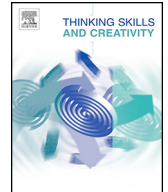




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Thinking Skills and Creativity

journal homepage: <http://www.elsevier.com/locate/tsc>

Large scale implementation of higher order thinking (HOT) in civic education: The interplay of policy, politics, pedagogical leadership and detailed pedagogical planning



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 October 2015
 Received in revised form 1 May 2016
 Accepted 10 May 2016
 Available online 12 May 2016

Keywords:

Higher order thinking (HOT)
 Civic studies
 Large scale implementation
 Instructional leadership

ABSTRACT

Educational policy documents from around the globe currently highlight the goal of teaching higher order thinking (HOT). Yet, most classrooms worldwide are still predominately characterized by a pedagogy of knowledge transmission, focusing on lower-order cognitive levels. This discrepancy points to the need to study issues of large scale implementation of HOT. The goal of this paper is to address this issue by examining two decades of implementing HOT in civic education in Israel, adopting a dual approach: first, the paper provides a historical analysis of relevant policies and political transformations, showing what happens to a policy decision to foster HOT over the years. The analysis shows that the way from a policy paper to what actually had taken place in classrooms is long and bumpy. The policy did cause several practical changes, but for more than 10 years, impacts were slim, sometimes causing unexpected (and undesirable) consequences. Then, the paper zooms-in on one specific period in which more elaborate implementation efforts took place. Significant hallmarks of the process were an emphasis on developing instructional leadership, detailed pedagogical planning, a blend of tight “top down” processes with “bottom up” processes characterized by growing freedom and autonomy, and modelling the culture of thinking.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Civics education and learning to think

Educational policy documents from around the globe currently highlight the goal of teaching higher order thinking (HOT) even more prominently than in earlier times. This trend is reflected in numerous curricular and standards documents (Zohar, 2013). Yet, most classrooms worldwide are still predominately characterized by a pedagogy of knowledge transmission that focuses on lower-order cognitive levels. Numerous studies show that despite decades of efforts to implement HOT, it is still far from being a predominant way of teaching and learning. It seems that the combination of the challenges involved in scaling up educational innovations in general with the challenges involved with teaching thinking in particular, is immense. Several researchers therefore note that scaling up the “thinking curriculum” is a huge challenge that is still awaiting educational systems all over the world (e.g., Osborne, 2013; Fullan & Watson, 2011; Resnick, 2010; Zohar, 2013). Accordingly, despite abundance of research about small-scale efforts to teach thinking, there is still a gap in the research literature about how to

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scale up these efforts across many schools and whole educational systems. This article aims to address this gap by analyzing a specific case of large scale implementation of HOT in civic education.

Education for citizenship and democracy is increasingly viewed all over the world as an important and central role of education, consisting of three components: knowledge and understanding, civics dispositions and attitudes and intellectual skills (Crick, 1998). Fostering students' intellectual abilities is viewed by many as a crucial factor in preparing future citizens for sound participation in a democracy (Goodlad, 1984; Cogan, 1999; Westheimer, 2008; Paul, 1992; Paul & Elder, 2000; Scheffler, 1973; Siegel, 1988; Gutman, 1987; Branson & Quigley, 1998). For instance, the British final report of the advisory group on citizenship ("The Crick Report") stated that 'Open and informed debate is vital for a healthy democracy. . . . Civics education should thus develop skills of reflection, enquiry and debate. It should help young people learn to argue soundly and effectively, think for themselves, solve problems and make decisions effectively' (Crick, 1998). Although the terms used by various educators when addressing this issue vary widely, applying terms such as critical thinking skills, argumentation, deliberation, decision-making, problem-solving and more, by and large these terms fall within the range of what is meant by the term higher order thinking (HOT, Zohar, 2013). One of the hallmarks of education for thinking is active learners. In this context active learners mean students who are active in their minds, engaging with tasks that require them to perform vigorous intellectual activities. A second meaning of active learners applies to the idea of political activism characterizing the goals of civic education.

The literature however, also points to a probable gap that is being created in many countries between the goals declared in policy documents and the actual situations in many schools. While the intent is to build a more intellectually active and demanding curriculum, the long lists of prescribed content that crowd the curriculum often prevents teachers from engaging students in active thinking. There is in effect an absence of empirical research on the extent to which civics intellectual skills are actually being taught in schools all over the world. There is also no systematic identification of how to overcome the barriers standing in the way of implementation of effective approaches for teaching such intellectual skills (MacKinnon, 2008). The fragmented evidence that does exist indicates that in many countries transmission of facts is more prevalent in civic education than the cultivation of intellectual skills (e.g., Paul & Elder, 2000; Westheimer, 2008; Yang & Chung, 2009; IES, 2007; Davies & Issitt, 2005). For instance, the results from the IEA 1999 Civics Education study conducted across 28 countries showed a gap between the stated curricula in many countries in which long lists of factual knowledge are to be conveyed but only an hour or two a week of classroom study is allotted to them. This study also showed that the required factual knowledge is often not related to concepts that are meaningful to students (Torney-Purta, Schwille, & Amadeo, 1999).

An analysis of the US results from this international study show that the U.S. international standing was stronger in civics skills than in civics content, with the performance of U.S. students on the civics skills subscale higher than that of students in every other country (National Center for educational statistics, 2001). However, the NAEP 2006 study conducted in the US showed different outcomes. In this study a larger percentage of students demonstrated basic-level knowledge of civics than knowledge that requires higher order thinking (i.e., answering civics questions requiring analysis, evaluation or taking and defending a position) (IES, 2007). The disparity between the two tests can be explained by the fact that the IEA Civics Skills items are rather limited in their intellectual demands while the demands posed by NAEP are more complex. Taken together these findings show that even the US students who did well on the IEA Civics Skills items compared to students from other countries, do not do well in civics test items requiring demanding intellectual abilities.

More recently, the 2009 International Civics and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) set out to investigate civics knowledge, attitudes, and engagement among lower secondary school students in 38 countries, as well as their teachers' and school principals' beliefs (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010). The findings show that most of the teachers and school principals regarded the development of knowledge and skills as the most important aim of civics and citizenship education. This component of knowledge and skills included, among other things, the promotion of students' critical and independent thinking. The students' ICCS assessment of civics knowledge showed that on average, across participating countries, only 28% of students were at Proficiency Level 3, characterized by the application of knowledge and understanding to evaluate or justify policies, practices, and behaviors based on students' understanding of civics and citizenship (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010). In sum, although we do not yet have an accurate picture of how much teaching for thinking actually does take place in civics classes, the data indicate that this issue still requires additional attention from practitioners and researchers.

1.2. *Research goals, questions and context*

The goal of this paper is to address the issue of wide scale implementation of teaching HOT in high school civics by looking at a specific case of implementing HOT on a national scale in civic education in Israel. The paper centers on civic studies, i.e., on the part of civic education taught as a formal school subject. The goal is to analyze the implementation process, adopting a dual approach: first, a historical analysis of relevant policy making and political transformations will be provided. Then, the paper will zoom-in on one specific period in which elaborate implementation efforts took place, with the goal of analyzing the pedagogical processes involved in scaling up HOT in civic studies. The leading question of this paper is: what can we learn from the specific case of wide scale implementation of HOT in civic education in Israel about large scale implementation of teaching thinking? In order to understand the significance of the processes described in this article some background information about the relevant educational context is required. The Israeli educational system is centralized. The curriculum prescribed by the Ministry of Education covers a large percentage of what is in fact taught in most schools.

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