Measuring the Impact of a Supplemental Civic Education Program on Students’ Civic Attitude and Efficacy Beliefs

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Abstract
This study examines the impact of Project Citizen Philippines, an extra-classroom civic education program, on its 3rd and 4th year high school participants’ civic attitude and efficacy beliefs. Three hundred forty three participants and 107 non-participants from various public high schools in the Philippines’ National Capital Region were compared on their scores on relevant scales, using the Mann-Whitney U test. Qualitative data was also gathered and analyzed using randomly selected student reflection papers. Findings indicate that project participants scored higher in the efficacy and attitude measures used than non-participants. Passages from the reflection papers lend support to these findings. The results are discussed in relation to other findings in the literature, and in light of the country’s current and planned school-based civic education programs. An implication of the study is the need to promote extra-classroom activities to supplement curriculum-based civic education efforts and to reach as wide a student population as possible, and to systematically evaluate and document such efforts towards providing data in furthering civic education in the Philippines.

Keywords: civic education, civic attitude, self-efficacy beliefs

1. Introduction
Civic education is generally understood as the formation of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions for effective democratic participation (UNDP Democratic Governance Group, 2004), the same three elements enumerated by Branson (1999) citing the Center for Civic Education’s (1994) National Standards for Civics and Government. Such a tri-component view is echoed by calls to go beyond mere knowledge provision in schools, and delve into the formation of functional democratic citizens (e.g., Youniss, 2011), through attitude formation and skills development. Attitudes have been found to influence citizens’ propensity to vote (Blais & St. Vincent, 2011) while skills have been shown to influence efficacy beliefs (Kirlin, 2002; Zaff, Moore, Papillo & Williams, 2003), which in turn may predict future civic participation (Sinha, 2006). Such a construal of civic education calls for the adoption of teaching methods other than traditional classroom-based means, such as experiential learning activities.

In the Philippines, the Philippine Center for Civic Education and Democracy (PCCED) administers Project Citizen (PC) as a supplemental civic education program to help form civic-related attitudes and efficacy beliefs among public high school students. Project Citizen is an adaptation of We the People: Project Citizen designed by the Centre for Civic Education in the United States. It is a step-by-step program that allows participants to take part in community problem-solving through policy formulation. Serving mainly as an extra-curricular activity, PC in the Philippines is run for interested public high schools, its 10 steps spread across six months (from August to February) of the country’s basic education calendar. The process itself begins with a classroom discussion of democracy concepts, followed by problem identification, community-based research, problem examination, policy formulation, and finally, a simulated hearing exercise. Schools that choose to participate compose a 15 to 20-student team of various year levels, selected and facilitated by a teacher trained in the PC process. Usually, one school forms one PC team. The program is meant to expose students to the dynamics of local (i.e., barangay) governance including local legislation, the causes and effects of actual community problems, and the challenges of community-based research. The process is also intended to engage students in skills important to successful civic participation such as consensus-building and conflict-resolution. The entire process is extra-classroom making students’ available free time a critical consideration in the selection of participants.
This study will evaluate the effectiveness of PC in building civic attitudes and strengthening efficacy beliefs among its participants. Using quantitative data from relevant scales and qualitative data from participants’ reflection papers, this study will determine whether students who participate in the PC process have stronger civic attitudes and more positive efficacy beliefs than their non-participant peers. As such, it hopes to contribute generally to the empirical investigation of the effectiveness of participative methods in civic education, and specifically to local literature on the systematic and empirical evaluation of experiential methods in citizenship education, which, based on the scarcity of materials on the subject in the Philippines, appears to be wanting.

1.1 Civic Attitudes
Civic attitudes refer to dispositions towards behaviours and practices involving civic and political participation, and democratic citizenship (UNDP Democratic Governance Group, 2004). They reflect peoples’ appreciation of their role as citizens (Bogard & Sherrard, 2008), and may be demonstrated through behaviours such as voting (e.g., Chareka & Sears, 2006), and the possession of traits such as tolerance and trust towards institutions (e.g., Nelson, Wade & Kerr, 2010). While Kirlin (2003) holds that existing literature does not strongly support the civic attitude and adult civic behaviour link, she acknowledges the importance of attitudes in active political participation, and recommends finding the factors that strengthen the mentioned link. In Psychology, this has been examined vigorously through Ajzen’s (1991) theory of planned behaviour, as well as the various factors that make attitudes predictive of behaviour (see Glasman & Albarracin, 2006).

Most attitudes are formed through experience, observation, and persuasion (Ciccarelli and White, 2012). Civic attitude formation through experience afforded by participation has shown compelling results. Terkla, O’Leary, Wilson and Diaz (2007) for instance found that college students’ participation in civic activities significantly affected their attitude about staying informed on national issues. Ajiboye and Silo (2008) on the other hand looked into the impact of civics club participation on students’ attitude towards the environment. The authors found that club participants developed more positive attitudes towards the environment after engaging in activities such as clean-up drives. Ajiboye and Silo (2008) referred to their efforts as taking the informal route, indicating the difficulty of formally institutionalizing a school-wide effort in an already packed school schedule.

The effect of involvement on attitude formation is attributed by some to a socialization process where participants are able to interact with individuals who may share the same civic interests (Hooghe & Stolle, 2003). Although in a more recent study, Stolle & Hooghe (2004) failed to confirm such socialization effects, they underscored the stability of such attitudes, if they exist during adolescence, through adulthood. It appears then that for civic participation to take hold, relevant attitudes must be developed early, whatever the mechanisms underlying their development may be.

1.2 Civic Efficacy
Self-efficacy refers to people’s beliefs about their own capabilities (Bandura, 1993) towards accomplishing identified objectives. In civic contexts, this may refer to beliefs about citizens’ ability to influence their government (Lopes, Benton & Cleaver, 2009), perceived socio-political control (Ohmer, 2007), or their understanding of government and political dynamics (Valentino, Gregorovicz, & Groenedyk, 2009). Such beliefs have been found to influence current and future civic engagement (McIntosh & Muñoz, 2009; Weber, Weber, Schneider & Sleeper, 2007) and political participation (Schur, Shields, & Schriner, 2003; Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2003).

The use of participation-based methods to develop civic efficacy has also been studied. Levy (2011) for instance found that coupling a high school course with a civics project significantly improved students’ belief that they can influence political processes. He cautions however that such participative activities need guided instruction to be effective. Pasek, Feldman, Romer and Jamieson (2008) found similar results among American high school students who participated in a supplemented civics education program. Said students reported higher efficacy for political participation after examining politicians’ influence on community problems. Among older adolescents, Terkla et al. (2007) found that levels of community involvement are related to beliefs about effectively contributing to community service. These findings indicate a participation-efficacy link. Despite these, civic efficacy does not seem to receive an explicit articulation in formal civics education curricula. Instead, civics education efforts mention the development of skills necessary for civic engagement. In the Philippines for instance, the high school Makabayan aims for the development of skills (e.g., social skills) necessary for political literacy (Mendoza & Nakayama, 2003). Skills development however may be related to heightened efficacy beliefs (e.g., Kirlin, 2002; Zaff et al., 2003). The development of specific skills through engagement may therefore enhance participants’ sense of civic efficacy. Kirlin (2002) in fact, found that the link between efficacy and skills may be stronger, relative to the link between attitudes and behaviour.
1.3 Engagement as Civic Education

Engagement through civic participation may come in the form of service. Arenas, Bosworth, and Kwandayi (2006) distinguish between two types of civic service: pure community service (i.e., programs unrelated to the school curriculum or are voluntary) and service learning (i.e., programs linked to curricular content). While both classifications are valuable in civic formation (e.g., Schmidt, Shumow, & Kackar, 2007), this study is interested in the former – the non-required, project-based or extra-classroom (i.e., outside or after class) type. Such activities have been shown to achieve positive civic outcomes (e.g., instrumental extracurricular activities; Glanville, 1999; Kirlin, 2003; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Levine, 2006; Seider, 2007). Despite this, school-administered civic education systems are oftentimes content-driven and focused on cognitive outcomes (Komalasari, 2012).

In the Philippines, the Makabayan curriculum at the basic (i.e., elementary to high school) level takes the form of a mix of subjects composed of social studies, and education in a variety of areas such as arts, music, values, and technology, instituted through the country’s 2002 Basic Education Curriculum (BEC). While some changes are underway as the country extends its basic education period from 10 to 12 years, civic formation may be expected to be similarly anchored on the content areas of Makabayan. Makabayan, by content, is meant to develop holistic individuals, imbued with a sense of national identity (Mendoza & Nakayama, 2003). By design, it was structured to deliver a variety of areas, at once aiming for integration and the de-clogging of what was perceived to be a packed basic education program. The Philippines' K to 12 curriculum no longer includes Makabayan but its individual components (e.g., Social Studies, Values Education) remain as standalone subjects and presumably classroom-bound and lecture-based. In an evaluation study conducted by the Philippines’ Department of Education (DepEd) in 2005 to monitor the implementation of the 2002 BEC, various constraints led high school teachers to “fall back on traditional expository mode like lecturing, question-and-answer, dictation exercise” (p.7) in their practice instead of resorting to experiential and integrative methods. Institutional community engagements therefore seem to remain the purview of the DepEd’ Center for Students and Co-Curricular Affairs, through what it calls co-curricular organizations such as student clubs and other school-based civic activities (e.g., tree planting). The system also welcomes partnerships from external organizations that deliver similarly-intended programs such as the scouting movement and PC.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Three hundred forty three (mean age=15.66 years) PC participants and 107 (mean age=14.85 years) non-participants took part in the study. Participant-respondents were part of the PC 2011 run, and came from 29 public high schools in the country’s National Capital Region. Non-participant respondents came from the same 29 public high schools as the participant-respondents, and were chosen based on their availability at the time the scales were administered. Participants were administered the scales after completing the PC process. Non-participants accomplished the scales as their schools were visited within the 6-month period of the PC process.

While PC 2011 participants were a mix of year levels (secondary basic education in the Philippines, at the time of this writing, had four levels), only 3rd and 4th year high school students were included in the study to control for the amount of exposure they have had to the Makabayan curriculum. Third and Fourth Year high school students spend a total of 15 hours every week on the different components of the Makabayan. Non-participant respondents were also chosen from the same year levels. A total of 218 (mean age=14.83 years) 3rd year and 232 (mean age=16.06 years) 4th year high school students were surveyed. In all, there were 175 (38.9%) male respondents and 275 (61.1%) female respondents.

2.2 Instruments

2.2.1 Civic Attitude

Attitude was measured using the Civic Attitudes Scale (CAS) developed by Mabry (1998). The 5-item scale measures attitudes specific to community service, with items such as “It is important to help others even if you don’t get paid for it”, using a 5-point Likert scale, and had a Cronbach’s alpha of .63 in the present study. Brandes & Randall (2011) reported a reliability coefficient of .81 and .89 for the same scale. Bringle, Phillips and Hudson (2004) report that the scale, which has been used in other published, empirical studies (e.g., Brandes & Randall, 2011; Buch & Harden, 2011) based on evidence, is unidimensional

2.2.2 Self-Efficacy

Students’ efficacy beliefs were measured using the Community Service Self-Efficacy Scale (CSSES) by Reeb, Katsuyama, Sammon, and Yoder (1998). This 10-item questionnaire measures students’ level of confidence in contributing to their communities through service, with items such as “If I choose to participate in community service in the future, I will be able to make a meaningful contribution” rated from 1 (uncertain) to 10 (certain). Recent research
has shown the instrument and its various versions to hold up sufficiently to reliability and internal consistency tests (Reeb, Folger, Langsner, Ryan & Crouse, 2010). The scale had a reliability coefficient of .91 in the present study.

2.2.3 Reflection Papers

PC participants are asked to write a one to two-page reflection paper after finalizing their presentation for the simulated hearing. This exercise is guided by two instructions: 1) for the students to describe what they did for the project and 2) to indicate what they learned (if any) throughout the process. Twenty-six sets of reflection papers, each set comprised of papers from student participants in a school, were submitted to the PC organizers. Three of the participating schools were not yet done with the reflection process at the time the papers were submitted to the PC organizers. From each set, two reflection papers were pulled out randomly and were used for the qualitative component of the present study. In all, 52 reflection papers were read and content analyzed for themes.

3. Results

3.1 Quantitative Findings

Scores from the two scales were subjected to a Mann-Whitney U test, using Statistica. Tests of difference have been used in various evaluative studies (e.g., Amerson, 2010; Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, Donahue, & Weimholt, 2007). The current sample was not randomly selected, thus the use of a non-parametric test. However, to support the quantitative findings, an analysis of qualitative data from student reflection papers was done.

Tables 1 and 2 show the results of the Mann-Whitney U test.

Table 1. Results on CAS Scores

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<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>215.85</td>
<td>15046</td>
<td>.004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Participants</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>256.38</td>
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Table 2. Results on CSSES Scores

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<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>214.25</td>
<td>14389</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Participants</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>262.62</td>
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Mann-Whitney U test indicates significant differences between the rankings in civic attitude and efficacy scores of PC participants and non-participants. Participants’ mean ranks in both scales were lower, indicating higher scores. Mean score differences per item in each of the scales indicate differences to be larger in item 4 (I feel that I can make a difference in the world) of the attitude scale (mean difference = .401) and in item 3 (I am confident that, through community service, I can help in promoting social justice) of the self-efficacy scale (mean difference = .903). In both cases PC participants scored higher than non-participants. On the other hand, mean difference was smallest in item 5 (It is important to help others even if you don’t get paid for it) of the attitude scale (mean difference = .031) and in item 7 (I am confident that, through community service, I can help in promoting equal opportunity for citizens) of the self-efficacy scale (mean difference = .346). In both cases, the mean score of PC participants was higher than non-participants.

The analysis of the 52 randomly selected reflection papers proceeded on a line-by-line manner, also adopted by Bradley, Curry, and Devers (2007) in their study. Chenail (2012) suggests the creation of an audit trail via comment clouds using an application in Microsoft Word when analyzing textual material. Since the reflection papers used in this study were hard copy materials, marginal written comments were used instead to annotate the passages selected in the paper. The passages were selected based on the degree to which they reflected student learning. These passages were then coded and clustered according to emergent themes. The theme clusters identified were shown to a civic education practitioner familiar with the PC process for validation. In all, 66 passages were coded, from which three themes emerged:

3.2 Qualitative Findings

3.2.1 Acquiring Knowledge about Community and Governance

The UNDP Practical Guidance Notes on Civic Education lists understanding political and civic contexts and understanding responsibilities of citizenship as two knowledge musts in civic education. Coded reflection passages indicate such understanding among PC participants. One female student writes, “It allows us to meet different local officials in our government, to see how they work and to understand how hard it was to be a law enforcer” while another one states “we can help them by...knowing what the issue (is) all about, supporting the organizations that are
raising awareness and by providing direct help to individual children.” Seeing government officials at work allows PC participants to understand governance, while encountering an actual problem allows them to realize opportunities for action, as reflected in the two previously cited passages.

In one student’s case however, learning about local government dynamics led him to believe that the government was the problem. He writes, “unfortunately, this ordinance concerning the problem about garbage segregation were (sic) not properly implemented due to lack of fund, facilities, and also the weak political will of the law enforcers.” Implicit in this passage is a realization about the operation of law in community life. Branson (1999) citing NAEP’s civic education components, lists the interplay between the constitution and the workings of the government as one of the enduring questions embodying civic knowledge. This underscores the need to teach students how the law (as enshrined in the constitution) guides governmental behaviour, in turn affecting community life. Other passages articulate a more citizen-centric view. One student writes, “We realized our roles as a Filipino citizen - that no matter how good a law is, the cooperation of the people is still needed to make it succeed.”

3.2.2 Developing a “Can Do” Disposition

Many participants expressed various difficulties as they went through the PC process. From time management (“my schedule became hectic”) to dealing with community members (“It is hard to deal with people who are skeptical”), the process seemed to present a variety of challenges. However, along with such difficulties, there was also a strongly articulated sense of being able to help. One student writes, “You don’t have to be part of the government because positions are only names but your works (sic) and actions will serve as your identity of being a citizen”, as another one states: “...even if I’m a student, I can help our government and community... solve our problems.” Other students expressed this in more affect-driven (e.g., “I felt that I could be a part of something bigger than myself”) and resolution-oriented (e.g., “I won’t remain the passive person I was before”) statements. These passages may be indications of a growing sense of confidence among participants which the UNDP’s Guidance Notes includes as a civic disposition element. Such a heightened sense of confidence may be reflected in another student passage: “We should not be afraid to join the campaign against bullying and observe the authorities to ensure that they do their responsibilities to prevent the problem”. Solhaug (2006) holds that believing in one’s ability to influence processes is critical in political participation, and citing Albert Bandura’s work, qualifies this to be self-efficacy.

3.2.3 Enhancing Interaction Skills

The PC participants cited a variety of skills that they purportedly developed in the course of the process, many of which may be classified as interaction skills. These would range from being able to communicate and express their ideas (e.g., “My English skills, both in writing and speaking had some improvements too”) to having to deal with individuals outside their social circle (e.g., “This experience also had encouraged me to talk to people that I don’t usually communicate with”). Other passages indicate learning to work in a group. One student writes, “I learned how to work in a team” as another one states “I learned how to socialize with others.” Branson (1999) cites interacting as an important civic skill, and defines it as “skills citizens need to communicate and to work cooperatively with others” (p.15). The PC process seems to create a challenging team environment as participants come from different year levels and sections. One student writes, referring to the first day the group met as a team, “I assume that they have bad attitude”. The same student reveals eventually that “my co- members...teach me how to pronounce the correct English...and they teach me how to translate my answer in English...” The same theme was reflected in other passages such as “assisting others is like assisting yourself”, “teamwork is really needed for this to work out”, and “I also learned to be more responsible in doing my tasks and also to work cooperatively”. Other passages reflect the challenges of group work. One student writes, “I was really uncomfortable with my classmates when there’s...misunderstanding”. The same student reveals however that she “…learned how to be a strong person, to make (herself) responsible for those people who needed (her) help.” Another student observes that in group work “…sometimes...the person becomes dependent to (sic) the leader” and goes on to offer a solution and states, “…that’s why there is a need to delegate work.” These passages may reflect learning in openness and tolerance which the UNDP Guidance Notes cites as among the important civic disposition elements.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In both civic measures, PC participants scored significantly higher than their non-participant counterparts. This indicates support for previous findings that participation in civic programs positively influences civic-related attitudes (e.g., Terkla et al., 2007) and efficacy beliefs (e.g., Pasek et al., 2008).

Exposing students to community issues on the ground, in a facilitative manner, has been shown to impart relevant and contextual information (Berns & Erickson, 2001) which may improve the efficacy of civic education efforts (e.g., Komalarasri, 2012). Information has been shown to affect attitude certainty (Smith, Fabrigar, MacDougall, & Wiesenthal, 2008) and relevant information appears to come by in the PC process, as shown in the first theme of the
qualitative analysis. Participating in activities that allows students to learn relevant skills, on the other hand, may lead to a heightened sense of efficacy as argued by Zaff et al., (2003). This again, finds qualitative support from some of the reflection passages collected. Skills acquisition was also cited by Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins (2007) as contributing to the efficacy of instrumental activities (versus expressive ones) in predicting adult civic participation. The PC process, as also indicated by one of the themes that emerged from the qualitative data, facilitates the use and practice of specific skills such as communication (“My English skills, both in writing and speaking had some improvements too”) and research (“I learned how to research all the information”), which may have contributed to the participants’ sense that they can effectively carry-out similar tasks in a community service context.

Individual item analysis indicates that, attitudinally, the supplemental program seems to work best in developing PC students’ sense that their participation can make a difference. This bears out the notion that participation allows students to see evidence of their efforts’ impact to the community (Terkla et al., 2007) possibly leading to more positive dispositions towards civic engagement. This may find support in some of the PC students’ reflection passages such as “I felt that I could be a part of something bigger than myself” and “...even if I’m (just) a student, I can help our government and community ... solve our problems”. Passive classroom strategies may work to transmit information (Print, 1999) but may not provide the same validating experiences. It must be noted however that this study involves a limited, non-random sample. The sample size and its representativeness may be considered limitations given that the study is interested in an institutional activity (i.e., basic education), with a nationwide scope. Any consideration of this study’s findings and implications may need to account for regional variability, which, in this study, is not done.

Also, while this study does not claim that PC is the only supplemental (i.e. extra-classroom) civics education program being run in the participating schools, it is the only one that, as of this study’s conduct, is being evaluated systematically. Effort was exerted to locate empirical studies on the effectiveness of similar programs, but none was located by the author. This study’s findings therefore are without consideration for the relative impact of other supplemental civic education programs, if they are being run, in the participating schools. Such a study of supplemental programs however has its precedence in other studies. Pasek et al. (2008) for instance qualified Student Voices as a supplemental civic education curriculum and co compared those who were exposed and unexposed to the program on various civics-related variables. Given the findings in the present study, future investigations into similar programs in the Philippines and their relative impact may be explored.

The efficacy of standalone classroom subjects, especially in civic education is not being questioned. However, as shown in this study, such efficacy may be improved with participation-driven efforts. Having extended its basic education program, the Philippines may think about institutionalizing opportunities for its school-bound youth to be civicly educated more effectively. Institutionalizing does not mean adding another subject to an already tight basic education schedule. As implied by Ajiboye & Silo (2008), there are resource-related difficulties in implementing school-wide programs. As it is, the Philippine educational system is already trying to make the most out of limited provisions (Diokno, 2010). What it can do instead is to promote extra-classroom venues, beyond the traditional paper and student government / organization structures, to widen the reach of such opportunities that function to educate students civicly. As interest and talent-based programs, these traditional venues may not suffice in reaching huge student populations of diverse persuasions and abilities. Non-government organization-sponsored and facilitated programs such as the one described in this paper may supplement this lack, and widen choices for students. A related implication may be the need to systematically and empirically evaluate the civic development and learning impact of existing school-based, extra-classroom efforts. As this author’s experience validates, such empirical efforts are lacking, and if they exist, are not systematically gathered and documented. The furtherance of civic education in the country, including extra-classroom efforts, needs such documentation and evaluation if it is to be approached rationally and methodically.

References


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