

Using Digital Technology to Enhance Students' Understanding of Citizenship Education

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[Abstract]

We propose to explore how **elementary pre-service teacher candidates** identified, video taped, photographed, discussed, and categorized samples of what they construed as democratic citizenship education occurring within elementary classrooms during their field placements. We propose to explore how **elementary school students** identified, video taped, photographed, discussed, and categorized samples of what they construed as democratic citizenship education occurring within elementary classrooms. We propose to use digital camcorders to record school activities, projects, and lessons that demonstrate the characteristics of the democratic citizenship education to reflect on students' understanding of democratic ideals and increase their awareness of the purpose of public education.

[Significance]

The project has the potential to

- 1) Enhance students' knowledge, skills, and values in democratic citizenship education. Both college pre-service teacher candidates and elementary students in local schools will benefit from this project.
- 2) Provide opportunities for faculty members and public school teachers for further professional development in their teaching, scholarly work, and service.
- 3) Strengthen networks and relationships with local school districts and seek more opportunities for collaborative projects.
- 4) Increase students' abilities to use digital technology to collect and analyze digital media data.

[Rationale]

Democratic citizenship education is a prominent concern in the social studies education literature (Niemi & Niemi, 2007; Ben-Porath, 2006; Hahn, 2001). Since the early days of the field, social studies in the United States has been associated with the preparation of citizens in a democracy. Although scholars have disagreed over the aims, content, and methods for preparing citizens, most social studies educators have advocated the development of democratic understanding in youth (Hahn, 2001). In the last and this century, scholars have been debating about the best ways to achieve that preparation. Many assumed that the primary purpose of social studies was to develop democratic understanding – the knowledge, abilities, and values needed to sustain democracy (Hertzberg, 1981). Most conceptions of democracy and the social studies include attention to principles embodied in the Declaration of the Independence and the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. Consequently, many states

and local school districts require that students take courses in U.S. history and civics or government before they graduate from high school (Hahn, 1999). Additionally, most state and local curriculum guide designate a variety of social studies courses to teach concepts and events associated with democracy and to develop skills and attitudes that support democratic participation.

In today's digital age, technology has taken large strides in the improvement of many aspects of our lives. Technology integration into education has been a strong trend in education reforms. Research shows that technology integration into social studies instruction has made great impacts on students' learning. According to Rose (2001), visual images such as photographs offer complex views of the world. "They interpret the world; they display it in very particular ways" based on the photographer's perception (p.6)." Collier and Collier (1986) maintain that the camera represents an impartial vision of the world that elucidates one's understanding of it. Video clips and photographs can capture not only thematic visuals (multiple vs. singles, children vs. adults), but also can reveal the societal structures and influences underlying this microlevel point of reference.

We are proposing a project to invite local elementary school teachers and their students to work with college preservice teachers to use digital camcorders to take video clips and pictures of events, activities, and school projects that demonstrate democratic ideals both in local schools and on college campus. Students will form into groups of three, each having a role to play in this collaborative project. One of them will be the photographer, one as a writer, and the third one as a presenter. In groups, students talk about what events, activities, lessons, children's books, and projects in their classroom, their school, or in their community that they believe are evidence of democratic education.

Video clips and pictures will be collected in four phases. For the first phase, each group of preservice teachers will take six video clips and photos featuring activities that demonstrate democratic citizenship education on college campus. Each video clip will be presented with a photoessay to explain why this activity is selected to be recorded and how it relates to democratic education. During the presentation, all students will analyze the available videoclips and pictures on display and identify gaps between students' understanding of democratic citizenship education and the real meanings of democratic education.

The second phase, each group of preservice teachers will take another six video clips and photos, featuring activities that demonstrate democratic citizenship education on college campus. Each video clip will be presented with a photoessay to explain why this activity is selected to be recorded and how it relates to democratic education. During the presentation, all students will analyze the available videoclips on display and identify improvements in students' understanding between the first phase and this second phase about the democratic education.

Video clips and pictures taken by the local school students will be collected in the third phase. Each group of elementary school students will take six video clips and photos, featuring activities that demonstrate democratic citizenship education in their schools. Each video clip will be presented with a photoessay to explain why this activity is selected to be recorded and how it relates to democratic

education. During the presentation, all students will analyze the available video clips on display and identify gaps in students' understanding about the democratic education. Preservice teachers will be present to help with the analysis.

The fourth and last phase will be collecting video clips and photos made by the elementary school students. Each group of elementary school students will take another six video clips, featuring activities that demonstrate democratic citizenship education in their schools. Each video clip will be presented with a photoessay to explain why this activity is selected to be recorded and how it relates to democratic education. During the presentation, all students will analyze the available video clips on display and identify improvements in students' understanding about the democratic citizenship education between the third and fourth phase. Preservice teachers will be present to help with the analysis. Recommendations will be made for local schools and college campus to organize activities and projects that have more salient features of democratic education.

We would like to start this project in the fall of 2009 with one local school classroom and students in one elementary social studies method course. One of us teaches media literacy in elementary education, and the other teaches social studies method course on campus. Both of us have extensive experiences of working with teachers and students in local schools. Our collaboration in teaching and research sets up a great example for preservice teachers to participate in collaborative projects.

We are proposing to seek funds to purchase 8 to 10 digital camcorders, and accessories that are necessary for video clip editing. These camcorders will remain properties of the Department of Childhood and Early Childhood Education, School of Education. They will continue to be used in course projects and research projects. When they are in use, we will be responsible for its safety. When they are not in use, they will be stored in a department cabinet. Other faculty members can access them for their projects. In the past, we would have to reserve the limited number of camcorders from the College Library and most of the time, those camcorders are either not available at our scheduled class time, or they can only be checked out for a very limited time. Projects like ours require extensive use of the digital camcorders. Digital camcorders allow the most convenient data collection, analysis, and storage.

These camcorders could be utilized for the next phases of our study. We will use this four-phase project as our pilot project. What we gain from this project can be extended to projects in the upcoming semesters in both media literacy and social studies method courses. Another project we would like to pursue is to invite students of color on college campus to take video clips and pictures to demonstrate their evaluation of diversity on campus. That project could be collaborated with Equal Opportunity Program on campus and Center for Gender and Intercultural Studies.

[References]

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[Budget*]

8 camcorders	8 x \$ 400 = \$ 3200
Tripods (3)	3 x \$ 120 = \$360
Stationeries:	
Cartridge for printers + Printing costs (flyers, phamphlets, paper, etc.)	= \$300
Children’s literature (tradebooks) about democratic citizenship education	= \$200
Large-storage Flash Drive (2)	2 x \$100 = \$200
<u>Recordable DVDs (blank)</u>	<u>= \$100</u>
	Total: \$4360

***Requested budget can be adjusted according to funds available.**