

Workshop Session 2

“Civic Empowerment and Community Building”

Report from the workshop
Saturday, December 3rd, 2005

Statement:

Ian Davies, University of York, United Kingdom

Models:

Milena Mushak, Federal Agency for Civic Education (BPB), Germany

“Participatory Budgeting – the Model of Berlin-Lichtenberg”

Alicja Pacewicz, Centre for Civic Education (CEO), Poland

“A school with class”

Claudia Zarikow, John F. Kennedy School, Germany

“Deliberation Forum / Programme Learning and Living Democracy”

Chair:

Gordana Miljevic, Open Society Institute, Hungary

Reporter:

Marc Lauriac, Germany

Dr. Ian Davies of the University of York began his presentation by suggesting that we should consider whether citizenship education is coherently expressed (articulation), supported by significant groups and individuals (legitimation), and implemented in such a way as to make things happen in schools and other communities (implementation).

He suggested that citizenship education emerges from both the civic republican (public contexts; responsibilities) and liberal (private context; rights) traditions and that we need to consider the meaning of what is being developed.

He reviewed the types of explicit citizenship education that have been developed in England since the 1960s (from civics, to political literacy, ‘new’ educations and different forms of citizenship education).

He suggested that the most recent introduction of citizenship education is related to the communitarian approach of the Blair governments. He outlined the meaning of citizenship that emerged from the Crick committee (social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy). He described the current National Curriculum for citizenship, drawing attention to the three interrelated strands of responsible action:

- Knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens;
- Developing the skills of enquiry and communication;
- Developing the skills of participation and responsible action.

A major research project led by the National Foundation for Educational Research has suggested that schools are at different stages of implementing citizenship education.

The labels 'focussing' (meaning hardly doing anything), 'developing', 'established' and 'advanced' (best practice) are used to describe those levels of implementation.

He drew attention to the recently developed handbook for continuing professional development that has been created by the Department of Education and Skills citizenship team. The citizenship team suggests that citizenship should mean legal and political status, involvement in public life and affairs and an educational activity. They advocate for a 'thick' approach to citizenship meaning that the approach should be 'pervasive' (not limited to schools but an integral part of all education for young people), 'inclusive' (an entitlement for all young people regardless of their ability or background) and 'lifelong' (continuing throughout life). Furthermore, they argue that the most effective form of learning is active (emphasises leaning by doing), interactive (uses discussion and debate), relevant (focuses on real life issues), critical (encourages young people to think for themselves), collaborative (employs group work and co-operative learning) and participative (gives young people a say in their own learning). The contexts for citizenship education are in the taught curriculum, through ethos and culture (initiating projects, students forums, peer mediation), and in the wider community (school exchanges, peer education, campaigns).

The Home Office has also joined the drive to promote citizenship education through its commitment to civil renewal. It suggests that civil renewal involves:

- 'active citizenship' – people who take responsibility for tackling the problems they can see in their own communities,
- 'strengthened communities' – communities that can form and sustain their own organisations, bringing people together to deal with their common concerns,
- 'partnership in meeting public needs' – public bodies who involve local people in improving the planning and delivery of public services.

Studies show that while 'micro participation' (specific voluntary activities of various kinds like for instance giving blood) is rising moderately, 'macro participation' (pressure group / political activity) is losing ground dramatically, when in fact, effective participation is proved to have a positive correlation with health, educational outcome and the feeling of well being. The good thing is that levels of participation can be rapidly altered by resolute action.

To conclude, Dr. Davies referred to some of the many challenges in developing citizenship education. Those challenges include philosophical and political considerations as well as those issues that seem more obviously and more simply to relate to implementation:

- Citizenship education should focus on world citizenship and on anti racism.
 - It is a school subject, thus requiring more investment in teacher development and training as it is done today.
 - There is a need for the development of functioning assessment methods and criteria.
 - Citizenship education should not impose rather but be the "strong bare bones" (B.Crick) to support other contents and leaving much room for different approaches.
 - The linking between schools and communities has to improve.
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Milena Mushak of the Federal Agency for Civic Education (BPB) presented the project of 'Participatory Budgeting' that has been developed as a pilot in the district of Berlin-Lichtenberg (257.956 inhabitants). The global aim of this project is to involve the citizens of Berlin-Lichtenberg in the decision process for the allocation of part of the funds of the budget of their district. Specific objectives are:

- to improve the information on the budget of the district,
- to ask the citizens on the prioritisation of the spending,
- to provide a "readable" budget (i.e. bundle all costs involved for the delivery of each public service concerned so to have an overview of how much each service costs).

The BPB together with the various German political foundations took part in the conception and implementation of this project. The whole coordination of the project was taken over by the BPB. It involved the organisation of workshops with citizens to launch the project, the development of a website detailing all the proceedings and documenting the results (www.buergerhaushalt-lichtenberg.de), and so on. A special effort was done to involve immigrants, young people aged 14+ and socially underprivileged.

Sine qua non for a broad acceptance and the credibility of the project were the negotiations with the parties elected in the district council to assure that each party agreed on the project and on its implementation. A steering committee was created with one representative of each political party, each with one vote, which did not reflect the balance of power within the district council where one party has the absolute majority (in this case, the PDS). This process was of absolute necessity to assure that this enterprise would be free of any political manipulation and would be recognised as valid by all political forces in place.

The 'participatory budget' that was discussed upon did not include expenses that were compulsory like for instance refuse collection, but only those that were negotiable such as the costs for adult education centres (VHS). This amounted to approximately €30m (5.83% of the budget).

Citizens were invited to give their opinion on this 'participatory budget' through the Internet, the distribution of 10.000 questionnaires, the organisation of various open councils. The voting process for the final citizens' recommendation on the 'participatory budget' was done through an opinion poll and an open council.

The consultation part of the project was finalised in August 2005. 4.000 citizens took part in the decision making and over 70 local facilities and NGOs were involved in the process. A short film and a handbook have been produced to be used for the implementation of such a project in other German cities. Thanks to the involvement of many voluntary workers, the overall budget for this action should not exceed €120.000.

Alicja Pacewicz of the Centre for Civic Education (CEO) presented the work of her NGO in the field of non formal education in schools. CEO promotes civic knowledge, practical skills and attitudes necessary in the building of democratic state founded on the rule of law and civil society. It operates an institute for the training of teacher.

Its model of civic education is based on three interrelated strands:

- Cognitive – knowledge and understanding (rules, institutions, citizen's rights, law etc.)
- Social – communication, social and civic skills (look for information, allies, discussing, stating, protesting, organizing etc.)
- Affective – attitudes, willingness to act, values (believing and standing up for beliefs)

Its main areas of operation are:

- Courses for teachers, textbooks, competitions
- Trainings for young leaders
- Methods of instruction: problem based learning, debate, discussion, simulation
- Learning by doing, experiential learning, service learning

CEO operates various models of community involvement:

- School projects: Leaflet about my town/village, local community problems opinion polls, public services, a visit to the courthouse, research on jobs available
- Local community projects: Youth Against Corruption, Project Citizen, Traces of the Past, Read it to Me
- Wider community: Young People Vote, Electoral Lighthouse, Youth in Europe, White Band Day

Project Youth Against Corruption

Involvement of students:

- Learn how to recognize situations that lead to corruption in everyday life (e.g. paying a bribe to the bus controller in order not to pay the ticket's price);
- Change their attitudes and level of tolerance for corruption in their own environment;
- Help local government to become more transparent, assist citizens in contacts with local authorities
- Students fight against corruption with poster campaigns, articles released in the local newspapers, leaflets, marches, happenings.

Coordination/Training:

- Anti-corruption in the national curriculum and the Transparent Poland project
- Teachers trained and not afraid to talk about corruption
- Students acting as monitoring bodies
- To monitor local authorities in order not to threaten them (such a project cannot work if the local authorities refuse any contacts with the students)
- Anti-corruption skills and strategies: identification, refusal, reporting
- Joint programme with European NGOs

Project Traces of the Past

Students explore their own town or its surroundings in order to discover interesting, though often neglected, buildings, places and other traces of the past – ruins, railway stations, cemeteries, life stories, legends. They dedicate themselves to taking care of their chosen historical object and symbolically adopt it. They restore it to the rightful place in their communities and its memory.

Students research information (desk and field research), they choose one object on which the activities will focus and reconstruct its history, collect documents and stories.

Project Citizen (MOD)

Preparing young people to effectively participate in public life - students identify social problems affecting their local community and select the one they find to be the most acute, they collaborate to work out their own solution to the issue and persuade the relevant local authorities to implement their solutions.

This project is part of the international 'Project Citizen', implemented in many countries all over the world.

This project implies:

- Active citizenship to be in the national curriculum and in the schools' priorities
- Teachers ready to rely on students' choices
- Teachers willing to spare the time for going out of school
- Teachers trained in leading the project
- Local authorities (and community) receptive to young people's ideas
- Creating possibility to have real impact (money, place, other resources)
- School projects from the same commune unite!

To conclude, the various problems that such projects have to face are the following:

- These projects sometimes end up in fictional community link and edu-fiction
- Students and teachers must be aware not to get instrumentalised by local officials
- Social tensions and political pressures are often involved
- Teacher has to act as coach and not as a partisan or a leader
- Space needed within the curriculum
- It has to be made on a voluntary basis which is not very easy to implement in school
- Teachers have to be trained before and throughout the project work
- Agendas should be set by teachers, not by the community

Claudia Zarikow of the John F. Kennedy School presented the "Deliberation Forum / Programme Learning and Living Democracy" project (www.deliberationsforum.de).

A deliberation means speaking openly and reasonably with the goal of reaching a gradual agreement between individuals with diverse opinions (Dr. Anne Sliwka). Deliberation Forums aim at promoting citizen involvement. Deliberative polls with fact-based and opinion-based questions are filled in by the participants at the beginning and at the end of the forum in order to examine how opinions change once citizens become more informed.

At the John F. Kennedy School, a class of 22 students has the goal to prepare a deliberation forum for the entire grade. A controversial question is defined as the subject for this forum, useful information is identified and gathered, experts and politicians are invited to debate with the students and the forum is organised.

The students attend a two day forum where they will acquire knowledge in an organized format, deliberate with peers and form a solid, educated opinion on the selected issue. They learn to respect other's opinion and gain the understanding of the need to be informed. The students organising the event learn also a lot about the chosen issue as well as very useful methods and skills to organise such forums.

A short discussion followed the presentations which focused on defining what we mean by civic empowerment, i.e.:

- Getting to feel that you have power.
- Gaining confidence.
- Having the willingness to take part in public life.

One prerequisite for civic empowerment is the will from those in power to share part of that power. At the same time, individual and structural circumstances that individuals are faced with have to be kept in mind.

After this discussion, the participants were separated in three groups to work on a specific issues.

1st Issue: Prerequisites for civic empowerment and community building

There exist prerequisites for civic empowerment and community building at 3 levels. At the individual level, prerequisites are knowledge (general and civic education), skills (critical thinking, communication) and behaviour (self esteem, self confidence).

At community level, prerequisites are knowledge (organisations, open communication, tradition) and a culture of tolerance for those who are different (individuals or other communities).

At society level, prerequisites are a proper education, strong institutions and democratic procedures. Furthermore, networking co operations have to be in place and common goals identified.

2nd Issue: Forms of EU cooperation to be promoted

- Develop a database for NGOs, projects and materials
- Improve the cooperation between the Council of Europe which has good ideas and the EU which has the necessary financial capacities
- More support for trans national projects and exchanges have to be allocated
- Special incentives should be developed to promote projects involving more countries. A good way to achieve this could be to require more paper work for a project involving only two countries than for one involving seven countries.
- Call for projects should be organised to implement the 'Plan D' of the EU so that it does not remain a theoretical plan.
- The use of best practice projects in different contexts and countries should be promoted.
- Benchmarking and evaluation techniques should be based on concrete projects, not on work developed within research institutes or public administrations.

3rd Issue: EU Policies to be worked on

- Immigration: More transparency in various country policies should be achieved leading to a harmonisation of regulations within the EU.
- Subsidiarity: The levels at which policies are formulated and implemented should be clarified (EU / national / regional / local).
- European Identity: Policies should be elaborated promoting the development and exploitation of the European identity.
- Inter generational dialogue: This is a vital issue in our European society which is aging at an alarming rate.
- Non EU countries: They should be better included in EU policies and project implementation.