

Social Studies for Democracy: Cultivating Communities of Inquiry for Filipino Students as Deliberative Citizens

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the problematic state of Philippine democracy that has long been attributed to the nation's history of colonial rule, widespread poverty and inequality, oligarchic structures, and dysfunctional institutions. It focuses on the role of education and Social Studies Education, specifically, in cultivating in Filipino citizens skills and attitudes necessary for active participation in deliberative democracy. Drawing from Dewey's philosophy of progressivist and democratic education, Peirce's notion of community of inquiry, as well as Lipman's Philosophy for/with Children, it sketches how Social Studies situated in classroom communities of inquiry will help develop communitarian dispositions and inquiry skills that are indispensable in a healthy and vibrant democracy. While it is recognized that there are numerous other pedagogies that aim at similar purposes, it is argued that the community of inquiry enables a unique and robust learning process that allows students to think reflectively, explore various contexts and experiences, question their assumptions, identify their prejudices, and make their own conclusions through deliberative, intersubjective dialogue.

Keywords: Social Studies, Democratic Education, Philippine Education, Community of Inquiry, Philosophy for/with Children

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INTRODUCTION

It is not spurious to refer to the Philippines as a “weak” state (Baildon, Sim, & Paculdar, 2016; Banlaoi, 2004; Gatmaytan, 2006; Kraft, 2003; Maboloc, 2017; Maca & Morris, 2012) with a “deficient” democracy (Abellanosa, 2020; Dressel, 2011). This can be easily attributed to the nation’s long history of colonial rule, widespread poverty and inequality, oligarchic structures, and dysfunctional institutions (Dressel, 2011; Lat, 2018; Miralao, 2008; Maboloc, 2017). The reinvigoration or reconstruction of this nation would undoubtedly entail fundamental changes to its sociopolitical and socioeconomic systems for a society’s ills, as well as its strengths, are deeply ingrained in its culture. The question of how it may cultivate its strengths and mitigate, if not eradicate, its ills is thus most important. For John Dewey, education plays a vital role in the cultivation of a society’s strengths for it is the fertile ground from which students could develop skills and attitudes necessary for active participation in democratic life: that is, if such education provides ample opportunities for students to grapple with one another’s experiences, ideas, and questions (Morehouse, 2010). Such an education, therefore, could very well help address Philippines’ perennial societal problems, or at least one of the basic ones, which arguably have to do with many Filipinos not involving themselves in democratic discourse and not asking questions about society, culture, and public policy. This, then, highlights how truly relevant Social Studies is in Philippine basic education. The bone of contention, at this point, is how Social Studies would most likely succeed as a civic education for democracy as this requires the development of critical thinking that allows one to ask questions and to make a categorical stand about social issues by engaging in deliberative discourse with others who have their own ideas about such things as well. In this light, Social Studies would now have to do with encouraging students to embrace the responsibility of sharing a nation together with other people and empowering them so that they are able to constantly reexamine and have a say in the status quo. Indeed, Constantino’s (1970) recommendation for education, which he articulated more than fifty years ago, remains relevant to Social Studies Education in that it must do its part in producing Filipinos who are “aware of the country’s problems, who understand the basic solution to these problems, and who care enough to have the courage to work and sacrifice for the country’s salvation” (p.20).

Social Studies in the Philippines

The Philippine educational system is a product of its history and changing sociopolitical contexts. Colonized by Spain in the 16th century, Filipinos’ civic education under the Spanish rule focused primarily on the Hispanization of customs and traditions and on the evangelization of majority of the population. Abinales and Amoroso (2005) say that this is where the “origins of the weak state” (as cited in Baildon et al., 2016, p.98) could be found as education resulted in a highly stratified society where learning opportunities were granted only to elite citizens known as *Ilustrados*. The dilution of nationalism furthered during the American rule, with the insistence on English as the medium of instruction separating the Filipinos from their past and the uneducated masses (Constantino, 1970). This was also exacerbated by an essentialist philosophy of education focused on a kind of civic (or, more appropriately, *civilizing*) education that taught Filipinos “how to exercise their rights against the ‘caciques’ and ‘bosses’” (Go, 2004, p.193 in Baildon et al., 2016). After gaining independence, citizenship education in the Philippines began to emphasize more nationalistic themes and this cut across the Commonwealth period, the Marcos era, and the post-EDSA Revolution era (Baildon et al., 2016). Nonetheless, the changing sociopolitical circumstances during these times bore their respective influences on citizenship education and this was evident in the way educational goals were articulated across these periods:

“While the 1982 goals reiterated the goals of the previous 1970 elementary curriculum (The Revised Elementary Education Program, 1970), the 1989 goals (Implementation of the New Secondary, 1989) were not a reiteration of the 1973 secondary curriculum (Department of Education and Culture, 1976). Instead, the 1989 goals were revised to reflect the changes in the political scene. For instance, the goal to develop “a reasoned commitment to national development” in 1973 became “enlightened commitment to national ideals” (Nelson, 1994) in

1989, signifying a change in tone (from reason to enlightenment) and construct (from national development to national ideals). The acquisition of work skills had to be matched with work ethics in 1989, putting forward the need for values.” (Calingasan, 2018, p.3)

In 2002, the Department of Education (DepEd) introduced *Makabayan*, “a new learning area that integrates several subjects with the goal of helping each Filipino student to develop a healthy personal and national identity” (Bernardo & Mendoza, 2009, p.181). However, this integrated approach proved to be a challenge that was very difficult for teachers to overcome as the curriculum remained congested and a coherent framework for integrating all the curricular elements in this new, singular content area was absent. Nevertheless, stakeholders were generally hopeful towards such a kind of civic education as it was seen as a strong effort in keeping the youth “grounded in key values central to the building blocks of affiliation and participation” (Baildon et al., 2016, p.107). At the least, compared with how citizenship education was during the Spanish and American eras as well as the Marcos period which underscored the value of discipline over freedom, Social Studies at this point has become more concerned with students’ autonomy, where stress is placed not only on general ideas of love of country or nationalism but likewise on notions of a person’s rights and freedom. Baildon et al. (2016) interpret this emphasis on the Filipino’s self-worth, autonomy, and agency as emerging from anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian struggles.

Presently, educational reforms such as the shift from the K to 10 to the K to 12 curriculum gear towards exigencies in contemporary national and global contexts (Baildon et al., 2016; Orale & Sarmiento, 2016) and the content area of Social Studies, or *Araling Panlipunan*, is no exception. Anchored upon constructivist principles, the DepEd Social Studies Curriculum Guide (The Department of Education, 2010) declares its learning methods to be collaborative, integrative, multi- and interdisciplinary. Among its goals are to help students become critical thinkers who have acquired a deep understanding of salient perspectives and issues in history, geography, political science, economics, and other related disciplines. Consequently, the Curriculum Guide highlights how learning in Social Studies must culminate into students’ meaningful appreciation of concepts instead of mere memorization of facts. Unfortunately, due to factors such as lack of access to opportunities for capacity building, large student-teacher ratios, and a curriculum that remains heavily congested, teachers are generally unable to implement strategies that are collaborative, integrative, multi- and interdisciplinary in nature (Dizon, 2020; 2021; Sobradil, Jacobe, Pandapatan, Porquis, & Casiro, 2017).

Nevertheless, some pedagogies anchored on these principles and involve the application of learned skills to real life situations have been tested in the Philippine context and are generally proven to be successful insofar as students acquiring a meaningful understanding about community and governance, developing their attitudes of self-efficacy in relation to their immediate communities, and enhancing their interaction skills (Piñgul, 2015). What is essential in these kinds of strategies is that they provide authentic communitarian experiences which allow students, for instance, to “fully appreciate and address issues relating to social inequality, inequity, and injustice” (Lucman, 2020, p.1). It is worth noting, however, that demystifying these concepts and, perhaps, establishing some common understandings regarding them are necessary prior to having students engage in community service-learning and other participation-driven efforts. As Lucman (2020) points out, there is a fine line between charity and solidarity and it is the latter from which communitarian experiences and efforts ought to be based, that is, if the kind of Social Studies we are envisioning is one that is geared towards democratic participation and social justice. Further, Lucman identifies some elements of such democratic and communitarian Social Studies pedagogy to be indispensable: “(1) Students should be able to explore their role concerning social issues; (2) Students should be able to probe the status quo looking into underlying causes of social problems and scrutinizing systems of power and oppression on institutional, cultural, and individual levels; (3) Students should be able to connect analysis to action; (4) Students should be able to connect struggles across boundaries of race, class, gender, and sexuality; and (5) Students should be able to provide concrete solutions” (p.3). Evidently, these conditions necessitate some learning process that would allow students to think reflectively, explore various contexts and experiences, question their assumptions, identify their prejudices, and make their

own conclusions. This, then, brings us to the question of how this learning process could transpire and thrive within the four corners of the classroom, prior to and even after students go out in their communities and engage in participation-driven efforts.

In attempting to address this question, it is worth to consider some implications of John Dewey's philosophy of democratic education to Social Studies Education, as its emphasis on "building community, building strong relationships, developing higher-level thinking skills for real-life application, and following student interests" (Williams, 2017, p.100) is aligned with the nature and purposes of the discipline which is to equip the youth with "knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of them to be active and engaged citizens in a culturally diverse, democratic society" (NCSS as cited in Lucman, 2020, p.2).

Toward a Democratic Social Studies Education in the Philippine Context

The notion of democratic education is most closely related to the Deweyan philosophy of experimentalism and instrumentalism but has been interpreted in different ways by educationists. One interpretation of Deweyan educational ideas gave birth to Progressivism, which is an evolutionary educational philosophy preoccupied with students being able to construct their own knowledge through experimentation of ideas that would enable them to adapt to their own desires and needs (Gutek, 1997). Interestingly, despite often being regarded as the Father of Progressivism, Dewey himself cautioned that progressive education could merely be reactionary towards traditional practices for progressivist methods may not necessarily translate to experimentalist and instrumentalist ends. This means that the very notion of what makes education democratic should first and foremost be dissected, so that if the progressivist philosophy is to be applied to Social Studies, for instance, there is a greater certainty that not merely the *means* but also the educational *outcomes* are truly progressivist and democratic. One common and important aspect of a progressivist education (although not a specific criterion of progressivist education) is the use of collaborative activities that not only allow for experiential and interest-based learning, but more importantly, for collaborative and inquiry-based learning.

"Collaborative" and "inquiry-based" learning in the context of this paper is anchored on Deweyan principles of education. For instance, Dewey (1916) posits that the classroom must become its *own* community—a miniature society of people who find camaraderie in each other despite differences in their beliefs and opinions and who forge a relationship based on mutual respect as they come to understand that to be in solidarity with others, they must share basic aims, aspirations, and knowledge. In other words, the classroom as an embryonic society should meet the following criteria for a genuine democracy: that there is "not only more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest, but greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control" and that there is likewise "not only freer interaction between social groups"... "but change in social habit—its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse" (p.100).

Therefore, a truly democratic education for Dewey would not just mean providing opportunities just so students can work together collaboratively because togetherness brings about experiential and interest-based learning. Instead, democratic education itself should aim at building togetherness among students for learning together should not be seen merely as a means in education but as an *end* of education. This is specifically relevant to Social Studies since the very nature of the subject area has to do with citizenship, and for a democratic society, ideally, this subject area should largely be characterized by a moral component which guides how individuals should think about issues that concern not only themselves but other members of the community as well (Glina, 2009; Hymers, 2009). This is grounded on an educational outlook that a student who is likewise a democratic citizen has both the right and the responsibility to engage in an ongoing attempt to think about and works towards the resolution of societal issues so that it helps maintain both the individual's and the community's growth and freedom (Bleazby, 2006). This right and responsibility are to be practiced in what Dewey calls a method of inquiry, defined as "the controlled or directed

transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole” (Dewey, 1938 as quoted by Juuso, 2007, p.84). Further, it is doubt, according to Dewey that leads us into reflection and thus to inquiry where we are forced to “begin thinking imaginatively, creatively, productively, so as to come up with a hypothesis of what could be done to make our doubt subside” (Lipman, 2004, p.6). Notably, Dewey highlights the importance of conducting inquiry, of grappling with doubt, amongst other individuals as it is in the company of other minds that we can establish a common goal and thereby attempt at accomplishing it together—a fundamental function for a healthy and vibrant democratic community (Juuso, 2007; Lipman, 2004). This is vital in a nation such as the Philippines where the people—from which the power is supposedly vested—are largely unable to exercise such power actively and intelligently as has been evident across history. As discussed, the baggage that the nation carries from its colonial past has ultimately resulted in the failure of its liberalism (Claudio, 2017). While there have been efforts towards post-colonial liberalism, the divide between the elite and the poor has already been so starkly drawn that the very idea of “the people” has become so ambiguous, the identification of which remains to be “a sustained political effort that is both necessarily exclusive and conflictual” (Ordoñez & Borja, 2018, p.3). Currently, this has led political scientists such as Ordoñez and Borja (2018) to analyze what they refer to as “the Duterte phenomenon” (p.2) that results in the election of a populist leader in a supposedly ‘democratic’ country. Regardless of what one’s political affiliations may be, from an educationist’s perspective, the idea that majority of the Filipino citizens who spend their youth in the schools are not provided with sufficient opportunities to cultivate their shared intelligence, to nourish their concern for their fellowmen and their society, and to assert their rights for self-determination, there does not appear to be much hope for a genuinely democratic Philippines. It may suffice to say thus that Philippine education, ultimately, would be nothing more than an instrument for social reproduction of inequality and injustice.

If we were to agree with Dewey that schools should be embryonic societies where subject areas, such as and especially Social Studies, emphasize on the practice of deliberative democracy, and that both communitarian attitudes and skills for inquiry are essential to democratic life, it can now be concluded that Social Studies Education will have to assume a more democratic stance in its definition, aims, and methods of teaching and learning. Given that Social Studies Education’s foremost aims is education for citizenship which necessitates the development of communitarian attitudes and skills for inquiry, it is now time to identify a possible method of teaching and learning that may best carry out what Social Studies Education is for in the very first place—an endeavor of utmost importance especially in the context of the Philippines as a developing, democratic country where it is imperative to “imagine” a new kind of democracy (Hermida, 2014); to redefine what “people power” should mean (Gatmaytan, 2006; Lat, 2008).

The Community of Inquiry and a Democratic Social Studies Education

As far as Dewey’s philosophy of education goes, it did not leave a particular model by which teachers can base their curriculum nor a clear teaching method or content area that would facilitate inquiry even if he did emphasize on the significant role of schools in creating a democratic atmosphere for cultivating an inquiring attitude among students (Lipman, 2004). Matthew Lipman banked on Dewey’s educational philosophy and designed a program for basic education, known as Philosophy for/with Children, which centers on the development of thinking skills and attitudes through the methodology of philosophical dialogue. This dialogue happens within an environment known as the ‘community of inquiry’.

Charles Sanders Peirce first coined the term ‘community of inquiry’ though Lipman (as mentioned in Planas, 2004) claims that it originated from Ancient Greece, particularly in the teachings of Socrates. Nevertheless, it was Peirce who concretized the idea of what a community of inquiry is: an interaction among scientists employing logic and semiotics to reach a common end in the field of science (Camhy, 2006; Morehouse, 2010; Planas, 2004). Clearly, there is much similarity in theory regarding inquiry and community between Peirce and Dewey. This is because Dewey was a student

of Peirce in the 1870s, inheriting the practical implications of his mentor's ideas (Lipman, 2003). As such, Peirce's theory of inquiry and community are not only similar to Dewey's but it is its kernel: it is from Peirce's scientific method and fallibilism that Dewey relates his concepts of experience and reflective thinking (Lipman, 2004).

In the context of Philosophy for/with Children, the term "community of inquiry" is often used interchangeably. The common ground is that in this pedagogy, the classroom consists of a group of students ranging from as young as preschoolers to as old as senior high school students who come together to share their thoughts, questions, and opinions in a climate of intersubjectivity. Applied to Social Studies Education, lessons in the subject area will now revolve on students' questions regarding a given topic for a day or the duration of the week. Hence, knowledge about history, culture, society, politics, economics, and geography in the community is built and not merely transmitted, as students are given opportunities to ask questions and share their opinions while following the train of logic in the process of inquiry. These habits of inquiry, as Lipman and other proponents of the community of inquiry argue, will allow students to "acquire a taste for rational analysis, driven by a thirst for truth" and ultimately, to "develop the critical tools they will need as individuals to better understand and navigate through life, and as citizens to contribute to public debate, support democracy and resist misleading propaganda" (UNESCO, 2007, p.14). As Social Studies largely has to do with developing students' skills and attitudes for citizenship, it thereby follows that the community of inquiry is a pedagogy that may well respond to this subject area's aims and objectives. Numerous scholars around the world agree and have argued for the application of Philosophy for/with Children precisely for the purpose of developing civic skills and dispositions among young students so that they become well-acquainted with their rights (Cassidy, 2017), with the virtues associated with deliberative democracy (Di Masi & Santi, 2016; Makaiiau & Tanaka, 2018; Šimenc, 2009), inclusiveness and diversity (Bleazby, 2009; Nishiyama, 2019), as well as social justice as a whole (Chetty, 2014; Makaiiau, 2017) through the development of what Kizel (2015) refers to as "socio-philosophic sensitivity" (p.139). Filipino teachers, however, remain largely unaware of this pedagogy (Bolaños, 2018; Canuto, 2013; Lee, 2014).

What Makes a Community of Inquiry?

The fuel necessary to start the inquiry is something to inquire about—a puzzling, disconcerting, problematic concept that the students themselves recognize and bring forward to everyone else's attention (Camhy, 2006; Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980; Murriss, 2000; Sharp & Splitter, 1995). Certainly, as topics in Social Studies revolve around history, culture, society, politics, economics, and geography, there are many things that students will naturally find puzzling, disconcerting, and problematic (e.g., social justice, law and public policy, Martial Law, social stratification, the separation of the Church and the State, etc.). It will hence not be difficult to commence an inquiry on the topics that will be tackled in the subject area. What will be challenging, on the other hand, is for the teacher to work through the students' ideas so that the class will still have a coherent understanding at the end of the dialogue, and to provide closure despite questions that may remain open even after the inquiry. This underscores the importance of the teacher as facilitator who should be the foremost model of open-mindedness, curiosity, empathy, and intellectual responsibility, and who must keep in mind to continuously cultivate a classroom environment where the atmosphere is democratic and is characterized by a common goal and mutual respect among all participants. While it is expected that the classroom will take time to transform into a community of inquiry, this process will transpire organically once there exists a convergence in purpose as an outcome of a truly collaborative relation among the students. Also, because the nature of the community of inquiry is cooperative and not competitive, students will see for themselves how it is better to "depersonalize their opinions to the extent that they can critically analyze their own as well as others'" (Nicoll, 1993, p.4). Ultimately, they come to realize the need to listen and suspend their judgment as they learn to place value in what others have to say, making them more and more understanding, tolerant, and caring towards others' experiences and perspectives (Accorinti, 2000; Fisher, 2006; Pearson, 2004; UNESCO, 2007; Yos, 2004). Thus, students are not only encouraged to think for themselves but also to think *with* others. Notably, while they grow to be more accepting of subjective experiences and

assumptions, “the fact that the process of inquiry takes place in a community-frame guarantees some degree of objectivity in the inquiry and in knowledge” (Planas, 2004, p.92). This, then, ensures that their learning results in both the acquisition of content knowledge and the development of communitarian attitudes and skills of inquiry that are indispensable in a functional democracy.

It is likewise important to emphasize that the community of inquiry is not only designed to pursue a common goal and to promote the democratic dynamics among persons but also to help surface the autonomous, reflective consciousness among individuals. As Planas (2004) stresses, “participating in a community of inquiry allows its members to perceive other points of view” and to use them to “build one’s own vision of the world” (p.92).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Social Studies and citizenship education are one and the same. It can thus be said that it is in this subject area that students should be given ample opportunities to acquire the necessary content knowledge, thinking skills, and dispositions that will allow them to understand what it means to live with others, to actively participate in a democracy, and to learn how to exercise their rights and duties of citizenship. As argued, the community of inquiry is an ideal pedagogy for Social Studies Education as it aims to provide an environment that will allow the teacher to not only teach Social Studies concepts to students but more importantly, to develop in them communitarian attitudes and inquiry skills that will allow them to “acquire a taste for rational analysis, driven by a thirst for truth” and ultimately, “develop the critical tools they will need as individuals to better understand and navigate through life, and as citizens to contribute to public debate, support democracy and resist misleading propaganda” (UNESCO, 2007, p.14).

While the assessment of the development of communitarian dispositions and inquiry skills as well as of the progress and quality of the community of inquiry itself may be difficult to do, this should not stop teachers from allowing students to engage in this kind of inquiry for “education is a part of the continuous reconstruction of knowledge and of society, and transformation is achieved partly through the acquisition of a critical language to analyze ideas, beliefs and theories” (Haynes & Murriss, 2001, p.6). In addition, it is through a truly open and free Social Studies situated in a community of inquiry that education will be able to “teach people to make good decisions” and “equip them to improve their own futures and become contributing members of society, rather than burdens on society” (Facione, 2007, p.2). Indeed, the community of inquiry may possibly provide a kind of Social Studies Education that the Philippines as a developing, third world democratic country has yet to benefit from, in terms of seeing its youth become Filipinos who are more active, caring, and critical citizens in its democracy. In this light, it would be useful for future practitioners to bear in mind that the community of inquiry is, by nature, a contextualized pedagogy and it will remain so for as long as educationists view students to be “active bearers of culture” who, as citizens, need to be empowered “to think for themselves and with others while staying grounded in their cultural backgrounds” (Elicor, 2021, p.1).

Finally, it is high time that the Philippine education curriculum rethink and refocus its priorities, from mere content knowledge acquisition measured mainly through quantifiable forms of assessment, to the development of communitarian attitudes and inquiry skills that would help Filipinos live a much more meaningful and prosperous life both as an individual and as a member of a revitalized Philippine society. Because a wide debate on the assessment of the development of thinking skills and dispositions in dialogues and of the progress and quality of the community of inquiry persists among educationists and researchers, future research may look into more comprehensive and holistic criteria for evaluating these.

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