjust laws in their teaching, such as speaking for minority groups and encouraging students to initiate or join a protest (Banks, 2017; Levinson & Fay, 2016).

Unfortunately, by referring to political neutrality and impartiality, the governments in many societies (e.g., the United States and Israel) discourage educators from doing this. The steps they take include banning the education of critical race theory, promoting majority-dominant knowledge in school curricula and textbooks, normalizing and beatifying assimilation, and restricting bilingual education (Cohen, 2020; J. C. Lin & Jackson, 2022b; Schuessler, 2021). They justify that these steps are necessary because schools should not be the place where the negative sides of the country are emphasized or where the sentiments and movements that would divide the country in the name of protecting diversity are nurtured and encouraged. Yet, the results of these actions are teachers and students are not allowed to condemn many problematic phenomena (e.g., assimilation and racism) in schools, let alone exploring their institutional and historical reasons. Hence, these actions reinforce conservatism, contributes to serve the interests of people in power, and maintains the historical and institutional injustice. In this sense, Parker's observation in 2003 is still relevant today,

> while the neutrality premise helps protect individual liberty from state and majority tyranny, it impedes the full flowering of pluralism. In societies where group identities are politicized and matter greatly in the conduct of public affairs, which is the case everywhere, indifference serves especially the interests of whichever groups presently enjoy positions of power--often the majority culture. [N]eutrality disguises actually existing power imbalances and often shifts attention to the supposed deficits of the excluded groups. In this way, political formulations that pretend neutrality tend to reproduce the status quo (Parker's, 2003, 27).

## Political neutrality and impartiality are used to promote certain political ideology and oppress dissent

In the original sense, political neutrality and impartiality were proposed to restrict states instead of educators from promoting certain political ideology over others in civic education (Gaus, 2009; Patten, 2012, 2014; Rawls, 1993). However, in practice the situation is often the opposite: states (re)define political neutrality and impartiality and promote their definitions as a restriction on civic educators to ensure they promote what the states want. For example, in the colonial Hong Kong, the British government required civic education to be alleged "politically neutral and impartial". At that time, being politically neutral and impartial referred to

prohibiting pro-China content in education and discouraging the cultivation of politically participatory citizens with a democratic consciousness that may danger the legitimacy of the British governance, which was de factor desinicization and had nothing to do with political neutrality (Lin, 2022b; Morris & Sweeting, 1991; Wong et al., 2017).

In today's Hong Kong, the Chinese and Hong Kong governments emphasize the importance of political neutrality and impartiality in civic education. They use this to accuse civic educators who promote alleged "western political ideologies and ideas" of making schools become a political arena, presenting biased views, and radicalizing youths to join anti-government protests, as the recent controversies surrounding the *Liberal Studies* subject and the warning of teachers across Hong Kong schools have illustrated (Chan, 2020a, 2020b). Interestingly, those who promote pro-China political ideologies and ideas (e.g., those teach for national security law) in schools are free from accusation.

A similar situation can be seen in China. On the one hand, the government keeps a close eye on schools and educators that promote western views on politics and blame them for not teaching civics professionally (as only teaching based on what the national textbook say is considered professional) and bringing their personal views into the classroom. Foreign curricula and textbooks which promote western political ideologies have also been prohibited from using in schools (including international schools) (Wright et al., 2022). On the other hand, the government requires schools and civic educators to convince students that (1) Chinese political ideologies are what China and its people need, and (2) western political ideologies do more harm than good to the Chinese society and the world (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China & State Council, 2019; Lin, 2022a). The government also encourages civic educators to use personal stories and express personal views on politics, as long as they serve its purposes (e.g., fostering patriotism); and requires all schools across China to use national unified textbooks for civic-related subjects (e.g., *Morality and the Rule of Law*, *History*, *Moral and Political Education*) (Lin, 2022b; J. C. Lin & Jackson, 2022a).

In the United States, the alleged neutral policies and ideas (e.g., the race-neutral policies and racial color blindness) have been harmful for achieving racial equity and justice (Saito, 2009). With recent controversies over critical race theory and gender diversity, teachers are increasingly forced down a route set by conservative politicians in many states, which falsely suggests that conservative attitudes and beliefs as neutral and impartial (Schwartz, 2021). In these cases, political neutrality and impartiality have gone against their original meanings and been modified to serve the government's interests.

Worse, political neutrality and impartiality are often used in civic education to suppress dissent. Take the above examples again. In colonial Hong Kong, the British government used them to suppress pro-China groups and their political activities and prohibit discussing controversial political topics in civic education, to "maintain a hegemonic society and to avoid

spreading communist and Kuomintang messages" (Wong et al., 2017, 629). Similarly, the banning of teaching critical race theory in the United States indicates a rising of conservative tendency of oppressing progressive political views.

### Political neutrality and impartiality make civic education isolated from real life

Fundamentally speaking, the need for civic education comes from civic problems that people have in real life. Most society today are not politically neutral. For example, the uncontroversial prohibition against murder and racism and sexism in most societies is a violation of state neutrality. Given the societies are not politically neutral, it is neither legitimate nor possible to require civic education designed by the societies to be politically neutral, because political neutrality will be just out of nowhere and make civic education isolated from real life. For example, when dealing with students who struggle with racism, sexism, language assimilation, marginalized status, second-class citizenship, identity issues, or other civic-relevant problems, adopting a cold "neutral and impartial" approach (e.g., color-blind) equates to pushing students away and making civic classrooms isolated from real civic issues that bother students in everyday lives. As Levinson (2016) puts it,

> school cannot follow a policy of strict neutrality when students' and families' identities are openly under attack in the civic sphere. Neutrality is a cold accommodation. Students and families should be welcomed with a warm, inclusive embrace, not just by educators and other school officials, but by the school community as a whole. (Levinson, 2016, 104-105)

In the "neutral and impartial" approach, students are treated as abstract human beings rather than real persons. Contemporary theories and pedagogies related to civic education (e.g., culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy) show that students are more likely to be active and empowered citizens when educators and schools see students, value diversity, and turn it into a resource, rather than standing behind a "neutral and impartial" stance (Banks, 2017; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lin & Jackson, 2022; Taylor et al., 2009). As many social and political issues relevant to students' lives are neglected through the "neutral and impartial" lens, every student seems to be equally treated, but no one is actually being seen (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Saito, 2009).

Worse, avoiding discussing controversial political issues in class in the name of political neutrality and impartiality does not help students to deal with them in reality. In fact, in this process, students are deprived of opportunities to safely explore and discuss these issues, and to develop critical awareness of and capacities to address more fundamental problems behind them. This avoidance of showing the actual political and social reality in civic education can be commonly seen among many societies (Erlich & Gindi, 2019). Take the ban of teaching race in the United States for example. As Levinson (2012) rightly notes,

> there are good pedagogical reasons to discuss race in the context of empowering civic education. Because ethno-racial patterns exist, and ethno-racial resources exist as well, we should name them and help students to reflect critically upon them. Furthermore, leaving something out of the curriculum doesn't mean it gets left out of students' life and ideas. (Levinson 2012, 73)

The role of schools, she concludes, is to teach children "to fight against some of the more inimical features of life in a society" (Levinson, 2012, 73). Unfortunately, even if racism are considered going against the founding principles of the United States (e.g., freedom and democracy) and civic teaching is supposed to help students become aware of the prevalence of racism and take actions to address it, studies found that most teachers still find handling racism hazardous and when possible, will circumvent the issue (Levinson, 2012). This situation becomes worse after many states pass the bill of banning teaching critical race theory and other related concepts, as students are increasingly impeded from being aware of and safely discussing civic issues like the "civic empowerment gap" (Levinson, 2012) and other long-standing historical and institutional injustice (e.g., racism and racial inequity), and from being empowered to address them.

In this case, pretending in schools that racism does not exist does not make racism disappear in society. Racism exists in American society. When students need help to understand and be empowered to address it, if civic education does not take this job, they have no choice but turn to others. These risks handing students over to people with ulterior motives (Ben-Porath & Dishon, 2015; Jackson, 2019). For students experiencing, suffering from, or struggling with racism, potential results of the neutral and impartial approach include feeling hopeless, considering schools abandoning them, or even losing hope for improving the society and becoming pessimistic.

## Towards Transformative Civic Education in Undemocratic Times

Civic education does not operate in a vacuum, but is influenced and shaped by the social and political environment of the society that it operates within. Civic education, from its beginning, aims to equip students with the capacity to fully participate in the civic life and improve the current social and political system (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). This transformative nature determines that civic education does not prepare students for now, but for the future (Banks, 2017). If people can agree on this nature, then the question is how civic education can better equip students to realize it.

Here we argue that a more powerful approach that goes beyond political neutrality and impartiality can be more helpful in the circumstances mentioned earlier. First of all, civic teachers need to feel alive and seen in their teaching, so that students can feel that they are

engaging with and taught by real people instead of a neutral robot. Civic teachers are real human beings, and the topics they need to engage with in the classroom are often controversial and connected with politics. In most cases, they are highly involved in the shaping of students' social reality, and most of them (even those favour a political neutral stance) are de facto key activists in the social arena (Oulton et al., 2004). Being able to teach these controversial political topics is one of the major challenges, joys, and tasks of being a civic teacher, and is also one important factor that defines a good civic teacher. Their vulnerability deprives them from enjoying this joy and developing themselves into qualified and experienced civic teachers through handling political controversial issues. Instead of leaving teachers with helpless or being trapped by trying to become a robot that is politically neutral and impartial, whole-school support is necessary to encourage teachers to bring themselves into the classroom without worrying about protecting themselves.

For example, in the civic class, teachers should be given more freedom to teach counter-narratives that are not promoted in curricula and textbooks, be encouraged to bring in their personal intellectual and "emotional responses to both the content of the textbooks and their students' reactions to the dominant national narrative presented therein" (Sheps, 2019, 358), and be protected from discussing current political events (Cohen, 2020). An open classroom climate, which has been proved a useful component in civic education, cannot be fostered unless teachers feel comfortable and supported by schools to explore controversial political issues (Martens & Gainous, 2013). Meanwhile, teacher training should provide opportunities for both pre-service and in-service civic teachers to understand and practice diverse approaches to properly and professionally bringing in personal views while dealing with controversial political issues. This can avoid "a situation whereby a student graduates without experiencing a controversial discussion and without seeing one of his professors conducting such a discussion" (Erlich & Gindi, 2019, 120).

Moreover, civic education should have the courage to take a stance against undemocratic and unjust circumstances, instead of being content with its role of maintaining the status quo and reinforcing injustice. Undemocratic and unjust cases are prevalent in nearly all societies. Although their concrete forms and targets may be different, they often share some features, such as racism, sexism, inequality of power, prejudice, bias, and discrimination. We are aware of that civic knowledge, skills, and values may vary across societies (Jackson, 2019; Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019). Yet, no matter how they are defined, the transformative nature determines that civic education has responsibility to point out what is wrong and help students to become aware of and have capacity to address them. Only by giving preference to civic competence and firmly condemning those undemocratic cases can there be hope for democracy and civic competence to be a new normal.

Additionally, due to states often take advantage of political neutrality and impartiality to promote ideologies and values that go against the good wills of political neutrality and impartiality, it is necessary to reconsider the boundary of political neutrality and impartiality in civic education. As mentioned, they were originally put forward to prevent states from promoting unjustifiable political ideologies. Put differently, the fundamental question behind whether we need political neutrality and impartiality is that whether or not the content that civic education "teaches for" is defensible. If it is, clinging to political neutrality and impartiality is unnecessary and would become an obstacle for realizing the content. It is in this sense, Dewey (2008) reminds that complete political neutrality and impartiality are illusions because "It is not whether the schools shall or shall not influence the course of future social life, but in what direction they shall do so and how" (p. 411).

For example, tolerance and mutual respect, among others, are worth teaching for in civic education. Although they are sometimes criticized as rooted in liberal western tradition, they are fundamental values undergirding the function of democracy and thus should not be constrained by political neutrality and impartiality. After all, political neutrality and impartiality exist to protect values like tolerance and mutual respect, so that dissents can be valued and protected. Only by teaching for these values can the good aims of political neutrality and impartiality be kept and realized in reality. If civic education has come this far to dare not to teach for them, political neutrality and impartiality would be just empty shells that have nothing to fight for.

Last but not least, civic education can be most effective when it links to both civic educators and students' real lives. Most useful strategies to foster active and participatory citizens, including culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy, civic action programs, ethnic studies teaching, and *deliberation* (Banks, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Parker, 2003), all require civic education to touch on controversial political issues that students experience or struggle with in daily lives. To better realize the transformative nature, controversial political issues (especially the recent ones) that are relevant to students' real lives should be discussed in the class, and personal stories and opinions regarding these issues should be encouraged.

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