

Project Citizen Tracer Study

Project Citizen is an international program, developed by the Center for Civic Education in the United States for increasing democratic participation, political efficacy and civic engagement levels of students at the high school level. It is a pedagogy that systematically trains the teacher-moderators in embedding education for democracy in the classroom while simultaneously providing a venue for students to participate in community problem solving and applying their lessons in citizenship in real life. Thus, it aims to connect the classroom learning of students on their rights and duties as citizens with the community work that immerses them in real world experience. In the process, they develop support for democratic values and principles, tolerance, and feeling of political efficacy.

The Philippine Center for Civic Education and Democracy (PCCED) and the Tan Yan Kee Foundation, Inc. with the support of the University of Asia and the Pacific (UA&P) through the Institute of Political Economy held the 5th run of Project Citizen in the Philippines last February 2012. In line with its fifth anniversary, the PCCED conducted a tracer study of previous Project Citizen participants.

Methodology

The qualitative study made use of purposive sampling with respondents from seven participating schools, namely: Rizal High School, Rizal Science High School, Muntinlupa National High School, Parang High School, Bagong Silangan High School, Gen. Pio del Pilar High School and Las Piñas National High School. The study's sample of 20 previous participants belonged to Project Citizen batches 2007 to 2010. Respondents and schools were chosen on the basis of the availability of contact information due to time constraints. Participants were subjected to a semi-structured interview that aimed to measure their participation in society as well as their awareness of socio-civic issues.

Limitations

Due to constraints such as limited time and the availability of contact information on previous Project Citizen participants, three respondents per year covered belong to the same participating school. Moreover, not all previous Project Citizen participating schools were covered by the study. The competition years 2006 and 2011 were likewise not included in the study's sample – the former because Project Citizen's format has not yet been finalized in 2006 and the latter due to the fact that they have just participated in the recently concluded Project Citizen run last February 2012.

Findings

Participation. All respondents were involved in socio-civic organizations and volunteer work either in school, in the church or in their communities. Moreover, all of them think that the activities that they are doing now help the society. Most of them said that they feel the impact that they have on society. However, some mentioned that they feel that their activities are only small efforts that do not do enough to really create a big impact in the society.

While all of the respondents were already active in extra-curricular activities and organizations since high school, majority of them mentioned that their participation in Project Citizen during their high school years has prompted them to join socio-civic organizations and activities in college. This is because Project Citizen helped them become more aware about their own communities especially regarding the problems that their respective communities face thereby prompting them to join socio-civic organizations after high school. In particular, Carl Moog, a Project Citizen 2007 participant said:

“If I had to choose among all my activities in high school *yung pinaka may impact talaga* is *yung* Project Citizen because aside from the fact that it is a competition that we joined, we were able to do something different for our own community.”

Another respondent, Magda Gana from batch 2009 of Gen. Pio del Pilar High School, said that Project Citizen helped her in her decision to join her various activities now that she is in college because it was through Project Citizen that she learned about the importance of people’s organizations:

“It is Project Citizen that I’ve realized how important the people’s organization is...*Nakakatuwa nga nung malaman ko na may Project Citizen kasi* it’s something new *kasi* school *diba* it’s a different institution from the *barangay*, *kahit* NGO ibang institution *din yun*...*Nung nagkaroon ng Project Citizen, nagkaroon ng way na nakita namin na pwede palang mag-work together yung mga iba’t ibang* institution.”

Awareness. All respondents displayed awareness about socio-political issues of today, especially in the local front such as the impeachment trial of former Supreme Court Chief Justice Renato Corona, our dispute with China over the Scarborough Shoal, the K to 12 program and the RH Bill. While all of the respondents generally knew about current events, not all were able to provide thorough insights on the aforementioned matters, basing their opinion on general perception or otherwise on how they felt about the issue.

Interestingly, a quarter of the respondents mentioned the observation that they were in fact more aware about current events when they were still in high school compared to their college years. This is attributed mostly to constraints in their time because of the increased academic demands in college. However, other members of the respondents said the contrary – that it was already in college that they became aware of current events. This is in the context of forming a deeper understanding of current events, of giving educated opinions about them, and of going beyond merely knowing about the facts.

Almost half of the respondents started becoming aware about current events in high school. On a close second are those who started knowing about the news way back in elementary while the others believe that they became truly aware about current issues when they were already in college or in the early stage of their professional career. Most of them attributed the beginning of their awareness of current events to their activities in school, particularly when they started joining their respective school’s journalism club and school paper as well as required news reporting practices for their social science classes. Others also attributed the start of their awareness to the practice of their parents at home of watching the news.

Respondents also demonstrated awareness in terms of how their activities help society. While most respondents admit to their activities being small steps, most of them are of the opinion that no matter how small the effort is, it still holds significance because changing the society is a gradual process and that these small efforts can serve as starting points. Specifically, Febe Lomboy, a 2008 Project Citizen participant from Rizal High School said:

“Through these activities, I somehow realized the importance of education, as it is the first step in curing the ills of the society. Through this knowledge, I wanted to be involved. And through being involved, even in the most indirect of ways, I knew that I am capable of making a change, no matter how small. ”

Project Citizen 2007 participant from the same school, Mark Villaluna, echoes the same sentiment:

“Changing society does not happen overnight; it has to start in something. I have always espoused the idea that big change comes first in small packages...If you want a society to progress along positive lines, you have to train the people in that society to think positively and you have to train them also not just in terms of the knowledge they need to get but the society will not function if it does not have a set of positive norms and values.”

Other Findings

Pursuit of education. All 20 respondents were either currently pursuing a college degree, have just finished their university education or are currently pursuing higher studies (master’s degree) in various fields such as the Humanities, Management, Engineering, Hotel and Restaurant Management, Information Technology, Education, Political Science, Nursing, Pharmacy, Marketing Communications, Accountancy, and Political Economy. Respondents are from different colleges and universities in the Philippines such as the University of Asia and the Pacific, Far Eastern University, Technological University of the Philippines, Perpetual College, Letran, Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Makati, University of the Philippines, the De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde, the National Teachers College and Adamson University. The respondents’ pursuit of higher education can be attributed to the fact that most Project Citizen participants are top students from the participating schools. Most of them belong to their respective schools’ pilot sections. As such, most respondents also mentioned being awardees of scholarship grants for their college education.

Future plans. All respondents plan to finish their college education. Afterwards, they plan to find jobs in their respective fields of interest, with some planning to open their own firms and companies or pursue a career in the academe. A few mentioned a desire to find a career in the government and in the civil society sector. Interestingly, very few from the respondents plan to go abroad to seek employment with some interviewees sharing the sentiment that it is still better to find employment locally to be able to give back to society. Lastly, majority of the respondents plan to pursue further studies or take a second course.

Impact of Project Citizen. Asked about Project Citizen’s impact on them, the respondents all answered that Project Citizen helped them in various ways. First, majority of the respondents

mentioned that Project Citizen has instilled in them a sense of awareness about the problems that they face in their respective communities – issues that they have previously neglected. They said that Project Citizen was an eye-opener for them about seeing the problems beyond the facade:

“I realized because of Project Citizen *na marami talagang nakatagong problema sa Pilipinas kasi yung facade nung tapat ng school namin, normal lang...but at the back of it is a former cemetery and I never knew that the cemetery was not completely removed from before. The thing is, the houses there are on top of the nichos...That was an eye opener for me that it’s the same for the whole Philippines – maganda tingnan pero sa likod, nakatago yung mga problems. On our part, I realized that as students, we can still do something for our immediate community.*” – Carl Moog (Project Citizen 2007, Rizal Science High School)

Moreover, Czarina Mae Lajara of the Project Citizen batch 2007 of Rizal High School relates that:

“Project Citizen has given me the start-up to really being exposed to the things in the society. We interviewed different kinds of people, which is both interesting and educational at the same time. Through Project Citizen, I became more interested as to what different kinds of people from different states and walks of life have to say about their life. I became interested to see beyond what media shows us. I wanted to delve more into the root causes of the problems in the society and Project Citizen is one of those who paved the way for it.”

Second, Project Citizen honed the respondents’ social and communication skills thereby also boosting their self-confidence. The interviewees mentioned that in the course of their research for Project Citizen, they had to deal with many types of people – from the rich to the poor, from those who hold power to those who have none – that led them to improve their communication skills. Many of them recalled how they had to present their proposals in front of their local *barangay* or city councils or to their *barangay* captain or the city Mayor as well as during the preliminary showcase. This also made them more open to people from all walks of life.

Third, Project Citizen also helped them realize that they have the ability to make a difference in their communities, to help solving their local problems even at a young age. In this regard, Magda Gana from the 2009 batch of Gen. Pio del Pilar High School says:

“*Nung pumunta na kami sa barangay, yun yung parang ‘totoo pala to’ kasi parang napaka-imposible na student tapos you will talk to the barangay captain para sa ganitong project parang imposible pero with Project Citizen, naging possible.*”

Additionally, she shares that:

“*Narealize ko rin sa Project Citizen na kapag matanda yung nagsalita sa kapwa matanda, parang politics lang, may halong kulay na...pero pag youth yung nagsalita sa matanda, pakikilingan ka. Takot kami kasi bata ba kami at our age, kala namin hindi kami pakikilingan pero mas lalo kaming pinakikilingan kasi parang may ‘wow’ factor...at a young age naisip nyo ‘to.’*”

Fourth, respondents said that Project Citizen honed their research skills, which they observed was helpful in their college academic requirements. Some of them related that before Project Citizen, they did not know how to do proper social science research. Others also shared that the research and technical writing skills they learned through Project Citizen gave them an advantage over other students in college.

Fifth, Project Citizen also improved their critical thinking skills. One respondent recalled that as they delved deeper into their research, their group began asking questions about the problem and their proposed solution such as: “Does this make sense?” or “Is it doable?” Another respondent shared that while most politicians or government officials would adopt the common solutions to address the problems in the community, as members of the youth, she realized that they can be as creative as they can be, thinking out of the box to find solutions to the problems they encounter in the community.

Sixth, some interviewees said that Project Citizen taught them both leadership and teamwork. One respondent remembered that when they were in 4th year high school and they joined Project Citizen, all participants were the top students in their class – the same set of people who she have always competed with. However, when they did Project Citizen, it was the first time that they were not competing with each other and so they were able to outgrow their competitiveness and work together as a team. As they moved above competing with each other, their ideas began to take shape. She recalls that slowly, it was no longer solely about winning although the competition aspect of Project Citizen served as their initial motivation.

Apart from the aforementioned, respondents also cited the following as ways in which Project Citizen helped them: increase in knowledge about the government, learning about the concepts and importance of equality, freedom, education and good governance, openness to help others, optimism and patriotism. Some respondents also mentioned that Project Citizen influenced their choice of course in college and even the choice of university.

Conclusion

Previous Project Citizen participants interviewed for this study showed both participation in socio-civic activities and awareness about current issues in the society. However, while the respondents were all involved in some socio-civic activities and they know that they are helping society through these activities, some of them do not feel the impact of what they are doing in society primarily because they believe that their activities are merely small efforts. As per their responses, Project Citizen helped most of them be prompted to join these activities after high school.

An interesting observation among some respondents was the perceived decrease in awareness of current events during college attributed to an increased academic workload. Additionally, majority of the respondents plot the beginning of their socio-civic awareness back in high school while some said it began in grade school and for some others, in college.

Interviewees were all either enrolled in college, have just finished college or are pursuing further studies from various universities and colleges in the Philippines. Most of them want to seek employment locally in their respective fields after graduation. Furthermore, majority of the respondents plan to take further studies or a second course.

After five years, Project Citizen has had most impact to its participants in the following aspects: social awareness, social and communication skills, change in attitude towards active participation in the community, research skills, critical thinking skills, leadership and teamwork.



Appendix A. Interview Respondents

School	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Rizal High School	3	3			6
Rizal Science High School	1				1
Muntinlupa National High School	1		1		2
Parang High School				1	1
Bagong Silangan High School				3	3
Gen. Pio del Pilar High School			1	1	2
Las Piñas National High School		2	3		5
Total	5	5	5	5	20

Appendix B. Sample Interview Questions

1. How are you?
2. What have you been busy with, lately?
 - *How often do you do these activities?
 - *What do you do when you volunteer?
 - *Do you think that these activities help the society? Do you think these activities help in solving societal problems? In what way?
 - *Do you feel like you are making a difference or an impact? Do you feel like you are contributing to society through these activities?
 - *How do you know that you are making an impact?
3. How did you find yourself participating in these activities?
4. Was there anything that you experienced back in high school that prompted you to join these types of activities now?
5. Now in college, are you familiar with any current events?
6. What socio-political issues interest you now?
7. What is your take on the issue/s?
8. How do you keep yourself informed about current events?
 - *Ask also about frequency
9. Were you this aware about current events back in high school?
10. When did you start getting involved/aware about the news/current events?
11. What are your future plans?
12. Did Project Citizen help you at all? How or in what ways?