Education for Democracy and Citizenship in the United States: In a Time of Inequality and Social Division

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Overview of Presentation

1. Challenge of Democracy and Civic Education in the U.S.
   - Inequality
   - Social Division

2. Empowering Disadvantaged and Marginalized Youth - Chicago Public Schools (IL)
   - Curriculum & instruction connected with students’ daily lives and foster their voice, civic knowledge/skills, efficacy
   - Opportunities inside & outside schools to exercise voice and take actions
1. Challenge of Democracy and Civic Education in the U.S.

- Preparing young people for civic life has been one of the central missions of public schools in the United States (Carnegie Corporation of New York & CIRCLE 2003).

- Meanwhile, civic education in the U.S. has been facing multiple challenges in recent years – namely, inequality and social division.
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Voter Turnout in National Elections by Family Income

Source: U.S. Census
1. Challenge of Democracy and Civic Education in the U.S.

Voter Turnout in National Elections (18-24) by Family Income

Source: U.S. Census
1. Challenge of Democracy and Civic Education in the U.S.

- Young people in low SES, youth of color and immigrant youth are less likely to be civically/politically engaged

Source: Callahan & Muller (2013) p.29.
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Youth Civic Engagement Clusters by Education (2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Any College Experience</th>
<th>No College Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civically Alienated</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadly Engaged</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Specialists</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undermobilized</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talkers</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donors</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Challenge of Democracy and Civic Education in the U.S.

- Disadvantaged youth are less likely to have high-quality civic learning opportunities in schools (Kahne & Middaugh 2009).

- There are also civic opportunity gap outside the school (Hart & Atkins 2002, Putnam 2015).

- Daily experiences in poor, urban neighborhood also impede their civic development (Rubin 2007, Furuta 2015).

"civic empowerment gap" (Levinson 2012)
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- The nation is experiencing a deep, widespread social and political division.

![Number of Hate Crimes in U.S.](https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/civil-rights/hate-crimes)
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Report: Hate Crime Is Rising In 30 Major American Cities [Infographic]

Hate Crime Is Rising In America's 30 Biggest Cities
Number of hate crimes recorded in 30 major U.S. cities

1. Challenge of Democracy and Civic Education in the U.S.

- Schools are facing various challenges from these social changes (Rogers et al. 2019).

89% of principals report that “incivility and contentiousness in the broader political environment has considerably affected their school community” (Rogers et al., p.7)
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- Strong differences of political opinion amongst students have created more contentious classroom environments. 
  - Occurred Multiple Times: 15%  
  - Occurred 1-2 Times: 50.3%  
  - No Occurrence: 34.7%

- Strong differences of political opinion amongst students have promoted hostile exchanges outside of class. 
  - Occurred Multiple Times: 11.5%  
  - Occurred 1-2 Times: 47.1%  
  - No Occurrence: 41.2%

- Students have made demeaning or hateful remarks towards classmates for expressing either liberal or conservative views. 
  - Occurred Multiple Times: 21.6%  
  - Occurred 1-2 Times: 53.1%  
  - No Occurrence: 25.3%

- Strong differences of political opinion amongst community members or between community members and school staff have had an adverse impact on the school. 
  - Occurred Multiple Times: 10.5%  
  - Occurred 1-2 Times: 36.8%  
  - No Occurrence: 52.7%

“The most significant reason I am putting forward to encourage this particular kind of democratic education [based on cross-cutting political talk] is that while it is *inauthentic* to the world outside of school, it is *authentic* to what a healthy democracy demands.” (Hess 2009, p.22)
1. Challenge of Democracy and Civic Education in the U.S.

- It becomes more critical for schools/teachers to teach students the importance of respect/trust, and the value of discussion and collective action of people from diverse backgrounds.

- We also need to empower young people who feel marginalized from the society so they can exercise their voice to change the society.
2. Empowering Disadvantaged and Marginalized Youth

“Schools need to take seriously the knowledge and experiences of low-income youth and adults of color—to teach in ways that are consonant with and that even build upon their knowledge and experience, in ways that are engaging and empowering rather than disaffecting and disempowering” (Levinson 2012, pp.53-54)
2. Empowering Disadvantaged and Marginalized Youth

- To empower disadvantaged/marginalized youth, it is essential to...
  
  • Listen to their voices and understand their lived experiences
  
  • Connect their daily experiences to classroom-based discussion and civic learning to make them more meaningful (Rubin 2012)
  
  • Provide hands-on experiences of civic and political engagement so they can feel their voice and participation matter (Levinson 2012)
2. Empowering Disadvantaged and Marginalized Youth

- Civic Education Reform in Chicago Public Schools (CPS)

  ✓ One of the largest metropolitan districts
  ✓ Hispanic: 46.7%
  ✓ African Americans: 36.6%
  ✓ Economically disadvantaged: 76.6%

- CPS recognized that it is critical to tackle with “civic empowerment gap” and introduced multiple initiatives throughout the district
2. Empowering Disadvantaged and Marginalized Youth

- CPS Civics Curriculum “Participate!”

“Students become engaged when issues are relevant and have a direct impact on their lives” (Chicago Public Schools 2016, p.6)

Some examples of activities:
- Discussion on affirmative action
- Historical learning from slavery and Civil Rights Movement
- Research project on immigration policy
2. Empowering Disadvantaged and Marginalized Youth

“Our classrooms are the microcosm of our world that we live in. We have to remember that when students come to school, they bring all of their lived experiences with them”.

“The classroom creates a safe space for students to have a voice, and to express how they feel, to learn about the history that informs the future, and for them to learn how to participate in the democratic society”.

Source: https://www.teachingchannel.org/tch/blog/talking-across-political-differences
2. Empowering Disadvantaged and Marginalized Youth

- “Project Soapbox” (Mikva Challenge)

“Project Soapbox is a public speaking competition facilitated by Mikva Challenge that calls young people to speak out on issues that affect them and their communities”

Source: https://mikvachallenge.org/our-work/programs/project-soapbox/
2. Empowering Disadvantaged and Marginalized Youth

- Service-Learning (SL) in multiple subjects
- Student Voice Committees (SVC)

“[CPS aims to] ensure that all high school students have access to a wide range of civic learning opportunities. From representing their peers on high school local school councils or Student Voice Committees to engaging in service learning projects [...] to solving problems in their own communities, there are many ways for students to engage” (Chicago Public Schools 2016, p.13)
From SURVEY - What are the top 3 issues of injustice facing our communities?

- Economic inequality
- Education access inequality
- Sexual orientation discrimination
- Unemployment
- Racial discrimination
- Gun violence
- Police brutality
- (unjust) immigration policy
- Unequal healthcare, lack of coverage for all
- Segregation of neighborhoods
- Religious discrimination
- Social class inequity
2. Empowering Disadvantaged and Marginalized Youth

- **Story of Jones College Prep H.S.**
  - ✓ 90% of students participated in the national walkout against gun violence (March 2018)
  - ✓ Multiple student organizations worked together and talked with principal, teachers, parents to make it happen
  - ✓ School culture that respects student voice

2. Empowering Disadvantaged and Marginalized Youth

“Every single student has a voice, and every single voice matters. And so, we have to make sure that in all of our schools and all of our classrooms, every single student has the opportunity to engage in a meaningful way”.

Source: https://www.teachingchannel.org/tch/blog/talking-across-political-differences
2. Empowering Disadvantaged and Marginalized Youth

- We yet need to make sure that such opportunities would not reinforce the social division - we rather need to help young people learn from and work across the differences (cf. Boyte 2004).
2. Empowering Disadvantaged and Marginalized Youth

“These findings point to an emerging ‘community’ of young people of various backgrounds coming together to make positive change, and defining themselves in opposition to older generations who they believe have failed them”. (CIRCLE 2018)

2. Empowering Disadvantaged and Marginalized Youth

- We yet need to make sure that such opportunities would not reinforce the social division - we rather need to help young people learn from and work across the differences (cf. Boyte 2004).

✓ Socioeconomic segregation (Putnam 2015) = More homogenous environments?
✓ Importance of giving students chance to hear other people’s voices and cultivating culture & space to listen to such diverse voices
References


References


