

Learning to *Become* Citizens by Enacting Governorship in the Statecraft Curriculum: An Evaluation of Learning Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

Citizenship education is important in developing nations, where establishing a vital sense of statehood, belonging, and common purpose amongst citizens presents political leaders with significant challenges. This paper examines the enactment of an innovative citizenship education learning program based on the Statecraft X curriculum. The authors hold that it is essential for student learning to be engaged in and studied performatively, in the everyday context of students' situated action and participation in discursive practices. Consequently, the curriculum involves school students using a 24/7 mobile learning game played on Apple iPhones—Statecraft X—to enact governorship in the game world Velar. In addition, students construct their ideal, but fictional, world Bellalonia via the “play of imagination” as part of a Play-between-Worlds curriculum model. Empirical findings show that (a) dispositional shifts on several values and beliefs related to governance and citizenship were significantly “better” for intervention group students compared with control group students, and (b) intervention group students demonstrated significantly improved learning gains, compared with control group students, in respect of a summative essay writing task on governance and citizenship, evaluated on the criteria of relevance, perspective, and voice.

Keywords: *Becoming, Citizenship, Dialogism, Game-Based Learning, Identity, Inquiry, Performance, Statecraft X*

INTRODUCTION

Citizenship education is especially important in developing nations where establishing a vital sense of statehood, belonging, and common purpose amongst citizens, presents political

leaders with significant challenges. In school systems, education administrators recognize the importance of nurturing students to develop into responsible and active citizens. In Singapore, citizenship education is enacted via the Social Studies curriculum. What constitutes a “good” social studies curriculum, however, remains strongly contested. Barr, Barth, and

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Shermis (1977) note that “[t]he content of social studies is a smorgasbord of this and that from everywhere; it is as confusing and vague as is the goal of citizenship, for not only do social studies educators have conflicting ideas as to how to create a ‘good’ citizen, they cannot even agree on the meaning of the term” (p. 2). Distilling from different historical emphases in the teaching of social studies, the authors propose three key approaches: (1) social studies as citizenship transmission, (2) social studies taught as social science, and (3) social studies taught as reflective inquiry. These approaches are based on distinct and competing philosophical and ideological positions. The first approach is driven by the desire to transmit to students a conception of an ideal society and of what it means to be an ideal citizen. Mainstream values tend to be equated with internalization of social norms and acceptance. This approach is most widely practiced by teachers. The second approach, social studies taught as social science, focuses on teaching students the methods used by social scientists in their professional practice and the techniques by which these scientists construct new knowledge. The third approach, reflective inquiry, views citizenship as best promoted through a process of inquiry where knowledge is derived from what citizens need to know to make decisions and to solve problems through participation in citizenship. Reflective inquiry seeks to develop skills related to literacy, including the ability to “read between the lines,” to be aware of, able to locate, and able to use information from multiple sources, being able to sense and identify problems, learning how to frame hypotheses and to select and interpret data, being able to identify value conflicts, and knowing how to weigh and assess value claims (Barr et al., 1977).

Given the different approaches to designing a Social Studies curriculum, we first interrogated and clarified our own philosophical position, together with its implied value system. The goal was to determine a fitting approach to designing an innovative social studies curriculum that can be localized to fit the Singapore context and that would provide

a high likelihood of being able to achieve the desired student learning outcomes related to Social Studies established by the Ministry of Education. We observed that while the Social Studies curriculum included objectives related to knowledge, skills, and values, widespread local practice indicated that the teaching of Social Studies emphasized knowledge, or content acquisition, at the expense of values education. Barr et al criticize this emphasis on the grounds that focusing on content leads to unending discussions about what content ought and ought not to be considered a legitimate part of social studies, when the focus ought to be on learning goals instead.

In the next section of the paper, therefore, we first problematize curriculum design in the context of 21st-century learning. We then provide a short literature review to position our work in relation to existing efforts in social studies and game-based learning. Following this, we explicate the conceptual ideas that underlie our learning design and follow this with an articulation of the design of the specific curriculum that serves as the basis of our learning intervention and of the game itself. We then present the research method, data analysis, and results of our reported study, drawing a comparison between the learning outcomes of an intervention group and a control group. After discussing our findings, the paper concludes by considering implications for practice, policy, and research, and the direction of future research.

PROBLEMATIZATION: DESIGNING AN INNOVATIVE SOCIAL STUDIES LEARNING PROGRAM FOR 21ST-CENTURY LEARNING

Based on their synthesis and analysis of the field, Barr, Barth, and Shermis (1977) define the Social Studies as “an integration of experience and knowledge concerning human relations for the purpose of citizenship education” (p. 69). They identify four learning objectives required for effective citizenship: (1) knowledge, (2) skills

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