

Mexico (Nuevo Leon)

Colegio Guadalupe. The Education for Democratic Citizenship Program: Learning to participate participating

Colegio Guadalupe is one of 120 Mexican low-income population schools that make use of a Democratic Citizenship programme which stimulates children to come up with ideas to solve real-life problems in their educational community. This process involves that students identify a problem, and then generate, implement and assess possible solutions, based on off-campus research, group discussions, etc. The objective of the programme is to foster students' communicative and organizational skills, their attitudes for citizenship (e.g., value of diversity and tolerance, rejection of violence), and a positive view on learning from real experiences. Teachers receive a professional training for implementation of the programme.

Main focus of innovation: LEARNERS, TEACHERS, CONTENT, ORGANIZATION

Other keywords: equity attachment

General Information

Name of the ILE: Colegio Guadalupe. The Education for Democratic Citizenship Program: Learning to participate participating

Location/Address: Nuevo León, México.

Website: <http://viaeducation.org>

ILE submitted by: Via Education

Rationale

Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21st century learning challenges?

Nowadays the democratic context in Latin America is exceptional. It is a historical moment because more governments have been elected democratically (UNPD, 2004); nevertheless it is also a moment when democracy is weak. A research held by the United Nations Development Programme (UNPD) shows that around half the population would be willing to have an authoritarian government, and would agree on losing their freedom of speech and right to organize if a better economical situation would emerge. Hence, it is necessary that people, especially children, develop democratic competencies that help them recognize themselves as individuals with rights. Citizens that can also contribute to the construction of a more democratic and inclusive society, within a process of social sustainable development.

The Education for Democratic Citizenship Program is the answer to this need since it serves as an innovative learning space where children and teenagers learn to build knowledge from their own experience. It also gives them the opportunity to solve real problems that affect their own educational community where they can contribute to create, implement and assess their own proposals. The program focus on democratic citizenship education and at the same time allows the development of knowledge in diverse content areas such as: language arts, civics and economics, including the application of the research process. The methodology promotes that students actively participate in their own learning process and turns them into change agents, self-directed individuals with a strong motivation to achieve goals for the common good. The program views children as an integral whole and considers its individual differences (Gardner, 1999), as well as the different aspects of their cognitive, social and moral development, including their skills for life (peaceful conflict resolution, social participation, democratic dialogue, analysis of reality, expression of ideas, stating a position on personal beliefs, empathy, organization and social commitment).

Various experiences in the world (Hart, 1997), demonstrate that children participate in social development and environmental projects from different levels, but most of them happen in non-formal educational environments, therefore, the need for citizen participation needs to extend to a formal education environment in order to open up the possibility of developing civic competencies in different areas.

Therefore this program responds to the 21st century learning challenges since it is enabling students to apply knowledge in the construction of a more democratic society. This means that learning is not only oriented to contents but also to attitudes, values and life skills. Nowadays it is not possible to conceive a teacher-centered education. This program shows how by incorporating participation learning methodologies, an innovative learning environment is generated, where dialogue, reflection, metacognition and deliberation make possible that students transfer learning to practice, and develop a sense of belonging that promotes decision making for the common good. It also brings evidence on how a program may contribute to the development of skills and competencies in a horizontal and holistic manner, where knowledge is applied on a day to day basis within the classroom and in the community. It shows how teachers and students change the way they understand the teaching – learning process.

Teachers and students learn to build knowledge from real experiences. They participate in authentic settings and design proposals to improve the quality of their environment, which opens a whole new point of view regarding the meaning of learning.

(See Appendix 1 for details on how the methodological process implemented with this program incorporates the elements that describe an innovative learning environment – OECD-CERI, 2008: self constructed, self regulated, co built, situated, goal-oriented, open to a variety of results, as well as collaborative and/or individual).

Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE

What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners' social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)

The purpose of the Education for Democratic Citizenship Program is to create learning opportunities for a citizenship practice, through a participative methodology. Children are able to provide initiatives to improve their environment and develop participation and democratic civic skills. Children will understand the meaning of participation and develop a sense of effectiveness, this is, that they feel they are able to solve problems in their communities as well as capable to improve their environment.

These goals, in a real setting are observed as follow: the participating children accompanied by a facilitator design projects that come up from their own ideas and from their own research in their community. They follow a series of structured steps through a collaborative approach. In the Education for Democratic Citizenship Program underlay the perspective of a competency based approach since in its definition and methodology expects students to be involved in a comprehensive experience where they can develop different dimensions of civic competency (knowledge, skills, attitudes and commitment).

Stated bellow is the knowledge, skills and attitudes the program seeks to develop. See Appendix 2

The **key factual and/or conceptual knowledge** chosen to be taught in the Education for Democratic Citizenship Program are: democracy citizenship, social participation, diversity, sustainable development, discrimination, prejudice, identity, multiple perspectives, social capital, deliberation, research process, laws and regulations, common good, peaceful conflict resolution and solidarity (Osler & Starkey, 2004).

The key conceptual constructs assessed are: democracy, citizen participation, diversity, deliberation, common good and solidarity.

The **skills** to be taught are: collective decision making for communication, organization and critical thinking (Kirlin, 2003). The category suggested by Reimers (2008) is also included:

- Skills for living together in peace
 - ✓ skills for peaceful conflict resolution (interpersonally and group)
 - ✓ assertiveness
 - ✓ skills to manage emotions
 - ✓ communicative skills
- Skills for democratic participation
 - ✓ skills to participate in group decision making processes
 - ✓ skills to advocate for the interest of others
 - ✓ skills to communicate ideas to groups
- Skills for plurality and diversity
 - ✓ considering different perspectives
 - ✓ confront discrimination and exclusion with democratic means

The **attitudes for citizenship** are also part of the citizenship learning dimension: values, attitudes and habits that prompt students towards a democratic culture. The program seeks to develop the civic attitudes researched by Olsen & Starkey (2004): value of diversity and tolerance; rejection to violence as a mean to solve conflicts, concern on the rights and well being of others; awareness of the need to balance personal freedom with responsibility towards others; feeling of belonging and the willingness to reach common objectives; personal effectiveness; a commitment and desire to be involved and participate in the community.

Learners

Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?

Nowadays the program has been implemented in the Guadalupe School from grades 1-9. All the students participate (an estimated of 800), between 6 to 15 years old. Each semester two student councils are organized, one in elementary and another for junior high school. Students are democratically elected (presidents and vice-presidents) by their schoolmates. The elementary student council is integrated by 24 students and there are 18 for the junior high.

This program is also being implemented in 120 low-income population public schools through a research project held in two different Mexican States, Nuevo León and Guerrero with different economical development. Another research project involves a comparison among highly marginalized rural and indigenous schools in the states of Chiapas, Durango and Nuevo León.

Facilitators

Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?

The teachers and facilitators are members of the school community.

Component of the program implemented into the classroom: In the case of the elementary level, the lead teacher is responsible for the implementation and in the case of junior high school; the facilitator is the Civics subject teacher. These teachers are assisted by the program coordinator in each school. *Component of the program implemented in the school – Student Council:* The work of the student council is facilitated by the program coordinator who was trained by Via Education. The profile of the coordinator is the following: a person with teaching or psycho-pedagogical preparation and experience in working with children. Training includes a stage where Via Education researchers model the intervention.

A second stage where the facilitator conducts the intervention along with Via Education researchers and finally, the stage of appropriateness where Via Education investigators let the facilitator conduct the whole intervention in a freer way.

The **role of the facilitator** is the key factor in the intervention. The training provided to the facilitator is both theoretical and practical. It is oriented to build his trust in the children capabilities so he will be able to create a learning environment based on dialogue and critical reflection. This will excel the **children** capabilities that will turn into the implementation of their own initiatives. Therefore they will put into practice what they learn and develop skills, attitudes and values at the same time.

The Via Education research team are the leaders of the design, implementation and assessment of the program. They are all Harvard University School of Education Graduates and have 15 years experience on education programs oriented to sustainable social development.

Organization of the ILE

How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?

Learning is organized through the structure established by the learning methodology of the program.

This means the methodology provides the facilitator with the foundation to guide students on the design of a project that has the objective of improving the quality of their environment. The steps of the methodology are very clear regarding its objectives as well as the competencies to be developed in each stage of the program. Nevertheless, the content of the project is determined by the initiatives of the children. The process to determine the project to be implemented involves children in mapping their community, carry out and introduce surveys and interviews, decide the aspect to be improved and draft, implement and evaluate results through an action plan.

Interaction of learners and facilitators: The program involves an innovative relationship style. Since the facilitators are adults they need to adapt when interacting with children. Despite the fact that adults are the guides in this process, they have to trust the children's capabilities and the implementation of their initiatives. On the other hand, students also need to shift their paradigm because they are accustomed to a hierarchical relationship, both in the school and with the family. This program, little by little, enables them to understand that their ideas are valuable. They get the opportunity to give an opinion, take a position that will be respected. Regarding the national curriculum, standards that integrate the civics contents have been approached in an informal manner. This program is a support proposal in the area of citizenship education that is implemented in a transverse manner.

Kind of pedagogy: The program is integrated by a series of carefully planned steps followed by a group of children or teenagers under the guidance of a facilitator. On one hand, the purpose is to provide a learning environment where participants develop their democratic and participation citizenship skills, and on the other hand to have them experience the improvement their own environment.

This means allowing the child to put into practice a project that requires the solution to a problem through a metacognitive process and reflection about the activity as he works on it to build learning. The steps include identifying a problem, designing an action plan, taking ideas into action and evaluating the outcomes. (Appendix 4)

The program is "citizenship education" rather than "civic education" because it encompasses skills and attitudes. According to experts such as COX (2006), the program achieves a thematic, quantitative and formative expansion that surpasses traditional civic education in the following manner:

The *Subject matter* focuses on the discussion of real problems and the solution of those at the reach.

The *quantitative* expansion is evident since the program applies to all levels of education and has an emphasis on transverse implementation. The program also has a formative expansion in its instructional design and implementation. It includes a "radical enrichment of the media and methods to educate the citizens, where the key principle of the new paradigm is the combination of study and participation practices, debate, decision and collective action" (Cox, 2006). It also looks forward for citizenship education and democratic processes to go beyond the classroom into defining a different style of relating to others.

The program is based on the research done about the participation of children regarding sustainable development (Hart, 1997). Children are considered as social inquirers in a process of investigation – 5 action. The idea is to achieve better levels of authentic participation, where they are responsible for their own initiatives and share them with adults. It is expected that they overcome non-participation processes such as manipulation or simulation.

Some classical concepts such as Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and Piaget's accommodation and assimilation are considered. Some other approaches are: Freire's use of dialogue in the analysis of situations and the development of critical thought, Gardner's (1993), knowledge building from multiple intelligences. Other strategies included are experiential learning, problem solving and service-learning.

Learning Context

In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?

The context where the program is implemented is a middle – low and low urban class. Students participating come from broken families and disintegrated and violent communities.

The learning space used is integrated by classrooms, library, computer lab, playground, head's office, and auditorium, this is, all the learning community and even beyond the walls. The learning community is a huge classroom. Since the implementation of projects is experiential, children have the freedom to use the school spaces and resources that may help with the development of the initiatives. If they want to go out of school, they have to do it with an adult. The resources are used so the children carry out the project research, the implementation of the projects, the communication and publication of outcomes.

For instance, they access technology to search for information, create presentations and produce videos about their projects.

Parents get involved through their children since they are given their role as active members of the community. We have observed how children have made a change the way adults interact with them. As they have had the opportunity to show their capabilities, adults take more into consideration their ideas. Likewise they feel more confident on their own conceptions.

History of ILE

Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?

Via Education is the research center that developed the Education for Democratic Citizenship Program.

The design originated from three concrete experiences:

1. *Working in social and educational development projects in marginalized communities, including rural, indigenous and urban environments in Mexico:* The community work developed by *Via Education* was the base to learn about the most important aspects of the characteristics of human groups organized for the development of their community. The researchers from *Via Education* lived in these rural communities to learn from this processes and compared them with the most relevant literature regarding sustainable social development.

2. *Academic experience and research:* The program was designed by Harvard University graduates. They founded *Via Education*. Its pedagogical foundation is based on a deep analysis on how to teach and what are the best ways to promote learning. Likewise it analyzes the best practices worldwide on how democratic citizenship education is taught and the processes that lead to an authentic participation of the students in their own learning process.

3. *Participation in research developed by researchers from the MIT Media Lab:* Finally, the program also came out from the participation in the research done by Leo Burd from the MIT Media Lab for the Lifelong Kindergarten Group. This project helped to learn about and implement innovative teaching – learning experiences out of the school, where innovation is taken far beyond and the student is put in a non-traditional educational setting.

The extreme impoverishment in which so many children in Mexico live and that we witnessed as we worked with the rural, indigenous and urban marginalized communities, made us reflect in the way education can become a mean to counteract this vicious cycle. Beyond that, we reflected on what kind of pedagogical experience could be implemented so children can effectively develop skills to act on their own impoverished reality and turn themselves into change agents. Ideally we should let them be whatever they want to be, meaning, let them find their *raison de d'être*. This is the main reason why we developed the Education for Democratic Citizenship Program. After our own academic experiences and research, we focused in this subject matter because it may have an impact in all other content areas of the curriculum. It can also become a learning space where different competencies can be developed, and that might have a direct impact in the life of the students, both in short and long terms.

The main idea of the program came out from the following question: What can be done to put to the reach of children an innovative learning experience, especially the neediest ones? Then we understood that school is the best setting, probably the only one for many children, where educational opportunities should be offered to develop life skills.

After questioning ourselves, we developed the pedagogical model for the Education for Democratic Citizenship Program, its implementation structure and focused on the following aspects of the program:

1. It should be an answer to nowadays needs in such a way that it should let students develop their own human potential and be able to improve their quality of life and participate effectively in a democratic society.
2. It should be low cost and congruent with sustainability; this means the school should be able to implement the program with its own resources, though limited.
3. It should value the human factor despite the obstacles due to a shift of paradigm for the teaching staff as well as their lack of training. It is important to trust their vocation and potential when teaching in an innovative manner. Likewise, it is important to value the potential and learning capabilities of the children despite their limited socio – economic conditions.
4. It should offer a learning opportunity with high quality standards, especially for educational communities of low profile, considering equity in order to teach best to whoever needs it the most.
5. It should develop life skills through a competency design, this is, visualize the learning process in a holistic manner, including all cognitive aspects, but also attitudes, values and skills development. By teaching democratic citizenship, learning transforms into: knowledge, learning by doing, learning to live together and learning to be (Delors, 1996).
6. It should offer the possibility of expanding its implementation without risking the quality of the learning experience. It is a complex pedagogical design with a simple implementation process, which makes it accessible to teachers and students under different contexts (urban, rural, indigenous and disabled) and grade levels (K-12 and higher education).
7. It should contribute to the civic education regarding the construction of knowledge on how to develop citizenship competencies in the students, as well as of best teaching practices and strategies to achieve goals.

Funding of the ILE

How is it funded?

Funding is a shared effort. The school assigns teachers and a program coordinator *in situ* for its implementation. Via Education raises funds to train facilitators, get materials and carry out the formative assessment and identifying learning outcomes. This is done through foundations, universities and the Secretariat of Public Education.

Learning Outcomes

What are the learning outcomes achieved by the ILE, including academic, social, interpersonal and meta-cognitive outcomes? How is learning assessed?

Via Education evaluated the program through a methodology of investigation – action during its implementation. In the first stage of transference it was done as a pilot test. This process lasted two years. The stages that followed were: design phase, implementation and evaluation phase, adjustment phase, systematization, end of pilot test and finally, transference phase. The purposes for this evaluation were to specify each step of the program and feedback as it was being implemented in order to observe its effectiveness and make adjustments. The process of the program was systematized in order to operate autonomously in the schools where it would be applied in the future. The main guidelines for implementation were established in order to make them effective when applied by the facilitator.

This evaluation included aspects of the program implementation related to the training of the facilitators and everything they might need to operate it adequately. It also included the experience of the participants in the development of citizenship competencies and aligning the outcomes with the objectives of the program.

In this preliminary evaluation, it was found that the program allows citizenship competence to transfer in the reality. The participants developed a feeling of appropriating their actions, as well as a sense of purpose and a feeling of belonging when contributing to improve their community. A paradigm shift was observed. The facilitator recognizes the richness of providing children an opportunity to have ideas and develop their initiatives. On the other hand, children have a better understanding of citizenship; their community and they find a methodology to practice their civic actions while they realize they have improved their environment.

Children grow awareness on the needs of others and realized their own potential to make changes. This work gives them the chance to see a change and it strengthens their self-confidence. Through their projects they have developed attitudes towards, commitment, responsibility, empathy, tolerance to diversity, feeling of belonging, and understanding of their ecosystem, 6 and its relationships. It was also evident that children have the skills to improve the quality of their environment, and they do it by collaborating with the people from their learning community.

After the qualitative and quantitative analysis we can confirm that the program is aligned to the objectives and has a positive impact in students. It is evident that when applied in as a comprehensive school strategy, the results might be even better since the entire learning community would be following the same objective in an authentic democratic action.

The preliminary findings of this formative evaluation at Escuela Guadalupe gave rise to expand the model with 150 teachers from other four states in Mexico within urban, rural and indigenous marginalized contexts. Finally, nowadays, Via Education participates in an evaluation on the analysis of teaching models for citizenship education along with the collaboration of specialists from Harvard University.

(Appendix 5)

Other information you consider to be relevant to describe the ILE

Additional information

About the Program

There are three ways to establish the program:

1. Through the student councils (one in elementary and another for junior high school).
2. Cross-sectional, any classroom where the teacher gives to the students the opportunity to take part. From their classroom the students participate settling, which are the urgent matters, and the actions they want to carry out to improve the school environment. Teachers are trained about the civic education and the student's participation. The teacher call an election at the beginning of the school year to decide who will be the president and vice-president, to represent the group in the student council (elementary or junior high school). Besides they do a reflexive work to identify what they do need to upgrade on their classroom. The students point out what are the outstanding issues and form committees. Every student enrolls in a committee, establishes a project plan and carries out the tasks.

The principal committees are: Academic committee, to help other students with their homework and academic work; First Aid committee, the students are in charge to bring the supplies for a first aid kit and give attention when their classmate suffer an accident; Order and Silence committee, help to keep order in the classroom (sometimes they use a little bell or a song to keeping down the noise in the classroom); Honesty committee, helping like mediators when things get lost in the classroom. And many others more specific committees that depend on each classroom situation.

3. Through the civic and ethical education subject in all grades. In this case the civic competencies of the program are aligning to develop the subject. Also the subject point out the work by projects and the participating methodology that follows the program and guides the teacher to carry out a project, but enriched with the participatory approach that encourage students to develop initiatives that improve the quality of the environment.

About the Cost

The annual cost per student is \$33.33 USD. The highest investment it's for the teacher's training.

The estimated cost is distributed as follows: 33% brings the school community of Colegio Guadalupe and gifts, and 67% Via Education gets through contributions from the Department of Education, universities, a local or national ONG, philanthropic foundations and citizen councils, among many others.