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The Development of Democratic Citizens: Can Schools and Teachers Play a Role?

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ABSTRACT

Democratic movements and networks across borders are sharing programs and strategies that are helping the development of a set of 'universals': values and beliefs that define what can be called a democratic education. Such universals are contested, but work to help classrooms emerge that link schools with communities and build contextual relationships with students, families and members of the broader society. Key to these democratic classrooms are tools and strategies of communication, deliberation and decision-making that provide for the sharing of multiple perspectives and work towards the construction of new knowledge. A recent study found that Polish students gained from their participation in such a program. Such studies help emphasize the roles schools and teachers can play in the development of democratic citizens.

Key words: democracy education, democratic attitudes, civic education, educational borrowing, problem-based learning

As you drive west from Nairobi, Kenya it becomes obvious that the geography you are inhabiting is about to change. At a certain point you begin to climb a bit, turn a curve around the hillside and leave the outskirts of the city. Not too long after leaving the city you see it, the Rift Valley, one of the most impressive geological features of the planet. It is home to many of the Masai, resorts for western tourists, and lush landscapes full of the animals that make travel to this part of the planet so famous. But after crossing down into the valley and climbing up the otherside, you find how interconnected the world has become. In towns like Kisii and Migori teachers work to prepare their students for life in a democratic society. And while the recent struggles in Kenya highlight how far things have to go to improve, these teachers also participate in international networks, developing lessons, training on new teaching strategies and arguing about key concepts of democratic education. They believe that their work can improve the knowledge, skills and attitudes their students have about democracy.

The field of education exists as one key way societies help to fulfill their need for citizenship education. Yet arguments persist as to whether or not teachers, schools and the actual lessons teachers utilize can impact the development of democratic habits of mind in their students. Contributing to this trouble has been a sense that curriculum and materials do not exist, as yet, that would support educators as they seek to develop citizenship knowledge, skills and attitudes in young people.

Giroux (1998), hooks (1994), Freire (2001) and Darder (2002) have all pushed educators to struggle with the intersections of culture, curriculum, and democracy. They have pushed teachers and others to think about the developmental change real education implies. They have encouraged educators to seek answers to key questions while remaining cognizant of the context in which teaching and learning is occurring. Teachers in Kenya, the USA or

Poland, by thinking deeply about the cultural assumptions of their classrooms and communities can work to best define what is need to improve schooling and student understanding. Education becomes a means for raising up the community, developing a democratic ethos, and improving the lives of those who inhabit neighborhoods, villages and towns in various parts of the world.

However, educators and nongovernmental organizations that are working with them do not live in isolation. Growing networks traverse national and culture boundaries and link educators in shared efforts. In an era of globalization societies may be questioning their particular definition of the ideal person, and impending reforms that are global in nature may result in the creation not only of a new concept of the ideal person but also of a new concept of the „ideal teacher for the ideal person" (Tatto, 2007).

These forces of globalization and the networks that continue to emerge, also are at play in the field of democracy education. Dewey (1916) described democracy as „a way of living together, a way of communicating with one another without the pretense of class or position." Dewey and his colleague stated, „responsibility for the conduct of society and government rests on every member of society; therefore, every one must receive training that will enable him [sic] to meet this responsibility" (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, p. 304). Dewey himself laid out two elements that characterize a democratically constituted society: „the greatest reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests," and „change in social habits–its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse" (Dewey, 1916, p. 87). In short, democracy is dependent on the ability of citizens to participate in deliberation (Mathews, 1996). Democratic education involves the creation of environments both in schools and individual classrooms that reflect Dewey's „living together" and seeks to link those environments to the communities outside of the school and classroom walls.

In 1967 Hess and Torney in their piece, *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children*, focused on the concept of political socialization and the development of values, attitudes and behaviors. They argued that the development of political behavior can be understood from the perspective of a theory of social learning and socialization. And while much of the learning is life long, a significant portion occurs in the early years of a persons' life. Their research concluded that there is a characteristic pattern of change in political attitudes from approximately the ages of 8 to the ages of 14 and that therefore most of the political socialization occurs at the pre-secondary school level.

Their early work then has highlighted reasons why countries and societies must pay attention to the development of democratic habits of mind and that much of this work should occur before the young person is in high school. Not only must educators be aware of and reflect on their conceptualizations of democracy; they must also act on these understandings to nurture the growth of democratic structures and habits. Others have worked to define how the democratic classroom relates to curriculum, curriculum that is „participatory, justice-oriented, and difference-sensitive" (Boyle-Baise, 2003, p. 54). „Doing democracy" in classrooms this way requires the marriage of deliberation and action. And creating democratic classrooms, inhabited by teachers who actively work to teach and develop democratic habits of mind in their students begs the question of what evidence exists that such efforts can, in fact, have an effect on students.

Networks focused on the improvement of democracy education are forced by the very nature of their work to confront the contextual nature of democracy and its many interpretations. Popkewitz (2004) talks about the conceptualization of educational borrowing and has said that „Knowledge is treated as something that is used by causal agents of change, reflecting the purpose and social interest of different social groups of actors, institutions, or social forces. Knowledge is placed as the outcome of material forces of production/reproduction rather than investigated as a productive object of „social fact" in constituting the world in which we live (pg. viii)."

So, within the field of democracy education forces exist, often directed by networks of educators, that are seeking to improve the teaching of democratic habits of mind, thereby seeking to fulfill the mission of schools: that of developing thoughtful, reflective, and action-taking citizens. Can schools improve the knowledge, skills and attitudes of students including their understanding of democracy and the actions they might take as a result of such understandings? If we seek to improve the nature of democratic society and view schools as one tool of such aims, then the question is a vital one.

THE IEA CIVIC EDUCATION PROJECT

For many years there has been a growing realization of the importance of the role of schooling in the development of knowledge and attitudes about democracy and life in democratic societies (Torney-Purta, Schwille & Amadeo, 1999). As a result, in the 1990's the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement organized and began to negotiate a cross-national study of civic education in 24 countries. They collected both case studies and survey/achievement test data to begin to develop a comparative picture of both what was happening in school and teaching about civic life and how those practices appeared to impact the understanding and attitudes of young adolescents in those very schools.

The study's conclusions about strong civic education programs and results surprised many. Poland, a so-called, newly emerging democracy appeared to have some of the highest achievement levels on both knowledge about democracy and attitudes representative of a vibrant democratic life. What was happening in Polish schools and with Polish teachers? Was it simply that Polish students were culturally predisposed to democratic life? The results of the IEA study caused many discussions and raised many issues within the international networks focused on civic education. Looking at the practices of one focused teacher training and student engagement program might shed some light on what is happening.

INQUIRY INTO ONE PROGRAMMATIC EXAMPLE

Evidence of the possibilities and potential impact of networks that work to borrow and or lend practices across national borders can be found in Poland. Established in 1994, *Centrum Edukacji Obywatelskiej* (Centre for Citizenship Education, CEO) is a non-governmental educational foundation in Warsaw, Poland. CEO promotes civic knowledge, practical skills and attitudes that are necessary in the building of a democratic state founded on the rule of law and civil society. From its beginning as a partnership with links across many organizations CEO has grown to be perhaps the largest and most successful civic education, non-governmental organization in Poland and maybe in all of Central and Eastern Europe.

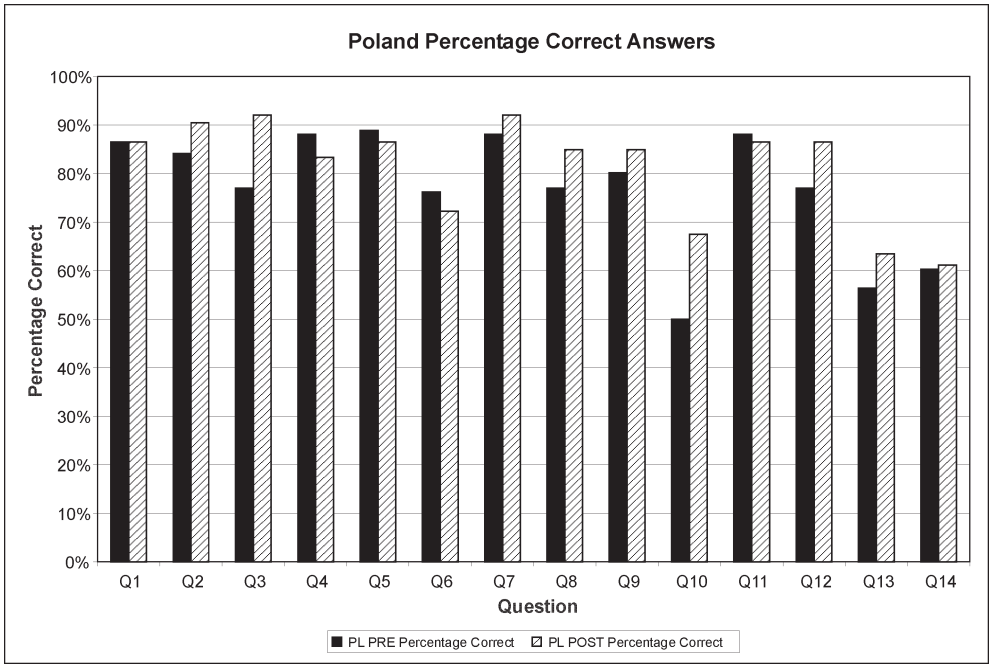
One of the programs brought to and then modified in Poland as a result of ongoing work with the international network of educators called Civitas is a project-based learning program called Project Citizen (Center for Civic Education, 2008) originally developed by the Center for Civic Education in California, USA. Project Citizen in Poland is known under the name „Young People in Action" and is implemented as an extra class in most schools that have trained to use the program. Students identify a local problem, plan how to implement an activity to improve the conditions related to this problem, and then also learn how to execute their plan of action. The Center for Citizenship Education (CEO) provides students with training on the rules of Project Citizen including team-building activities, planning, dividing tasks, looking for coalitions and the preparation of portfolios in which to document their efforts. Students who help with the implementation of the project may come from the primary, lower secondary or secondary schools.

AN EVALUATION STUDY

Recently an evaluation study[1] was completed looking to see if it was possible to identify and measure the improvement of democratic knowledge skills and attitudes in young people

ages 14 and 15. The Teaching for Democracy study (Craddock, Subreenduth & Fischer, 2007) was designed to probe the connection between student knowledge, attitudes, and skills about democracy and the teaching methods and materials of Project Citizen in English and sponsored by the Center for Citizenship Education in Warsaw, in Poland.

Central to the study and the questions related to the programs impact was the belief that teachers employing active methods and materials for teaching about democracy have a significant impact on student knowledge and attitudes about democracy. The methods and process of the study included a student survey, teacher interviews and information gathering about the communities in Poland and three other countries that were involved. The survey instrument was adapted from the IEA study and also included other items from previously validated sources created as part of other ongoing evaluations. The survey was administered to 14 and 15 year olds on their civic knowledge, attitudes and skills involving 15 schools and 250 students for the presurvey conducted before participation in the program. Following participation a post survey was conducted with 14 schools and 194 of the same students. At the time of the post survey a control group was identified that included 14 schools and 260 students. Most control schools were placed in the same town except for three of which were located in a neighboring village. While randomly selected, most schools were located in towns with a number of inhabitants below one hundred thousand. Two schools were located in large cities, Szczecin (population 410,000) and Częstochowa (population 250,000). Students were also surveyed from rural communities. And again, while randomized, the schools managed to represent all parts of Poland, each with different historical and traditional backgrounds (including the location during the partition). Most survey items were based on the IEA study (Torney-Purta, Schwille & Amadeo, 1999) and the original Polish translations were provided for use in this study.[2]



Source: Craddock, Subreenduth and Fischer (2008)

While the original study looked at four countries (Ukraine, South Africa, the United States and Poland), a T-Test procedure on the difference in students' answers led to the discovery of significance in only two of the countries, Poland and Ukraine (Craddock, Subreenduth & Fischer, under review). Students demonstrated significant improvement in civic knowledge in the average correct answers after participating in Project Citizen, as well as improvement in attitudes and the demonstration of skills viewed important in a democratic society.

FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

Polish students demonstrated an increase in correct responses for 9 of the 14 questions following their involvement in Project Citizen (See Figure 1). The questions demonstrating the greatest improvement (Q3, Q10, Q12) all involve the students interpreting provided information to arrive at a correct answer. The last two of these questions involve correctly interpreting a political leaflet.

However, participation in Project Citizen appeared to leave students less certain about the functions and roles of democratic government. Three of these questions required student to select characteristics of a 'democratic country' regarding organizations, political parties and governance.

Importantly, when Treatment and Control Group were compared on the post-test of knowledge questions no statistical significance was found, we did find that Project Citizen students consistently outperformed the Control

Table 1: Attitudes and Skills Sections and Responses

Categories	Questions	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5
What is good and bad for democracy?	A1-A16	Very bad	Somewhat bad	Somewhat good	Very good	Don't know/ doesn't apply
An adult who is a good citizen	B1-B10	Not important	Somewhat unimportant	Somewhat important	Very important	Don't know
What responsibilities should government have?	C1-C10	Definitely should not be	Probably should not be	Probably should be	Definitely should be	Don't know
When you are an adult, what do you expect that you will do?	M1-M10	I will certainly not do this	I will probably not do this	I will do	I will certainly do this	Don't know
As part of a school assignment or for some other reason, have you gathered information on problems in your community or country from:	O5-O10	Never	Sometimes	Often		
Within the last six months, have you as a part of a class assignment or for some other reason...	O11-O17	Did not do	Have considered	Once	More than once	
Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements	O19-O23	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	

Source: Craddock; Subreenduth and Fischer (2008)

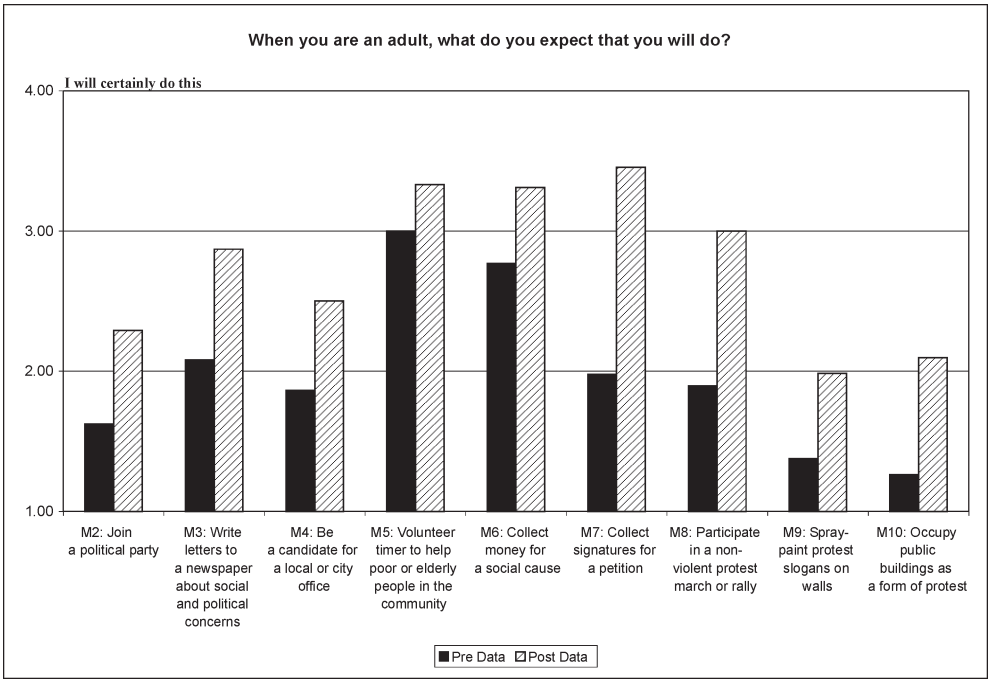
group on nearly every civic knowledge item. Its persistence across multiple items gives us confidence that these students were gaining from their experiences.

EVALUATING THE IMPACT ON ATTITUDES AND SKILLS

A second section on civic attitudes/skills included a total of 70 Likert scale items that spanned a variety of issues and responses in multiple choice format. By looking at the difference in the class average score for each item in the section of the survey before and after they participated in Project Citizen we attempted to see what, if any, impact participation in the program in their schools was having. Polish students demonstrated statistically significant differences in averaged class responses on five of the civic attitude/skills sections and therefore showed a wide variety of change (See Table 1).

For example, Polish students participating in Project Citizen were asked their response to the expectation that immigrants should give up languages and customs in a democracy. Before Project Citizen they responded that this was 'somewhat bad for democracy', however, after participation in Project Citizen they their average response decreased an entire category and their class average response became that such an expectation was 'very bad' for democracy. The program was clearly changing attitudes and represented an increased understanding and tolerance of ethnic and linguistic minorities in a country that has seen an increase in the number of economic immigrants entering the European Union from further into Eastern Europe.

Students were also more likely to increase their expectation and willingness to take part in political participation. Nine separate categories saw changes in response, including the largest changes where students were more likely to say they expected to collect signatures for a petition and/or participate in a non-violent protest (See Figure 2).



Source: Craddock, Subreenduth and Fischer (2008)

In the skills section Polish students showed an increase in the actual usage of both media sources and government offices as a means of collecting data for a school assignment. Increases in this area imply that Polish students increased their non-school/textbook collection of information while participating in Project Citizen.

INVESTIGATING CLASSROOM PRACTICES

If we are to work with teachers and schools to duplicate and improve on such impacts as those demonstrated by the Project Citizen program in Poland, then further information is needed from the teachers and classrooms where the program was carried out. In this study such information came from qualitative data that was also collected through a variety of means. After selecting the sample schools randomly to participate in the study an effort was made to visit each of the schools and communities chosen. Individuals were trained on a set of interview questions and a site visit protocol. Over the course of that school year in Poland, almost 100 schools developed Project Citizen projects. Altogether, over 2000 teachers and students worked to complete a local project focused on a community issue. Teachers reported finding out about Project Citizen from leaflets and the website of the Center for Citizenship Education. Some are even encouraged by students to apply to become part of the program.

Initially, training for teachers looking to us the Project Citizen program is provided over a two-day period. This training focused on the use of project methods of teaching and also the role of the teacher as a supporter of youth activity. This altering of the traditional Polish teacher role and methodology is a significant aspect of the program and mentioned by almost every teacher interviewed. In an important aspect, student leaders also participated in a parallel training that lasted over five hours. These student leaders were trained on the project method, identifying community issues, and leading tasks. They were taught how to prepare a plan, build a team and divide roles.

When teachers were asked how they proceed to work with the students it is clear that the training impacts the manner in which teachers approach the task. Interviewed teachers talked about „assisting", „let them act on their own", „Students should mobilize peers on their own." Many of the teachers also talked about the clear fit with the curriculum. All were teachers of civics, specifically the KOSS curriculum if they were in the middle schools. As one teacher said, „I teach the students (about) civil society and the necessity of civic engagement. In that project students gained practice for the theory taught." Teachers interviewed described the natural way that the projects fit the section on community they were expected to teach during civic education class.

As a result of the visits being spread across the year, it became clear that Project Citizen is implemented in such a manner that it is ongoing, meets weekly or biweekly and that the various steps (planning, research, action) occur over a significant part of the school year. These classes and meetings occur in the afternoon after the normal class time. By February, many of the projects were already planned or in process, they had been the topic of local media coverage and were engaged in fundraising activities designed to pay for aspects of the projects.

The biggest issues that were raised in the interview process reflect an important aspect of Project Citizen in Poland. Student groups are expected to identify an issue, propose a solution and, most importantly, put that solution into action. As a result, challenges have included fundraising for the cost of projects and also how to deal with failure when the local city council says no to a project idea. Some teachers also discussed the struggle of the students to see all of the logistical issues embedded in their solutions and project ideas.

However, teachers often talked of the prospect of the national showcase, a chance to share ideas with peers from across Poland as a key aspect of the motivation. The schools feel the positive energy of the projects, pride from the head teacher (Principal) about the way the projects add to the community profile of the

school, and the significant media coverage the projects are provided.

Teachers also described significant things that they saw students gaining by participation in Project Citizen. They described the students as „more active", „self-confident", „gaining self-independence", and that they demonstrated entrepreneurship. For middle school students and young high school students to accomplish a learning task that, as one teacher put it, „makes (them) courageous in contacts with institutions and strangers" is a significant step in many of these communities and schools.

Parents and community members are very supportive of the projects. They understand, according to the teachers interviewed, what their children gain from participating in Project Citizen. In some projects the community is surveyed and often parents or community members are involved in putting the identified solution into action. For a number of schools, the local media attention on television or in the press is also a significant positive.

The culmination of the Project Citizen program in Poland is the national showcase. Held each year, the showcase during the year of the study involved student groups arriving in a central Warsaw location and displaying the various aspects of the steps of their project. As the students shared their projects and talked to visitors walking amongst them they once again demonstrated their new skills of communication, their new knowledge about their ability to impact change in their community and continued evidence that schools can impact the development of democratic citizens.

CONCLUSION

As you approach the Boys secondary school in Migori, Kenya you find a single story building where classrooms are made up of desks and rows. The teacher's desk sits raised on a platform and walls reflect the international image of the work of schooling. When you talk to the teacher he will complain about the heavy workload implied in the syllabi that come from the education offices in Nairobi. Students in these grades have exams to pass and there is never enough time. To complicate things, there is no school exam for Geography, History and Civics, the Kenyan subject most often called GHC. How will the teacher be convinced that lessons about and for democracy matter? His students will not take a school-based test, however, he is faced with the question of whether schools can impact their students and the development of democratic habits of mind; the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to become active citizens of the societies they inhabit?

Both the IEA study of the 1990's (Torney-Purta, Schwille & Amadeo, 1999) and the Teach for Democracy study (Craddock, Subreenduth & Fischer, 2007) would say that the answer to that question is yes. As a result, it is possible to propose that other classrooms utilizing active teaching methods, engaging students in deliberation and developing points of inquiry about issues and conditions in the community might also be able to duplicate the success of Project Citizen and other teaching strategies and models.

Programs such as Project Citizen need to be shared within and outside networks of other educators interested in improving democracy education in their communities. The teacher in Migori, Kenya might find the program to be exactly what his school needs. Such a teacher will 'borrow' the idea, negotiate the editing and revising of the program to reflect the cultural context of western Kenya. And yet, at an essential deep level democratic knowledge, skills and attitudes will still be at the center of the program and its methods. „(B)orrowing is not copying but rather... Provides a concept to examine how patterns of thought move through and are transmutted in different layers of the local and global systems" (Popkewitz, 2004). And as the teacher struggles with the testing and overloaded syllabi so prevalent around the world, his students just might develop the ability to impact the community and help it improve.

As those of us who believe that schools have a role to play in the improvement of democratic society continue to share and learn from our colleagues in countries and communities all around the world we do so within a growing body of evidence that such growth and development

will, in fact, occur. Dewey (1916) stressed the importance of deliberation as the foundation for democracy and the need for teachers to model it in service to the public good. He highlighted the need in democratic classrooms for just such deep and disciplined inquiry as is seen in programs like Project Citizen. By understanding the important role that schools, teachers and classrooms play for young people we take a massive first step in working to improve the conditions of democratic societies.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Much of the data analysis described in this paper is based on the work of Alden Craddock, Sharon Subreenduth and the author. The full study compares the results of Project Citizen across four countries. For more information see Craddock, A; Subreenduth, S. and Fischer, J. (2008) Assessing Project Citizen: A Four Country Civic Education Assessment (under review).

[2] Special thanks to Professor Krzysztof Kosela from the University of Warsaw – the Polish coordinator of the IEA study for providing us with the original translation.

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