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The Future of Civic Education in the 21st Century:

What challenges face civic educators in the coming five, ten, and twenty years?

Challenge #1:

A huge number of adolescents but also adults show a considerable, glaring and alarming deficit of political knowledge.

Challenge #2:

We will be kept busy by the loss of politicians' prestige as well as by the disrespect and disenchantment with politics and parties.

Challenge #3:

We need a modified, up-to-date substantiation and presentation of civic education.

Challenge #4:

Emotional acceptance has to be strengthened by identity forming and experience-driven formats.

Challenge #5:

Civic education dealing with emotionality and value orientation inevitably recommends the examination of "national identity".

Challenge #6:

Confidence-building measures and information about the problem solving capacities of the political system will stay the main tasks of future civic education.

Challenge #7:

We should set more realistic goals and nevertheless enlarge our objectives.

Challenge #8:

We have to develop a concept of civic education with a greater appeal to all segments of society, especially average citizens.

Challenge #9:

Civic education should start earlier with democratic education in kindergardens and elementary schools.

Challenge #10:

Learning about political institutions will remain an indispensable part of civic education.

Challenge #11:

We need more empirical research on teaching and learning to find out exactly how political learning works inside the "black box", which ways of learning and teaching are successful, and why.

Challenge #12:

In order to attain a more universal concept of civic education, common standards and curricula need to be defined.

Challenge #13:

If we want to take civic education seriously, we have to broaden the scope for design and participation.

Challenge #14:

Civic education in the 21st century always means media education, too.

Challenge #15:

Inamorata: We have to prove civic education's capacity for innovation.

INTRODUCTION

In a world changing so fast, only the one who is ready to change can preserve. The one who doesn't want to change will lose what he wants to preserve, too. (Gustav Heinemann, Federal President of Germany 1969-1974)

Common transatlantic challenges and tasks for civic education

What we are talking about

First of all, let me give you a definition of our field of activity, civic education, in order to prevent misunderstandings in the subsequent discussion. I am referring to the Arbeitsausschuss für politische Bildung (study group of civic education) that defined the term as follows:

"Civic education is to convey knowledge of society and the state, European and international relations including the politically and socially significant developments in culture, economy, technology, and science. It should facilitate the capacity for judgement on social and political processes and conflicts, should enable the perception of proper rights and interests, duties and responsibilities towards fellow men and women, society and environment and should also encourage to participate in designing a liberal, democratic social order and a democratic system of a state: In doing so, life world-oriented and experience-driven approaches and methods can be adopted. For the sake of consumer-oriented didactics, the combination of civic education with aspects of professional, general and cultural education is possible as far as it predominantly serves the goals of civic education."
(www.bpb.de/veranstaltungen/ISXYOO,0,0,Politische_Bildung_Definitionsversuche.html)

Challenge #1:

A huge number of adolescents but also adults show a considerable, glaring and alarming deficit of political knowledge.

Civic education seemingly does not succeed in conveying long-term and sustainable basic knowledge. Only a few shocking examples of various surveys should be mentioned at this point:

- 88 % of all Germans don't know how many member states the EU has.
- 40 % of all Germans have never heard anything about the Lisbon Treaty.
- 40 % of all East-Germans are convinced of not having anything to do with the election of the Members of the European Parliament.
- 53,5 % of all Germans don't know how many federal states Germany consists of.

- 52,3 % of all Germans are unable to allocate which one of the two votes of the elections for the Bundestag is more important.
- 66 % of all West German pupils approve the statement The German Democratic Republic (DDR) was not a dictatorship, people just had to adapt themselves like anywhere else.
- 30 % of all West German pupils knew the government of the DDR erected the Berlin Wall. Most of the pupils had no idea who did so. Many of them guessed it had been the Federal Republic of Germany or the Allied Powers.

Challenge #2:

We will be kept busy by the loss of politicians' prestige as well as by the disrespect and disenchantment with politics and parties.

These problems are inherent to the system. According to a survey by Forsa (Stern 1/29/2004) only

12 % of the population have confidence in political parties (81 % in the police, 72 % in doctors). According to a survey by Allensbach (Spiegel 25/2008, 93), only 6 % show a particular respect for career politicians. A research by Patzelt showed that only 50 % of all Germans believe our problems can be solved by our political system. Members turn their backs on parties. Few citizens are willing to run for local office.

I can tell you a thing or two about it: I am a passionate but bad soccer player. Every Wednesday I feel like moving in two different worlds: During the day at work in the academic and overly intellectual functionary's and university town; and in the evening at the soccer practice in my village, home to

3 000 inhabitants, in the world of craftsmen and "ordinary people" who dump their opinions about and prejudices against politicians on me.

It is precisely where people talk about politics the most, that civic education does not take place: at regulars' tables and clubs' festivals. The complexity and often in-transparency of national and global procedures fosters the precarious disinterest in politics. The "information overkill" by electronic media and the impression of being exposed to "foreign powers beyond our control" in an internationalized world, fortifies these feelings of helplessness.

This negative attitude towards democracy is apparent in large parts of the population: During the last election campaign for the German Bundestag the "Stuttgarter Nachrichten" (8/29/2005), a super-regional German newspaper, invited its readers finish the sentence "If I was chancellor ...". A self-employed manager wrote: "My first official act would be to abolish the cronyism of political parties. All elected representatives would work absolutely impartially and just for the people's benefit. There would be no left or right, no opposition ..."

Challenge #3:

We need a modified, up-to-date substantiation and presentation of civic education.

Civic education can neither still be justified exclusively with the holocaust and the swastika nor merely with the absence of war. Civic education is required in times when voter turnout declines more and more, when young nations and democracies develop structures of a civil society, when welfare state-oriented countries remodel their social state in times of high national debt and need to ask for some understanding for these decisions. In a liberal democracy, civic education has to aspire identification with the bases of the public and social order and with the goal of critical sympathy. Some are not aware of how fragile our democracy is. Democracy has become self-evident for us, but we must not become indifferent to it. The efficiency of a democracy is not an automatism a fact that is proved especially by information from western democracies every day, may they come from Washington or Straßbourg. The experts of Freedom House register a global decadence of political rights and civil liberties: Democracy is on the retreat, a paradigm stuck in a crisis. We experience a revival of authoritative systems all over the world that seem to solve problems efficiently. But: in the name of and to the advantage whom? Only together we can face the

problems of global warming and transnational terrorism. Therefore, civic education is needed more than ever. Democrats don't appear from nowhere.

We have to offer experiences and communicate the individual advantages everybody derives from democracy. We have to create a new brand awareness for democracy: branding democracy. It has been a real brand for decades: established and distinctive ... and nevertheless it is often perceived a redundant slow-seller. If we don't succeed in making the worth of democracy obvious to the people, an endangering situation for democracy could emerge in the course of time.

Tocqueville already wrote: "A people that doesn't demand anything but keeping peace and order from its government is already a slave in its core! It is a slave for its well-being! (...) In such a situation, each ambitious man can seize power. Only by making sure that economy is prospering, he will be forgiven everything else."

Elsewhere he wrote: "It happens that wealth will distract people from participating in democracy. Their love for wealth will make them become more and more dependent!"

Challenge #4:

The emotional acceptance of our democracy has to be strengthened by identity forming and experience-driven formats.

Another important task is to develop an emotional bond to democracy by means of pedagogical offers: Education should focus on knowledge and skills, on virtues and values. In Germany, we suffer particularly from hardly being able to appreciate the positive aspects of our democracy. Far too often, our critique is directed towards persons and this is how we damage our state institutions. Our task is not about fostering a submissive belief in institutions. But a certain appreciation of the achievements of the Grundgesetz (German Constitution) is desirable. I regret that on the German schoolbook market there is no such teaching material as "A part of something great – Activities to motivate kids towards a better appreciation of the American Heritage" (Aten 1997) like in the United States. We should watch, evaluate, and judge democracy in its form of appearance, but also get into it. We have to not only point out grievances, revealing and clarifying conflicts of interest, but also animate interest and motivate participation. Wouldn't it be nice to have democracy taught in an enthusiastic way?

Peter Sloterdijk, German professor of Philosophy, specifies this in his characteristic language: "Teachers are people who believe explaining something would always be better than doing something. A lot of teachers practice didactics of discouragement. They often do so unwillingly by clandestinely putting their own failure or self-pity on their young clients. ...Children should be protected from adults' pessimism. ... This is the real disaster of education."

Peter Sloterdijk in: „Die Woche“, 9/14/2001, p. 31f.

Challenge #5:

Civic education dealing with emotionality and value orientation inevitably recommends the examination of "national identity".

Despite of the enthusiasm which spread out during the Fifa soccer World Cup in 2006, we as Germans still have difficulties in defining our relation to the nation. The best example for this controversy is the campaign "You are Germany". "You are Germany" is an image advertising aiming at positive thinking and a new German national feeling. It was launched by 25 media enterprises and coordinated by Bertelsmann.

I would like to show you one spot of the campaign.

In contrast to the US, we lack an undisturbed relation to the nation, but also to the political institutions. Only very slowly do we start to take a certain pride in the constitution and the German Flag.

"Politics is more interesting to people who are committed to some kinds of collective identities, e.g., partisan or national identities, because the self is more emotionally invested in objects that have a public, or political nature" (Rahn 2004, 22).

The dilemma is that we should work on a European identity rather than on a national one. The construct "nation" will remain a reference figure in daily life and in international relations in the foreseeable future. For better or worse: Identities can be formed, even European ones. However, they have to be accepted by the people. Hence, the much more relevant question, politically, is how a German identity (as far as it exists) can be transformed into a European one, as the nation state will not be overcome as a frame of reference easily.

"The relation between Union and nation state will be one of the important questions to be settled in years to come. The nation state with its cultural and democratic traditions will remain the primary variable creating identity for the people in Europe in the future. It is the most important framework for language, culture and tradition and cannot be replaced in a big Union if you want to convincingly and democratically legitimate European decisions. On the other hand the member states will essentially depend on a democratically legitimized European Union capable of political action." (former German Secretary of State Joschka Fischer 2001, 3).

Despite history, genocide and the crimes of the National Socialists, we should be able to develop a normal relation to our fatherland. A definition of patriotism on which consensus might be obtained in the United States can also claim to be valid for German patriotism: Patriotism is "pride and love for one's country" (Li and Brewer 2004) or "Patriotism is an attachment to nation, its institutions, and its founding principles" (Figueiredo and Elkins 2003).

Unfortunately, Americans on their part have gambled away a lot of their reliability and credit all over the world because of their national hubris. The Bush administration and its "mob rule of elites" with a "diplomacy of dilettantes" is mainly responsible for it, according to the young American political scientist Parag Khanna (Neue Züricher Zeitung, 08/22/2008).

From the point of view of civic education, however, there is no alternative to a liberal democracy that expresses but also exemplifies these claims throughout the world, like the United States of America does. We need a consensus on liberty being more important than equality, on distributive justice not being the same as allocating justice. (Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 08/01/2008). We need to adhere to the principle that separation of powers and human rights must be indispensable and defining elements of all political systems. All too often, Europeans get the impression that the United States only get involved for the purpose of democracy where their own interests concerning strategy, or energy policy are at stake.

Challenge #6

Confidence-building measures and information about the problem solving capacities of the political system will stay the main tasks of future civic education.

Regaining the personal and institutional confidence of citizens is primarily the task of politicians and parties. However, the task of civic education needs to be to keep the basic trust in politics and policy awake even if it is shaken by everyday's incidents and scandals. "Encapsulated trust" conveys the feeling of institutional stability that outlasts crises and menaces. Nevertheless, another problem of democracy appears: Citizens are supposed to trust a system of government, although they are per se expected to remain sceptical of them:

"As we are dealing with conflicts of interest and competition for power, the institutionalization of mistrust rather than the establishment of trust is recommendable. Thus, the main objective of classic liberalism is limiting and controlling the exercise of power by means of cleverly arranged checks and balances."
(Seubert 2002, 125)

This trust can only emerge and be felt if the citizens know that they share responsibility for the success of democracy. "We are the people! We are one people!" With this slogan the people of the former German Democratic Republic (DDR) marched in the streets in order to protest for the German unity. This can only be claimed by people who do play a part in the political process themselves, as they did in 1989. Only an adequate voter turnout of more than 50 % expresses the trust and the democratic legitimization to govern in the name of the majority. In my opinion, this issue should be the tenor in an information campaign of civic education, even if political parties already promote in this field in their own interest. Article 20, clause 2 of our constitution, the Grundgesetz, says: "All state authority emanates from the people. It is being exercised by the people through elections and voting and by specific organs of the legislature, the executive power, and the judiciary."

Let me illustrate this by means of three short quotes and a video clip, each of them showing the importance of voting in its own specific way.

"Bad candidates are elected by good citizens who don't vote."
Thomas Jefferson

"The people has spoiled the government's trust. Wouldn't it be easier if the government just dissolved the people and elected another?"
Bertold Brecht

"It is a fortune to have the right to vote. Peace and its election campaigns are more interesting than war and its battles of encirclement and annihilation. It's a property: a voice. It carries weight and proves I'm alive."
Günter Grass

In the German language we use the word "Stimme" for "vote" as well as "voice", this should amplify a notion of the possibility to "make oneself heard", to "have a say", within the democratic process. Too often however this opportunity provided by democracy – and only by democracy – is not appreciated by the people owning that great right.

Challenge #7:

We should set ourselves more realistic goals and nevertheless enlarge our objectives.

We mustn't create an idealistic and naive image of democracy but rather make plain to young people that politics manage conflicts of allocation of rare resources and that democracy is geared to the average consumers. We are asking too much of ourselves if we keep believing that only civic education could save the world and that our moral and pedagogic ambition or even rigor was the only way to interpret the world.

I am quoting Wolfgang Sander: "In civic education it is habitual to assume that it would conduce to the realization of values, it should somehow produce the "good" – i.e. just, solidary, peaceloving, tolerant – citizen." (Sander 2002, 40).

Instead of strengthening fundamental democratic values such as tolerance, give-and-take and responsibility for the common good, civic education unintentionally nurtures a cynical attitude towards politics. The reason is a misunderstood democratic idealism. For laymen, the attempt of influencing political decisions is a very exhausting undertaking and needs citizens who are extremely resistant to disappointment. Democracies are bad problem solvers. Why do schoolbooks teach so few about the limited influence of the individual in mass democracy, about the hardship of civic participation, about the institutionalized corruption of the political class and the specific weaknesses of democratic problem solving? The

difficulties of civic education are mainly a result of the fact that democracy is nothing that could make people fall for it at first sight. It is about fighting battles, struggling for compromise (all too often perceived as "rotten" by the population), rules, institutions, laws and parties. Politics and politicians should not promise heaven on earth – not even a Barack Obama. Politics stays the art of the feasible, of progress in a snail's pace.

Even if "it has to be accepted that democracy cannot assume the politically active citizen as the normal case" (Detjen 2000, 12), we still need him as a model: Enabling as many citizens as possible to participate in political life in a conscious, competent and committed way.

We will not be able to resolve the discrepancy between presenting politics as sexy and adventurous on the one hand and giving consideration to the reality that democracy needs plenty of patience and that it takes a lot more to achieve change than in other political systems on the other hand. Democracy is not a 100 m race which can also be completed by the help of drugs, but an arduous and exhausting marathon. However, it is in the citizens' best interest that political decisions cannot be made authoritatively just like that. A nice but also questionable example for this is the amplification of the Airport of Frankfurt. Politicians, residents and enterprisers have been quarrelling over it since 1998. More than 127 000 objections have been checked (Spiegel 23/2008, 62).

Challenge #8:

We have to develop a concept of civic education with a greater appeal to all segments of society, especially average citizens.

We need concepts focusing on basics, especially concerning adult education. Therefore we need a renaissance of grass root education as it was practiced during the 1970s ("Drivers license in politics", workshops in companies). Disenchantment with politics is mostly characteristic of those who are ignorant. One major deficit is definitely the education of adolescents and adults beyond school. Leaving school usually means being left alone without civic education. Realizing civic education for everybody does by no means run like clockwork and the way to achieve it is cumbersome and arduous. But in my opinion a democratic society cannot abandon that claim. We pay too much attention to elites and groups like migrants and illiterates and do not care enough about the middle of our society. But migrants and illiterates have greater advantages from social work than from civic education.

In non-school-related areas we are facing a problem of accessing the broader populace. Academies are important and do a good job, but they do not solve this problem.

"Democratic education means to turn ignorant and uninterested people into reflected spectators. First of all, interest in politics has to be aroused. The next step would be to build a consolidated basic knowledge of politics and polity, including ways of participation.

Additionally one has to teach how to adjudicate the political processes. This is the most challenging goal civic education has to achieve." (Detjen 2001, 7).

A self-critically assessment of the representatives and work of civic education institutions, including myself and my work, is this: We are producing too many books, our lectures are too boring, we are too bureaucratic and care too less for "ordinary citizens".

Siegfried Schiele (2002, 192) sums up our goals concisely. "Civic education, which is only administered, is not worth the money it costs. ... Civic education is too boring, too much out of date, methods and ways are too traditional, and too introverted. Civic education is conceptually outdated and institutionally fossilized. Without creativity and innovative power, civic education will not be able to cope with its future tasks."

Challenge #9:

Civic education should start earlier with democratic education in kindergardens and elementary schools.

We have to seriously pursue our goals of focusing on the essentials and rejuvenation. Imparting and consolidating knowledge about democratic principles, rules and rituals has to start in kindergartens and elementary schools in appropriate ways. The project "Grundschulrallye" (rally for elementary schools to learn about local affairs) designed and accomplished by my colleagues and me at the LpB Freiburg, is a great example. 10-year-olds become acquainted with local affairs in a playful way. They slip into the role of aliens from the planet Polit-X 2-0-0-8 coming to Freiburg to find out how the city is organized. A greeting at our city hall is the final highlight of a forenoon like this.

Another ambitious project involving millions of euros will be started this fall. Together with authors of children's books, we plan to create a basic rights spelling book for about 450.000 elementary school students in Baden-Württemberg. It is supposed to explain and narrate the most important liberties provided by our constitution. Similar spelling books, which are already on the market, showed the possibility not only of presenting the Ten Commandments, but also the rules of civil society in a way that is appropriate for children. Unfortunately, there are only few practical examples and there is no didactic concept for civic education at elementary schools. One of the few pioneers in this field is Dagmar Richter.

Challenge #10:

Learning about political institutions will remain an indispensable part of civic education.

For the past two decades, our subject has focused mainly on the improvement of lessons, turning to a more method-oriented education, rather than dealing with theories. Traditional lessons about institutions are often associated with dusty, nostalgia, boredom, and very few appeal to students. But knowledge and comprehension of institutions are essential to form an opinion on politics. Focusing exclusively on methods has led to a decoupling of teaching methods from content, and to an autonomy of social learning without a tight connection to politics and polity. Methods should exclusively be a means to an end. They should help to gain basic and established understanding of political structures, systems and institutions.

There is, however, one basic rule one has to follow in lessons: Humans before institutions. Institutions should disburden und arrange social interaction. We and our participants should not be afraid of "walking the extra mile", because the shortest way often leads to the dead end of ignorance.

In school, too, you have to walk the extra mile to make political learning possible. You must not only pick your participants up where they are but lead them on. Don't stop after arousing interest, inform. Do not only encourage the individual but also clarify the social object, and encourage political engagement. Do not only share experiences, opinions and judgments but also hand your knowledge and facts on.

Learning about institutions is more necessary than ever. Why are there no exercises and training programs for political vocabulary or some kind of dictionary of political terms, translating them into an easily and understandable language?

Although the term "Wissen" (knowledge) has gotten out of fashion and is being rejected as archaic, it is still essential for civic education. Knowledge is power, no education is ever in vain and democratic awareness is the first qualification of a citizen. If we are the people, and hence the determining sovereign, it is imperative that we as citizens have to be educated correspondingly. Schools for general education, which are financed by tax payers and the state, should predominantly serve our community and serve the labor market only secondarily. It is our duty to resist an absolute marketization of the human being.

Challenge #11:

We need more empirical research on teaching and learning to find out exactly how political learning works inside the “black box”, which ways of learning and teaching are successful, and why.

Up to now, we still don't know enough about how cognitive schemes are being modeled and how political categories are learned. Someone might say that ex-cathedra teaching is more effective than group work today – and tomorrow another one could convince you that role plays are the most effective way of learning political contents. Who cares and who proves? There is no empirical database on the performance of adult civic education in Germany. I would love to prove the fact that our activities and projects are responsible for 20% of Freiburg's residents' “correct” democratic consciousness. So far, we have to accept the lack of research on the effects of our work. Concerning empirical classroom teaching research, Georg Weißeno, who is here today, is probably the more competent contact person.

Challenge #12:

In order to attain a more universal concept of civic education, common standards and curricula need to be defined.

The smallest consensus of civic education contains three essential principles: Prohibition against overwhelming the pupil, treating controversial subjects as controversial and giving weight to the personal interest of pupils. Beyond these formal principles, Germany and Europe need a canon of the contents and knowledge that is to be taught and learned in civic education. The essentials and musts of civic education should be summed up in a global curriculum. Therefore we have to find operationalized learning targets, to develop standards and competencies that can be examined. Currently, however, not even the sixteen German federal states are able to find a common consensus.

America is already beyond that point. Concerning theory, there is an outstanding conceptual framework which was made up by the Center of Civic Education and Will Harris. It may claim global relevance for civic education, even if the concrete contents will have to be modified for each country according to its specific history, political culture, and regime and so on. Harris' model is a splendid theoretical base which allows a clear and transparent evaluation of what should be dealt with in lessons about politics to achieve a structured and systematized political understanding of our world.

Still we are missing creative and innovative realizations of this concept in pedagogic practice. To be frank: If you look at CCE's compendia and text books, you will be shocked seeing those printer's nightmares, the boring design, and intellectual demands which need to be preserved but should be realized in another way. The text books created by “We the people” or “Project Citizen” are static, boring, and the tasks given rely too heavily on mere reproduction, they are too repetitive and mechanistic. They don't make you feel like a juvenile dealing with politics or participating. Our text books and materials are more convincing. Our American colleagues could learn from us by adopting our teaching methods which focus on problem solving, critical and divergent thinking.

On the other hand, we should study the work of John Hale, Margaret Branson and the CCE-team to see how we can internationalize education. The Center for Civic Education's work is internationally appreciated and overwhelmingly accepted. Its global mission receives an amount of financial support we do not even dare to dream of. We as Germans still stop at our federal states' borders in order to protect federal autonomies and vanities. In comparison to the Center's work on transformation processes in Eastern Europe, Palestine, Malaysia or Indonesia, Germany utterly underperforms in this field: Grade F (fail). It is a shame for Old Europe that the internationalization of education only takes place in solemn speeches, but not in practice.

Challenge #13:

If we want to take civic education seriously, we have to broaden the scope for design and participation.

It is a mistake to call democratic schools "embryonic societies", as Dewey did. They do not resemble a smaller form of a democratic society, not a miniature democracy. Looking at formal and informal authority of teachers you will find that they have more power than a democratic legislator could ever have. "But these schools do come close to living up to the educational standard directed by democratic values: democratize schools to the extent necessary to cultivate the participatory along with the disciplinary virtues of democratic character" (Gutmann 1999, 24).

Challenge #14:

Civic education in the 21st century always means media education, too.

Civic education has to reveal and display the mechanisms and effects of a media society: discourse with so-called agenda setters, designers of reality and pollsters needs to be sought. The daily plebiscite via the media, the assumed empirical will of the people, how it is calculated and generated, is an important field civic education has to deal with. A good example is the current situation in Austria, where the royal paper "Kronenzeitung" is read by so many people (it reaches 43%) that it seems to get ahead of democratic institutions. This way it may have an essential influence on the elections "crowning" a chancellor. We must pay more attention to new media and new ways of communicating like Web 2.0, Facebook, or the Second Life. We have to get into young pop culture and everyday media to stay in connection with youths. Currently we are working on a project like this. We are trying to find elements of civic education, or useful for civic education, embedded in the popular cartoon show "The Simpsons". An essay, which will be published soon, is to point out the program's ability not only to comment on almost all recent political and social issues, but also how we could use it in civic education.

Challenge #15:

Inamorata: We have to prove civic education's capacity for innovation.

Civic education starts with the curiosity and the interest in political questions and problems. Only then, a process of learning becomes applicable knowledge. Pedagogic innovation has to be directed against crustification and uniformity, narrow classroom-oriented approaches and the lack of orientation towards political practice and participants' needs.

We also need to advance continuously in the improvement of the techniques of civic education. "Places of learning" have to be reconsidered. In addition to the classic academies and educational establishments, we need to think about a "calling" civic education.

As for the future of civic education, it is rather insecure: Civic education has no uniform lobby. Our field is rather unpopular. Our crew lacks team spirit. Civic education in (German) classrooms has not experienced redrafts for many years. Why does civic education mark time in didactical and methodical respects since the great disputes of the 70ies?

The reasons are multiple and home-grown: As long as the didactics of our subject matter as well as its representatives rotate only around their own axis and are more interested in their publications than in improving the pedagogical experience; as long as teachers insistently refuse to reflect their practice and keep "muddling through"; as long as the centers of civic education are too busy with themselves – their concerns about staff reduction, structural change and budget cutting – to be able to initiate innovative impetus for the redefinition of civic education, we don't have to be surprised if our profession doesn't move ahead. Too much convention unfortunately leads to stagnation. What is the benefit from "conceptual

knowledge of interpretation, political ability to judge and act and methodical skills" (Weißeno 2005, 36), if everything remains within the realms of theory, without any effects in real life, because civics classes are out of date and out of touch with students' hearts and minds?

"If civic education is too self-sufficient, it has to be enlarged and extended in a community-forming way. ... Civic education has to stay ready to take risks. The fondness with experimenting has to remain a permanent rule. ... Civic education wants to activate and encourage by qualifying for political interference and participation in terms of an *empowerment*" (Krüger, 2002).

To cite the admirable „grande dame“ of civic education, Margaret Branson (2001, 12):

„If civic education programs are well designed and well taught, if they meet frequently, use participatory methods, stress learning by doing, and focus on issues that have direct relevance to participants' daily lives, they can have significant, positive impact on democratic behaviors and attitudes. If courses do not meet these criteria, participants gain little from the program, and are virtually indistinguishable from the general population on most measures.“

The success of civic education depends to a high degree on the learning experience during childhood and adolescence, and therefore particularly on us as teachers. In the future the most important task of civic education will not consist of searching for mathematical magic formulas which evaluate the outcome of civic education accurately to three decimals, but in encouraging young people to break new ground in education and encouraging entrants to develop individual talents as teaching personalities.

Since 1998 I have had the chance to participate in wonderful conferences like today and I am sure to once more flying home with my suitcase full of inspiration and ideas. The wish remains however, in 2008, too, that this exquisite circle of civic educators on both sides of the Atlantic may finally realize a project together instead of each going on, trying to improve the world as a lone-fighter.

FINAL

According to an old Finnish legend, once upon a time, there were two stone cutters. They were both working on cubical blocks of granite. A person passing by asked them what they were doing. "I am cutting this granite into cubes", one of them said exhaustedly. But the other one answered with his cheeks burning of fervor: "I am collaborating in the construction of a cathedral!"

It was lunch time in a factory and a worker cheerlessly opened his packet lunch. "Oh no", he said aloud, "cheese sandwich again!" This is how it happened two, three, four times. Then a colleague who had heard the man grumbling said: „If you hate cheese sandwiches so much, why don't you tell your wife that she should make a different kind of sandwiches for you?“ „Because I am not married. I make these sandwiches for myself.“

"Civic education is never finished. It never ends. It cannot, it may not rest on its laurels and look back contentedly on achievements of the past. Civic education has to confront the changing times again and again. It has to react and try to anticipate as far as possible." Johannes Rau (2000)

"Democracy means that if the doorbell rings in the early hours, it is likely to be the milkman." Winston Churchill

"Democracy is only contagious if it is not executed routinely or forced upon others by means of violence, but if it is lived with enthusiasm –an enthusiasm without arrogance"

Wolf Lepenies, winner of the Prize for Peace of the German book trade in 2006

„Politics is the art of the possible, but all the experience confirms that the possible could not be achieved if there hadn't always been someone in the world reaching for the impossible.“
Max Weber

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