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Civics and Citizenship Education in Schools in Afghanistan

Item Type	openaccess;article
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Download date	2026-05-20 07:10:19
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/7685

**Civics and Citizenship Education
in Schools in Afghanistan**

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Master's Project

Center for International Education

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December 2009

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the status of civics and citizenship education in schools in Afghanistan. My purpose for this study was (a) to understand what is taught about civics education in classrooms, (b) what concepts of civics education are addressed in the national curriculum and the text books, and (c) what role civics education plays in Afghan schools to produce productive citizens. My assumption is that schools have direct impact on civics understanding of the students and how they use their civics knowledge in everyday life. Civics education raises students' political, governance, and social awareness and informs them about their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

At this time of transition of Afghanistan from isolation to connection with the rest of the countries of the world, it is very important to understand how students build up their social and political views and how they perform their civil responsibilities.

During my field work, I visited two female schools and one male school in Herat city. My research method was mostly qualitative; phenomenology, case study, and document review approaches. My findings are mostly based on school and classroom observations and my interviews with school teachers, students, and few of the administrative members. I also looked at the signs, symbols, and norms that represent civics education in schools.

The little that I might have achieved through this research is aimed to strengthening Afghanistan schools in producing more productive citizens.

Chapter 1

A constitutional democracy is in serious trouble if its citizenry does not have a certain degree of education and civic virtue. Phillip E. Jonathon

Introduction

This study is based on the belief that sustainability of a democratic society in Afghanistan is highly dependent on the awareness of Afghan people and particularly the young generation of their rights, values, and civic responsibilities. My hypothesis is that schools can have a direct impact on the socio-economic and political situation in the country. It is essential that the new graduates of schools in Afghanistan build a strong labor force to improve the economy of the country with equal participation of males and females in the country. This is only possible when the quality of education is improved in classrooms and schools can effectively improve knowledge and skills of citizenship in students.

I conducted this research to (a) to look at the status of civic and citizenship education in primary and secondary schools in Afghanistan and (b) to compare differences in interpretations of civic concepts by diverse groups of teachers based on their gender, age, level of education and ethnicity. Also I wanted to look at what is written about civic and citizenship education in school language text books in order to describe and compare the relation of what is taught in classrooms and what is said in the curriculum and the gap between the two. My assumption is that the existence of gender discrimination, violence against women, and the rare participation of women in economy, the labor force, politics, and social activism in Afghanistan partly has to do with either problems in schools' curriculum or the way teachers teach about civic education in their classrooms. Therefore, I used a phenomenological approach to interview teachers and observe classrooms and carried out a document analysis to examine text books and language curriculum.

Historical Background

Afghanistan has gone through a long history of war which has resulted in severe damage to the educational, economic, social, and political infrastructure(s) of the country. Such transitions particularly affected the content, means, and manner in which civic education has been taught in schools in Afghanistan. In the past few decades, there has not been any specific course or subject about civic education in schools in Afghanistan. However, since the defeat of the Taliban regime by the international community and Afghan people, the Afghan government and international donors (such as the USAID and World Bank) have been helping the country to rebuild its educational infrastructure.

During this transition, it is important that Afghanistan not fall into the hands of extremism, illiteracy, and ignorance again. Therefore, political awareness of Afghan citizens is fundamental for them to make the right decisions for the country when they vote for example. After decades of authoritarian governments in Afghanistan, now the people go to the polls to send their representatives to senate, parliament, provincial councils, and the presidential palace. Upon talking to some educated Afghans, and based on my own personal experience, the vast majority of Afghan citizens failed to send the right people to parliament and provincial council when they first experienced democratic elections in 2004. Many faculty members, political experts, and social activists who ran for either parliament or provincial council did not get enough votes to take seats, regardless of their knowledge and expertise. “The majority of people we see in the parliament and provincial counsels were chosen based on their power, political influence, and ethnicity and not based on their knowledge and expertise,” said a government employee (personal communication, July, 2009).

Therefore, the importance of civic awareness in schools cannot be overestimated in Afghanistan. I believe that schools can play a major role in social and political awareness of the future generation. In schools, students learn, understand, and are able to utilize their acquired skills and knowledge in order to preserve history and promote justice and democracy (Heater, B., D., 2004). Most

importantly, educational policy makers need to ensure that students get the proper instruction and are able to utilize their knowledge effectively upon graduation. The goal is not to control students' way of thinking, but to make sure that the outcomes of schooling meet the demands of the country and standardized vision and mission of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Afghanistan.

A remarkable increase in the number of school children in Afghanistan after the collapse of the Taliban gives hope. A recent research study shows that over 6 million children in Afghanistan go to school, while this number was less than a million before 2001. The research further shows that the enrollment of girls is now 35 per cent, while during the Taliban it was zero per cent (Sigsgaard, 2009). I believe such an increase in enrollment is important; however, for the future generation of this county to become aware of their civic rights and responsibilities and to actively and productively take part in rehabilitation of Afghanistan, the quality of education must be improved in schools (citation, or you must say I believe).

In fact, the lack of education and the domination of illiteracy ruined the nation, and now quality education along with students' understanding of civic rights and responsibilities could essentially democratize and rebuild it. Mason, a professor at Indiana University, in a speech addressing Afghan educators argued, "Given the complex roles assumed by citizens in a democracy, it is imperative that schools teach students how to effectively exercise their rights and responsibilities" (Mason, 2007, p. 2).

With the help of USAID, countries like Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh invested in the inclusion of civic education in their educational institutions, and has resulted in a remarkable expansion of democracy, decrease of human rights violations, and overall improvement of those countries (PPC/CDIE, USAID, 2006).

Throughout this study, I not only explored notions of civic education addressed in language curriculum of Afghanistan, but also the way such concepts were interpreted and taught to students in classrooms. I stopped here Due to time limitation in my research I only studied these concepts in

language text books from grades 4 to 7. Throughout my experience as a student in Afghanistan and upon talking to some Afghan educators, I realized that concepts of civic education have mostly been taught through language courses in Afghanistan. Language learning is closely related to citizenship education. Research shows that “language education is increasingly constructed as contributing to citizenship education” (Osler, & Starkey, 2005, p. 2).

Language text books in Afghanistan contain many passages mostly in the form of poems that are related to civic education; for example, poems about unification of Afghanistan, Afghan national character, peace, women, freedom, justice, and other concepts which are directly related to civic understanding of students. These poems are mostly written by Afghan scholars. Some of the poems talk about civic education from a religious perspective, for example, one of the titles in the 6th grade book is about “Justice of His Excellency Omar” who was the most powerful Caliph and ruler of Islam and is best known for his justice. There are poems about women which mostly describe the position of women in the society and their rights as human beings. In old text books, still used in schools that I observed, most poems about women refer to them as mothers and emphasize on their roles as house wives and protectors of their children.

Research Question

What Concepts of Civic Education Are Addressed in Language and Literature Curriculum in Primary and Secondary Schools in Afghanistan and how do teachers interpret such concepts?

I particularly focused on the view point of school teachers in contrast to what the national curriculum of Afghanistan stated about democracy, gender equity and equality, rule of law, and diversity.

Democracy

Democracy is defined as “the absence of hereditary or arbitrary class distinction or privileges” (Merriam-Webster, 2005, p. 158). Since the collapse of the Taliban and the establishment of the Interim Administration of Afghanistan, this term has become a common word in discussion of the people of Afghanistan be they educated or illiterate. Outside of schools, democracy is a controversial term in Afghanistan. A local Afghan believed that a Western democracy wouldn’t work in Afghanistan. But how does he define a Western democracy and what kind of democracy does he want for Afghanistan? Or when a school teacher who was a participant of my research insists on “Islamic Democracy” what is her definition of Islamic democracy and how does she explain it to her students. The word democracy has even raised tensions among senate members in Afghanistan some of whom believe that democracy has created problems in this country (BBC, 2009). A high ranking authority from the Afghanistan Senate believes that “Freedom and Democracy are two different words but every individual Afghan wants freedom” (Mujadidi, BBC, 2009).

With great interest I explored most of those concepts which are explained briefly in chapter three of this paper. However, since my thesis project was limited to schools and only focused on language

subjects in public schools in Herat city, Afghanistan, these terms were not explored in depth with the public.

Gender Equity and Equality

Equity is defined as “justice according to natural law or right; specifically freedom and equality is defined as “the quality of state of being equal” (Merriam-Webster, 2005, p. 210). Afghanistan has been a male oriented country throughout its history. Lack of equity and equality in fragile state of Afghanistan has always raised concerns in the international community, the UN, and for Afghan intellectuals. Gender disparity has particularly been worrisome in Afghanistan. Women have suffered the most during three decades of conflict in Afghanistan and yet eight years after the Taliban they are still among the most vulnerable. In this research I tried to look at how schools address the issues of equity and equality and how that affects the society and future generations. Although eight years after the Taliban women’s life condition is much better and women can go to school, to some extent work, and even run for president, they are still deprived of most of their rights as equal human beings. During my interviews with female school teachers, I noticed fear in their voices when they were talking about their rights. This is because still Afghanistan is still to a great extent a male-oriented country where women have fewer rights.

Diversity

During my research, I also looked at the issues of equality and equity among the diverse ethnicities in Afghanistan such as: Pushtuns, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Tajiks, Hindus, Nooristanis, Pashaei, etc. Through my research interviews, observations, and text book analysis, I looked at how issues of equality and equity are addressed in the books, how they are interpreted by teachers and how such interpretations affect students and the community as a whole. I found some poems talking about the diverse ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Although most of such poems encourage brotherhood and

unification among all these ethnicities, most of the teachers I interviewed believed that the mention of the names of ethnicities in the text books is “a big mistake”. The participants believed that talking about ethnicities in school text books creates division among the different groups and encourages students not to look at the Afghan population as one people.

The Rule of

For a country to practice democracy, it is important that the public be aware of the basic rules and laws of the country and that the government system runs on the basis of accepted and defined laws and regulations to ensure justice, order, and security for the country. Lack of awareness of the laws can easily bring chaos in a society. In an ethnically diverse country like Afghanistan, the rule of law can play an integral role in promoting tolerance and respecting diverse values. It is the constitution of a nation that brings its people under the umbrella of law and encourages unification among diverse ethnicities. “For a democracy to survive and flourish, a critical mass of its citizens must possess the skills, embody the values, and manifest the behaviors that accord with democracy” (USAID, 2002, p. 15).

During my classroom observation, I found out that many students in 5th and 6th grade were unfamiliar with the word *Qanoon Assasi* “constitution” and most of the teachers I talked to had not read about it. I also went through Dari text books from grade 4 to 7 to see if anything was said about constitution. But the text books did not talk much about constitution and its importance. Lack of awareness of people about the rule of law in Afghanistan has been a major factor in instability in the country.

In conclusion, the ultimate goal of this study is to contribute to the process of rehabilitation and democratization of Afghanistan by helping the MoE in improving the teaching and learning of civic and citizenship education in schools in Afghanistan. For this purpose, I found no subject more

significant than exploring concepts of civic education in language teaching at schools in Afghanistan. I hope that my study will improve learning in classrooms and better application of students' knowledge and skills in life productive Afghan citizens. Submitting a copy of this thesis to MoE might hopefully help this ministry get a clearer picture of the status of civic and citizenship education in schools in Afghanistan.

Chapter 2 explains the methodology I used for this research. I used three approaches of qualitative research; phenomenology, document analysis, and case studies. The chapter also explains how these approaches were used in my study and what limitations and challenges emerged during the study. This chapter further explores characteristics of the schools I observed, characteristics of my participants, my own ideas as a researcher and how I influenced the study, and the criteria which were used to choose the sample of my participants.

Chapter 3 explains in detail my findings in the field. It includes quotes from my interviews, findings from classroom observations, quotes from students, and quotes from the text books. This chapter also includes analysis of the data and my interpretations and impressions.

Chapter 4 covers my recommendations based on the results of the study in the field and analysis of the data based on literature review on the topic. This chapter also includes a conclusion which suggests what further studies need to be done in regard to the subject of civic and citizenship education.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Process

I first wrote my research proposal while at UMASS Amherst. My academic advisor gave me feedback and I went through Institutional Review Board (UMASS IRB Committee) for approval. The job of IRB is to protect the rights of individual participants in a research. This institute is mandated by the federal law of the US to ensure justice and protect human rights from any harm as research subjects. Without the approval of IRB, a research will not be recognized. After I got IRB approval, I did some literature review about the status of civic and citizenship education in developing countries. With some well documented theory under my belt I was ready to start my field work in Herat Afghanistan in June 2009.

I conducted my research in Herat province for several reasons. (a) because I lived all my life in Herat with my family and I was familiar with schools and education department, thus, I thought I would find it easier to do my research in my hometown given the time limitation I had for my research, (b) because I knew that Herat had a diverse population in terms of different ethnicities, languages, and peoples' economic and educational status and through my research I intended to focus on diverse groups, and (c) I was familiar with the context and I hoped to get more support from the school of education and the department of education to assist in navigating the logistical and administrative bureaucracy.

The Department of Education in Herat gave me a permission letter that introduced me to all schools of Herat city and Injil and Ghozarah districts of this province. It took me only a day to get the

permission letter. The department of education welcomed me and encouraged me to bring them a copy of the report of my findings. I felt that the fact that I was coming from the US as a student and a researcher helped me to secure this letter.

I started my field work by conducting a pilot test at the school of education and with some students outside school. However, none of the pilot test participants were in my research samples. I conducted the pilot test to see if I had the right questions. Later, the pilot test helped me rearrange some of my questions and come up with more follow up clarifications and questions in my questionnaires so that my participants understand the questions. Through the pilot test I also realized that I had to define some of the terminology for better understanding of my participants or to use a synonym of some specific terms so that the participants would understand them better.

The first pilot test I conducted was with a school student who was selling sandwiches from a stand. After greetings, we had this conversation.

Researcher: Why do you go to school?

Student: “Because it is important to be literate and I want to find a good job in the future to help my family”.

Researcher: Very Good! Can you tell me what it means to you to be an Afghan citizen and do you think your education will help Afghanistan too?

Student: “I don’t know what citizen means and I am not sure if I can do anything for my country in the future except for supporting my family”.

Our conversation ended there since he was busy serving other customers. However, a couple of days later, I went to him again. This time I went to see if what I had asked him had made him curious. I bought a beverage this time; but he would not accept money and this is what he added to our previous conversation.

Student: “Can I answer your second question today Ostad (teacher/ usually used for a faculty)?”

Researcher: Of course you can!

Student: “Citizen means that I am from Afghanistan and I have to get education like children of other countries and serve my country in the future. We are responsible for our country and if we know what this responsibility is, then we do it”.

The Department of Dari Language and Literature at the School of Education in Herat University helped me work with some in-service teachers for my pilot test. I conducted a focus group interview with a diverse group of in-service teachers.

1) Participant one, a young teacher who taught in Afghan Turk private school in Herat seemed to know more about concepts of civic education than an experienced teacher who had taught the same subject at a public school for more than a decade. This made me curious to know what private schools taught about civic education and how different their curriculum was. There are many new established private schools in Herat. All of these schools started operating after the fall of the Taliban.

2) Participant two, was a school teacher who had finished school in Iran. Some of the phrases and words she was using were Iranian vocabulary. She had an accent and I could not totally understand some of the words and phrases she was using. What made me curious was to see how she interpreted such terminologies and how she taught them to the students in school and how her interpretations would affect the civic understanding of students. I planned to visit her school and do a classroom observation. But she taught in a school that was far from the city and for security reasons I decided that I could not visit her school.

3) Most of my pilot test participants regardless of gender used masculine names more often in their examples about civic education. For instance, when talking about a president or a national figure, they mostly used the name of a male. This maybe meant that more examples in the books were written using a male

name than a female name which made me curious to review the text books to find out the ratio between the use of feminine and masculine names.

However, due to time limitation and security reasons I decided that I could not fully conduct my research the way I had proposed and based on issues raised from the pilot test. Furthermore, despite the important issues that I found in my pilot tests, it was not possible to conduct the research in private schools too for a comparison purpose. Thus, in order to use the limited time I had ~~more~~ most effectively I decided to focus only on public schools and purposefully choose random teachers regardless of their ethnicity. My presumption was to go to schools where the majority of teachers belonged to a particular ethnicity. But in the field I realized that it would take much longer time to travel to all those areas and security was another factor that affected my research question.

After my pilot test, I organized and translated all my questionnaires, consent forms, and the materials I needed for my research.

Research Methods

I mostly used three qualitative research approaches for my study. (a) I used phenomenology approach for my interviews with teachers and students and classroom observations, (b) I used case study approach to look at the overall school status and how that affected the teaching of civic education in classrooms, and (c) I used document analysis to look at school text books and language curriculum in order to find out about the concepts of civic education stated in the curriculum and to see if there was a gap between what was said in the curriculum and what was taught in the classrooms. The overall reason for the use of qualitative approaches was to learn about schools, teachers' points of view, students view points, and language curriculum and school text books in relation to civic and citizenship education. As Rossman and Rallis (2003) state,

Qualitative research begins with questions; its ultimate purpose is learning (p.4)

Having the concept of qualitative research in mind, I entered the research field as a learner aiming to generate some data. I found qualitative research approaches functional in working directly with my participants in the field. My primary intention in this research was to talk to school teachers, observe their classrooms, and generate information from them about the status of civic education and citizenship training. Therefore, interviews and classroom observations were core to my research activities.

Qualitative researchers talk with people; watch and listen as folks go about their everyday tasks, read documents and records,; and look at physical space, clothing, tools, and decorations (Rossman, & Rallis, 2003 p. 9).

My first impression was that in order to collect sufficient data from my participants, I had to build trust with them. In the context of Afghanistan research is still a new phenomenon for many people even educators at schools and universities. Thus, I found it essential to build trust with my participants so that they would not feel threatened and would be willing to talk to me. In order to build such trust, I used the validity and reliability segments of qualitative research approach.

Reliability and Validity

According to Rossman and Rallis, 2003 validity and reliability tools are important components in qualitative research to establish trust with participants and audience. Qualitative research emphasizes on protecting participants rights, dignity, and safety by keeping participants' anonymous and by observing the confidentiality of research findings. The use of participant informed consent forms helped significantly at this point. The consent forms clearly explained the purpose of conducting my research and the fact that as a researcher I would do all I could to keep my participants' identity anonymous.

Furthermore, to increase the credibility and reliability of my study I tried to assess and monitor my own work so that I could remain objective and less biased for the sake of reliability and creditability of my findings.

Phenomenology Approach

For gathering data, I used “phenomenology” approach of qualitative research. This approach is used to find out about the perspectives of specific participants about a particular concept or an activity (Patton, 1990). I found phenomenology approach valuable tool for conducting interviews with my participants and observing their classrooms. Furthermore, in phenomenology approach language is the central medium (Scharam, 2006). This concept helped to construct meaning through conversations with my participants. Phenomenology genre not only best fitted my research inquiry from a research literature point of view but also it gave me the opportunity to have my own in-depth self-reflection on the topic.

Interviewing teachers, observing, and reviewing documents and text books were core of my work in this research.

Through observing, interviewing, and documenting material culture, qualitative researchers capture and represent the richness, texture, and depth of what they study (Rossman , & Rallis, 2003, p. 17).

Interviews

Interviewing takes you (researcher) into participants’ worlds (Rossman, & Rallis, 2003, p. 180).

I used purposeful sampling for the selection of my participants (a) because I had a limited number of population, thus, random sampling was not feasible and (b) because of the characteristics of my participants in terms of gender, and age. I interviewed ten school teachers. I started all my

interviews with an informal conversation with each participant by having a cup of tea with them. In all schools I went to they offered me tea and I had to accept that even if I didn't want to drink tea. Accepting to drink tea played a very important role in my work with my participants. It made the atmosphere more friendly, created more trust between me and my participants and based on Afghani culture it is very respectful to accept an offer. Only once I refused to have tea and that made a difference in my work. I had a hard time to establish the friendly and informal conversations that I wanted to start before going right into my questions. And I did not get as much information from my participant as I did from others. For my interviews, I mostly used phenomenological interview technique.

I used the phenomenological interviewing approach. Phenomenological interviewing helped me to link my classroom observations to my interviews with my participants. For example, I asked my participants why they pursued a lesson the way I observed in classrooms or why they interpreted certain vocabulary the way they did in the class.

Phenomenological interview helped me in learning about my participants' life history, skills, what it meant for them to be a teacher, what motivated them to become teachers, and how external pressures such as poverty, and lack of security affected their life. I used follow up questions to make sure my participants were clear about the questions. The strength of an interview comes from the relevance of the interview questions and from your skill in asking follow up question (p. 185). I had to elaborate some of the terminology by giving examples or synonyms of the vocabulary since some the terminology I used in my research seemed to be new for my participants, for example, a couple of my teacher participants were not even familiar with the word citizen and citizenship. But by asking them more questions and giving them some hints, I understood that those participants used the word

countryman instead. Asking follow up questions and explaining for clarification helped mutual understanding of the subject by myself and my participants.

According to Rossman and Rallis, 2003,

In conversations with my participants the exchange of facial expression such as eye contact helped me in developing rapport with them. Nodding my head and the use of pauses to repeat some of my participants' words to assure them that I was listening to them carefully seemed to give them more confidence and encourage them to share more with me.

However, some of the vocabulary that my participants were using could have different meaning depending on the diverse experience of my participants as teachers and how they viewed civic education. For example, words like; freedom, democracy, and human rights had different meaning for different participants.

I used open ended elaboration and clarification techniques for efficacy of my conversations with my participants. These tools were mostly useful for two purposes; they helped me be more lucid in my questions, and they helped me understand that at first I would get something different from what my participant meant if I did not ask her a follow up question. Some of the frequent follow up questions I asked were:

1. Could you tell me what you mean by...?

Some of my participants seemed hesitant at the beginning of conversation. I asked one of my participants why she thought there was a big gap in the way masculine and feminine names were used in the text books. She said that she was not happy with how the curriculum was designed but when I asked her to elaborate why she did not like the curriculum; she just told me that because the curriculum has been designed outside Afghanistan and because of the interference of some other countries. She did

not seem to feel comfortable telling me which countries and I decided not to push to make sure her rights as a participant were respected.

2. Are you saying that,....?

I asked this question to make sure I had got the right information that she meant to share with me.

3. Could you say more about it?

Sometimes my participants would say something that seemed to have a story behind it and that had to do with the individual experience of my participants. For example, one of my participants told me that she always felt sad that some of her female students had to leave school at grade nine. After asking her to tell me more about it, she told me the stories of a couple of her students who had to leave school because their parents had given their hands for marriage. She was happy that she had convinced the parents and husband of one of them to let the girl come back to school but she was unhappy about the other girl who had to leave school perhaps forever.

4. Does it mean that,.....?

Even when I felt I understood what my participants had told me, I would sometimes repeat what they said to make sure I had understood it correctly. To my surprise, sometimes I would hear something different from what I had interpreted and seemed to be sure about. So, repeating what they said, helped me understand that even when I felt certain about what I had heard, I could be wrong.

Characteristics of my participants

I had ten teacher participants for this study. The major criteria that I considered in choosing my participants were; the expertise of the participants on the issue and what information they were likely to provide me for my research question. All participants were recruited from three different public schools in Herat. My participants included males and females. All participants were over 18 years old and had some knowledge of civic and citizenship education and how it was taught in schools. Access to most of my participants was easy (a) because of the permission letter I got from the department of education which allowed me to conduct my research in schools and (b) the fact that most of the participants knew that I was from that area and I worked for Herat University as a lecturer. However, I initiated my contacts with participants through school principals and heads of departments and later on by direct phone contacts with my participants. Once I got in touch with all language department teachers, I used a purposeful selection strategy in choosing some of the teachers from each department. Some of my participants were flexible in their time schedule and others were not due to work load but I assured them that I would be more flexible with their time preference and the number of times they want to do the interview. The following is the table of characteristics of my participants.

Table of Participants' Characteristics

Participant	Age	Gender	Education Degree	Number of years	Interview one	Interview two	Remarks
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As indicated in the table, 80 percent of my participants were women and only 20 percent of them were men. It is because it was hard to reach the men. I would make appointments with them and then would have a have a hard time to interview them. However, women were more punctual and interested in being a part of the research. A reason for this is because men have to work besides their teaching profession. Thus, I have more perspectives of the women in my research than the men.

Case Study Approach

My work had a lot to do with context of schools I was working in and the physical environment of classrooms. I interacted with people and collected data through my conversations with them and by observing their learning environment; classrooms and schools. I found phenomenology approach a useful tool for this purpose.

Life occurs in context, that is, the natural setting in which the people work, study, play, eat, drink, love, and in fact live” (Rossman and Rallis, 2003, P. 9).

Classroom Observation

Observation: “Observation takes you (researcher) inside the setting” (Rossman, & Rallis, 2003, p. 194).

Classroom observation helped me to discover issues that my participants had not talked about during the interview. It also helped me infer meaning from the actions of my participants in classrooms. I observed my participants' classrooms because (a) I wanted to get a sense of how classrooms looked physically, how many students were there, and what signs symbolized citizenship in classrooms and (b) to see what teaching methods teachers used to make learning happen. Also I wanted to see how teachers taught concepts of civic education and citizenship and how they translated and interpreted poems about civic education and citizenship to the class, and

to compare my interview findings with what I had observed in classrooms to see if there was any difference in the way teachers talked about civic and citizenship education and the interpretations they made in classrooms.

During my classroom observations, I used a recorder and took notes. Since most of the classrooms I observed were large, I could not capture the voice of students at the other end of the classroom. However, when I had a dialogue with students or when I asked them questions, I would go closer to them and ask them so that I could hear them well. Note taking also helped me with the parts that were not recorded.

About Researcher

The researcher's personal biography is the lens through which he sees the world. Gender, race, and ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, politics, and beliefs all affect any research project (Rossman, & Rallis, 2003, p. 10).

I am a second year Master's candidate at the Center for International Education, UMASS, Amherst. I conducted this research as part of my Master's program. From 2006 up to Aug 2007, I taught at the same school as an assistant professor. Most of the classes I taught contained in-service students who taught at primary and secondary schools in Herat. In almost every public school in Herat, there are teachers who are familiar with me. However, for my research I decided to work with teachers who had not taken any class with me at the School of Education. My position at the university and the fact that I had taught them could affect my relationship with my participants and the kind of data I might get from them. Still almost all my female participants had either seen me in their schools before or at the university or knew me through their colleagues who had taken my courses at the school of education. The fact that they knew me seemed to have dissimilar impacts on my participants. Mostly the younger participants seemed to talk to me more

frankly particularly about the problems they faced in their classrooms. However, older and more experienced teachers seemed to be frightened and thought that I was evaluating their work even when I had clearly explained my research project to them. Also, the fact that I came from a teaching background during my classroom observation not only did I focus on the concepts and contents of civic education and citizenship that were taught and discussed in the classroom but also on the pedagogical skills of teachers in how they pursued the lesson.

In general my background at the university made a very positive impact in reaching schools and my teacher participants. I could easily get permission from the Department of Education in Herat and started my work with schools without any problem. However, this could be harder for me as a young male to interview female teachers at schools and to convince some of the school principals that I needed to sit with their teachers for an interview. In one of the schools where the principal of school was new and apparently very cautious of everything, tried to sit next to me while I was interviewing the female teachers. I talked to him, showed him the letter from the Department of Education, and still he was not convinced. So, the next day, I talked to him first before starting my interviews with teachers. He tried to ignore me. Then I told him that if he didn't want me to conduct my research in his school, it was totally up to him. But I requested him to write in the back of the letter I had from the Department of Education his reasons for not letting me interview the female teachers. He refused to write and let me do my interviews. Later on, after one of my interviews, I went to him and explained my purpose for visiting his school again.

About Schools

Sultan Qiasudding Quri

Sultan Qiasudding Quri is located in the center of Herat city. The school was founded in 1938 and it was named after a great Afghan scholar. Sultan Qiasudding Quri is one of the oldest public schools in Herat. 7507 students attend this school all of whom are male students. This school employs a total of 196 teachers and all of them are male. So, the teacher student ratio is 1:38. Only 40 teachers have BA or BS who are called professional teachers. The school leadership team consists of the school principal, school head master, and two administrators all of whom are male. The school operates in three shifts during the day. It has recently established an office that connects to the parents of the students which is called “Students’ Parents Association” and according to the head master, it is active and they meet with the parents of the students monthly. The school also contains a Department of Discipliners which consists of a teacher who is the head of the department and 12 to 15 senior students who are members. These students walk around school during the school hours and make sure all students are in the classrooms in class hours. Also, if there is a conflict or an argument between two students, discipliners are authorized to interfere and mediate. Some of the discipliners hold sticks in their hands some times which means they are also authorized to punish students by corporal punishment. The school principal described their major problems as lack of space and lack of teachers.

Reasons for selecting Sultan Qiasudding Quri School

I selected Sultan Qiasuddin Quri School for several reasons. First, this is one of the oldest schools in Herat which has graduated the largest number of students of all schools in Herat. Most of the successful students from this school served Afghanistan in high positions like ministers, directors and other key political and social positions in the government of Afghanistan in the past few decades. Second, this school is geographically the closest school to the Department of Education and it is assumed that this school gets more attention for this department (a) because international visitors more often visit this school and (b) the historical background of this school makes it a focal point. And (C), I chose this school because it was all male school and I wanted to compare my research outcomes from this school with those from female schools. Furthermore, prior to starting my field work, I made an assumption that because this school has graduated very successful students who served the country before, the status of civic education and citizenship training would be different; perhaps because this school has had more professional teachers in the past than any other schools. For instance, my father who did his primary and secondary education at this school, always talks about his American instructors who were excellent in teaching as he says.

Tajrabawi High School

Tajrabawi is located in first district residential area in Herat city. The school was founded in 1969. The word Tajrabawi means experimental. It got this name because university students who want to become teachers come are required to come to this school and do practice teaching to fulfill the requirements of being eligible to teach. Since it was established, this school has closely

worked with the Teacher Training Institute in Herat. That is why the school is located in the same area as the School of Education in this city. It is a public school and 7379 students attend this school 3834 of them are male students and 3545 of them are female students which is 48 percent of the total number of students. This school employs a total of 192 teachers of whom 100 are female teachers. The school has separate buildings for male and female students. So, the teacher student ratio in female school is 1:35 and in male school, it is 1:42. The male school employs one teacher who holds a master degree and only 5 teachers who hold either a BA or BS. So the ratio between professional and non professional teachers in male school is 1:15. The female school has 45 teachers who either have a BA or BS. The ratio between professional and non professional teachers is 1:2. The female school leadership team consists of the school principal and school head master. And the male school leadership team consists of school principal, school head master and an administrator.

The female school operates in three shifts during the day and the male school operates 2 shifts in a day. Both schools have recently established an office that connects to the parents of the students which is called “Students’ Parents Association” Both schools also have a Department of Discipliners which consists of a teacher who is the head of the department and 10 to 15 senior students who are members of the department. These students walk around school during the school hours and make sure all students are in the classrooms in class hours. The only difference is that in female school the discipliners do NOT carry sticks and are not authorized to punish the students. If they see unauthorized students out of classroom in class hours, they report it to either the school principal or head master. However, in male school the discipliners are authorized to interfere and mediate and punish the students using a stick. Both schools consider lack of teachers and lack space and equipment as their major problems.

Reasons for selecting Tajrabawi High School

I selected the female section of Tajrabawi School for my research. Although the information above is about both male and female schools, I conducted my research at the female school. I got the information about the male school through one of my students. This student came from a research course that I taught at the school of education during my stay in Herat. However, the information about the female school comes through my research. There were several reasons I chose Female section of Tajrabawi School for my research. First, because it was an all female school which would give me a chance to do the comparison part of my research in terms of gender. Second, this school is located in a relatively richer, and more developed part of the city which would again give me a chance to compare it with the school I chose in a very poor residential area in Herat to see how such a difference influenced my research findings. And fourth, because Tajrabawi School has been one of the most successful female schools in Herat and I wanted to know what made this school more successful and how that would affect my research results.

Baghe Nazargah School

Baghe Nazargha School is located in a rural residential area on the east side of the city. The school was founded in 1989 and it is called Baghe Nazargah because it is located in a place called Baghe Nazargha which means “scene of the garden”. This is one of the newer schools in Herat. Province Reconstruction Team (PRT) of Italy built a new building for this school a few years ago. The children who come to this school mostly come from very poor families who live in

that area. It is a public school with 1456 female students. This school employs a total of 43 female teachers. So, the teacher student ratio is 1:34. 15 teachers have high school degree and 28 others hold a BA or BS. The school leadership team consists of the school principal and two head masters. The school operates in two shifts during the day. Female students come to school in the mornings and male students come to school in the afternoon.

Reasons for selecting Baghe Nazargah

I Selected Baghe Nazargah School because (a) this school was located in a remoter and poorer residential area (b) because this school had recruited many recently graduated and young female teachers, and (c) to see how such factors would affect my findings as shown in the table bellow.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a similar process of sorting, categorizing, and regrouping the data into piles or chunks that are meaningful (Rallis, & Sharon, 2003, p. 271).

I started the data analysis part of my research mostly in Amherst after I got back from Afghanistan. I first transcribed all my data of the interviews and observations then I sorted my data and categorized them into different themes. I went through my transcriptions again and put them in order under each theme. Then went through the list of all my themes and the data that came with it and selected the most relevant and important ones. After my themes and my raw data that matched were organized, I prepared an outline for my thesis report. The outline concluded of 4 chapters which are explained in conclusion part of chapter one in this paper. After getting feedback from my academic advisor on my outline, I started writing the first draft of my thesis.

For each theme, I put the inputs of my participants from the field, and while doing my analysis later I tried to consider the following questions for some of the relevant themes.

What can be inferred from what my participant said?

What could influence the belief of my participant the way she interpreted and explained an issue?

- What does “what was said” mean?
- Why it is important to know what was said?
- How does the interpretation of the participant could affect students?
- How do the specific characteristics of my participant such as; gender, age, work experience, and education level could affect the belief of the teacher about what is said?
- How do I (researcher) influence what is said?

- What assumption can I make from what is said?

Limitations and constraints

“No studies are perfect” (Rossman, & Raills, 2003).

This study also had its limitations. Some of the limitations were:

Time

The study of civic education and citizenship is very broad and it takes long time to conduct a full research. Although I started this research with the intention to work with a diverse ethnic group of Afghan teachers, due to limited time I could only work with teachers who mostly belonged to the Tajik ethnicity and were originally from Herat province. Furthermore, I intended to go to some schools in remote areas in villages in Herat; again, due to the limited time, I could only do my study in three schools two of which were in the city and the third one was not too far from the city but located in a more isolated corner of the city. Furthermore, for my data analysis I did not have sufficient time cover most of my findings, but I hope to use them for future research projects. Also, this paper might lack a detailed analysis of some of the data, which is also due to the time constrain since I have to finish my paper faster to prepare for defending my Master's.

Security

Security is an immense challenge on the way of improving education in Afghanistan. One day I was sitting at one of the schools when the principal received a call. She seemed nervous after talking on the phone, after she hanged up. I asked her why she looked upset and she said that one of her school kids had been stabbed by unknown armed people. Stabbing school girls and

putting asides on their faces had happened so many times before this too, for example, in the South according to BBC “attackers in Afghanistan have sprayed acid in the faces of at least 15 girls near a school in Kandahar” (BBC, Nov. 12, 2008).

Many families were concerned saying that the government could not protect its citizens. Fear seemed to have negative impacts on students’ life. In every single class I observed, I realized that it was very important for me to establish trust with the students so that they would feel free to express themselves when I asked them questions. It is to be mentioned that in schools that I interviewed students under 18, I got permission from the school principal.

Traditions

It is essential to respect the cultural values and traditions of Afghan people and particularly Afghan women. Afghan women specially care about their moral values. Therefore, in my interviews with female teachers, I tried my best to be learn about their specific character and how they seemed to be comfortable being interviewed. Some teachers had a sense of humor and others did not. Thus, it was important for me to discover this fact. One of my strengths of my interpersonal skills is to make dialogue atmosphere friendly by saying a relevant joke about the issue I am talking to my participant. This is even true when I talk to a university president or a professor. When I can find the sense of humor in my participant, I can better interact with them. However, there were some of my participant who did not feel comfortable even to smile. So, I tried to be very respectful but at the same time, I did not find it very easy to interact with them. Moreover, I can better understand people when I have eye contact with them. However, some of my female participants, though much older then me, did not seem to be very comfortable with direct eye contact, thus, I did not feel very comfortable during the interview.

During my classroom observations, I found students very shy. When I addressed a question to a group of 40 students, only 3 to 4 of them would volunteer to answer my questions. Girls with older dress who seemed to come from poorer families were particularly shy. However, starting a dialogue with them or telling them a short story from my experience or saying a joke, would make some of them talk. I found out that it was significantly important to speak to the language of kids and be like them when talking to them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on my understanding of literature of civic and citizenship education and the courses I had taken in qualitative and quantitative research, I mostly used the qualitative phenomenological approach for this study. I used interviews and observations mostly for collecting data. The specific instruments I used were; pens, notebooks, binders, and a recorder. I had 10 teacher participants from three different schools. I used a purposeful random technique in choosing my participants. This selection was based on teachers' age, gender, and years of work experience in school. I informed my participants about the primary goals of the study and how the results of this study were intended to help civic and citizenship education in schools in Afghanistan. I collected my field data in six weeks (June 16th 2009). I stored the data on my PC and kept a back up on a recorder and a flash memory. To protect the identities of my participants and insure confidentiality, I tried to avoid putting identifying words and phrases on my papers unless my participants had allowed me to do so. I let my participants know that I would not reveal any personal information that would identify them such as their names, address, position, etc.

I interviewed my participants in their departments, outside school building, and observed them in their classrooms. Participants knew that their participation was totally voluntary and with no financial compensation. They were informed that they could refuse to participate at any time. Also, for conformability of my findings, I tried to compare my findings to other valuable research papers on the topic. I also compared my findings to the literature of the issue in terms of the definition of civic terminology. For all my participants, this was their first experience being interviewed for a research and I believe they are now aware of the basic principles of research.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

In this part of my paper, I am going to shed light on the literature review of the issue, the way civics and citizenship education is taught in schools I visited for my research, and the effective ways that civics and citizenship should be taught in schools. The information comes from my interviews with school teachers, principals, and a few of the students and based on my school and classroom observations in addition to some readings about civics and citizenship. Furthermore, the paper will elaborate some of the core issues in schools that affect the concepts and status of civic education and citizenship in schools in Afghanistan. I will then do my analysis of some of the findings based on literature review of the issue, my understanding of the context of education in Afghanistan, and my interpretations of what I observed or heard from the people in the field. In the following chapter, I am going to present my recommendations, and suggestions that might hopefully contribute in improving the status of civic education in schools in Afghanistan and what needs to be done.

After going through some text books, I found that there were some lessons in that encouraged students to be productive citizens; lessons that talk about freedom, human rights, equality, and civil rights and responsibilities of Afghan citizens. However, a significant number of students I talked to after and during my classroom observations and a significant number of teacher participants knew very little about core civic concepts and their civic responsibilities and rights. Therefore, after some thoughts and oral analysis of my findings, I came to understand that

there are interventional issues that prevent teachers and students from understanding of concepts and knowledge of civic education and citizenship rights and responsibilities. Thus, along with the analysis of my data from the field, I will discuss some of such interfering issues and their impacts on school performance.

As soon as I started some dialogues with school teachers and students and observed some of their classrooms, I realized that still the memorization system is the dominant style of pedagogy in schools in Afghanistan. Teachers read a lesson, ask students to repeat it after them and assign students to write the lesson in their note books and bring them to class the next day. Directions in the text books also encourage memorization system, and very little critical thinking, analysis, or reflection from the students. Some of the text book directions that explain what students should do in the classroom and for their assignments are quoted in this chapter.

Both teachers and students seemed to have poor knowledge of civic and citizenship education and their understanding of citizen rights and responsibilities. Though many of the students I talked to had gave a common reason of their purpose for coming to school which was to “serve our country” very few of them could explain how and why. Girls were particularly unsure of their future career and how that would help themselves and their country.

What causes the poor status of civic education inside classrooms?

Low quality of education and gap between content and pedagogy

Teachers still use old fashion teaching methods. In most of the classrooms I observed be, regardless of grade level there was very little interactions among the students in the classroom. Except for one female class where students played a demonstration, other classrooms all looked

alike; the teacher reading a lesson, repeating words with the students, asking students to make sentences for the words, and assigning students to write the lesson in their notebooks. Even in the classroom where the demonstration happened, the teacher of the class was the only one who gave feedback about the demonstration while student could presumably contribute a lot to that. In other words, students' points of view were not valued in the classrooms. Teaching had more of a directive style telling students what to do and what meaning to make out of a lesson rather than letting them making meaning of their own interpretations and understandings.

Learning is a process for the students to learn, to understand, to make meaning of the concepts taught in the classroom, and for them to be able to utilize their knowledge and skills in day to day life (Gajda, 2008) ----does not happen in classrooms I observed in schools in Herat.

It was evident from what teachers and students were saying that their perception were to learn knowledge today and use it in the future. For example, a common answer I received from students about why they went to school was, "I go to school to become a teacher or a doctor in the future. This is while other students are not even sure about what they want to do with their knowledge in the future. It is like students do not consider themselves as citizens but consumers of knowledge. For them teachers are sources of knowledge who are there to transfer what they read in the book to the students and cover the contents. In fact, this is how teachers were taught in schools and in teacher training institutions. A part of the problem is the curriculum of higher education and the gap between curriculums of both ministries of Education and Higher Education. Concepts of citizenship and civic rights and responsibilities are hardly discussed in classrooms while teachers could link every lesson to civic responsibilities of the students and challenge them to think about their roles as citizens. This is because teachers lack pedagogical skills and do not have access to the contemporary knowledge of teaching. In other words, schools in Afghanistan

are isolated from all other schools in the world. There are several reasons for such isolation. (A) Lack of access to the internet and other sources to contact with schools around the world, (B) Majority of the teachers do not know enough English to communicate with the teachers in other parts of the world, and (C) problems with the job itself, such as long working hours, ratio among the students and teacher, lack of good administration and leadership, and lack of resources in school.

Another problem is with the way teachers define productive citizens. Teachers' interpretations and definitions of civic concepts contradict the way many educational theorists and experts define civic responsibilities, and citizenship.

“Civic education, whenever and however undertaken, prepares people of a country, especially the young, to carry out their roles as citizens. Civic education is, therefore, political education or, as Amy Gutmann describes it, “the cultivation of the virtues, knowledge, and skills necessary for political participation” (Crittenden, 2007, web page).

During my interviews, I asked all my participants what the word “citizen” meant to them and what they thought the qualifications of a good citizen were. Some of the responses I got from my participants were:

- 1) “A productive citizen is someone who is with people, is social, patient at the time of difficulties, and does not get angry at people” (respondent one, female school instructor).
- 2) “A productive citizen is like a family member, someone who respects others in the community like his family” (respondent 2, a male school instructor).
- 3) “Someone who is honest and has enough knowledge about his or her profession (respondent 3, a female school instructor).
- 4) “Someone who has tools and the authority to use them effectively” (respondent 4, female school teacher).

Students' responses (6th grade):

“Someone who helps the society is a good citizen. I want to help my society through teaching profession”.

“Someone who works and studies hard and through that can help the society in the future”.

“A good citizen is someone who can defend the country. I want to become a policeman in the future to do that”.

“A good citizen is someone who defends his/her country. I want to become a policewoman and I know that it is OK for women to be police”.

In terms of qualifications of a productive citizen, most common responses were:

“Someone social”, “Well behaved person”, “Helpful to the community”, “Honest, respectful, moral and educated”, “someone friendly”

Note: My participants gave me similar responses when I asked about civil rights and responsibilities of a citizen. For example, “A good citizen should be honest and respectful”.

To my surprise none of my participants talked about civic rights and responsibilities of a productive citizen neither the importance of civic education in understanding of the political system of the government. In most of their answers and explanations, my participants referred to citizenship responsibility merely in terms of social ethics. None of them talked about the civic responsibilities of the students in terms of applying their knowledge for the promotion of their country as students and future professionals. Neither did they talk about the importance of political and cultural awareness of a citizen to be a productive citizen.

I believe that the reason teachers and students look at civic education mostly as social awareness and knowledge of ethics and morals is because of how the society is culturally formed and the fact that such knowledge is the focus of the mosques. Many students start their pre-school education in mosques, for example, issues such as respect for elders, etc. Although social awareness and ethical responsibilities are important for the students to understand, it is not everything that a citizen needs to know. Teaching of professional responsibilities, political and cultural awareness is missing in schools. One reason for that is that teachers are afraid to talk about the political system of the country in the class. Afghan people have not experienced much freedom of speech, thus, are hesitant to get hurt by the people in power. In fact people had been isolated from long time ago. For example, from the time of King Mohammad Zaher, then the influence of Soviet Union, civil war, and later on the Taliban. However, now that the international community helps Afghanistan move towards a more democratic state, this country encounters so many challenges because of the broken infrastructures.

Do the Students learn in schools I visited?

“Educational reform must start with how students learn and teachers teach, not with legislated outcomes” (Brooks, & Brooks, 1999, p. 3).

So many of my teacher participants defined learning as “gaining and understanding knowledge”. The application of knowledge on the ground which is, indeed, the core value of gaining knowledge and the ultimate purpose of learning was missing in their definition. Teachers hardly seemed to make an attempt to make their classrooms student centered, and to motivate their students to think critically, and finally to make their classrooms achievement oriented. Findings show that encouraging creativity and critical thinking is crucial in learning.

Schools can expect to produce effective citizens only when their students encompass the ability to think critically, question candidly and when students demonstrate creativity, critic ideas, analyze issues and solve problems. Of course not all students would be expected to display the same degree of talent in all of these. However every individual student should be encouraged to demonstrate some degree of critical thinking and active participation based on their learning profile. Students' learning profile is different in terms of their learning style, talent, or intelligence profile (Tomlinson, & Allan, 2000). Research on child psychology shows that children naturally have the ability to think.

“Children are natural thinkers and that the ability to reason will develop as a general function of cognitive maturation” (Hester, 1994, p. 79).

Motivation

“Every single one of you (students) has something that you are good at. Every single one of you has something to offer. And you have a responsibility to yourself to discover what that is” (President Obama Sept., 2008 speech).

During my classroom observations, I realized that teachers did not seem to encourage students to participate in the classroom. A part of the problem was the large size-class that did not allow teacher to give at least most of the students a chance to participate in the class. However, the other problem was in teaching style and methodology. Teachers seemed to content just to lectures and did not put students in groups to discuss and talk.

Teachers seemed not to motivate their students to use their brains to think, reason, question, create, and solve problems in the class. As Hester quotes from Torrence and Myers (1971), “Motivation is the key to learning” (Hester, 1994, p. 36).

Moreover, teachers were emphasizing about moral science and encouraging students to be humble. This could too make students too shy and passive to questions anything that would raise their political awareness about political and cultural issues that surround them.

Teaching methods that I found more effective in classrooms

Storytelling

Storytelling is an accepted way of learning in schools in Afghanistan. Many of the stories are based on political, social and cultural changes throughout the history of Afghanistan, thus, contribute significant amount of civic education. Teachers tell stories in order to make the lesson more meaningful to their students. In early 90s when I was studying at a primary school in Herat, Afghanistan, hearing stories from my teachers was my most favorite part of the classroom.

Educational theorist Kieran Egan, in his book about “Teaching as storytelling, 1989” emphasizes that teaching through story telling is an effective teaching alternative to other content focused and traditional theories of teaching. According to him, storytelling is still a powerful approach through which students make meaning of what they learn.

There was a story about “ Hazrate Omar” the second Khalifa or leader of Islam teaches students about responsibility. In this story, Hazrate Omar who is the governor of his place and the leader of Muslims neglects to fix a bridge which will one day cause damage to a pedestrian. Because of this negligence, Hazrate Omar, faces punishment by God though he was a leader. This teaches students that no matter in what position you are, you are responsible for your deeds and for your job.

In fact, storytelling seemed to be an effective method of awakening students’ imaginations. Research shows that children learn more effectively through creating images in their minds.

“Childcare's imaginations are the most powerful and energetic learning tools” (Egan, 1989, p. 2).

I believe stories that are told in the classrooms in Afghanistan have a deep root in the history of this country.

“The story form is a cultural universal; everyone everywhere enjoys stories” (Egan, 1989, P. 2).

However, merely telling stories and not letting students discuss, analyze, and inquire what the story means to them and how it helps them in real life is not as useful. If the goal of a school is to produce effective citizens who will build up their social, political, and professional life upon the experiences of such stories, students should be allowed to reflect on such stories. Reflection of students on stories they here will particularly help them analyze the past events and learn from what went right or wrong in the country. Some of these stories express success experiences and some failure and students could be given the opportunity to root out and reasons why a story was a failure and why another was a success and what they learn from it in real life or what they can adopt from it.

I observed a class where the lesson for that day was about “Unification”. The instructor read the lesson from the book, asked students to reread the lesson, and then she said the following story to the class about the importance of being united. I could see the same excitement in faces of many of the students the same way as I was excited during my primary education.

“Once upon a time, there was an old man who had four children. He had always tried to make her children understand that it was important for them to be united but every time he had failed. One day when he was about to die, he asked his children to come to him. The children

came to their father's house. Their father told them that he was dying and that he wanted to give them some advice. This time he did not talk to his children why he wanted them to be united, instead he illustrated what he wanted them to understand. He gave them a bunch of sticks that were tight together and asked them to break the sticks. Because the sticks were tight together and made a strong bunch, all brothers tried hard but could not break them. Then the old man separated the sticks one by one and asked them again to try to break them. This time, his children could easily break the sticks. So, he told them, that if they stayed together and were united, no one would be able to break them but if they had dissension, anyone could easily break them".

The instructor made the class more interesting for the students by telling the story. Students seemed to enjoy listening to her. However, the teacher did not make any attempt to ask the students what they had learned from this story and what it meant to them to be united. Instead she asked the students to repeat the same story again. However, she could ask students to tell their own stories about unification.

Other Lessons in the Text Books

Some lessons which are about nation (watan), talk about preserving the country from the harm of foe; for example, fighting to free the country from foreigner foe. Very few lessons talk about fighting against illiteracy and ignorance and how important that is for a free country. Children of that age need not to know about freeing their country and preserving their heritage by hating or fighting others. Instead, teachers could encourage their students to free their country from ignorance and illiteracy and give them hope that they are the ones who should fight illiteracy in the country. Such encouragement from the teacher would motivate students to think of themselves as part of change and make them feel important as students who can be a part of

change as they come to school. Furthermore, the use of such words might distract students' minds by the sad stories of war or even give them a defensive attitude to them.

Through my school visits and interviews with teachers and students I decided that family is the primary or perhaps the most influential place where students build up their political and social views. Schools do not seem to be a place for the students to build up such views partially independent from their parents' political and social views. (A) because school curriculum does not encourage students to think independently but to accept fixed concepts said in the book, (b) because common teaching styles mostly encourage memorization and not analysis and critical thinking, and (C) because teachers are afraid to encourage students to questions their own ways of thinking or what they bring from their families. Children are usually not allowed in Afghanistan to question or even explore what their parents tell them at home. For example, if their parents favor a particular political party in the country, the children are expected to support the same party. Or if the father of the family votes for someone in the presidential elections, children over 18 usually vote for the same person even if that person is not necessarily the right person to lead the country. I have seen so many parents who advice their children to be quiet when elders are in a room. Even some parents think that for their children to be quiet and not to question anything, it's a part of their ethics at home.

“A family can be thought of as a complex relational system. The characteristics and development of one child are thought to be associated with the rest of the family members’ characteristics and development” (Hall, 2008, p. 64).

Thus, it was my understanding that families are the major source that children are dependent on and learn about their world but is that going to help them become more effective citizens?

I believe that many parents even those educated are not quite familiar with today's progress of science and technology both of which have impact on the new political and social arena. If they favored a particular political view, they continue to believe in the same way as they have not been exposed to new schools of thoughts and political concepts. Now, whether or not that kind of view helps the country, school children continue to support their parents and usually father's view points. I believe this is true for the social life of the children too. If the parents have not been happy with a particular social group or even an ethnicity, children will most probably continue to harbor the same way of thinking as their parents; this may not be good for the country's stability.

Schools could make attempt to challenge students to think of a bigger picture of the world they live in and to learn about basics of the different political systems, beliefs, and other diversities of not just their country but the world. Otherwise, it might be difficult for the new generations to deal with the new challenges of the world of economy, politics, and other global issues easily.

“Humans are social creatures whose surviving and thriving are very dependent upon their social competence. Children and adults use the information from others to help them see themselves, at least from a perspective separate from their own”(Hall, 2008, p. 87).

Moreover, mere focus on the teaching of courtesy, students fail to develop their critical thinking and questioning issues. The classroom atmosphere was not open for the students to allow time for thinking and asking questions.

“ Teachers who believe that their task is to educate the Socrates within students can make the classroom a place for asking as well as answering questions” (Hester, 1994, P. 48).

In most of my classroom observations I realized that many of the students seemed frightened to pose questions.

After I observed a 7 grade classroom, I had a short dialogue with one of the students:

Me: Hi, what's your name?

Student: Hi, my name is ...

Me: I enjoyed sitting in your classroom. Do you think you understood everything your teacher taught today?

Student: um, no not everything.

Me: Then why did you not ask her about the things you didn't understand?

(The student paused and seemed to be lost what to say, and then she said,)

Student: I don't want to make my teacher unhappy by giving her wrong answers.

Me: Do you think your teacher will punish you if you make mistakes?

Student: She may not punish me but if I ask a wrong question she will think I am stupid and my classmates will laugh at me.

As a result, I found out that so many of the students are afraid to explore new ideas because of the classroom environment.

Through classroom observation, my overall impression was that teaching of civics is more about how students should live their social life. The traditional and dominant teaching and learning theories practiced in the schools I observed seem to prevent students from broadening their horizons, thinking about their political and professional life as Afghan citizens. In order to have productive citizens in the future, schools in Afghanistan should prepare children to think about their social, political and professional life and not just learn-how to behave in the

community and how to respect elders. None of the teacher participants related their lessons to what students as productive citizens could do for their country.

One can acknowledge and admire the efforts schools make to make students' better people in their social life. That is a significant compliment for a good and productive citizen. The emphasis of schools on social life is also understandable when we take a look at the historical context of Afghanistan. Living together and being with people is a great value for Afghan people. And because Afghan people have experienced so many difficulties in life and were always victim of war and politics, they built their social and family life one dependent on another. For example, children in most of the places are dependent on their parents until they have grow up enough to be able to work and bring money home to support their siblings. Girls were and in most remote areas are still expected to stay home and boys to go out and work. For children and even the youth, to sit quiet where elders are talking has been a common tradition. It is considered a sign of respect and politeness for the kids and the youth to be quiet where elders are also there.

Learning to Apply in Real Life?

“Education is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (Brooks, & Brooks, 1999, p. 9).

Brooks, 1999 argue that schools and teachers could make learning both a process for living and a preparation for learning in the future. They emphasize on student centered schools and helping students understand dynamics of education. They also state that for students school should be a place for exploring new ideas, posing questions, expanding curiosities, and learning information to overcome challenges and problems.

However, my impression was that learning to apply was not encouraged in classes I observed during my research in Herat. Memorization and repetition system is strongly in place. Even new teachers who got their bachelor after the Taliban did not seem to encourage creativity and critical thinking in their classrooms. As someone who taught at the school of education in Herat, I believe that a part of the problem is that teachers are taught in the same way at the teacher training courses. My experience was that courses at the school of education were mostly focused on content rather than pedagogy. At least for the first three years of teacher training there is very little teaching of pedagogy. For the last two semesters students at the school of education get a chance to go to schools and practically teach and be observed by their teacher. However, because there are many teacher students in every class, in-service teachers get to go to a classroom only for one or two practices, teach and be assessed by a professor from the school of education.

A second dilemma is that some of the teachers do their BA in one subject but teach a different subject in school. One of my participants had done her BS in Chemistry, but she was teaching Dari language in school. I know some other teachers who majored in science departments but teach social science subjects in schools. Teaching social science subjects require specific pedagogical skills that presumably teachers did not get in science classes and vice a verse.

And a third problem I found was with the pedagogical directions and practices in school text books that are not designed to address a student centered classroom and students' creativity and critical thinking in the classroom. Research shows that creativity and critical thinking if integrated and encouraged in activities in the classroom, increase students performance.

“Critical and creative thinking, when infused into every lesson into every classroom, will enhance student performance in all areas of the curriculum including the ability to analyze issues and form judgments, as well as, to anticipate the actions of others” (Hester, 1994, p. 9)

Chapter 4

Notes from the Field

National Symbols

In most of the classrooms I observed, I heard three names from the instructors; Ahmad Shah Baba, Mirwais Nicka, and Malalay Maywand. These characters are considered national heroes of Afghanistan. Instructors encouraged their students to respect these characters and to preserve the heritage they left behind. Although some of the students I talked to knew very little about these characters, most of them were familiar with their names and considered them as national figures. But among many of the national symbols of this country throughout the history, why are these three names remembered more often and how knowledge about these people affect civic understanding of the students?

Ahmad Shah Baba Durani (1723 – 1773)

Founder of Durani Empire, Ahmad Shah Durani was the first elected king of Afghanistan. Ahmed Shah Durani is known as “Ahmad Shah Baba” (The father). He is known as the most trustworthy and loyal commander of Nadershah (1736–1747) Persian Empire. Ahmad Shah Baba ruled Punjab, Lahor, Kashmir, Sindh, Mughal India, and on the west he disintegrated Afsharid Empire. In 1756 he invaded New Delhi, India. In 1750s Durani Empires was one of the largest Islamic Empires in the world (Momand, 2000).

Ahmad Shah Baba was an outstanding general and a just ruler. He governed with the help of a council of chiefs, each responsible for his own people. Thus all matters of national issues

were centralized, but each chief ruled his own tribe. This kind of arrangement won the support of the people, and was prevailing political pattern in Afghanistan until the monarchy ended in 1973. Ahmad Shah Baba's vast realm soon broke apart. Afghans were better fighters than administrators (Momand, 2000, web page).

Students were familiar with the name of Ahmad Shah Baba and considered him as a national hero. However, their information was limited to that point. Teachers were doing a good job of highlighting some of the good characteristics of Ahmad Shah Baba such as; just leader and trustworthy ruler. However, none of the teachers encouraged students to talk in groups or individually why it was important to be just and trustworthy or to give examples of the people they trusted and why. In other words teachers could ask students to reflect on the life of Ahmad Shah Baba and what lessons they learned from his life. Teachers could also have their own reflections on the lesson. For instance, the instructor could tell her students that Ahmad Shah Baba is considered a national honor because (a) he was the first elected king of the country who was elected by the elders of the country (b) because of his fame in trustworthiness and loyalty, and (c) because of his justice. Then the teacher could talk about the importance of each of these terms or let students talk to each other why it was important for Afghan citizens to raise such qualifications.

Malalay Maywand

Malalay is known as a legendary Afghan woman. She was daughter of a Sheppard. She fought British on July 27th of 1880 in Maiwand War. When she noticed that Afghan men were losing the war to the British, she took her veil off, raised it as a flag and shouted and said,

“Young love, if you do not fall in the battle of Maiwand, By God someone is saving you as a symbol of shame”

“With the drop of my sweethearts’ blood, shed in defense of motherland, will I put a beauty spot on my forehead, such as would put to shame the rose in the garden”. Malalay was killed in this war (Momand, 2000, webpage).

Both teachers and students knew Malalay as a national figure and a hero. In one of the classrooms where the instructor was talking about Malalay, she just narrated the poems, and talked about her war against the British. The teacher merely read the lesson and made no attempt to encourage her students to talk what they had learned from this lesson. She herself could reflect on it by saying that now that it is time for Afghan people to rebuild their country, they should be legends in reconstruction of their country by preserving it from illiteracy. She could also give them the inspiration that as women they could be gain fame in learning and working hard and becoming expert doctors, musicians, artists, professors, and any other professions so that the future generations would remember them as leaders of rehabilitation.

Also, Malalay was daughter of a poor shepherd which means fame is not only for the rich and people who have power. During my classroom observation, I noticed that girls who were poorly dressed and seemed to be poorer than other students, were more quiet and shy. The instructor could encourage those students by saying that they didn’t have to be rich or from the elite family to be a leader. Malalay grew up in a poor family but today the country recognizes her as a legend and a national honor of the country.

Mirwais Khan Hotak (1673 – 1715)

Mirwais Khan, born in Kandahar province, was the founder of Hotaki dynasty. Many Afghans call him “ Mirwais Nicka (Grandfather). He is considered as Afghanistan first great nationalist (Momand, 2000). In his time Persian Shia Rulers ruled Kandahar outrageously (Wikipedia). Momand further states that Mirwais Khan fought against Persians and defeated the

Persian Empire in 1709. Many historians state that Mirwais Khan did not fight for power but he fought for the independence of his nation to put an end to the cruelty of Georgian (1703 – 1709).

A quote from Mirwais Khan's speech

OH, you Afghan tribe, I say this with faith and truthfulness that all I did was for your freedom; freedom is such a precious gift that in order to achieve that it maybe necessary to engage in trickery (translation, 2009).

He said this because he killed Georgian by playing a trick. He invited him to a banquet and then killed him.

The same recommendation applies for Mirwais Khan's lesson. The instructor could explain to the students what it meant to be a nationalist. She could also talk about the bad results of cruelty, in addition, to talking about the importance of freedom in human's life.

In all three lessons, the instructors could encourage students to work in groups and discuss why these three figures are considered as national symbols and what some of the things were that they could learn from these heroes. However, the teacher could help students by describing how different situation was now from then. This means that if Malalay was a legend in freedom, it is now time for being pioneers in rehabilitation of Afghanistan.

Women and the New Era

Women are the twin halves of men. (Prophet Mohammad)

In order to understand how schools address gender issues, I mostly focused on document analysis. I went through the textbooks since I could not find any language curriculum in the Department of Education.

In most of the text books, I noticed that there were more pictures and names of boys and men than women and girls. For example, in the sixth grade text book, on page 19 there is a picture

of boys playing football, page 15 of the same text book in a lesson about mother, only boys are sitting around their mother, or page 21, there is a picture of a family but the conversation is only between the boys of the family.

One of my participants said, “ I am happy that women are making good progress after the Taliban and they get opportunities to prove that they can also work in their community along with the men and that they are not different. But I am concerned that still many men do not want to admit that women are equal to men and they have the potential to prove that”.

She also added that some of the students’ parents believed that it was enough for their girls to get education to learn how to read and write. That’s why, she said, we ask parents to come to school so that we can convince them that their girls are talented and that they should allow them to continue their education to a higher level.

This participant said that although, some of the parents refuse to come to school, she and other teachers have been successful in building trust with few of them, however, there are parents who take their girls out of school after grade eight or nine and force them to get married, she added. Fathers, she said, refuse to talk to the school members and mothers have no authority at home to send their girls to school even when they want it.

What new books say about women’s rights?

Women, have equal rights as men in social and family life and with no gender discrimination they have the right to work, get education, and own properties. Women can take part in social, political, economic, and cultural movements the same as men (6th grade text book, p. 65).

This is a quote from a newly published text book. The older books that students use in classrooms do not say this. Old books mostly refer to women as mothers only. Only a few of the teachers had new books. Although this quote contradicts the way some people look at women’s

rights in Afghanistan. Female teachers said the same thing in their interviews. However, during my classroom observation, I noticed that teachers did not encourage the students to think about their rights as citizens, probing questions, and challenge their teachers by talking about their life.

The teacher could, for example, encourage her students to talk in groups about what it meant to be a woman in their community, and if there were problems, how they could overcome such problems and challenges through education.

When I asked one of my participants what she thought about women's life condition in Afghanistan, she said that fortunately, in the past few years (after the Taliban) women's life has been getting better. She believed that before women only served family and stayed home but now they could work along with men. She was happy that there are women in the parliament; there are Afghan business women, teachers, and other professions but it didn't mean women had equal rights as men. However, she believed that yet, the life condition of women was not satisfactory. "Strict traditions make the life of women bitter" she said. She said that she taught her students about the wife of Prophet Mohammad was a business woman but if women's rights were taken away from them in the society, it was because of old traditions and beliefs. "We still have problems with the narrow minded people in our country who do not think that men and women have equal rights and women can too participate in the reconstruction of their country" she added.

The use of masculine and feminine names in Dari text books

Third Grade text book

- a. The use of names and nicknames of masculine..... 296 times
- b. The use of names and nicknames of feminine68 times

Forth Grade text book

- a. The use of names and nicknames of masculine308 times
- b. The use Names and nicknames of feminine..... 66 times

Fifth Grade text book

- a. The use of names and nicknames of masculine, 179 times
- b. The use of names and nicknames of feminine,.....92 times

Sixth Grade text book

- a. The use of names and nicknames of masculine,.....102 times
- b. The use of names and nicknames of feminine,.....56 times

Seventh Grade text book

- a. The use of names and nicknames of masculine, 413 times
- b. The use of names and nicknames of feminine,.....101 times

In general, names like; Prophet, Follower (male), father, mother, Malek, Sultan, are used more often and are considered as a name in this graph.

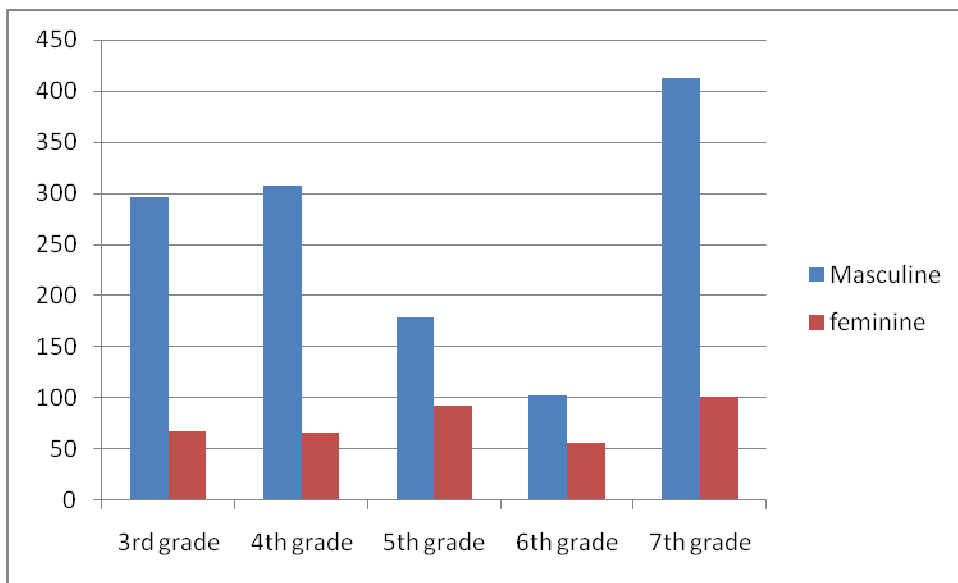


Chart 1: Gendered name and nickname use in Dari language text books grades 3-7
Source: Thesis author's analysis, summer 2009

Hallal and Haram

Hallal and Haram are two religious terms. Hallal (lawful, authorized) means something in harmony with the Islamic laws, and Haram (Unlawful) means something forbidden by Islam. These two terms are common to hear about in schools in Afghanistan. Out of school, Muslims and particularly Muslim travelers mostly refer to Haram and Halal in terms of food and drink. For example, they do not eat meat that is not koshered or they do not drink any drink that contains alcohol. However, in schools these terms are taught with a broader definition. One of my teacher participants said this,

“ Halal means when people work hard and as a result of their hard work they earn money. Halal and Haram also means choosing between the right and wrong path. For example, stealing, saying lies, and being unjust are all Haram. Students should remember not to say lie, not to be unjust, and not to steal other peoples' properties and this is a recommendation of the Almighty God”.

The concepts of Hallal and Haram are very important in Muslims life. In most of the classrooms where teachers talked to their students about Hallal and Haram, they gave almost same definition of encouraging their students to avoid harming others, saying lie, and being unjust. However, the instructors could also talk about what it meant for the students to distinguish between Hallal and Haram as responsible citizens and how that would affect their work for their country. Teachers only taught about Haram and Hallal from religious point of view. The teacher could, for instance, ask her students how these two concepts affect them in their work place in the future or how they would deal with Haram and Hallal in their daily life as responsible citizens.

A Demonstration about Being a Good Citizen

Students of seventh grade at Tajrabawi School played a demonstration.

There were 3 characters in this play.

- Khalil, a good patriotic person
- Asad, someone against peace
- Naeim, mediator

Khalil is working in a public garden and planting flowers and trees.

Asad: What are you doing Khalil?

Khalil: Planting trees to make my country look green and beautiful

Asad, Oh, you have got a long tongue these days, Ok, don't talk to me like this and remember, I don't want to see these things anymore!

Khalil: No, you can't stop me, it's for our county, for peace!

Asad: That is none of my business; I don't want to see these things anymore. I'll teach you a lesson tonight!

Khalil:, addressing to the audience: See how bad this guy is. I'm doing this for my country, I don't where this guy is coming from?"

Asad, walking somewhere on a different day and running by Naeim

Asad: Come, Naeim, I want to tell you something.

Naeim: Oh, what is it?

Asad: You see what these are (showing him some money) You know what these are, right?

Naeim: Yeah,

Asad: Ok, you have to do something for me and I will give you all this money

Naeim: What is it?

Asad: Will you do that?

Naeim: Yeah, anything

Asad: Go and take Khalil from his home, and kill him tonight. He is doing things for this country that I don't like.

Naeim: No, it is a sin. I'm not going to do that. After years of hardship, we are building peace and you want to ruin that! I don't want your money!

Asad: See I have money and power, so if you don't do that, I'll kill you too!

Naeim: Ok, give me the money and I'll do that!

Asad, It's yours. Go, and do your job now!

The mediator who witnessed Khalid and Naeim talking says to Naeim, " Look, don't listen to Asad, he is a bad guy, and he is against peace in our country. We lost so many nice people in this country, So, let's be nice to each other.

Naeim, coming back to Asad,

Naeim: Here, get your money back. I don't want to kill my countryman.

Asad: Oh, I gave you much more than this, and now you come back and you haven't done anything?

Naeim: I don't want to destroy my county for money! If my friend had not stopped me from killing Khalil, I would have already killed that innocent guy! You should remember that you are making a big mistake. We all have to appreciate the good works of others in this country!

Asad: Maybe Khalil gave you more money or what?

Naeim: No, he didn't give me money; I don't want to destroy my county! God loves peace and it's God's order that we should work on peace! Go, and apologize!

Asad: Oh, yeah, you are right!

Naeim: With peace we have freedom. During the war we were like birds in a cage. Now, we are free, like a free bird that can fly anywhere! See how beautiful it is!

Asad, Oh, you are right! I should go to Khalil Ahmad and apologize! Oh, God, please forgive me!

Both Asad and Naeim come to Khalil and apologize!

Khalil thanks them and encourages them to live in peace and harmony!

Quotes from the Text Books

After classroom observations and going through the text books, I noticed that the quotes in the books do not encourage student centered class. Neither do they encourage critical thinking nor creativity of the students in classrooms.

Nation

Nation was the title of a lesson in 7th grade book. The teacher read the following passage from the text book for her students.

“A nation that does not strive for its pride does not deserve prosperity. The intellectual human resource of our country (Afghanistan) is the result of thousands of years of efforts of our ancestors; such resource means that we should promote and build up our country suitable to today’s world countries and the way its great name deserves” (p. 7).

The teacher read the lesson from the book. Then she translated some of the vocabulary of that lesson to the students and asked them to repeat the words after her. She then asked a few of her students to come to the front of the classroom and reread the lesson. Almost half of the class time passed. Then she read the lesson again for the students who didn’t understand the lesson and several times asked the students if they could read the lesson and understood what it said. Again she asked another student to read the lesson and repeat the vocabulary which were written on the flash cards. She also asked students to make sentences for each vocabulary. And at the last moments of the class she did exactly what the text book asked the teacher to do. This is what the book directs the teacher to do:

Directions for practice in text books

- “Assign students to write half a page about patriotism” (p. 7)
- “Assign students to find the ancient names of Afghanistan and its important cities and write them in different inks and bring them to class tomorrow”.

The teacher assigned students to write half a page about patriotism, and find the ancient names of Afghanistan and its important cities as directed in the text book. “We will start our new lesson tomorrow” said the instructor.

Such method of teaching was not uncommon in most of the classrooms I observed. But does what happens in the classroom help students learn about their civic rights and responsibilities? Do the students learn, understand and have the skills to apply the knowledge they gain in the classroom in real life?

Looking at the definition of civic education, it is understandable that this lesson “The Nation” contains significant issues about civic education. For example, the teacher could use the time of the class more effectively by letting students to read the lesson silently and then to say or write a couple of sentences of their own about “patriotism”. The teacher could also engage students in groups to talk about the vocabulary of the lesson and what they meant to them. For example, students could talk about the human resource of Afghanistan and their role as human resource of the country. The instructors could also assign students to write about their role as Afghan citizens for in building up their country. The lesson has a great clue to encourage students to learn about other countries of the world. Thus, the teacher could assign students to learn something about one of the countries they liked or the teacher could specify the names of the countries to her students and assign them to learn about them and to compare them to their own country. Understanding about other countries of the world is an important part of students’ knowledge about civic education and citizenship.

Shaikh Abu Ali Sina

Shaikh Abu Ali Sina Husain was one of the most famous scholars of the world. His father was from Balkh Afghanistan. He wrote many books and contributed significantly in the world of medicine. His ideas are still used in the world of science and medicine both in the East and the West.

The instructor read the lesson and simply asked a few of the students in the classroom to reread the lesson.

Students are inspired when they read about a great scholar who lived simply but achieved significantly in his or her life. Abu Ali Sina gained knowledge and contributed generously to the world. Such is knowledge of civic education. If the teacher could put students in discussion groups to talk about the life style of Ali Sina, his inspirations, and his skills and dispositions, such activities could significantly improve students civic information in one and at the same time inspire them to be more active and motivated in their school work and their life. Therefore, teaching about such successful characters and particularly that they were Afghan citizens could make the teaching more meaningful and concrete. The instructor could ask the students to reflect on the life of Ali Sina and talk about what made him such a successful and famous character and what inspired him to help the world with his knowledge and skills. Also, she could ask students to talk about what they learnt from the life of Ali Sina. By posing such questions chances are that the teachers and the schools produce more Ali Sinas in the future who would serve their country and the world.

Directions to the instructor

- “Assign students to memorize the biography of Inbe Sina” (Grade 7th p. 25).

- “Dear students! Write a paragraph about Inbe Sina which should not be less than ten lines”
(p. 25).

Knowledge

“Oh, teacher!

Enlighten me, what is knowledge?

What is knowledge that makes the universe?

(Knowledge that makes the universe) comes with action

Such as a tree that produces fruit

(7th grade p.26)

Teacher’s interpretation of this poem

“The students ask their teachers what knowledge is, the knowledge because of which the world exists. And the teacher tells her students that knowledge is like a tree and the fruits of the tree are the actions. So, if you have knowledge but you do not use it, you are like a useless tree that does not produce any fruits”.

The instructor finished her translation and interpretation of the poem. She reminded students that she would start a new lesson the next day. Most often teachers teach their students based on the directions of the text book.

The book Directions to the instructors

- “Assign students to write a short paragraph about knowledge” (7th grade, p. 26).
- “Assign students to change the forth line of the poem into statement” (7th grade, p. 26).

When I listened to the whole poem by the teacher, I expected that she would have a lot to share with the students, hear from them, and have them talk about their definition of knowledge. However, the teacher merely translated the poem which did not really explore the details and

depth of each verse of the poem. Neither did the text book give clear instructions for the teacher about how she could engage students in better understanding of the lesson and the importance of knowledge in their lives.

Knowledge is defined as “the range of one’s information or understanding or “familiarity, awareness, or understanding gained through experience or study” (knowledge, 2009).

Based on this definition, the instructor could encourage students to talk about their knowledge and how their knowledge has impacted their life. This would give students more confidence and would make them think. The teacher could also ask students to analyze the poem, for example, asking students to get into groups and talk about the poem. Why the world is created based on knowledge? Why is someone who does not use his or her knowledge in action like a tree that does not have fruit?

Helping students to probe such questions, or preparing similar questions based on the contents of the lesson would make the class more effective and would meet the goals of the schools to produce more effective citizens.

Individual Rights

Going through the text books from 4th to 7th grade, I did not find any lessons that talked about individual rights of the students. None of my participants related any lesson to the rights and responsibilities of the students.

I believe when students understand that as human beings and citizens of Afghanistan they have rights and responsibilities, they will feel empowered to utilize their rights to perform their civic responsibilities. It is particularly true in the context of Afghanistan where students do not usually hear anything from their parents and their schools about their rights as individuals.

Freedom

One of the titles of the of a 6th grade text book that captured my attention was about “Freedom”. I asked a female school teacher to teach this lesson in her classroom with my presence. It was a short poem. After the teacher read the lesson and some other students repeated it, I got a chance to interact with the students. I asked if any of the students wanted to volunteer to talk about freedom. I had this dialogue with one of the students.

Researcher: “Why is freedom important in humans’ life?”

Student: “Freedom is very important for human beings. Freedom improves our life. Without freedom, we cannot do anything”.

Researcher: “What does freedom and being free mean to you”?

Student: “ For example, if our families do not let us to come to school, we are not free and we cannot get education. Now we are free to come to school and to serve our country in the future”.

Researcher: “Ok, thanks, but what service do you want to provide for your country and why”?

Student: “If my family would allow me, if my family would allow me I want to continue my education to a graduate level and hopefully become an artist”.

(When she said that she wanted to become an artist with a face full of fear, all students laughed).

Student: “Of course if my family would allow me, she repeated again”.

Researcher: “What kind of artist do you want to become?”

Student: “I like the art of singing” (She did not dare to say she wanted to become a singer)

Researcher: “Very good. Good luck! So, you may want to do your undergrad at the School of Fine Arts!

This conversation encouraged other students to talk to me. A 12 year old female student stood up and after her introduction, said that she had made a poem of her own about freedom. She had a picture of a pigeon in her hand and a poem written under the picture.

Come, come my pigeon
And fly over my head

Oh, my beloved pigeon
Oh, my beloved pigeon

Land on the ground
And eat from the seeds of love

Oh, my beloved pigeon
Oh, my beloved pigeon

I love you, like my soul; for
You are the symbol of peace
You are the symbol of love

Oh, my beloved pigeon
Oh, my beloved pigeon

For the existence; you exist
You exist that we exist

Oh my beloved pigeon
Oh my beloved pigeon

I hope I did a fine job of translation of this poem. But in Persian language, the native language of the student, the poem was very touching and well written.

Later on, I started a dialogue with some other students and asked them about their dreams for the future. Neither of the students shared anything about their dreams in their personal life which is not something I expected differently. Because of the traditions in Afghanistan, children are too shy to speak about their future plans and particularly to say anything about their personal life desires. Because students know very little about their rights and responsibilities as children, they have not built their self confidence; this was mostly true for female students. I talked about my own future plans and encouraged the students to share theirs with me.

Student one: “I come to school to learn and then serve my country. I want to serve my country by becoming a police”.

Student two: “School will help us (students) when we grow up. We will be able to become engineers, medical doctors, policemen so that we can serve our county. I personally like to become a medical doctor”.

Student three “I want to become a teacher”.

I believe that because of the negative consequences of war, existence of restrictive traditions in the families, and lack of a civic mission at schools, students are shy and feel insecure to talk about themselves.

Quotes and Sayings

Children have rights as human beings and also need special care and protection (the UN).

It is my experience that in Afghanistan quotes and sayings of scholars, elders, and famous educators are read or told to the children as advice of their ancestors as powerful words that guide towards success.

For the schools to teach students about their individual rights, I believe that the instructors could bring quotes from the UN about children’s rights and let the students analyze the quotes, think about them, and reflect on them. The translation of the Charter of the United Nations in Persian could be found on the internet and in book stores. Teachers who do not have access to the internet could ask for help from other teachers who do have access to the document and they could share it with each other. Although some of the quotes in the charter of the UN look ideal with all global problems that exist, such quotes could broaden the horizon of the students, and encourage them to believe more in themselves as a member of human family.

Furthermore, such quotes may help students in better understanding of their rights and responsibilities as the citizens of Afghanistan. However, it is important that the teachers would let students read the quotes silently, think about them, relate them to their personal life, probe questions, and discuss them with their classmates. Also, the teachers could encourage their students to talk about the quotes, ask their parents about the United Nations, why they call it the United Nations, and questions of this kind. The teacher could tell students what it means that Afghanistan is a member of the United Nations.

It is also important that teachers be well aware of the family traditions of the children so that they can help them broaden their horizon and then to share their knowledge with other family members. Schools could also raise parents' awareness through students. Knowing about the UN and what rights children have as members of the human family is very important for the students, teachers and the families. At this transitional time in Afghanistan, for some people any new idea could be considered as a Westerner idea that is to be imposed on them. That is why some of my participants emphasized on an Islamic and Afghani democracy for Afghanistan.

One of the branches of the United Nations is UNICEF. UNICEF is mainly concerned about children's rights and protection who are under 18. UNICES has its own principals based on an agreed convention which is set up on the bases of various traditions and cultures of the world. This convention protects the individual rights and dignity of children regardless of their gender, race, language, religion, wealth, birth status, and opinions the same as every other human being. This convention is internationally recognized the principals of which are unchangeable and are aimed to include all basic human rights such as; civic, cultural, economic, political and social rights (UNICEF).

The four core principles of the Convention are non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child (UNICEF).

Schools in Afghanistan could provide their students with such information. Not only this information would expand students' horizons but would also give them courage to ask for their rights and observe others' rights.

The UN convention sets out children's rights in 54 articles. However in here, I am going to include a few of them that have more relevance to the life of children in Afghanistan. I will then explain how lack of such knowledge has affected the students' life in schools in Afghanistan and how the understanding of such concepts might make the life of children better in schools in Afghanistan.

Article 4

The government has a responsibility to make sure your (children) rights are protected. They must help your family to protect your rights and create an environment where you can grow and reach your Potential.

Although the international community and the government of Afghanistan try to help families to improve children's life in Afghanistan, many children seem to have very little support from their families and the government. I believe that the best that the family does in Afghanistan is to feed their children and protect them from dying of hunger. Rather than that, most of the families are unable to support their children with school work, better nutrition and health, and help their children reach their desires. In most of the classrooms I observed, I realized in the appearance, behavior, and outfit of the students that they seemed to suffer either from lack of good nutrition, health, or mental disorders as a result of the bad consequences of war, poverty, and

lack of security. Though a couple of schools that I observe are more privileged than those in the rural areas, many students did not look happy. Some of them wore very old dress with holes on them, and almost all of them seemed to be shy and insecure. However, most of the students seemed to be passionate about coming to school and learning. Although some of the students told me that their reasons for coming to school was to be save from illiteracy, some others had bigger picture in mind hoping to become pilots, police, engineers, and doctors in the future.

Article 19

You have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, in body or mind

Children have always been among the victims of war in Afghanistan. The worst has been the negative psychological affects of war on children which is apparent in schools. In the past few years, children have been kidnapped for various reasons. During my research in Herat I found many children scared of being stabbed. “Today I received a call from a family that their daughter was stabbed on the way to school” said a school principal. News of this kind seemed to affect other students too. Students become hopeless and discouraged to work for a country and government that cannot protect their right to living. A Research done on school children between age of 11 and 16, shows that

Children who grow up in an atmosphere of conflict, abuse and mistrust will not have the platform necessary to contribute to the construction of a democratic and stable society (Ambassador Kaare Aa, 2009).

Chapter 5

Recommendations and Conclusion

Civics Education teaches students about their civic rights and responsibilities and raises their social and political awareness. Research shows that civics education is an essential topic to be taught in elementary school (Donna Brazile).

At this transition time, I believe it is important for Afghan children to learn about their civic rights and responsibilities so that they can build up their political and social views by their own understanding. Schools can play a significant role in this regard. With the help of the international community, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of school students in Afghanistan since the collapse of the Taliban. Over 6 million children go to school in Afghanistan (MoE, 2009). However, quality of education and schooling is still a big concern for the international donors such as; USAID, World Bank, and the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan. Furthermore, many families in remote areas do not let their children to go to schools and particularly their daughters. Poverty, lack of security, and traditional beliefs are main factors that many families especially in remote areas do not allow their children to go to schools. Boys work as farmers, shippers, labors, or run small businesses to support their families. Girls stay home to help their mothers with the house chores until they get married. And once they get married, they are a house wife and have to serve their husbands. This is particularly true in poorer areas. Baqnazargah School which was one of the schools I used for my research is located in poorer residential area in Herat. Teachers at this school were mostly concerned about their female

students who did not continue school after eight or ninth grade a major reason for which was early marriage. According to Afghanistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

A lack of public awareness regarding laws and principles is hampering the rights of children, and perpetuating problems such as forced and early marriage, violence and child labor (Spanta, 2009).

Raising Awareness

I believe that for schools to produce productive citizens, it is important that students be aware of their rights and responsibilities. A major challenge at schools I observed was lack of awareness of students about their rights as children. As most of them grow up dependent on their parents or other older people in the family, they seem to have built up their social and political beliefs as their parents. It is my experience that even my friends who were adults almost all the time favored the political view that their father had favored even if that had not helped the country. However, schools could play a major role in here in raising awareness of the students. For example, when talking about human rights, justice, freedom, law, gender equity, and other important civic issues, teachers could involve their students to read quotes from the UN, Islamic Scholars, or other world famous Eastern and Western scholars. And then to think about them, pose questions to the teacher, and relate them to their own life. For example, quotes from the UN raise awareness of the students and directly affect their individual life as Afghan citizens. Teachers could simply use such quotes according to the level of knowledge and understanding of the students. The goal is for the students to be familiar with such concepts and think about them more critically in upper levels of education at school. A couple of such quotes are:

“ Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice” (the UN).

'That man is a Muslim who never hurts anyone by word or deed, but who works for the benefit and happiness of God's creatures. Belief in God is to love one's fellow men" (Holy Prophet Mohammad).

"How do you make a mankind your slave when he was free from the day his mother gave him birth" (Hazrate Omar).

"Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes" (Ghandi).

Schools could also aim to educate families through their children in schools by encouraging children to raise issues of human rights, justice, and freedom at home. However, interpretations of poems and lessons at schools I visited and the impacts of schools on children and families did not seem to be very effective in raising awareness of the students about their civic rights and responsibilities. I believe that bringing new concepts into the curriculum is necessary but challenging and difficult given the fact that such ideas may contradict the traditional beliefs of many families. As one of my teacher participants indicated, she found it hard to connect to the parents of a girl who wanted their daughter to leave school and get married. However, she also added that in some cases she had been successful in convincing parents to continue to let their children to come to school. "Parents are not aware of the values of education and how much in can change the life of their daughters" she said.

Conclusion

Almost all responses about effective citizens were about ethical issues like; how students should live, how they should behave with other members of the community and their social responsibilities. None of my respondents talked about work responsibility in the world of market and economy, political and global awareness.

I believe there needs to be a balance between teaching students about their social responsibilities as effective citizens and their future professional responsibilities and particularly their responsibility for their country. Most of the lessons are broad, for example, encouraging

students by saying “we have to preserve our history”. But neither the book, nor the teacher encourage individual students what they can do in real life to preserve their history and make their country a better place. Critical thinking, creativity, collaboration in group work, and individual reflection styles of learning are not very visible in schools I visited. Some contents of the lessons seemed to be inspiring and helpful for the students. However, both the text books and the instructor failed to use such content in an effective way. Also teachers seemed to fail to relate the lessons to the real life of the students. For example, during my classroom observation, I heard one of the students saying that she wanted to become a pilot in the future. After the class time, I interviewed that teacher and one of my questions was;

Me: One of your students told you that she wanted to become a pilot in the future. So, as her teacher, how will you encourage her and help her to achieve her dream?

Respondent: “There is nothing about pilot and airplanes in seventh grade Dari text book. Well, there was something about airplanes in sixth grade text book”.

Me: But don’t you think that when you teach her about punctuality, it will help her in her future profession. For example, if you tell her that as a pilot she will need to be punctual in order to be a successful pilot.

Respondent: Oh, of course that helps.

Only one participant defined “effective citizen” as someone who feels responsible for what he is doing in his profession. This participant said, “As a teacher I am only effective citizen when I do my job responsibly and I make sure my students learn in the classroom”.

When I asked my participants how they defined learning. None of my participants talked about the application of the knowledge of the students in real life.

Despite the lack of a balance between the use of male and female names, there are some chapters of the book that are encouraging. In a poem that was about women and the new era, participant 4 said, “The modern era has not only been the era of science but also a century for women’s’ progress. Today’s’ women have mental and thoughts independence and they should stand on their own feet. Their existence is important for the society and the women’s activities in 21th century have been a testament to this end”. However, most of the time she described the role of the young generation to keep their ancestors heritage alive, as she addressed to her students saying, ““You are the future of your country and the country is in your hands” You should keep your ancestors’ names alive”. Both teachers and instructors put emphasis on preservation of historical heritage. This I believe is good but students should also be encouraged to change the face of their country for better. Merely, encouraging students to preserve their history may not help the country in the global world. I believe teachers should also encourage students to be ready for change and not to content with what they have. They could give examples of the technological and scientific progress of the developed world.

Throughout my interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, I realized that schools in Afghanistan have a long way to go to produce productive citizens. Although the significant enrolment of the students is promising in this country, there are some major challenges in the educating students to become productive citizens of Afghanistan.

1. There is a big gap between pedagogy and content in the way text books and language curriculums are designed. The curriculum and text books merely encourage memorization and content coverage.

2. Lack of pedagogical skills of the instructors. Still so many teachers lack the modern pedagogical skills. Although the international NGOs train teachers to learn about pedagogy, even teachers who have many times attended such seminars and trainings lack teaching skills. I believe this is because of three main problems.

- Bad bureaucracy and corruption in the government and NGOs
- Top down decision making policies and lack of involvement of teachers in decision making

- And as a result, lack of effectiveness of the trainings and seminars.

3. Teachers' limited general knowledge and information (encyclopedia)

4. Lack of a civic mission in schools curriculum

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