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Commentary: Learning Democracy by Empowerment? A Controversial View on the Project “The Chestnut Case”

Frequently used basic terms

Acting Democratically (contest)	Demokratisch Handeln (Wettbewerb)
citizenship education / civics	Politische Bildung
education for democratic citizenship	Demokratiepädagogik
German Democratic Republic (GDR)	Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR)
Learning and Living Democracy (contest)	Demokratie leben und lernen (Wettbewerb)

1 Citizenship Education and Learning Democracy after the Fall of the Berlin Wall (“Wende”). The Project’s Report

In 1990, after the peaceful revolution in the former GDR, both German countries were reunited. However, citizenship education in Germany was quickly confronted with certain difficulties due to this rapid political unification process. The reason for that was that the majority of those people who lived in the former GDR, were disappointed with political promises as well as with their personal and economic hopes which had not become true. This resulted in a disenchantment with politics - “Politikverdrossenheit” - of these citizens and especially of adolescents, which had a huge impact on German-wide discussions in the fields of politics, education, and political science in the 1990s (see also critics on the term “Politikverdrossenheit” by Arzheimer 2002).

Due to the anger of unfulfilled hopes, the rage aroused quickly against immigrants. Even politicians, regardless of which party they belonged to, identified *foreigners* as the cause of faults and failure within the unification process. Shortly after the unification, right wing extremists organized pogroms in different German cities – Rostock-Lichtenhagen (Mecklenburg-West Pomerania), Mölln (Schleswig-Holstein) and Hoyerswerda (Saxony) – and with these shocked civil society. Germany’s unification process seemed to foster a new *national chauvinism*, which was then internationally observed with fear and worry.

Let us now have a look at our case: Weimar is a German small town in Thuringia, one of the so-called new federal states. There, in 1919, the first German democracy, the *Weimar Republic*, was founded. Today, the town is internationally well-known due to the *Weimar Classic* and the *Classical*

*Modernism.*¹ The students of the Friedrich-Schiller-Gymnasium – a German high school – attend their lessons in a *Bauhaus* building which is surrounded by a park and Weimar-typical “houses which were built by the end of the 19th century, the years of Germany’s foundation”. The school’s “history is long and deeply rooted in the ideal of traditional schools” that “are committed to higher education.” In 1927, immediately after its foundation, the school placed a scientific emphasis in its curriculum which is still valid. Here, in this small-town atmosphere and culture that is committed to higher education, students start to get involved with protecting a chestnut tree from being cut down on May 11th, 1995.

Figure 1. Friedrich Schiller Gymnasium in Weimar²



Until today, citizenship education in Germany has been debating the students’ involvement, the developing project’s dynamic – “from a single action to a broad campaign” – and its impact on the understanding of democracy of children and adolescents. Five documentations of this project have been published so far (Lokies 1997; Beutel, Lokies 1999 a, Beutel, Lokies 1999 b; Beutel, Lokies 2001 as well as online in the project data base of the contest Acting Democratically “Demokratisch Handeln”³). Four commentaries discuss the case critically from the perspective of subject-didactics and the education for democratic citizenship – “Demokratiepädagogik” (Breit 2005 a; Breit 2005 b; Grammes 2010; Petrik 2010).

¹ In the 18th century among others, Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe lived and worked in Weimar. In 1919, Walter Gropius founded the *Bauhaus* there. The European Union designated Weimar as the European Capital of Culture in 1999.

² http://www.schiller-gymnasium-weimar.de/uploads/pics/FSG-Gebäude_01.jpg

³ <http://www.demokratisch-handeln.de/dh-data/show.php?id=2302>

We refer to the original version of the project's report in the year 1997. This report follows the course of the project in detail and proves to be a lively example on how projects' dynamics and processes of learning could be illustrated:

The project's report shows how an emphatic note – “An anonymous appeal” – leads to the students' involvement with the case: “This is our tree!” – calls Franziska angrily. “It provides shadow, protects us from the Schwanseestraße – local street –, and we can throw chestnuts at the boys.” The project's report offers loads of student's comments such as the above mentioned. We get to know their reasons for becoming involved. By this, their ideas of politics, as well as their disappointments with it become clear: “Because of the fact that these politicians do not seem to support the students' campaign, they discuss further actions and a new idea is born.” The creativity of their involvement is rewarded. Moreover, the report sensitively reveals how the students develop new strategies in emotionally critical situations and how they discover political spheres of activity, such as “uncoordinated actions” in the school's area, PR-campaigns in the city center, and getting in touch with responsible politicians. The involvement to protect their own chestnut tree influences broad decisions on a local political level: “Your protest movement could not prevent the chestnut tree from cutting down, but it has saved more than twenty other trees in Weimar so far”, sums up the Mayor of the town. Finally, the project The Chestnut Case leads to a number of follow-up projects, for instance the foundation of a tree group and building a new sports gym. According to the preliminary conclusion of the project's report, the children and adolescents seem to have acquired a new political strategy: “In fact, the students do not only react to incidences – they proactively cause change.”

Nevertheless, the project's report does not lack reflection or tell a repugnant success story. Moreover, the involvement's impacts on everyday school life are openly presented: “However, this campaign has a direct impact on the school: lessons are not held and the school is more or less paralyzed.” Frustrating experiences in the course of the involvement as well as even threatening emotional dynamics are also described: “The following action deeply shocks these children: while screaming and crying, they have to watch how the chestnut tree is being cut down in no time at all in despair. [...] Other children and teenagers join the 5th graders at the building site; the workers leave in a hurry. The children become furious.” In addition, loss of trust and a lack of understanding of the students for the politicians' action are intensively displayed. However, determining which impact these experiences have on the students' process of learning democracy is left to the reader. The project's report does not explain the relationship between morality and justice: “It is crap to cut down a healthy tree,” says Jeanette, 6th grader. “I didn't understand that. This man, who was sent to us today, couldn't even explain it. He always referred to the law.” “We notice” – write Florian and Michael (13 years old) in a school's brochure – “that the officials failed when they approved to the cutting down of the tree. Moreover, we claim that we cannot trust the so-called Greenies and Departments of Environmental Affairs. Even the Mayor, who we informed, did anything to prevent the tree to be cut down.”

It is unusual in citizenship education that a single school project is

discussed in such an intensive and controversial detail. Since the widely-known *Beutelsbach Consensus*⁴ was founded in 1976, serious controversies, in particular concerning the aims of citizenship education, have not taken place.

The above-mentioned phenomena of crisis in united Germany lead to the situation that *democracy* as a normative reference point in citizenship education was rediscovered and newly discussed within the 1990s. Therefore, a number of educating programs, initiatives and organizations have been founded since then, in order to stop right wing extremism on the one hand and to support learning democracy with children and adolescents on the other.

In 1997, the project *The Chestnut Case* is awarded by the supporting competition *Acting Democratically*. *Acting Democratically* is established as one of the major school competitions in Germany so far. It refers to a number of traditions of pedagogical reforms: projects should develop and strengthen the relationship between democracy and education, from school to polis. Its competitive character could be compared to US programs such as *We the People* of the Center for Civic Education.⁵ In Germany, *Acting Democratically* is not without controversy: Do adults only take advantage of the adolescents' societal and political involvement because of contests? Or, do such awards lead to more recognition of societal and political involvement?

The program is related to a pragmatic learning theory: at school democratic education and practical learning should be intertwined. Students should not only gain knowledge of politics, in fact, they should be able to experience politics and democracy by themselves (see also Beutel, Fauser 2001). These experience-based and action-oriented forms of learning are now established as education for democratic citizenship in Germany. More and more, education for democratic citizenship is promoted to become a generic term for all of those pedagogical tasks that are connected to preserve and renew democracy. In fact, democratic education aims at supporting the adolescents' willingness to participate in our civil society. In the years 2002-2007, the schools development program Learning and Living Democracy [Demokratie leben und lernen⁶], took place in 13 out of 16 German federal states. By this, education for democratic citizenship has provoked the harshest conceptual dispute in civic education since the ideological debates in the 1970s.

4 <http://www.lpb-bw.de/beutelsbacher-konsens.html>

5 www.civiced.org/wethepeople.php

6 www.blk-demokratie.de

Figure 2. Comparison of didactics of politics / education for democratic citizenship [see also Fauser 2007]

Didactics of Politics	Education for Democratic Citizenship
focused on political science	Focused science of pedagogy
subject teaching	Interdisciplinary / school culture / cooperations with extracurricular partners
knowledge-based	ability and empowerment
aimed at state level, at government and at power	aimed at human rights-universalism democracy as a mode of private life, a mode of public life and a mode a power

With regard to this dispute, didactics of politics criticizes that education for democratic citizenship reduces – in terms of thinking democracy theoretically – politics to democracy as a mode of private life. For that reason, adolescents do not learn to make a difference between social, societal, and political involvement. Education for democratic citizenship tries to transfer experiences of harmony within the personal environment on the one hand, and micro-political structures of decision-making to institutionalized politics on the other. This, from a didactical perspective, has to lead to rejecting democracy as the optimal mode of government in the eyes of adolescents. Therefore, they are not able to develop a full understanding of the functions and logics of politics. In fact, political decisions – towards the intention – will be left to so-called elites and no longer to the citizens; this is known as post-democracy which Colin Crouch introduced recently.

In the course of this article, we will recap the case’s controversy regarding subject-related didactics and democratic education. Therefore, we summarize published discussions from Gotthard Breit (University of Magdeburg), Tilman Grammes (University of Hamburg) und Andreas Petrik (University of Halle). This is worth doing: The project The Chestnut Case offers the opportunity to study which different conceptions in terms of citizenship education are currently discussed in Germany.

2 Disenchantment with Politics – Didactics of Politics’ Scepticism

Gotthard Breit (2005a, 54ff) differentiates three levels to which the activities of the project are related. This corresponds to the pragmatic conception that learning democracy is operationalized on the intertwined levels of a mode of private life, mode of public life, and mode of government.

Figure 3. Forms of activities in the project *The Chestnut Case* (Breit 2005a, 55)

School activities	Discussion in ethics lessons; meetings of the students council; documentation in a school's brochure
Political activities	Letters to the property's owner, to the towns administration and to the head of the department for environmental affairs; protection of the tree over the weekend
Social activities	Collecting signatures; creating posters; distribution of flyers; organization of rallies and demonstrations; Information of the media; delivery of petitions

While these school's activities take place the students are able to re-think their activities, develop societal and political actions and judge the course as well as the results of the project. In line with their societal action the students publish their interest on saving the life of the tree and try to enforce this. According to Breit, the protection of the tree by some students illustrates a form of non-violent resistance or civil disobedience. Further, the two-hours long blocking of a main road, which is considered to be illegal, is subsumed under political actions.

In general, Gotthard Breit exposes that German lessons of politics lack societal learning (see JSSE 4-2009⁷). The following will show why the project *The Chestnut Case* is recognized as a reference for learning democracy: It empowers people to think about aims, contents and methods of societal learning. Learning democracy as a mode of public life is supposed to illustrate opportunities of solving conflicts. As a mode of public life, democracy will be a way of living if citizens are able to solve disputes peacefully and end these in a satisfactory way for both sides. Therefore, it is vital to point out in the reflecting phases of the project that a constitutional state enables legal regulations of conflicts. Then, the project might lead to attach students to the following:

- relationship between citizen and administration;
- meaning of society's organization for a life in freedom;
- Basic Law's claim for use of ownership in order to protect common welfare.

On the one hand, there is scepticism of those who favour the position of the didactics of politics focused on the fact that the project does not offer a positive perspective of politics and administration. The meeting with the Vice Mayor as well as with the head of Department for Municipal and Environmental Affairs are responsible for the loss of trust in politics. According to the students' interest, they get the impression of not being adequately supported by the politicians. These experiences might have a negative influence on the adolescents' attitude towards democracy as a form of government.

⁷ <http://www.jsse.org/2009/2009-4>

On the other hand, the adolescents are at first deeply disappointed with the cutting down of the chestnut tree – regardless of their long-term political success. This frustration could have been avoided if the students had had a broader knowledge of politics. In order to assess the events adequately, the adolescents need knowledge of:

- positions of the Basic Law, the German constitution, ownership;
- the tasks and responsibilities of the Vice Mayor and, respectively of the City Council and the city’s administration;
- majority principle and representative principle of democracy;
- as well as the citizen’s opportunities to participate in politics.

Furthermore, the project’s report is considered to be a proof for the politics didactics’ thesis to make experiences purely is not sufficient to analyze and judge the incident adequately (Breit 2005b, 53ff). The students do not know their scope of action in which they take action: The investor, for example, had the license to cut down the tree long before the activities started. According to the boundaries of a constitutional state, this cannot be called off easily. Hence, the students judge politics although they are not able to consider all interests, freedom of action, and (legal) compulsion of their opponents. As far as the help of terminologies is concerned, the project’s report does not clarify how these experiences could broaden their knowledge and theorize the whole case. Consequently, Breit favors acquisition of knowledge and development of thought patterns.

In terms of didactics of politics it is pointed out: Without the constitutional state, democracy as a mode of government will not be put into practice. The project leads to “the worst result of all efforts of citizenship education:” Facing democracy as a mode of government frustrates, moreover, disenchantment of politics increases. Here, chances and limits of an education for democratic citizenship are openly displayed: The project work offers to make experiences by action; however, it does not give students the chance to reflect on their taken actions. They are “left alone helplessly” and cannot develop their former “desires and visions of democracy”. In the end, they get to know current politics as a field “which good democrats will no longer step on.”

3 “Micro- and Macro-World” – A Synthesis of Learning Theory, Education for Democratic Citizenship and Categorical Conflict-Based Teaching Methodology in Politics

Andreas Petrik (2010) recaps the different perspectives of didactics of politics and education for democratic citizenship on the project *The Chestnut Case* from a learning theory’s point of view.

According to the view of didactics of politics, the students will not be disappointed because politicians fail. Moreover, misinterpretations concerning their ideas of everyday life are the cause of their frustration. In order to overcome this difficulty, teachers of civic education should support their students in defining the heart of the problem in detail firstly. By this,

the conflict's parties' interests and argumentation strategies have to become clear. In addition, it is necessary to be aware of the legal situation in order to think of actions to take. Then, the students are able to proactively take actions themselves. They are able to deeply understand the whole conflict in the so-called circular problem-solving process (circle of politics). This point of view empowers them to grasp the central political categories such as power, interest, justice and decision.

From the perspective of education for democratic citizenship the project shows that enchantment with politics is produced or even enforced by the actions of professional politicians. Therefore, citizenship education should be put from "a political head to democratic feet" (Gerhard Himmelmann). Tensions between principles of democracy and political reality always have to be kept in mind. According to the project's report the true success of the students is not seen in their way of deep thinking about democracy as a mode of government; in fact, it is rewarded that they campaign for democratic public – democracy as a mode of public life – and for their own school – democracy as a mode of private life. Instable democracy has to be consolidated at its basis in a continuous and deliberative way – especially at school as an "embryonic society" (John Dewey). Therefore, the follow-up project by students to build a school's garden could contribute to stabilize inner democracy. This garden has been founded by the involvement of civil society and represents the elements of societal and ecological responsibility. Furthermore, the students' involvement caused a public and ecological re-thinking in Weimar.

The criticism of education for democratic citizenship on the former concept of categorial civic education lessons (see Engelhardt 1964; Leps 2010-8⁸) aims at the term-based analysis of macro-political cases which students consider to be too abstract. The Dilemma of the above-mentioned lesson principle seems to be that complex categories should mirror complex reality which on its own needs to be cleared up elementary. Moreover, the analysis of unrealistic political conflicts lacks a connection to the students' value orientation and their theories of everyday life. That is why a cognitive analysis needs to have a propaedeutic experimental phase of its own democratic actions in a micro-political environment first. Experiences of self-efficacy by taking actions in a micro-political environment should encourage and empower students to long-term political involvement.

In fact, Andreas Petrik criticizes that an education for democratic citizenship refers to the individual and his or her societal experiences. However, the approach frequently operates with a harmonic picture of a consensus-based everyday reality in democratic questions. This cannot be compared to the character of politics itself. Therefore, the project does not show if all students solely thought of saving the life of the chestnut tree is equally important as the economic interests of the investor and the town. Projects, initiated by a personal indignation, might develop a negative group dynamics. This could prevent controversy and forming an opinion.

Societal conflicts in a personal environment such as *The Chestnut Case* could offer worth access to politics. In this micro-world, theoretical approaches to politics, in particular in terms of distribution of power and wealth, can be personally experienced, or, at least become manageable.

⁸ <http://www.jsse.org/2010/2010-3/engelhardt-en-jsse-3-2010> und <http://www.jsse.org/2010/2010-3/leps-en-jesse-3-2010>

Concerning democracy as a mode of private life there could arise misinterpretations or difficulties to act adequately. These could lead students to look after elementary democratic principles and processes – autonomously or with the help of their teachers. However, *The Chestnut Case* shows: If we miss one of the phases of the political analysis, then complexity of democratic processes and institutions can remain frustratingly vague.

Summarized from a learning theory's perspective it can be concluded that didactics of politics as well as an education for democratic citizenship have not found sufficient answers to the transfer-problem from micro- to macro-world. Andreas Petrik favors therefore a didactical synthesis between an education for democratic citizenship on the one hand and categorial conflict-based teaching methodology in politics on the other. This synthesis is brought to reality by the conception of a “genetic didactics of politics”, which is oriented on “elementary phenomena” (Eduard Spranger; see Petrik 2011; Petrik 2004).

4 “Deliberation and Governance” – A Criteria-Based Societal-Scientific Analysis

A criteria-based analysis of the project could be referred to the regulative ideas of the *Beutelsbach Consensus*. By its three guidelines, it has established an ethical background for pedagogic actions, which does not only affect citizenship education: Prohibition against Overwhelming the Pupil, Treating Controversial Subjects as Controversial and Giving Weight to the Personal Interests of Pupils.

In 2005, the so-called Magdeburg Manifest of the Education for Democratic Citizenship⁹ was founded. This manifest contains a criteria collection of proficiency concerning the education for democratic citizenship.¹⁰

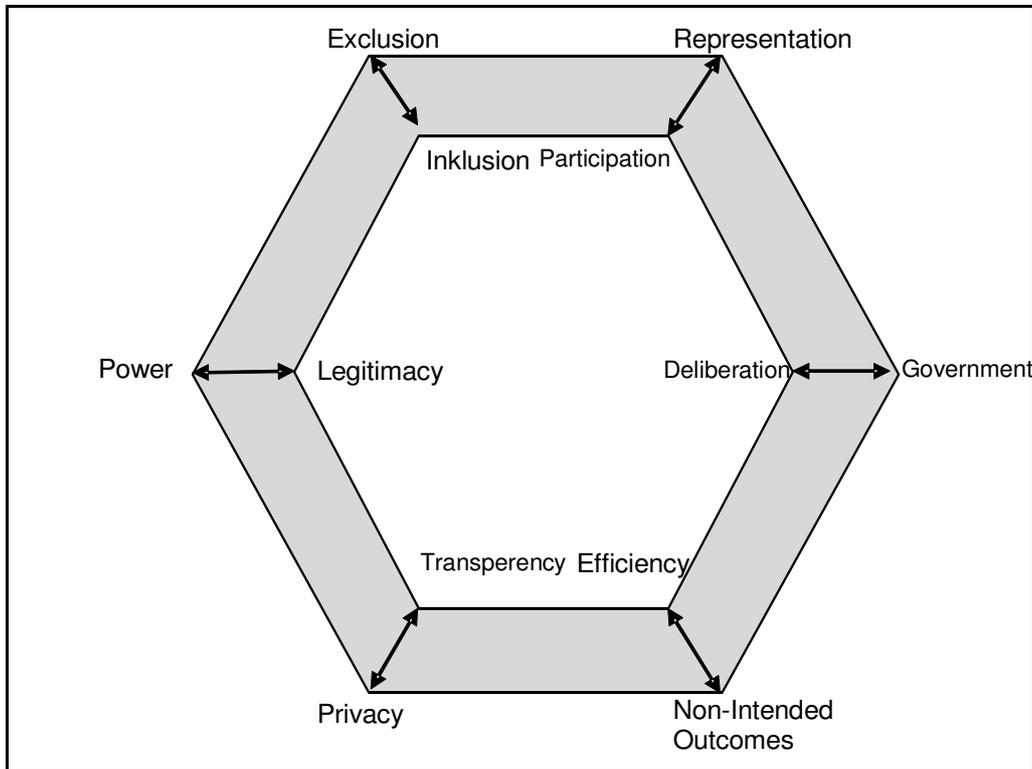
“The democratic way is political- and pedagogical-wise based on a common and shared intention to include all affected people (inclusion and participation), to enable a balanced and on the principle of justice oriented practice of decision-making (deliberation), to adopt appropriate and economical ways and means (efficiency), to bring the case to public (transparency) and to ensure critical examination of acting and to ensure that institutions are based on the guidelines of justice and morality (legitimation).”

This collection of criteria points out that an education for democratic citizenship is mainly based on participatory and deliberative theories of democracy. From the didactics of politics point of view it is criticized that parliamentary-representative theories of democracy are ignored. Tilman Grammes suggests a “dialectic-polar” formulation of the above-mentioned criteria.

9 <http://degede.de/fileadmin/DeGeDe/Grundlagen/magdeburgermanifest.pdf>

10 In order to measure democracy, political-scientific and empirical-comparative research use similar criteria.

Figure 4. Criteria of Proficiency Concerning the Education for Democratic Citizenship [Grammes 2010]



These criteria help to judge the quality of acting in the means of democratic citizenship. For instance, this is explained by the categories “deliberation and government.”

Concerning the intertwined institutions in a democracy, the tensions of involvement and reflexion of educational projects are systematically solved. This is illustrated by comparing the project *The Chestnut Case* with a prominent project model: the German adaptation of the American curriculum *We the People* of the Center for Civic Education (Koopmann 2005). Young people adapt roles of little social scientists who explore local political problems in ten steps.

Figure 5. Project phases “Active Citizens” / “We the People”

Project active citizens: phases	content / challenges
1	collect problems
2	chose a project [cooperative planning]
3	collect information
4	check different ways of solution
5	develop one way of solution
6	compile an action plan
7	prepare an exhibition
8	present an exhibition
9	start to solve the problem
10	reflect experiences [meta-phase of learning]

Following these phases step by step, the students are on the line, they take even “natural” steps of learning according to, for instance, typical phases of a political problem-solving process (circle of politics).

Idealistically, the ten steps of the project *Active Citizens* can be divided into two phases: a legislative phase – steps 1-2 – and an executive phase – steps 3-10. By this, phases 2 and 4 are the important, neuralgic gateways:

a) legislative modus / forming the political will (steps 1-2): In order to define the formation of a political will at the gateway of politics and education it describes the inner state of a person as well as the outer state of the community. After a spontaneous start of the project, “defining a problem” (2nd phase) means to pause for a moment. The students will form their political will,

- whether respectively, which of the different alternative topics of the project is discussed first. Does the chestnut tree even appear on the agenda?

- Do we really want to advocate the tree?

At first, the involvement of the project *The Chestnut Case* starts coincidentally. In the beginning, the students do not carry out a planned project according to project theory. In the course of the project, purposeful planning phases with strategic debates develop. Alternatively, one group could have opted for building houses. Should there be two parallel projects competing with each other? Is that feasible? However, the majority must not suppress the minority. Therefore, Prohibition *Against Overwhelming The Pupil And The Principle Of Opposition* has to be obligatory in models of learning democratic citizenship.

b) Executive modus / governance (steps 3-10): the group of learners decides on a problem and the basic way of coping with it. The project moves on from the legislative to the executive modus. Now, it is important to find a smart way of handling the problem: How should we manage the project, how should we implement policy? Even in the executive modus there are

deliberative phases. Therefore, the fourth step is to analyze other solutions before the fifth step “to develop an approach” and an action plan is taken.

By this, we can ensure a logical process which contains controversial debates (deliberation) and determined action-taking (governance) in order to meet a realistic political form.

On the contrary, the didactics of politics is not able to point out this difference on the project *The Chestnut Case*. The project’s report starts after the political will seem to have already been formed. The project takes place in the executive modus and therefore lacks controversy – for good reason.

By the constant oscillation of debating and governing, projects are able to offer an experience to explore a sophisticated model of citizenship. According to Richard Rorty, this is described as the so-called *liberal ironist*: she is able to become attached to a community project (“govern”) and, at the same time, to accept its contingency and grounded relativism (“debate”). Concerning this model of citizenship, all principles of the *Beutelsbach Consensus* – treating controversial subjects as controversial and giving weight to the personal interests of pupils – are brought into a polar and energetic relationship.

The criteria-based conclusion: The project *The Chestnut Case* is a reference project in terms of education for democratic citizenship, because it states an example of governance and deliberation. This can be found in other curricular examples and lesson reports, too. In terms of didactic decisions, it is not a question of “if” or “if not”. However, didactics of politics and education for democratic citizenship seem to focus on this controversy too often. In fact, it is more a question of time, the right moment and the pedagogical tact.

5 The Project *The Chestnut Case* in Professional Education of Teachers

According to our experience, the confrontation with this project in teachers’ professional education and university seminars reveal three ways of reaction and types of teachers:

The *activists* become euphoric concerning the project. It is appreciated as a prototype of societal and ecological involvement of students. They oppose to categorial and institution-based teaching; it is supposed to be boring and outmoded. The project *The Chestnut Case* is seen as a prototype to educate students to active citizens. From a normative point of view, the subjective feeling of injustice legitimates all pedagogic action-taking.

The *carers* fear legal consequences concerning the form of action taking of the project – in particular the blocking of the road. Due to the fiduciary duty teachers are afraid of facing possible legal consequences. In their eyes it is an unreasonable demand for the students that they have to experience failure and frustration. Projects that are aimed at the public and intend societal and political change are overwhelming and dangerous. Instead of true experiences these teachers prefer activity-oriented methods within a protected environment and within school. Their normative point of reference

is the “adult as a role model” who helps the younger generation growing up “wisely.”

The *supportive of the state* criticize the school’s civil disobedience. They condemn that students and teachers do not accept the legitimized decisions that have been reached by legal action of the state. This supports the thesis of the didactics of politics to provoke enchantment with politics. Furthermore, this group refuses group dynamics and emotions in political learning processes because of the memory of psychological phenomena of the masses in the past. They prefer a rational examination of the system of institution and its “legitimation by proceeding action” (Niklas Luhmann). Their normative point of reference is asserted law and the political system.

The project *The Chestnut Case* might provoke an either-or-debate at university and in further education for teachers. Then, teachers and students might discuss the following questions:

- Which political pattern of thinking and which idea of proficiency is mine / our pedagogic acting based on (teacher’s personality)?
- Which objectives do I try to achieve: Should citizenship education ensure the status quo of a democratic constitutional state? And /or should it enable “democratic experimentalism” (Hauke Brunkhorst) by participation? What is democracy and how does it take place?

Different theoretical conceptions of democracy could be worked on; in particular the relationship between representation and participation. The project condemns antinomy of legitimation and emancipation within political education processes (see also a project’s analysis in Welniak 2011).

A detailed analysis asks in which relationship experience, action and empowerment as well as knowledge are referred to each other in the course of the project – rhythm, pedagogic tact. The project allows taking the obligatory “bridging problem” – which is typical of political education processes – into account: How could experiences of the surrounding micro-world, i.e. of democracy as a way of living, support students in learning to understand the political macro-world, i.e. democracy as mode of public life and a mode of government? In addition, the project challenges how experiences can be systematically and term-based reflected in action-oriented forms of learning (education). The above-mentioned criteria of didactics of politics and education for democratic citizenship (*Beutelsbach Consensus, Magdeburg Manifest*) may contribute to structure, to give content-wise cooperative advice and to allow ambivalences in diagnostics. By this, everyone’s own pedagogical practice can be continuously reflected.

6 Conclusion

In fact, the project’s report does not tell any superficial success story – styled for being awarded in a contest. On the contrary, it describes chaotic beginnings, wrong paths and students’ disappointments, too. For that reason, it enables this constructive professional controversy, which we have illustrated. The latter demonstrates how beneficial detailed didactic analysis of forms of democratic citizenship education can be.

In the eyes of education for democratic citizenship, creativity could completely revitalize forms and basic figures of political-societal education in Germany and could also enrich these with new developments (see also the database of the school's development program Learning and Living democracy for more material¹¹). It is also oriented in particular on Anglo-American visions of a "Civic Education" (see Sliwka 2008).

In conclusion, we want to emphasize the importance of pausing for a moment within and after an "action"- like the students did during their project. The development of new forms of teaching and project ideas needs to be guided by criteria-oriented and learning theory's reflexions as well as comparative curriculum's analyses. For instance, the above-mentioned project database *Acting Democratically*¹² is a valuable treasure chest of pedagogic and political creativity. However, its systematic, education-scientific and didactic evaluation is still to be completed. In sum, what do we achieve why, with whom, how and where?

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¹¹ <http://blk-demokratie.de/index.php?id=82>

¹² <http://www.demokratisch-handeln.de/dh-data/index.php>

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