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Classroom Participation as Essential Pedagogy in Undergraduate Social Work Education

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Classroom Participation as Essential Pedagogy in

Undergraduate Social Work Education

by

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Abstract

This Banded Dissertation promotes the significance of classroom participation in the undergraduate social work classroom and is comprised of three scholarly products: a conceptual article, a qualitative content analysis research article, and a workshop presentation. Critical pedagogy and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) are concepts utilized across all three scholarly products to demonstrate the need for intentional classroom participation methods that represent the mission of social work education. The first product is a conceptual article that provides strategies for alignment between social work educators' teaching philosophies and their classroom participation methods. The article makes the case for recognizing classroom participation as a distinct and crucial teaching tool for baccalaureate social work educators. The second product is a research study conducting a qualitative content analysis of 33 *Introduction to Social Work* undergraduate course syllabi. The study sought to better understand how educators conceptualize classroom participation and what they expect of their students. Findings were organized around the categories of expectations, attendance, and grading. The third product is a workshop that was scheduled for presentation at the Association of Baccalaureate Program Directors (BPD) 37th Annual Conference. The purpose of the workshop was to highlight the need for intentional class participation methods in the baccalaureate social work classroom and to draw attention to the complexity of creating and maintaining classrooms that rely upon active student engagement. The Banded Dissertation makes the case for why effective use of classroom participation is instrumental for effective teaching in social work.

Keywords: classroom participation, critical pedagogy, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, content analysis, social work education

Dedication

Teachers are not performers in the traditional sense of the word in that our work is not meant to be a spectacle. Yet it is meant to serve as a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning.

—bell hooks (1994, p. 11)

This Banded Dissertation is dedicated to undergraduate social work students who participate in class, even when it does not feel entirely comfortable. This work was conducted in honor of students who speak up in class regardless of their apprehension or unease: Your voices are needed.

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Classroom participation is a pedagogical tool integral to social work education. Paradoxically, limited social work research explores the definition and application of classroom participation, indicating that the impact of various classroom participation strategies on student learning is unknown. Classroom participation is an essential pedagogical tool hidden in plain sight. This Banded Dissertation seeks to highlight and explain why classroom participation matters in the undergraduate social work classroom. It also explores how classroom participation is defined by social work educators and how various conceptualizations can most effectively be used to advance the goals of social work education.

While classroom participation is a pervasive phrase and component of teaching across disciplines in higher education, there is little agreement as to a singular definition of the term (Orwat et al., 2018; Rocca, 2010). Scholars reference classroom participation as a term to describe classroom atmosphere (Dancer & Kamvounias, 2005), classroom activities (Rocca, 2010), as well as the assessment and evaluation of participation itself (Bean & Peterson, 1998). The word *participation* in the literature is often used interchangeably with terms such as *engagement*, *interaction*, and *performance*, indicating that the concept of classroom participation remains elusive and open to interpretation. While the concept seemingly appears intangible, social work educators in particular have a vested interest in defining, strengthening, and emphasizing the importance of classroom participation as a pedagogical tool. Social work educators widely recognized that active classroom participation is an important aspect of an engaged and functional social work classroom (Orwat et al., 2018). Classroom participation helps to facilitate many teaching methods particular to social work education, such as the

development of professional competencies (Jones, 2008), critical reflection (Gambrill, 2012; Lay & McGuire, 2010), and reflective practices (Mishna & Bogo, 2007).

In addition to defining classroom participation in relation to social work education, it is also important to consider various classroom participation models and methods particular to the discipline. Anastas (2010) highlights six teaching methods specific to the needs of social work education: lecturing and explaining; reflecting on experience; leading a discussion; inquiry and discovery; training and coaching; and using groups and teams. Notably, all six of these categories are reflected in the literature pertaining to classroom participation (Rocca, 2010). Additionally, all of these methods require student participation and/or engagement, again signaling that teaching methods particular to social work education are heavily reliant on classroom participation.

A considerable amount of research has been conducted regarding how student identity impacts classroom participation. Individual personality factors such as levels of confidence, introversion, and anxiety have been shown to impact students' willingness to participate (Eddy et al., 2015; Murphy et al., 2017; Weaver & Qi, 2005). Demographic factors such as age (Fritschner, 2000; Weaver & Qi, 2005), language of origin (Tatar, 2005), and cultural background (White, 2011) are also factors that impact a student's level of confidence and subsequent comfort in participating in the classroom. Studies related to student participation have also been conducted with a gendered lens (Crombie et al., 2003; Hyde & Deal, 2003). In addition to student identity, instructor presence and classroom climate are addressed throughout the literature pertaining to classroom participation. Instructors who communicate that they care about their students as learners and people create classroom climates that are more conducive to participation (Crombie et al., 2003; Dallimore et al., 2004; Rodriguez-Keyes et al., 2013).

Instructors who create "safe spaces" where students perceive that their contributions are not under scrutiny tend to experience higher rates of student participation as well (Frisby et al., 2014). Conversely, when students are intimidated by their instructors or perceive them as verbally aggressive, they are less likely to participate (Rocca, 2009). Many social work skills, such as the appropriate use of self-disclosure (Cayanus et al., 2009) and rapport building (Merwin, 2002; Weaver & Qi, 2005), can be employed in the classroom by instructors to increase student participation.

The literature clearly demonstrates that classroom participation matters in regard to student success. It is what allows students to share personal narratives and apply classroom material within the context of their lived experience (Mello, 2010; Rocca, 2010). It can also help with classroom management issues such as accountability and preparedness (Jones, 2008). If social work educators want more students to engage in quality classroom participation throughout their educational experience, it is therefore imperative to study and support classroom participation studies at the introductory Bachelor in Social Work (BSW) level. This Banded Dissertation aims to explore how classroom participation can be used as a thoughtful and discrete pedagogical tool to enhance engagement and student learning outcomes. The three products that comprise this Banded Dissertation offer strategies and methods for how BSW educators can utilize classroom participation to their pedagogical advantage via the process of examining the meaning and purpose of classroom participation.

Conceptual Framework

Critical pedagogy and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) form the conceptual basis for this Banded Dissertation. Critical pedagogy is often considered a theoretical response to more authoritative and traditional models of teaching and is therefore well suited to

the exploration of classroom participation in the contemporary social work classroom. SoTL promotes the idea that teaching in itself is a scholarly activity. It is a form of systematic inquiry that celebrates the connection between research and teaching; therefore, it is also an ideal lens through which to view the issue of classroom participation.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is a teaching paradigm that stresses the role of power in the production of knowledge and asserts that the purpose of education is to work toward the freedom of oppressed groups (Saleeby & Scanlon, 2005). It is a critique of the authoritative, traditional "banking" method of education as explicated by liberatory educational theorist Paolo Freire (1970). The banking model imposes the teacher as subject master and relegates their students to being passive receptacles, or banks, into which knowledge is to be deposited. From a critical perspective, knowledge is much more subjective and all information is value-laden. Critical educators subscribe to Freire's model of conscientization, which refers to helping learners to become aware of inequalities and, equally as important, helping them address these inequities (Freire, 1970). Education is never neutral from a critical perspective. On the contrary, it is a political act that demands active *participation*. The role of an educator within the critical paradigm is to question the construction and underlying political motivation of ideas and knowledge. Learning is more dialectical in nature in comparison to more objective teaching paradigms.

Critical pedagogists Henry Giroux (1988; 2011) and bell hooks (1994) assert that critical education can challenge social inequality through encouraging dialogue, demonstrating effective social critique, and engaging student voice—all teaching methods that require active participation. Contemporary pedagogical concepts embraced in social work education such as

transformational learning (Anastas, 2010; Daloz, 2000), development of student consciousness (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005), and intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Murphy et al., 2009) are derived from critical pedagogy and relate to discrete teaching methods used to encourage classroom participation. Additionally, the critical pedagogy perspective demands that educators arm students with the necessary skills to participate and advocate for social justice, even when that may involve taking social or emotional risks in the classroom (Oliver et al., 2017). Critical pedagogy is a suitable paradigm through which to view issues of classroom participation because of its emphasis on critical thinking and analysis, dialogic learning, and social action (Saleeby & Scanlon, 2005).

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

SoTL questions the assumption that scholars should focus on research in their respective disciplines, and instead proposes recognition of the importance of research based in pedagogy. Beyond this shift, Gilpin and Liston (2009) explain SoTL as a movement within higher education with a three-part agenda: (1) identifying teaching as a form of inquiry relevant to research; (2) recognizing the act of teaching as a public act that contributes toward the common good; and (3) classifying teaching as a scholarly endeavor, subject to assessment and evaluation. Additionally, Felton (2013) highlights five principles of sound SoTL practice: it should (1) include inquiry into student learning, (2) be grounded in context, (3) be methodologically sound, (4) be conducted in partnership with students, and (5) be appropriately public. This Banded Dissertation is grounded and designed with these principles in mind.

The first principle of SoTL, the inclusion of inquiry into student learning, encourages exploration of how teaching and teachers influence student learning. Classroom participation is a topic representative of SoTL because it is a discrete teaching tool that could either enhance or

impede student learning and outcomes. Critical inquiry into a well-defined aspect of student learning, in this case classroom participation, is a clear demonstration of SoTL.

The second principle of SoTL demands that good practice is grounded in both scholarly and local context. The components of this Banded Dissertation focus specifically on the baccalaureate social work environment and use relevant theory grounded in critical pedagogy and prior research on classroom participation to guide the overall inquiry.

Third, good practice using SoTL must be methodologically sound. The research-based component of this Banded Dissertation, Product Two, is methodologically congruent with the overall purpose of the study: the exploration of how educators conceptualize classroom participation and what they expect of students. By conducting a qualitative content analysis of existing teaching documents (syllabi), the study connected the primary research question to improving student learning, a main focus of SoTL.

Fourth, strong practice of SoTL should be conducted in partnership with students. The conceptual article in this Banded Dissertation, Product One, proposes how to involve students in the definition and assessment of their classroom participation. The article explains how to use a classroom participation tool as an active teaching method that requires relinquishment of authority and power by instructors and increased ownership of the learning experience by students (George, 2017).

Finally, best SoTL practices dictate that pedagogical theory and results are shared with a larger public audience. The workshop described in this Banded Dissertation, Product Three, underscores the need for sharing information about classroom participation in the baccalaureate social work classroom with a larger learning community.

Critical pedagogy and SoTL allow one to critically examine how classroom participation is constructed and intellectualized by educators generally and the baccalaureate social work educational community specifically. The conceptual framework outlines the guiding principles used to critically explore participation in the baccalaureate social work classroom across the three products of this Banded Dissertation.

Summary of Banded Dissertation Products

This Banded Dissertation centers on the significance of classroom participation in the undergraduate social work classroom and is comprised of three scholarly products: a conceptual article, a qualitative content analysis research article, and a workshop presentation. Critical pedagogy and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) are concepts utilized across all three products to demonstrate the need for intentional classroom participation methods that represent the mission of social work education.

The first product is a conceptual article that provides strategies for alignment between social work educators' teaching philosophies and their classroom participation methods. The provided framework is rooted in critical pedagogy, while recognizing that varied instructional methods across the spectrum of teaching paradigms can be used to foster classroom participation. The article makes the case for recognizing classroom participation as a distinct and especially crucial teaching tool for baccalaureate social work educators. The framework serves as example for how to create, facilitate, and maintain classroom participation expectations that align with the values and ethics of the social work profession broadly, and critical pedagogy specifically. A step-by-step discussion of how the author found explicit congruence between their teaching philosophy (based in critical pedagogy) and a discrete classroom participation teaching method serves as a specific example of the framework in action.

The second product is a research study that conducted a qualitative content analysis of 33 *Introduction to Social Work* BSW course syllabi. The study sought to better understand how educators conceptualize classroom participation and what they expect of their students. Findings were organized around the categories of expectations, attendance, and grading. Emergent themes indicate that BSW educators have traditional, overly regulated expectations when it comes to classroom participation. Few syllabi in the sample conceptualized classroom participation as a discrete pedagogical tool that can inspire student performance and engagement. Implications for how BSW educators can deliberately create classroom participation expectations, policies, and assessment tools that cultivate and support engaged classroom participation are discussed.

The third product is a workshop that was scheduled for presentation at the Association of Baccalaureate Program Directors (BPD) 37th Annual Conference. The workshop presented best practices related to classroom participation in the baccalaureate social work classroom using a contemporary interpretation of bell hooks's engaged pedagogy framework (1994). The purpose of the workshop was to highlight the need for intentional class participation methods in the baccalaureate social work classroom and to draw attention to the complexity of creating and maintaining classrooms that rely upon active student engagement. Recognizing that the workshop was focused on the concept of participation, the presenter designed it to be interactive and require substantive engagement from conference attendees. The workshop included time for attendees to share ideas and methods related to classroom participation with one another. The workshop was designed for attendees to acquire discrete tools to help them strengthen their class participation policies and implement new engagement strategies.

Discussion

Highlighting classroom participation as a discrete and essential pedagogical tool is critical for effective teaching in social work. Creating distinct classroom participation methods should be part of developing a teaching philosophy for every BSW educator. The process of tailoring specific classroom participation methods will help educators establish congruence between their teaching philosophy, the goals of social work education, and the specific needs and goals of their classroom environments. This Banded Dissertation provides basic principles, methods, and research findings for undergraduate educators looking to recognize classroom participation as a teaching tool particularly relevant to the social work discipline.

Effective use of classroom participation can be instrumental in the facilitation of transformative learning. Transformative learning hinges on the concept that critical thinking can lead to larger social action and change as well as personal transformation (Anastas, 2010). Undergraduate social work educators are tasked with preparing students not only as generalist-level social work practitioners, but as engaged and motivated professionals who will champion social justice and advocate for human rights. This level of advocacy and activism does not spontaneously occur; it is nurtured in the classroom. Educators who give considerable thought and effort toward creating classroom environments reliant on classroom participation will help shape social work students capable of speaking up, engaging fully with others, and supporting vibrant and healthy communities.

The research-based article within the Banded Dissertation (Product Two) found that the diversity of pedagogical approaches regarding classroom participation in the BSW classroom mirrors the current literature on classroom participation across disciplines: There is little agreement from educator to educator about what classroom participation is and how it can be

fostered (Rocca, 2010). Findings from this Banded Dissertation reinforce a recent call to reconceptualize classroom participation in social work education by better defining and assessing the term (Orwat et al., 2018). While a diversity of pedagogical approaches should be encouraged, deliberate efforts need to be directed towards creating classroom participation expectations, policies, and assessment tools that cultivate and support classroom participation. Results from Product Two indicate that BSW educators often describe classroom participation using negative, punitive language. BSW educators interested in refining their classroom participation policy and methods to reflect the values of the profession could consider how to frame classroom participation expectations from a strengths-based perspective. Social work education has the opportunity to redefine and showcase how classroom participation can inspire student engagement, rather than primarily serve as a disciplinary or classroom management tool.

Implications for Social Work Education

This Banded Dissertation encourages social work educators to consider purposeful alignment between their teaching methods and their classroom participation expectations. A central assumption throughout the work is that social work students who confidently participate in the classroom will ultimately have the opportunity to strengthen their communication and engagement skills necessary for success in the field. However, classroom participation does not just spontaneously occur. Social work educators need discrete tools and strategies to promote and foster active classroom engagement and discussion.

Many educators may be open to the idea of refining and restructuring how they approach classroom participation, but may feel unsure of where to start the process. Shulman (2004) explains that making teaching "community property" is an essential component of SoTL. A community-wide depository or learning commons where social work educators could share

classroom participation strategies and tools would be an ideal way to highlight and promote the use of effective classroom participation methods in social work education. Social work educators invested in classroom participation should also consider revising and redesigning their classroom participation methods regularly in order to meet and reflect current student needs.

Implications for Future Research

Limited research explores the use of classroom participation as a discrete teaching tool in the undergraduate social work classroom. While there is a significant knowledge base related to classroom participation, the majority of studies are not specific to social work education. SoTL is a clear lens through which additional research could be conducted. Social work educators interested in classroom participation could consider how to study and evaluate participation in their respective classroom environments. Classroom-based research regarding discrete classroom participation practices would help educators understand the effectiveness of different tools and approaches. Increased scholarship on the evaluation of classroom participation pedagogy would benefit the larger social work education community.

Across the literature, quantitative measures are more often used to assess classroom participation, such as how often students ask questions, raise their hands, or make comments (Rocca, 2010). Additional research is needed that explores social work educators' participation expectations and approaches from qualitative perspectives. While the frequency of classroom participation as well as the potential demographic variables that contribute toward a student's propensity to participate are important, future research could explore the subjective experience of classroom participation from both the instructor and student perspective. Research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observation are especially well matched to exploring the ways in which classroom participation is occurring in social work classrooms.

Conclusion

Classroom participation is a discrete and powerful pedagogical tool influential to social work education. Educators who give considerable thought and intentional effort toward classroom participation methods are actively incorporating the values of social work education into their teaching practice. Use of effective classroom participation methods in the social work classroom will result in transformative and crucial learning experiences for students. Social work education has the opportunity to champion classroom participation methods as a critical aspect of teaching and learning. This Banded Dissertation highlights how undergraduate social work educators can deliberately create classroom expectations, policies, and assessment tools that cultivate and support engaged classroom participation.

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Aligning Teaching Philosophy with Classroom Participation Methods:

Strategies for Social Work Educators

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Abstract

This paper provides a classroom participation conceptual framework rooted in critical pedagogy. It underscores the need for intentional class participation methods in the Bachelor in Social Work (BSW) classroom and congruence between educators' teaching philosophies and classroom participation expectations. BSW educators have a vested interest in developing environments reliant on active classroom participation. Therefore, classroom participation must be considered a discrete pedagogical tool and an essential component of educational practice. While varied instructional methods across the spectrum of teaching paradigms can be employed to foster classroom participation, it is imperative that educators curate methods specific to their classroom environment and student need.

Keywords: BSW education*,* participation, teaching philosophy, critical pedagogy

Aligning Teaching Philosophy with Classroom Participation Methods:

Strategies for Social Work Educators

Social work, as the name suggests, is an inherently *social* academic discipline and profession. While student participation is an integral aspect of the college classroom experience across disciplines (Rocca, 2010), educators in the Bachelor in Social Work (BSW) classroom have a pointed interest in developing effective communication and engagement skills among students. Developing social work students are required to interact with others in the classroom environment, in part to prepare them to be adept communicators who can actively engage and help various populations once in the professional field. Bachelor's-level social work programs typically provide the foundation for students' critical thinking and participatory-based skills (Orwat et al., 2018). Therefore, it is especially important to consider how instructors can utilize class participation as a pedagogical tool in the baccalaureate social work classroom.

Social work educators represent a variety of teaching paradigms, from the more conservative to radical (Graham, 1997). Regardless of pedagogical leaning, effective educators will seek agreement between their teaching methods and classroom participation expectations. Student confusion can occur when there is incongruence between an instructor's teaching philosophy and their classroom participation expectations. For example, while the author identifies most closely with the critical paradigm of teaching, the author previously used a standardized rubric to evaluate and assess classroom participation. Research indicates that the author is not alone in utilizing positivist assessment tools regarding participation: predetermined criteria and instructor-generated tools are often used by instructors to determine participation expectations (Dancer & Kamvounias, 2005). The rubric formerly used by the author was distributed to students at the beginning of the semester and highlighted traditional aspects of

class participation such as attendance, class preparation, completing in-class assignments, speaking during discussions, asking questions, and respecting varying opinions and beliefs. While this method served a utilitarian purpose, Orwat et al. (2018) suggest that one-size-fits-all approaches to classroom participation, such as the author's former approach to classroom participation, do not honor the individual student experience. The former rubric also failed to evaluate classroom participation over the course of the semester or provide time for ongoing reflection regarding the participation process. The incongruence between the author's teaching philosophy and teaching methods resulted in a reconceptualization of how the author approached classroom participation from both a conceptual and practice standpoint. Recognition of this discord served as the catalyst to create the primary framework presented in this article.

The forthcoming conceptual framework is rooted in critical pedagogy and stems from recognizing the importance of aligning a teaching philosophy with teaching methods. bell hooks's seminal narrative text *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) describes how critical educators emphasize the importance of critical self-reflection by raising consciousness about oppression, privilege, and discrimination, while promoting student commitment to social change. Modern pedagogical concepts embraced in social work education such as transformational learning (Anastas, 2010; Daloz, 2000), development of student consciousness (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005), and intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Murphy et al., 2009) are derived from critical pedagogy and relate to discrete teaching methods used to encourage classroom participation.

The framework relies on specific teaching methods such as the utilization of critical self-reflection assignments, as self-reflection is an essential component of adult learning generally and social work education explicitly (Anastas, 2010). The Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) Educational Policy and Assessment Standards (EPAS) require students to be self-

critical and to evaluate their own practice (CSWE, 2015)—a process that can and should start in the classroom environment. Additionally, the 2015 EPAS identifies six dimensions that are associated with the provided competencies: performance, knowledge, values, affective reactions, critical thinking, and professional judgement. Notably, all six of these dimensions have associated multidimensional assessment measures that are often connected to classroom participation activities (Poulin & Matis, 2015).

By building awareness regarding classroom participation and fostering individual student participation growth, instructors are increasing the likelihood that students will enter the social work field with the necessary skills to participate and advocate for social justice. The following framework serves as an example of how to create, facilitate, and maintain classroom participation expectations that align with the values and ethics of the social work profession broadly, and critical pedagogy specifically.

Critical Pedagogy as Applied to Social Work Education

It is imperative that social workers can identify and develop a teaching philosophy and subsequently identify potential areas of incongruence between their teaching philosophy and their teaching methods (Anastas, 2010; Graham, 1997). Consequently, social work educators interested in developing effective classroom participation methods in alignment with their teaching style must consider the core assumptions of their identified teaching paradigm (Brookfield, 2000). The first step in this process is to deconstruct participation methods in relation to the identified teaching paradigm. As an example, this article will focus on deconstructing core elements of critical pedagogy and then applying various essential components to class participation methods.

Critical pedagogy is a teaching approach that underscores the role of power in the production of knowledge and asserts that the purpose of education is to work toward the freedom of oppressed groups (Saleeby & Scanlon, 2005). It is a critique of the authoritative, traditional "banking" method of education as explicated by liberatory educational theorist Paolo Freire (1970). The banking model imposes the teacher as subject master and considers students as passive receptacles, or banks, into which knowledge is to be deposited. From a critical perspective, knowledge is much more subjective and all information is value-laden. Critical pedagogists subscribe to Freire's model of conscientization, which refers to helping learners to become aware of inequalities and, equally as important, helping them address these inequities (Freire, 1970). Education is never neutral from a critical perspective. On the contrary, it is a political act that demands active participation. The role of an educator within the critical paradigm is to question the construction and underlying political motivation of ideas and knowledge. Learning is more dialectical in nature in comparison to more objective teaching paradigms. Critical pedagogists Henry Giroux (1988) and bell hooks (1994) assert that critical education can challenge social inequality through encouraging dialogue, demonstrating effective social critique, and engaging student voice—all teaching methods that require active participation.

Saleeby and Scanlon (2005) promote critical pedagogy concepts as specifically applied to social work education. The key elements of their approach include *socialization toward critical thinking*, *dialogic learning*, *conceptually driven analyses*, and *social action as education*. Significantly, active participation is a key component of each element, signaling it is an appropriate lens for viewing the process of class participation. Critical pedagogists encourage students to assume a more active role in the learning process, calling on students to understand

their own beliefs and ideologies as a learner. This is what Saleeby and Scanlon (2005) refer to as *socialization toward critical thinking*. While it is imperative that educators have a firm grasp on their own teaching paradigm, the critical paradigm also tasks educators with helping students explore their core beliefs and values.

Dialogic learning, also referred to as student-centered learning, is an additional key component of critical pedagogy as applied to social work education (Saleeby & Scanlon, 2005). At the most basic level, dialogic learning calls for replacing traditional lectures with more active methods such as group work, class discussion, conversation based on vignettes or case studies, and other active learning methods. Saleeby and Scanlon (2005) suggest that dialogic-based social work classrooms require students to share their lived experience, engage in discussions of difference and similarities, share experiences of domination and oppression, and learn how to increase comfort with ambiguity and disagreement in the classroom. It is important to note the challenges and complexities these objectives present. These are ambitious educational undertakings that, yet again, require concrete teaching strategies that are discretely linked to classroom participation methods.

From a critical perspective it is also imperative that social work educators engage students in *conceptually driven critical analyses* (Saleeby & Scanlon, 2005). Through asking critical questions an educator can help students become aware of value dimensions and consequently raise consciousness. Critical educators engage in circular questioning, incite debate, and help students clarify their core values (Graham, 1997). Finally, critical educators would be amiss if they did not consider *social action as education* (Saleeby & Scanlon, 2005). Critical educators acutely recognize the connection between knowing and doing. Critical pedagogy demands that students are recognized as potential agents of individual and social

change (Giroux, 2011), a position reinforced throughout the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (CSWE, 2015). Current educational standards require students to demonstrate knowledge via real practice experience—acknowledgement that skills and knowledge alone do not result in competence. By deconstructing critical pedagogy, it becomes clear that critical pedagogists are in need of ideologically congruent classroom participation methods. Before specific critically based teaching strategies are introduced, it is essential to understand the context of classroom participation as a pedagogical tool in the baccalaureate social work classroom.

Class Participation as a Pedagogical Tool

Defining Participation

Though class participation is widely regarded as an integral aspect of classroom learning, researchers and educators have not reached consensus on how to define it (Rocca, 2010). While definitions of class participation are multifaceted and specific to the context in which they are utilized, most definitions include the concept of the exchange of ideas and discussion within the classroom environment (Orwat et al., 2018). Many frameworks have been proposed to assist instructors in conceptualizing, defining, and measuring classroom participation, indicating that there is an educational audience across the spectrum of teaching paradigms eager for best practices on the subject. Dancer and Kamvounias (2005) provide a valuable framework that divides classroom participation into five categories: preparation, contribution to discussion, group skills, communication skills, and attendance. However, concrete frameworks such as this highlight the tendency to think of class participation as measurable and discrete, rather than a constantly evolving and flexible tool.

In reviewing the literature on classroom participation, researchers note the complexities of conceptually defining the topic (Orwat et al., 2018; Rocca, 2010). The word *participation* is often used interchangeably with phrases such as *engagement*, *interaction*, and even *performance*. The varied vocabulary used to describe classroom participation could account for educator confusion in matching pedagogical paradigm to participation methods. However, the confusion regarding the definition of participation extends beyond the literature to the classroom itself. Fritschner (2000) found that classroom participation is defined differently between faculty and students, often causing misunderstanding surrounding classroom expectations. While findings from the study indicate that faculty perceive six different levels of student engagement, student views were more polarized (Fritschner, 2000).

Classroom Participation Models and Methods

Many participation models are based on the traditional "banking" model of education as critiqued by Freire (1970). Initiate-Respond-Evaluate, commonly described as I-R-E, is one such common method for classroom discussion (Cazden, 1988). Instructors initiate a discussion question, promoting students to respond, and the instructor evaluates the validity of each student's response. This method requires the instructor to assume an authoritative, directive position, causing the discussion to be teacher-centered, rather than student-driven (Jones, 2008). An additional criticism of this model is that depending on the size of the class, many students can be left out of the discussion and relegated to the role of passive observers (Weaver & Qi, 2005). The cold-calling method refers to an instructor calling on a random student without warning (O'Connor, 2013) and highlights the role that authority and power have in relation to classroom participation. While a controversial practice, evidence has shown cold-calling to be a useful practice in relation to student accountability and preparation for class (Dallimore et al., 2004),

indicating that class participation is used not only as an active tool to engage students, but also as

an informal assessment of student readiness. Defining student participation is difficult because of

its subjective nature. Most often, quantitative measures are used to assess classroom

participation, such as how often students ask questions, raise their hands, or make comments

(Rocca, 2010). Additional research is needed that explores social work educators' participation

expectations from a qualitative perspective.

Importance of Classroom Participation

While scholars have spent time defining *what* participation is and *how* it is facilitated,

researchers also study *why* classroom participation is essential. Participation is what allows

students to share personal narratives and apply classroom material within the context of their

lived experiences (Mello, 2010; Rocca, 2010). Evidence suggests student preference toward

teaching styles that promote participatory engagement rather than traditional lecture format

(Levey & Peters, 2002). From a more utilitarian perspective, participation can promote

accountability and address the issues of unprepared students (Jones, 2008). The central

discussion of why classroom participation is important is closely linked to a lively academic

debate about whether to grade participation or not (Mello, 2010). Critics of graded classroom

participation reference its highly subjective nature (Bean & Peterson, 1998) and cite issues of

instructor authority and power (Gilson, 1994). Those in favor of the practice cite improved class

discussion as a result of enhanced participation (Dallimore et al., 2004). While ideological

arguments abound on the definition of classroom participation, best practices, and the purpose of

classroom participation, many empirical studies on the subject focus on how student identity is

related to participation.

Participation and Identity

As salient as the *what*, *how*, and *why* of participation is the *who* factor. Scholars writing about participation indicate the importance of exploring whether certain groups of students are more apt to participate than others. For example, individual personality factors such as levels of confidence, introversion, and anxiety have been shown to impact students' willingness to participate (Eddy et al., 2015; Murphy et al., 2017; Weaver & Qi, 2005). Demographic factors such as age (Fritschner, 2000; Weaver & Qi, 2005), language of origin (Tatar, 2005), and cultural background (White, 2011) are also factors that impact a student's level of confidence and subsequent comfort in participating in the classroom. Although the majority of studies include precision and measurement of concepts, it is important to examine participation concepts in a qualitative manner. Once such example would be gender: Many studies related to student participation have been conducted with a gendered lens. Research shows that male college students participate more than female students (Crombie et al., 2003), a finding that is especially relevant to social work education, considering social work students are more often female than male (CSWE, 2017). Hyde and Deal's (2003) study about gendered participation specifically in social work classrooms found no statistically significant differences based on gender through survey data; however, the focus-group portion of the same study found differences in *how* men and women participated. Female students participated in ways that were more focused on relational behaviors, while male students were more assertive and individually focused in their participation.

The research on student identity as it relates to participation is vast and covers many different demographic categories, including race, age, gender, generational standpoint, first-generation student status, cultural background, subject matter experience, and more, enforcing

the notion that social identity impacts classroom participation. While these studies are essential

pieces in understanding the complexities of who participates, student identity is not a singular

causal variable capable of predicting classroom participation.

Participation and Classroom Climate

Instructor presence, classroom climate, and subject matter are all addressed in the

literature on student participation. Instructors who clearly communicate that they care about their

students create classroom climates that are more conducive to participation (Crombie et al.,

2003; Dallimore et al., 2004). Evidence suggests that social work students who "feel known" by

their instructor are more motived to participate and consequently more likely to engage in

classroom discussion (Rodriguez-Keyes et al., 2013). Instructors who create "safe spaces" where

students perceive that their contributions are not under scrutiny tend to experience higher rates of

student participation as well (Frisby et al., 2014). Conversely, when students are intimidated by

their instructors or perceive them as verbally aggressive, they are less likely to participate

(Rocca, 2009). Many social work skills, such as the appropriate use of self-disclosure (Cayanus

et al., 2009) and rapport building (Merwin, 2002; Weaver & Qi, 2005), can be employed in the

classroom by instructors to increase student participation. Subject matter also plays a role in

students' willingness to participate. Social work students in particular often feel scared and

unskilled when required to articulate their values and perspectives in the face of potential social

or emotional risks (Oliver et al., 2017).

Research suggests that classroom size also contributes toward students' propensity to

participate. Crombie et al. (2003) report that a small fraction of the total students in any given

classroom usually account for the majority of participation. Evidence shows that these students

are more effective communicators (Dancer & Kamvounias, 2005) and report gains in personal

character development (Kuh & Umbach, 2004), skills that BSW programs have a keen interest in developing in their students over time. In addition to the various personal skills that are enhanced through participation, students earn higher grades as their participation increases (Handelsman et al., 2005). If educators want more students to engage in quality classroom participation throughout their educational experience, it is imperative to further explore classroom participation models and tools at the BSW level.

Participation in the BSW Classroom

Although BSW programs provide the foundation for many social work students' critical-thinking and participatory skills, limited research on classroom participation has been conducted at the baccalaureate level. While Hyde and Ruth's (2002) explanatory study on social work class participation and self-censorship is especially relevant considering that sensitive content is regularly discussed in social work classrooms, it was conducted at the master's level. Results suggest that students are more likely to self-censor because of individual factors such as shyness, lack of preparation, and class size, rather than concern for political correctness (Hyde & Ruth, 2002). Orwat et al. (2018) provide a model of reflective classroom participation particular to the needs of the social work discipline; however, it is a model specific to the graduate level. The authors indicate that classroom participation provides a rich forum for critical exchanges in a controlled and safe space and call for additional research related to participation specific to the social work classroom. Social work education is beginning to explore participation as pedagogy at a conceptual level. However, there is a clear need for additional models and tools specific to social work educators in the BSW classroom. The following teaching method rooted in critical pedagogy addresses this need by offering concrete strategies and tools to develop and encourage classroom participation. The method applies structural components of the Orwat et al. (2018)

model to the BSW classroom, with an emphasis on the philosophical alignment between the model and critical pedagogy.

Class Participation as a Pedagogical Tool for the Critical BSW Educator

BSW educators can incorporate a critical self-reflection teaching method to support students in assessing, strengthening, and meeting their personalized classroom participation goals. By considering classroom participation as a discrete pedagogical tool, BSW educators are inherently acknowledging the importance of classroom participation. By considering how a classroom participation teaching method aligns with a teaching philosophy, they are ensuring the tool will be pedagogically effective. Use of the following critically informed teaching method can help to demystify classroom participation expectations and aid in a transformational learning process. The method relies on the development and use of a critical self-reflection assignment that students can use to self-evaluate and direct their classroom participation. It strives to actively highlight the importance of class participation in relation to the social work profession, while honoring the distinct needs and experiences of individual students. What follows is a step-by-step description of how to use class participation as a teaching tool in the BSW classroom from a critical pedagogy perspective.

Similar to the Orwat et al. (2018) model, the first step in the process is a self-assessment of class participation by each individual student at the start of a semester. Unlike the Orwat et. al (2018) model, the model uses the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis framework as an assessment tool. While SWOT assessments are commonly used in corporate settings, George (2017) adapted the tool as a democratic framework for evaluating teaching and learning. The SWOT assessment can be used as an active teaching method that requires relinquishment of authority and power by instructors, and increased ownership of the

learning experience by students (George, 2017). Using the SWOT method to assess classroom participation positions instructors and students as co-educators in the learning process. A sample SWOT matrix of classroom participation, adapted from the George (2017) model, is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Critical Self-Reflection Matrix for Classroom Participation

	Positive (Strengths)	*Negative (Challenges)*
Internal	What are my classroom participation **strengths**? How do they enhance my learning, progress, and/or engagement with the course? What helps me participate in class?	What are my classroom participation **weaknesses**? How do they hinder my learning, progress, and/or engagement with the course? What hinders my class participation?
External	Are there **opportunities** to improve my classroom participation? How can I maximize my learning, progress, and/or engagement in the course?	What **threats** prohibit my ability to participate in class? What stifles my learning, progress, and/or engagement with the course?

Students fill in the four squares of the matrix related to their self-awareness of their class participation. For example, a student may identify the strength of feeling comfortable participating in small groups; the weakness of having difficulty raising their hand in large groups; the opportunity of sharing what they discuss in smaller groups with the larger classroom; and the threat of fearing public speaking in large groups. This is just one possible example of how the SWOT matrix could be used in relation to classroom participation for an individual student; the possibilities are endless. Use of a tool like Figure 1 promotes student ownership in the learning and assessment processes and helps clearly define classroom participation on an individual basis (Chan et al., 2014; Tillema et al., 2011).

The second step of the process is for students to use the SWOT matrix to develop course-specific class participation goals. The process of goal-setting creates agency for students and shifts the expectation from passive learner to active collaborator in the learning process (Keesing-Styles, 2003). Goals will be informed by the expectations of the specific BSW course and each individual student's personal strengths and challenges as identified through the SWOT matrix. The process of goal-setting is an essential skill in the social work field and therefore serves a dual purpose for this teaching method: it increases student ownership and leadership in the classroom participation process, while simultaneously serving as an experiential exercise in goal-setting. This process underscores the social work adage of meeting the client (or in this case student) where they are, by honoring the developmental and motivational level of each individual student (Orwat et al., 2018). The instructor will give feedback regarding the initial goals and share a set schedule for when reflections are due regarding goal progress throughout the semester.

The final and continuous step in the model requires students to engage in ongoing self-evaluation throughout the semester. Course-embedded self-evaluation is a process shown to provide students with greater self-awareness and overall better academic performance (Lew & Schmidt, 2011). The self-evaluation should be in direct connection to the stated goals and could entail completing the reflective journal entries on the process. Assignments could include prompts asking students to reflect on their classroom participation in relation to their SWOT matrix. An additional reflection piece could include revising the original SWOT matrix midway through the course in response to the student's current performance. An instructor implementing this method could also consider encouraging student check-ins during office hours to provide support toward goal attainment and to further build relationships with students. Using this model,

the grade assigned for class participation could be connected to students' self-reflection journal assignments. The assignments would detail their self-reported progress in working toward reaching individual classroom participation goals set throughout the semester. Ultimately, use of this three-step teaching method can help aid in students' transformational learning—one of the main goals of critical pedagogy. In order for transformational learning to occur, there must be congruence between an educator's teaching philosophy and their classroom participation methods.

Explicit Congruence between Critical Teaching Philosophy and Classroom Participation Teaching Method

The teaching method described above is an example of how to utilize pedagogical tools that align with a particular teaching philosophy in order to create social work classrooms reliant on engaged and transformational classroom participation. When one considers the teaching method in relation to several core principles of critical pedagogy, it is clearly well aligned with the paradigm. bell hooks's narrative text *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) is considered an influential work for critical educators. Florence (1998) conceptualized hooks's work by dividing critical pedagogy into five major components: (1) reconceptualization of knowledge, (2) linking of theory and practice, (3) student empowerment, (4) multiculturalism, and (5) incorporation of passion. Figure 2 provides a graphic representation of core components of critical pedagogy as applied to the class participation teaching method in the BSW classroom.

Figure 2

Critical Pedagogy As Applied to Classroom Participation Teaching Method

Reconceptualization of Knowledge	• Students and teachers as co-learners. Learning is a dialogic process. • Ways of knowing and knowledge generation related to classroom participation are limitless.
Linking of Theory and Practice	• Students who are engaged classroom citizens will inherently be strengthening skills necessary for becoming effective social workers. • Students *theorize* what constitutes successful classroom participation and then demonstrate their theory through classroom *practice*.
Student Empowerment	• Construction of mutual, not hierarchical, learning community. • Student-as-expert in relation to their classroom participation strengths and challenges.
Intersectionality	• Participation styles generated by student experience, not teacher preference. • One type of participation style not valued over another. • Individual student perspective and knowledge celebrated.
Incorporation of Passion	• An engaged and participatory classroom is a joyful space. • Students acknowledged as holistic beings whose mind, body, and spirit can be nourished through classroom participation.

Critical Pedagogy Concepts Applied to Classroom Participation Teaching Method

First, critical pedagogy requires educators to intentionally question how they define knowledge and how that knowledge is transmitted in the classroom environment. Critical pedagogy refutes the idea of a universal truth. Instead, the paradigm embraces the idea that there are many ways of knowing, therefore promoting active student engagement through the communal and dialogic construction of knowledge. Through this lens it becomes imperative to consider not only *what* social work educators teach, but *how* knowledge is constructed in the classroom. This teaching method operates under the assumption that there is not one ideal type of classroom participation. In fact, students generate a classroom participation model based on their

particular needs and strengths. Ways of knowing and generating knowledge related to classroom participation are limitless under this method.

Secondly, critical pedagogists promote the linkage of theory and practice. From the critical perspective, separating the two perpetuates systems of domination by underscoring the disconnect between students' lived experience and the expectations of the academy. The CSWE Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (2015) utilize language that emphasizes the linkage between theory and practice in the social work classroom. By reading the action verbs in the nine CSWE competencies, it is clear that social work educators have a distinct responsibility to link theory and practice through classroom participation. Educators are charged with helping students *demonstrate*, *engage*, *advance*, *assess*, *intervene*, and *evaluate* their knowledge in order to promote social, economic, and environmental justice in the world around them (CSWE, 2015). Social work educators are presented with the dual challenge of creating classroom environments that expose students to theory and essential subject matter *and* arming them with the tools necessary to apply this knowledge to the greater social environment. Once knowledge is constructed in the classroom, critical pedagogy and social work education both demand translating knowledge into practice. The current teaching method requires students to *theorize* what constitutes successful classroom participation and then necessitates that they demonstrate their theory through classroom *practice*.

A third component of critical pedagogy requires educators to reflect on student empowerment in the classroom. Critical pedagogy requires educators to examine the structure of power within the educational systems they teach in and to construct mutual, not hierarchical, learning communities. Classroom communities constructed via critical pedagogical methods value all voices through mutuality and dialogue. Engaged pedagogy flips the teacher-as-expert

narrative upside down and requires active and honest contribution from all members of a classroom community. Via this teaching method, the student is recognized as the expert in relation to their classroom participation strengths and challenges. Engaging students as co-educators in the classroom participation process underscores the importance of individualizing the classroom experience, which in turn will conceivably increase students' skills and levels of confidence regarding participation. Critical self-reflection used in this manner is related to consciousness raising and will result in teachers and students educating one another. The method recognizes the strengths and experiences of all members of the learning community and does not value one type of learning style over another. BSW educators should not expect social work students to arrive in their classrooms knowing how to successfully participate; instead it is their job to draw out and enhance strong participators through effective and personalized teaching approaches.

A fourth component of critical pedagogy requires educators to reflect on multiculturalism in relation to classroom participation. hooks's original discussion (1994) of multiculturalism focused primarily on race. Since then contemporary feminist scholars have explored the idea of an intersectional classroom and specifically intersectionality in the social work classroom (Murphy et al., 2009). This teaching method is rooted in the intersectional perspective; it aims to value varied student experiences and how a social work student's social locatedness impacts their propensity to participate in the classroom. By placing emphasis on the importance of classroom participation and the many different types of participatory styles, this method has the potential to yield rich intersectional classroom discussions. The BSW classroom benefits from intersectional discussion, where everyone's voice is valued and their multiple and intersectional identities are recognized. This method allows for participation styles to be generated by student

experience, not educator preference. It intrinsically values a diversity of participation styles, not

favoring one (such as direct verbal contribution during class) over the other (such as asking a

question of the instructor outside of class). Through this method participation styles are

generated by student experience and identity, not the preference or identity of the instructor.

Lastly, critical pedagogy encourages educators to consider the connection between

classroom participation and passion. In a critical classroom, students are acknowledged as

holistic beings whose mind, body, and spirit can be nourished through classroom interaction

(hooks, 1994). When educators are constructing participation expectations, critical pedagogy

requires them to contemplate how they can foster a joyful and passionate learning environment,

not one that is simply focused on subject matter mastery and the achievement of good grades. An

engaged classroom, reliant on everyone's unique contributions, will likely be a joyful and

energizing space. Figure 2 and the associated dialogue highlight the philosophical linkage

between critical pedagogy and the specific classroom participation teaching method. This step-

by-step process serves as an illustration of how a BSW educator can strategically align their

teaching philosophy with their classroom participation teaching method. Educators interested in

finding alignment between their teaching philosophy and classroom participation method could

create a similar diagram to Figure 2 and share it with their students as a basis for a class

discussion. As demonstrated, this simply involves deconstructing specific aspects of an

educator's teaching philosophy and mapping them to chosen classroom participation methods.

Tsang (2011) confirms this type of reflective group discussion is an effective strategy for the

development of students as evolving professionals. Additionally, this can help BSW educators

come to a clear consensus on the definition of classroom participation in their respective

classrooms.

Implications for BSW Educators

This discussion aims to inspire BSW educators to consider the alignment between their teaching philosophy and their classroom participation expectations. By viewing a specific teaching method through a critical pedagogy lens, BSW educators can consider how classroom participation could be constructed and utilized in their respective classrooms using a method compatible with their own teaching philosophy. Critical pedagogy is uniquely situated to address social work classroom participation methods because of the paradigm's ability to engage in dialogue about issues essential to the profession, such as power imbalances, injustice, oppressions, intersectionality, and diversity. Social work students who can confidently navigate classroom participation surrounding these topics will become more engaged classroom citizens and thereby strengthen their skills for their careers as future practicing social workers.

Notably, the process of aligning a classroom participation teaching method with a particular teaching paradigm can be replicated regardless of teaching philosophy. While there is natural alignment between critical pedagogy, social work education, and classroom participation needs in the BSW classroom, there are limitless ways to facilitate class participation, across the spectrum of teaching paradigms and level of learner. The central argument is that the *process* of considering how an educator's classroom participation expectations align with a teaching philosophy is essential.

Recommendations for Further Research

Despite the fact that student-centric classroom teaching methods are not fully accepted within higher education, pedagogical movements like the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning emphasize individual learning as central to the classroom experience (Liston & Rahimi, 2017).

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning seeks to combine teaching and learning with scholarship by producing publications related to the improvement of pedagogy and views the classroom as the site for research inquiry. Future research should be conducted through a lens of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and focus on understanding how philosophical teaching shifts can improve student learning. For example, educators who elect to alter their classroom participation teaching methods to better reflect their teaching philosophy should consider conducting classroom-based evaluations regarding the shift in their pedagogical methods. Educators considering how to incorporate new teaching methods that are more reflective of their teaching philosophy should consider how they will measure the success of their pedagogical shift. Simple pretest and posttest measures could be utilized to measure the effectiveness of various methods. Future research could include the development of pedagogical methods across the teaching paradigm spectrum (from positivist to constructivist) and individualized evaluation of the effectiveness of these methods.

While this discussion is based within baccalaureate social work education, there is room for additional research across academic disciplines and professions. For social work education, active student participation is essential, and it is therefore imperative to create a diversity of teaching tools to address this pedagogical challenge. The presented teaching method provides a classroom participation conceptual framework rooted in critical pedagogy because it is the author's identified teaching paradigm. However, there is the opportunity for additional models across the spectrum of teaching paradigms. All educators, regardless of specialty, should consider employing pedagogical tools and methods that align with their discipline. Researchers interested in creating new pedagogical methods in alignment with their personal teaching philosophy should consider a pressing issue or challenge related to their discipline and then

create teaching tools in response. Transformational learning will occur when educators carefully

consider how their teaching philosophies align with their teaching methods.

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What Do You Mean I Have to Participate?

A Qualitative Content Analysis of BSW Syllabi

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Abstract

Classroom participation is a central component of effective BSW education. However, research regarding how BSW educators utilize classroom participation as a pedagogical tool as well as what BSW educators require of their students in regard to their classroom participation is limited. This study sought to better understand how educators conceptualize classroom participation and what they expect of students through a qualitative content analysis of 33 BSW course syllabi. Findings were organized around the categories of expectations, attendance, and grading. Emergent themes indicate that BSW educators focus primarily on decorum and classroom management in regard to classroom participation. Few syllabi in the sample conceptualized classroom participation as a discrete pedagogical tool that can inspire student performance and engagement. Implications for how BSW educators can deliberately create classroom participation expectations, policies, and assessment tools that cultivate and support effective classroom participation are discussed.

Keywords: classroom participation, BSW education, syllabi, content analysis, pedagogy

What Do You Mean I Have to Participate?

A Qualitative Content Analysis of BSW Syllabi

A shy student avoids making direct eye contact when the professor poses a discussion question to the class. A fellow student, eager to impress, tends to dominate classroom conversation. Yet another student looks to be completely disengaged, indiscreetly checking their phone and quickly exiting the room the moment class is dismissed. These scenarios are familiar to any college educator and represent a central learning dynamic: classroom participation. While classroom participation is a ubiquitous term and experience across higher education, there is little agreement as to a singular definition (Rocca, 2010). Most definitions include the concept of the exchange of ideas and discussion within the classroom environment and evoke the Socratic method of inquiry as a formative and widely recognized classroom participation technique (Orwat et al., 2018). Scholars reference classroom participation as a general term to describe classroom atmosphere (Dancer & Kamvounias, 2005), classroom activities used to elicit participation (Rocca, 2010), as well as the evaluation of participation itself (Bean & Peterson, 1998). While classroom participation is difficult to define, it is particularly essential to the success of social work educators and the subsequent capability and confidence of social work students.

In order to guide students in their quest to achieve competency within the field of social work, it is necessary for social work educators to create classrooms reliant on active classroom participation. It is widely recognized that active classroom participation is an important aspect of an engaged and functional social work classroom; therefore, social work educators utilize a variety of strategies to elicit student contribution and engagement in the classroom (Orwat et al., 2018). Bachelor in Social Work (BSW) instructors are often the first educators to introduce

students to the field of social work and to support students' mastery and confidence within the profession. However, limited research has explored how BSW educators conceptualize classroom participation and the language they use to convey their participation expectations to students.

This study considers how BSW educators utilize classroom participation as a pedagogical tool as well as what BSW educators require of their students in regard to their classroom participation. Using a qualitative content analysis method, the study presents classroom participation themes and strategies contained within the text of 33 *Introduction to Social Work* syllabi from a sample of Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited programs. Syllabi are ideal pedagogical artifacts; they provide a glimpse into educator expectations and classroom procedures. This study considers how often language related to classroom participation appears within syllabi, as well as the type of language, classroom activities, and classroom guidelines used to describe classroom participation. The themes generated from the content analysis provide an overview of what BSW educators expect in regard to classroom participation. A better understanding of these expectations could lead to considering classroom participation as a discrete and purposeful pedagogical practice as opposed to a standardized clause on a syllabus.

Classroom Participation Strategies Relevant to BSW Educators

The vast majority of teaching methods particular to social work rely on engaged classroom participation. Social work educators are encouraged to not only expose social work students to material, but to lead them through a transformational learning process (Anastas, 2010). The ability of students to speak up, so that they can in turn advocate for client needs, human rights, and social justice, is an essential skill that is developed in the classroom through

active participation (Oliver et al., 2017). Anastas (2010) highlights six teaching methods particular to the needs of the social work discipline: lecturing and explaining, reflecting on experience, leading a discussion, inquiry and discovery, training and coaching, and using groups and teams. Notably, all six of these categories are reflected in the literature pertaining to classroom participation (Rocca, 2010). Additionally, all of these methods require student participation and/or engagement, signaling that teaching methods particular to social work education are heavily reliant on classroom participation.

The lecture-only format of a class session is losing popularity across disciplines (Rocca, 2010), as are techniques often associated with lecturing, such as cold-calling on students (Bean & Peterson, 1998; O'Connor, 2013). While Dallimore et al. (2004) showed that calling on students even when they have not volunteered can be an effective practice, Moguel (2004) noted mixed reactions to cold-calling. Certain students tend to dominate discussions that are in response to instructor-initiated questions (Fritschner, 2000), providing additional evidence that classroom techniques heavily reliant on instructor leadership are not the most effective.

Reflection is an essential component of learning generally and social work education specifically (Anastas, 2010; Mishna & Bogo, 2007). Notable critical pedagogues Saleeby and Scanlon (2005) promote critical pedagogy concepts as applied to social work education. A key element of this approach includes *socialization toward critical thinking*, another term for critical reflection. Critical educators encourage students to assume a more active role in the learning process, calling on students to understand their own beliefs and ideologies as learners. These sorts of conversations most often occur during in-class discussions, another hallmark of participation in the social work classroom. Small discussion groups are often more comfortable for students who prefer to engage with smaller groups before contributing to a larger class

discussion (Rocca, 2010). Scholars have called for a reconceptualization of classroom participation that goes beyond the traditional view of verbal contributions as the primary type of participatory evidence (Orwat et al., 2018; Schultz, 2009). In response to the diversity of student comfort and strength in regard to classroom participation, Schultz (2009) even suggests interpreting and attending to student silence as a type of participation.

The central discussion concerning effective classroom participation strategies is closely linked to a lively debate regarding whether or not to grade student participation. Mello (2010) highlights this controversy with a sense of humor, explaining that "three things in life are certain; death, taxes, and the fact that […] educators all have an opinion, usually a strong one, regarding the grading of class participation" (p. 77). Proponents of graded classroom participation point to grades as a motivating factor for student involvement (Dallimore et al., 2004), while critics reference its subjective nature (Bean & Peterson, 1998) and cite issues of instructor authority and power (Gilson, 1994). Orwat et al. (2018) propose that an essential element of broadening the definition of class participation in the social work classroom is shifting how it is traditionally assessed. They point to Stiggins's (2002) model of shifting from "assessment of class participation to *assessment for class participation* and learning" (Orwat et al., 2018, p.362).

A more nuanced assessment process of classroom participation speaks to the specific needs of a social work classroom. While the ability to speak up and advocate is an expectation of social work students, social work educators often struggle with how to teach these skills in the classroom (Oliver et al., 2017). Skills needed to succeed in the social work field can be introduced, strengthened, and assessed in the social work classroom through active student participation (Jones, 2008). Therefore, it is imperative to understand what social work educators

expect of students in regard to their classroom participation and how they are relaying these expectations.

Syllabi as Pedagogical Artifacts

Syllabi are often distributed before the start of a course and are the first cue students receive regarding their instructor's classroom participation expectations. For faculty interested in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, syllabi are ideal documents because they provide links between the classroom and research (Afros & Schryer, 2009). Collins (1997) explains that syllabi serve as a socialization tool for both students and instructors, while simultaneously locating them within the discourse of their specific academic community. The language found within syllabi is representative of power and authority dynamics, social interactions, and professionalism (Afros & Schryer, 2009). Not only does the syllabus serve as a classroom management tool, it is often evidence of what has worked well for an educator in the past (Slattery & Carlson, 2005). Slattery and Carlson (2005) assert that an effective syllabus includes identifying information, a course description, course goals, ways to meet course goals, information about grading, a course schedule, rationale for the importance of the course, motivational messages, and university support systems. Unsurprisingly, the inclusion of this amount of information often leads to exemplar syllabi being 20 or more pages in length (Harrington & Gabert-Quillen, 2015).

A limited number of studies have utilized content analysis of social work syllabi, despite their potential ability to be an abundant data source for educational researchers (Drisko, 2008). Syllabi are documents influenced by larger context, ideologies, and structural conditions and are therefore imbued with complex meaning. Mehrotra et al. (2017) assert that analyzing syllabi permits researchers to effectively explore the explicit and implicit values and assumptions within

social work curricula. While content analysis of syllabi is an emerging methodology, several social work education studies have effectively used syllabi as data sources (Drisko, 2008; Hong & Hodge, 2009; Maschi et al., 2019; Mehrotra et al., 2017, Moffat & Oxhandler, 2018; Sweifach, 2015; Teasley & Archuleta, 2015). Notably, all of these studies focus on a particular type of social work *curriculum* (including qualitative research, social justice, diversity, forensic social work, group work, and religion and spirituality) as opposed to a pedagogical *tool or strategy* such as classroom participation. Additionally, all seven studies were conducted using Masters in Social Work syllabi, indicating that there is a current lack of research using BSW syllabi. The rich data available within a syllabus should encourage social work education researchers to use this data source as a way to explore the dominant framing of various pedagogical strategies and tools across all levels of social work education. Qualitative content analysis is an ideal methodology for exploring the meaning of class participation as represented in BSW syllabi.

Methodology

Content analysis is a methodology used to determine the presence of specific themes and concepts within texts (Rubin and Babbie, 2017). This qualitative method was chosen for the current study in order to explore how educators conceptualize classroom participation and what they expect of students through a content analysis of 33 *Introduction to Social Work* BSW course syllabi. As demonstrated by Mehotra et al. (2017), content analysis of social work syllabi allows researchers to examine language contained within the documents as reflective of dominant paradigms, power structures, and predominant pedagogical positions.

Data Collection

At the time of this study, the CSWE database listed 547 BSW programs in the United

States (CSWE, 2020). A spreadsheet of all 547 programs was generated alphabetically and then

randomized. The purpose of this randomization was to comprise a sample of schools with

diversified geographic region, public or private institutional status, religious affiliation, program

age, and program size. From the randomized list, 30 programs were contacted at a time. E-mails

were sent to the CSWE database "Primary Contact," requesting an *Introduction to Social Work*

syllabus from the program. This specific course was chosen because it often serves as BSW

students' first orientation to the discipline. The initial e-mail to the Primary Contact explained

that the study had received Institutional Review Board approval and that no identifying

information would be used during the data analysis process or reporting of the study. To be

included in the study, a program had to offer an *Introduction to Social Work* course, return a

copy of the program's syllabus, and provide a signed consent form from the intellectual owner of

the syllabus. If the Primary Contact did not respond after one week, a follow-up e-mail was sent.

After an additional week of no response, communication was ceased and the next school on the

randomly generated list was contacted. Communications were sent in batches of 30 personalized

e-mails at a time. In order to reach the target response rate of $n=30$, 226 personalized e-mails to

Primary Contacts were sent. The final sample of syllabi for the study was $n=33$.

Sampling Frame

The sample (see Table 1) included 55% public and 45% private institutions, in

comparison to the reported national figure of 76% and 24%, respectively (CSWE, 2018). The

sample reflected regional diversity, including 11 programs from the Midwest, 11 from the South,

six from the East, and five from the West/Southwest. Eight of the 10 CSWE memberships were

represented, with representation missing from the New England and Northeast regions. Syllabi

representing online courses were solicited, but the majority of the sample (*n*=30) represented

courses taught face-to-face.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics (n=33)

Variables	*f*	%
CSWE Regions*		
3 Mid-Atlantic	*6*	18
4 Southeast	*8*	24
5 Great Lakes	*9*	27
6 South Central	*3*	9
7 Mid-Central	*2*	6
8 Rocky Mountains	*1*	3
9 West	*1*	3
10 Northwest	*3*	9
Public/Private Institution Status		
Public Institution	*18*	55
Private Institution	*15*	45
Religious Affiliation		
Religious Institution	*11*	33
Secular Institution	*22*	66
Class Format		
Face-to-face	*30*	90
Online	*3*	9

* Regions 1 (New England) and 2 (Northeast) were not represented in the sample.

Data Analysis

An inductive thematic content analysis process was conducted to determine the presence

of specific concepts related to classroom participation throughout the sample of syllabi. The

study employed Saldaña's (2016) First Cycle and Second Cycle coding approach to data

analysis, where First Cycle methods produce the initial codes assigned to data units, and Second

Cycle coding methods work with the resulting First Cycle codes. The First Cycle of coding

involved an open-coding process of all the data to familiarize the researcher with the available

content and to enable them to begin to propose descriptive categories and themes. Each syllabus

was analyzed line-by-line and initial codes were notated using an Excel spreadsheet. All parts of

each syllabus were analyzed, including but not limited to course objectives, assignments, grading

policies, classroom policies, etc. Then it was determined whether there were stand-alone

section(s) specific to classroom participation that could be extracted from each syllabus. Sections

with keywords relevant to classroom participation (e.g., *participation, attendance, conduct,*

professionalism, class preparedness, student behavior, etc.) were flagged and notated within the

Excel spreadsheet. Of note, each syllabus included within the sample had stand-alone section(s)

pertaining specifically to classroom participation. These sections were subsequently extracted

from the syllabi and imported into NVivo, a qualitative coding software program. After an

additional coding of the extracted participation-specific sections using NVivo, a list of

descriptive codes was generated and an initial codebook was created.

Next, the researcher randomized a subset of the stand-alone classroom participation

sections (*n*=8) and asked a partner coder to code the subset. Partner coding provided analytic

triangulation and was used to increase the rigor and trustworthiness of the coding process

(Padgett, 2017). Like the researcher, the partner coder is a current social work educator at a

CSWE-accredited BSW program. Comparing and contrasting the partner coder's coding process

of the subset, and their resulting codebook, affirmed some of the initial codes developed during

the First Cycle coding process and inspired potential new codes before the Second Cycle coding

process began.

After the exchange of codebooks with the partner coder, the researcher returned to the

entire sample with a list of categories and themes in mind for an additional coding pass. Using

these Pattern Codes, the Second Cycle of coding was undertaken to pull together material from

the First Cycle into more meaningful units of analysis (Miles et al., 2020). The final coding was

conducted with the larger purpose of the study in mind: How BSW educators utilize classroom

participation as a pedagogical tool and what BSW educators require of their students in regard to

their classroom participation.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Study methods were selected in order to maximize the trustworthiness and rigor of the

results. Specifically the practices of triangulation, partner coding, and creating an audit trail were

strategically employed (Padgett, 2017). Meeting with a partner coder was an essential aspect of

the triangulation process and allowed the lead researcher to consider the rigor of their results by

comparing them to a different source. Partner coding also prompted the researcher to engage in

memo writing. Saldaña (2016) describes the essential process of memo writing as noting

thoughts and ideas that emerge through researcher interaction with the data. These notes allowed

the researcher to consider any emerging biases and discuss them with their partner coder. Finally,

an audit trail was kept to document the process of the content analysis so that the study could be

replicated.

Findings

Findings were organized, focusing on the categories of *expectations*, *attendance*, and

grading and evaluation. Several related themes were recognized within each category (see Table

2). Through initial analysis of the sample, the majority of language related to classroom

participation represented educator expectations and requirements, while less space overall was

dedicated toward describing classroom participation as a pedagogical tool. A heavy emphasis

across syllabi was placed on educator expectation and regulation regarding classroom

participation.

Table 2

Descriptive Categories and Themes

Categories	Themes
Expectations	Professionalism
	Student Responsibility
	Preparation
	Classroom Environment
Attendance	Mandatory Presence
	Excused vs. Unexcused Absences
Grading and Evaluation	Additive vs. Deductive Grading Policies
	Feedback

Expectations

The level of specificity regarding classroom participation expectations ranged significantly from syllabus to syllabus. However, the majority of language relating to classroom participation expectations could be linked to four distinct themes: professionalism, student responsibility, preparation, and classroom environment. Across all four themes there was a perceptible emphasis on rules and regulations as well as classroom decorum.

Professionalism

Many syllabi stressed the connection between classroom participation and the profession of social work. Syllabi consistently made the explicit link between effective classroom participation and professionalism in the field, as described by one syllabus's author: "Active participation in class discussions and consistently reading assigned materials and being prepared to discuss the subject content in an informed manner is essential. This is considered professional conduct." Language representative of this theme often drew a parallel between workplace expectations and classroom expectations. One syllabus even predicted that classroom behavior would be suggestive of future field placement success: "The behavior pattern demonstrated in class attendance may be indicative of commitment in a field practicum setting." Another pointed

to a lack of tolerance for certain behaviors: "All social work courses are preparation for professional practice. This means that excessive absences, tardiness and early departures will not be tolerated any more than such behaviors would be tolerated in the work world." An additional syllabus went so far as to include a list of 11 specific negative classroom behaviors under the heading "Professional Practice Behaviors Do Not Include." More syllabi dedicated space toward describing unacceptable and unprofessional behavior, as opposed to providing examples of the professionalism they were hoping to experience from students. An exception to this negative framing of expected professional behaviors was a syllabus that stated that "effective social interactions with colleagues, critical self-reflection, and sharing of supportive and helpful feedback with others are critical social work skills that are reflected in student's class participation."

Student Responsibility

Syllabi consistently reminded students that classroom participation was their responsibility. Language ranged from vague demands of personal accountability, to specific instructions for how to demonstrate said responsibility. General guidelines included "Students are responsible for their learning in this course" and "Show initiative and be pro-active and responsible for own learning." More specific recommendations tended to cluster around what students should do if they were absent from class, such as "Students are responsible for all course information presented and/or materials passed out regardless of an absence. Be sure to contact a few class colleagues for updates." The majority of language regarding student responsibility centered on directing students what to do if they committed some sort of error or mistake related to their classroom participation. Similarly to language surrounding

professionalism, syllabi tended to highlight what not to do as opposed to providing concrete examples of what proactive student responsibility would entail.

Preparation

Preparation was often mentioned as a positive activity students could complete as a way to demonstrate effective classroom participation. Directives like "Complete all assigned readings before class" were extremely common. The word "preparation" itself was often utilized to describe the importance of classroom participation. As one syllabus succinctly put it, "Preparation and participation are integral to student learning." Aside from requirements to do the assigned reading, directives on how to specifically prepare for class were generally limited. An exception was a syllabus that described how the professor aids students in their preparations and uses participation as a pedagogical tool:

> I want you to be in class and to come to class prepared. Sometimes I will give a small assignment for you to bring to class, sometimes you will have a quiz over the readings, and sometimes you will participate in a class activity that requires you to have prepared for it.

Generally, syllabi highlighted effective student preparation as an integral trait that would help to create a positive classroom environment.

Classroom Environment

A notable subset of the syllabi gave mention to the link between classroom participation and the classroom environment. Several syllabi specified that each individual student's presence was important to the dynamic and functionality of the classroom. In one syllabus, attendance and participation were explicitly linked to the learning environment: "The participatory nature of this course leads to my expectation that you attend every class session in its entirety. In this way you

assume responsibility for helping to create a mutual learning environment for all of us." This spirit of mutuality was echoed across several syllabi, including one that stated, "Your thoughtful participation is essential both for your own learning and that of your classmates. Obviously, if you miss a class, your contributions will be missed as well." Another syllabus dedicated space toward highlighting the importance of classroom discussion, and how this discussion impacts the classroom environment and student experience:

> I also ask that you share your own thoughts and real-world experiences as they bring the course material to life. Throughout this process, all voices are welcomed, valued, and respected. Small and full classroom discussion and other activities will require student participation and are designed to encourage self-reflection and the expansion of how you see and interact with the world.

Class discussions were often used to demonstrate the importance of active participation. Students' ability to participate in these discussions is obviously linked to their physical presence in the classroom.

Attendance

Attendance as representative of classroom participation was a heavily represented category throughout the sample. In fact, seven syllabi each only had one section pertaining specifically to classroom participation, and these seven sections were all titled either "Attendance," "Attendance Policy," or "Last Day of Attendance." If limited language was used to describe classroom participation in a syllabus, the language tended to simply reference attendance. Two distinct themes emerged as part of this category: mandatory presence and excused vs. unexcused absences.

Mandatory Presence

The aforementioned seven syllabi that only referenced attendance as a form of classroom participation simply stated the attendance policy of the specific course, program, or college. A variation of "Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes," "Attendance is mandatory, not optional," or "The participatory nature of this course leads to my expectation that you attend every class session in its entirety" was found in most syllabi across the entire sample. A majority of syllabi also included a specific amount of classes a student could miss before being dropped from the course.

Excused vs. Unexcused Absences

Some syllabi made the distinction between excused and unexcused absences. There was a wide range of philosophy regarding how many classes were permissible to miss, whether they be excused or unexcused. Syllabi ranged from fairly permissive and flexible: "Three absences are allowed—no questions asked," to rigid and prescriptive:

> There are two types of absences: emergency/excused and unexcused. An absence is considered "excused" under very limited emergency circumstances, which include documented death in the immediate family, or documented illness of self or a dependent child. Most other absences are considered unexcused.

The distinction between excused and unexcused absences was most often utilized for grading and evaluation purposes.

Grading and Evaluation

Every syllabus in the sample provided a unique form of classroom participation grading and evaluation. Eighteen syllabi in the sample had an explicit participation grade detailed in the syllabus, while 25 did not. Of the 18 syllabi that had an explicit grade assigned to classroom

participation, the mean percentage of a student's overall grade was 13.14% and the median was

11.75%. The lowest value in the set was 7% and the highest was 25%. Grading strategies ranged

from complex and specific point systems based on attendance and participation in classroom

activities, to policies that left the grading of participation to the discretion of the instructor. Two

themes comprised this category: additive vs. deductive grading policies and feedback.

Additive vs. Deductive Grading Policies

Syllabi tended to approach the grading of participation with either an additive or

deductive approach, with more syllabi falling into the latter category. Representative clauses that

viewed the grading of classroom participation with an additive philosophy included "Students

may receive up to 10 points for participation in each class" and "Students are expected to

participate in class discussions and activities each day and will receive participation points based

on their level of involvement and participation." Notably, a specific explanation for how those

points could be earned was often missing from the syllabus. Representative clauses that viewed

the grading of classroom participation from a deductive philosophy included "More than 6 hours

of absence for the entire course will result in a reduction of a student's overall grade by 10

percent" and "Attendance and participation will factor into your grade and missing more than 3

class sessions will result in a reduction of the grade by 1 letter grade." One instructor explicitly

used the phrase "attendance bank" and explained that students could lose or gain points based on

their attendance and participation in class. Another instructor used the language of "Rewards and

Penalties" to describe how students could lose or gain points in relation to their classroom

participation grade. While complex systems of numeric grading abounded across the sample,

much less space in syllabi was dedicated toward the specifics of individualized student feedback

regarding classroom participation.

Feedback

Few syllabi mentioned how more qualitative feedback would be provided regarding students' classroom participation. One syllabus indicated that "a feedback report on student participation will be provided at the mid-point of the semester and students can request feedback on their participation grade at any time by emailing or talking with the instructor." This was the only syllabus in the sample to explicitly provide an option for students to dialogue about their classroom participation grade with the instructor. Interestingly, only one syllabus mentioned the grading of classroom participation as a group effort involving a student's peers. This class divided students into different feedback pods and had them evaluate one another's efforts: "You will provide an evaluation of each of your group members at the end of the semester that I will review and include in your overall participation efforts." Across all syllabi, feedback regarding classroom participation was always linked to the grading of classroom participation. The themes of *expectations*, *attendance*, and *grading and evaluation* serve as means to help educators understand and advance classroom participation strategies in the BSW classroom.

Discussion

Through conducting a qualitative content analysis of 33 BSW *Introduction to Social Work* syllabi, the study aimed to understand how BSW educators utilize classroom participation as a pedagogical tool and what BSW educators require of their students in regard to their classroom participation. Across the study sample, BSW educators specified a variety of expectations, strategies, and assessment tools in relation to classroom participation. The diversity of pedagogical approaches mirrors the current literature on classroom participation: There is little agreement from educator to educator about what classroom participation is and how it can be fostered and encouraged (Rocca, 2010). This discussion serves as an invitation to reflect on how

BSW educators can deliberately create classroom participation expectations, policies, and assessment tools that cultivate and support effective classroom participation. While scholars across varied disciplines have researched classroom participation (Rocca, 2010), the topic is not typically addressed in the social work literature; signally there is a gap regarding how classroom participation is researched and utilized specific to the discipline.

Throughout many syllabi, negative, punitive language was used to describe classroom participation expectations. Policy is often shaped in response to history, and syllabi policies are no exception. Perhaps the prevalence of negative language across syllabi is in response to negative behaviors educators experienced in their former classrooms. However, BSW educators interested in motivating student participation could instead consider how to frame classroom participation expectations from a strengths-based perspective. While there was considerable emphasis on what students should *not* do if they wanted to be effective participators, there was a lack of clarity or examples provided about what effective classroom participation entailed. BSW educators could consider including a clause in their syllabus that states, "Effective classroom participation looks like…" or "Students who contribute to the classroom environment tend to…" When drafting a classroom participation section of a syllabus, it may be helpful to consider how classroom participation policies can inspire student participation, rather than punish or highlight poor performances.

Syllabi are documents that traditionally highlight the importance of rules and regulations in support of a positive educational experience. However, the heavy emphasis on decorum in syllabi sections related to classroom participation is at odds with the values of the social work profession. Relatedly, findings from this study reinforce a recent call to reconceptualize classroom participation in social work education by better defining and assessing the term

(Orwat et al., 2018). Many expectations analyzed in this study seemed to be written with the intent of socializing social work students to follow rules and respect authority. Instead of creating syllabi that enforce the traditional role of teacher as expert and student as novice, BSW educators could consider how to craft classroom participation policies that encourage critical thinking, creativity, and other critical pedagogy approaches necessary to challenge injustice and inequity (Saleeby and Scanlon, 2005). If social work students will be future advocates and problem solvers, the discipline would benefit from creating classroom participation policies that foster the skills they will need as agents of change. Interested educators could consider how classroom participation policies can encourage students to speak up and take risks, rather than fall in line and accept the status quo.

Relatedly, BSW educators relied heavily on attendance as the main indicator of classroom participation success. Attendance was featured as the primary component of classroom participation—to the point of sometimes being the only component of classroom participation mentioned in a syllabus. Many syllabi indicated that if a student was simply present, that was adequate in terms of their classroom participation. While it was disproportionately featured across syllabi, attendance is just a small component of what encompasses classroom participation (Rocca, 2010). Obviously, participation cannot occur when students are absent from the classroom, but BSW educators could consider additional elements of participation beyond simple physical presence. Classroom participation can be used to nurture human relationships, improve public speaking skills, build empathy, encourage active listening, practice reflexivity, etc. The list of skills related to classroom participation and the profession of social work is vast. Instead of emphasizing attendance as the primary indicator of classroom

participation, syllabi could consider how to individualize and tailor classroom participation to the needs of each student, while championing some of the most needed skills of the profession.

A variety of grading strategies were used to evaluate and assess student participation. Most were instructor-driven and relied on quantitative point systems that were often directly tied to attendance. These findings indicate that there is room to consider more comprehensive and individualized methods of evaluation in future syllabi. Orwat et al. (2018) provide a useful framework for student self-assessment and evaluation of classroom participation that involves structured goal setting throughout the semester. It requires students to think beyond attendance as a form of participation and allows students to evaluate their individual classroom participation strengths and challenges. This is an exemplar model for graduate-level social work students and could be adapted and modified for the BSW level. The model suggests ways to enhance student engagement and integration throughout the classroom participation process, rather than having students simply follow a set structure or process dictated by the instructor.

The findings of this study indicate that BSW educators grasp the importance of classroom participation (as evidenced by its heavy overall grade percentage in many syllabi) but often lack the tools and strategies to consider classroom participation as an innovative and effective pedagogical tool. This discussion adds to the current literature by highlighting classroom participation as a specific pedagogical approach in baccalaureate social work, worthy of additional research and exploration. This study aims to inspire BSW educators to review their own classroom participation section of their syllabus and consider how it can be enhanced to better reflect their teaching philosophy as well as the overall values of the social work profession.

Strengths and Limitations

The main strength of this study is that it is the first known study to explore BSW classroom participation expectations via content analysis of syllabi. The study also utilized a geographically diverse sample. The two-phase approach to data analysis and use of a partner coder also increased the rigor and trustworthiness of the study. The exploratory nature of the study serves as a starting point for researchers with an interest in participation in the BSW classroom. The study findings can be used to create aspirational classroom participation techniques and policies for interested BSW educators.

Course syllabi are only representative of an instructor's intent and do not represent what actually occurs in a classroom. This discrepancy is a limitation of the study. While instructor intention is certainly worthy of research, future studies could explore how classroom participation is used as a pedagogical tool by directly observing the BSW classroom environment. Additional observational data regarding how instructors apply their syllabi's policy in the classroom would have allowed for increased rigor of the study.

The study sample was a small subsample of current CSWE-accredited programs. Because of the relatively small sample size, findings from this research are not intended to be generalizable. Future research could increase the subsample size, which would result in a more fully representative sample.

Conclusion

Social work's emphasis on communication, advocacy, and the importance of human relationships uniquely situates BSW educators to be leaders in adapting and modeling effective classroom participation strategies. The language used throughout the syllabi in the study sample indicates that BSW educators have traditional, overly regulated expectations when it comes to

classroom participation. BSW educators looking to improve student engagement and classroom outcomes can consider how they use classroom participation as a pedagogical tool and think beyond classroom participation as simply classroom management.

The findings from this study point toward the need for explicit tools and strategies that encourage effective classroom participation in the BSW classroom. While it is apparent that classroom participation is considered an essential component of BSW pedagogy, educator expectations are not necessarily in congruence with the values of social work education. Ongoing efforts to draw attention to the importance of classroom participation will continue to strengthen educational outcomes for BSW students.

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The Power of the Engaged BSW Classroom:

Participation as a Pedagogical Tool

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Abstract

This workshop presents best practices related to classroom participation in the baccalaureate social work classroom using a contemporary interpretation of bell hooks's engaged pedagogy framework (1994). The purpose of the workshop is to highlight the need for intentional class participation methods in the Bachelor in Social Work (BSW) classroom and to draw attention to the complexity of creating and maintaining classrooms that rely upon active student engagement. The workshop will emphasize that classroom participation should not be viewed simply as a means to an end. Instead, classroom participation should be considered an essential component of the social work educational experience that every educator should carefully consider as part of their teaching philosophy. The workshop will discuss potential classroom participation policies, as well as strategies for building and maintaining classrooms reliant on active participation.

Keywords: classroom participation, engaged pedagogy, classroom environment, BSW education

Workshop Presentation

This workshop was scheduled for presentation on March 22, 2020, from 8:00 to 9:15 am at the Association of Baccalaureate Program Directors (BPD) 37th Annual Conference in Birmingham, Alabama. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the entire conference was cancelled. Titled "The Power of the Engaged BSW Classroom: Participation as a Pedagogical Tool," the workshop is anchored in hooks's theory of engaged pedagogy (1995) and explains why the theory is ideal for fostering engaging Bachelor in Social Work (BSW) classroom environments. The workshop is organized via the five major components of engaged pedagogy: (1) reconceptualization of knowledge, (2) linking of theory and practice, (3) student empowerment, (4) multiculturalism, and (5) incorporation of passion (Florence, 1998). Because the workshop is focused on the concept of participation, the presenter designed it to be interactive and require substantive engagement from conference attendees. The workshop includes time for attendees to share ideas and methods related to classroom participation with one another. Attendees also analyze how their teaching philosophy does or does not currently align with these expectations. Attendees leave the workshop with discrete tools to help them strengthen their class participation policies and implement new engagement strategies.

The Power of the Engaged BSW Classroom: Participation as a Pedagogical Tool

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Introductions

What do you remember about your own classroom participation during your undergraduate education?

Workshop Objectives

I) Engage in discussion surrounding the importance of intentional class participation policies.

II) Apply engaged pedagogical tools in order to enhance classroom participation in the BSW classroom.

III) Describe the five major components of critical pedagogy in relation to classroom participation.

Classroom Participation Background

- Social work as a participation-dependent discipline.

- BSW classrooms as the foundation of student participation.

Aligning Teaching Philosophy with Classroom Participation Methods: Strategies for Social Work Educators

It is imperative that social workers are able to identify and develop a teaching philosophy and subsequently identify potential areas of incongruence between their teaching philosophy and their teaching methods (Anastas, 2010).

Spectrum of Teaching Paradigms

Positivist	• There are objective facts taught by people who know them (teachers) to those who don't (students).
Post-Positivist	• Fairly clear distinction between teacher and learner, but some acknowledgement that teachers can learn from students.
Critical	• Less clear distinction between teacher and learner. Learning is a dialectical process.
Constructivist	• No clear distinction between teacher and learner, and teaching and learning process.

(Graham, 1997)

What are your classroom
participation expectations?

Does your teaching
philosophy/paradigm align with these
expectations?

Attendance & Participation Rubric

Attendance (15 points)	
• Attends all classes	
• Never late	
Class Preparation (15 points)	
• Reads all required reading	
• Communicates with professor about any questions or concerns	
• Completes all assignments	
Class Participation (20 points)	
• Actively participates in class	
• Does not use technology for non-class related purposes	
• Completes all in-class assignments	
• Asks thoughtful questions and/or contributes thoughtful ideas	
• Respects classmates and instructor	
Total Available Points: 50 points	

Critical Pedagogy as Applied to Social Work Education

Critical pedagogy is a teaching approach that underscores the role
of power in the production of knowledge and asserts that the
purpose of education is to work toward the freedom of oppressed
groups (Saleeby & Scanlon, 2005).

Critical pedagogists Henry Giroux (1988) and bell hooks (1994)
assert that critical education can challenge social inequality through
encouraging dialogue, demonstrating effective social critique, and
engaging student voice—all teaching methods that require active
participation.

Class Participation as a Pedagogical Tool for the Critical Educator: Application to the BSW Classroom

Step 1: Self-assessment of class participation

Students fill in the four squares of the SWOT matrix related to their self-awareness of their class participation.

(George, 2017; Orwat et. al, 2018)

Critical Self-Reflection Matrix for Classroom Participation

	Positive (Strengths)	Negative (Challenges)
Internal	What are my classroom participation **strengths**? How do they enhance my learning, progress, and/or engagement with the course? What helps me participate in class?	What are my classroom participation **weaknesses**? How do they hinder my learning, progress, and/or engagement with the course? What hinders my class participation?
External	Are there **opportunities** to improve my classroom participation? How can I maximize my learning, progress, and/or engagement in the course?	What **threats** prohibit my ability to participate in class? What stifles my learning, progress, and/or engagement with the course?

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Step 2: Students use the SWOT matrix to develop course-specific class participation goals.

The process of goal-setting creates agency for students and shifts the expectation from passive learner to active collaborator in the learning process (Keesing-Styles, 2003).

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Step 3: Ongoing self-evaluation of class participation.

Possible Assignments

- Reflective journal entries on the process.
- Revising the original SWOT matrix midway through the course.
- Student check-ins during office hours to provide support towards goal attainment and to further build relationships with students.

Critical Pedagogy Framework Applied to Classroom Participation Teaching Method

Reconceptualization of Knowledge	• Students and teachers as co-learners. Learning is a dialogic process. • Ways of knowing and knowledge generation related to classroom participation are limitless.
Linking of Theory and Practice	• Students who are engaged classroom citizens will inherently be strengthening skills necessary for becoming effective social workers. • Students *theorize* what constitutes successful classroom participation and then demonstrate their theory through classroom *practice*.
Student Empowerment	• Construction of mutual, not hierarchical, learning community. • Student-as-expert in relation to their classroom participation strengths and challenges.
Intersectionality	• Participation styles generated by student experience, not teacher preference. • One type of participation style not valued over another. • Individual student perspective and knowledge celebrated.
Incorporation of Passion	• An engaged and participatory classroom is a joyful space. • Students acknowledged as holistic beings whose mind, body, and spirit can be nourished through classroom participation.

(Florence, 1998)

Closing Discussion

What effective classroom participation methods do you use in your classroom?

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