

## **Reinventing Freire in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Citizenship education, Student Voice and School Participatory Budgeting**

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*This year marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Paulo Freire, one of the most influential educational thinkers of the 20th century. In the 21st century, he continues to inspire many progressive educators around the world. This paper focuses on the connections between Freire's work and ideas (especially those related to citizenship education and school democracy) and school participatory budgeting, a process that has been growing significantly in the last decade and is presently being implemented in thousands of educational institutions around the world. The paper traces a line that connects Freire's work at the Social Service of Industry (SESI) during his youth, his work as Secretary of Education of Sao Paulo upon his return to Brazil from exile (particularly the Escola Cidadã project) and the current efforts around school participatory budgeting (School PB). The discussion on School PB is illustrated with two cases from Arizona: an inclusive model piloted in three schools, and a district-wide School PB initiative on school safety that includes students, parents, and staff in 20 high schools.*

*Keywords: participatory budgeting, participatory governance, civic education, citizenship education, civic engagement, democratic schooling, Paulo Freire*

### **Reinventing Freire in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Citizenship education, student voice and school participatory budgeting**

"I don't want to be followed; I want to be reinvented," Paulo Freire said on several occasions (Vittoria, 2021). It is in this spirit that we approach this paper. Inspired by Freire's ideas, and especially by his practice as an educator in Brazil (both before his exile and after his return), we discuss the recent development and expansion of a process known as School Participatory Budgeting (School PB). We first outline how the School PB model emanated from Freire's project of Escola Cidadã (Citizen School). The School PB process aligns well with Freire's ideas on dialogue, participation, collaboration, creativity, student agency, and change, and disrupts both traditional authoritarian models of school governance and rote practices of citizenship learning. We trace the expansion of both Youth PB and School PB from their modest origins in Brazil to where now this participatory democratic process has been taken up in many countries across the globe, including Argentina, Mexico, Perú, Colombia, Spain, Russia, France, Italy, Zambia, South Korea, Czech Republic, Portugal, United States and Canada. We then highlight examples of the growing School PB movement, focusing on two cases from the experience of School PB in Arizona. We chose Arizona not only because that is where the first School PB process in the U.S. was designed and implemented, but also because it is a place for continuous experimentation and innovation. We next discuss methodological challenges and

limitations to studying School PB and conclude by returning full circle to Freire with some comments about his legacy and his influence on School PB.

**In the beginning was SESI: From a 'culture of silence' to dialogue and self-governance**

In 1947, after a brief practice as a lawyer and several years of high school teaching, a 26-year-old Paulo Freire started a 10-year period as director of Education and Culture of the Social Service of Industry (SESI) in the state of Pernambuco, one of the poorest regions of Brazil. SESI had been created in 1946 as a non-profit organization to promote social welfare and cultural development of industrial workers, their families, and the communities. Those formative years at SESI were crucial in the development of Freire's educational ideas that would be articulated two decades later in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970). Most of Freire's reflections on knowledge, human development, dynamics of oppression and liberation, and the role of education in those dynamics that appear in that book originated from his experiences in Northeast Brazil. In *Letters to Cristina*, Freire (1996) described his decade at SESI as the most important political-pedagogical practice of his life (p. 81).

SESI was a pivotal moment in the life of young Freire for several reasons, of which three are particularly relevant to this paper. Firstly, the daily interactions with workers and peasants allowed Freire to become more aware of their realities and perspectives, and to understand the impact of colonialism, exploitation, illiteracy, and banking education on what he eventually called a "culture of silence" (Freire, 1970). Secondly, SESI gave Freire an opportunity to explore the possibilities of overcoming that culture of silence through a pedagogical approach that promoted critical reflection on reality, valued local knowledge and nurtured dialogue. Indeed, at SESI Freire learned that dialogue was not only an element of the educational process, but also the moment when people meet to discover reality and transform it together (Freire, 1970). Thirdly, as SESI's director, Freire established an open and horizontal style of administration and implemented a system that he called "parlamentarization" that consisted of a combination of study groups and action groups. Through these initiatives he wanted to demonstrate that dialogue, democracy, and self-governance could be implemented in institutions, hence involve children and their families in discussions about educational and social issues, usually held in learning circles and workers' clubs. Indeed, the democratic, open, and flexible management system that Freire implemented at SESI relied strongly on school-family relations. In the educational institutions managed by SESI, Freire invited students and parents to participate in forums about education and society, to discuss issues that affected learning like child labor, malnutrition, and authoritarianism (Jeria, 1984). He believed that those and other social and educational problems could only be solved with the participation of parents and the community. Moreover, he hoped these forums would encourage parents to become more involved in the development of school policies, to participate in decision-making bodies in schools and eventually transfer those capacities to other civic and political spheres (Flecha, 2004; Gadotti, 1994, 1996; Gadotti & Torres, 2009; Gerhardt, 1989; Romao, 2001; Rosas, 2001; Schugurensky, 2014). At that time, the leadership of SESI was not interested in those reforms, and Freire was asked to resign.

***Freire and the transformative potential of schools***

Several decades later, after a successful literacy campaign and 15 years of exile, Freire would have another opportunity to try to democratize hierarchical educational institutions in Brazil as Secretary of Education of the City of Sao Paulo, the largest urban metropolitan area of Brazil and one of the largest in the world (Schugurensky, 2014). One of the initiatives of this administration, the Escola Cidadã (Citizen School), constituted an

important attempt to transform education. This project relates to two ideas that were part of Freire's conceptual framework. First, unlike his contemporary deschooling advocates like Ivan Illich, Everett Reimer, John Holt and Paul Goodman, Freire not only believed that schools were one of the few avenues still available for upward social mobility in unequal societies but also that they could contribute to social transformation by becoming more democratic institutions, equipping students with critical thinking and citizenship skills, equalizing opportunities and partnering with the community to address local problems (Freire, 1970; Jeria, 1984; Schugurensky, 2014). Second, his proposal to change school culture was rooted in his concept of "inédito viável," which has been translated as "viable unheard of," "untested feasibility," or "doable solutions." Freire argued that traditional authoritarian cultures can change over time, but this demands consistent efforts and the continuity of alternative processes that are more participatory and democratic (Freire, 1970). The collective construction of such a liminal democracy requires a paradigm shift. Freire outlines leaving behind banking education, paternalism, elitism, and top-down decision-making and nurturing the emergence of a new ethos and innovative practices guided by a shared vision.

Freire's ideas on institutional democratization, participation, dialogue and cooperative learning were also influenced by the progressive school movement, and particularly by the writings of the educational philosopher John Dewey. These ideas were popularized in Brazil by Anísio Teixeira, an intellectual leader who had taken courses with Dewey at Teachers' College Columbia University in the late 1920s and became Director of Education of Rio de Janeiro in the early 1930s (Warde, 2005). Inspired by those ideas and by his experiences at SESI and at several literacy campaigns in different parts of the world, Freire argued that education for democracy cannot be separated from the practice of democracy and that democracy can be learned more effectively through direct and active participation in one's communities. To those who criticized him with the argument that most people did not have the responsibility required to make decisions, he replied - echoing Dewey's dictum that the cure to the problems of democracy is more democracy - that the best way to learn social and political responsibility is experiencing such responsibility (Schugurensky, 2014). This was an important pillar of *Escola Cidadã*, which was conceived as an antidote to the authoritarian model of school governance and to the traditional approaches to citizenship education.

### **Ails and allays of citizenship education**

Traditional models of citizenship education have two common problems. The first is the emphasis on rote memorization of historical, geographical, and institutional content connected to a test (Center on Educational Policy, 2007; Dee & Jacob, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2012; West, 2007). We acknowledge that many of these facts are important and certainly deserve a place in the curriculum. However, an overreliance on a memorization of facts is problematic not only because students would forget that information after the exam (the more irrelevant and distant the information to the lives of the students, the more likely to be forgotten), but also because it does not pay enough attention to the development of democratic competencies, dispositions, and mindsets. Moreover, the overt attention on hegemonic historical knowledge often leaves out multiple perspectives of historical events and counternarratives of marginalized peoples and can perpetuate a nationalistic "glory story" instead of acknowledging and exploring the impacts of the "glory story" - including those stories and experiences still present and affecting students today (Allen, 2014; Gibson, 2019; Levinson, 2012; Shaver, 2017; Vasquez & Altshuler, 2017; Westheimer, 2015).

The second problem lies within the structure of opportunities for youth civic engagement. In many nonformal and formal educational institutions there is an overrepresentation of the “usual suspects,” that is, students who are already afforded leadership opportunities because they have more means and ability to participate and therefore continue to engage and reap the benefits of democratic participation. This civic engagement opportunity gap has increased over time and plays a key role in reinforcing the ‘Matthew effect’ in civic participation and political representation (Klein, 2021; Levinson, 2007; Mirra et al., 2013; Pape & Lim, 2019; Pope, 2015; Snellman et al., 2015; Swartz et al., 2009). As Sherry Arnstein (1969) put it:

The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you. Participation of the governed in their government is, in theory, the cornerstone of democracy—a revered idea that is vigorously applauded by virtually everyone. The applause is reduced to polite handclaps, however, when this principle is advocated by the have-not blacks, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Indians, Eskimos, and whites. And when the have-nots define participation as redistribution of power, the American consensus on the fundamental principle explodes into many shades of outright racial, ethnic, ideological, and political opposition (p. 24).

In many countries, low-income schools and minoritized student populations have had unequal access to civic learning opportunities for a long time. Hence, the citizenship education opportunity gap is part and parcel of a citizenship education debt owed unto historically marginalized youth and families (Bauman & Brennan, 2017; Hart & Atkins, 2002; Kahne, 2009; Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Levinson, 2009; Lo, 2019; Sherrod, et.al., 2002; Wilkenfeld, 2009). These cleavages are wider along lines of race, class, and ability since affluent, white, able-bodied students are often afforded more civic-oriented government classes, service-learning opportunities, democratic simulations, exposure to and discussion of current events, and classroom environments open to teamwork and deliberative conversations (CIRCLE, 2013; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2013; Levinson, 2012; Terzi, 2007). Conversely, students in poorer communities, nonwhite students, and students with disabilities have fewer opportunities to develop the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices necessary for full participation in democratic life (Levine, 2009; Levinson, 2007; Pope, 2015). This situation has long-lasting implications, as uneven participation in schools can extend unto adult life with uneven political participation and power (Kahne, 2009; Levinson, 2009, 2010; Westheimer, 2015). In this regard, several studies have shown correlations between socioeconomic status, ability, and race, on the one hand, and exposure to civic education and levels of adult political participation, on the other (CIRCLE, 2012; Comber, 2003; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Hart et al., 2014; Jamieson et al., 2011; Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2015; Levinson, 2010; Rebell, 2017). Uneven access to citizenship learning opportunities erodes equal democratic representation and puts into question the notion of governing ‘of and by the people’. By the time youth leave school, the opportunities that they had to develop citizenship knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices would largely influence their propensity of civic and electoral engagement as adults (Jamieson et al., 2011; Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017).

### *Citizenship education, civic engagement and school democracy*

Inspired by Freire’s ideas and work, one way to address the ails of citizenship education is to develop an ecosystem that connects citizenship education, civic engagement, and school democracy. Such an ecosystem would create a variety of democratic learning opportunities that provide students with authentic engagements in civic action and lay

the groundwork for a participatory readiness through project-based learning, experiential citizenship education, and active participation in self-governance (Allen, 2014; Gill et al., 2018; Levinson, 2012; Youniss, 2011). Schools that provide students with opportunities to engage in deliberation and decision-making processes have been found to nurture a culture of democratic engagement (Gutmann & Thompson, 2009; Hansen et al., 2003; Ito et al., 2010). When youth are involved in democratic processes, whether in school or other spaces, they are more likely to increase civic and political interests, knowledge, and skills and social-emotional learning (Albornoz-Manyoma et al., 2020; Augsberger, 2017; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Hess & Torney, 1967; Levine, 2007; Westheimer, 2015). Furthermore, students who engage in curricular and extracurricular citizenship education activities tend to participate more as adults considering measures like civic duty, community involvement, political attentiveness, and political efficacy (Hahn, 1998; Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Jamieson et al., 2011; Lerner, 2004; Levine, 2007, 2013; Levinson, 2012; Niemi & Junn, 1998). Augsberger et al. (2017) also found that when provided opportunities for shaping civic knowledge and participation skills in schools, a young person's likelihood of voting increases as an adult.

The development of an ecosystem of citizenship education, civic engagement, and school democracy makes sense because schools have many initiatives, programs, and courses in each area, but they usually operate in silos, with few connections among them. This ecosystem should promote student agency but at the same time should recognize the significance of adult allies who support youth empowerment and allow for autonomous decision-making as part of a power sharing relationship (Finlay et al., 2010; Mitra, 2005). While many schools around the world have experimented with these ideas since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, occasionally these initiatives have been implemented at a larger scale, like a school district that covers an entire city. This was the case of the *Escola Cidadã* (Citizen School project) that Freire and his collaborators implemented when he was Secretary of Education of Sao Paulo in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was later adapted by other Brazilian cities (most notably Porto Alegre) and inspired teachers and educational reformers around the world (Schugurensky, 2014). While the *Escola Cidadã* project has many dimensions, in this paper we focus on one dimension (school democracy) and one specific process that is currently gaining traction in many countries: School Participatory Budgeting.

### ***Escola Cidadã (Citizen School)***

*Escola Cidadã*, or the Citizen School project, is a world-renowned example of an educational reform aimed at embracing counter-hegemonic policies and practices to create transformational social spaces for learning democratic processes and citizenship education (De Azevedo & Schugurensky 2005; Fischman & Gandin, 2009; Gandin & Apple, 2004; O'Cadiz, Wong & Torres 1998). The Citizen School project began in 1989 and its growth was spurred in tandem with Brazil's Working Party, formed by industrial workers and peasants as a movement under the Popular Administration (Fischman & Gandin, 2016). The project was guided by many of Freire's ideas, particularly the design of the organizational structure that enacts a transformation of the status quo of schooling and catalyzes "a new architecture of knowledge" (Torres, 2017, p.15). At their core, these schools function as a citizenship learning center where rights and responsibilities are fostered and discourse within a diverse community is valued.

As an ally to traditional models of citizenship education, the Citizen School is grounded in the practice of democratization and operationalizes this concept in three ways: a) accessibility and pedagogical constructs, b) curriculum and participation, and c) governance and decision-making relationships among all school-related stakeholders (Fischman & Gandin, 2009, 2016). Citizen Schools were strategically placed in the most

disadvantaged areas of Brazil and supportive structures, such as cycles instead of grade levels and the Learning Laboratory for students with specific needs, were put into place to ensure individual student success (Gandin & Apple, 2004). Drawing on Freire's critique of the banking model of education, an overarching tenet of the *Escola Cidadã* is a reconstruction of the curriculum. *Escola Cidadã* embeds and contextualizes the curriculum within the community itself, replacing the historically whitewashed curriculum with community experiences and perspectives that have long been excluded and oppressed. In turn, the learning shapes a student's own cultural and community manifesto in that students learn through the histories of their family, culture, and community. Citizen Schools value cooperation and solidarity in relationships among students, families, educators, and administrators. Within this framework, all school community members play a role in the management of the school and the reorganization and construction of knowledge. School community members regularly come together to design and deliberate on administrative principles, resource allocation, project foci and curriculum mapping (Fischman & Gandin, 2016).

Although similar models of transformational learning spaces like *Escola Cidadã* exist in other school districts, very few have focused at the same time on democratizing access to knowledge and democratizing administrative decision-making within schools. The case of Porto Alegre is particularly relevant because the experiment lasted three continuous municipal administrations (from 1989 until 2000). Further, it combined key elements of the Citizen School pedagogical model proposed by Freire with an instrument for civic engagement and municipal democratization, namely the participatory budgeting, which has sparked the international School Participatory Budgeting movement that is blossoming in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Cabannes, 2004).

### **School Participatory Budgeting**

School Participatory Budgeting (School PB) is a tool for citizenship learning, civic engagement, and school democracy. In a typical School PB process, students and the school community facilitate, implement, and engage within a participatory process to decide how to spend a portion of the school's budget. School PB stems from municipal Participatory Budgeting (PB), the democratic process of deliberation and decision-making over budget allocations that originated in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989 and is now implemented in over 11,000 cities around the world. Some countries like Dominican Republic, Peru, Panama, Poland, South Korea, Angola, Kenya, Portugal, Ukraine, Indonesia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Scotland have laws requiring some form of PB in municipal budget allocations (Cabannes, 2004; Dias, 2018; Dias et al., 2019).

Research on this process has revealed that participatory budgeting has positive impacts on a variety of areas, including civic participation (from neighborhood associations to electoral turnout), governmental transparency, accountability and effectiveness, community wellbeing, gender equality and redistribution of resources within cities. Moreover, participatory budgeting is also known as an informal school of citizenship, because participants increase their levels of political efficacy and civic capacities (Cabannes, 2004, 2006; Curtis, 2020; Lerner & Schugurensky, 2007; Lerner & Secondo, 2012; Schugurensky, 2006; Touchton & Wampler, 2014).

In Brazil, School PB has been utilized alongside the *Escola Cidadã* project in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, but those processes have not been continuous due to changes in the leadership of municipalities and school districts. At the same time, in some cities around the world, students have been involved in city-wide participatory budgeting

processes as participants but have not led a process themselves. A few cities have offered a youth-led participatory budgeting process alongside the wider municipal process. Although not wholly conducted within an institutionalized school setting, Youth PB exists as a participatory engagement opportunity for young people in partnership with municipalities and non-profit organizations. One of the earliest documented Youth PB processes took place in 2004 in Rosario, Argentina with \$80,000 allocated from the city's budget (Lerner, 2006). In 2014, Cluj, Romania, implemented a Youth PB process with the goal to fund 250 youth-proposed and -led projects (Brennan, 2016). The Portuguese City of Cascais allocated 150,000 euro to a Youth PB project in 2017 through the mayor's office and city council in partnership with fourteen local schools to engage youth with "the sphere of political decisions which concern them" (Resende, 2018). In 2018, the Newry, Mourne and Down Community Planning Partnership of Ireland expanded its participatory budgeting process to include the local youth in submitting ideas and voting on final projects (Communities Leading Change, 2018). Over the last three years, Poland has seen multiple Youth PB initiatives unfold across cities spanning from Mrągowo to Szczecin (Projects, 2020). The UK has also administered Youth PB processes across various cities for the past decade, including Brighton and Aberdeen (Duarte, n.d.) and North Ayrshire and Glasgow in Scotland (Projects, 2020).

In the U.S., the city of Boston began a Youth PB process in 2014, allocating \$1 million dollars from the city's capital budget for youth ages 12-25 to vote on 14 different projects (City of Boston Mayors Office, 2017). Research on this process reported an increase in confidence to enact community change and greater likelihood to contact public officials, vote, volunteer within the community, and work with others to solve community problems (Augsberger et al., 2017; Grillos, 2014; Levine, 2014). The city of Seattle allocated \$700,000 of its 2016 budget to a Youth PB process called Youth Voice, Youth Choice (Habe & Apone, 2016.) During Fall 2018, in Bloomington, Indiana, the Common Council approved to allocate \$15,000 of the municipal budget to a 2019 Youth PB process (City of Bloomington, n.d.). In 2020, Vermont Afterschool, a statewide nonprofit, provided each community youth council \$5,000 to fund youth-led projects through a Youth PB process (Katrlick, 2021).

Youth PB and School PB share some common features, including a shift from an adult-centric model of decision-making to one that transfers power to youth and a process in which young people work with adults in identifying and solving problems through democratic processes of deliberation and decision-making. The main difference is that School PB takes place within K-12 schools and pays particular attention to its pedagogical dimensions, whereas Youth PB takes place in other community settings, includes older youth, and does not necessarily focus on the educational side of participatory democracy.

The School PB process, like the municipal PB and the Youth PB processes, is typically organized in five steps: 1) students propose ideas to improve the school community; 2) students transform these ideas into viable proposals; 3) students campaign for and present proposals to fellow students; 4) students vote for top proposals, and 5) winning projects are funded. At the outset of the School PB process, a "steering committee" of students is recruited to be shepherds of the process, charged with developing the framework of the process, communicating the process to the rest of the school community, and serving as leaders throughout the process (Johnson, 2020). In many cases, at the conclusion of the School PB process, all school community stakeholders conduct an evaluation and make recommendations for improvements for the next cycle. All stages of the School PB process are led by the students themselves, with the support of their teachers and, at times,

community organizations. A full School PB process takes several months, but shorter processes have been implemented.

School PB is a unique model of citizenship education and an effective learning tool for democratic processes due to its authenticity and inclusivity. The School PB process is not a simulation or tokenistic exercise absent of any realistic, tangible outcomes. Instead, students participate in an electoral cycle centered on student-driven ideas that result in real public resources being spent on the winning project ideas. The School PB process is also inclusive in that all stakeholders of the school community are involved in the decision-making process and engage in both the deliberative democracy and electoral phases of the process. Additionally, many School PB processes draw a representative sample of the school population to be on the steering committee as a “mini-public” to mindfully ensure that traditionally underrepresented students are included within the student steering committee. School PB’s objectives include increasing participant civic knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and dispositions through centering participant voice to increase advocacy, efficacy, empowerment, and trust. The School PB process aims to empower participants to lead as community problem-solvers and acquire skills and attitudes needed for lifelong active civic engagement (Brennan, 2016; Cohen et al., 2015; Schugurensky, 2002).

#### ***School PB: A growing international movement***

In the last two decades, more and more schools adopted School PB. In this brief section we provide a general overview with some examples from different countries. In Canada, as early as 2005, Ridgeville Elementary School in West Vancouver, Canada implemented School PB in collaboration with the Parent Advisory Council’s budget allocations (Participatory Budgeting Project, 2014). In 2015, a cross collaborative School PB model between three elementary schools and a community center in Chelsea, a small municipality of Quebec, Canada, was successful in implementing School PB as a partnership between the school and greater communities. English-speaking and French-speaking students involved in this School PB process overcame linguistic barriers to communicate back and forth in English and French almost all the time through teacher support and the utilization of creative mediums -an important implication for the historical divide between Anglophone and Francophone populations within this region and many others worldwide (Schugurensky, 2017).

In Europe, the case of France is particularly interesting because PB began at the school level in the Poitou-Charentes region and was later adopted in Paris at the municipal level, then expanded throughout Parisian schools (Kovalenko et al., 2020). Since 2005, over 90 public high schools in the French Poitou-Charentes region have implemented School PB using an allocation of 10% of the schools’ budget with students guiding the process design and decision-making, while parents, teachers, and school employees serve as a support structure (Participatory Budgeting Project, 2014; Röcke, 2014). By 2014, the city of Paris adopted a PB process for Parisians to decide how to spend 5% of the municipal budget, and in 2016 France expanded its already-existent municipal PB process into the school system to include 91% of Parisian elementary and general schools (Kovalenko et al., 2020). Spain has employed a School PB process called *Agora Infantil* in six schools from within the Andalusian provinces since 2014 (Albornoz-Manyoma et al., 2020). Outcomes of a study on students engaged in *Agora Infantil* found an improvement in psychological empowerment among student participants as well as increased decision-making and deliberative skills (Albornoz-Manyoma et al., 2020). In addition, Portugal launched School PB throughout all schools within the country in 2017, allocating one Euro per student with a minimum of 500 euros per school to fund the winning projects (Nelson, 2018). In Italy,

School PB is implemented in Milano through a project called “Decide 4 your School” (Stortone, 2017) and in several other cities and communes, including Roma, Ancona, Pordenone, and Trebisacce (Stortone, n. d.). Poland launched School PB in Warsaw in 2017 and has since expanded to three other cities including over 50 schools (Kovalenko et al., 2020). Also in 2017, Slovakia implemented a School PB process in one high school as a pilot after intermittent municipal PB processes throughout the country (Gažúrová et al., n.d.). In 2019, Lithuania piloted School PB in two Vilnius district schools with a post-process evaluation revealing increases among students’ understanding of budgets and desire to engage in the school community (Duncikaite, 2019). Ukraine has borrowed from its robust municipal and community level PB processes to establish School PB in 122 schools across two community regions since 2019 (Kovalenko et al., 2020). In the UK, School PB has been implemented in elementary schools as well as in high schools (PB Unit, 2010), and in Scotland, the Participatory Budgeting Charter and PB Scotland Hub have called for increased opportunities for young people to be able to contribute to school budgetary decisions (PB Scotland, n. d.).

In Russia, as part of a country-wide adoption in 2017, School PB has been adopted utilizing regional budgets of municipalities in collaboration with schools (Shulga et al., 2019). In South Korea, School PB is implemented in several cities. The first school district in South Korea to experiment with School PB was Seoul, but the most notable case is the city of Daegu (the 4<sup>th</sup> largest city in the country) because it implemented School PB in all its K-12 schools (No, 2018). Zambia began its first School PB in 2017 called *My School, My Vote* wherein 4000 students from two secondary schools participated and submitted 140 idea proposals (Dennis, 2020). Several cities in Brazil (especially São Paulo, Porto Alegre, and Recife), have implemented School PB processes in over 200 schools (Best et al., 2011). Beyond Brazil, School PB processes are taking place in other Latin American countries like Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Argentina, Venezuela, Mexico, and Chile (Cabannes, 2006; Taft & Ramirez, 2019).

In the United States, the first School PB process took place in Bioscience High School in Phoenix, Arizona in 2013. Since then, the Phoenix Union High School district has incrementally adopted School PB into all twenty of its high schools. Other Arizona schools have followed suit in an incremental adoption of School PB in Chandler, Sunnyside (Tucson), Queen Creek, Mesa and Tempe, with approximately 50 K-12 schools engaging approximately 50,000 students every year (Bartlett et al., 2020). More schools and new districts are committed to implement School PB next year. Probably one of the most significant moments of the School PB movement in Arizona took place in 2020, when the Phoenix Union High School District, building on their successful experience with the process for several years, started a School PB process to reimagine school safety, reallocating \$3.6 million from the budget hitherto devoted to school resource officers (school police). We will return to this in the next section (Phoenix Union High School District, 2020).

In Chicago, Sullivan High School conducted a semester-long School PB pilot in 2015 with 575 students. After successful outcomes and community feedback, School PB expanded in 2017 to three Chicago high schools (Steinmetz College Prep, Hyde Park Academy, and Al Raby High School). By 2021, School PB is now implemented in 16 schools. It is pertinent to note here that Chicago was the first city in the U.S. to implement municipal PB, with an experiment in the 49<sup>th</sup> ward in 2009. In a recent evaluation of the Chicago School PB, 94% of students reported having a better understanding of how to apply skills learned during the process to the real world and 88% of student participants “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that collaborative problem solving is more effective than solving problems on

one's own. Additionally, teachers reported the School PB process as beneficial in supporting the existing school curriculum and desired learning outcomes (Crum & Faydash, 2018). In 2018, New York City launched the largest scale of School PB processes in over 400 of the city's high schools (Lerner, 2018). There have also been several individual schools that have implemented School PB within the US, including Walker Upper Elementary School in Virginia (Johnson, 2020), Overfelt High School in San Jose, California, and Met High School in Sacramento, California (Mathews, 2018). Further, there have been newly emergent School PB processes like Syracuse City School District in New York with seven of its schools participating during the 2020-2021 school year.

### **School PB, citizenship education and empowerment: the case of Arizona**

Arizona has been at the forefront of the School PB movement in the US. This can be explained by three factors. First, as noted above, the Phoenix Union High School District (PXU) launched the first School PB process of the country in 2013 and the first district-wide process in 2016. Second, there is a coalition of schools, nonprofits and a local university that has promoted constant experimentation, innovation, capacity building and a gradual, organic expansion of the process. Third, a team of local researchers (especially graduate students at Arizona State University) have conducted process evaluations and impact evaluations aimed at providing feedback and improving the process. These studies have shown increases in participant knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices concerning citizenship education and empowerment, as well as an improvement in school climate, specifically with improved trust and communication between students, teachers and staff, and school and district leaders (Bartlett et al., 2020; Cohen et al., 2015; Gibbs, et al., 2021; Keidan, 2020; Kinzle, 2019). Given space constraints, it is impossible to discuss in detail the variety of School PB processes taking place in Arizona since 2013. Hence, in this section we will discuss two recent innovative cases: Inclusive School Participatory Budgeting (ISPB) and Re-imagining School Safety through School PB.

#### ***Inclusive School Participatory Budgeting (ISPB)***

The ISPB model was first implemented in one Arizona middle school in 2019-20 as a pilot project in partnership with the Center for the Future of Arizona, Arizona State University's Participatory Governance Institute, and the Arizona Developmental Disability Council. In 2020-21 the school decided to continue the process, and two high schools from another Arizona city also adopted the model (publication forthcoming). The ISPB model is based on three pillars of inclusivity throughout the process. First, including and representing all students (especially students with disabilities) throughout the process and more specifically within the student steering committee. Second, providing students and school community stakeholders with multiple opportunities to engage throughout the process (especially through a primary vote and deliberations in core Social Studies classes). Third, engaging all the stakeholders of the school community (students, teachers, staff, and family members) in the process, including the vote on the final project proposals. Putting these pillars of inclusivity into practice, the student steering committee was a representative sample of the overall student population, with an overrepresentation of students with disabilities. While Social Studies classes promoted student-led presentations and discussions, the student steering committee welcomed broader participation through open meetings, tabling and campaigning, and voting.

Taking into consideration limitations around survey-only data collection with minors and students with disabilities, the research team conducted one-on-one interviews with students while simultaneously administering a survey about changes in civic knowledge,

Attitudes, Skills, and Practices (KASP) that included 40 indicators, and additional indicators on changes in school climate. During the interviews, students were asked to explain their perceived level of change for each KASP indicator. Findings revealed significant mean changes for all students involved in the ISPB process across the following indicators:

- Increased knowledge of participatory democracy
- Increased knowledge of how decisions are made within their school
- Increased knowledge of other students' needs
- Increased feeling of ideas being heard
- Increased ability to campaign for proposals
- Increased desire to work on more projects to improve the school
- Increased propensity to help make decisions at school

More specifically, students with disabilities had significant mean changes in the following indicators:

- Increased knowledge of how a budget works
- Increased feeling of confidence in making a difference in the school
- Increased ability to speak publicly
- Increased ability to make decisions in a group
- Increased practice of talking to teachers outside of class

Overall, students involved in the ISPB process reported experiencing a greater sense of belonging and collaboration, an increase in psychological empowerment, and better relationships with their teachers and peers. Within focus groups, the teachers and school community stakeholders reported observing increased confidence and leadership skills of the steering committee members, increased positive interactions among students with and without disabilities, and growth in deliberative skills and communication abilities (Bartlett et al., 2020). Survey findings also revealed a significant increase in the political efficacy of students, as indicated by a large effect size (Gibbs et al. 2021). Looking forward, the findings and outcomes from the ISPB model have produced promising results for individuals with disabilities and civic engagement, especially considering people with disabilities have a lower sense of political efficacy (Gastil, 2000), are less connected with and consulted by public officials (Schur et al., 2003; Silverstein 2010; Parker Harris et al., 2012), and have lower voter turnout rates (Coley & Sum, 2012; Shields et al., 1998).

### ***School PB to Re-imagine School Safety***

In 2020, the Phoenix Union High School District (PXU), the birthplace of School PB within the U.S., recently expanded and added a focus to its annual School PB process: re-imagining school safety. Prompted by demands for an equity-based overhaul of school discipline trends, (Anyon et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2020; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Skiba & Rausch, 2006), PXU has opted to not renew its contract with the Phoenix Police Department's School Resource Officer program for 3 years (Phoenix Union High School District, 2020). Instead, this budget of \$1.2 million per year has been re-allocated to a School PB process over three years, for a total of \$3.6 million.

A steering committee from each of PXU's high schools drives the PXU School PB process; each school's steering committee is composed of students, staff, and parents. The PXU School PB process follows the calendar year, with the first cycle set to be completed in December 2021. Due to COVID-19, the process has taken place virtually thus far, with in-person programming slated to resume Fall 2021. To date, the school community proposed project ideas have been submitted to the online platform, and committee members have

participated in monthly meetings to discuss the process and further develop idea proposals for the final vote. The district-wide final vote will take place in November 2021.

The PXU research team will use a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach in a convergent mixed methods case study design to evaluate the PXU School PB process. Data will be derived from the steering committee members' participation in a survey and focus groups and be used to evaluate the process implementation, participant experiences, and school community-level impact. This School PB process will be the first district-wide, community-driven deliberation and decision-making participatory process focused on school safety. Implications include an improvement in school community-based participatory processes and an increase of community-based strategies for school safety.

### **Methods, Challenges, and Limitations**

School PB is a relatively new and ever-expanding experiment of democratic participation in school communities. Given its malleable nature, innate inclusivity, and capacity for innovation, School PB enables schools and communities to adopt and modify the process to fit their own context and initiatives. Evaluations of School PB have typically involved a mixed methods approach, combining survey data with interviews and focus groups conducted with participants and observations recorded throughout the process. More recently, School PB evaluations have encompassed participatory methods like youth participatory action research (YPAR) and community-based participatory research (CBPR) to center participant experiences and include participants in the evaluation itself. Additionally, some School PB evaluations have used arts-based research methods such as photovoice, improvisation, and digital artifact curation (Appleton, 2018; Bartlett et al., 2020).

These exciting opportunities in creative and extensive evaluative methods also pose methodological challenges when evaluating the effectiveness of School PB processes in fostering democratic knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices. Outside of issues in navigating research with minors (e.g., informed consent and assent, participation, confidentiality) involved in a School PB process, characteristics of the school community setting can play a role in the rigor of the evaluation, as well as the research design. As schools and districts adopt a variety of evaluation methods, comparative research approaches have also proven to be difficult. Additionally, to date, there has been no longitudinal analysis of students' participation in a School PB process.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Paraphrasing Obama's acceptance speech in 2008, many things can be achieved when educators put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more towards a more democratic and just society (Obama, 2008). There are many ways to reinvent Freire in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and one of them is to continue -and deepen- his efforts to nurture a citizen school, one in which everyone can experience tensions of democracy and exercise the rights and obligations of citizenship (Freire, 2003). For Freire, democratic self-governance can contribute to transform authoritarian schools in creative spaces, in which student learning is connected to their experience, to collective actions for improving their own reality, to feelings of joy and hope, to genuine dialogue, to a sense of common purpose, and to the development of active citizenship (Freire 1997; Carvalho de Souza & Krupek 2021; Barcelos and Azzolin 2021).

In the last two decades, School PB has been taken up throughout cities and countries around the world (Dias 2018; Dias et al., 2019). The studies on the impact of participant experiences on learning and changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices, however, are still in their infancy. To begin to explore these effects, many process and impact evaluations on the School PB process have been conducted, as well as both small- and large-scale rigorous research pilot and case studies. The findings from these evaluations have produced promising results to further support School PB as a high-impact pedagogical approach to connect civic engagement, citizenship education, and school democracy (see, for instance, Albornoz-Manyoma et al., 2020, 2021; Falck & de la Rosa, 2021).

Circling back to Freire, School PB encompasses both the analysis of reality and the collective construction of solution-oriented actions, two phases of the educational process that the Brazilian educator conceptualized as dialectically related. For him, the nurturing of citizenship requires transformative actions, connecting the subjective and objective dimensions of the development of consciousness. As he noted, education is praxis: action and reflection of men and women upon the world to transform it (Freire, 1970). While he was writing this in the context of adult literacy circles in Northeast Brazil in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, such a process of transformation can also take place today in schools and involve children and youth, as well as teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, and community members. Through PB and related initiatives, students can transform not only their school environment but also transform themselves from objects to subjects and from mere recipients of content to active agents of learning. Moreover, they can learn democracy by doing in inclusive environments (like the case of ISPB) and acquire the habits of self-governance and cooperation by working together with the rest of the school community on relevant projects (like the case of Phoenix Union).

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