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Civic Learning in Changing Democracies

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Civic Learning in Changing Democracies:

Challenges for Citizenship and Civic Education

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The times, they are a changing in long established European and North American democracies. Alarming numbers of young citizens seem to have turned their backs on government and conventional politics. It appears that contemporary politics in most societies increasingly fail to capture the interest and attention of young citizens, who are generally skeptical of politicians and party affiliation, and increasingly unlikely to vote. A study of voting turnout by age in 15 European democracies conducted by the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance in Sweden concluded that youth voting decline is a serious and widespread problem for contemporary democracies looking to the new generation of citizens for participation, legitimacy and support (IDEA, 1999).

Some scholars have concluded that there is a distinctive Millennial Generation (roughly composed of those turning 21 around the turn of the century), and that this cohort is profoundly apolitical, as highlighted by a rejection of traditional citizen roles centered around civic duties such as voting. For example, 71 percent of British *Millennials* believe that voting makes no difference. The numbers of British youth who aspire to enter public service are dwarfed by nearly a fifty-to-one preference for entrepreneurial business careers (Pirie and Worcester, 1998). A follow-up survey in Britain in 1999 compared the *Millennials* to the general population and found that 40 percent of 18-24 year olds in Britain were not even registered to vote, compared with just 8 percent of the general population (Pirie and Worcester, 2000). O'Toole (2004)

observes that a media stereotype of the youth engagement crisis in Britain has evolved around the factoid that more young people voted on the reality TV show *Big Brother* than in the 2001 general election.

Even before it had reached the level of media myth, the severity of youth voting decline in Britain prompted the government to commission what has become known as the Crick Report (1998), which called for compulsory civics education in the secondary schools. The underlying question for Britain --and for this essay -- is what should such education look like? A first step toward an answer is to understand the nature of the problem.

Young Citizens and Politics: Origins of A Cross-National Trend

A general survey on the status of young people in Europe revealed a remarkable convergence of trends reported by researchers in 15 European Union member states and three nations outside the EU (Instituto di Ricerca, Milan, 2001). A bulletin on the report posted by one of the participating research institutes sounded this alarm: "Young people's and young adults' limited political participation -- voting, membership in political parties, youth organizations, and representation in decision-making bodies -- is considered a major problem in most Western European countries. Young people's declining political engagement and participation in society are perceived as a challenge for the future of representative democracy (Deutsches Jugend Institut, 2003).

A survey of the "civic and political health of the nation" in the United States concluded that the American Millennials might be better termed the "DotNets," both out of their strong self identification as a generation and their preferences for communicating through various digital interactive media, factors that seem important for thinking about civic education initiatives. Like their European counterparts, the American DotNets are turned off to conventional politics and

government, but highly involved in issue activism, political consumerism, and protest activities (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, and Jenkins, 2002).

Some observers contextualize such trends in less alarmist terms based on theories of social change, arguing that recent generations have entered a time of post-material politics in which citizens participate by other means through “self actualizing” or “self reflexive” involvement in personally meaningful causes guided by their own lifestyles and shifting social networks (Inglehart, 1997; Giddens, 1991). If we apply this perspective on social change and political identity to the question of what defines the Millennials as a generation with similar cross-national political tendencies, we might consider first that they entered society at the height of the current wave of economic globalization. Among other things, this period has been defined by high levels of labor market dislocation (more frequent career changes, less employment security, periods of unemployment and underemployment) and an overriding sense of generalized risk (Bennett, 1998; Beck, 1999, 2000). Unlike earlier periods of modern era change, the contemporary experiences of risk and dislocation are negotiated by individuals largely through independent identity management strategies. The Millennials are less guided by encompassing ideologies, mass movements, party and governmental support structures, and other factors that might help individuals focus on government and politics in times of strain.

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. Observers like O'Toole and Bang argue that new generations of citizens are simply redefining what they mean by politics, and that social scientists should embrace this shift. Others counter that citizens greatly diminish their political capacity when they replace familiar public action repertoires centered on government and collective identities with narrower discourses fashioned from highly personalized and localized concerns (Eliasoph, 1998).

Even government efforts to reach the Millennials may encounter difficulty in delivering collective solutions for personalized problems. Consider, for example, the reaction of a 19 year old black woman (one of O'Toole's respondents) to an effort by the British Labor Party to address economic and social dislocation among young people:

> ……this New Deal thing that Tony Blair has come up with, it's not for everybody, it does not suit everybody's needs. It basically puts everybody in a little box and expects them to go either this way or that way. It doesn't work for everybody… You have to treat people as individuals, not just a little group so that everybody does have the opportunity to do something. (O'Toole, 2004, p. 18)

Some observers contend that changing definitions of citizenship are a natural feature of democratic life (Schudson, 1998). This is surely true. However, the compelling issue remains that the turn away from defining democratic activities such as voting may also represent a serious threat to the core of democratic civic culture (Putnam, 2000). Put differently, the coding of politics in highly personal and localized terms raises questions about whether contemporary democratic governments can appeal to their new citizens on the terms they were primarily designed for: delivering collective solutions to broadly defined social problems.

The Challenge for Civic Education

The challenges to civic education in this picture are obvious. Most policy makers define and fund civic education programs (which are run primarily in the schools) based on highly conventional citizen models which center around the idea of the "Dutiful Citizen" (DC). At a minimum, the DC is expected to learn about the basic workings of government and related political institutions, to understand the values of the civic culture, to become informed about issues and make responsible voting choices. The challenge for civic education, simply put, is how to keep a realistic focus on these conventional DC virtues while appealing to changing civic orientations of the new "self- Actualizing Citizen" (AC) 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. Table 1 offers a preliminary contrast between the AC and DC models of citizenship.

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

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

The debates about whether Millennials are effectively engaged, and democracy can prosper, with AC politics that exclude the core of the DC action repertoire makes for an interesting academic debate, but it is a debate that does not serve the interests of civic education particularly well. Whatever the merits of the respective positions, both dimensions of citizenship seem important to address and integrate in effective approaches to civic education. The Dutiful Citizen continues to have obvious appeal, particularly to educational policy makers, based on the reasonable perception that citizen activities centered on voting and informed opinion are necessary to instill in new generations in order to ensure the viability of democratic polities. At the same time, recognizing that young citizens today may have substantially different social and political experiences than their elders did at comparable stages of life also seems important to

incorporate into models of civic education -- both to address substantive changes in citizen roles, and to motivate young people to find personal meaning in a civic picture that includes them.

What can/should civic education do for the AC who simply fails to make the connection between personal political concerns and the distant DC world of government and elections? While there is no obvious standardized solution for this dilemma, this analysis offers a set of heuristics based on communication logics that enable young learners to participate in defining their personal political world as part of the learning process, and to find more meaningful pathways that lead to conventional politics and government. In short, the basic challenge for civic education is finding compelling ways to integrate the two citizenship models. The illustrative case of civic education in Australia highlights some of the issues and the dilemmas in addressing this challenge.

Case in Point: Australia

Australia offers an interesting national case both because of the awareness in the policy community of generational changes among young citizens, and the difficulty of incorporating this awareness into the classroom curriculum. Part of the policy innovation and implementation problem no doubt stems from the fact that there are so many sites of civics curriculum coordination and breakdown -- as is the case in many nations. For example, the Civics Education Research Group at Canberra University (2004) lists 45 distinct sites of input and coordination -- from international organizations such as the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), to national governmental policy agencies involved with citizenship, education and immigration, to numerous state education boards and private councils. At the same time, the issues confronting the Australian civics project have been fairly well defined by The Australian Council of Education Research (ACER) following participation in the

landmark IEA study of 90,000 fourteen year olds in 28 nations (Torney-Purta, Lehman, Oswald, and Schulz, 2001).

Australian students scored around the middle of the international distribution in terms of overall civics skills scores. The authors of the ACER report conclude that despite this passing performance on the skills and knowledge tests, the data revealed a deeper problem. The adequate performance of Australian students on basic civic knowledge and skills measures did not translate into a desire to engage in the corresponding activities of civic life defined by the IEA study as "conventional citizenship" (which I term the DC side of the citizen divide). Among the disturbing findings: 83% felt that joining a political party was not important in order to be considered a good citizen; only 55% felt that knowing about the nation's history was important; only 50% regarded following issues in the media s important; and 66% regarded engaging in political discussion as unimportant. The relatively strong commitment to voting was downplayed in the report as merely echoing the compulsory status of voting in Australia (Mellor, Kennedy, and Greenwood, 2001, p. 160). What seemed equally clear in the IEA study is that the AC side of civic life is far more attractive to young Australians: 80% said it was important to engage in activities that benefit others, 74% wanted to protect the political environment, and 68% were concerned about human rights. The authors conclude that Australian students were inclined to look outside government for solutions to political problems.

What were the implications of this increasingly familiar young citizen profile for Australian civic education? The results of the IEA study became the basis of a report from the Australian Council of Educational Research on the goals for civic education in Australia. The recommendations of the ACER report included a sensible blend of the AC and DC sides of contemporary citizenship (Kennedy and Mellor, 2001). I list their recommendations below,

taking the liberty of noting what seem to be the DC goals above the dotted line and the AC goals below it.

- Knowledge of Australian political institutions and structures
- Values concerning democracy, the rule of law, social justice, equity and fairness
- Commitment to including all Australians in the political process
……………………
- An obligation to see citizenship in an international perspective
- Understanding the everyday lived experiences of young people and their apparent alienation
- Recognising schools and classrooms as democratic institutions
- Accepting that citizens are constructed by multiple identifies rather than a single identity.

Where is Australia in crossing the AC/DC divide? The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth of Australia (2002) surveyed national civic education policy, and analyzed all available documents from agencies promoting or conducting civics education programs. The first conclusion was that civics is not even among the 8 key learning areas established for all schools in Australia. Indeed, there is concern that civics has slipped from the required curriculum in many nations, reflecting the educational turn toward basic academic skills and, perhaps, reflecting underlying struggles to depoliticize the schools. The second conclusion of this national survey was that only three content areas were widespread throughout Australian civics curriculum documents: 1) Australian democratic heritage and operation of government and law; 2) Australian national identity and cultural diversity; and 3) the set of skills and values necessary for informed and active participation in civic life. These goals are very similar to the three DC goals identified in the recommendations from the IEA study. Still missing from the general civics learning picture in Australia were the goals that might engage the AC citizen.

Bridging the AC/DC Divide: A Communication-Based Model of Civics Education

The case of Australia suggests that even when the challenges of addressing complex citizenship are recognized, the solutions are elusive. In part, this may be due to generational differences in the perceptions of citizenship that favor policies and curriculum designed by older citizens who do not experience public life from the standpoint of younger generations. This may be compounded by the false, but commonly heard, impression that approaches to civic education that include AC perspectives necessarily sacrifice DC virtues. The overriding problem may be the absence of a model for integrating both AC and DC elements of citizenship in a coherent curriculum.

In the remainder of this essay, I suggest various ways in which the logic of civic education from the policy level to the classroom may begin to address this issue of changing citizen roles without sacrificing the focus on DC skills and activities. In particular, I suggest a heuristic approach to engaging young citizens in their educational environments through four sequential steps toward civic engagement, each involving a communication process that enables the individual learner to define her own relationship to: 1) meaningful issues that enable personal identification, 2) relevant information that motivates rather than discourages linking the issue to government, 3) other (citizen) learners who may provide peer recognition and political support for initiatives involving the issue, and 4) and available citizen pathways to effective governmental action on the issue. These communication/learning processes aimed at better integrating the AC and DC aspects of citizenship are defined in the following four sections of the paper. Taken as a set, these four elements of civic learning show the importance of

communication skills to contemporary citizenship, from face to face issue deliberation, to navigating the mass media, to using interactive digital channels to communicate with other citizens and engage with government.

Using Issues to Communicate Identity in Political Context

A starting point for engaging AC learners who experience a distant and often disagreeable DC world is to allow them to define their own political standpoints -- and avoid immediately requiring them to locate those standpoints in terms of conventional politics. This may be easier than it initially appears. Political standpoints for the AC emerge fairly easily around issues. Moreover, exploring shared experiences with those issues enables shifting the framing of those experiences from private to common concerns. There is evidence that the DotNets are concerned about issues and problem-solving, and even more inclined toward collective identification with their peers than predecessor generations. For example, the U.S. civic health of the nation survey found higher levels of generational identification (69%) among the DotNets (those born between 1977 and 1987) than among GenX (42%), the Baby Boomers (50%), or the Matures (51%). However, in keeping with their AC citizenship bias, the DotNets were by far the least likely (38%, 48%, 60%, 59%) to say that good citizenship entails responsibility (Keeter, et al., 2002). At the same time, the DotNets are as likely as any generation to have engaged directly in political consumerism in support of environmental and other causes, and they are nearly twice as likely as other citizens to have participated in protest politics. What can be done to channel these clear indications of political interest and potential for common identification in more conventional political directions?

A simple proposition about civic learning is that conventional skills such as engagement and information-seeking begin with motivation -- generally powered by interest in specific issues or problems (Neuman, Just, and Crigler, 1992). A promising beginning to any civic learning experience is to empower the learners to find issues in their immediate communities that seem important to the people with whom they live and associate. One model for this is the Student Voices project, a national civic learning program developed by the Annenberg Public Policy Center in the United States (Student Voices, 2004). Student Voices begins by training students to take simple surveys of their communities and bring the results back into the learning environment (usually a classroom) to explore through deliberations under the guidance of the learning facilitator (usually a teacher). The Student Voices model is interesting because learners introduce issues with which they identify personally, and they contribute through group deliberations to the development of a class issue agenda that results in a collectively constructed issue or problem that becomes the focus for subsequent civic learning (Student Voices, 2004). A similar model is offered by the Project Citizen curriculum developed by the Center for Civic Education in the U.S. (Project Citizen, 2004).

Once learners have identified with a personal issue and participated in constructing a collective framing for a common issue (which may or not end up resembling their initial issue), they have taken the first step in understanding how to construct a public discourse and negotiate interests in common with others with whom they identify. These elements of the civic learning process can be enhanced through a combination of conventional and technology-driven communication processes. For example, the results of deliberations can be posted on discussion boards for follow-up reactions from those involved in the deliberations, and for sharing with others engaged in similar experiences in the same school, across the city, or around the world.

Sample discussions can be viewed at Seattle Student Voices (2004), a project housed at the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement (2004).

The mixture of face-to-face deliberation and subsequent individual reactions through messages and chats can create a sense of personal ownership in the issue adopted by the learning community. The issues may cover a wide variety of topics, from crime, drugs, education, and teen recreation issues, to local and global environmental concerns. The actual issue is less important than its origins in both individual and collective definition and recognition processes, and the willingness of the facilitator not to impose too much definition from on high.

Once a motivating issue is constructed, the natural next questions involve: What is being done about this problem? Who is doing it? What works? What doesn't? Why? The next step at this point is to open up various kinds of access to information and to provide learners with perspectives on the biases and benefits of various communication channels in society.

Navigating the Political Information Environment

Young citizens are immersed in what may be the richest, yet most fragmented information environment in human history. The channels that young citizens use to gather information and to communicate about their political issues are important considerations in creating engaged citizens. Tuning out is surely as useful a skill as knowing what and when to tune in. Media literacy training can create awareness of the dilemmas of incorporating DC information skills into the often discouraging real world media experiences of young citizens. This entails lessons aimed at more critical deconstruction and use of available information channels, and at finding channels that address the issue (defined above) at the center of the

learning experience. These aims can be advanced by introducing civic learners to several different spheres of the media environment in which they live: *the electoral communication sphere*, *the conventional news and entertainment sphere*, and *the digital information sphere*.

The electoral communication sphere is important in order to demystify the process through which campaigns seek votes, a process that often excludes substantial voter blocs such as young people. Opening the discussion of citizen communication with this focus addresses honestly the young citizen's questions of Why aren't politicians talking to me? and Why don't they seem to care about my issues? Painting today's democratic process with a broad brush finds parties and politicians scrambling for electoral support by placing their appeals in the hands of professional communication consultants who target narrow voter blocs to gain tactical electoral advantage Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999). The near universal consensus among these consultants is that spending precious campaign budgets on messages aimed at young voters is a waste of time and money. Young people are deemed hard to reach through conventional media strategies, and even harder to convince that politicians are not all alike. The idea that campaign messages and candidate images are marketed to voters much the same way that that commercial products are sold may help young citizens to see that, in communication terms, they represent demographic market segments -- highly prized for selling fashion and entertainment products, but less valued in electoral marketing strategies. A simple proposition about youth disengagement is that since they are not asked in meaningful terms to participate in the electoral process, they don't (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, and Jenkins, 2002; Bennett and Xenos, 2004).

This introduction to political communication offers learners an honest appraisal of their place in the political scheme of things in most countries, and may help them see why many of their peers reject a political system that implicitly ignores them. At the same time, it is important

to show that electoral results do have consequences for various social groups, including young people. It is also important at this point to introduce citizen engagement options -- both electoral and non-electoral - - that provide both information and pathways to effective action concerning the issue defined in the last learning module. The general goal here is to begin moving away from the idea of the citizen as a passive spectator, whether in the electoral arena, or more generally, in relation to government, and toward a model of active citizenship.

A major obstacle to active citizenship is the relationship that many young citizens establish with the mass media. The absence of citizens --particularly young citizens -- playing central roles in conventional news and public affairs programming reinforces impressions that issues are too confusing or that there is nothing that they can do about them. Such discouraging attitudes can be linked to the general media environments of negativity toward politics, politicians and government in which most young citizens are immersed. Most mass media content aimed at young audiences ranges from apolitical, at best, to overtly hostile toward politics. The aim of most youth programming is immersion in a commercialized environment selling fashion, entertainment, and other consumer products as the core elements of social identities anchored in lifestyles (Bennett, 1998). An examination of that environment seems an appropriate next step in understanding the broad rejection of politics and the common experience of being lost when thinking about the problems and issues that do matter.

The commercial news and entertainment media make for engaging subject matter. Case materials in media literacy abound in nearly every national context. Consider, for example, the market research materials produced by the German public service broadcaster ARD. The monthly reports called *Media Perspektiven* often publicize the network's market research with a focus on demographics. These studies demonstrate common trends audience trends such as the

graying of the public service news audience, and the disproportionate appeal of news on commercial channels to younger viewers. The implications of these trends for politics and citizenship are dramatic. For example, people who exclusively watch news on public service channels consistently demonstrate two to three times the levels of interest in political affairs, depending on what is happening during the periods when polls are taken (*Media Perspektiven*, 6/2002). The explanation for this political interest gap is most likely a combination of what these audiences are offered by different media sources, and what interests they bring to their viewing in the first place. For example, an analysis of news content on the public and private channels shows that political content fills 66% and 63% of news programming on the two leading German public channels, ARD and ZDF, compared to just 29% and 28% on the leading private channels RTL and Sat1 (*Media Perspektiven* 2/2002). Audience political tastes are considerably at odds as well, with public serviced audiences preferring information about national politics, state politics, social issues and international affairs, and private channel audiences ranking natural disasters, crime, and accidents as their favorite news fare (*Media Perspektiven*, 5/2001).

The moral of this media literacy story is that media choices matter. While it may be difficult to convince young learners to tune in public service news, there are other high quality and personalized news sources that may appeal to them. In learning environments with school or home access to the internet, the most obvious direction for DotNets with issues to understand is the rich sphere of discourse and information on the Web.

<u>The digital information sphere</u> offers a rich menu of interactive information options for individuals seeking something beyond generic news information about motivating issues. For example, the BBC has launched a prototype experiment called *iCan*, which enables citizens to define and post their own issues, link to broad networks of similarly concerned individuals, find

information about public actions and government responses, and, ultimately, push for BBC coverage of their concerns. There are also many poor quality sites that may merit another round of communication literacy training in the digital sphere. In general, however, the information habits of *netizens* suggest two promising trends (based on research in the U.S.): 1) young people increasingly prefer their information in online, interactive environments, and 2) veteran internet users are among the most informed citizens (Pew, 2004).

Nations still vary in their development of internet access, with the United States leading in this category, while Germany and France have been slower to introduce the levels of service competition and infrastructure necessary to democratize this important communication medium. However, increasing numbers of schools are wired, and next generation mobile phones will have search and information features that may enable young people to do more than download the latest hit songs as ring tones. Where access is available, young people follow. In the United States, the internet now rivals regular news programming and comedy shows as the leading sources of information about politics for young people (Pew, 2004). More importantly, those who use the internet are far better informed than those who rely on other sources of information, and *netizens* are far more interested in politics (Hamilton, 2004). The natural attraction of young people to digital communication technologies can be important for motivating engagement with their issues, and, as outlined in the next set of recommendations, helping to establish collective identifications with those issues as well.

Communication Technologies and the Learning Experience

The danger in personalizing the information process, of course, is the fragmentation of publics and the isolation of individual citizens. Developing a highly individualized sense of politics may not be regarded as a problem in the AC world, but it is often seen as antithetical to

the DC view of the democratic polity. In order to counter the perils of isolation through overly personalized digital media experiences, the learning environment for next generation citizens must be designed to appeal to the affinity for networks and communities of interest. Interactive communication technologies should be aimed at creating echoing online environments that enable others to engage with and contribute to emerging understandings of the issue at the center of the learning experience. This sense of common engagement with one's own and with others' issues introduces the experience of being part of a public as a core element of the learning process.

Research on the learning environments preferred by DotNets suggests that there are a number of fundamental changes that can be introduced productively into the traditional learning environment. As part of a Microsoft effort to design educational technology, Peden (2003) has summarized an effort in the United States to create national classroom technology standards for teachers. According to this perspective, the key to the successful introduction of technology in the learning environment is not just delivering hardware or software applications, but reorganizing the social and psychological contexts in which they are used. Peden contrasts the new learning preferences with the traditional learning environment as follows:

New Learning Preferences	Traditional learning Environment
Student/group Centered	Teacher centered
Multimedia	Single media
Collaborative work	Isolated work
Critical thinking/informed decision-making	Fact/knowledge-based learning

Source: Peden (2003). Based on International Society for Technology in Education. See ISTE (2004) National Technology Standards for teachers.

These norms for introducing technology into the learning environment are also happily aligned with a more democratic experience for the AC learners. Current DC approaches to civic education often seem lamentably at odds with the ideal AC experience of peer-to-peer, non-hierarchical, network participation. For example, conventional civics education often treats the subject matter as: a) another academic subject, b) with right and wrong responses arbitrated by the teacher as central authority, and c) students competing in isolation for academic favor. For example, the results of the IEA survey of high school students in the U.S. suggests that the dominant learning experience in civics classrooms was the traditional learning model of isolated learners, receiving fact-based material from teachers. For example 89 percent of 9th graders reported reading from textbooks, and 88 percent reported filling out worksheets, compared to only 45 percent reporting debating and discussing ideas, 40 percent engaging in role play or mock trials, 31 percent receiving visits from leaders, and 27 percent writing letters to express their opinions (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

Research indicates that not only do students prefer interactive learning environments, but that these environments matter for the translation of civics skills into civic practice. For example the U.S. "civic health of the nation" study found that those who participated in high school debate were far more active politically after they entered public life than those who had no debate experience. The debaters were nearly twice as likely to attend community meetings and sign petitions, and three times as likely as those who did not debate to participate in boycotts. Joining groups in high school also significantly boosted a range of adult civic activities including regular voting (Keeter, et al. 2002).

The lesson seems clear: learning environments that emphasize old style, fact based, teacher-centered pedagogy may succeed in imparting abstract facts and skills of the sort that can be tested, but, to return to the findings from the Australian case, they do not help young citizens translate that knowledge into later civic practice. Perhaps the message here is that providing learners with tools to experience actual civic practice in the learning environment makes more sense. Communication environments that offer collective experiences and provide public displays of group projects may create a first semblance of public life. The Student Voices projects described earlier illustrate these principles, as learners are introduced to an interactive digital web environment that enables them to tailor information and communication to their group issue projects. In addition to having access to external media input for information purposes, this interactive web environment also enables learners to communicate among themselves about emerging understandings of issues, and about the ways in which government and larger publics might become engaged with their causes. This brings us to the next logical next step in our civic learning model: linking communities of civic learners meaningfully to the real world of politics and government.

Communication and Participation in Civic Networks

It is important for AC engagement in this issue-based civic learning process to link to the entry points to DC public life such as press, government, issue organizations and community networks. For nearly every problem or issue identified by our citizens in training, there is abundant public information available about it, and much of that information shows how citizen interest and advocacy networks are trying to win the attention of government. In addition,

citizens in nations that have embraced e-government initiatives have increasing access to relevant government activities through online record archives, and through televised coverage of government proceedings that are often archived digitally and streamed on demand. Perhaps most importantly, civic activists and public officials are often available to address the concerns of young citizens, whether through personal visits or participation in computer chats. Using these and other channels, the interactive learning situation can ultimately connect citizen-learners to sources of information about their political concerns, and to networks of citizens and officials involved in making policy about them.

One model that illustrates this linkage to the larger political world is Student Voices (2004) in the United States. The website for the project (http://student-voices.org/) introduces a set of information resources, along with linkages to government and civic organizations. Once there is an active connection between the group issue project and the relevant sphere of politics and government, it is important to facilitate real contact with the various actors this sphere. It turns out that representatives of civic groups and public institutions are generally willing to meet with young people, and to have remarkably open exchanges about their political concerns. Various formats can be developed for bridging the learning environment and the policy arena. For example, Student Voices links into local elections by inviting candidates to talk with students in schools and preparing students to interrogate candidates in a press-debate format held in an open public forum that is televised on local public access television. In addition, class issue projects are often presented as public policy recommendations, and judged in a civics fair by community leaders. Similar mechanisms link the classroom and the larger political environment in Project Citizen (Center for Civic Education, 2004).

These bridges to the public sphere and the policy process result not only in learning a set of civic skills, but, more generally, developing a higher regard for participating in the DC political world (Bennett, Simon, and Xenos, 2002). In some cases, students have become actively involved in the policy process they developed as part of their issue projects. In other cases, students have learned to communicate their viewpoints through the production of television public affairs programs that are aired through local public access cable channels and stored digitally for future use (http://www2.ci.seattle.wa.us/Media/ram_sc.asp?ID=2167).

The overall result of this integration of the civics learning environment with the real political world is a bridge between the AC and DC models of citizenship that offers next generation citizens a broader repertoire of civic action than they might acquire in conventional approaches that, no matter how well-intentioned, risk reproducing the same aversion to the DC model of citizenship that many young learners bring to the learning situation in the first place.

Conclusions

Creating a civics environment that integrates the AC and DC worlds is not always easy, as the earlier case of Australia suggests. Even if we leave aside the digital divide questions of technology deployment and access, there are several policy hurdles that must be confronted in order to implement models of the sort outlined above. Among the most obvious policy obstacles are three: elevating the importance of civics in the curriculum; getting curriculum developers and the policy officials who monitor them to understand the evolving nature of citizenship; and encouraging schools and teachers to offer students a taste of democracy in the learning environment by bringing issues that matter to them in contact with real political processes.

Bringing civics back in. Strange as it may seem to those of us who are passionate about civic education, courses on citizenship and government are far from standard in many national education systems, and even rarer in settings outside the schools. In the United States, for example, fewer civics courses are taught today than several decades ago, suggesting that part of the decline in political participation may well be attributed to a parallel decline in the prominence of civics in the schools. Public officials and educators talk a great deal about education today, but the focus is on basic job skills such as reading and math, and not such basic life skills as citizen participation. The problem here may run deeper than casual neglect (oops we forgot civics!). In recent years, for example, the schools in America have become political battlegrounds policed by conservative groups who detect liberal political bias in most programs that favor creative thinking over strict academic discipline. Rather than being regarded as a virtue, the creative teaching of civics is likely to be viewed with suspicion in many communities. The case needs to be made by education leaders and public officials that the crisis in civic engagement requires giving the same priority to civics education that has been given to teaching basic skills.

Recognizing changes in citizenship. Bringing civics back in will do little good if those who design and implement the curricula implicitly assume that "good citizenship" looks like the traditional DC model. Youthful skepticism about authorities who do not invite meaningful dialogue on their issues will kill engagement with outmoded models based on duty and obligation. Ample evidence now exists (thanks to studies such as the IEA surveys and the PEW civic health polls) about how young people respond to various kinds of learning environments. Reproducing environments that alienate young citizens serve neither the educational nor the public good.

Opening the learning environment to the world. Even if new directions of citizenship are acknowledged and incorporated in the civics curriculum, the modes of implementation in the learning environment become the final gate that can open or close the learning experience. Those who facilitate the learning experience must encourage an element of democracy in the classroom, as manifested in guiding young citizens through the construction of a meaningful public problem, enabling them to create a community of interest and understanding about the problem, and then making contact with groups and officials in the public sphere who are engaged with it. This process must be structured, of course, but creating a sense of ownership in the process on the part of the learner of the learner is the key to understanding how to take responsibility as a citizen after the learning experience is over.

Developing and deploying information and communication technologies can bring this democratic experience to life for the learners. As with most uses of technology, however, the value added depends on the organization of the social context in which the technology operates. In the case of citizenship education, the design of the learning environment must pay careful theoretical attention to the changing realities of public life with which citizens must engage.

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