

# Democratic Thinking and Community of Inquiry: A Challenge to Social Studies Teachers of the 21st Century

Melchor L. Cuizon<sup>1\*</sup>, Ma. Chin Labao Cuizon<sup>2</sup>

1. Central Luzon State University, Philippines

2. Tambo National High School, Ayungon, Negros Oriental

\*Corresponding Author Email: [cuisonmel@clsu.edu.ph](mailto:cuisonmel@clsu.edu.ph)

**Abstract:** Education is an agent of transformation and a powerful tool for developing a holistic personality geared toward the development of the community. The school plays a major role in developing the civic consciousness of the students. Thus, this institution can be an effective venue for social transformation and aims at shaping and molding the student's civic consciousness about social realities and issues that beset the country. The Department of Education (2013), defined *Araling Panlipunan* as the study of how people, their communities, and societies have lived in the world, with special attention to their beliefs, cultures, and their interactions with their environment and with one another. The object of the discipline is to equip students with the necessary "skills and dispositions required of them to be active and engaged citizens in a culturally diverse, democratic society" which suggests Dewey's proposed "*democratic social studies education*". Thus, the questions that the paper wanted to explore are formulated in this way: First, what is Dewey's proposed *democratic social studies education*? Second, how this method can be applied in a classroom setting? This paper utilizes related reading articles to shed light on the above questions.

**Keywords:** Araling Panlipunan, John Dewey, Democratic Social Studies Education, Community of Inquiry, Education, Tambo National High School

## Introduction

Education is an agent of transformation and a powerful tool for developing a holistic personality geared toward the development of the community. The school plays a major role in developing the civic consciousness of the students. Thus, this institution can be an effective venue for social transformation and aims at shaping and molding the students' civic consciousness about social realities and issues that beset the country (Tantengco, & Maramag, 2016). According to John Dewey (2016), education is a "fertile ground" from which students develop the skills and character necessary for nation-building. As Constantino (1970) remarks "Education must produce an individual who is "aware of the country's problems, who understands the basic solution to these problems, and who cares enough to have the courage to work and sacrifice for the country's salvation".

In the K to 12 curriculum, *Araling Panlipunan* is commonly used instead of the English translation for social studies (Pangilinan, 2021). The goal of the course as defined by the National Council for Social Studies External is to promote civic competence among the Filipino people" (Balas & Salcedo, 2019). Thus, *Araling Panlipunan* as reiterated by the Department of Education (2013) is the study of how people, their communities, and societies have lived in the world, with special attention to their beliefs, cultures, and their interactions with their environment and with one another (Estrella, 2018). The object of the discipline as Lucman (2020) articulated is to equip students with the necessary "skills and dispositions required of them to be active and engaged citizens in a culturally diverse, democratic society" which suggests Dewey's proposed "*democratic*

*social studies education*". The questions that this paper wanted to explore are: First, what is Dewey's proposed *democratic social studies education*? Second, how this method can be applied in a classroom setting? This paper utilizes related reading articles to shed light on the above questions.

### **John Dewey's Democratic Social Studies Education**

The educational system of the country is a product of colonization, especially under the Spanish and American eras which resulted in "a poor state of civic consciousness among the Filipino people". Two factors affect the discriminating educational system of the period. First, in the Spanish time, education was selective, that is given only to privileged "*Ilustrados*". This was even furthered by the American era where the English language became the only medium of instruction. The struggle for nationalistic identity among the Filipino people has become an issue of concern, hence, education at the moment is primarily essentialist and the focus is inculturation of the Western customs and traditions. However, after gaining Philippine Independence the "civilizing education" introduced by the colonizers was changed to "citizenship education" for the Filipinos whose themes and goals were grounded on the love of country. This theme becomes the mandate of the Department of Education curriculum reflected on the 1973 and 1989 goals of the institution to develop a "reasoned commitment to national ideals (Canuto, 2022).

In 2002, the *Makabayan* subjects were introduced by the Department of Education (DepEd) to inculcate in the minds of the students a sense of national identity (Bernardo & Mendoza, 2009). This reform to the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) was implemented through DepEd Order No. 25 in the school year 2002-2003. The rationale behind the reform was to raise the quality of Filipino graduates by empowering them to become lifelong learners, which can only be achieved by being functionally literate, that is *Makabayan* (patriotic), *makatao* (mindful of humanity), *makakalikasan* (respectful of nature), and *maka-Diyos* (godly) (Reyes et al., 2018). However, there are issues and problems confronted by teachers like curriculum congestion which hinder them from formulating an inclusive coherent framework (Canuto, 2022). The shift of Philippine education from the K to 10 to the K to 12 curriculums expands the scope of education to the global context (Baildon et al., 2016; Orale & Sarmiento, 2016). This is mandated by law through Republic Act 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. The aims are articulated on the following: (a) allow every student to receive a quality education that is globally competitive based on a pedagogically sound curriculum that is at par with international standards; (b) broaden the goals of high school education for college preparation, vocational and technical career opportunities as well as creative arts, sports, and entrepreneurial employment in a rapidly changing and increasingly globalized environment, and; (c) make education learner-oriented and responsive to the needs, cognitive and cultural capacity, circumstances and diversity of learners, schools and communities through the appropriate languages of teaching and learning including the use of the mother tongue as a learning resource (Estrella, 2018). The goal of the curriculum is to engage students of *Araling Panlipunan* to be actively involved in the social issues of society. This encourages students to be critical in magnifying these issues and problems. Through critical thinking, students can provide systematic insights in responding to these social concerns that primarily affect their well-being. Having this magnifying lens, the students can seize this historical moment with critical insight and probably initiate action that eventually improves one's state of being. One of the expectations of the Enhanced Basic Education Curriculum of the K to 12 Program (DepEd, 2013), is to prepare students with the skills necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that is "functionally literate and developed Filipino", which articulates the goals of the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA), and the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century to UNESCO (Delors et al. 1996; UNESCO 1995). The manifestation of this acquired "national identity" of the students as Ebro (2022) remarks is expressed as "you and your community; you, and your community and the country; and you, your community, the country and the world. The concepts proposed an integral understanding of *pagkakakilanlan* (identity). Thus, "*Ang Araling Panlipunan ay pag-aaral ng mga tao at grupo, komunidad at lipunan, kung paano sila namuhay at namumuhay, ang kanilang ugnayan at interaksyon sa kapaligiran at sa isa't isa, ang kanilang mga paniniwala at kultura, upang makabuo ng pagkakakilanlan bilang Pilipino...*" (Social Studies is the study of people, groups, communities, and society on how they lived and are living, their relationship and interaction with each other and their environment, their beliefs, and the culture that make up the Filipino national identity) (Cited by Ebro, 2022 from a presentation during a summer training for social science teachers in University of the Philippines, Diliman). Having these in mind, the important question that teachers of *Araling Panlipunan* commonly ask is how these goals and objectives could transpire and thrive not only at the classroom level but more so in their respective communities which maximizes the student's participation-driven effort.

The notion of democratic education is closely related to Dewey's philosophy of education which according to scholars paved the way to progressivism. Although he was quoted as the initiator of progressivism, however, he clarified some important points that a progressivist education must adhere to. This is the use of collaborative activities that transcend experiential and interest-based learning to collaborative and inquiry-based learning (Canuto, 2022). This notion of *collaborative and inquiry-based learning* that John Dewey (2016) suggests derived from his belief that a "*classroom is an embryonic community*", a community of his/her own and where

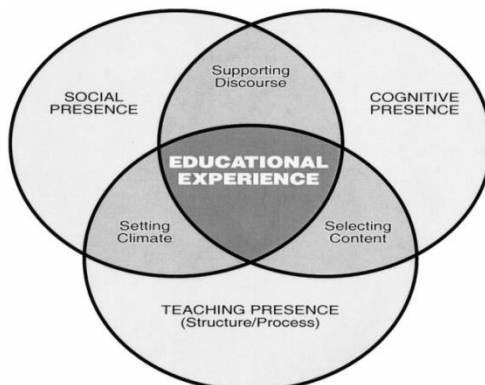
camaraderie is achieved regardless of principles, ideologies, and gender preference. This democratic education as Dewey proposed should not be limited to working collaboratively in the classroom rather it must aim at building togetherness among students, an experience of citizenship, an integral component of a democratic society. The development of a student’s sense of citizenship shall allow him/her to engage responsibly in the community aware of his/her rights and responsibilities. The attainment of citizenship that is grounded on solidarity and mutual respect is vital, especially in the Philippines which has a defective and corrupt political mentality. Thus, social studies education in the country should develop a democratic stance that necessitates education for citizenship toward an enlightened democracy grounded on shared responsibility.

**The Community of Inquiry**

According to John Dewey, the school is the best place where students can enhance their inquisitive attitude through democratic discourse. To facilitate this inquiring attitude among students, Matthew Lipman (2004), introduced a methodology to develop the critical thinking skills of the students, which is later called the *community of inquiry*. This pedagogy has a resemblance to Socratic dialogue, where students are encouraged to actively participate in a classroom discussion facilitated by the teacher towards “a climate of intersubjectivity” (Canuto, 2022). Following the process of inquiry, students are led to ask essential questions related to the topic, this will facilitate to sharing of their opinions and ideas in the classroom. When applied to Social Studies Education according to UNESCO (2007), this will “develop 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”. This pedagogy is important in developing a sense of citizenship among students which according to scholars consists of human rights literacy (Cassidy, 2017), values associated with deliberative democracy (Di Masi & Santi, 2016; Makaiau & Tanaka, 2018; Šimenc, 2009), inclusiveness and diversity (Bleazby, 2009; Nishiyama, 2019), as well as social justice as a whole (Chetty, 2014; Makaiau, 2017). The development of these values as the outcome of the pedagogy results in what Kizel (2015), called "socio–philosophic sensitivity" (Canuto, 2022). This is not an easy task, especially for teachers who is the prime facilitator of the community of inquiry. There are several challenges that a teacher may encounter in the classroom. These challenges include synthesizing students' diverse ideas and opinions on the topic or issue of discourse. On the other hand, one has to understand that initiating a democratic atmosphere and transforming it into a community of inquiry requires ample time and practice. In addition, one must understand that the community of inquiry among students is not solely a competition, but rather to develop cooperative learning among students necessary in building a shared vision of the world. This creates a communitarian attitude and inquiry skills that allow students to "acquire a taste of rational analysis, driven by a thirst for truth”. These tools enable students to navigate life in the spirit of citizenship who actively participate in public debate, support democracy, and resist misleading propaganda” (UNESCO, 2007 as cited by Canuto, 2022).

Compared with the traditional didactic discourse, this collaborative inquiry–based community among students is effective and efficient. For instance, the study of Cheung et al., (2020), shows that the competencies of students in terms of critical thinking and problem-solving skills are significantly relevant. This was also confirmed by numerous studies such as (Burrows 2003; Crouch and Mazur 2001; Gormally et al. 2009; Knight and Wood 2005; Terenzini et al. 2001) as cited by (Cheung et al., 2020). Developing the competencies of the students requires also the teaching ability of the teacher in the classroom. As Cheung et al., (2020) add the ability of the teacher to facilitate discussion has also been shown to be a major factor in helping the learners to attain a higher level of cognitive achievement. Thus the role of the teacher as an effective facilitator in the classroom is crucial in building an effective community of inquiry.

To facilitate the process of community of inquiry in the classroom, Garrison et al., (2000, 88) offer a framework. The teachers and the students serve as the key facilitators of the entire educational experience. The learning process occurs within the domain of the three interrelating core elements: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence.



**Figure 1.** Elements of an Educational Experience in Community of Inquiry (CI) Garrison et al., (2000, 88)

This framework developed by Garrison et al., (2020), can be traced back from the discourse of Dewey (1933), Peirce (1955), and Lipman (2003) whose principles are geared towards dynamic and collaborative thinking (Stenbom, 2017, 3). Although the effectiveness of the framework is mostly applied to online learning nevertheless, it does not exclude the learning process in the traditional classroom setting. As Guo et al. (2021) argue "this framework is instrumental in promoting the student's competencies specifically in the areas of social and cognitive learning process". For instance, the domain of social presence develops the ability of the students to freely express themselves in the classroom. Through open communication, the students felt their worth as a person who belonged with others and not isolated individuals (Arbaugh, 2019, 73). This element is categorized into three interrelated components: (1) affectiveness, where in the process of communication the students are free to express their emotions, (2) open communication, where students are led into dialogue with each other, transcending one's boundaries and limitations, and (3) group cohesion, where students develop a sense of group commitment (Guo et al., 2021, 2). The studies of Arbaugh (2005) & Hwang and Arbaugh (2006) as cited by Cheung et al. (2020), show that there is a strong correlation between social presence and learning outcomes attainment (p.3). Thus, the deeper the student's social interaction occurs, the better they will appreciate what community of inquiry is all about. As Cheung et al. (2020) added this element is also necessary for the development of cognitive presence.

In the cognitive presence, the students can construct ideas and able to participate in discourse through a step-by-step process. This involves (1) triggering event, where the students first identify the issue of concern, (2) exploration where students investigate the issue of inquiry collaboratively, (3) integration where students construct meaning derived from a dialogue with others in the exploration phase, and (4) resolution where students are lead to a possible response or solution to dilemmas or the issue of concern (Garrison et al., 2000). Teaching presence on the other hand directs both the social and cognitive presence toward the attainment of a meaningful classroom discussion that results in an outcome-based education. This can be done through two components namely (1) instructional and organizational design, and (2) facilitating discourse where students can identify the convergence and divergence of an issue leading to acceptable consensus (Guo et al., 2021, 2). Instruction and facilitation require a teacher who is solely responsible for the conduct of the community of inquiry. According to Sharp (2015), the role of a teacher in the classroom is significant in casting off intellectual fear that hampers the student's imagination, intellectual audacity, and creativity (44). Thus, participation in a community of inquiry allows students to participate in dialogue grounded on trust and open inquiry necessary in constructing a worldview of balanced humane conception of how to live well, while at the same time developing a more thoughtful tolerance of the diversity of perspectives that individuals have regarding what it is to live well (Sharp 2015, 39).

### Conclusion

Democratic reflective thinking contextualized in the framework of the community of inquiry for social studies teachers of the 21st century as suggested above is grounded on a constructivist principle of learning outcomes. This principle articulates Dewey's principle of education that empowers students to academically and critically engage in the discourse and dialogue in the classroom. Dewey critic the objectivist principle of education as guilty of category mistake, a principle focused merely on the "telos" of inquiry that only teaches students to learn solutions at the ephemeral level rather than getting them involved in the whole process of learning activities (Akyol et al., 2009, 124). The integration of the three elements is essential to create a critical community of inquiry among students in the classroom. Applying these elements in a social studies course enhances or exhibits the quality of educational experience and learning outcomes (Garrison et al., 2020, 92). The resumption of classes to the traditional face-to-face learning mode after the pandemic posed certain challenges in the classroom. Educators are challenged to elevate learning methodology to higher-order thinking skills which is made possible through the instrumentality of teachers with the aid of technology in addressing the cognitive, social, and teaching presence. Thus, integrating the three elements in an instructional design empowered by technology inevitably shapes the way people relate to each other toward collaborative and inclusive learning experiences among students (2020, 92).

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