The Hidden Curriculum in Financial Literacy: Economics, Standards, and the Teaching of Young Children

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INTRODUCTION

Public schools in the United States carry the potential to forward a conception of citizenship that cultivates democratically oriented and informed individuals (Dewey, 1927). Educating such a citizenry involves attending to the intellectual and moral dimensions of humanness and examining the economic, political, and social forces that affect lives and the lives of others. Myriad interpretations of citizenship include a pragmatic focus on civic duty and activity (NCCS, 2013; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), those that aim for social transformation and economic justice (Freire, 1970; Macrine, McLaren, & Hill, 2011), neoliberal approaches to individualism and material security (Stern, 1998), as well as postmodern concerns over plurality, subjectivity, and existentialism (Biesta, 2011). While notions of citizenship are inflected in all subject areas, social studies in particular seeks to cultivate a kind of civic competence that promotes the content knowledge, intellectual processes, and democratic dispositions required of students to be active and engaged participants in public life (NCSS, 2013). In addition, the solidification of neoliberal school cultures has piqued interest in the adoption of economic education in the primary grades, so much so that teaching about the economy may become just as critical as teaching students reading, writing, and numeracy skills.
Economic literacy includes the capacity to rationally identify economic problems, alternatives, costs, and benefits; analyze the incentives at work; examine the consequences of change; collect and organize evidence; and weigh costs against benefits (Marri, 2014; NCREL, 2003; Salemi, 2005). It involves an understanding of the decisions that drive public policy at the macro (fiscal and monetary policy) level and the ability to make informed choices at the micro (personal finance) level of everyday life. Financial literacy, a component of economic literacy, focuses on the ability of adults and children to use knowledge and skills to manage their financial resources effectively (Dorado, 2011). Gary Stern (1998), former President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, described financial literacy as a curriculum aimed to ensure that teachers and students understand the economic forces that significantly impact the quality of their lives. Financial literacy, as a proposed curriculum in schools, has been supported by the U.S. Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of Education, The National Council on Economic Education, with a 1999 symposium, “The Economic Literacy Project: Seeing a Blueprint for America,” attended by over 60 representatives of academia, business, labor, K-12 education, consumers, government and financial institutions.

Educators, then, are asked to incorporate economic literacy as fundamental to preparing students for active and engaged democratic citizenship (Marri, 2014). When they go to the polls or engage in civic activities, active and engaged democratic citizens should use their economic literacy skills to understand how their choices connect to their own economic well-being as the well-being of the nation as a whole. While there will always be forces beyond individual control, economic literacy can be understood as a means to increase a young person’s chances of being self-reliant and independent enough to stave off difficulties during times of austerity or recession. At the elementary, or primary school level, economic literacy focuses specifically on how children make decisions about their imagined personal finances in order to increase their chances of maintaining a level of material comfort and security in the future.

In this chapter, we analyze EngageNY’s new collection of social studies curricular and instructional resources that speak directly to financial literacy in each of the lower elementary grade levels kindergarten through second, ages 5–8. These resources, released in May 2015 by the New York State Education Department (NYSED), support “key aspects” as determined by the New York State Board of Regents, the governing body responsible for the general supervision of all educational activities within the state. Although the curriculum suggested on the EngageNY website is not mandated—all curriculum decisions are local decisions in New York—the instructional resources on this website were the first, and for some time, the only examples of Common Core aligned lessons available to educators who found themselves forced to make drastic changes in their previous teaching standards and pedagogies. Therefore, the publication of financial literacy materials via
the EngageNY website not only reaches a wide audience of educators who have become accustomed to using the website as a place to locate approved “best practices,” but also becomes a contested site through which certain values, attitudes, and political conceptions of citizenship become legitimized and forwarded.

Using the typology of social studies education developed by Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977), we analyze this curriculum to discern the types of messages engrained within them. In doing so, we explore how the official knowledge (Apple, 1993) of financial literacy carries with it an overt and hidden curriculum that expects students to adopt certain economic beliefs and principles, specifically those that align to neoclassical economics. Neoclassical economics, the most mainstream understanding of Keynesian economics, focuses on the determination of goods, outputs, and income distributions in markets and orients individuals toward the use of rational decision-making to maximize utility and profit. Analyzing for hidden curriculum acknowledges that in addition to content and skills, curriculum is always an imbrication of cultural values, judgments, and dispositions that influence beliefs about who we are as individuals, as well as our existence within communities and as part of the national and global landscape.

To better understand how curriculum shapes various notions of citizenship, we supplement the Barr et al. (1977) typology, applied to the financial literacy units, with the work of Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne (2004). Westheimer and Kahne conducted a two-year study of 10 educational programs across the United States and used democratic theory to develop a framework on the types of desirable citizens promoted in schools. By doing this, we are able to read the EngageNY curriculum at the intersections of social studies and citizenship, pushing our analysis below the surface of mere representation and literal text, and at the end of each section, present suggestions for classroom practice and further thoughts on the economic education of young children in New York City public schools.

CURRICULUM BACKGROUND

The NYSED, in conjunction with the release of the curriculum, provides educators with the Social Studies Resource Tool Kit. NYSED designed the toolkit to put instructional and curriculum design tools into the hands of teachers and instructional leaders in local districts (NYSED, 2015). The Toolkit resources focus on helping teachers implement the Inquiry Arc of The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards through four dimensions: (1) developing questions and planning inquiries, (2) applying disciplinary concepts and tools, (3) evaluating sources and using evidence, and (4) communicating conclusions and taking informed action.
NYSED claims to have hired K-12 New York State teachers to craft inquiries, which serve as the centerpiece of the Toolkit (NYSED, 2015). Accordingly, these inquiries set a curricular and instructional course that teachers can consider in light of the NY Framework. Although the inquiries may have been intended to enable teachers to bring in their professional expertise and knowledge of successful instructional practice, rather than scripts or modules for teachers to follow, the curriculum is presented with specific directives with little to no content knowledge.

For each grade level, the tool kit provides six suggested inquiry topics that include the usual subjects of identity, maps and geography, civic ideals, government, and immigration. The kit also includes an inquiry based on an understanding of financial literacy and economics. This release marked a concerted effort to include discussions of money and exchange at the elementary grades (https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-k-12-social-studies-resource-toolkit-kindergarten-grade-4) in New York State. We present the conceptual framework used for the chapter in the section before presenting our analysis of the K-2 curricula.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Barr et al. (1977) typology categorizes social studies curriculum and pedagogy into three historical traditions: citizenship transmission, social science, or reflective inquiry.

The citizenship transmission tradition works from the premise that citizenship is best promoted by instilling proper values for making decisions in civic life. For example, it relies on direct transmission and exposition of these values by the teacher; indirect transmission through student discovery of correct interpretation; and an unquestioned acceptance of current society. Teachers or other instructional leaders select curricula/content to function as the illustration of values, beliefs, and attitudes, relying on textbooks, recitation, lecture, question and answer sessions, and structured problem-solving exercises to convey content (White, 1982). Despite numerous iterations and critiques of Barr et al.'s (1977) notation of citizenship transmission, it is generally understood as a structural-functionalist approach that positions school as transmitting the social norms and values that prepare students to conform to the existing social structure.

Social studies as a social science (Barr et al., 1977) serves as the purpose, method, and content through which to acquire knowledge that is self-justifying and self-validating. Teachers have students emulate the social scientist, not only by grasping the structure of the discipline, but also in learning the mode of inquiry characterizing certain disciplines. In the social science tradition, educators promote citizenship as the mastery of social science principles, processes, and problems.
Since social scientists have their own methods for gathering and verifying knowledge, teachers can help students discover and apply appropriate methods through the structure, concepts, problems, and processes drawn from the social science disciplines (Barr et al., 1977; Misco & Hamot, 2012; White, 1982).

Finally, the reflective inquiry tradition promotes citizenship through a process of inquiry whereby citizens examine multiple sources of data and determine courses of action that resolve identified problems. In this domain, teachers engage students in a self-reflection process that analyzes the values and interests of others in a society and responds to conflicts through the testing of situational insights (Misco & Hamot, 2012; Vinson, 1998; White, 1982). How these three typologies appear in the EngageNY financial literacy curriculum is presented in the section on analysis and discussion.

Over time no single notion of citizenship and civic education has prevailed (Ross, 2006; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Political scientists, politicians, historians, civic educators, parents, and community organizers continue to contest varying and contrasting conceptions of citizenship and civic education (Connolly, 1983; Levine, 2007). These conceptions are by no means neutral. In fact, each promotes particular ways of knowing, relating, and acting (Parker, 2001). Unsurprisingly, long-standing debates on the meaning of "good" citizenship have resulted in significantly varying implications for curriculum and pedagogy in classrooms. In this chapter, we supplement the Barr et al. (1977) typology by using the Westheimer and Kahne (2004) framework to examine the types of economic citizenship promoted by the NYS curricula.

THREE TYPES OF CITIZENSHIP AND CIVIC EDUCATION

In an overview of the landscape of social studies and civic education, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) provide three types of citizenship promoted in schools: the personally responsible citizen, the participatory citizen, and the justice-oriented citizen. Their categorization is based on an analysis of leading social studies educators and classroom practices of teachers. We chose to use their three categories as they capture the varying and contrasting conceptions of citizenship and civic education in the field of social studies education (Barr et al., 1977; Ross, 2006; Stanley & Nelson, 1994). These categories also resonate well with the work of classroom teachers, administrators, and curriculum writers (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). In other words, these categories capture many common classroom practices of K–12 educators by focusing on content-centered approaches from the academic disciplines and issue-centered approaches examining specific issues.

The teaching of personally responsible citizens includes forwarding such characteristics as honesty, integrity, self-discipline, and hard work (Lickona, 1993;
Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Wynne, 1986). For example, personally responsible citizens would act responsibly in their communities by paying taxes, recycling, donating blood, volunteering at a shelter, or contributing to a food or clothing drive. This vision of citizenship assumes that an improvement of society and a resolution of social problems result from individual actions of law-abiding citizens with good character (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Similarly, according to Walter Parker (1996), this notion of citizenship promotes a “traditionalist” view of citizenship in which citizens vote, develop opinions on public policy, hold deep commitments to liberty and justice, and have thorough understanding of the mechanics of democratic institutions, such as governmental agencies and organizations.

Educational practices and programs that promote personally responsible citizenship seek to increase volunteer service among students. Two examples of such programs are Character Counts! and Points of Light. The Character Counts! program emphasizes six pillars (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, citizenship) and teaches students to “do your share to make your school and community better, cooperate, get involved in community affairs, stay informed, vote, be a good neighbor, obey laws and rules, respect authority, and protect the environment” (http://charactercounts.org/sixpillars.html, retrieved September 28, 2016). Similarly, the Points of Light program emphasizes volunteer service as “fundamental to a purposeful life and essential to a healthy world” (http://www.pointsoflight.org/, retrieved September 28, 2016).

Participatory citizens, in contrast, place emphasis on collective community-based action to improve society and resolve social problems. These citizens seek to actively participate in the civic affairs and the social life of community at the local, state, or national levels (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Participatory citizens fit into a “progressive” conceptualization of citizenship in which direct participation goes beyond voting and individual action (Parker, 1996, p. 112). This category values active participation through leadership roles “within established systems and community structures” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 240). For example, they organize a food drive rather than only contributing to it through donations. Other participatory activities may include campaigning for a representative, a ballot measure, or running for an elected office. Additionally, participatory activities might include volunteering for a leadership role in government, a nongovernmental agency, a community-based organization, or working toward solutions to local problems with other like-minded citizens.

In the classroom, this vision of citizenship stresses teaching students how to actively participate in community-based and governmental organizations as well as other organized efforts to improve society. Examples of such educational programs are school-based service learning projects, such as Newmann's citizen action curriculum (1975) or Engle's decision-making model (1960). These programs emphasize deliberation on public issues, group problem-solving, and community action.
The third vision of citizenship, justice-oriented citizen, calls for “explicit attention to matters of injustice and to the importance of pursuing social justice” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 242). Such citizens engage in structural critiques and aim to address the root causes of social problems. They improve society through action. For example, these citizens, rather than contributing to or organizing a food drive, would explore why people are hungry and act to solve the causes of hunger in the community. According to scholars such as Ira Shor (1992), these citizens engage in social critique and aim for structural change.

Educators who promote justice-oriented citizenship engage students in deliberation about social, political, and economic structures with the goal of creating active collective strategies for societal change. These educators want students to create approaches that challenge injustice and, if possible, address the root causes of problems. Such citizens, however, must be “prepared to effectively promote their goals as individuals and groups in sometimes contentious political arenas” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 243) as their fellow citizens will hold different perspectives. As such, educators should assist students in developing their communication skills so that they are able to work collaboratively with those who may oppose their views.

ANALYZING THE CURRICULUM

In the next section, we investigate if and how the financial literacy curriculum prioritizes personally responsible, participatory citizen, and justice-oriented citizen, and in doing so, discuss the broader possible consequences for these types of economic citizenships.

INDIVIDUAL WANTS AND NEEDS IN KINDERGARTEN

Using the definition of citizenship transmission, we examine the kindergarten curriculum, “Why Can't We Ever Get Everything We Need and Want?,” as one that forwards a set of beliefs, rules, and dispositions fundamental to the economic needs and wants of larger society (Giroux, 1987). One of the earliest examples of citizenship transmission is attributed to an article entitled Southern Workman, published in 1907 by Thomas Jesse Jones. In the expanded book that followed, Jones lamented that young African Americans and Native Americans would never be able to become integral members of broader society unless they learned the ways in which social forces operate within society and the various available responses to social power (Ross, 2006). In the context of the United States, curriculum on economic self-reliance and responsibility is inextricably linked to the historical condition of certain racial, ethnic, rural, and gendered populations. In this account,
Jones presumed their participation in the very market systems that ostensibly justified slavery—and in turn doubled as rationale for colonist ideologies—could in some way provide social mobility for a population that has been historically stripped of their autonomy to fruitfully exist.

In “Why Can’t We Ever Get Everything We Need and Want?,” there is a hidden curriculum at play (Apple, 1993). This curriculum directs teachers to instruct 5- to 6-year-old children on how to categorize and sort material objects into wants and needs, and then explores “basic economic principles” as markers of “good” citizenship and “good” decision-making during times of scarcity. Scarcity, austerity, and recession are framed here as a result of natural disasters, rather than relations of power, greed, or systemic discrimination. Although the authors never explicitly state the “basic economic principle” from which they claim to draw, we find that neoclassical free market capitalism serves as the unquestioned order of things.

According to Max Weber (1930), the production of capitalist ideology involves not only rational thought and behavior, but also inculcates an ethos, a spirit, and a hidden message. This message assumes in an indiscriminate way that the market not only holds primacy over our everyday experiences, but that no other alternatives exist to the economic culture we have created. This naturalization of consumptive life is not only present in this activity, but similarly so in the following explanation of goods and services: “Goods are those tangible things we can use, keep and consume; services are those things that others do for us.” These two key lines of thought—needs and wants and goods and services—are threaded throughout this kindergarten curriculum and amplify the rugged individualism and self-serving ideology upon which the United States is notorious for around the globe.

Surely, the audience here is not the exceptionally elite with whom the discernment of needs and wants takes on an entirely different way of thinking, if it is a necessary thought at all. Suffice it to say that financial literacy for low-income children may possibly lead to more financially secure livelihood, more options, more things, perhaps but not inclusive of, more opportunities. Yet, it does not allow children to begin thinking of citizenship as a kind of ethno-political response-ability that regards the individual as part of a collective well-being that carries with it a complex history corrupted by economic injustice and inequality. Regardless of the flippant condescension found in the unit—children’s perspectives are described as “innate,” “naïve,” “silly”—in our experience as educators and teacher educators both in California and New York City, we find children to be exceptionally keen to issues of fairness, equity, sharing, and redistribution. We believe that if teachers began the unit with larger, more meaningful questions such as “what do we want for each other in this world?,” children will follow in tow and begin to flourish with sophistication on issues of poverty, scarcity, and the prioritization of people over material privilege. Underlying this financial literacy curriculum is the assumption that for low-income people irrationality and lack of impulse are
reasons for economic hardship, deflecting attention from a history of institutional and systemic social, political, and economic disenfranchisement.

When considering the social science framework, there exists ample research that critiques neoliberal school reforms for its unrelenting obsession with the positivist learning sciences (Biesta, 2014; Taubman, 2009). In this perspective, knowledge is caught within the dualisms of right versus wrong and is considered to embody a fixed meaning that is then utilized as a form of truth, or evidence, to complete a specific aim or task. In the NYS P–12 Common Core Learning Standards, social studies has been subsumed under English Language Arts & Science in a subsection entitled, “Informational Texts,” which forwards an implicit belief that social studies is the application of information, not critical inquiry, question-making, sourcing, interpretation, and releasing the imagination. This emphasis on the rational thinking subject appears in the unit when teachers are asked to evaluate learning through and as concrete developmental stages: students move from “the identification level” when they are able to identify a need from a want; into “the application level” when they are able to explain how to satisfy said needs and wants; and finally, into an “interpretation level,” in which they make decisions based on a simulated condition of scarcity.

Furthermore, this kindergarten unit instructs teachers to examine with students the concept of scarcity and to explore the options people have when “not being able to have all the goods and services that a person needs or wants.” With the individual self as the centerpiece of concern, the unit provides examples of what to do when an impending snowstorm causes the community to dry up supplies at a local grocery store. Courses of action include, “pay a higher price, buy something else, or wait until the supply increases.” The curriculum suggests that teachers use a simple notation system (+ or -) to record the strength of student understanding as they brainstorm how to respond appropriately during times of scarcity.

The hidden assumption suggests that there are correct ways to respond during crisis situations, which in turn governs and produces particular kinds of knowledge about what constitutes acceptable forms of citizenship, as well as moral and civic responsibility. The manner in which teachers are instructed to measure correctness and distribute quantifiable points, particularly as it concerns a subject such as citizenship, is one example of what Wayne Au (2011) calls the “New Taylorism” of school. Here, we see a resurgence of the factory-like efficiency popularized by educational reformers at the turn of the 20th century. By applying concepts of scientific management, namely the systematic regulation of individuals in order to effectively produce predetermined aims and outcomes, this curriculum tightens and constrains the imagination in order to serve a neoliberal culture of auditing and evaluation, and does so in the name of capitalism and consumerism.

In the social studies methods course that Debbie teaches, preservice student teachers develop primary grade-level curricula on the unifying theme of “Creation,
Expansion, and Interaction of Economic Systems found in the NYS Scope and Sequence Standards for Social Studies. One semester, a student designed a first grade simulation in which the school cafeteria served as a microcosm of various formal economies that differ in their role of government intervention and resource distribution. Given a fixed supply, one scenario asks students to think about how food would be distributed if students with more money were able to buy more and students with less had access to disproportionately less. Although the vocabulary of capitalism, socialism, egalitarianism, etc. was determined developmentally inappropriate, the underlying premise demonstrated to children that classes exist based on their relationship to economic theories, capita and its distribution. In the second scenario, children consider what would happen if the principal decided to collect school monies then distribute food equally to all members of the class. Here, the teacher intended for children to begin contemplating ideas of fairness and asks them to compare and contrast the two situations with the aim of analyzing conditions of scarcity and the possibility of more equitable futurities. In the third case, children are asked to consider yet another situation in which a baseline minimum is established such that those with more money are able to buy more, only after all students have been sufficiently fed and provided for.

In this lesson, students not only considered the role of government in matters of the economy and the challenges of meeting wants and needs in a situational context that is relevant and accessible, but also did so through a reflective inquiry lens that centered on interdependence and invited possibilities outside free market fundamentalism. If we admit that our current neo-liberalist system perpetuates an increasing divide between the few wealthy and the majority middle class and poor, and that this leads to heartbreaking narratives of poverty, incarceration, desperation, and tragedy, then we must teach our children to imagine the future otherwise and to assist them in creating new systems of economic justice that are premised on notions of fairness, not materialism and self-over-others. This lesson should not be taught exclusively to the children of the poor, as curriculum on financial literacy tends to aim. It should not stem from deficit constructions of certain populations and their apparent lack of impulse control and rational choice-making. Instead, we should enact this curriculum for all kindergarten classrooms since participation by all is necessary to reconstruct a society that engages with social issues and institutions that promote a more just and equitable distribution of society’s benefits.

FAMILIES AND CHOICE-MAKING IN THE FIRST GRADE

In alignment with the NYC Scope and Sequence Standards for Social Studies, this first grade unit builds off the previous year by focusing on the child as part of a family unit. Whereas in kindergarten, the teacher explores various criteria for
determining an object as an individual want or a need, this unit asks the children: “How do families gain money? What do families choose to spend their money on? Why do families choose to save money?” As written into the curriculum, the foundational concept for this unit is based on the economic principal of cost-benefit analyses, or CBA. Generally known, CBA is a methodological technique used to calculate and compare the strengths and weaknesses of alternative costs, such as labor, time, and capital, in order to maximize benefits for a private sector business or governmental policy or project. By applying an assessment of a business to the decision-making process of a family, this unit approaches financial literacy through the personification of corporations as human beings, or human beings as corporations, a highly contested debate that reached the floor of the U.S. Supreme Court no more than five years ago.

By establishing an artificial legal persona, the U.S. Supreme Court passed the 5-4 First Amendment decision entitled Citizen United which expanded the rights of corporations to act as individuals and deregulated their monetary spending in candidate elections. Four years later in 2014, another 5-4 decision supported a craft store chain Hobby Lobby and its claim that companies do have the right to exercise their religious freedom, like individual citizens, and therein, were permitted to deny their 16,000 employees access to certain kinds of contraceptives that the owners considered abortifacients. This personification not only extends certain constitutional rights and responsibilities to private enterprises, but ensures protection of their economic development by, for example, protecting shareholders from being sued as individuals, or protecting them from warrantless search and seizure. Although the teacher in this unit is not instructed to use such language, the underpinning ideology is to treat the family as a unit of business.

In regard to the notion of citizenship transmission, there is a clear inculcation, both hidden and overt, of the child via teacher into the economic agenda set forth by the private sector. It is delineated in the first paragraph of the unit that 6- to 7-year-old children should be able to examine the “costs and benefits associated with decisions about spending and saving money” and be able to demonstrate this in the development of “an argument supported with evidence that addresses the question of how families make economic choices.” Therefore, the unit implicitly promotes the idea that children and their families should be commodified, evaluated, and advised through the language of the market in order for them to ensure fiscal security in the future, and that children should be able to argue for this through evidence, which points them toward “a list of ways students can help their families save money.”

Whether this is an appropriate discussion to pursue with children of this age is a matter of how teachers assume responsibility for the world in which children are about to enter. According to Hannah Arendt (1954), the crisis in education falls from the fiat accompli established through the dictatorial intervention of the
adult, who instead of producing new futures and conditions, inculcates them into a world in which the new already exists. This is what Barr et al. (1977) call citizen transmission. About this Arendt (1954) writes, “education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it” and by that token it is the adult who must carry the dual responsibility of changing the world while protecting children from it. Education, she continues, is “where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices … but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world” (p. 193). This may signify that the education of a personally responsible citizen (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), in which teachers ask children to assume responsibility for others, in this case, the fiscal decision-making of their family members, may not be appropriate at the age of 7–8, a time of discovery and play that may need to be safely harbored from the political world, and most certainly from the financial.

Historically, the field of education has tended to adopt and explode certain terms, acronyms, concepts, and practices. One such word has become that of “choice.” Throughout this first grade unit there is ample mention of “choice” as rational decision-making, an interpretation that aligns with the personally responsible citizen who must have “good character, be honest, responsible, and law-abiding” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 242). Yet, the most popular use of the term “choice” in the field of education today is in reference to “school choice” wherein students and their families are provided alternatives to their publicly funded schools. School choice programs are scholarship tax credit programs, which allow individuals or corporations to receive credits toward their state taxes in exchange for donations made to nonprofit organizations that grant private school funding. Framed as the positives of venture philanthropy, school choice has been highly publicized as an opportunity for poor, predominantly families of color, to escape the failures of the public system by enrolling their children in schools that are semi-controlled by private and corporate interests, multimillionaires, and their government and political apparatchiks. Choice, interchangeably viewed as freedom, is defined in a capitalist democracy as the right each individual has to determine their course of destiny, to reap the fruits of creative autonomy, and to actualize the possibility for self-development. Unfortunately, such freedoms are granted more to some than others. In a Foucauldian sense, we can examine the use of choice here, not as representative, but rather as producing a discourse in which the knowledge of choice governs and inscribes a false sense of independence; failure arising not from structural exploitation, but rather from a lack of civilized control and intellectual thought.

In the unit, children are provided a series of images, such as a medical doctor examining an X-ray or a family jogging in the park, and asked to categorize them as either a means to obtain money or an example of leisure or spending. As
a supplement, there is a source reading, entitled “What is a Budget?” with statements such as, “Companies and countries have budgets to manage their spending. Putting together a budget can help you, too.” Throughout, it is taught that people have choices that can either enrich or impair them. The second task asks students to consider the economic choices families make by watching a 3-minute video created by PrudentialCorpAsia, a life insurance, asset management, and consumer finance operation involved in the development and dissemination of Common Core Learning Standards. This animated video shows a money mint printing notes and shipping them to banks from which “a world of possibility” can be accessed. Thinking about money helps us understand that we can earn, spend, save, or donate that which we secure with hard work, a throwback to the Protestant work ethic that, according to Weber (1930), buttressed modern-day capitalism. The third supporting task includes the use of an online PowerPoint about short-term and long-term saving goals and an excerpt on how to use savings appropriately. “The idea,” it reads “is not to SPEND money but to be money smart and learn how to HANDLE IT. Here is how smart people use the money they have” [original capitalization]. Northwestern Mutual, another life insurance and financial planning firm, produced this supplementary material.

Similar to our critique of kindergarten, we have grave concerns over the consequence of decontextualizing economic hardship through the reinscription of the mythical meritocracy. The hidden message pervasive in this unit is that hard work and rational “smart” decision-making is the panacea to poverty and struggle. The rugged individualism here is clear and as individuals help themselves out, there becomes no need for government intervention, welfare programming, or an analysis of history, discrimination, and the status quo. The danger is not only a mis-education—Carter Woodson’s (1933) concern for the neglect of history particularly for the African American community—but an anti-education, in that there is no need to study; no need for inquiry, investigation, or reflection into the plight of others. Financial literacy in this way—and this is not the literacy dreamt by philosopher Paulo Freire (1970) or those of new literacy studies (for an overview, see Gee, 1996; Street, 1995)—renders elementary school teaching to logical empiricism and pragmatic skill-building, one that positions a child to judge and evaluate their own family and the decisions made by their beloved parents and guardians.

Finally, the culminating project asks children to survey the spending decisions of their family members and to then create posters that promote money-saving strategies. In an effort to include a social action component into the curriculum, children are being used as capitalist advocates in the world, a turn that does not bode well to the democratic principles foundational to this country. One possible residue of this project is an attitude of contempt toward self, family, and a child’s own people, as they are taught to admire those with capital and judge those without. From our experience, children are keenly aware and sensitive to matters of
money, not necessarily in terms of financial responsibility, but in their affective engagement with other children from differential and referentially classed backgrounds. An implicit hidden education bent at the intersections of poverty and individualism, capitalism and choice, and the false illusions of merit and deservedness, produces a scenario within which individuals are noticed and praised for their material prowess.

Children from low-income communities hear of summer trips to Paris told by classmates and peek into backpacks that are either glimmering with new materiality or punctured by the worn down, recycled, and renewed. They experience feelings of envy, anger, and shame, as well as pride, happiness, and contentment. However, this shame, tied to the appearances of oneself in the presence of others, is shaped both by how the subject perceives itself and also by the way in which others will judge, evaluate, and find the child either desirable or insufficient. Shame is the failure to live up to the ideal image we hold of ourselves (Taubman, 2009). The most profound lesson learned by students may be a deficit construction of themselves and their adult counterparts for making poor choices with money. Many teachers, particularly at the childhood level, are profoundly concerned with the manifestation of class disparity in their room. They redistribute classroom materials in egalitarian ways and structure communal sharing experiences. An appropriate revision could perhaps teach the child that they are more than their economic identity; that one should not be judged or evaluated based on wealth; and to love their families unconditionally despite the hardships and challenges they may face.

INTERDEPENDENCE AND COMMUNITY ECONOMICS IN THE SECOND GRADE

In the second grade, the curriculum expands into the domain of community, defined as a dynamic assemblage of individuals, desires, and interdependent relationships that move, shift, and contract as a collective “we.” The unit challenges students to understand that through businesses, town organizations, and local governments, a community meets the needs and wants of its people, finding strength in collective efforts to address problems.” In contrast to the previous grades, this unit disperses responsibility from the individual into the interstitial relations that constitute our interdependence. The first segment returns to the idea of wants and needs as children brainstorm categories of workers, businesses, and organizations. The second asks students to complete a graphic organizer describing the challenges of scarcity, particularly the quality of healthy and fresh foods in poor neighborhoods and the impact of California droughts on crop yield. Both of these excerpts discuss related careers, such as farmer advocates, professors, and food scientists, which invite students to think about important kinds of work not typically visible or
recognized. The third segment speaks to a sense of collaboration and highlights people's attempts "to rise above economic and geographic challenges via the use of tools and technology, new ideas, recycling, and sheer determination." News stories include Breanne, a woman who started a community garden for a charity called Su Casa; an economical solution to building a playground out of recycled materials; and the work of Alexandra Flynn Scott, an 8-year-old girl with neuroblastoma who sold lemonade as a way to raise money for pediatric cancer research.

The concept of interdependence is described as "a diverse, mutually supportive web" among material matter, forms of exchange, human beings, and situational conditions and resolutions. The emergent field of new materialisms in curriculum studies (Snaza, Sonu, Truman, & Zaliwska, 2016) represents a range of theorists who are turning attention back to the nature of matter and the place of embodied humans within the material world. New materialist thought begins by entangling the human in a horizontal relationship with a whole host of other human and nonhuman entities such that spaces become emerging sites in which entities are created, rather than separated things that merely come together. For example, the first source text, entitled "Farmers Grow Corn," does not actually position the farmer as the subject, as implied in the title, but traces the movement of the corn and the ways in which its contact with humans created subjects of farming both through culture as exemplified by American Indian innovation and those that sell crops to companies for retail or animal fodder. We believe this approach to interdependence can resonate with what Rosi Braidotti (2013) calls the web of interrelations, a concept drawn heavily from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's construction of assemblages. Here, there is a blurring of boundaries such that entities do not exist as stable and bounded things but are "intra-active" and emerging from their relationality.

In his poignant argument for a new materialist inflection in the teaching of social studies, Mark Helmsing (2016) writes, "With a focus on life and the living world, the kinds of thinking that social studies education could make possible would resonate with an unending array of unfolding material encounters to study" (p. 138). The hidden curriculum being forward here, more than in the previous grade levels, is the notion of connectivity, transaction, intra-action, mutual constitutiveness, terms that describe not only the significance of relationships over individual development, but that our very subjectivities are dependent on our relation with the other, an ethical response that acknowledges that which is outside the self whether that be human or nonhuman. For Diane Coole and Samantha Frost, "materiality is always something more than 'mere' matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable" (2010, p. 9). The second excerpt describes a New York City schoolteacher and puts her in relation to a newly purchased home. Being the first in her family, she describes the affective experience of pride that accompanied her
new acquisition and although the story still carries the narrative of individualized hard work and de-historicized success, it does present an emotional narrative that stands in stark contrast to the flattened out categorizing activities of kindergarten and first grade.

Aside from citizenship transmission and social science (Barr et al., 1977), this unit incorporates comparably more elements of reflective inquiry particularly as reading passages include the description of careers and professions that respond to environmental problems of scarcity. Again, there is no mention anywhere that scarcity impacts differentially, nor is there discussion of how certain economic systems, such as capitalism, function precisely on the production of haves and have-nots. Richard Howitt, who teaches at the University of California, is said to help farmers overcome drought conditions, and Breanne works with Su Casa, a charity that harvests healthy fruits and vegetables for poor women and children. In sourcing these texts, it is found that they are written, translated, or adapted from organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, or a group called Newsela that employs teachers to modify current events into grade-level appropriate text. While insurance companies created the online videos suggested in the previous grades, this second grade unit is decidedly infused with materials from nonprofit organizations and educators. The tone is markedly different; now, as a pedagogical affect, there is a feeling of care, not material accumulation; there is a sense of responsibility and participation, not one of judgment and definitive reasoning.

As opposed to the character-based or personally responsible approach to citizenship, this unit pushes students just beyond the limits into what Westheimer and Kahne (2004) delineate as participatory. Here, students do not contribute time to a cause, but work to actively organize and strategize community efforts. Although the students do not necessarily enact these moves, they are exposed through the readings to various models of people who commit their lives to such causes. However, an exploration of why such problems exist, what they call justice-oriented citizenship, is not present at all. Students are not asked to critically assess the social, political, and economic structures that work below the surface, nor do they examine social movements, as a collective of individuals who have historically fought for social change. This absence is most clearly seen in "Poor People Cannot Find Fresh and Healthy Food," an article featured in the Philadelphia Inquirer and adapted by Newsela. In this piece, it is clear that "poor" people—a word that must be interrogated for its pathologizing history and its inscription of a deficit characteristic onto human rather than system—do not have access to markets that stock quality food and that these same individuals have been found to digest rotten produce only to get sick. The solution, as proposed, is to promote frozen, dried, or canned goods since fresh produce tends to spoil quickly. Benjamin Chapman, described in the text as a food safety officer, contends that "poor" people eat spoiled food for one reason, because "it is better than eating nothing at all."
CONCLUSION

In *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, Gert Biesta (2014) argues that during these neoliberal times the inescapability of evidence and competency makes critical conversations on the purpose of education more difficult. The treatment of knowledge as contained, deliverable, and measured has reduced education to the development of skills at the expense of a focus on the values of and hopes for the greater good: the question of why we teach has been interred by directions on how to teach. Moreover, with increasingly more weight being placed on the production of standardized curriculum, best practices, assessments and evaluations, corporations have seized the opportunity to profit off the booming business of telling teachers what to do. What becomes compromised, he claims, is the very central tenet of teaching: the ability to exercise our judgment as teachers. By examining the recently released EngageNY curriculum on financial literacy, we have attempted to raise questions about the kinds of values and beliefs teachers are being asked to forward to young elementary-age children. Throughout, we found a general emphasis on the teaching of proper decision-making behaviors, but a suspicious disregard for a deeper analysis into the ways that the economy impacts the lives of people. This is not to say that we are against the idea of discussing the role of judgment in economic life. We believe that the pervasiveness of the free market, including its aggressive media presence and the material inequality seen by all around the world, makes financial and economic literacy an important area of study for teachers and children. What we contend here is that a critical education, one that cultivates compassion, solidarity, and justice, cannot begin from a condition that thrives on the economic disequilibrium of its people, and that this curriculum could be strengthened in two major ways: first, greater transparency of its contributors and content, including the participation of corporate benefactors, its economic platform, and general background information from which teachers are able to make judgments; and second, a move away from the presupposition of capitalism to an analysis of various forms of economies and exchanges.

The discipline of social studies is about deep investigations into how and why events occur both in the past and present contexts. It inquires, explores, and critiques traditional conventions and canonical texts in the area of history, geography, sociology, psychology, and economics with the aim of forwarding democratic values, global citizenry, and intellectual curiosity and pursuit. This means that social studies educators are charged with providing their students a kind of learning experience that not only prepares them to take up certain roles as citizens in the United States (Gutmann, 1999), but also positions them to resist, reconceptualize, and act when structures and systems express discriminatory beliefs and values. This brings to bear one very fundamental issue in the writing of this chapter—if we pay attention to the question of purpose in education, what comes to pass as
we discover a difference of opinion that is insurmountable and weary of compromise. It may be very true that the authors of these financial literacy units are not interested in criticality in the way that we are. The authors of this curriculum may instead believe in the sanctity of the market and its potential to save individuals from poverty and struggle. While we consider these tenets to be problematic, overly simplified and even dangerous, what happens then to classroom teaching when the contents of a curriculum come into direct opposition with those charged to enact it? In the end, the teachers will have to make their own judgments. We hope this chapter raises some important questions that assist them in doing so.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you consider to be the social ideology that drives conventional approaches to financial education? To what extent does this represent a socially just ideology?
2. This article begs the question—Do teachers routinely critically analyze curriculum? Do they consider the implicit and often explicit beliefs put forth as dogma?
3. Sonu and Marri echo the writings of other researchers (e.g., Chris Arthur and Laura Pinto), who claim the presence of a hidden curriculum in existing financial literacy curricula. Locate a financial education lesson with which you are familiar. To what extent does it infer a hidden effort to maintain the social status quo? What modifications would you employ to challenge its assumptions?
4. Reconsider the solution provided to the problem of food access described before the conclusion. What would a justice-oriented solution to the situation look like?
5. What might “greater transparency” look like for curriculum contributors? How do you think having this information would affect curriculum purchasing?

REFERENCES


