



CENTER FOR PUBLIC DELIBERATION

The 21st Century Responsibilities of Citizenship Discussion Report from forum held on April 21, 2008 during the Spring 2008 Community Issues Forum

Introduction

At this year's Center for Public Deliberation (CPD) capstone event, we included a discussion entitled *The 21st Century Responsibilities of Citizenship*. The background information for the forum was developed by Mary Kathryn Hurd, Jessica Garrick and Martin Carcasson. This was the first year that CPD used citizenship as a forum topic, and so we approached it with the mentality that capstone could be the first step in a long-term project.

The basis for this discussion stems from the idea that many people are unhappy with the state of democracy in the United States. Studies cite decreasing voting numbers and trust in government, and increasing polarization, cynicism, and apathy among the populace. The media itself has become politicized, or otherwise tends to focus on image, spectacle, and strategy. Others argue that such proclamations are exaggerated, or misinterpreted, and that the current public apathy represents contentment with the status quo rather than a crisis of democracy. The many views on the current state of democracy led us to develop a discussion based on reexamining the roles of the 21st Century U.S. citizen. CPD's interest in this topic is directly related to our goal of improving civic education at all levels. Our public schools are charged with the responsibility of providing civic education to our youth, and therefore they have an important role in forming conceptions of citizenship. In the future, CPD wishes to examine this function of schools by developing a long-term project, which focuses on civic education.

Participants

In our discussion, there were nine students, eight of whom were enrolled in the capstone class. There were five non-students. However, only twelve people handed in their green pre surveys, meaning that we don't have complete information on everyone. Everyone in the room was Caucasian. Five participants were males and eight were females. Five people listed their political affiliation as democrat, one said liberal, one stated progressive. Another wrote down moderate, one said conservative, another said Republican and two said independent or nonaffiliated. Thus, while the majority stated democrat, liberal, or progressive, there was some amount of diversity among political affiliations in the room. Seven participants stated that their household income was less than 20K, two stated \$40-\$50K, and another stated more than \$74K. Two didn't answer this question. All of the students heard about the event in class, one non-student stated that they heard about it on the web, one from a friend, and another saw it on the CPD

mailing list. Five participants stated that this was their first public forum; five stated that they had been to 1-3 forums, one said 4-8, and another said more than eight.

The fact that all of our participants were Caucasian was the largest source of unbalance in the room. This is important as people who grow up as racial/ethnic minorities likely have very different perceptions of what it means to be a citizen. In the future, we should be committed to ensuring a more diverse audience.

The Process

The night of the event, we set up easels in each of the rooms reserved for us in the Hilton Hotel. After everyone was broken into groups – based on their own preferences - we took our group to our designated room. Here, everyone took their seats and finished filling out their pre-forum survey. We introduced ourselves, Mary Kathryn introduced the topic, and then we asked everyone to introduce him or herself and state their personal interest in the topic. The interests varied, all of the non-students present had high personal commitments to community involvement. Most of the students stated that they either were very involved, or wanted to be more involved. Some stated that it just sounded interesting. One who was not a citizen of the United States said that he was curious about the differences between the U.S., and Scotland. Then, Jessica introduced the format, and we began approach one. Our note takers were two graduate students in the Speech Communication department.

Analysis/Summary of the discussion

Reviewing the notes from the discussion and surveys, we will break down points of common ground, points of contention and key themes in the discussion.

The group found common ground in that there needed to be an increase in civic education in K-12, but that instead of having just one civics class in high school it needed to be incorporated into numerous classes in hands-on learning ways. It also needed to be taught from elementary on, that if civic education is introduced earlier and reiterated over it would make more of an impact on students. The group also felt that it is the teacher's responsibility when introducing civic education to get the students "fired up" by using creative, hands-on techniques.

Another point of common ground in the group is that we need to look at our media critically when evaluating information about our government. In turn we need to educate our students in how to critique media forms. There was a great deal of agreement within the group that STEM initiatives and civic education were not necessarily at odds with each other, but rather civic education could somehow be integrated in the current curriculums.

The dots showed that the group believed there is more to being a good citizen than just voting and contacting your representative. They agree it is not about education but about

making students aware of real issues, and maybe even introducing them to local issues to give them a hands-on, reality to these pressing issues. There was disagreement and tension on what kind of “real” issues from the community should be introduced to the students and at what age would be appropriate, for example; to take them to a homeless shelter or to bring an Iraq war veteran into the classroom. The dots showed common ground that we should teach students the values that go along with these “real” issues.

There was common ground in the discussion and according to the dots that the group did not agree with our approach that apathy was a sign that things are working and that change is not needed. Actually the group felt the opposite, they do feel apathetic and helpless, that their voice is not heard and their vote does not count but this apathy is not a sign that things are working well, but a sign that constituents are losing faith in their government.

Also a point of common ground with the group and with the dots; the group agreed that we need to look at our media critically when evaluating information about our government, and in turn we need to educate our students and children to be able to critique media. Most students don’t learn how to critique information that is put in front of them, they take what they see or hear as truth.

The dots showed agreement that capitalism should be an area of reform. We need to change so we don’t have just one bottom line, to make profit, but include what we call ‘triple bottom line’, that includes people and the environment all at the same importance as making profit.

Also a point of tension in the group that while they all agreed that globalization was undeniable and to learn about other cultures and societies was important, there was disagreement that global education was idealistic and that we have problems that are local and national that need to be addressed before we start trying to work on global problems.

Notes from the discussion

Approach 1: Citizens should be personally responsible

Appreciations

- People participate on their own free will, should we require participation? **(1 dot)**
- As an educator is it a personal responsibility to get students “fired up” **(1 dot)**
- Personal responsibility is important, you have to want to be involved
- People would get more involved with the “right issue(s) (uranium mining, rising gap prices, the draft)

Concerns

- Personally responsible = passive citizens
- “Minimal” approach minimum amount of effort.

- Tradeoff, we live in a rights based society so we can't require people to vote
- Marginalization of people who don't have resources
- Apathy isn't because things are working well **(2 dots)**
- People need to concentrate on other priorities, they are "numb" and overstressed
- Citizens have a feeling of helplessness and apathy, people feel that their vote can't change things **(2 dots)**
- We have a disconnection from reality
- Schools and teachers have a responsibility as well to engage students in civic education
- Information overload from the media and biased information, maybe the problem is partly the media
- Problem is a "democracy divide", where only those who are privileged enough to get an education vote while those who don't are too busy working and providing for themselves and others to get engaged in the political process. **(1 dot)**

Approach 2: Citizens should also be engaged and informed constituents

Appreciations

- We should tweak civic education, make it more 'authentic' and hands-on **(1 dot)**
- Place more focus on grassroots campaigning **(1 dot)**
- Put more emphasis on local political education; think locally for "larger" reform, it will have a branch out/trickle down effect.
- Total systemic reform is too idealistic **(1 dot)**
- A good start is more civic education earlier in K-12, and maybe make it media specific or include media critique as a part of civic education **(2 dots)**
- Educate citizens on moral/values that need to be implemented into decision making
- This is a good building block to move forward **(1 dot)**
- We need to look at our media critically and implement this early on in education, create ways to teach people to be critical of media. **(5 dots)**

Concerns

- Tweaking the system won't change, the entire system needs to change including campaign finance reform **(1 dot)**
- Not just about education but needs to include awareness of issue's that effect real people, more about consciousness, education and values **(7 dots)**
- Involvement with politics is difficult with all of the information overload
- Getting this involved is a lot of work
- Education makes a difference **(1 dot)**
- Being a 'good citizen' isn't just about being involved or staying informed, it means more **(1 dot)**
- There are more things that should be included in being involved in being an active "good" citizen (protests etc) not just about voting and contacting your representatives **(2 dots)**

- Polarization is a negative part of this system and in order to motivate people we must push for less polarization; elimination of “taking sides” **(1 dot)**
- Personal involvement is important **(1 dot)**
- Capitalism also should be an area of reform, triple bottom line is not just about making profit but should also include people and the environment. **(4 dots)**
- Education should be about process, not just issues **(1 dot)**
- Can we really reform campaign finance reform, isn't that too idealistic?
- Civic education needs to be reformed as well, not just add more of it, we need to “burn it down” and start over **(2 dots)**

Approach 3 - Citizens should also be collaborative problem solvers in their local communities

Appreciations

- Good to start with the local **(1 dot)**
- Helps with information overload/apathy, because the "issues" are local **(3 dots)**
- Empowered to make a difference at the local level
- change is possible **(3 dots)**
- More community involvement, equal access
- See more value on the local level
- Using media to be influential in a way different from organizations such as CPD
- enlighten students to be curious about "stuff", listen become engages **(3 dots)**
- Getting through to students by personal narratives about controversial issues-political engagement **(3 dots)**
- LOCAL ISSUES, but have a representation of information/ "speakers"
- Deliberation is education in and of itself

Concerns

- Why local issues will fit this model?
- There are (or should be) distinctions between personal or public issues
- How do we implement this in K-12 (what issues are appropriate?)
- Where is the role of parents in K-12, education and civic education with controversial issues; schools can be very censored **(1 dot)**
- Parents would need to be advocates of the process and the issue selection
- Does it really foster lively conversation? **(1 dot)**
- Whose role is it to organize it? What is the role of the citizen in organizing or issue framing?
- Real local issues or controversial issues may not be able to be deliberated. Will it always come back to debate?
- All people need to be involved for it work rather than just the "regulars"
- Public Deliberation doesn't have to look a certain way, mediated forms too.

Approach 4 - Citizens much take a global view of their responsibilities.

Appreciations

- Very important, but timely and huge (**2 dots**)
- Globalization is undeniable (**4 dots**)
- World traveling is a must (**1 dot**)
- World wide collaborative education
- Make local choices with the global effect in mind (**4 dots**)
- Exposure to what's out there

Concerns

- (Trade-off) Takes a lot of time, but it's a good idea
- (Trade-off) Hard to envision, but we're all in it together
- (Trade-off) Seems very idealistic to implement but we need to take care of each other
- We do need to address "local" or our nation's issues. We have many issues here (poverty, etc.)
- Personal issues are importing (caring, personal, recycling, biking)
- (Trade-off) Thinking globally is great, but we need to help people in our community
- (Trade-off) When you make a local choice you are impacting a global community.
- We should think of all our relationships with the world (local and global) and we should start with the local

Reflections

Questions 1: (Civic Education) Would you support an increased focus on civic education in K-12, even if that would take away from other current educational initiatives, such as current push for more math and sciences (STEM)?

- Incorporate civic education into courses- not just add a new class or standards
- Standardizes testing wastes time that we could spend educating, even spending on civic education and training for educators

Question 2: (School District) If you could say one thing to our local school district leadership concerning civic education, what would it be?

- Doing is learning
- Don't just focus on bringing students into the community but we need to bring the community into the classroom, give the students face time with public officials and spark an interest that way
- In government and civic education classes, focus on "how to" rather than the history, find a balance between the two.
- One class is not sufficient
- Testing isn't always effective, doing is (two people said this)
- Difference kind of testing might produce more desirable results (two people)
- Think outside the box, hitting the "head, heart, hands"

General observations:

Within the group there was a great deal of agreement on expanding civic education and a good discussion regarding what sort of issues are most appropriate to be engaged at the K-12 level.

Within the group we had difficulties distinguishing between what sorts of activities are activities would increase engagement in democracy. There was a great deal of discussion about how to present controversial issues and how to increase decision-making skills, etc. A few people stated that we need to teach children how to critically watch/read the media. There was a lot of trade offs discussed on the idea of global citizenship. The group felt that we do need to know more about global issues, but not necessarily at the expense of community and local issues.

Survey Results

10 out of the 15 people in attendance were CSU students.

Questions:

1. Civic Education should be increased in K-12
SA - 11 A -3 N-1 D -0 SD-0
2. Our current political system prohibits active citizenship
SA - 0 A -4 N-4 D -6 SD-1
3. Citizens should take more initiative in community decision-making
SA - 9 A -5 N-1 D -0 SD-0
4. Global awareness should be increased in K-12
SA - 7 A -5 N-2 D -1 SD-0
5. Citizen apathy and cynicism are critical problems
SA - 6 A -7 N-1 D -1 SD-0
6. Political polarization is a critical problem
SA - 3 A -7 N-2 D -2 SD-0
7. Our political system currently works reasonably well
SA - 0 A -4 N-7 D -4 SD-0
8. I received a high quality civic education
SA - 2 A -6 N-2 D -4 SD-1

After analyzing the surveys and going off of the discussion in the forum it is clear that most everyone feels that civic education should be increased in K-12 curriculum. Also a majority felt that global awareness should be increased in K-12 curriculum, to include foreign language, increased geography and cultural lessons.

The common ground in our group was found in an increase in civic education, an increase in working on the local community level to make a national impact. Common ground was found with the idea that the fundamental workings of a citizen begin in K-12 education, and we need to take responsibility to teach our children so they can grow up to become responsible citizens.