

Civic-Link:

Irish Launch New Project Citizen Program

By Jenifer McShane

An innovative program in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is attempting to defuse years of tension by encouraging cross-border educational exchanges among school children in the region.

Civic-Link, a *Project Citizen* initiative of Co-operation Ireland, was formally launched at a high school in Belfast on May 25 in the presence of U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley, Northern Ireland Minister of Education John McFall, and Republic of Ireland Minister for Education Michael Martin.

Co-operation Ireland, a nonpolitical nonprofit organization headquartered in Dublin and Belfast, will administer the pilot along with the Center for Civic Education as part of a new initiative of Civitas: An International Civic Education Exchange Program.

The three-year pilot project is designed to encourage young people to learn about their own community and others, and to become more active citizens. In the first year, *Civic-Link* will be introduced in 30 schools

throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland that will each be linked with a cross-border partner school.

Students from the cross-border partner schools will work

together on public policy research issues. Their collaborations will include visits to each others' homes and schools. Students, for example, will try to identify issues or problems within their own area or group and then examine current policies relating



Students from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland exchange ideas.

to these issues. They may then decide to explore an alternative policy of their own to resolve the issue. The project's sponsors hope that North-South visits and ongoing communication will enable the students to share information, learn from each other, and cooperate in constructing action plans to bring about change.

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About 70 students from 12 schools took part in an introductory workshop on the day of the launch. They examined what they felt were important issues in their area — litter, vandalism, robberies, violence, suicide and health

problems relating to alcohol, drugs and HIV.

“By developing a program that includes linking classes of students in different and diverse communities, Co-operation Ireland’s *Civic-Link* program has made a remarkable contribution to the center’s *Project Citizen* program,” said Chuck Quigley, executive director of the Center for Civic Education.

“This addition should enhance the program in the United States as well as in many other countries in which it is being implemented. Already, the leaders of the programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina and other countries have expressed an interest in adding the Irish innovation to their programs, as well as linking their schools in their countries with schools in Northern Ireland.”

Jenifer McShane is U.S. Project Director for Civic-Link.

Hungarian and American Civic Educators Share Teaching Methods at Summer Institute

Dozens of Hungarian civic educators took the opportunity to expand their teaching strategies and deepen content knowledge in civic education during a five-day summer institute in Fonyod, Hungary.

The July institute, a joint initiative of The Florida Law Related Education Association Inc., Civitas-Hungary and The State Bar of Texas-Law Focused Education Inc., was the partnership's culminating activity for 1998–99.

Institute participants included 47 civic educators from Hungary — secondary teachers, university faculty, pedagogical institute faculty and Civitas coordinators. Civitas-Hungary staff, Hungarian teacher-trainers, American master teachers and university faculty presented and facilitated discussions at the institute.

Teachers who participated in the institute received in-service credits for recertification in civic instruction through an agreement between Civitas-Hungary and the Hungarian Ministry of Education.

Rosie Heffernan, a *We the People...* teacher from Florida who facilitated parts of the institute, said the sessions “magnified the successes” of all previous activities she has observed through the partnership over the last few years. She attributed the success to several factors: the greater number of participants trained at one time in one location; the high level of theoretical and ideological discussions, which not only assisted the participants as educators, but respected and intellectually

challenged them as professionals; and the quality of the presenters.

“The participants were exposed to lectures espousing the principles of democracy; practical methodology for incorporating these principles in the classroom; cooperative learning techniques for exercising and internalizing

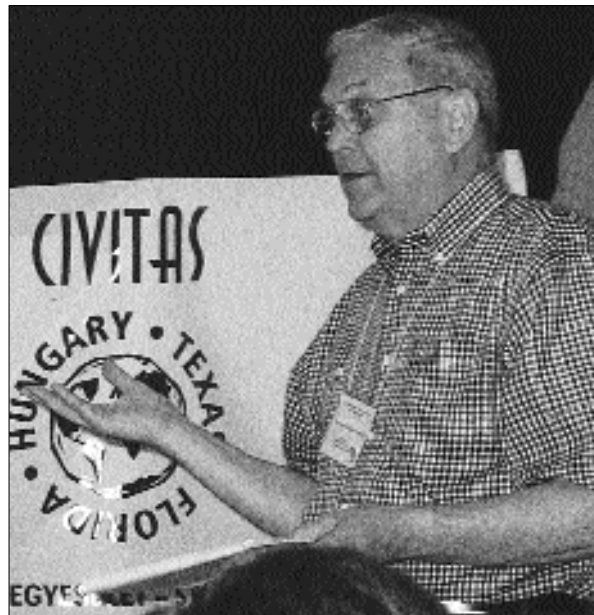
room application sessions.” At the end of the week, he said, the exchanges of gratitude were so rich that participants became emotional.

About 95 percent of those who filled out program evaluations said the institute was extremely useful. All agreed or strongly agreed that they were likely to use knowledge gained during the coming school year. They gave the presenters high marks for their style, content knowledge and methods.

The Civitas Summer Institute took over 10 months to develop. In October, Civitas-Hungary staff visited Florida to discuss the institute design and the composition of the joint Hungarian-American institute faculty. Based on those discussions, a delegation of Hungarian educators was chosen to visit Florida and Texas in January to experience civic education in the United States and to complete the design and content of the summer institute.

The Hungarian delegates included a constitutional attorney, a university instructor, the director of a human rights and peace education foundation and the director of teacher training for Civitas-Hungary. The delegation worked very closely with the Texas representatives while visiting Austin, Texas. Finally, assignments were made to each institute faculty member, lessons and activities were developed, and all materials were formatted and translated for use in an institute notebook.

The institute model focused on four



Chief Justice Major B. Harding, Florida Supreme Court, discusses the independent judiciary and the role of the courts.

civic knowledge, skills and virtue; and the correlation of civic and economic education in a democratic society,” she wrote in an evaluation of the program.

Ernest Abisellán, associate director of The Florida Law Related Education Association Inc., who administered the institute, added that the model was well received by participants. “The teachers were enthusiastic, engaged and very involved in the active learning strategies modeled by the American presenters during the class-

core content areas with corresponding strategies for classroom application. The content areas were

- Principles of Democracy in Education for Democratic Citizenship;
- Teaching Democratic Constitutionalism;
- Developing Democratic Communication Skills; and
- Civic and Economic Education for Democracy.

On the first day of training, John Patrick, Ph.D., of Indiana University and a Civitas partner with Latvia, discussed global trends in education for democracy and the principles of democracy in education for democratic citizenship. Heffernan led the teachers in lessons on comparative constitutionalism and core democratic principles.

Later in the week, Chief Justice Major B. Harding of the Florida Supreme Court discussed American constitutionalism and the role of the independent judiciary. Jerry Perry from Texas discussed the principles of American democracy found in the U.S. Constitution, and Jan Miller, secondary site coordinator, presented lessons on the separation of powers.

Dr. Cheryl Jennings of the Florida State University Stavros Center for Economic Education (affiliated with the National Council for Economic Education) discussed the relationship between civic and economic education. She presented a lecture on economic decision making and public policy. She also facilitated various lessons developed by the National Council for Economic Education.

The institute was deemed such a success that discussions are already underway in Florida, Texas and Hungary to repeat the institute model in 2000.

Region Watch and CCE Project Updates

Project Citizen Launched in Four More Countries

We the People... Project Citizen, the Center for Civic Education's program for middle school students to promote competent and responsible participation in local government, is currently in use in 18 countries around the world. This spring, Croatia, Kazakstan, Hungary and Poland each held their first countrywide *Project Citizen* competitions and/or showcases. In Croatia, 200 students from 12 schools from all regions of the country traveled to Zagreb for the showcase. Approximately 400 Kazakstan students participated in the *Project Citizen* competition in Almaty.

Russia

CCE's Mary Bristol and Ron Morris participated in a workshop April 16–17 in Vladivostok that was designed to help participants — both teachers and members of nongovernmental organizations — to understand a democratic, pluralist society.

The workshop focused on the concept of the “ideal citizen” in a democratic society. The participants developed their own list of characteristics of an ideal citizen, which they analyzed and compared with Civitas definitions of the ideal citizen. The participants also role-played lessons on authority from the Center's *Foundations of Democracy* and examined the concept of public policy making while reviewing CCE's *Project Citizen* curriculum.

The conference was funded by the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR) through a grant from USIA.



One of the 200 Croatian students who traveled to Zagreb for the first Project Citizen showcase prepares for his presentation.

New Video Documents *Project Citizen's* Successes

Eleanor Roosevelt, who was considered one of the most effective child and family advocates of her day, was a strong proponent of teaching children the nuts and bolts of government and how it affected their lives.

“Our children should learn the general framework of their government” she said. “And then they should know where they come in contact with the government, where it touches their daily lives and where their influence is exerted on the government. It must not be a distant thing, someone else’s business, but they must see how every cog in the wheel of a democracy is important and bears its share of responsibility for the smooth running of the entire machine.”

It was in this spirit that the Center for Civic Education launched *We the People ...Project Citizen* as a civic education program for upper elementary and middle schools. Today the program has evolved into an international movement. A new 22-minute video released by CCE in April, which cites Eleanor Roosevelt’s intent, documents the growth and positive results of the program.

The video includes interviews with civic educators in Kazakstan, Brazil, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It describes how *Project Citizen* has successfully been adapted and implemented by a variety of countries around the world.

CCE Executive Director Charles Quigley notes that the program has a very important historical precedent in American life. “There is a saying that the philosophy of today’s classroom is the philosophy of tomorrow’s government,” he says in the video. “Traditionally in the U.S., Jefferson, Madison and everyone said one of the principal reasons for having schools, and also one of the reasons for having public schools, is to pass on to each generation an understanding of their heritage.”

Karl Kurtz, director of state services for the National Conference of State Legislators, a sponsor of *We the People*, explains that the program is especially relevant today. “We have had over the last decade a real crisis in terms of public support for governmental institutions,” he says on the video. “The only solution to that in our view over the long run is education.”

Quigley also explains the appeal of the program to other nations. “Because our curriculum materials deal with fundamental ideas, such as participation, such as questions of

political authority and different ideas about proper sources of authority and where you draw the line on authority, people in other countries have found them relatively easy to try to adapt to their cultures.”

The video shows students defending their portfolios during the *Project Citizen* countrywide competitions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Irish educators discussing the launching of their own version of *Project Citizen*, called *Civic-Link*, to provide, among other things, exchanges between students in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Marianne McGill of Co-Operation Ireland indicates on the video that the program has great potential for her country. “What’s great about this project is that you can do it in terms of action-oriented activities about issues that initially may not be controversial, and that sets the foundation of getting into deeper issues about what citizenship really means,” she says.

For information on the video’s availability, please contact CCE at their Web site at www.civiced.org.

Palermo Delegates Broaden the Agenda

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For the first time, the ICEEP Summer Seminar was expanded to include educators and civic leaders from outside Eastern and Central Europe. Representatives participated from Colombia, Indonesia, Kazakstan, Mexico, Mongolia, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland.

The 80 participants in the one-and-a-half-day meeting exchanged information on civic education and planned upcoming Civitas program activities. Highlights of the meeting included the premiere of a new video on *Project Citizen* (see related story) and a discussion of *Education for Democratic Citizenship: A Framework*, a new project designed to outline the core concepts of democracy shared by countries throughout the world.

Sarah J. Wheat is International Program Coordinator at the Center for Civic Education.