

Teaching about Justice With Justice: How Using Experiential, Learner Centered Literacy Methodology Enhances Learning of Justice Related Competencies for Young Children

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Abstract : abstract outlines a proposed study to examine how and to what extent interactive, experiential, learner centered methodology develops learning of basic civic and democratic competencies among young children. It stems from the Literacy and Law course taught at Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, DC, since 1998. Law students, trained in best literacy practices and legal cases affecting literacy development, read "law related" children's books and engage in interactive and extension activities with emerging readers. The law students write a monthly journal describing their experiences and a final paper: a conventional paper or a children's book illuminating some aspect of literacy and law. This proposal is based on the recent adaptation of Literacy and Law to Brazil at Mackenzie Presbyterian University in São Paulo in three forms: first, a course similar to the US model, often conducted jointly online with Brazilian and US law students; second, a similar course that combines readings of children's literature with activity based learning, with law students from a satellite Mackenzie campus, for young children from a vulnerable community near the city; and third, a course taught by law students at the main Mackenzie campus for 4th grade students at the Mackenzie elementary school, that is wholly activity and discourse based. The workings and outcomes of these courses are well documented by photographs, reports, lesson plans, and law student journals. The authors, faculty who teach the above courses at Mackenzie and Georgetown, observe that literacy, broadly defined as cognitive and expressive development through reading and discourse-based activities, can be influential in developing democratic civic skills, identifiable by explicit civic competencies. For example, children experience justice in the classroom through cooperation, creativity, diversity, fairness, systemic thinking, and appreciation for rules and their purposes. Moreover, the learning of civic skills as well as the literacy skills is enhanced through interactive, learner centered practices in which the learners experience literacy and civic development. This study will develop rubrics for individual and classroom teaching and supervision by examining 1) the children's books and students diaries of participating law students and 2) the collection of photos and videos of classroom activities, and 3) faculty and supervisor observations and reports. These rubrics, and the lesson plans and activities which are employed to advance the higher levels of performance outcomes, will be useful in training and supervision and in further replication and promotion of this form of teaching and learning. Examples of outcomes include helping, cooperating and participating; appreciation of viewpoint diversity; knowledge and utilization of democratic processes, including due process, advocacy, individual and shared decision making, consensus building, and voting; establishing and valuing appropriate rules and a reasoned approach to conflict resolution. In conclusion, further development and replication of the learner centered literacy and law practices outlined here can lead to improved qualities of democratic teaching and learning supporting mutual respect, positivity, deep learning, and the common good - foundation qualities of a sustainable world.

Keywords : democracy, law, learner-centered, literacy

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