

Enhancing students' responsibility towards society through civic involvement projects

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The recent literature on corporate social responsibility is searching for new ways of education in relation to citizenship and social responsibility. This paper reviews some of the educational issues discussed within the corporate social responsibility literature. It also includes examples of some of the methods and tools used at universities across the world. This overview helps to set the context for and identify the relevance of civil involvement projects in this area. Following the literature review, we outline an approach to civic involvement projects that has been developed at Sabanci University in Turkey. The paper concludes with some suggestions for universities that are developing or planning to develop their own social responsibility programmes.

Keywords: citizenship; social responsibility; education; civic involvement projects

Introduction

The main goal of higher education is still an ongoing debate: whether it should be training for jobs or preparing students to become stewards of the earth and participants in democracy for global social justice. It seems there are four main obstacles in academia that prevents this problem from easily being resolved (Andrzejewski & Alessio, 1999). First, many educators and policymakers do not experience or see the immediate consequences of global, ethical and social problems, thus they distance themselves from them. Second, these global, ethical and social issues seem so depressing that people tend to think that we can have little or no influence on them. Third, teachers have been taught to avoid 'political' issues that differ from the conventionally accepted beliefs embedded in a traditional curriculum. Finally, as discussed earlier, educators have not usually been taught about issues of social and global responsibility in their own educational experiences. To make things worse, as Hosmer's study (1999) shows, many people who are active in teaching and research in Business Ethics believe that neither their teaching nor their research 'count' for merit in relation to salary increases and promotion/tenure decisions at their institutions, and that few enjoy high levels of support from deans, faculty, or students.

When these obstacles are overcome, methods for teaching students social responsibility are likely to become a main theme in the literature. This paper aims to present one of these new methods that have been applied at our university during the last seven years. By describing the method developed, it will become clear what challenges stand in front of education in this area.

The paper has two main parts. The first part summarises the current literature on citizenship and social responsibility in education. The second part then uses a case-study approach

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to introduce the civic involvement projects (CIPs) developed at Sabanci University as a mechanism of inducing social responsibility into the curriculum.

Background: citizenship and social responsibility in education

The title of Wilhite and Silver's (2005) article, 'A false dichotomy for higher education: Educating citizens vs. educating technicians', is a good provocative start for an article. It shows the popular debate about the mission of higher education: either giving students discipline-specific competence or preparing students for lives of moral and civic responsibility necessary to support a democratic society. A similar discussion is carried out in Macfarlane's (2005) paper on 'The disengaged academic: The retreat from citizenship'.

An extension of the question might be a consideration of why a university should not encapsulate both missions. Do these two goals intrinsically contradict each other? Rather than having a philosophical discussion on the mission of a university, this paper moves on to the next step and searches for an answer to the following question: how a university could educate its students to become good citizens.

It might seem a simple task to give students learning opportunities for addressing the real-life problems of their communities. By understanding problems, students and faculty might contribute to the search for solutions to these problems. This is rather a difficult task considering the complex, interdisciplinary, interdependent and multi-cultural context of real-life problems. As Jongh and Prinsloo (2004, p. 118–119) highlight:

There is a need to move away from a measured, linear curriculum to a 'transformatory' curriculum. Transformatory education has as its starting point that 'for learners to change their meaning schemes (specific beliefs, attitudes, and emotional reactions) they must engage in critical reflection on their experiences, which in turn leads to a perspective transformation'.

The need for transformation has been acute particularly after the recent business misconduct examples of Enron and WorldCom that have given rise to the further questioning of the basic notions of citizenship and profitability. There is a great deal of cynicism about the social responsibility of corporations. Many stakeholders see corporate citizenship as a window-dressing activity of companies to hide their abusive practices. That is why there has been an increase in ethics education in business schools and among business people. But more importantly, the content of education has come under scrutiny. For example, the management guru Mintzberg (2004) calls for a 'third-generation management development' where managers are reflective practitioners. This might necessitate providing them with the ability to recognise and talk about ethical problems more accurately and easily. According to Crane and Matten (2004), this might be a three-step process requiring:

- (1) identifying the situation where ethical decision-making is involved;
- (2) understanding the culture and values of the organisation; and
- (3) evaluating the impact of the ethical decision on the organisation.

A similar call for an intensive change has also been raised by the partnership of the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) and the United Nations Global Compact in 2004. These two influential international organisations have started an initiative to develop a new generation of globally responsible leaders and managers by inviting business schools and companies from all parts of the world to work together. They will investigate current business school curricula and propose changes on a global scale that will be both enforceable and teachable. Further, at its Johannesburg meeting, the United Nations

decided to name the period from 2005 to 2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

The Aspen Institute published reports in 2001 and 2003 entitled *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* (Aspen/WRI, 2003) that showed a growing interest and consolidation of business ethics and responsibility-related topics in the teaching and research agendas of business schools. As business schools and business have been a driving force, the recent educational programmes are mainly designed for corporate social responsibility (CSR) rather than citizenship; this finding was reflected in a study made by the European Academy of Business in Society (EBIAS, 2005). Matten and Moon's study (2004) analysed the practice of European educational programmes in business ethics and sustainability and concluded that the term CSR is an umbrella term covering a wide range of topics from business ethics to Environmental or Ecological Management. Matten and Moon's (2004) survey was conducted in 2003 and consisted of the responses of 65 institutions across Europe. The results show that the goals of teaching CSR are categorised under four headings:

- provision of graduates with CSR skills;
- supply of CSR education for practitioners;
- specialist CSR education for industries; and
- research to advance knowledge in CSR.

Increasing interest in CSR can be seen vividly in Europe. For example, the European Commission's (2001) Green Paper was intended to promote a European framework for CSR by giving emphasis to company training and life-long learning. A year later, the European Commission (2002) reported the following:

- CSR is behaviour by businesses over and above legal requirements, voluntarily adopted because businesses deem it to be in their long-term interest;
- CSR is intrinsically linked to the concept of sustainable development: businesses need to integrate the economic, social and environmental impact in their operations;
- CSR is not an optional 'add-on' to business core activities – but about the way in which businesses are managed.

In parallel to the developments at the policy level, business schools in Europe have increasingly started new CSR models and programmes. A survey (Matten & Moon, 2004) highlights the fact that CSR in European business education is partly grounded in the environmental agenda, followed with a concern with ethics. Dedicated CSR modules and CSR programmes in European business schools mainly target graduate-level students, with only 9% of them designed for undergraduate students. Similar results are also reported in a study made by EABIS (2005). There seems to be three sources of educational CSR programmes: university programmes, in-company training (such as Intel Ireland, Lloyds TSB, Microsoft, Procter & Gamble, and Shell), and third-party programmes offered by consultancy firms or associations (such as CSR Europe, World Business Council for Sustainable Development) (EABIS, 2005).

Compulsory modules and courses on CSR are offered by 27% of all respondent institutions but another 38% of these institutions indicate that their CSR effort is embedded in other modules and courses, while 47% of respondent institutions have optional modules (Matten & Moon, 2004).

The call for transformation in education is not only preparing for a new curriculum but it also includes changes in the pedagogies adopted in CSR programmes, courses and

modules. Muijen (2004) states clearly that CSR is based on pluralism in value perspectives and aims at an empowerment strategy by means of integrating (not ‘managing’) diversity and cultural change. The perspective of change through dialogue is proposed as a means of innovating the curriculum and the primary processes of educating students. As Muijen (2004, p. 244) describes:

In a dialogical and multi-cultural context, other interpretations on (human) nature are not just feasible, but likely to occur. Dialogue facilitates social dynamics in such a way that our organizational and cultural interpretation of ‘social responsibility’ reflects the needs, wants, motives and values of all participants in the dialogue, i.e. the stakeholders.

Another proposal for the pedagogy of educating CSR is active learning (EABIS, 2005). For example, the Oikos foundation, a leading international student-organisation for sustainable economics and management, offers active learning in its winter school programme (EABIS, 2005). One important type of active learning involves having community service projects embedded within academic coursework. The US experience shows that nearly one-third of all K–12 schools and half of public high-schools provide such service-learning programmes (Wilhite & Silver, 2005). Some of the benefits of these programmes are listed as: improved academic achievement, positive attitude toward school, increased civic engagement, social maturity, concern for others, emotional intelligence, positive self-concept, and reduced involvement in risky behaviour. It also claims that students working with other students, in comparison to students who interact primarily with an adult teacher, are more likely to be adventurous and innovative in dealing with new information as well as more likely to develop sophisticated views of how epistemological beliefs are constructed. The studies about the impact of service-learning programmes on college students seem to show similar benefits. It is shown that college students who have service-learning experience show greater evidence of community involvement following graduation than do students who did not have such experience.

It has been suggested that: ‘student’s self-reported enhanced understanding and interest in issues of business ethics is present when multiple pedagogical methods, e.g., case studies, lectures, assignments, and an Oxford-style debate, are applied by a number of faculty members’ (Spain, Engle, & Thompson, 2005, p. 7). Table 1 shows the teaching tools utilised in the European courses – where inviting business speakers and using real-life case studies are widely adopted tools (Matten & Moon, 2004).

Table 1. Teaching tools adopted in the European CSR programmes.

Teaching tool	Respondents using the tool (%)
Business speakers	32
CSR case studies	25
Speakers from non-government organisations	20
CSR professional speakers	17
Internships	6
Communications/media speakers	5
Other ^a	17

^aFive most popular: e-learning; debates/discussion forums; simulations; audiovisual aids; international student exchange.

Source: Matten and Moon (2004).

Case study: civil involvement projects at Sabanci University

Studies dealing with the CSR practices in Turkey are rather limited (Cetindamar & Arikan, 2006; Küskü & Zarkada-Fraser, 2004). However, the business practices of CSR in Turkey seem to be mainly in the realm of philanthropy (Küskü & Zarkada-Fraser, 2004). For example, the largest telecommunication company (Turkcell) has a programme called 'Contemporary Girls of Contemporary Turkey'; this provides scholarships to girls living in Eastern Turkey. Another example is the large conglomerate (Ülker) that has made contributions to the '10 Billion Oak Tree Campaign' – a project which seeks to protect the environment.

The educational practices of CSR are another neglected research topic. As far as we are aware, the only available study analysed the engineering curricula of Turkish universities. The findings revealed that the emphasis given to environment and sustainable development in engineering curricula is quite limited (Unal, Can, & Genc, 2004).

The following case study describes an innovative model of CSR practice in education. It is based on service-learning through social responsibility and participatory democracy at a fundamental level.

Briefly, the case study deals with CIP projects implemented at Sabanci University, which was established officially in 1996 in Istanbul, Turkey. The University started its formal education programmes in the fall of 1999. The university set its mission as:

Our mission is to develop competent and confident individuals, enriched with the ability to reflect critically and independently, combined with a strong sense of social responsibility; and, to contribute to the development of science and technology, as well as disseminating the knowledge created to the benefit of the community.

Following this mission, CIPs were developed in 1999 and have been carried out since then. They are a compulsory part of the course programme of Sabanci University because the University believes that pointing out the realities of life and learning to play an active part in understanding these, is an indispensable part of quality university education. It should be noted that we have the complete support of the university administration for our work, which allows us to carry out our programme with not only ease but also with financial backing. Our programme is very much a grass roots one, following the educational philosophy of Vygotsky in that students create their own knowledge. In this case, it is truly learning by doing rather than focusing on theory and academic work. By being involved in various issues at the grass-roots level, students gain a better understanding of the complexity of issues, and learn to see that they can make a difference through their direct involvement. Our programme fits within the university's philosophy, which aims to see our students graduate as well-rounded individuals in addition to being academically and professionally successful.

CIPs are hands-on learning programmes for understanding participatory democracy, where students take active roles in civil society, dealing with various problems and working in co-operation with national and international Civil Society Organisations and state institutions. The underlying rationale for the CIP programme is a belief that individuals are responsible for the society and the world in which they are living. We argue that if one believes in the democratic process, one needs to understand that there is a responsibility by all individuals to the society that extends beyond voting. The Turkish context presents several different realities to common practices of civic participation as well as an understanding of democracy. With 59 governments in 83 years, and three military coups, it can hardly be expected that citizens will exercise their democratic responsibilities nor to become

involved in issues of social responsibility on their own. CIP strives for internalisation of participatory and democratic values through active involvement with (mostly) the local community at different levels.

Within our programme, we provide the necessary tools for people – our students as well as those they work with – to realise themselves. This is done through teamwork, through empowerment, through training and, of course, through direct involvement. With the exception of the coordinator and office assistants, all involved in CIP are students. All projects operate in teams, with students choosing the topic they wish to work on. Teams are led by supervisors, students who have previously completed at least one project, and have passed the application process – written application, oral interview and case study as well as recommendation from their team supervisor – to officially become part of the larger CIP Team. Team Supervisors meet with their teams once a week and join the team each week for the implementation of the project. They are responsible for keeping attendance, for overseeing the curriculum for the specific project and for creating enthusiasm for the project and the team. The Team Supervisors are overseen by the Advisory Supervisors, students who have at least three years of involvement within the programme. The Advisory Supervisors are responsible for trouble-shooting, giving and being available for advice, and for ensuring that all official permission and contacts have not only been obtained but are maintained. They also implement the various training needs for the different subjects we address – bringing in experts when necessary and/or delivering the training themselves when possible. The third tier of this student-led structure is Event Supervisor, a small group of the most dedicated students who are in their senior year – or exceptional students in their junior year. They are responsible for our larger events, for being available to give training to both team members and other supervisors, for site visits to the projects, and for filling in when the Team or Advisory Supervisors (for whatever reason) are not available. With this structure, our students are empowered, empower each other, learn leadership, learn responsibility, encourage creativity and, in short, keep the programme running.

As Table 2 shows, since 1999, we have carried out 237 projects with more than 2000 students with 323 students volunteering for positions of responsibility (some volunteer their entire student career). Table 2 shows the different types of project that we work with and the total number to date.

Table 2. CIP projects at Sabanci University.

Project type	Number of projects
Children	99
Research and technology	3
Health and sexual responsibility	10
Traffic	1
Earthquake relief	3
Southeastern Turkey (children)	36
Animal rights	3
Handicapped	13
Human rights	30
Environment	26
Elderly	9
Women	4
Total	237

As a result of their involvement in the CIP programme we believe that students at Sabanci University develop a better understanding of social issues – be they poverty, shortcomings of the state educational system, environmental issues, the realities of elderly in nursing homes, becoming more comfortable working with the handicapped, human rights, and other related concepts. They also develop a sense of empathy, a greater appreciation for their own fortunes, and learn to see themselves in a different light as they grow as individuals through their involvement.

In the summers and during semester breaks, we also work in southeast Turkey. This is the least developed region of the country, a region that has been torn by conflict for 15 years. It has high levels of poverty, a strong military presence and few opportunities for those who live there. Our students work together with youth from the region, often university students themselves, with children who live there. As our students are based there for a minimum of two weeks, they learn to see the realities for what they are and the regional problems on a different level. We believe that giving a human face to any given problem does much towards dispelling prejudices and towards opening minds to think more objectively (Watson, 2002).

We have seen a number of our students go on to do graduate work addressing a number of the issues we work with in the CIP programme. Some examples include: a former student (now studying at the London School of Economics) who is completing his PhD in Development Economics; another (who is based at the College of Eastern Utah) is working on gender issues; another who has just completed his Master's degree in Development Administration at University College London; and one who is studying at a prominent state university in Istanbul – working on a Master's degree in Sociology (focusing on the lack of correlation between rights and practices for handicapped). All of these are pursuing graduate degrees as a result of their involvement in CIP.

We also have former students who were active in CIP and who are now working in the corporate world and who continue to be involved in issues of social responsibility – as well as trying to bring the concept to a higher level in their respective jobs. One person, who works for a major multinational company here in Istanbul, provides us with programme sponsorship for 'Sun Day' – our end-of-year celebration for upwards of 3000 people with whom we work directly in Istanbul throughout the academic year as well as contributing to other events and Civil Society Organisations throughout Turkey. Another person has been able to implement a comprehensive recycling programme in the company where she works. Yet another keeps active with our programme and is helping us to write our training manual entitled, *Human Dignity for Human Security*.

Again, focusing on the Turkish context, we keep the focus of our programme on social responsibility and participatory democracy at a fundamental level. We are not without our critics, particularly those who question us on why such a programme should be mandatory for all students. We have seen that such criticism comes from those who believe such work should be done on a voluntary basis. While we do not disagree, as mentioned previously in this case study, the realities we live in here are different to those elsewhere – where there may be a more established history of volunteering. We have found that many organisations do not wish to work with young people as they are seen as not being responsible. Many organisations here work professionally and do not have much of a structure for volunteers; our eager, but inexperienced, students do not always offer them much. So we have the double task of trying to set up a structure in which our students can learn about social responsibility and be directly involved in addressing various issues as well as trying to convince those active in civil society that with some support, tolerance and guidance, young people can in fact contribute to the goals they are working towards. One of the

ironies of our programme is that we work more with state-run organisations, namely the Ministry of Education and Social Services, than with those of civil society. The challenge of this is that any time there is a change in the administration, we essentially need to start from scratch, as it is essential to obtain permission from the state organisations to carry out our work with them.

Those of us working as permanent office staff – the coordinator, programme manager and two full-time assistants – deal with the official paperwork of the projects. We also foster and maintain relationships with all those we work with and, in general, oversee the general programme and encourage the students on the official CIP Team. We believe that part of our success is due to the ‘familial’ manner in which we operate: our doors are always open and for the most part, we are always available. We join in the All-CIP Team meetings and ‘pop-in’ on the individual team meetings as well. Though we have a structure, we make efforts to keep our interactions on a ‘horizontal level’. Students come to see us more as friends rather than as instructors.

With varying degrees of success, we were able to implement programmes similar to CIP in 18 state universities throughout Turkey with the financial assistance of the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation. Several universities implemented the programme as a club while others followed our example and held the programme as a class. Only three universities have CIP as a requirement and those are faculty specific; several others offer CIPs as an elective. Although we have not been able to carry out a complete assessment of the different levels for success – or lack thereof – in establishing CIP at other institutions of higher learning, it is apparent that any such programme needs proper administration – not just staff willing to help out. Those schools that have employed personnel to oversee the CIP-like programme have been more successful at maintaining the projects than those who left it to a club or to staff volunteers. In a country without a strong history of volunteering or civic involvement, it is hardly surprising that both students and universities in general need a stronger structure in order to implement successfully the learning opportunity and in so doing realise the principles that CIP aims to achieve.

Within our own programme at Sabanci University, when we ask students what they think about the requirement of CIP, 85% consistently agree that the projects should be mandatory. As one student put it so succinctly, ‘If I did not have to continue with my project, I would not have and I would not have had the satisfaction and warmth that I have had from working with these children whose lives are more difficult than I could have imagined’ (Anonymous, 2004). Another student responded, that now they did not even want to think of the possibility of the one-year participation not being mandatory, as they might have missed such opportunity with their ‘laziness’ or ‘inattention’ to volunteering at the beginning of their university life.

In a survey conducted in 2004, students active in the CIP programme said they considered the ‘work’ that they have done in the CIP programme as valuable as coursework for their personal, social, intellectual development. Building social awareness, personal development and empathy were more important than building political awareness for these respondents which confirms our belief that our students are indeed getting the point of our programme.

We would like to add a quote from a student who participated in one of our summer projects in southeast Turkey: ‘for the first time in my life, I was 100% sure that I was doing something right, and something good, and for the first time in my life, I was proud of what I was doing’. Sometimes it just comes down to providing the opportunity for young people to develop themselves.

Conclusion

This paper has raised the issue of finding a way of supporting and guiding students to work with others to improve the quality and sustainability of their natural and social environments. The integration of social responsibility into education is a daunting – and rewarding – task of assisting students in understanding diverse values and gaining action skills.

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, there is more than one solution in bringing social responsibility into higher education; hence this paper shows just one of these potential solutions based on real-life experiences. As Jongh and Prinsloo (2004) describe, education on sustainability and social responsibility should embrace pedagogy of critique, possibility and engagement. Among these three, possibility is particularly important; we interpret it to mean that we, as ordinary people, might live our lives and actively participate in creating a safer, more humane, sustainable world (Andrzejewski & Alessio, 1999). Based on our experience in CIP projects, we believe that by being involved in various issues at the grass-roots level, students gain a better understanding of the complexity of issues, and learn to see that they can make a difference through their direct involvement.

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