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DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION: GLOBAL RESEARCH PROJECT*O.V. Kozhevnikova, D. Zyngier*

The paper reports on the International Global Doing Democracy Research Project which involves scholars from over 25 countries examining perspectives and perceptions of democracy in education in order to develop a more robust and critical democratic education. The focus of this project is on how education supports, cultivates and engages in, and with, democracy. The paper describes the organization, methodology and research instruments of the project.

Key words: philosophy of education; democracy; Democracy Index; thick vs. thin democracy; citizenship.

In 2006 an English-language weekly news and international affairs magazine *The Economist* published for the first time a so called «Democracy Index» followed by updated lists produced in 2008, 2010 and 2011. The Index measures the state of democracy in 167 countries based on 60 indicators grouped in five different categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture. According to the first three issues of the Index, Russia scored a total of 5.02 (2006) to 4.26 (2010) on a scale from zero to ten was ranked as a «hybrid regime». In 2011 Russia was downgraded from a hybrid regime to an authoritarian regime and kept the 117th place in the list [6].

The Project began when Dr Paul R. Carr from Canada (8th on The Democracy Index) and Dr David Zyngier from Australia (6th on the Democracy Index) met at the second *Doing Democracy by Learning Conference* held at OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), University of Toronto, Canada, in October 2008 and initiated the Global Doing Democracy Research Project (<http://doingdemocracy.ning.com>). The focus of the project is on how education supports, cultivates and engages in, and with, democracy. While there are many on-line networks created among academics for the exchange and sharing of ideas, the development of such an on-line activist research group focused on democracy and democratic education is uncommon. A major focus at this phase of

the project involved using a collaboratively developed and locally contextualised on-line survey tool that collected both quantitative and qualitative data from diverse groups of education-students, academic staff, and practising teachers. Each researcher is responsible for the analysis of the data within the shared critical pedagogical framework that was originally developed by Carr (2010) [3]. The aim of the research, ultimately, is to compare and contrast these findings and implications across diverse political contexts, including the *old* democracies (countries such as the USA, Australia, Canada, England), *emerging* democracies (those countries coming out of autocratic, military or other dictatorships and or colonial rule), and what we have termed the new democracies (places and countries that are doing democracy differently as a result of public initiatives found in Latin America and elsewhere), highlighting the following themes:

- 1) The apparent predisposition among education-students (future teachers) and educators to understand democracy and politics in a *thin* way;
- 2) The potential for university education teachers and classroom teachers to do transformative or *thick* democracy in education;
- 3) The importance of understanding power and difference in relation to democracy; and
- 4) The cultivation of a critically and meaningfully engaged educational experience that links social justice to education and democracy.

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Since 2008 the on-line survey has been translated into Portuguese, Spanish, Bhasa Malay, Greek, Turkish, French and some others and has been already adapted and applied in over 30 international contexts [2]. Currently, we are working on the trans-adaptation of the research materials for the Russian context. We believe that our taking part in this cross-cultural research project may contribute to the implementation of democratic values into the system of education in our country and thereby influence the future generations understanding of and participation in the democratic process.

The study seeks to contextualize, identify, problematize and analyze how educators experience, understand and perceive democracy, and how this connection to democracy actually shapes the democratic experience for themselves and students in and through the education experience. The research instrument for this study is a detailed questionnaire containing approximately 25 questions solicited Likert scale quantitative responses as well as open-ended qualitative responses. The questionnaire does not define such terms as democracy (it is apparent that there is no one universal definition for it), citizenship, and social justice to participants but, rather, asks them to do so. The aim is to ascertain the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives of participants in relation to democracy without judging the level of sophistication they demonstrate through their responses [4, p. 150].

Thus, the research attempts to gauge how educators (undergraduate and graduate students planning to work as teachers, school teachers and principals, and university professors) are engaged in democracy in education. A general hypothesis is that progressive, critical democratic education work in classrooms and schools, along with the resultant experience for the students, will be greatly diminished if teachers have a weak or disaffected attachment to democracy themselves. As Carr states, while there are numerous factors involved in the formulation and framing of democracy in schools, clearly educators have an important role to play in cultivating and shaping the educational experience for students in relation to their present and future attitudes, behaviors, ideologies and engagement regarding democracy. The stress on political

literacy and critical learning is, therefore, a key focus of the discussion [4, p. 149].

The research seeks to broadly address important, systemic issues in an interdisciplinary way, favouring a thicker interpretation of democratic thinking/perceptions/experiences within education, including political and media literacy, critical engagement and emancipation. The project methodology is based on the notion of representative versus participatory democracy: the former highlighting electoral processes — thin democracy — and the latter focusing on critical engagement and social justice or thick democracy. B.R. Barber [1] and then L.A. Gandin and M.V. Apple [9] raised pivotal questions on the saliency of liberal democracy, including the tension between individualism and the rights of all citizens framed by concepts of shallow and deep democracy. Deep or thick democracy, according to Furman and Shields, espouses a number of principles that champion individual rights and responsibility within diverse cultural communities in the interests of the common good. These include: 1) respect for the worth and dignity of individuals and their cultural traditions; 2) reverence for, and proactive facilitation of, free inquiry and critique; 3) recognition of interdependence in working for the common good; 4) responsibility of individuals to participate in free and open inquiry; and 5) re-affirmation of the necessity for collective choices and actions in the interest of the common good [8]. Carr has further developed the notion of thick democracy, infusing critical pedagogy and the notion of how knowledge is constructed into a spectrum of possibilities, potential, experiences, and realities in relation to how democracy in education can be considered and conceptualized [3]. Since work in these fields is being carried out across many disciplines, there is the potential in the *Global Doing Democracy Research Project* for significant participation from different sectors, including researchers, educators in K-12, higher education and adult education, community development workers, urban planners, community organizers and a variety of governmental and non-governmental organizations invested in improving local democracy, and particularly capacity building for local democracy.

Attempting to determine the salience of a linkage between education and democracy beyond the

civics classroom is important as it may have implications for the conceptualization and delivery of teaching and learning in relation to democracy [12] both in the classroom and in the education academy. Indeed as the mantra of *every teacher is a teacher of literacy and numeracy* spread through education systems world-wide, followed by every teacher is a teacher of ICTs, our call is for *every teacher to become a teacher of democracy*. The need to critically interrogate and understand the perspectives, experiences and perceptions of teachers in relation to democracy in education informs the context for this study [4; 5].

Discussions on democracy often result in platitudinous affirmations that it is naturally desirable, and, as a corollary, anything that is not democratic is considered virtually irrelevant. Kahne and Westheimer found that schools and teachers largely teach *a thin democracy* which «emphasizes individual character and behaviour but obscures the need for collective and often public-sector initiatives» [10, p. 36]. Identifying three competing visions of «citizenship» in practice in schools they suggest that these are «particularly helpful in making sense of the variation: the personally responsible citizen; the participatory citizen; and the justice oriented citizen» [12, p. 239 emphasis in original]. In their research, they conclude that each vision of citizenship reflects a relatively distinct set of theoretical and curricular goals. Significantly, they claim that these visions as delivered in programs are not cumulative. The core assumptions behind each of the different perspectives reflect a particular approach to problems and solutions in society: *personally responsible citizen solve social problems and improve society*, by having a good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community. The participatory citizen solves social problems and improves society through active participation and leadership within established systems and community structures. Finally, the justice oriented citizen solves social problems and improves society by questioning and changing established systems and structures when they reproduce patterns of injustice over time [11].

The aim of the project is to further democratize education and, concomitantly, society, to develop not only competencies, skills and knowledge but

also curriculum, pedagogy, policy and practices that may positively affect the institutional culture of education. The scholars interested in the contributing for the application of the survey in Russia are encouraged to contact either the authors of this article or the website of the project [7] to become a part of the team.

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ДЕМОКРАТИЯ И ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ:
ГЛОБАЛЬНЫЙ ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛЬСКИЙ ПРОЕКТ

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Идет речь о международном исследовательском проекте Global Doing Democracy Research Project, в котором принимают участие ученые более чем 25 стран с тем, чтобы изучить перспективы и представления о демократии в образовании для его демократизации. Основное внимание в рамках данного проекта уделяется тому, как образование связано с демократией, как оно поддерживает и культивирует демократические ценности и идеи. Описывается организация, методология и исследовательский инструментарий, используемый в рамках проекта.

Ключевые слова: философия образования; исследовательский проект; демократия; Индекс демократии; прямая и представительная демократия; гражданская позиция.