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CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

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The Role of Civic Communication in Teaching World Citizenship

Irena Zaleskenė

Vilnius Pedagogical University (Lithuania)

Civic communication: what it is and how it could be taught?

All countries are looking for ways to help the younger generation to become responsible and active citizens in the contemporary globalised world. This is particularly so in countries that are becoming more multicultural. Many researchers have suggested that classical conventional citizenship education is no longer an effective way to prepare citizens for taking their roles in global society. Establishing stronger human relations between people, communities and nations is a necessary precondition for democracy, peace and stability, as well as for sustainable cultural, political and social development. In this paper we make an assumption that teaching civic communication could be a possible way for young people to accept and understand different opinions and different patterns of behaviour.

The concept of communication itself has many different connotations. Many researchers agree it is an inclusive concept, meaning 'to give a share of; to transmit; to hold intercourse' (Casell, 2000). Communication takes place 'when one mind so acts upon his environment that another mind is influenced and.... by this' (Curson, 2004). Some researchers try more specific definitions for communication in the teaching and learning process. For example, communication is described as either the process by which people attempt to share meaning through the transmission of symbolic messages (Stoner, 2004) or as the transference of information from sender to the receiver, with the information being understood by the receiver (Koontz,). Having in mind these definitions we can state that successful communication must have two elements: understandable content and the ways and methods by which this content could be understood.

On the content of communication in a multicultural society, community problems, social and cultural issues and related civic subjects could be seen as the main components of this. This differs from concepts in the literature such as 'political communication', 'ethical communication', etc. We see the concept of 'civic communication' as the most powerful in this context.

As to the methods of communication, deliberation as a communication process could be seen as a method for teaching civic communicative skills. Deliberation 'is public discussion and decision making that aims to reach resolution, wherever possible, and to live respectfully with those reasonable disagreements that remain unresolvable' (Guttman, 2001). One of the teaching deliberative skills models is the Structured Academic Controversy (Johson, 2002), presented below.

Structures Academic Controversies are a sequence of steps in which students examine two sides to an issue. Issues are framed such that they can be approached from 'pro' and 'con' positions, for example, 'Should voting be compulsory in a democracy?' It is used to help achieve consensus around a controversial public issue, not to 'win' the debate.

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Thus, participants are encouraged to understand and develop the best possible position within their group. Conceptual conflicts motivate students to actively search for more information, new experiences, and to develop their own more adequate cognitive as well as affective perspectives. It helps students develop attitudes and skills that are consistent with democratic citizenship, such as tolerance, perspective-taking, critical thinking, and problem solving

A Transatlantic project: 'Deliberating in a Democracy'

This project is to run for five years (2004-2009) and will involve about 100 secondary school teachers and more than 1000 students from different locations in the Czech Republic, Chicago, Estonia, Denver, Lithuania, Los Angeles, Russia, Azerbaijan and Washington DC.

The two major goals of the project are:

- To teach students about acceptance and understanding of unknown positions and attitudes through the deliberative process 'Structured Academic Controversy'.
- To document and describe the experience of teachers and students engaged in this.

The project involved three staff development sessions, followed by three classroom deliberations, student deliberations on electronic message boards, teacher exchanges and videoconferencing. The first two years of the project were mainly concerned with staff development, including:

- **Content Focus**, to improve and deepen professors' and teachers' knowledge of democratic principles and processes, and their understanding of effective methods of teaching this to diverse students. This focus is through seminars, working with legal and political content experts, using primary sources, and teaching with materials and curricular resources developed by the DID Partner Organizations.
- **Active Learning** is a process for analytic teaching and studying. More than modelling and debriefing active lessons or just engaging teachers in small and large group discussions, it involves teachers and professors in reviewing student work, observing, co-teaching, and having adequate planning time during each staff development meeting.
- **Coherence**: this is important to consider the goals, standards, and assessments required in the different sites. Two ways to address this are involving teachers in selecting the content for deliberation and in providing email access for teachers to work with colleagues across sites.
- **Adequate Duration**: not only the total number of contact hours that participants spend in staff development, but the span of time over which the activity occurs. Ideally, contact time is interspersed with opportunities for teachers to experiment with what they have learned in their classrooms.

- **Collective Participation** creates a learning community with similar needs and interests and provides support to the group. Teachers have similar teaching assignments, an interest in the subject, and a commitment to improving learning using deliberation as a method to improve student learning and promote democracy.
- **Form or Organization Suited to Achieving Significant Change** to provide the five factors listed above. Each DID site determines the format best suited to its needs - study groups, teacher networks, mentoring, and/or action research.

Results of the evaluation of the project

After the first year of the project activities an evaluation was carried out by a team from the University of Minnesota. These results are largely based on the report of Patricia Avery, team leader.

The evaluation was based on a five-level model for evaluating professional development (Guskey, 2000), which includes teachers' reactions to staff development sessions, teachers' learning from staff development sessions, organizational support and change, teachers' use of new knowledge and skills in their classrooms, and student learning outcomes. Data was collected through interviews (with students, teachers, school administrators and national project managers), focus groups, observations, and a survey.

The main findings were:

- The deliberative model Structured Academic Controversy served as a vehicle for increased discussion between students and their teachers about national and international issues. 85 % of students reported a significant increase in the amount of discussion with their teachers about national and international issues, but the same was not true for discussions with peers and parents.
- The model is not a solution for all that troubles democratic societies, nor is it a pedagogical approach that replaces everything else. But it teaches students that conflict is inherent in public issues, and that deliberation is a process for thinking deeply and purposefully about these issues. The project took part in different sites, and countries at various stages in their histories as democracies, which suggests the strength of the model.

One of the Lithuanian students commented:

[The deliberations] will help us to listen to each other, that's the main point, I think, in democratic discussion and then the material was very interesting so we learned about certain educational political situations in various countries...and so how we want to, to begin to be interested in some kinds of things we weren't interested in before.

This report only presents a small part of the results, from the first year of the project. Evaluation is planned after each year, which will give more meaningful results. At the

end of the project (2009) we will draw the conclusions on the effectiveness of deliberation for teaching civic communication.

Conclusions

The literature suggests that deliberation can be considered as a way of positive civic communication. Data from the evaluation of the project showed that teachers were generally satisfied with the staff development sessions; and that students were being exposed to multiple perspectives, and giving consideration to those perspectives. In the next stages of the project questions need to be addressed:

- Are students inclined to respond to issues in a yes/no fashion? Such an outcome would seem to have limited advantages to a democracy in which multiple perspectives almost always mean more than two perspectives.
- Does the model promote dichotomous thinking? This may result from framing the issue in a 'pro' versus 'con' manner.
- Our data shows some differences between countries. Does this difference matter in terms of student experience? Were the differences the result of purposeful decisions made by the teachers? Or the result of misunderstandings from the teacher workshops?

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