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PRESERVICE TEACHERS SHIFT CONCEPTUALIZATION OF ROLE IN DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION WHEN CONFRONTED WITH DELIBERATIVE PEDAGOGY

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The United States has consistently maintained low voter turnout relative to other democracies, with the burden of civic education shouldered primarily by K-12 schools. A contributing factor is the curricular avoidance of teaching contemporary political issues and teachers' sense of underpreparedness to teach beyond the basic role and processes of government. While differing perspectives exist on the appropriateness of including contemporary political issues in schools, the field has also shown that it can in fact increase student civic engagement. The objective of this mixed methods study was to determine how preservice teachers view teaching politics and elections under the premise that teacher education can better prepare them before licensure. In order to understand how preservice teachers conceptualize the teaching of elections, a total of 34 students from one urban and one rural university in the Midwest completed pre and post surveys on the likelihood of their teaching about contemporary political issues, participated in class activities that involved interventions to support their teaching of elections, and participated in a 45 minute semi-structured interview. Preliminary data suggests that preservice teachers shifted their individual understandings of teaching civics, democracy, and the democratic process. Also suggested, preservice teachers trended towards greater democratization of democratic education while a minority of them either did not expand or further restricted their views on which school subjects and grade groups should engage with democratic education. Their shifts in teaching contemporary political issues indicate that there is further potential for teacher education to prepare preservice teachers to incorporate democratic education and contemporary issues into curricula. Preservice teachers would also benefit from deliberative teaching strategies because they would be confronted by and work through these types of questions far in advance of their fieldwork.