



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

# The Journal of Social Studies Research

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jssr](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jssr)



## Citizenship education goes digital

Brooke Blevins\*, Karon LeCompte, Sunny Wells

Baylor University, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, One Bear Place #97314, Waco, TX 76798, USA



### ARTICLE INFO

Available online 27 December 2013

### ABSTRACT

After years of neglect, civics education is gaining the attention of educators, political scientists, and politicians in the United States. As recent national citizenship reports have suggested, the level of civic knowledge in the U.S. has remained unchanged or even declined over the past century (NCES, 2011). New technological innovations are, however, providing promising hope for restoring civic education in the United States. This study explores the impact of one of these innovative technologies, iCivics.org, an online civics education gaming program. This study examined the impact of structured game engagement in 13 classrooms (grades 4, 5, 6, 8, 12) with over 250 children. To explore the effectiveness of this program on students' civic knowledge, this article presents a three-dimensional analysis of the results, including both quantitative and qualitative data. Initial results of this study suggest that iCivics provides positive gains in students' content knowledge. Moreover, findings highlight the important role teachers play in implementing iCivics and the need for more research on civics education through gaming formats. Copyright © 2013, The International Society for the Social Studies. Published by Elsevier, Inc. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

To promote democratic commitments, civic education programs should help students identify social problems in need of attention and provide positive experiences in civic participation. High quality civic education programs must also engage students in real life projects and simulations, create community connections of support, and introduce students to compelling role models as a means of developing the civic knowledge, skills, and capacities necessary for active citizenship. This means that children need to be exposed to civic problems and civic engagement at a young age giving educators the time and resources to effectively scaffold students' propensity to be competent contributing adult members of society. Parker (2003) calls this the "Just Community." In other words, students are involved in school and classroom governance. This approach to civic education requires a shift in school climate and teacher leadership roles. While this curricular change holds promise, might these kinds of experiences be even more valuable if youth could experience this type of civic problem solving virtually?

Recent research has highlighted the positive role that video games might play in developing engaged citizens (Kahne, Middaugh, & Evans, 2008). In this article, we present findings from a research study that utilized the pedagogical venue of video games to teach civic ideals and practices. Specifically, this study explored the use of an educational video game called iCivics and its impact on students' civic learning and engagement. As such, we present a three-dimensional analysis that includes quantitative and qualitative data gathered from 250 students in 10 classrooms. To begin, we situate this civic

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [brooke\\_blevins@baylor.edu](mailto:brooke_blevins@baylor.edu) (B. Blevins), [karon\\_lecompte@baylor.edu](mailto:karon_lecompte@baylor.edu) (K. LeCompte), [sunny\\_wells@baylor.edu](mailto:sunny_wells@baylor.edu) (S. Wells).

education study in the context of current literature, then describe our conceptual framework, outline our methodology, and finally explore the resulting data.

## Review of literature

While the American school has long been seen as a site for citizenship education, the imposition of reform efforts such as No Child Left Behind, which promote increased educational time in math, reading, and science, have pushed civic education into a tenuous position in American public schools (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Consequently, students are more likely to know the judges on American Idol than current Supreme Court justices. With accountability measures tied only to math, reading, and science, it is no surprise that time devoted to citizenship education has significantly decreased. Where civics education still exists, it generally takes the form of a one-semester secondary level course on American government that focuses on factual knowledge and little on the role of everyday citizens (Levine & Lopez, 2004). A 2006 study by the Center on Education Policy reported that 71% of school districts reported decreasing time in social studies education to make room for reading, writing, and math (Jennings & Rentner, 2006).

This decreased time spent on citizenship education may be evidenced in a recent NAEP report entitled, *A Nation's Report Card: Civics 2010*, which asserted a marginal increase in 4th grade students basic understanding of civics and no increase among 8th grade or 12th grade students since the previous 1998 study. Additionally, Galston (2001) noted a decline in youth engagement in community, voting rates, and interest in discussing political issues, in the United States over the past few decades. One possible explanation for this low level of engagement is that students have a difficult time imagining themselves as future citizens as most activities and simulations in the classroom are textbook based and meaningless to their lives (Alazzi, 2009; Chiodo & Martin, 2005). However, in a representative democracy that centers on the participation of informed voters, finding ways to help foster citizenship knowledge, attitudes, and actions for all students is imperative. Certainly a great deal of research in the field of social studies attends to the educational preparation of citizens for active civic participation. This research suggests that citizenship education is best accomplished by providing classroom civic learning opportunities (Feldman, Pasek, Romer, & Jamieson, 2007; Hess & Gatti, 2010; see Gibson & Levine, 2003 for a review), explicitly addressing political participation (Feldman et al., 2007; Kahne & Spote, 2008), encouraging students to participate in citizenship activities (Mellor, 2008), utilizing simulations and role plays (Gibson & Levine, 2003), engaging in controversial issues discussions (Hess, 2002), participating in service learning (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Wade & Saxe, 1997), and promoting extracurricular involvement (McFarland & Thomas, 2006). Additionally, Mellor (2008) noted the most effective way to accomplish this goal for citizenship education is to teach students civic and political knowledge while they concurrently participate in citizenship activities. Hence effective civics education involves both formal and participatory learning opportunities.

Recent research provides additional insight into new ways to enhance citizenship education and increase students' civic engagement. Findings from a Pew Internet Research Report (Kahne et al., 2008) offer interesting possibilities for attending to the question of how best to prepare active citizens. The results of this study implied that video games may be a viable option of extending citizenship education because they parallel the kinds of civic learning opportunities found to promote civic engagement in other settings. Video games promote civic learning in three main ways: simulations of civic and political action, consideration of controversial issues, and participation in groups where members share interests in effective ways. Additionally, this report suggested that civic gaming experiences are more equally distributed among race and class divisions than many other civic learning opportunities (Lenhart et al., 2008). Online gaming experiences have the potential to provide high quality civics education engaging for all students.

Additionally, another national survey (Project Tomorrow, 2009), with more than 280,000 students, found that games or virtual simulations for teaching concepts (51%) were the top requirements for the 21st Century classrooms. One year later, the same project (Project Tomorrow, 2010) asked, *what do you think would be the benefits if video or on-line games were part of your regular schoolwork or classroom activities?* The top responses from students from grades 6 to 8 included: Easier to understand difficult concepts (61%), learn more about a subject (58%), more engaged in the subject (57%), more interesting to practice problems (54%), learn how to work in teams (43%). The results of this study suggested that, in addition to enjoying video game play, students also believed video games had positive possibilities for increasing their learning and engagement in the classroom (Trespalacios, Chamberlin, & Gallagher, 2010).

One online gaming experience designed to promote civic education in schools is called iCivics. Prompted by the startling and dismal statistics about civics education in the United States, former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor set out to reinvigorate civics educations and empower today's youth through informed civic discourse and action. O'Connor's vision led to the creation of iCivics, a "web-based education project designed to teach students civics and inspire them to be active participants in our democracy" (Curley, 2010, para. 7). This free program is aligned to state and national standards and focuses on teaching core civics content. The site has lesson plans for teachers and online games and interactive modules for students. iCivics is interactive in that participants can make avatars and earn points for the games they play. Students can earn achievement badges, get their names on national leader boards, and connect with real-world civic projects that are important to them. Students can spend their points on their favorite "impact project," selected from a list on the website, and every 3 months the project with the most points will receive \$1000 from iCivics. In iCivics games, which take 15–45 min to complete, students simulate roles as civic leaders and tackle real-life problems, find answers for themselves, and engage in challenging and relevant material.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/108401>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/108401>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)