

# **CREATING A CITIZENSHIP CURRICULUM: WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE WAY STUDENTS LEARN TO BE CITIZENS?<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

In recent times, the global community has had to respond to massive turbulences such as the financial tsunami, the ‘swine flu’ pandemic and what seems like ongoing international terrorism. At the same time, there are the recurrent issues of the ongoing dislocations caused by wars, historic conflicts and tensions. The need for effective programmes of citizenship education is more apparent now than ever.

This paper reviews recent research concerned with the citizenship curriculum and student learning. It draws on international literature to examine how different societies have responded to the need for school programmes of citizenship education and it will identify international best practice in this area. It focuses particularly on empirical research in an attempt to identify those variables that best facilitate student learning of citizenship knowledge and skills.

*Based on this review, a new framework for citizenship curriculum is proposed to meet the ongoing challenges that seem to be a feature of living in this new century.*

**Key words:** Citizenship curriculum, Teaching and Learning Citizenship.

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## Introduction

Almost ten years ago as we stood on the brink of this new century there were hopes and dreams of a new age. An age that would be more humane, more kind, more accommodating, more tolerant, more accepting, less confrontationist, less combative, less confronting, less selfish and less hurtful. Despite Barak Obama's urging that we "dare to hope", we have seen little of these attributes. In the past ten years we have witnessed the rise of international terrorism bringing death and destruction, a tsunami that wrought extraordinary damage across the region, prolonged wars the rationales for which remain highly contested, a financial meltdown the impact of which was felt across continents and recovery from which is still under way, the escalation of nuclear capabilities in the hands of unstable and politically volatile nations and ongoing conflicts inherited from the previous century that have remained as immune from solutions they were then. It is perhaps for this reason that Stanford University's President said recently (Hennesy, 2009, p.6) :

the problems facing the world seem more urgent than ever, and it is clear that we need new approaches to address the challenges...our goal is to educate our students so they will discover needed solutions and become the kind of leaders our planet desperately needs

In reality, this new century has made life more challenging and demanding so that now much more is expected of citizens and consequently of citizenship education. Ironically, however, future citizens do not seem to be in a good space to be able to confront the mega-issues that confront their societies. Bennett (2005, p.5):

Living in these disrupted social contexts, young citizens find greater satisfaction in defining their own political paths, including local volunteerism, consumer activism, support for issues and causes (environment, human rights), participation in various transnational protest activities, and efforts to form a global civil society by organizing world and regional social forums (Bennett, 1998; O'Toole, 2004). Bang (2003) has called this a generation of "everyday makers" who define their own sense of politics according to networks of personal relationships aimed at adding value to their lived experiences.

Bennett (2005, pp. 6-7) refers to young people with this personalist orientation as "the new 'self-Actualizing citizen' who may see her political activities and commitments in highly personal terms that contribute more to enhancing the quality of personal life, social recognition, self esteem, or friendship relations, than to understanding, support, and involvement in government". He contrasts the 'self Actualizing citizen' with what he calls the 'dutiful citizen' who "is expected to learn about the basic workings of government and related political institutions, to understand the values of the national civic culture, to become informed about issues and make responsible voting choices. The comparisons are quite marked as shown by Bennett's (2005) attempt to contrast what he calls AC and DC versions of citizenship responsibilities:

**Table 1**

*The Divided Citizenry: The traditional civic education ideal of the Dutiful Citizen (DC) vs. the emerging youth experience of self- Actualizing Citizenship (AC)*

Actualizing Citizen (AC)	Dutiful Citizen (DC)
Diminished sense of government obligation – higher sense of individual purpose	Obligation to participate in government centered activities
Voting is less meaningful than other, more personally defined acts such as consumerism, community volunteering, or transnational activism	Voting is the core democratic act
Mistrust of media and politicians is reinforced by negative mass media environment	Becomes informed about issues and government by following mass media
Favors loose networks of community action – often established or sustained through friendships and peer relations and thin social ties maintained by interactive information technologies	Joins civil society organizations and/or expresses interests through parties that typically employ one-way conventional communication to mobilize supporters

Taken from Bennett (2005, p.7)

Bennett's view is not an uncommon one. Other scholars have made similar points (Putnam, 1995; Youniss et al., 2002) and there have been a number of studies that have sought to identify the correlates of young people's civic engagement in attempts both to understand and enhance it (Fahmy, 2006; Saha, Print and Edwards, 2005; Menezes, 2003; Bekkers, 2005 ; Keulder and Spilker, 2001). We need to be aware, however, that there is a social context that constructs the way young people respond to the external environment, otherwise we are likely to blame young people for not being more 'publicly spirited' and more 'other' oriented. That is to say, a danger with this line of thinking is that it can descend to leveling personal blame rather than looking at issues in a broader context. Elsewhere, for example, I have talked about the notion of the 'self regulating citizen' (Kennedy, 2007). promoted by neo-liberal conceptions of the nation state in which individuals are encouraged to look after themselves rather than rely on state provision and to seek solutions to community problems that will enhance their own well-being. It could be argued that the rampant hyper-capitalism so pervasive throughout this century and the likely cause of the financial collapse in October 2008 was itself a product of this kind of neo-liberal thinking: all that matters in this context is the aggrandizement of the individual at the expense of the good of others and of society in general. Thus if our young people seem inward looking, self concerned and obsessed with their own social well being, the causes are likely to be as much in the values that our societies have promoted over the past two decades as in the personal predilections of young people.

The issue for educators, however, is how address the current context in such a way that young people, citizens of the future, can be empowered to play a critical and constructive role in their respective societies. The policy tools are actually quite limited for this task but since we need to rely on ‘soft’ policy approaches to meet ‘hard’ policy objectives. The questions for this paper, therefore, are: Given the context described above, how can the school curriculum be constructed to meet the citizenship needs of young people in our societies and how can research assist this task? To address this question the following issues will be discussed:

1. The formal curriculum – is there a preferable mode and what should be the content?
2. The informal curriculum - how important is it in this century?
3. Teaching and learning – what do we know?
4. Schools as learning environments for future citizens – how should they operate?
5. What might a research based citizenship curriculum look like?

### **The formal curriculum – mode and content**

Much time could be spent defining what is meant by “curriculum” but for the purposes of this paper, I shall take the classic definition: “all the experiences a student has under the influence of the school”. But I want to supplement it by saying that these experiences are selected from all the possible experiences available and possible. That is to say, the formal curriculum results from a process of selection – it does not consist of all possible knowledge, skills and values – but a selection of these. This selection is often made by government agencies or quasi government agencies or schools and sometimes even teachers. However it is made, the formal curriculum consists of what someone, somewhere, sometime, thinks is important for young people to know.

The question for the citizenship curriculum is how to make it a part of students experiences; or put another way, how to make it part of the curriculum offerings of schools. There is a competition for time amongst all possible knowledge, values and skills that could be included: which is more important: Maths? Science? Mother Tongue Language? A Second Language? History? Geography? Economics? Art? Music? Physical Education? Religious Studies? Citizenship Education? Education authorities will often make the decision about the form that different curriculum areas will take, how much time to allocate and how it should be assessed. For citizenship education this has resulted in different modes of curriculum delivery being adopted across countries. Yet how effective are these different modes? If the education of future citizens is important for our societies we need to be able to identify modes of delivery that will provide the results we want. This issue has been the focus of some work my colleagues and I at HKIEd have been doing recently<sup>2</sup> (Kennedy

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et al., 2009). I would like to share with you the preliminary results because it represents a research-based answer to the issue of effective curriculum delivery.

Using data from the IEA Civic Education Study and supplementary information from a range of other studies we identified possible modes of curriculum delivery used across twenty eight countries. These are shown below, drawn from (Kennedy et al., 2009).

Several points can be made from the table on the following page. First, delivery modes are either compulsory or non-compulsory and there is considerable variation cross the sample countries. Second, within these two categories of delivery the curriculum may be organized as a single subject, both as a single subject and integrated across other subjects and as an integrated cross curriculum theme. We have developed a number of models<sup>3</sup> to try to assess the effectiveness of each of these modes in relation to student learning. Our results indicate two things: student get better results when citizenship education is delivered as a compulsory single subject and the results are statistically significantly different from the results of those students who experience other modes of delivery. The caveat is that the model also shows it is not the mode of delivery that causes these results – the mode of delivery accounts for a very small amount of the variance in the model. We now believe we need more complex models and we are building those to try to identify the variables that may work side by side with mode of delivery to account for enhanced student learning. Policy makers need to take a serious look at citizenship education as a single compulsory subject in the school curriculum, at least as a starting point, if they wish to provide an effective context in which civic learning can take place

**Table 2. Mode of curriculum delivery of citizenship education at grade 7-9 in 1999**

Country	Terminology	Mode of curriculum delivery (approach)		References
		Separate or Integrated/cross-curricular	Compulsory or not	
Australia	History, Geography, Social Studies, Economics, Commerce and Legal Studies, Learning Areas of Society and Environment	Integrated and cross-curricular	Non-compulsory	Print 1996; Torney-Purta, Schwille, and Amadeo 1999
Belgium (French Community)	History, Social Sciences, Philosophical Courses, Religion and Non-denominational Moral Education	Integrated and cross-curricular	Non-compulsory	Eurydice 2005; Torney-Purta et al. 1999
Bulgaria	Students' Class, Man and Society, Literature, History and Civilization, Geography and Economy, etc.	Integrated and cross-curricular	Non-compulsory	Torney-Purta et al. 1999
Canada	Social Studies, History, Law, Political Science, Economics, Sociology etc.	Integrated and cross-curricular	Non-compulsory	Kerr 1999a; Torney-Purta et al. 1999
Chile	Civic Education	Separate subject	Compulsory	Reimers 2007
Colombia	Social Sciences, Ethics and Moral Education Areas of Education	Integrated and cross-curricular	Compulsory	Torney-Purta et al. 1999
Cyprus	Civic Education	Separate subject and integrated	Compulsory	Birzéa et al. 2004; Eurydice 2005; Torney-Purta et al. 1999
Czech Republic	Civic Education/Civics	Separate subject	Compulsory	Birzéa et al. 2004; Eurydice 2005; Torney-Purta et al. 1999
Denmark	Social Studies, History, Danish	Integrated and cross-curricular	Compulsory	Birzéa et al. 2004
England	Education for Citizenship	Integrated and cross-curricular	Non-compulsory	Kerr 1999a; Torney-Purta et al. 1999
Estonia	Civics/Social Education	Separate subject and integrated	Compulsory	Birzéa et al. 2004; Eurydice 2005
Finland	History and Social Studies	Integrated	Compulsory	Birzéa et al. 2004; Eurydice 2005
Germany	Social Studies, History, Politics, Geography, Religion, Language and Economy	Integrated	Decided by individual states, mostly compulsory	Birzéa et al. 2004; Eurydice 2005; Torney-Purta et al. 1999

<sup>3</sup> Ordinary least squares regression models

Yet a student's curriculum experience is made up of more than just the formal content within a particular curriculum framework. The formal curriculum can be delivered in a variety of ways that may or may not engage students. Thus we included in our model students' perceptions of their classroom climate in citizenship education lessons – referred to as the 'Open Classroom Climate Scale' (Torney-Purta et al., 2001, pp138-140, 151). The extent to which students perceived that they had the opportunity to ask questions and raise issues in class was a positive predictor of students' civic learning in all models. The  $\beta$ s for all models fell within a small range ( $\geq .10, \leq .11$ ) but were significant as in the original study (Lehmann et al., 2001, p. 151). Thus the way teachers create a learning environment in the classroom can influence students' engagement and consequently their learning, and this is irrespective of the actual mode of curriculum delivery. Therefore, this area is entirely within the realm of the school and classroom teachers. Teaching makes a difference!

### **The informal curriculum – learning in different ways**

There is a formal structured curriculum representing knowledge, skills and values seen to be important by society – it is usually written down in curriculum documents and endorsed by different groups. The compulsory single subject curriculum referred to above would be an example. In addition, however, students have other experiences in schools that are not so structured. These might include clubs, societies, sporting teams, student councils, choir, drama groups etc. In the IEA Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta et al., 2001, p151) it is reported that student participation in a school councils had a small, direct and positive effect on students' civic learning ( $\beta = .09$ ). In a secondary analysis of the European data, Turney-Purta and Barber, (2005) showed that there was a medium correlation between participation in a school council and future plans for active participation ( $r = .43$ ). In a different analysis in the same paper they showed that in most European countries participation in a school council accounted for only a small amount of the variance in student learning about voting. While these results may appear somewhat meager, they were the first attempt to try to measure these effects. In addition, there are some further indications of the potential of informal learning to enhance , and in at least one case, influence negatively, students' civic leaning.

Turney-Purta and Barber, (2005) reported that reading newspapers is a moderate predictor of students likelihood to vote ( $\beta$ s across their European sample were  $\geq .10, \leq .21$ ). Torney-Purta et al. (2001, p.151) reported that the frequency of watching TV and news amongst the international sample was also a moderate predictor of students' likelihood to vote in the future ( $\beta = .13$ ). These could be activities that take place out of school, but they on the radio) that there are differential levels of trust in the media across countries. Thus, it is not just could equally well take place within school if they were developed as instructional and learning activities. Yet Husfeldt et al. (2005) have shown in relation to the media in general (based a new scale "Trust in the media" that included three items on the extent to which students trusted news in the newspaper, on TV and reading or listening in general that is the issue but how this is done and in particular whether students are able

to apply critical skills to the task. Amadeo, Torney-Purta and Barber (2004) have shown the positive relationship between media consumption and both students' civic knowledge and their attitude to future civic engagement. Torney-Purta and Barber (2005) have pointed out "school-based programs that introduce students to newspapers and foster skills in interpreting political information may be of value". This may be a particularly important thing to do for students whose home environments do not provide them with these informal learning opportunities. It seems important not to leave these things to chance if we know they are capable of supporting learning.

Not all informal learning experiences are positive. Torney-Purta et al. (2001, pp.151-152) reported that when students spend a lot of time outside of home in the evenings they will tend to have lower civic learning scores. In their model, "evenings spent outside the home" was negatively related to civic knowledge ( $\beta = -.09$ ). This simple item has been replicated in many studies with similar results. Gage et al. (2005) reported that young people who spend an excessive amount of time away from home in the evenings are more likely to be engaged in alcohol consumption, smoking, bullying and a range of other problems. Kuntsche et al. (2009) reported in a cross national study that while cannabis use was reduced amongst young people in most countries between 2001 and 2006, that frequency of use was related to the amount of time they spent out with their friends in the evening. In the strictest sense, this variable is outside the ambit of schools – it is a home and parental responsibility. Yet it is important to highlight that there are very significant social forces working against the gains that students might make in school. Can schools counter these external forces? Perhaps the most important way is to build strong home-school partnerships so there is a consistency between the two. Adequate counselling services in schools may also be of assistance. Importantly, we should recognize that young people are subject to many pressures and the role of schools is important, but not all embracing. But schools should not feel powerless – there are areas of

### **Teaching and learning – moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

I have already mentioned the importance of classroom climate and the development of an open a classroom climate so that students are free to express their opinions and ask questions. The whole realm of teaching provides opportunities to create a conducive environment for students' civic learning. Bennett (2005) provides a starting point for consideration : "1) young people increasingly prefer their information in online, interactive environments, and 2) veteran internet users are among the most informed citizens (Pew, 2004)". Teaching with technology has become a popular theme but it seems citizenship teachers are quite conservative when it comes to pedagogy. Torney-Purta et al. (2001, pp.162-164) reported that across the twenty six countries they surveyed, "there is evidence of a preponderance of teacher-centered formats. A combination of textbooks with recitation (and sometimes worksheets is used with the highest frequency)". This survey is now ten years old and the instructional choices from which teachers chose as part of the survey did not include any reference to teaching with technology. Yet a recent collection of case studies on citizenship pedagogies across the Asia Pacific region confirmed the

continuing dominance of relatively conservative teaching strategies (Kennedy et al., 2010). For example, Lawthong (2010) reported that “the recognized need for additional training in teaching methods is consistent with the finding mentioned earlier that many Thai social studies teachers reported lacking confidence in using a variety of teaching methods”. It is also the case in those countries dominated by examination cultures that pedagogies in general tend to be conservative. The challenge is considerable if pedagogies for citizenship are to become more innovative and engaging.

The discourse on this topic at the moment is pervasive (see, for example, *Innovating to Transform Teaching for 21st-Century Learning* (<http://www.futureofed.org/resource/library/ModernizingToolsWhitePaper.pdf>) and at times seductive. Social networking, mobile learning, learning commons, games, wikis, and more are promoted as technology based processes that can engage young people in learning. Yet we have little evidence on the effectiveness of these learning processes or the capacity of teachers to incorporate them into daily classroom activities. Our education systems have historically lacked the capacity to scale up these kinds of teaching innovations to move beyond pilot studies and enthusiastic early adopters. On the other hand, we continue to utilize teaching and learning strategies that characterized not just the twentieth century but the nineteenth century! We have not moved ahead and it remains a challenge – how to teach young twenty first citizens in ways that are consistent with their preferred learning modes but will deliver or help students construct the kinds of knowledge, values and skills needed for twenty first century citizenship.

### **Schools as learning environments for future citizens - saying and doing**

The concluding note in the previous section raises the issues as to whether classrooms can become conducive places for promoting effective civic learning. The same question can be raised for schools themselves. The previous sections have pointed to the importance of formal and informal learning as the key tasks of schools in helping young people become active and engaged citizens. In addition to these micro components of a school’s operations there has for a long time been a strong advocacy for “democratic schools”, or schools that reflect democratic management and governance structures that can nurture future citizens (for example see Backman and Trafford, 2007). Gore (2001, p 2) identified 6 key components of a democratic school:

- inclusive consultation and collaboration
- open communication
- equality of opportunity in representation
- freedom for critical reflection
- appropriate decision making processes
- a focus on the common good.

Unfortunately, there are few systematic research studies to support this advocacy. Nevertheless, literature abounds on the value of such schools whether from a leadership and management perspective (Chapman et al., 1995) or school accountability perspective (Jones,

2006). While the concept of the ‘democratic school’ is intuitively appealing to democratic educators, systematic research is needed to see what features of such schools enhance student learning.

Within all schools, however, we do know that participative opportunities for students provide them with a positive experience of schools but particularly they enable students to see what can be achieved when people work together in groups (Torney-Purta et al., 2001, pp.133). Yet results of a cross national study reported by Flanagan et al. (1998) were not conclusive on the issue of the impact of democratic school practices. First, the results were gendered so that these practices operated differently for boys and girls. In only two countries (the United States and the Czech Republic) did democratic school practices predict boys’ future civic commitment ( $\beta_s = .13$  and  $.14$  respectively) and for girls in only one country (the United States,  $\beta = .16$ ). “Sense of membership of a school” was a stronger predictor of civic commitment, but not in all countries (for example the United States and the Czech Republic) and not uniformly within countries for both boys and girls (for example, significant for girls in the United States ( $\beta = .22$ ) but not boys ( $\beta = .03$ ) and the reverse in Bulgaria ( $\beta$  for boys =  $.12$  and for girls =  $.08$ ). Interestingly, however, one scale, “Family ethics of social responsibility”, was a significant predictor of civic commitment across all countries and for both boys and girls ( $\beta \geq .17, \leq .36$ ). This suggests that home factors are more stable and more influential than school factors thus reinforcing the necessity of strong home-school partnerships for citizenship education.

## Conclusion

Can we develop a research based model for a citizenship curriculum, teaching and learning? First, it has to be said that data is limited and this point has been demonstrated throughout this paper. Nevertheless, there are a number of principles that can be identified to assist policymakers and curriculum developers with the important task of constructing the citizenship curriculum.

First, the school is not the only agent involved in citizenship education. The community, family and peer also play a role. Any curriculum must consider these external influences. This paper has identified the importance of home—school-community partnerships as an important prerequisite for successful school curriculum. At the same time it has to be recognized that the community (and indeed families) can also provide negative experience for students.

Second, the environment of the school seems to play an important part in preparing young people for citizenship although exactly how it does this is not yet quite clear. Opportunities for participation and providing an environment that is supportive seem to play a role but these may work differently in different national contexts and for boys and girls within these contexts. Schools also provide opportunities for informal learning that can be creative and constructive and these need to be included as part of the full range of experiences for young people.

Third, the form the school curriculum takes may not be as important as the way it is enacted.

Fourth, classrooms provide learning opportunities related to the formal curriculum but they are also environments in which informal learning takes place. Open classroom climates should be encouraged but based on available data the learning gains are not great. Participation in classroom activities seem an important way to engage students so that their views and opinions are valued but also tested.

Fifth, there are interactions in curriculum delivery that are complex. The school curriculum is not an objective reality created apart from the broad social contexts that inevitably influence it. Creating the citizenship curriculum, therefore, is not a technical task that can follow simple prescriptions. It is a cultural task than can strive to be research based, keeping in mind the constraints imposed by the broader social contexts in which schools operate.

Hopefully, these principles will assist educations systems and schools with the key task of developing an effective citizenship curriculum. Yet more research is needed to enhance this model and this is a significant challenge for the future.

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