From Denver to Caracas, Santa Fe to San Jose: Teaching about the ‘Right to Have Rights’

Civitas Latin America: A Civic Education Exchange Program  Jennifer Bauduy

In an upstairs classroom on the outskirts of the Dominican capital, Santo Domingo, a group of twelfth graders listened attentively one day last spring as their teacher read an article aloud. The article discussed a case in which the police detained three individuals without charging them with a crime.

“Is it fair to be put in jail without having a trial?” teacher Julio César Urbáez asked. The hands of several students shot up.

“I don’t think that’s justice,” said Gabriel, 19, after Urbáez called on him. “Everyone accused of a crime has the right to appear before a judge.”

The teacher elicited other responses and the students engaged in a debate about the rights of detained individuals. Later, the class broke up into small groups and the students dramatized various scenes dealing with justice, which Urbáez had assigned them.

Urbáez’s class, a group that generally concentrates on vocational skills like accounting, woodwork, and sewing, studies civics once a week like the other students at Fe y Alegría (Faith and Happiness).

In spite of frequent power outages at the modest school, the students study hypothetical cases from their activity book, ¡Por Una Nueva Ciudadanía! (Towards a New Citizenry), adapted from the Center for Civic Education’s Foundations of Democracy curricular material. A network of civic education groups, called the Civic Education Consortium of the Dominican Republic, modified the book for their country. (See the lesson plan in this article for a sample from the original U.S. version.)

Today, versions of the original activity book are being used in more than forty countries. In each country language and terminology are changed to transfer concepts correctly. Additionally, since the book’s lessons incorporate historical examples, current events, and real-life illustrations, these are all changed to fit each country’s context, said Oscar Cruz of the Center for Civic Education. For example, adapted books change references to the U.S. Constitution to fit each country’s political system.

“The activities are the same, but the examples are different,” Cruz said.

The Center, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit group, administers a $5 million, five-year cooperative project with other civic education organizations. The project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is called Civitas Latin America: A Civic Education Exchange Program.

Last year marked the first year of the five-year grant. The program seeks to exchange U.S. civic education experiences with Latin American groups, to assist such groups in implementing their own programs, as well as to implement civic education for U.S. students that create a better understanding of Latin America.

“The Center’s international civic exchange programs have enabled us to share our knowledge, experiences, and programs with colleagues around the world,” said Charles Quigley, the Center’s executive director.

In May of 2003, collaborating organizations gathered to share experiences at a Civitas seminar in the Dominican Republic. People from fifteen Latin American countries and ten U.S. states participated in the meeting, each discussing the challenges of teaching about democratic citizenship in their own countries. Many highlighted the importance of educating citizens about the “right to have rights,” especially in countries with histories of authoritarian rule.

Urbáez and the other teachers at Fe y Alegría are enrolled in a program that trains educators to teach civic education. Last year, some 585 educators across the Dominican Republic participated in the program, which is run out of the Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra (PUCMM), a catholic university. The PUCMM also serves as a headquarters for the Dominican Civic Education Consortium. Teachers are trained one day each month for a full year at the university.

“The goal is to develop a civic and moral education program that converts the school into a transformative space for overcoming our cultural legacy of authoritarianism, while at the same time helping to create a new citizenry,” said Nerys García of PUCMM, who coordinates the project’s high school level.

Among other activities, Civitas Latin America seeks to partner U.S. states with Latin American countries. Several of the groups already have exchange programs with teachers in various countries. Civitas Costa Rica formed a three-way partnership this year with the State Bar of Texas and the Center for Democracy and Civic Education of New Mexico to promote civic education exchanges.

The Civitas Latin America program is already having a significant impact.
in different countries. In Mexico, the Federal Electoral Institute has used its own adaptation of Project Citizen—the curricular program that promotes participation in local government—as part of the institute’s three-year (2001-2003) Civic Education Strategy Plan and as an elective course nationwide. In Colombia, Fundacion Presencia, a group that works on education for democracy issues, has organized nation-wide networks of civil society organizations to help implement Project Citizen as well as the Foundations of Democracy curriculum.²

While numerous countries have recently demonstrated an interest in promoting democracy in the classroom, to date few have had the materials necessary. Eager to modify their educational systems, the ministries of education in several countries have begun using the Center’s curriculum to help implement such reform. Among the reforms the Foundations curriculum promotes is a move away from the traditional lecture-centered lesson while promoting an emphasis on student-participation activities.

Gabriela Bolaños, who works with Civitas Costa Rica, said one advantage of the exchange program is that having students learn about different cultures and languages fuels mutual respect across cultures. “Where there is respect for others, there is a better chance for true understanding among social groups and among nations,” she said.

Gilberto Muñoz, the social studies coordinator for Denver Public Schools, agreed. Muñoz works on the partnership that Colorado has formed with Venezuela and New York. Denver Public Schools works with Colorado’s Center for Education in Law and Democracy (CELD), the regional coordinator for Project Citizen. Their New York partner is the Justice Resource Center.

In mid-May, the groups carried out their first exchange and hosted several Venezuelan educators. The objective, among other things, was to allow the Venezuelan educators the opportunity to analyze how Colorado’s citizens participate in making public policy; to see how Project Citizen is adapted for students in various school settings, and to improve teaching and learning about the role of citizens in developing public policy.

“We had their visit coincide with Colorado’s annual statewide Project Citizen showcase, which was something the Venezuelans wanted to see given the fact that they’ve only begun to use the Project Citizen curriculum and have never organized a showcase,” Muñoz said.

Since the exchange, at least one of the Venezuelan teachers has begun working with one of the Denver teachers to plan some type of student project between their classes. Additionally, while in Colorado, the Venezuelans conducted a seminar for Denver metro area teachers on Venezuela’s political and economic landscape. As a result, this year CELD is organizing a session on Venezuela during its annual law conference for teachers. And this fall, one of the Denver participants may travel to Venezuela to train teachers on implementing Project Citizen, Muñoz said.

Why is it so important to foster such exchanges? Muñoz noted that, in keeping with the NCSS curriculum standards, students need to be more knowledgeable and educated about Latin America. The third strand in the standards, PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS, and the ninth strand, GLOBAL CONNECTIONS, call for students to gain experience in “the study of people, places and human-environment interactions,” as well as the “study of global connections and interdependence.”

“There are many lessons about the meaning, importance and the need for maintenance of a democracy that people living in the U.S. can learn from our neighbors to the south,” said Muñoz. He said the group’s visit was inspiring because the Venezuelans showed a determination to educate their fellow citizens about democracy despite present-day obstacles such as the brief coup against President Hugo Chavez in 2002 and other political strife. ²

Notes
1. The Center for Civic Education along with a group of U.S. and Latin American organizations joined to form the Civitas Latin American Consortium (CLA). CLA received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to conduct a five-year cooperative civic education exchange program known as Civitas Latin America: A Civic Education Exchange Program.
2. We the People: Project Citizen is a curricular program that promotes participation in local government. The program helps young people learn how to monitor and influence public policy. For more information visit www.civiced.org/project_citizen.html.

Jennifer Baudo is associate editor of Social Education. National Council for the Social Studies is collaborating with the Center for Civic Education as part of the Civitas Latin American Consortium, which is working to promote the exchange of civic education best practices among educators.
Lesson Plan

What is Procedural Justice?

This lesson plan, developed by the Center for Civic Education and published in the Center’s Foundations of Democracy curriculum, explores the role of procedural justice in government and society.

Teacher’s Guide

Lesson Overview
Students are introduced to the subject of procedural justice. Students learn that procedural justice refers to the fairness of the ways people gather information and make decisions. They learn to identify situations involving issues of procedural justice and the reasons it is important not only in law enforcement and the courts, but also in the executive and legislative branches of government.

Lesson Objectives
At the conclusion of this lesson, students should be able to do the following:
• define and explain the importance of procedural justice
• identify situations involving issues of procedural justice

Preparation/Materials Required
• Student text, pp. 343-344
• A copy of the Bill of Rights for each group of three students.

Teaching Procedures

A. Introducing the Lesson
Ask students to imagine that they are the subject of a court trial. What might be some of their concerns about the information presented to the court? What procedures would they want the court to follow in trying to determine their guilt or innocence?

While you post “Terms to Know” on the board, have students read “Purpose of Lesson” on p. 343.

B. Reading and Discussion
What are the purposes of procedural justice?
Have the class read “What are the purposes of procedural justice?” on p. 343. Ask students to define the term procedural justice. Ask students to identify three goals that procedural justice is designed to accomplish. Their responses should include the following:
• to increase the chances of discovering information necessary to make wise and just decisions
• to ensure the wise and fair use of the information in making decisions
• to protect the important values and interests, such as the right to privacy, human dignity, freedom, distributive justice, and efficiency

C. Critical Thinking Exercise
Examining Issues of Procedural Justice
Have students work with a study partner to complete the critical thinking exercise, “Examining Issues of Procedural Justice,” on p. 343. With the class read the directions for completing the exercise and review the questions in the “What do you think?” section. Ask students to share their responses with the class.

D. Reading and Discussion
Why is procedural justice important?
Have the class read “Why is procedural justice important?” on p. 344. Discuss their responses to the questions in the “What do you think?” section.

E. Reading and Discussion
Why are law enforcement agencies and the courts responsible for using fair procedures?
Have the class read “Why are law enforcement agencies and the courts responsible for using fair procedures?” on p. 344. Discuss the way students think procedural justice limits the authority of law enforcement and the courts.

Have the class work in groups of three students. Distribute a copy of the Bill of Rights to each group. Ask students to examine Amendments Four, Five, Six, and Seven and to identify some basic rules for procedural justice the Founders included in the United States Constitution. Ask students the reason they think each rule might be important in ensuring that citizens are treated fairly by their government. What important values and interests do these rules require our government to respect?

F. Reading and Discussion
The Executive and Legislative Branches of Government
Have the class read “The Executive and Legislative Branches of Government” on p. 344. Discuss their responses to the questions in the “What do you think?” section.

G. Concluding the Lesson
Direct attention to the illustrations on pp. 343 and 344. Ask students to respond to the questions in the captions:
• Why might it be important to require that fair procedures be used to gather information?
• How does the right to trial by jury help guarantee a fair hearing for people accused of crimes?
• What other rights can you think of that help guarantee a fair hearing?

Have students re-read “Purpose of Lesson” on p. 343. Ask them to describe the extent to which they achieved the objectives of the lesson.

Using the Lesson
The activities suggested in “Using the Lesson” on p. 344 reinforce or extend what students have learned about the definition, goals, and importance of procedural justice. When working on any of the activities suggested, encourage students to use the terms they have learned in the lesson. Students may work on the activities individually or in small groups.
Lesson

What is Procedural Justice?

Purpose of Lesson
This lesson introduces you to the subject of procedural justice. The lesson provides a definition of procedural justice and explains its importance.

When you have completed the lesson, you should be able to define procedural justice, explain its importance, and identify issues involving procedural justice from your own experience.

Terms to Know
- Procedural justice
- Due process of law
- Bill of Rights

What are the purposes of procedural justice?
Procedural justice refers to the fairness of the way information is gathered and decisions are made. It does not refer to the fairness of the decisions themselves.

The goals of procedural justice are
- to increase the chances of discovering information necessary to make wise and just decisions
- to insure the wise and fair use of the information in making decisions
- to protect important values and interests, such as the right to privacy, human dignity, freedom, distributive justice, and efficiency

Critical Thinking Exercise
Examining Issues of Procedural Justice
Each of the following imaginary situations involves one or more issues of procedural justice. Read the situations and work with a study partner to answer the questions that follow them. Be prepared to share your answers with the class.

1. Two neighbors inform the police that you look very much like one of a group of teenagers who broke into the school over the weekend and destroyed property in several classrooms. The police arrest you and charge you with vandalism.

2. Your P.E. teacher decides to let the class choose what game they will play during the physical education period. The teacher asks for suggestions from several students and then says, “O.K., that’s it—volleyball.” Although you and several friends who wanted to play basketball raised your hands, you were not given an opportunity to make your suggestion before the decision was made.

3. Acting on a tip from an informer, the secret police broke into Alicia’s house and searched for materials critical of the government. When they found several books by writers with “foreign” sounding names, they took Alicia to the police station. After being questioned for five days without sleep and with nothing to eat but bread and water, Alicia confessed. She admitted she had criticized the government several times. She was then tried as a traitor, convicted, and sent to a work camp for ten years.

4. A commission was established by the federal government to license industrial plants on public lands. The commission was required to hold public hearings before giving licenses. Several times, however, the commission refused to allow certain groups to make presentations at public hearings. The commission claimed that its staff had already studied and rejected the positions the groups wished to present.

What do you think?
1. What was the information gathered in each situation? What decision was to be made on the basis of the information?
2. How fair were the procedures used to gather the information or to make the decision in each situation? How could you make the procedures more fair?

Why might it be important to require that fair procedures be used to gather information?
Why is procedural justice important?
It is not unusual for people to ask, “Who cares about the way people get information or the way they make decisions, so long as they get the information they want and the decisions are good ones?” By the time you have finished studying this unit, you should understand the importance of procedural justice and be able to explain why people should care about the way information is gathered and the way decisions are made.

Scholars say that it is possible to tell how much value governments place on freedom, human dignity, and basic human rights by examining how carefully they provide for procedural justice in the actions of their police, courts, and other government agencies.

The importance placed on procedural justice by the Founders of our nation led them to include basic rules for procedural justice in the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights (the first ten amendments to the Constitution.)

What do you think?
1. Why might the way information is gathered or the way a decision is made be important?
2. Give an example of the importance of using fair procedures at school or in your community.

Why are law enforcement agencies and the courts responsible for using fair procedures?
All societies have found it necessary to gather information about suspected crimes and to arrest persons suspected of breaking laws. They also have found it necessary to give authority to certain officials to hold hearings to decide whether or not a person is guilty of a crime or to settle conflicts among people. In the United States, these activities are usually carried out by persons working in our law enforcement agencies and our courts.

Because great power over human life and property is given to people working in agencies of government, a set of rules is needed to limit that power and say how it must be used. One set of these rules prohibits the government from taking a person’s life, liberty, or property without due process of law. In most situations this means that the government cannot act against a person without giving the person a fair hearing. Due process also requires law enforcement agencies to respect important values such as privacy, human dignity, and freedom when they gather information and arrest people.

The United States Constitution and Bill of Rights contain some of the rules of procedural justice that must be followed by law enforcement agencies and courts. Other rules of procedural justice come from laws and regulations adopted by Congress, state legislatures, and other government agencies.

The Executive and Legislative Branches of Government
We often pay more attention to issues of procedural justice that arise from the activities of law enforcement agencies and the judicial branch than to those that may arise from the activities of other parts of our government. The reason for this attention may be that crimes and trials usually receive more publicity than the activities of other agencies of the executive branch or of the legislative branch of government.

It is important not to overlook the activities of the executive and legislative branches of government in our communities, states, and nation. These branches of government also have authority to gather information and make decisions that have a great effect on our everyday lives. For example, they can draft citizens into military service, declare war, control trade, and collect taxes and decide how tax money will be spent.

What do you think?
1. Review the goals of procedural justice. Why might it be important for all agencies of government to use procedures that further those goals?
2. Describe some procedures used by your student government or school administration to gather information and make decisions. Explain why you think these procedures are fair or not.

Using the Lesson
1. Find examples of issues of procedural justice reported in the press or on television. Describe these issues to your class. Discuss the fairness of the procedures used to gather information and make decisions in these situations.
2. Read the Bill of Rights. Identify the provisions which deal with the procedures used by government to gather information and make decisions. How do these provisions ensure that people will receive a fair hearing? How do they ensure that important values such as privacy, human dignity, and freedom will be protected?