

Teaching for Democracy: Assessing Project Citizen in Poland, South Africa, Ukraine and the United States

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Executive Summary of Findings

Over the past two years, our mixed-method case study research has examined one of the most successful curricular programs arising out of the civic education assistance movement: *We the People: Project Citizen* (PC). Project Citizen is a problem-based learning curriculum for middle, secondary and post-secondary students developed and promoted by the Center for Civic Education. By working with partners in four countries, Poland, South Africa, Ukraine and the US, we now have a better understanding of the strengths and challenges for implementing this important program.

Our analysis of Project Citizen's impact on student civic knowledge, attitudes and skills set a very high standard for demonstrating effect. The first hurdle was using items designed and verified independently from PC and used in other international civic education research. Thus the questions were not prepared with Project Citizen in mind and in fact, may have had little to do with potential content PC students would be expected to cover. Secondly, we used benchmark methods for quasi-experimental research conduct and analysis. We did this through random selection of cases and demographically-specific control groups in each country where possible. The statistical analysis employed involved the most rigorous methods by considering class averages for individual survey items and a high probability level (.05) for significance. Setting such high standards for demonstrating impact lends confidence to the following quantitative findings.

Our quantitative analysis of the responses from students participating in Project Citizen in Poland, South Africa, Ukraine and the United States demonstrate improved civic knowledge in two distinct ways. Firstly, they demonstrated improved civic knowledge from the time they started PC to its conclusion. This improvement was substantively significant in all four cases and statistically significant in Poland and Ukraine. Secondly, PC students demonstrated improved civic knowledge when compared to their peers at the end of the program. Again, this finding was substantively significant in its comprehensiveness across the three cases involved in the Treatment-Control portion of the study. From these two findings it becomes apparent that we found students participating in Project Citizen in Poland, South Africa, Ukraine and the US to have improved in their civic knowledge both during the program and in comparison to their peers. It is clear from our research that student content knowledge regarding democracy and citizenship can improve from participating in Project Citizen. What is less apparent from the quantitative analysis is the degree of the effect and what conditions are both necessary and sufficient for this relationship to develop in multiple contexts.

We also found statistical evidence that Project Citizen has an impact on student civic attitudes and skills in all four of our country sites albeit at different degrees and areas. After their participation in Project Citizen, students in all four countries had significant difference in regards to their conceptions of "what is good for democracy" while different pairings of countries appeared on other areas of the survey. Polish students demonstrated the largest number of statistically significant results with the US having the second largest number. The greatest number of items exhibiting statistical significance were in the 'Adult Expectations' category (10 questions) and the 'Class Assignment' category (7 questions).

Evidence also emerged that PC students in Poland, South Africa and the US differed significantly from their non-PC peers in regards to the civic attitudes and skills. In our comparison of PC versus non-PC students in each country, we found similar trends to the changes revealed in our pre-post examination of

PC students alone. While no single category of questions included significant results for all countries, each category did return some statistically significant results. Among the different pairings on each category the areas of ‘Adult Expectations’ (4 questions) and ‘Class Assignment’ (7 questions) emerged again as have the most statistically significant results. Considering this finding with those of the Pre-Post analysis leads us to assert that there is clear evidence that Project Citizen has impact on student civic attitudes/skills especially in the areas of the civic activities they intend to participate in when they become adults and the kind of activities they engage in as part of class assignments. Unfortunately, this calculation of number of significant responses is somewhat misleading since the student responses were often contradictory to the most common expectations of active citizenship education.

Lastly, our qualitative analysis of the Polish and South African versions of Project Citizen revealed some of the defining characteristics and contexts necessary for understanding the impact of PC on student learning in different locations. It is apparent from our interviews and observations that Project Citizen is being conducted with a wide variety of students, for different purposes, over different lengths of time in different ways. It is also apparent that teachers involved in Project Citizen feel very strongly that the benefits of the program most strongly impact student, educator and community members’ attitudes about participants’ motivation, efficacy, leadership and skill development. They also consistently note that implementation of the program is constrained by practical issues based on contextual factors of each site.

Conclusion

We emerge from this long, complex and multi-national research convinced that Project Citizen impacts student civic knowledge, attitudes and skills. However, the scope and degree of this impact varies greatly among different sites in the study with some countries showing little statistical evidence of impact while others show a great deal. Understanding of this impact is confounded by the very element that has made Project Citizen so widely used – its flexibility. Because Project Citizen is generic by design and so readily adapted in practice, discerning the direct impact of the curriculum on student civic knowledge, attitudes and skills has proved to be a very challenging task.

Although this research has been challenging it has not proved futile. We have found, to varying degrees, statistical and substantively significant results of Project Citizens impact on civic knowledge, attitudes and skills for each country in our study. What now remains is to better understand the contextual factors that create this variance across locations and how this information can make this widely-used curriculum more effective in teaching the next generation of citizens, as well as helping us more effectively document the contextual and specifics of each location.

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[Project, US and Ukraine Findings](#)

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Fact Sheet

Project Citizen and Civic Knowledge

- ★ In Pre-Post tests, Polish students demonstrated a statistically significant increase in averaged correct responses for 9 of the 14 questions.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, Ukrainian students demonstrated a statistically significant increase in averaged correct responses for 13 of the 14 questions.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, all students (Polish, South African, Ukrainian & US) showed an overall improvement of approximately 5% in their civic knowledge as demonstrated by averaged percent of correct answers.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, PC students showed improved knowledge in all but 10 cases out of 56 possible. Thus, 82% of the time students improved their civic knowledge while participating in PC.
- ★ Treatment-Control Post tests, did not return any statistically significant average differences in student civic knowledge.
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, the mean difference in averaged scores between Treatment Post and Control Post was less than 5% correct for any country.
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, the PC students in all countries outperformed their non-PC peers 95% of the time on civic knowledge questions.

Project Citizen and Civic Attitudes/Skills

- ★ In Pre-Post tests, only 31 items of a total 280 possible responses (11%) returned statistically significant differences between class averaged scores.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, the students in Poland demonstrated the most statistically significant differences (18) with the United States have the second largest number (9).
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, Polish students taking PC indicated that expectations of immigrants giving up languages and customs was “Very Bad” for democracy.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, Polish students taking PC indicated that government responsibilities should include basic health care, provide industries with support to grow, reduce differences in income, provide basic free education.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, Polish students taking PC indicated that as an adult they expected to join a political party, write letters to newspapers, be a political candidate, volunteer, collect money for social causes, collect signatures on petitions, participate in non-violent protest, paint protest graffiti and occupy buildings in protest.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, Polish students taking PC indicated that as part of a school assignment they had collected information on community issues from media resources and government offices.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, Polish students taking PC indicated that in the last 6 months they had spoken with a government official about community issues and tried to get other people to support solution(s) to community problems.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, South African students taking PC indicated that peaceful protest against unjust laws was “good for democracy”.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, South African students taking PC indicated increased effectiveness to take part in political and public life.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, Ukrainian students taking PC indicated that wealthy influence over government was not “good for democracy”.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, Ukrainian students taking PC indicated that they believed less in the value of following political issues in the media as a trait of good citizenship.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, US students taking PC were less likely to see peaceful protest as good for democracy.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, US students taking PC were less likely to see voting in every election to be a trait of good citizenship.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, US students taking PC were more likely to view the reduction of differences in income as responsibility of government.
- ★ In Pre-Post tests, US students taking PC were less likely to expect to volunteer their time for poor or elderly people as adults.

- ★ In Pre-Post tests, US students taking PC were more likely to indicate that as part of a class assignment they had spoken with a government official about community problems, tried to get other people to support solutions to problems, written a letter to a government official, attended a local council meeting and met with an interest group to gather information.
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, the students in Poland demonstrated the most statistically significant differences (13) with the United States have the second largest number (6).
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, only 21 items of a total 280 possible responses (8%) returned statistically significant differences between class averaged scores.
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, the Polish PC students were more likely to see having many different organizations as good for democracy and wealthy influence over government as bad democracy than their non-PC peers.
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, the Polish PC students were more likely to expect as an adult to vote in national elections, collect signatures on petitions and participate in non-violent protest and less likely to write letters to newspapers than their non-PC peers.
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, the Polish PC students were less likely to report having gathered information on community problems from media sources than their non-PC peers.
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, the Polish PC students were less likely to report having spoken with a government official, tried to get others to support solutions and met with interest groups as part of a class assignment than their non-PC peers.
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, the Polish PC students were less likely to report having cooperating with others to handle problems in the community than their non-PC peers.
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, the Polish PC students were more likely to report effectiveness in communicating ideas to others and cooperating with others than their non-PC peers.
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, the South African PC students were more likely to see peaceful protest as good for democracy than their non-PC peers.
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, the South African PC students were more likely to see voting in every election as important for good citizenship.
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, the US PC students were less likely to see patriotism and loyalty to country as important to good citizenship than their non-PC peers.
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, the US PC students were more likely to report having cooperated with others to handle community problems than their non-PC peers.
- ★ In Treatment-Control Post tests, the US PC students were more likely to report having spoken with a government official, tried to get others to support solutions, written letters to officials and phone officials as part of a class assignment than their non-PC peers.
- ★ When comparing the statistically significant responses between the Pre-Post tests and the Treatment-Control Post tests we find only 10 questions overlapping (2%).

Qualitative Findings for Poland and South Africa

- ★ There exists a variety of implementation methods, student participants and expected objectives of Project Citizen as it is used in different countries and even sites within the countries.
- ★ Teachers engaged in PC are confident in its importance to both themselves and their students' self-image, [leadership and skill development](#) especially in regards to their motivation and effectiveness.
- ★ Teachers see positive impacts in the attitudes of community members as well as local authorities such as principals and other teachers.
- ★ Practical issues such as resources, language, skills and even resistance from community, administrators or other teachers prove to be challenges that need to be successfully overcome for Project Citizen to be a success.

Basic Survey Questions

PART ONE

- A. On what date were you born? Write in month, day and year. ___ Month ___ Day ___ Year
- B. Are you a girl or a boy? Girl Boy
- C. Which best describes you?
- A. African American B. Asian C. Caucasian D. Hispanic E. Other
- D. Were you born in the United States? No Yes
- E. How often do you speak English at home?
- Never Sometimes Always (or almost always)
- F. Do you get a daily newspaper at home? No Yes
- G. How many books are there in your home? Do not count newspapers, magazines or books for school;
- A. None B. 1 – 50 C. 50 – 100 D. More than 100
- H. How many years of further education do you expect to complete after this year? Please include vocational education and/or higher education.
- A. 0 years B. 1 - 2 years C. 3 - 4 years D. 5 - 6 or more years
- I. How far in school did your mother and father go?
- | | Mother | Father |
|--|--------|--------|
| Finished elementary school | _____ | _____ |
| Finished some high school | _____ | _____ |
| Finished high school | _____ | _____ |
| Some vocational/ technical education after high school | _____ | _____ |
| Some community college, college, or university courses | _____ | _____ |
| Completed a bachelor degree at a college or university | _____ | _____ |
| I don't know | _____ | _____ |
- J. Have you had a course in civic education or social studies or government or in education for democracy? Yes No
- K. What clubs or other student associations do you most participate in? _____

PART TWO

- Q1. Which of the following is an accurate statement about laws?
- A. Laws forbid or require certain actions.
 B. Laws are made by the police.
 C. Laws are valid only if all citizens have voted to accept them.
 D. Laws prevent criticism of the government.
- Q2. Which of the following is a political right?
- A. The right of pupils to learn about politics in school
 B. The right of citizens to vote and run for election
 C. The right of adults to have a job
 D. The right of politicians to have a salary
- Q3. A woman who has a young child is interviewed for a job at a travel agency. Which of the following is an example of discrimination? She does not get the job because...
- A. she has no previous experience.
 B. she is a mother.
 C. she speaks only one language.
 D. she demands a high salary.

- Q4. In a democratic country having many organizations for people to join is important because this provides...
- A. A group to defend members who are arrested.
 - B. Many sources of taxes for the government.
 - C. Opportunities to express different points of view.
 - D. A way for the government to tell people about new laws.
- Q5. In democratic countries, what is the function of having more than one political party?
- A. To represent different interests in the national legislature [e.g. Parliament, Congress]
 - B. To limit political corruption
 - C. To prevent political demonstrations
 - D. To encourage economic competition
- Q6. In a democratic political system, which of the following should govern the country?
- A. Moral or religious leaders
 - B. A small group of well-educated people
 - C. Popularly elected representatives
 - D. Experts on government and political affairs
- Q7. What is the major purpose of the United Nations?
- A. Safeguarding trade between countries
 - B. Maintaining peace and security among countries
 - C. Deciding where countries and boundaries should be
 - D. Keeping criminals from escaping to other countries
- Q8. Which of the following is most likely to cause a government to be called non-democratic?
- A. People are prevented from criticizing [not allowed to criticize] the government.
 - B. The political parties criticize each other often.
 - C. People must pay very high taxes.
 - D. Every citizen has the right to a job.
- Q9. Which of the following is most likely to happen if a large publisher buys many of the [smaller] newspapers in a country?
- A. Government censorship of the news is more likely.
 - B. There will be less diversity of opinions presented.
 - C. The price of the country's newspapers will be lowered.
 - D. The amount of advertising in the newspapers will be reduced.

Circle the correct answer for each question based on this imaginary political leaflet.

We citizens have had enough!
A vote for the Silver Party means a vote for higher taxes.
It means an end to economic growth and a waste of our nation's resources.
Vote instead for economic growth and free enterprise.
Vote for more money left in everyone's wallet!
Let's not waste another 4 years! Vote for the Gold Party.

- Q10. This is an election leaflet which has probably been issued by...
- A. The Silver Party.
 - B. A party or group running against the Silver Party.
 - C. A group which tries to be sure elections are fair.
 - D. The Silver Party and the Gold Party together.
- Q11. The authors of the leaflet think that higher taxes are...
- A. A good thing.
 - B. Necessary in a free market economy.
 - C. Necessary for economic growth.
 - D. A bad thing.

Q12. The party or group that has issued this leaflet is likely also to be in favor of...

- A. Reducing government control of the economy.
- B. Lowering of the voting age.
- C. Capital punishment.
- D. More frequent elections.

Q13. Three of these statements are facts and one is an opinion. Which of the following is an opinion?

- A. Actions by individual countries are the best ways to solve environmental problems.
- B. Many countries contribute to the pollution of the environment.
- C. Some countries offer to cooperate in order to diminish acid rain.
- D. Water pollution often comes from several different sources.

Q14. Three of these statements are opinions and one is a fact. Circle the fact.

- A. People with very low incomes should not pay any taxes.
- B. In many countries rich people pay higher taxes than poor people.
- C. It is fair that some citizens pay higher taxes than others.
- D. Donations to charity are the best way to reduce differences between rich and poor.

PART THREE

What is good and bad for democracy?	Very bad for democracy	Somewhat bad for democracy	Somewhat good for democracy	Very good for democracy	Don't know/ doesn't apply
A1. When differences in income and wealth between rich and poor are small	1	2	3	4	5
A2. When political leaders give jobs in the government to family	1	2	3	4	5
A3. When newspapers are free of all government control	1	2	3	4	5
A4. When one company owns all the newspapers	1	2	3	4	5
A5. When immigrants are expected to give up languages and customs	1	2	3	4	5
A6. When people are critical of the government are forbidden from speaking at meetings	1	2	3	4	5
A7. When courts and judges are influenced by politicians	1	2	3	4	5
A8. When many different organizations are available for people to belong	1	2	3	4	5
A9. When young people have an obligation to participate in activities to benefit the community	1	2	3	4	5
A10. When a minimum income is assured for everyone	1	2	3	4	5
A11. When political parties have different opinions on important issues	1	2	3	4	5
A12. When laws that women claim are unfair to them are changed	1	2	3	4	5
A13. When people refuse to obey a law which violates human rights	1	2	3	4	5
A14. When newspapers are forbidden to publish stories that might offend some groups	1	2	3	4	5
A15. When wealthy business people have more influence on government than others	1	2	3	4	5
A16. When people peacefully protest against a law they believe to be unjust	1	2	3	4	5

An adult who is a good citizen	Not important	Somewhat unimportant	Somewhat important	Very important	Don't know
B1. Obeys the law	1	2	3	4	0
B2. Votes in every elections	1	2	3	4	0
B3. Joins a political party	1	2	3	4	0
B4. Would participate in a peaceful protest against a law believed to be unjust	1	2	3	4	0
B5. Follows political issues in the newspaper, on the radio or on TV	1	2	3	4	0
B6. Participates in activities to benefit people in the community	1	2	3	4	0
B7. Takes part in activities promoting human rights	1	2	3	4	0
B8. Engages in political discussions	1	2	3	4	0
B9. Takes part in activities to protect the environment	1	2	3	4	0
B10. Is patriotic and loyal to the country	1	2	3	4	0

What responsibilities should government have?	Definitely should not be the government's responsibility	Probably should not be the government's responsibility	Probably should be the government's responsibility	Definitely should be the government's responsibility	Don't know
C1. To guarantee a job for everyone who wants one	1	2	3	4	0
C2. To keep prices under control	1	2	3	4	0
C3. To provide basic health care for everyone	1	2	3	4	0
C4. To provide industries with the support they need to grow	1	2	3	4	0
C5. To reduce differences in income and wealth among people	1	2	3	4	0
C6. To provide free basic education for all	1	2	3	4	0
C7. To ensure equal political opportunities for men and women	1	2	3	4	0
C8. To control pollution of the environment	1	2	3	4	0
C9. To guarantee peace and order within the country	1	2	3	4	0
C10. To promote honesty and moral behavior among people in the country	1	2	3	4	0

	I will certainly not do this	I will probably not do this	I will probably do	I will certainly do this	Don't know
M1. Vote in national elections	1	2	3	4	0
M2. Join a political party	1	2	3	4	0
M3. Write letters to a newspaper about social or political concerns	1	2	3	4	0
M4. Be a candidate for a local or city office	1	2	3	4	0
M5. Volunteer time to help [benefit] [poor or elderly] people in the community	1	2	3	4	0
M6. Collect money for a social cause	1	2	3	4	0
M7. Collect signatures for a petition	1	2	3	4	0
M8. Participate in a non-violent protest march or rally	1	2	3	4	0
M9. Spray-paint protest slogans on walls	1	2	3	4	0
M10. Occupy public buildings as a form of protest.	1	2	3	4	0

As part of a school assignment or for some other reason, have you gathered information on problems in your community or country from:	Often	Sometimes	Never
O5. Media resources (e.g. newspapers, radio, television, Internet, library)	[3]	[2]	[1]
O6. Professors or scholars	[3]	[2]	[1]
O7. Lawyers or judges	[3]	[2]	[1]
O8. Community organizations or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)	[3]	[2]	[1]
O9. Government offices	[3]	[2]	[1]
O10. Family and friends	[3]	[2]	[1]

Within the last six months, have you as a part of a class assignment or for some other reason:	More than once	Once	Have considered	Did not do
O11. spoken with a government official about problems in your community?	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
O12. tried to get other people to support your solution to a problem in your community or country?	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
O13. written a letter to a government official?	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
O14. phoned a government official?	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
O15. attended a local council meeting?	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
O16. made an appointment and visited a government official by yourself or with a group?	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]
O17. met with members of interest groups to obtain information?	[4]	[3]	[2]	[1]

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
O19. I think I have a good understanding about the political issues that are faced by my country.	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
O20. I feel that I am ready to take part in a political and public life.	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
O21. I have cooperated with others to handle the problems in my community.	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
O22. I am familiar with the problems that are faced by my community.	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
O23. I often discuss what is happening in national or local politics.	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)

How effective are you for each of the following characteristics?	Very effective	Effective	Somewhat ineffective	Very ineffective
O24. Communicating your ideas with others	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
O25. Co-operating with others	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
O26. Working with others to solve problems	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
O27. Leading a group	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
O28. Listening and understanding others' points of view	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
O29. Compromising to reach a consensus	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)