Education About Democracy, and the Democratization of Educational Content

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Opening Reflection

What do students need to learn, in order to participate effectively and appropriately in a democracy?
Overview

1. The concept of curriculum
2. The implications of democracy for determining educational contents
3. Three types of democratic content
   – Content “about” democracy
   – Issues of significance
   – “Democratized” content
4. Teaching democracy
The Concept of Curriculum

What does “curriculum” mean in the context of democracy education?
What is Curriculum?

Different perspectives on curriculum:
- The **ideal** curriculum
- The **formal** curriculum
- The **perceived** curriculum
- The **experiential/lived** curriculum
- The **observed** curriculum
- The **planned** curriculum
- The **hidden** curriculum
Elements of a Curriculum

Most curricula address (either explicitly or implicitly) some core elements:

• What students should learn
• How learning will be assessed
• Criteria for admission and promotion
• Resource materials (textbooks etc.)
• Expected teaching and learning processes
• Qualities required of teachers
Structuring a Curriculum

Different ways of “framing” curriculum

• Curriculum as a **body of knowledge**
• Curriculum as a **vision or philosophy**
• Curriculum as a **set of themes/ ideas**
• Curriculum as a **set of subjects/ topics**
• Curriculum as a **set of question or issues**
• Curriculum as a **set of objectives**
Curriculum Objectives

• Education for democracy versus education about democracy

• Conventional Curricula (KSAs)
  – Knowledge
  – Skills
  – Attitudes
Curriculum Objectives

• Education for democracy versus education about democracy
• Conventional Curricula (KSAs)
  – Knowledge
  – Skills
  – (Attitudes)
• Issues in Education for Democracy
  – KSAs are insufficient, focus on content
  – Content-focused curricula do little to support actual civic engagement
  – Need to go beyond individual learning
Curriculum Objectives

What it all comes down to:
1. What is it that we are trying to do?
2. How do we expect to achieve that?

Therefore, we need to clarify:
1. What do we mean by “democracy” and “democratic citizenship”
2. What do we mean by “education”, “teaching”, and “learning”
Democratic Curricula and Curricula on Democracy

The implications of democracy for determining educational contents
Curriculum Objectives

The challenges with “teaching democracy”
• Democracy is not just a body of content
• Learning “about” democracy does not necessarily result in democratic behaviors
• It is multifaceted, involving formal and informal structures, as well as various themes and issues
• It has numerous, contested, definitions and forms

... but all of this helps make education for democracy such a fascinating field!
Curriculum Objectives

Back to our two key questions:

1. The “What”
   – What is it that we are trying to teach?
   – What do we mean by democracy and democratic citizenship?

2. The “How”
   – How do we teach and learn these things?
   – How do we expect to achieve these ideals?
A Broad View of Democracy

Freedom
Modernization
Westernization
Justice
Human rights
Social justice
Sexism
Racism
Civil Society
Disparities
Patriotism, nationalism, populism
Poverty
Religious tolerance
Disparities
Diversity
Multiculturalism, pluralism
Transparency
Accountability
Corruption
Independent media
Judicial independence
Discrimination
Gender equality
Minority peoples
Indigenous rights
War and peace
Colonialism
Immigration
Public health
Sovereignty
Democracy
Elections
Personal Responsibility
Culture and traditions
Rule of law
Resource extraction
Urbanization, migration
Persons with disabilities
Tolerance
A Broad View of Education

Pedagogy  Curriculum  Textbooks

Assessment  Tracking and streaming

Professional standards  Diplomas, degrees

School climate  Transparency

Professional associations  Child rights

Teachers

Quality of instruction  Grades

Gender equality  Minority peoples

Indigenous rights

Admission requirements  Studying, Memorization

Discipline  Projects

Discrimination  Resource extraction

Peer relations  Extra-curriculars

Routines and procedures  Desks

Curriculum  Resource extraction

Resource extraction  Classroom management

Homework and Assignments
Expected Outcomes of EfD
Expected Outcomes of EfD

Student

School System
Expected Outcomes of EfD

Students
Expected Outcomes of EfD

Active Democratic Citizens
Expected Outcomes of EfD

- Political Systems and Government
- Culture and Society
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Issues and Current Affairs
Expected Outcomes of EfD

- Critical Thinking
- Systems Thinking
- Critical Literacy and Communication
- Working Through Ambiguity
- Conflict Resolution
Expected Outcomes of EfD
Expected Outcomes of EfD

- Autonomy
- Justice and Care
- Integrity
- Reciprocity
- Local and Global Citizenship
- Reasonableness
- Mutual Civic Respect
- Civic Engagement
Expected Outcomes of EfD

Active Democratic Citizens

Knowledge

Skills

Dispositions
Expected Outcomes of EfD

- Sense of Connectedness
- Democratically Engaged Teachers
- School and Community Partnerships
- Parental and Community Involvement
- Democratic School Governance
Expected Outcomes of EfD

• EfD Curriculum Framework Learning Outcomes:
  – Knowledge (learning about)
  – Skills (learning how to)
  – Dispositions (learning to be)
  – School Outcomes (learning together)
The Student’s Experience
The Student’s Experience

- Supervision & Accountability
- Institutional Culture
- Pedagogical Approaches
- Role Modeling
- Curriculum Integration
- Classroom Management
- Assessment & Evaluation
- Teacher Talk
- Textbook & Curriculum Content
- Physical Environment
- Legal & Policy Environment
- How Texts are Used
- School Leadership
- School Governance
- Teacher Qualifications
- Parental Involvement
- Community Linkages
- Social Justice in the System
- Students' Involvement in School
- Student's Experience
The Student’s Experience

- Teacher talk
- Textbook & curriculum content
The Student’s Experience

Explicit Content
- teacher talk
- textbook & curriculum content
The Student’s Experience

- supervision & accountability
- institutional culture
- pedagogical approaches
- role modeling
- curriculum integration
- classroom management
- assessment & evaluation
- teacher talk
- textbook & curriculum content
- physical environment
- student involvement in school
- teachers’ involvement
- teacher qualifications
- community linkages
- social justice in the system
- political governance
- school leadership
- how texts are used
- legal & policy environment
The Student’s Experience
Three Types of “Democratic” Content

1. Content about democracy
2. Issues of significance
3. “Democratized” content
Three Types of “Democratic” Content

1. Content About Democracy
Curriculum Content:
1. Content About Democracy

Addressing questions such as the following:

• What is democracy?
• How do democracies work?
• What are the key arguments for and against democracy?
• How can democracies be cultivated, strengthened, and enhanced?
• What is the global context of democracy?
Teaching Content About Democracy

Approach and method matter a lot. Consider:
• Encourage student engagement and discussion
• Facilitate student learning, rather than lecturing
• Raise awareness, rather than indoctrinating
• Cultivate critical reflection on the theory and practice of democracy

... Learning about democracy should be exciting and empowering for students!
Three Types of “Democratic” Contents

2. Issues of Significance and Democratic Importance
Curriculum Content:
2. Issues of Significance

Issues of significance are:
• Things that matter (or probably should!) to citizens in a democracy
• Relate to the values and principles of democracy, such as equality, justice, freedom, and human rights
• Events and incidents that have relevance to democratic development

… How about some examples?
Curriculum Content:
2. Issues of Significance

If you’re looking for a list of potential issues...

- Human rights
- Social justice
- Racism
- Sexism
- Poverty
- Religious tolerance
- Disparities
- Patriotism, nationalism, populism
- Modernization
- Sovereignty

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Corruption
- Independent media
- Judicial independence
- Discrimination
- Gender equality
- Minority peoples
- Indigenous rights
- Culture and traditions
- Rule of law
- Environmental sustainability

- War and peace
- Colonialism
- Resource extraction
- Urbanization, migration, immigration
- Public health
- Westernization
- Persons with disabilities
- Tolerance
- Multiculturalism, pluralism

... and so on, and so on!
Selecting Issues of Significance

Consider the following points in selecting issues for study:

• These issues tend to be highly interrelated, and can be discussed from a number of perspectives

• Consider “entry points” in the formal curriculum where such issues might be introduced

• Consider age-appropriateness, and whether there might be analogous issues appropriate for younger students
Teaching Issues of Significance

Approaches for teaching issues of significance:
• Integrating into existing subjects/topics, rather than adding as additional content
• Problematizing materials that show bias
• Analyzing perspectives, and seeking alternative perspectives
• Using current events or existing content matter as a starting point
• Look for “entry points” to repeatedly work these issues into class discussion
• Avoiding token treatment of important issues
• “Normalizing” critical thinking and debate
Three Types of “Democratic” Contents

3. “Democratized” Content
Curriculum Content: 3. “Democratized” Content

Additional considerations regarding the contents that students study:

• What does it mean when all decisions about “what to study” are made by adults in positions of authority?

• How important is it for students to have opportunities to pursue and cultivate their own authentic interests?

• To what extent can the contents of study be “negotiated” with students?

• How best to balance “democratized” content with mandated content?
Curriculum Content: 3. “Democratized” Content

What is meant by “democratized” content

• Contrast democratized content with authoritarian/mandated content
• Relates to the balance of power in the classroom
• Emphasizes what is relevant and interesting to students
  (other content can be organized around it!)
• Gives students a chance to have some voice in what they learn
  (as well as how they learn it, and how they demonstrate their learning)
Curriculum Content:  
3. “Democratized” Content

Why is democratized content important?
• Experiencing different degrees of authority and control in their lives
• Perceiving adults in a different manner
• Opportunities to make decisions and cultivate interests
• Development of student engagement and autonomy
• What matters is less important than the fact that something does!
“Teaching” Democratized Content

Suggestions for “democratizing” the content that students study:

• Adjust what is “taught” based on student interest
• Ask students what topics or aspects of a topic interest them most
• Provide choices in the specific topics of study (within a given framework, or not)
• Project-based, and problem-based approaches
• Student-generated content, presentations, debate etc.
• Peer-teaching
• Use “teachable moments”
Teaching Democracy

Education About Democracy...
... in Democracy
Teaching Democratic Content

Remember this?

And this?
Teaching Democratic Content

What do they have in common?
Teaching Democratic Content

Consider what is being “learned” in a long, dry lecture on democracy...
Teaching Democratic Content

Both the medium and the message matter in democracy education.
Teaching Democratic Content

Both the context and the content have an impact on learning.
Teaching Democratic Content

... and beware of the interactions between the two!
Teaching Democratic Content

Guidelines for “teaching democracy”
• Use democratic teaching approaches
• Link with prior knowledge
• Link with life outside school
• Emphasize experience
• Emphasize empowerment
• Emphasize collaboration
• Always consider the “hidden curriculum”
Teaching Democratic Content

Ways of “teaching content” without lectures:
• Mini-lessons
• Discovery centers
• Guided readings
• Inquiry projects
• Debate and discussion
• Interactive presentations
• Guided questioning (Socratic teaching)
• Student presentations
• Guest speakers
• Field trips
• Simulations/ role plays
• Deconstructing tests!
## Teaching Democratic Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Get away from relying on...</th>
<th>Work towards increasing...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecture-based teaching</td>
<td>Facilitating student inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only teacher-selected contents</td>
<td>Student choice in contents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks only</td>
<td>Multiple sources of content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual assignments</td>
<td>Collaborative activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only the teacher’s voice</td>
<td>Students’ voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single unchallenged perspectives</td>
<td>Critical exploration of bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed, fact-based questions</td>
<td>Open reflective questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Striving for “order”</td>
<td>Striving for “engagement”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Putting Everything Together
Putting Everything Together

Democratic Classrooms
- how texts are used
- physical environment
- pedagogical approaches
- assessment & evaluation
- classroom management
- curriculum integration
- role modeling
- use of technology
- peer relations

Democratic Schools
- community linkages
- school governance
- school leadership
- students' involvement in school
- parental involvement
- teachers' involvement

Democratic Systems
- institutional culture
- teacher qualifications
- social justice in the system
- supervision & accountability
- legal & policy environment

Content About Democracy
- what democracy is
- how democracy works
- arguments for and against democracy
- cultivating and enhancing democracy
- the global context of democracy

Issues of Significance
- environment
- human rights
- gender
- minorities, marginalization & discrimination
- corruption and abuse of power
- poverty
- globalization
- migration and immigration
- war, conflict & violence

“Democratized” Content
- negotiated with students

student
teacher
classroom
school
system
Closing Reflection

What was it about your own learning and development that led you to an interest in democracy? Were there key concepts, books, or “teachers” that inspired you? What was special about the way you encountered those things?
Thank you

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