

Background

Civic education is vital to democratic forms of government. It equips and empowers citizens with the agency to influence and shape society, and to be active in democratic processes. The ongoing pandemic demonstrates the complex nature of social issues that require different sectors, organisations and individuals to join forces for effective responses. To contribute to shaping a democracy that serves Bhutan's needs, BCMD organised a webinar on Cultivating Civic Mindset and Civic Action on March 25, 2022.

With perspectives from international and national academia and practitioners from the school and civil society contexts, the webinar shed light on the status of civic education in Bhutan and how it can be harnessed to address societal needs.

The webinar was well received as over 800 people from diverse backgrounds - secondary and tertiary educators, students, policymakers, district administrators, local and international NGOs along with engineers & planners, police officers and doctors - from all over Bhutan registered.

Alan Sears, Speaker

This all comes to me from a place of personal crisis. This is my 45th year of teaching - it is a long time - and I have been a civic educator for all of those 45 years. If you look around the world, in Canada and many parts of the world, there is evidence that civic education is alien to some of us. People seem to be ignorant about democracy and its components are. They are breaking off into small camps and fighting each other vigorously, not listening to one another and there is a trend in some parts of the world of choosing autocratic rather than democratic leaders in governments. All of those things, for me, came to a head in about 2016 at a conference of a European group on citizenship in Spain. I came home from that conference and started to ask myself a set of questions:

- Is it even possible to do what we set out to do; to educate citizens who embrace complexity, transcend personal and narrow group interests, and engage vigorously but positively with their fellow citizens in working for the common good?
- Have we been fooling ourselves all these years? When push comes to shove and things get tough, don't humans retreat to their familiar territories of family, partisan attachments, ethnic or national groups, and fortify themselves against others?
- Isn't what we are seeing in democratic societies the natural response to threats to economic security, changes in power dynamics, and the resulting loss of status and social peace?
- Is the kind of citizenship education advocated by democratic states just a pipe dream only possible in good times?

And here's the question that got me:

- Has my career been worth anything? Have I made a difference?

Maybe that is part of getting older - we all begin to wonder that. I had these questions about democracy and citizenship education. So I decided not to give up thinking more deeply about it, and I began reading a lot of work in cognitive psychology. I discovered that many of the things we see in the world that appear to be issues and problems for creating a civic mindset - the theme of this conference - are natural ways humans reason. Often literature presents "reason" as the systemic thing that people do: they identify a problem, collect evidence and work through it. But human reasoning is a lot different from that in many ways. What we are trying to do in civic education is to get people to reason unnaturally - not to fall back on their natural tendencies and reason.

So, we've developed five dichotomies. These are the dichotomies of civic reason:

<p>Natural Reasoning</p> <p>It is natural to crave certainty and simplicity</p>	<p>Civic Reasoning</p> <p>Good civic reasoners embrace complexity and recognise that almost nothing important in the natural world or human relations is certain or simple.</p>
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The first dichotomy is that it is natural to crave certainty and simplicity. We all like the world to be certain and simple, and in many ways, when it is, it just makes life easier. We don't have to think through things, we can just go automatically. We have evolved to do some things without thinking too deeply about them. But the problem is that good civic reasoners embrace complexity and recognise that almost nothing important in the natural world or human relations is certain or simple. We have to help young people get a hold of this - to understand that the world is complicated and the problems that they have to wrestle with as civic people are complicated and different people feel differently about them.

<p>Natural Reasoning</p> <p>It is natural to embrace information that confirms our views while ignoring or rejecting information that casts doubt on them: minds are hard to change.</p>	<p>Civic Reasoning</p> <p>Good civic reasoners are cognitively flexible, they are disposed to seek out and consider information that challenges their thinking, admit error, and change their minds when appropriate.</p>
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I have done a lot of work on what is called priori knowledge. Humans come to any learning situation with a cognitive framework and a set idea in their heads, and it is difficult to change that. It is difficult for you to change your mind, and it is difficult for me to change my mind. We often look for information that confirms our ideas [inaudible] for this is information bias. We

have to put students in situations where they are continuously confronted with other points of view and circumstances because good civic reasoners are cognitively flexible. They are disposed to seek out and consider information that may challenge their thinking and admit errors, and change their minds when appropriate.

<p>Natural Reasoning</p> <p>It is natural to believe we know more than we do and discount the need for more information and broader perspectives.</p>	<p>Civic Reasoning</p> <p>Good civic reasoners recognise the limits of their own knowledge and seek substantial collaboration with others who can add perspectives and evidence to the consideration of issues and questions.</p>
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It is natural to believe we know more than we do and discount the need for more information and broader perspectives. Sometimes in psychology, this is called a Dunning–Kruger effect. You all know people who think they know more than they do and you would rather not spend much time with them, but it is a feature we all have. So, we have to help students learn that good civic reasoners recognise the limits of their own knowledge and seek substantial collaboration with others who can add perspectives and evidence to the consideration of issues and questions. So, bringing people in contact with other people, and other perspectives is more important than helping them come to the point where they understand their limits.

<p>Natural Reasoning</p> <p>It is natural to reason together with people who think like us, and to hold firmly to perspectives accepted by those close to us.</p>	<p>Civic Reasoning</p> <p>Good civic reasoners question accepted truths, are intellectually nourished by diversity, seek out and consider other perspectives and worldviews, and are open to shifting their socio-political allegiances.</p>
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It is natural to reason together with people who think like us and to hold firmly to perspectives accepted by those close to us. We see this in the internet phenomenon of filter bubbles where the news gets filtered for people in ways that the bots think we will like, and we like to hang around with people who think like us. But in fact, good civic reasoners question accepted truths. They are intellectually nourished by diversity and seek out and consider other perspectives and worldviews. They are open to shifting their socio-political allegiances. So, we are not life-long members of the conservative, liberal, democratic or republican parties or whatever parties we have. We are open to changing our minds when we see other perspectives.

<p>Natural Reasoning</p> <p>It is natural to desire conclusive, lasting</p>	<p>Civic Reasoning</p> <p>Good civic reasoners question accepted</p>
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solutions to complex problems.	truths, are intellectually nourished by diversity, seek out and consider other perspectives and worldviews, and are open to shifting their socio-political allegiances.
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Finally, it is natural to desire conclusive, lasting solutions to complex problems. We want our governments and our civic organisations to fix things, to give us the perfect healthcare or education systems, or the perfect system of roads. But the truth is that almost no important issues have solutions that will satisfy everyone and last forever. We keep arguing, discussing or debating the same thing. So, I think the most important thing we need to do in civic education is to help people have a tolerance for ambiguity - to be able to handle the ambiguity that we will have to discuss the issues over and over again as times change, and that is not a strange thing, that is just the way democracy works.

I am writing a book about how to do some of these things- how to develop some of the civic reasoning in history class, but this is not something for any one subject. These ideas transcend all subjects. As Deki Choden will tell us, they go into the ways a school is organised and as Dr Chencho Lhamu will tell us, they go into the interrelationship between schools and communities, because parents, community members, and community organisations have a role in teaching this kind of citizenship education. As I am excited from what I have seen about the work in Bhutan and I think you are on the track to taking this holistic approach.

Deki Choden, Speaker

Let me begin my session by sharing our school’s vision, which is “Edu-caring for universal happiness and wellbeing”. I do believe the vision of care and happiness does underscore the importance of cultivating civic mindsets that inspire students and young people to become positive change-makers. Our inspirations are quite clear. Basically, as everyone knows, GNH (Gross National Happiness) is not only our school’s mandate in Bhutan since 2010, but it is also the “development with values” as His Majesty the King has so aptly described. When we transitioned to democracy, we wanted to know how we in schools can play a part to educate to become good citizens, and contrary to examination-oriented education systems, how can we go beyond a focus on academic success to nurturing “cooperation and collaboration” over “competition” to achieve bigger goals that impact everyone’s success.

So, let me start by sharing some of the avenues and pathways that I mentioned earlier that help us realise our goal and vision of a more human-centered society. There are quite a few that we have developed over the last decade and a half, but for the purpose of this conference, I would like to highlight three of them with the focus on Design for Change.

Design for Change (DFC) is a global school initiative that is in over 65 countries and in Bhutan, DFC is also spread to close to 260 schools.

Project Helping Hands for Health and Happiness (ProH4) is ELC’s very own citizenship programme that is inspired by the notion that it is not charity but a social responsibility. We are partnered with about eight civil society organisations including the Bhutan Kidney Foundation, Bhutan Toilet Organisation, Nazhoen Lamtoen and a few animal welfare organisations like the Royal Society for Protection of Nature and Jangsa Animal Trust to name a few.

Wellness and Wellbeing (4PWB & SEL) - As His Majesty has often reminded us, we can not give what we do not have. We believe that cultivating wellness within is the way towards bringing about wellbeing for all, and certainly as teachers in schools.

I believe that these are all human-centered and that is how we see ourselves at least taking on the mantle of cultivating a civic-minded citizenry. With this, let me now jump into the topic of my session: Design for Change.

As you can see in **Design for Change**, the words “I can” are highlighted which is really the message of DFC, that children matter, they can be empowered to be the change they wish to see in their world, and that they can drive the change and now is the time do it - they don't have to wait to be adults to do it. So, DFC is a global school initiative and it has four easy steps: *Feel, Imagine, Do and Share (FIDS)*.

‘Feel’ is where empathy comes to the fore. Empathy is emotional intelligence that allows a child to recognise somebody else’s pain and suffering. So, in schools where we only focus on academic success, it does not leave much room to contribute to nation-building or to be a force of change. Then, you go to the ‘Imagine’ stage which is your 21st-century life skills of critical thinking, creative thinking, problem-solving and decision making. All of those are so well exercised even without the children knowing that they are using these skills. ‘Do’ is about taking agency and no idea is as good as having the implementation fidelity to enforce them, and ‘Share’, because nothing is of value unless it is shared for a bigger impact.

Let me share a story of a remote school in Bhutan that has tried to exercise civic action and connect it to the values of GNH. The story is titled Bamboozled and is the story of a 15-year-old girl named Anita and her friends creating a safe pathway to Ragaytung Primary School, in Chhukha.

Feel

Anita and her friends felt that the way to your school was a long and treacherous walk with the risk of falling down the hill.

Imagine

They imagined a safe path for daily commute to school.

Do & Share

They discussed ideas and rallied the parents and the community to build a bamboo fence along the path. They also cleaned up the thorny bushes and planted trees along the path for further safety.

We have four pillars of GNH, which are Good Governance, Sustainable Economic Development, Environmental Conservation and Cultural Preservation.

In the first pillar, we see students recognising the problem of dangerous pathways to school that they had to walk on every single day. They took leadership in finding their solutions which is good governance. As preparation for sustainable economic development, the fencing that the students used were of local resources and they used local expertise who were basically their farmer parents, with great cost saving. For environmental conservation, they used bamboo which grew in plenty in their school neighbourhood, not plastic or metal fences. So, pollution reduction was also an idea that they exercised. Finally, cultural preservation is about using local

know-how and techniques that are homegrown making us more self-reliant.

But underlying all of this is the idea of “mindfulness”, which is so integral in all of the above. You can create solutions but what kind of solutions - would our solutions create more problems? So, I believe that is where well-being comes in.

This project draws the connection between DFC and life skills education. In fact, every Bhutanese school has two periods allotted per week to learn about life skills education.

Thinking Skills

It is not about knowing life skills and regurgitating them in an exam, but rather being able to exercise your critical thinking, creative thinking, problem-solving and decision making, which is what Anita and her friends did when they recognised the clear and present danger of the narrow pathways.

Effective communication Skills

How much do we communicate even within our schools? Anita and her friends discussed among themselves and communicated with the school administration to rope in the parents who were the local experts and spend the whole day in the school to create a 150-metre long bamboo fence.

Social and Emotional Skills

Maybe the older students realised how unsafe it would have been even more so for the very younger children who would be crossing these pathways.

When they are able to see the visible result of their civic actions, can you imagine the kind of confidence that these children would have? This is what DFC teaches us - to cultivate a FIDS-for-KIDS “I CAN” mindset.

So ultimately, through Design for Change and the many alternative pathways to a vibrant education system, the big question we have to ask is: What is the purpose of education and what kind of legacy can we leave behind?

Dr Kezang Sherab, Speaker

My session is based on some of the work I have done with the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) on Participation and Democratic Culture at the School Level: A Baseline Study. This study was quite a big study that involved people at the local government level, dzongkhag officials, and other stakeholders including some civil servants. Today, I chose to speak on the school aspect.

In general, we tend to associate democracy and democratic culture with politics and politicians. Most of the time, we think “I’m not a politician. This is not for me” which is in fact not true and there is much more than that. I believe that this kind of attitude comes from our society which is hierarchical in structure. This tends to create social inequalities and structural disadvantages in our society. For instance, it is often considered impolite to ask questions to our teachers or our parents, and even sometimes it is impolite to argue with the elders. Most often, we have experienced that if a group of parents are talking or discussing something and a child tends to interrupt, the parents make a remark “This is not for you. This is for the elders.”

With such parenting practices that are prevalent in our society and when reinforced in the school setting, it is likely to groom citizens who would lack a sense of voice and agency and be detrimental to the democratic system of governance. If you look at best practices elsewhere in the world, we will come to know that even well established democratic nations consider civic citizenship education to be the key aspect of their curricula. It is mainly because these democratic values, attitudes, knowledge and skills are very much learned behaviour and do not happen automatically. It can be taught in the form of a formal curriculum in the school setting or in the form of experiential learning like Deki Choden shared earlier - the Design for Change programme - where children get the opportunity to learn different democratic values and processes.

So, realising the importance, BCMD had initiated a project called Project Mikhung in Paro Dzongkhag and I had the opportunity to study this project. I am going to share some key findings from this study. This study looked at the student's level of civic knowledge, their understanding of the roles and responsibilities in a democracy, whether they participate or not, and whether they are able to acquire these behaviours and attitudes.

We used a sequential mixed method. We started with a survey of students; they were class 9 students who were involved in Project Mikhung. We had responses from 55 students from two project schools. Based on the survey findings, we designed interview questions for the focus group discussions. We had two focal group discussions with students in the two project schools and also two focus group discussions with teachers in the same schools.

This is a fairly small-scale research and we don't want to generalise the findings to other contexts. However, having said that, there are many other indicators that this is applicable and relevant to other contexts and schools throughout Bhutan. We also had an open-ended section where people provided a lot of comments. So, these were the data we used.

These are some of the key findings from this study:

- Limited Civic Knowledge

We had a sort of test for participants to find out their awareness in terms of democracy and democratic culture processes. On average, only 43.3% of the participants displayed civic knowledge which indicates that there is a lot we can do to help these children.

- Limited Democratic Culture

There was very limited democratic culture practised in schools, even in the classrooms where teachers teach their students.

- Teachers Lack Civic Knowledge and Democratic Practices

Not only students, but we have also found out that even teachers lack basic civic knowledge and democratic practices. This finding confirms an earlier finding of Wangmo (2016) that civics education basically lacks both content and practice in the Bhutanese context.

- Disconnect between theory and practice

There is a huge gap between what children learn in terms of theory in the school setting and the actual practice. Most often, children are taught theoretical aspects, whether in classrooms through formal curriculum or through other programs, but they have very limited opportunities to practise some of these theoretical aspects.

This brings us to the role of the hidden curriculum - how our children learn tacit knowledge.

Most often, in our school settings, we tend to neglect this aspect. We all know that teachers are asked to be role models to students but the findings show that in fact, the role-modeling happens in a negative way. There is plenty of research that shows that children learn from adults, their teachers, in a hidden way more than what we teach them in the classrooms. This tells us that we have to be very careful in terms of our behaviour, what we speak to them about and what we teach them because we tend to often contradict ... This is more impactful than the content knowledge that they learn. The knowledge they pick up from their elders, teachers and parents in the form of the hidden curriculum has a lifelong impact on the children. If we are not careful, we tend to most often convey, in part, negative behaviours, values and skills to our children.

Related to this, a couple of days back, I saw this news online: “Man who felt humiliated at school, stabs teacher 101 times, 30 years after graduating!”. This clearly indicates that what we do with our children has a lot of impacts. This man was humiliated by his teacher when he was in primary school and after so many years, he has had with them and suddenly commits this crime.

We never know, some of our students must be going through this situation because most often in our classrooms, we tell children that we have to be honest, be kind to others, have compassion, and that there should be justice and equality, but most often, our actions as teachers and parents are otherwise. That is what I mean by the hidden curriculum.

I would like to finish by sharing the following: “Democracy is best learned in democratic settings.” As teachers and parents, we need to engage our students, put them into settings where they learn these important values in life - values of justice, equality, openness, and as Alan mentioned earlier, respecting different points of view and tolerance for ambiguity. All these are learned behaviour. So, we need to create this environment for our students.

Chencho Lhamu (PhD), Speaker

1. What is a civic mindset?

The importance of civic mindset and civic action lies in the fact that human beings are social in nature and that we live and thrive in supportive communities. A civic mindset is a “unifying outlook that connects people” through recognition of common interests and purpose, and the one that builds bridges across tribes placing primacy on the common good.

In simple terms, to have a civic mindset means to be community-spirited-- to think of not just oneself but of those with whom we share the social and physical space. This poster illustrates what a civic mindset means to me. “I am my community”.

Why cultivate a civic mindset? I give three reasons:

1. Growing individualism

Traditionally, we are a close-knit society. Civic sense is ingrained in our culture; neighbours help each other during plantation and harvest seasons, take turns to build houses and babysit relatives' and neighbours' children. However, with modernisation and urbanisation, neighbours living in the same apartment hardly exchange words of greeting. Life has become busy and we mind our own business, so to say. This is further aggravated by people on the move looking for jobs or on job transfers; the time and the motivation to nurture a sense of attachment with the community of residence are limited.

2. Welfare mindset

The introduction of democracy is engendering a “transactional relationship” between the elected and the citizenry and a “welfare mindset” in general. Demands on elected representatives to return favours of personal nature are not uncommon in our young democracy once we have cast our votes. As political pledges play an important role in garnering support, promises of small and quick favours tend to create a culture of reliance on the state to provide for everything while the country sinks deeper into external debts.

3. Narrow view of education

Not only does the education system divorce learning from reality with a heavy emphasis on content regurgitation, but when learning is taken out of the school campus for students to connect with community issues and the state of affairs, it becomes unsettling and cumbersome for adults and authorities. The reason is that we view education as a learning process confined to textbooks and classrooms. These are some of the forces shaping our society, and the results of which will be evident in the values and mindset of the younger generation. To be intentional about how we shape our future, we need to embed our young people's learning in social change as it unfolds if they are to become competent in navigating real-life challenges.

How does BCMD promote civic mindset and civic action?

Basically, BCMD follows an experiential learning process with hands-on activities and reflective sessions embedded in authentic learning contexts. I think this is best explained in the form of a story, and I pick one of the many stories.

A group of Jigme Namgyel Engineering College students who were trained on asset-based community mapping set out to study the issues and strengths of their locality. They stumbled across Dhujum Dharma House, a monastery in SamdrupJongkhar. We promote the idea of communities as self-organising entities capable of solving some issues by themselves without the need for an expert or an external intervention through the concept of asset-based community development. The college youths found that the monastery served both spiritual and recreational purposes as pujas and rituals are performed there and people from the town come to enjoy the cool and clean air during weekend picnics near the monastery.

However, the youths also found that the place had issues of open defecation due to the absence of public toilets. The workshop on community mapping requires them to mobilise as many relevant resources and support from within the community as possible and to decide on a solution that is acceptable to all stakeholders. So, on consulting the caretaker of the monastery, they found that the monastery already had timber and sand. Collectively, they decided to build a two-unit toilet to solve the problem of open defecation.

Being engineering students the youths identified themselves as one important “asset” in the community; they managed to get a donation of construction materials from a private firm, additional funds from SJI, a local CSO, and combined with small seed money from BCMD, they constructed 7 toilets and addressed the issue of open defecation at the monastery. This local initiative by JNEC students illustrates that when community residents come together and pull in resources, some issues of the community can be resolved by the community, for the community.

What results are we seeing from this initiative?

1. Develops ownership

We observed that the experiential learning approach makes youth connect with their communities, become more aware of social-economic and environmental issues and develop a sense of ownership of their community once they have become part of a solution-building process.

2. They also realise and acknowledge that community development is a shared responsibility of the state and the citizens.

3. Appreciate the complexity of social issues

The youths come to understand that social issues are complex. The process helps them develop critical and analytical skills.

4. If you are interested to find out more about the results of this initiative, go to the BCMD website we will be uploading the research report soon.

Lessons

We have observed that in our young democracy, empowering the youth is not enough; equally important is to create awareness in authorities about the role of citizens and the youth in community development. Empowering one group and not the other leads to suspicion and resistance that threatens to rob the young people of meaningful learning experiences.

So, an intergenerational approach to civic education is critical in Bhutan’s fledgling democracy. While the young learn to express their voice responsibly and respectfully, we need the adult folks to learn to provide a safe space and an open mind to listen to the diverse views of the youth as they try their hands at being active citizens.

We observed that such a learning process requires one motivated and civic-minded teacher to inspire the youths, supported by an educational leader who believes in taking learning beyond the prescribed textbooks, and local authorities who see the long-term value of nurturing civic mindset and civic action in citizens and the youth.

Q&A Session:

1. Yonten Norbu on Facebook: *What is your view on the civic mindset of your generation and the generation of today? Which generation is easier to inculcate a civic mindset?*

Alan Sears: *In much of my work here, I often joke with my students at the university and tell them “please don’t vote”, because we have this concept of three crisis in civic education, a crisis among the youth:*

- *A crisis of ignorance - we believe young people don’t know the things they need to know to be good citizens*
- *A crisis of agnosticism - that young people don’t believe the things they should believe*
- *A crisis of alienation - that young people have withdrawn from community to become individualistic and everything else*

However, I think almost all the young people that I have talked to here in Canada in my research want to make a difference in their community. They are not alienated or agnostic and they are not particularly ignorant either compared to my generation. The students did want to make a difference in their communities, but they did not believe the traditional political structure made much of a difference. So, almost all of them were oriented to getting involved in grassroots organisations or civil society organisations. There is nothing wrong with that but giving up on formal politics is a dangerous thing because lots of decisions are made through politics. In some of our work, we have talked about the triple narrowing of politics and one is to exclude oneself from the political life and say one is only going to work in the civil society sector. So, I don’t think it is any more difficult to generate a civic mindset in students today than in my generation but I do think the issues are different and we have to pay attention to how young people think.

2. Karma Phuntshok on Facebook: *How is civic mindset related to one's spiritual practices?*

Deki Choden: *In Bhutan we are known for making very large donations to the building of temples and stupas which is important as part of our culture. But through our citizenship education programme at ELC and our partnerships with organisations like RSPCA, we try to teach our students the idea of empathy and compassion. In fact, in our school, we now have about nine dogs. This is also following His Majesty’s lead during the pandemic of how the dogs*

are starving and unfed. So, for a Bhutanese or anybody who has a strong inclination to spirituality, I think there are so many opportunities in front of us where we can be a force of good and where our compassionate action can really serve all sentient beings.

Chencho Lhamu: If our understanding of spiritual practice is just to light butter lamps and chant prayers, perhaps people might not see the connection between spiritual practice and civic mindset. But I do see a connection here because to have a civic mindset is not to think just of oneself but of all the people around you. What happens in your community affects you and what happens to you affects your community. So, this connects with the buddhist concepts of interdependence and interconnectedness. To me, civic action is basically spiritualism in action.

3. Thinley Choden on Zoom: *What is the biggest challenge in educating and implementing Design for Change at ELC?*

Deki Choden: This is just to echo what everybody else said about rigidity in schools to follow a set curriculum. Especially given that we continue to be a part of an examination oriented education system, not just in Bhutan but all over the world, I think there is that concern among teachers, parents and all the other stakeholders for students to perform well on their exams, especially ones that relate to high stakes exams. Because of that, I feel like there is a little bit of deviation from what really matters in education. Regardless of all of this, when we understand wellbeing, care and emotional intelligence, I think we create a much more conducive environment to cultivate a cognitive intelligence. At ELC, there are no rankings in the exams because we believe that when we teach, we learn twice. So, this whole idea of caring and taking stewardship of your planet for the future are going to be important aspects of living in this new age with its new challenges. When we have emotional intelligence and are able to navigate through all of these aspects of life and the new challenges, I think we are in a much better position to handle our lives, succeed in our lives and ultimately achieve happiness and wellbeing.

4. Pema K Khandu on Facebook: *What are your recommendations to educators like me to link the disconnection that you have observed between theory and practice of civic education in the schools?*

Deki Choden: I have the problem with the word 'knowledge'. Whenever somebody says they go to school to get knowledge, I think you can get knowledge on the internet now but schools are places where you turn that knowledge into wisdom. I think that is what we are falling short of. There is not enough of the wisdom and the compassion that will put all that knowledge and science to use. It has to serve our purpose. Not that we become slaves to knowledge and regurgitate it in exams to show we are smart. But if we can translate them into actions which will serve us, then we can wiser as a society and as a nation.

5. Kelzang Penjor on Facebook: What about the parents' role in developing the civic mindset?

Alan Sears: *There is considerable discussion about if the issue is with the curriculum or the teachers but I think sometimes we put too much on schools. Developing a civic mindset is a wide cultural activity. Schools are important but it is not just for schools. There is literature research from around the world that demonstrate that children who come from homes where issues are discussed and they have an ability to make their own points of view known, where other points of view are brought into the home and explored, then that correlates highly with good civic outcomes - the desire to participate with better civic skills, with empathy for different points of view that Deki Choden talked about. So, parents have a critical role and I think schools and parents can work together to enhance that role. If schools design curriculum about schools - Chencho Lhamu was talking about the importance of bringing contemporary issues where you can design a set of discussion questions or activities that children might actually take home and discuss with their parents. Family context has a huge influence on people's attitudes towards community and civic life.*

6. Yonten Norbu on Facebook: Has BCMD implemented any plans or programs in collaboration with MoE to cultivate civic mindset and action? I feel schools will benefit majorly from such programs as this is the population shaping our future.

Chencho Lhamu: *The citizenship education initiative is in collaboration with Paro and Samdrup Jongkhar District, so if that qualifies as a collaboration with MoE, then yes, we are collaborating. But regardless of whose name features in the document where we agree to collaborate, I think the beneficiaries are young people of the country and that is what is the most important for BCMD.*

7. Phuntsho Namgay on Facebook: Even as we present and listen to about civic mindset and civic education, we have unknown section of population dumping waste everywhere, sharing unethical videos, fake news, sexual harrasment amongst many more. We have come a long way living in a democratic society. Where are we going wrong?

Kezang Sherab: *This indicates that our formal education is not helping in cultivating a civic mindset. We need to refocus in terms of educating. I have seen many educated people throwing their doma wrappers from their prados on the road side. I am happy to share that with Royal Kasha, we are now rolling out Bhutan Baccalaureate which is likely to address the issue of civic mindset and action among the citizens.*

Chencho Lhamu: *I tied this to Alan Sears' session where he talked about normal reasoning versus civic reasoning and how it is our tendency to desire for certainty, simplicity, lasting solutions to complex problems whereas civic reasoning is complex. So, I think we will never see a time when no single individual will litter the environment. I think we will always have these*

kinds of issues. But the question here is, can we improve? Can we change our behaviour? I believe we can. How we do that relies a lot on how we groom our younger generation as a parent and as a teacher? I recall this teacher who had been part of BCMD's initiative. He went back to his school and he took this group of children to map resources and issues in school. The children found out that their toilets need better cleaning. But his colleagues asked him "why are you going through this process? Why do you not tell the students? They will do it.".. But when there is a process of studying an issue, finding out the causes of it and coming up with solutions of their own, there is better ownership of the learning. The learning is not just at the cognitive level but at the level of the heart; there is ownership. I think it has to do with how we perform our role of nurturing our children as a parent as well as teachers.

Recommendations (as a result of the conference)

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Speaker Profile

Alan Sears is a Professor Emeritus in the Faculty of Education at UNB and specialises in civic and history education. His current work examines how collective memory and commemorative spaces, objects, and ceremonies shape historical consciousness and inform civic engagement. His most recent book, coauthored with Penney Clark, is *The Arts and the Teaching of History: Historical F(r)ictions* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2020). He is currently working with Carla Peck on a book titled *Rescuing Reason: The Democratic Imperative of History Education*.

Deki Choden is the Principal of Educating for Lifelong Citizenship (ELC) High School. She has served as an educator and curriculum designer for over three decades. Under her leadership, ELC school became a country partner for Design for Change (DFC), a global school movement that inspires every child to take ownership of their problems and create or imagine solutions from a very young age. It is her belief that nurturing the heart must precede the honing of the intellect.

Kezang Sherab is the Dean Research and Industrial Linkages at the Paro College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan. He has published on a variety of educational topics such as GNH education, non-cognitive skills, youth issues and the research culture. He was the principal investigator of the research on *Inquiry into Citizen Participation and Democratic Culture at the Local Level*.

Chencho Lhamu works as the Executive Director at BCMD. She has served in the civil service in various capacities for over a decade. As one of the pioneering members of the erstwhile Royal Education Council (2007 – 2014), she has worked as a Program Director to reform teacher education in the country. She continues to develop contents and enhance personal and professional development of teachers, youth, and elected leaders at BCMD.

Moderator

Tandin Dorji is the President of Norbuling Rigter College. He has served as an educationist and a researcher for over 20 years, teaching history in schools and colleges and designing curriculum with the Ministry of Education. He has Ph.D in Social Anthropology and is currently also serving as the Chairperson of History and Civics Committee, Department of Curriculum and Professional Development.