Citizenship Education in Post-Revolutionary Egypt: Examining the Curriculum of a Civic Organization

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Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to explore the role that a civic organization plays in preparing youth for citizenship in post-revolutionary Egypt. Through exploring and examining the curriculum of one of the civic organizations in Cairo, Bokra, I shed light on some of the themes of citizenship that emerge in the organization's summer school's curriculum. For each theme, I examine the type of practices and learning experiences created for the students in order to empower them and prepare them to assume more active roles within their communities. In the end, I propose a few recommendations for improving the Bokra School experience so that it has a stronger impact on youth in light of the socio-political change movements in Egypt.*

Keywords: Citizenship Education, Egypt, student learning, curriculum analysis, socio-political change

One of the features that distinguished the January 2011 revolution in Egypt was that a large proportion of the protesters were youth. Egypt, with nearly a quarter of the population (24.3%) comprised of youth between the ages of 18 and 29, has witnessed an increasingly significant role of youth in politics during the past 2 years (the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, 2012). As Bamyeh (2011) explains, the revolution is one of the most important events that Egyptian youth have experienced in

modern times. It, in fact, provided them with a "grand spectacle of the type that had shaped the political consciousness of every generation before them in modern Arab history (p. 1). The youth in Tahrir square not only helped end the authoritarian and corrupt regime of former President Mubarak but also inspired millions of Egyptian youth in their pursuit of creating a better future for Egypt (Hauslohner, 2011).

Golia (2012) explains that this period of Egypt's history is very critical because Egyptians feel that they can finally exercise some freedom but that, at the same time, their efforts are not directed towards common goals to develop the country. For this reason, many Egyptians have started launching campaigns and started programs that aim to organize Egyptians youth in order to improve the Egyptian community. Many have also joined civic organizations that prepare youth to assume more active roles within the society. The role of these civic organizations in preparing youth for post-revolutionary citizenship has, however, not yet been explored. Therefore, it is essential that we explore these new channels that that have been created for Egyptian youth in order to learn about the kind of citizenship discourses they promote.

Although much of the literature on citizenship education has traditionally focused on formal schooling emphasizing knowledge of the political system, more recently there has been substantial attention to understanding how youth understanding of citizenship develop through civic organizations that aim to prepare young adults to be active citizens (Kirshner, 2009; Nasir & Kirshner, 2003; Rogers, Mediratta & Shah, 2012; Youniss & Hart, 2005). In understanding what active citizenship mean, I adopt the definition of Theiss-Morse and Hibbing (2005) in which they describe active citizenship as citizens' involvement with fellow citizens in civic initiatives and organizations for the purpose of making the community a better place. For individuals to successfully engage civically, they need to possess certain democratic values such as social responsibility, an appreciation of working with others (Kirshner, 2009) and tolerance.

In the case of Egypt, citizenship education research is generally very scarce. There are, in fact, some studies that explore citizenship education in Egyptian schools before and after the revolution. Such studies conclude that even after the revolution of January 2011, citizenship education is schools still does not prepare students to be active citizens of a democratic system. The curricula mainly focus on the government, its achievements, and the ideologies it promotes (Waddell, 2013). Literature on the impact of outside-school programs and organizations is almost non-existent. Therefore, the aim of this paper is look at the role of outside-school civic organizations in preparing young Egyptians to be active citizens through developing youth understanding of their roles and responsibilities in an emergent democratic system. I do that through a brief examination of the summer program of one of the civic organizations, Bokra, in Cairo during the summer of 2012. Though examining the program, I try to align the practices used at the organization with

best practices in citizenship education in attempt to find out how effective such practices are in fostering youth understanding of what their roles in a democratic system should be like.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The he aim of civic organizations is to develop the civic identity of youth so that they start to make civic commitments. For this reason, the scholarly literature that I chose to focus on for this study is that which looks at the formation of moral and civic identity. I also review research that looks at youth civic engagement in general.

Literature on youth moral and civic identity

Since definitions of civic identity are broad, many of the major works of scholars that look at youth civic engagement resort to theories of moral identity that is an area that is an area of research that is. In fact, researchers view moral and civic identity as overlapping constructs (Nasir & Kirshner, 2003; Kirshner, 2009; Yates & Youniss, 1999). One reason for alternating between the two terms is because they both refer to some progression from being interested in only oneself to being concerned about more than personal interest and competencies (Kirshner, 2009). One distinction that exists, however, between the two terms is that while moral identity is concerned about *doing the right thing* or *altruistic behavior*, civic identity is about developing interest in participating in community development which is usually not only individual but also collective (Boyte, 2004; Kirshner, 2009). Therefore, Kirshner (2009) defines civic identity as one's sense of belonging to big political community .Civic identity then could be understood in terms of belonging and commitment. The fuel for such feelings of belongining and commitment is ideology. Ideology refers to a set of personal beliefs that result from interaction with the different cultural, historical, social, and political aspects of the context where one lives (Erikson, 1968; Kirshner, 2009; Rubin, 2007; Youniss &Yates, 1997). What these definitions make clear is that the relationship between civic engagement and the development of civic identity is greatly influenced by the context where civic experiences take place.

Research also shows that identity motivates young people to make moral decisions that, in return, lead to prosocial action for the purpose of developing one's community (Hart & Fegley, 1995). Damon and Gregory (2006) explain that moral identity is the best predictor of the person's sense of commitment to moral action. The moral concerns of a person influences the way they position themselves with regards to the community. Therefore, people who define themselves in terms of moral goals tend to see moral problems in everyday life and feel responsible for fixing these problems. Some researchers went a step further and investigated how moral identity lead young people to engagement in prosocial activities. For example, Hardy and Kisling (2006) found that

scores of identity achievement for youth were correlated with a high level of community service and altruism whereas scores on identity diffusion where correlated with low prosocial outcomes.

Another study that confirms this notion is one by Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger and Alisat (2007) in which the researchers conducted a study with a group of high school students and classified them into different categories based on their level of civic engagement. The four categories included activists, helpers, responders and uninvolved youth. Activists were young people who were engaged on the political and the communal levels. Helpers, on the other hand, were those who helped people in their communities but were not involved on the political level. Responders were young people who responded to communal and political issues but did not initiate them while uninvolved youth were those who were not engaged in any political or communal activities. The researchers then aligned these categories to identity development. They found that the activists and the helpers had high scores of identity achievement when compared to the other two categories. Activists and helpers also reported higher social involvement than their counterparts in the other two categories. The results of these studies indicate that there is a link between civic identity achievement and participation in social action to develop one's community. Therefore, it is essential to look at the role civic organizations play in instilling civic skills, knowledge and attitudes in adolescents.

Literature on youth civic engagement

In recent years, researchers who study youth identity have shifted their attention from only looking at youth individual growth to a focus on the role of context and how it contributes to the development of civic identity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Erikson, 1968). For example, Tereshchenko (2010) highlights how the social and political conditions in a given community help young people position themselves in relation to that community. The researcher explains that "the spatial position of individuals in particular places adds another dimension to the issue of symbolic inclusion into/exclusion from the national citizenship space." (p. 148). The researcher goes on to explain how and growing up in a certain "place" determine s one's sense of belonging to or detachment from his/her community. For the purpose of this study, it is essential then to look at how civic organizations develop their curricula and programs to prepare young Egyptians to be active citizens after the revolution.

Research also focuses on the kind of skills youth develop through their civic engagement experiences. Flanagan (2003) explains that civic engagement experiences incorporate social responsibility and political values into the identity formation process which, in return, contribute to the development of skills. She also explains that civic engagement is a major factor that helps adolescents develop a sense of trust in the community where they live. Such feelings of trust are important motives for continuous community

contribution. Kirshner (2009) conducted a study where he worked with a group of youth in a youth organizing program to look at how adolescents develop civic skills through participation in a civic organization. After observing and interviewing minority group youth, the researcher concluded that being part of a civic organization helps adolescents position themselves with regards to the community where they live and become aware of their roles and responsibilities in improving communal conditions. They also develop skills such as sociability and cooperation which contribute to their repertoire of civic skills and competencies.

Similar studies include one by Hansen, Larson, and Dworkin (2003). The researchers surveyed a number of adolescents using the Youth Experiences Survey (YES) to determine what skills youth gain through civic participation. The results showed that two of these were leadership and linkage to community. Youniss and McLellian (1997) also explain that perhaps the most important civic skill that adolescents develop through civic activities is developing awareness of the organizational practices required for future adult civic engagement.

In 2002, Kirlin introduced a model of skills that youth develop through participating in civic activities. This model includes skills such as working in groups, organizing others to accomplish tasks, communicating, and working out differences. Building on that, Parker, Wilkins, and Dale (2010) conducted a study in which they explored the development of each of Kirlin's civic skills through a number of designed civic activities that they planned for adolescents over a period of one week. By working closely with youth in these simulated civic activities, the researchers were able to identify which civic skills students were gaining.

Another group of researchers went a step further and looked at the practices that institutions should adopt in order to help youth develop civic skills and identities. These usually refer to interactive practices that aim to raise the awareness of the students of the needs of the community. Some strategies that Quintelier (2008), for example, discusses include allowing students to organize community projects, inviting government guest speakers and planning field trips. Other researchers such as Feldman, Pasek, Romer and Jamieson (2007) stress the important of discussions as one best practice in the area of citizenship education.

To conclude this section, researchers believe that adolescence is a crucial time in one's life that needs to be carefully studied because it is the time when identity is formed and roles are explored. As Arnett (2000) and Flanagan (2008) explain, youth enjoy the privilege of being 'free' to explore social issues and possible future roles that they can assume. This continuous process of exploration helps solidify their notions of self-concept which affects the way their civic identities are formed. Therefore, it is essential

that several opportunities be created for youth inside and outside school to help them explore their political and communal potentials. In the following section, I discuss the program of a civic organization in Cairo in the summer of 2012. I try to look at the opportunities that the organization creates for young Egyptians so that they acquire the civic skills.

CONTEXT AND DATA SOURCE

Bokra is a civic organization in Cairo. It was founded in 2006 by a group of professionals in the areas of civic action and human empowerment who had a strong vision concerning the role of youth in the society and the need for civic engagement. I had the opportunity to speak to two of the founders of the organization. They stressed the point that the incubating NGO does not impose any agendas on the organization. Instead, founders and organizers always abide to the initial mission statement of the organization that is to equip youth with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be active citizens. Being a strong believer in the Frierian approach of teaching and learning, one of the founders explained that the organization also aims to give participants ownership of their learning and help them become life- long learners who can reflect on who they are as citizens of a country in urgent need for development in almost every aspect of life.

Bokra organization launches a summer school that offers intensive training to youth so that they can start their own civic initiatives after completing the program. The three-week long summer school usually attracts young people from all areas of Egypt who have the desire to be civically-engaged but also think that they lack the skills and training to do that. To be part of Bokra summer school, students need to apply and go through a long process of screening and interviewing before final selection is made. Upon selection, they receive a full scholarship that covers all the activities of the program. Once the sessions start, the school organizers and facilitators take the students on an intensive step-by-step 'learning journey' of discovering who they are, what they want and how they can translate their civic ideas and plans into actions. Being a school of substantial development, Bokra puts students on the beginning of the road of civic engagement. In other words, it gives students the skills they need to re-question their roles and commitments and also explore channels of contribution to Egypt.

In summer 2012, the school had 32 students who were all receivers of scholarships awarded by USAID to top students in all Egyptian governates/provinces to attend private universities in Cairo and Alexandria. The students were between the ages of 20 and 21. They came from a wide-range of governates that represent almost all geographic areas in Egypt. These included cities such as Fayyoum, Sohag and Minya in Upper Egypt, Hurghada on the Red Sea and Alexandria and Matrouh on the Mediterranean.

During the summer of 2012, I was involved with Bokra organization for a larger research project. This allowed me to spend time with the program founders, organizers and students. It also gave me access to the school resources. One of the resources that I had the opportunity to take a close look at was the organization's summer program curriculum. In the following section, I first describe what the curriculum of the organization looked like. Then, I try to align the practices used at Bokra summer school to best practices in citizenship education bearing in mind the context of post-revolutiony Egypt.

ANALYSIS

In this section, I first briefly present the goals and topics of the summer school curriculum of Bokra organization. After that, I move to a discussion of how these goals are achieved and how these topics are covered. Through this discussion, I try to link the activities used at the organization to literature on best practices in citizenship education.

Program goals and topics

As mentioned earlier, the summer school lasts for 3 weeks. The curriculum is based on a set of general learning goals. The main learning goals of the organization are:

* Become aware of self, interests and personal skills and capabilities.

* Conceptualize the power of collective rather than individual effort or action

* Develop an understanding of the reality of the community where one lives and the civic initiatives that are most needed to develop this community

* Develop an action plan to serve the community where one lives in one's area of interest or specialty

During these three weeks, several topics that are directly linked to the community are presented to the students. Usually, each week, has an overarching theme that includes different topics. The three themes are:

* Self-discovery and national identity
* Approaches to sustainable development
* Application of change initiatives

Teaching practices

The school uses a wide range of interactive pedagogies (Smith, Sheppard, Johnson &Johnson, 2008) that engage learners and focus on their needs. Through creating a safe environment where students constantly determine the course of the day and choose what they want to do, students are expected to leave the school with a feeling that their voices are heard and their opinions are taken into consideration. The curriculum of Bokra

summer school is based on a very interactive approach of teaching and learning through the use of guest speakers, discussions, field trips, character-building games and task-based activities. In what follows, I discuss only some of the activities used to present each of the three curriculum themes listed above.

Theme 1: Self-discovery and national identity

The theme of self-discovery and identity is meant to empower students and help them realize their strength and potential. For the self-discovery part, students are actively engaged in a number of writing and speaking workshops. The purpose of the writing workshops was to help students delve deeper into self and reflect on the experiences that shaped who they are. In fact, writing narratives have not been overlooked by researchers. Many studies that aimed to learn about how youth develop different types of identities utilized narratives as a means for helping students play an active role is discovering who they are, what they want and what commitments they intend to make in regards to self and the community (Daskalaki, 2012; Syed & Azmitia , 2008) . On the other hand, the speaking component of the self-discovery theme capitalized on the notion of the power of story-telling. Research shows that telling stories about self and one's position within the community where they live does not only help youth reflect on their life experiences and personal commitments but also helps them realize that their voices are heard and that their experiences matter. For the adults involved in these story-telling sessions, listening to the oral narratives of the students help them better understand youth preferences, visions and struggles of making communal commitments. In fact, many researchers use oral narratives and story-telling techniques to learn more about how the civic identities of young people develop (McAdams, Diamond, Aubin & Mansfield, 1997). Learning about identity through stories does not only help a researcher learn about the personal experiences that motivated a person to make certain civic choices or commitments but also about this person's notion of space and time through continuous reflection on the social, cultural and political context where one lives (McAdams, 1996; Sfard & Prusak, 2005). The main facilitator at Bokra School described herself as a "storyteller" when she first met me. She planned and facilitated many writing and storytelling sessions at the first week of the school for the sole purpose of empowering youth and helping them realize their own points of strengths.

An interesting observation I made about Bokra summer school when I attended their planning meetings and reviewed their documents was that the first few days of the school were, in a way, considered research days during which the organizers and facilitators of the program collected data about the students in order to guide instruction during the rest of the sessions. Therefore, the utilization of writing and speaking learning experiences was a powerful tool that the school used. Not only did it help empower youth but also it

helped the adults involved in the program to modify teaching and learning practices to better suit the needs of the students.

As explained by the organizers of Bokra School, generally, the curriculum is continuously adjusted with each new group of students so that it best fits their learning and developmental capacities. This kind of continuous evaluation and revaluation of the school throughout the three weeks highlights the significant role of interaction between adults and youth in the program. The impression I had through observation and talking to the founders, organizers, and students was that the school intended to create a democratic atmosphere where youth felt that adults were not in control of everything. Researchers like Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chavez, and Angelillo (2003) and Kirshner (2007) discuss the role that interaction between adults and youth in civic programs play in preparing youth for their future societal roles.

The topic of national identity is introduced through discussing issues such as history, language, and life-long learning. The purpose is to help students learn more about where they come from and have pride in their language, culture and heritage. Spring (2004) discusses the importance of teaching about national identity, language and history in order to prepare active citizens with strong feelings of belonging and commitment to their nation states. Through shedding light on the achievements of the past and the role of former citizens in developing their countries, students start to believe that they, too, need to contribute to their communities. At Bokra summer school, national identity is fostered through field trips to historical and cultural sites. Students also get the opportunity to meet with prominent cultural figures who speak to them about the uniqueness of the place, its people and its language. In addition, students travel to other cities in Egypt in order to meet with young leaders who started civic initiatives in these communities or to visit areas that need development so that they have a clearer picture of the civic projects that are most needed in such cities. Field trips and guest speakers are two among many of the recommended teaching and learning practices in citizenship education (Quintelier, 2008). Not only do these practices equip students with knowledge but also they affirm the strong connection between the individual and the community.

Theme 2: Approaches to sustainable development

The purpose of theme two is to help students build a strong knowledge base of all the different aspects of any community. For example, during the sessions of theme two, students learn about the current situation and the civic initiatives needed in the areas of politics, economics, education, media and environment. The sequencing of sessions at the school is, as a matter of fact, very logical. In theme one, students are empowered through a journey of self discovery that makes them feel that they are responsible for developing their communities each with the skills and capacities he/she possesses. Theme two then shows students channels through which they can organize and work hand- in -hand to

create solutions that are based on in-depth knowledge of the current situation in Egypt. In addition to the use of guest speakers in different fields of knowledge and with different views and stances in regard to communal issues, Bokra summer school utilizes reflection and discussion activities.

The use of discussions and reflection activities has been identified as one of the best practices in citizenship education (Feldman, Pasek, Romer &Jamieson, 2007). Not only are discussions useful because they give students space to express their ideas but also because they help create a democratic atmosphere in the classroom where everyone's voice is heard and everyone's idea is taken into consideration. This reinforces one of the major democratic values that educators hope to instill in youth which is collective agency (Kirshner, 2009). The idea of collective agency helps youth understand that change is more effective when it comes from a group with a shared cause and a clear mission. It also helps youth value the input and contribution of others which leads to the development of better social skills. What is also interesting about Bokra summer school is that when the organizers arrange to have guest speakers, they usually contact speakers who have different points of views. Some of the speakers would sometimes have very radical viewpoints that are new to the students. The purpose of doing that, according to my conversations with the organizers, is to show students that each person has the right to say what they want and what they believe. Freedoms should not be limited. Also, everyone should be willing to listen to opposing viewpoints no matter how hard is. In a way, such practices foster the democratic values of freedom of expression and equality.

Theme 3: Application of change initiatives

After students realize their personal skills and capabilities and are prepared with knowledge about the different sectors of the Egyptian community, they are expected to start applying what they have learned in the school so far. During theme three sessions, students listen to guest speakers who talk to them about how to transform their ideas for civic initiatives into action. After that, students work in groups and develop plans for how they will start their civic initiatives after completing the school. Cooperative tasks, which focus on finding solutions for community related issues, have been widely supported by researchers. For example, Smith, Sheppard, Johnson and Johnson (2008) explored ways through which they could prepare their engineering students for the future through adopting what they referred to as the 'pedagogies of engagement'. Their aim was to assist students by developing the social skills necessary for success within their communities once they graduated. They emphasized the importance of cooperative learning and of designing tasks through which students could work together, negotiate solutions and make decisions.

To sum up this section, at Bokra summer school, students are not only theoretically taught about their communities and that they should contribute to its development.

Instead, they are, according to the school founders and organizers, taken on a learning journey through which they learn about themselves, realize the skills they possess and gain first-hand experience of what being an active citizen in a democratic system means. Not only does the teaching and learning atmosphere at the school fosters and nourishes democratic values but also field trips to different parts in Egypt, guest speakers in addition to cooperative learning tasks all help the students understand and also practice what it takes to be an active citizen in Egypt after the revolution.

CONCLUSION

Although Bokra summer school seems to be implementing many of the best practices of citizenship education that are well supported by research, there are still two considerations that one should bear in mind. First, the development of civic identity should never be viewed as a simple process. As Rubin (2007) explains, civic identity development is an on-going process that is influenced by one's interaction with the community where he/she live. The context where one lives largely affects the kind of civic positions they take and commitments they make (Nasir & Saxe, 2003). Therefore, we cannot conclude that the students at Bokra summer school undergo a process of civic identity formation in a period of 3 weeks. We could, however, look at the Bokra experience as one that is eye-opening for the students. During Bokra summer school, students realize that they are part of a whole and that their contribution for the betterment of the whole society matters.

Second, Bokra summer school seems to be struggling with devising a long-term assessment plan to track the impact of the summer school on the students on the long run. Although the curriculum includes a wide range of formative assessment strategies throughout the three weeks (mainly in the form of discussions and written narratives), the school seems to need a follow-up plan to check whether or not the students have started their civic initiatives. The school organizers proposed the idea of meeting every three months for the year following the school to check the progress of the students. They also communicated to me that previously, the organizers planned focus group discussions with former Bokra alumni in order to learn about the impact of the school one or two years later. They thought this was an effective strategy that they wanted to continue doing in following years. Again, these practices need to be well-planned and regularly conducted. Sperandio, Grudzinski-Hal and Stewart-Gambino (2010) explain that assessment in citizenship education is a challenge. However, institutions need to have a solid and consistent assessment plan in order to be able to determine how effective their civic instruction is.

Bokra summer school seems to employ strong elements that are well-supported by citizenship education research. It is an example of how outside- school civic programs

can help youth better connect to the communities where they live (Kahne, Nagaoka, Brown, & O'brien, 2001) .What is special about Bokra summer school is that it challenges students' understanding of what active citizenship really means. The civic experiences that Egyptian youth are exposed to either in school or through family and media are limited to knowledge about the political system and its achievements. Activism and participatory citizenship prior to the revolution were frowned upon. This was mainly because most civic efforts that youth attempted before the revolution resulted in imprisonment and detention (El-Mahdi, 2009). When the January 2011 revolution took place, youth viewed the uprisings as an opportunity to voice their opinions. However, youth still needed to be taken on a step-by-step process of learning what post-revolutionary democracy meant. For this reason, many civic organizations emerged in order to prepare Egyptian youth for a new phase in history. Bokra is one example of such organizations. It aims to empower the individual so that he/she realizes the importance of taking action and contributing to the development of the community. It also attempts to restore hope for the future. Only through a young hopeful and active generation of citizens can Egypt be rebuilt.

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