

# From Comrade to Citizen

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Fifteen years of democracy in the former Soviet Union and its satellites have seen the first generation of youth develop into democratic citizens. During this time, organizations in the United States and educators in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have collaborated to produce varied approaches to democratic citizenship education. This article notes the rising civic competency in the former Soviet world (particularly in Eastern Europe), describes an increasingly accepted framework for civic education on a global scale, and details three significant trends in cross-cultural civic curriculum projects in post-communist countries. Lessons learned from such projects can be summed up in four guiding principles, and they frame future challenges for civic education work in the region.

## **Civic Competency in Post-Communist States**

A 1999 study of 14-year-olds and their civic knowledge in 28 countries (undertaken by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, or IEA) reveals that civic education programs are working. The study examined both the content of educational programs for democratic citizenship as well as the skills of their graduates and found that the most successful programs appear to be those in Poland, the United States, and the Czech Republic.<sup>1</sup> Most notably, schools that had established a classroom climate open to discussion of issues related to citizenship tended to have higher national scores. In a promising finding, researchers also discovered that higher scores in civic competency led to a greater likelihood that young people will vote in future elections.<sup>2</sup>

## **Core Components of Civic Education**

Many of the sub-categories within the IEA study focused on conceptual, cognitive, behavioral and attitudinal elements that have emerged over the past decade and a half as fundamental to democratic citizenship. John Patrick (Indiana University)—through his long experience with projects in Central and Eastern Europe and his lifelong study of teaching and learning democratic citizenship—has been refining these elements into a global framework, and his most recent iteration has four key components.<sup>3</sup>

*Civic knowledge* is based on an understanding of the principles and practice of democracy. Six concepts lie at the core of global education for democracy:

1. *Representative democracy*: free, fair, open and contested elections through which an inclusive citizenry chooses governmental representatives.
2. *Rule of law*: just treatment for all citizens through a constitution based on the rule of law that places appropriate limits on a representative government

elected by the people.

3. *Human rights*: guaranteed equal protection of natural rights for all individuals through the due process of law.

4. *Citizenship*: the source of authority for the constitution and the government, whereby citizens take ownership of their country by consenting to the manner in which it is governed and by choosing those who will govern.

5. *Civil society*: a collection of independent associations that can act unrestrained on any matter that does not endanger the human rights of others and that can check the political forces within a society that might like to circumvent government and the rule of law.

6. *Market economy*: governmentally protected and regulated personal investments involving a free exchange of goods and services based on competition that allows prices to be set through the free consumer choices of the people.

Civic knowledge also includes an understanding of the various interpretations of citizenship in democracies around the world and of perennial issues embedded in the core principles of democracy, like the potential clash between freedom and equality. This knowledge gives citizens the ability to communicate with a common vocabulary and act together for common civic purposes.

*Cognitive civic skills* require the ability to identify, analyze and synthesize information about political and civic life and public issues. Acquiring these intellectual skills allows students to develop the ability to evaluate and make decisions on public policy issues, think critically about the conditions surrounding political and civic life, contribute constructively to the improvement of political and civic life, and think comparatively about the aspects of democracy practiced in other countries. This last skill enhances students' understanding of their own democracy as they come to realize that their democracy is not only one of many, but also one of many versions of this form of associated living.

*Participatory civic skills* consist of interacting with others to promote personal and common interests, monitoring public events and issues, deliberating with other citizens and reaching consensual decisions, and influencing (through action) public policy and civic life. These skills lie at the heart of civil society because they enable individuals to form groups that can act to promote society's common good without interference from elected officials or government agencies.

*Civic dispositions* encompass the belief in human rights, respect for equal rights, acceptance of the obligation to participate in public life, and promotion of the common good. These dispositions confirm the common and equal humanity and dignity of each individual. A student holding these dispositions will work to protect and respect the rights of others, act morally while practicing self-restraint as a citizen, and contribute to the common good.

Essentially, these dispositions are the moral foundation of a civil society.

### **Three Trends**

in Civic Education Programs

Many collaborations between U.S. institutions and educators in the post-communist world have operationalized Patrick's framework, producing three trends: (1) original curriculum development, (2) university preservice teacher education and (3) adaptation of existing curricula. Various combinations of these trends can be found in each of the projects described here.

*Trend 1: Original curriculum development.* Projects conducted by Bowling Green State University and Ohio State University have helped educators in Poland and Ukraine develop new curricula for pre-adult civic education that include all of Patrick's four key components.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the University of Iowa College of Education has collaborated with educational reformers in the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Latvia to help them create a bottom-up unfolding of new curricula that meets the needs of their local populations.<sup>5</sup> In each of these projects, the post-communist educators experienced residencies at their host U.S. institutions and participated in curriculum seminars where they explored curricular ideas that fit their national contexts. These seminars, which met throughout their residencies, provided educators with the foundation for developing ideas and writing instructional materials that can be used with pre-adult students in specific post-communist environments. Among the more popular democratic teaching methods adapted by post-communist educators are Socratic seminars, role playing/simulations, historical document analysis and service learning (all of which bring to life Patrick's framework).

*Trend 2: University preservice teacher education.* Many recent programs have developed a course in civic education, or even a complete certification program, for post-communist educators. For example, in a collaboration between Boston University, Russell Sage College, and teacher education institutions in Samara, Russia, scholars and teacher educators from the U.S. worked with teacher educators in Samara to develop a preservice teacher education program and textbooks in civic education. Known as the University Reform Initiative, this project encouraged the use of extracurricular civics activities, a notion shunned since the staged projects of Soviet times.<sup>6</sup>

In another example, a project between Indiana University and Vilnius Pedagogical University developed interdisciplinary preservice teacher education. This project developed a curriculum that fuses social work with civic education. The Vilnius Pedagogical University's master's degree in social education now graduates teachers who not only act as advocates for child welfare but also can help students analyze social problems within a developing democracy. Therefore, graduates of this program focus on the intersection of civic education and school social work in the areas of Patrick's framework that include morality, ethics, rights, responsibilities, empathy and

positive socialization.[Z](#)

*Trend 3: Adaptation of existing curricula.* Given the speed with which the post-communist world must democratize, many projects emanating from U.S. partnerships have adapted an existing civic education curriculum to meet the needs of individual post-communist educational contexts. A prominent example is the Center for Civic Education's Project Citizen. This curriculum typifies the trend in post-communist civic education that seeks to re-involve citizens in their political lives as members of a democracy. Based on the idea of setting a course for public policy, Project Citizen prescribes a format for students to investigate a public issue and develop a reasoned policy that will address this issue. Research on Project Citizen in Latvia and Lithuania indicates that this adaptation is successful when indigenous educational reformers collaborate with U.S. partners in teacher education programs and schools.[8](#)

### **Lessons Learned**

Over the past 15 years, four practical guidelines have emerged from the interactions between U.S. and international participants as they worked together both in the United States and abroad. The essential similarity between these successful partnerships was the development of usable curricula for schools in the target countries. The following practical guidelines brought about these product-driven outcomes.

*Guideline 1: Build a common understanding of democracy and of the educational purposes implied by this understanding.* Each program required that both partners understood the shared elements of democracy that could form a basis for discussion and subsequent curriculum development. As a result, the partners had common ground on which to build the content and pedagogical practices needed to develop a civic curriculum that could contribute to the process of democratization. Each partnership embraced common elements of Patrick's framework.

*Guideline 2: Combine established theories on democratic citizenship education with their practical applications to offer educators in emerging democracies new cultural experiences.* Programmatic aspects of each partnership led post-communist educators from their initial conceptions of citizenship education to new understandings and applications drawn from the American educational context. This was accomplished during the residencies at host U.S. institutions by matching each international participant with a local teacher, having participants attend educational conferences and conducting weekly seminars with participants about the content and pedagogy most suitable for developing democratic citizens.

*Guideline 3: Develop curricula that match the resources and culture of its intended national context.* When organizing the educational experiences that give life to a new curriculum, participants must avoid the possible clash between the curricular alternatives experienced while working with

established democracies and the educational limits in their home countries. Otherwise, the application of the reform initiative to the intended national context may result in educational experiences that confuse rather than assist students as well as teachers.

*Guideline 4: Implement a systematic evaluation of the new curriculum to monitor its adaptability to local culture and the achievement of its purposes.* The U.S. directors of the programs mentioned above traveled to developing democracies to meet with ministry officials, members of leading nongovernmental educational organizations, pedagogical scholars and teachers, and these meetings served to set objectives for each partnership. These objectives varied from program to program due to the differences in each country's context. However, they offered benchmarks for determining whether each project had achieved its educational goals. Constant monitoring of the curriculum development process, as well as rigorous field-testing of new instructional materials, worked to secure curricular suitability for these transitional democracies.

### **Future Challenges**

Taken together, these four guidelines frame a challenge for future civic education reform in the post-communist world. In each project example, sociopolitical context varied and civic educators had to adapt to the political conditions. For example, projects with Poland and Latvia took root and flourished due to an extremely rapid movement toward stability as democratic nations. In contrast, Kyrgyzstan has had several cross-cultural civic education projects, but political instability marked by public disillusionment with the post-communist government has led to revolution and an uncertain future.

A second challenge is that funding for civic education projects has shifted significantly from the post-communist world to the Muslim world. Policy makers see a diminished need for educational reform in this part of the world as post-communist countries enter the EU and NATO.

Finally, no curricular change can take root if the adult population, raised with different expectations, views democracy in a negative way. For example, as free markets invade the post-communist world unchecked by weak governments and poorly enforced constitutions, the adult population has experienced diminished social programs and increased gaps in wealth. The youth of these countries see a world of consumer choices but lack the benefit of adult guidance to reinforce the aspects of responsible choice so critical to a democratic society and evident in many cross-cultural curricular reform initiatives.

The overall challenge, therefore, lies in sustaining systemic educational reform in post-communist countries in the hope that mature democratic citizenship can be achieved over time. To do so requires a vision that extends far beyond the present generation of youth and a commitment from

established democracies to support this vision over the long term.

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### **Notes**

**1** Judith Torney-Purta, Rainer Lehmann, Hans Oswald, and Wolfgang Schulz. *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-Eight Countries: Civic Knowledge and Engagement at Age Fourteen* (Amsterdam, Holland: IEA, 2001). The 28 countries studied were largely European (eastern and western) but included Australia, Chile, Colombia, Hong Kong, and the United States.

**2** Judith Torney-Purta and Wendy Klandl Richardson, "Teaching for the Meaningful Practice of Democratic Citizenship: Learning from the IEA Civic Education Study in 28 Countries" in *Civic Learning in Teacher Education: International Perspectives on Education for Democracy in the Preparation of Teachers*, Vol. 2, edited by John J. Patrick, Gregory E. Hamot, and Robert S. Leming (Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 2003), 25-44.

**3** John J. Patrick, "Teaching Democracy Globally, Internationally, and Comparatively: The 21st Century Civic Mission of Schools" in *Civic Learning in Teacher Education*, 21-44.

**4** Alden Craddock, "Civic Learning in Teacher Education through an American-Ukrainian Partnership" in *Civic Learning in Teacher Education*, 139-156.

**5** Gregory E. Hamot, "Methods of Teaching Democracy to Teachers and Curriculum Developers: Examples from Post-Communist Europe" in *Civic Learning in Teacher Education*, 117-138.

**6** Charles White, "Civic Learning in Teacher Education: An Example of Collaboration by Russians and Americans" in *Civic Learning in Teacher Education*, 157-176.

**7** Giedre Kvieskiene and Terrence C. Mason, "Integrating Civic Education and Social Work: The Social Education Master's Degree Program at Vilnius Pedagogical University" in *Civic Learning in Teacher Education*, 189-214.

**8** Thomas S. Vontz, Kim K. Metcalf, and John J. Patrick. *Project Citizen and the Civic Development of Adolescent Students in Indiana, Latvia, and Lithuania*. (Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 2000).