Democracy in and through education: Ukrainian Challenges and Opportunities

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Ukrainian civil society in action for changes and dignity

Peaceful mass protest of the people on Independence square in Kyiv (December 2013)
Focus on the three main points

- The stages in the development of education for democracy in Ukraine
- Lessons learned
- The challenges as current opportunities
Main phases of development

• from the beginning and middle of the 1990s to 2004
• from 2004 to 2013
• from 2014 to 2015
Main challenges of the post-soviet era

- Authoritarianism, complete administrative regulation and control over schools and all educational processes
- Lack of any experience in citizens of carrying out activities beyond state regulation
- Devaluation of social values due to dual morality and the declarative nature of the values proclaimed by Soviet society and the state
- Severe material hardship associated with the life and work of the majority of educators in those times.
Typical design of the teaching and learning process

- Very detailed regulation of curriculum content
- Successful learning outcome was understood as memorizing knowledge and mastery of individual cognitive skills
- Annual oral exams in several subjects from Grade 5 to 10
- Lecture-style approach to interaction between students and the teacher, aimed at the mythical ‘average’ student
- Methods and tools for teaching and learning, which implied an active teacher who influences passive students
Late 1990-th. Initiatives for change

For the majority of these programs the main purpose was to acquaint Ukrainian educators with their different approaches to education (as well as life in general)
Start of education for democracy – start of TDP

• We first learned about the fundamentals of internationally tried and tested educational approaches
• We gained a deeper understanding of democracy as a social order, the principles and foundations of a democratic education system
• Our professional growth as educators involved a distinct learning process, which went on in the background and helped us master the practices for organizing non-formal education
In 2002-2003 we presented our own educational product – the elective school subject for Grade 8 ‘Practical Law’
New teaching of teachers. How it started
‘Practical Law’ as a separate school subject was a good initial strategy

• Teachers could start teaching legal themes from the new perspectives of universal human rights, democracy and law-governed state as this approach is inherent in the very content of the subject
• Subject was based on an original and innovative pedagogical model
• It enabled us to go beyond the school and help students develop skills for participation
Experience of democracy in and out of the classroom
Inspiration of 2004. Orange revolution

The Ukrainian democratic community united against an attempt to rig the presidential election.

- The declarative, inconsistent and non-systemic nature of education reforms
- The need to go beyond a specific subject or classroom in order to reach out to the whole school or the wider community
- Significant differences of opinion, particularly regional, regarding developments in the country
- The cultural, ethnical and religious diversity in Ukraine
- A conflict between democratic and post-soviet values which still existed and continued to affect society
2005-2010. Great partnership, great results

Education for sustainable development
Lessons for sustainable development
New projects. New ideas 2005-2010
Revolution of dignity
(December 2013-February 2014)
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New qualities of the new citizens

- A readiness to defend one’s own position firmly,
- Mutual support and assistance, solidarity,
- Tolerance and respect for all members of the movement,
- Awareness of one’s own rights and freedoms, readiness to take concrete action to protect them,
- Striving for European values and democracy,
- Impressive self-organization.
Lessons learned

• Educational products can be successful only when they anticipate/meet the needs and future of society.
• All ideas and programs coming from abroad must be carefully adapted to the Ukrainian context. Just copying European and others practices would be futile.
• Taking into consideration the rising expectations of non-formal education, the key to success is a high-quality educational product (a student book, teacher’s guide, etc.) that is offered to schools.
• To carry out projects, it is crucial to recruit the best experts.
• To implement innovations in the state education system, they must be ‘built into’ the existing curriculum or legislation.
• It is important to work consistently on partnerships with state-run and non-formal educational institutions.
• One should constantly maintain the network of partner schools by engaging them in new initiatives.
New phase, new issues

- Was Maidan a success?
- Do we really stand on the doorstep of social transformation?
- In our journey as a nation, have we travelled past the point of no return to the USSR?

Maidan divided the territory of Ukraine and the hearts and minds of people.
Disappointment
Great challenges and great opportunities

- We see the growing role of education for democracy and sustainable development both for young people and adults.
- We need more work to implement it on a systematic way for teachers and other educators.
- Non-formal education and NGOs have a key role to play in this process.
- There should be a consistent focus to develop the participation of citizens, and first of all young people, in addressing community challenges.
- Partnerships and exchanges with educators from European countries will be very valuable.