

**Citizenship Education in the United States:
Regime Type, Foundational Issues, and Classroom Practice**

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Abstract

Citizenship and citizenship education are old ideas that are again at the forefront of scholarship in the social sciences and education. This chapter examines three issues that animate citizenship education in the United States, including its core tension: balancing personal freedom with a common political culture. The chapter also reviews promising citizenship education practices and highlights the profound inequality that marks their allocation to schools and students. The chapter concludes with the key role played in U. S. citizenship education by non-governmental organizations. Five concepts anchor the chapter: *citizenship, citizenship education, regime type, liberal democracy, and classroom and school practice*.

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Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves therefore are its only safe depositories. And to render them safe their minds must be improved to a certain degree. This is not all that is necessary, though it be essentially necessary. An amendment of our [Virginia] constitution must here come in aid of the public education.

--Thomas Jefferson, 1787

Introduction

Citizenship and citizenship education are two of the oldest ideas in political theory, and scholars are showing new interest in both. Through every era of recorded history, these ideas have been present, linked, and contested. Jefferson's view, summarized here in his plea for public education, is a distillation of centuries of Western writing on the subject—beginning with the Greeks (especially Plato and Aristotle), the Romans (Cicero), and then the daring thinkers of the Renaissance who jettisoned theism (Machiavelli) and of the Enlightenment who constructed reason, rights, and individuals (Locke, Rousseau). This tradition set the precedent for what followed in the United States. When Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her associates met at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 and ratified the *Declaration of Sentiments*, or when Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed the crowd at the *March on Washington* more than a century later, they were mobilizing the civil rights principles of the *Declaration of Independence* and the U. S. *Constitution* to advance their own causes. The woman suffragists famously altered the second sentence of the *Declaration of Independence* to read: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal..." (Stanton et al., 1889, p. 70). Similarly, King demanded not an alternative to the founding principles of the United States but their fulfillment. "Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy," he said.

We have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. . . . We have come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. (2001, p. 82)

The idea of citizenship is concerned with membership in a political community. Who belongs and who does not? The stakes are high because not only is *citizen* an identity but because rights and benefits come with membership—access to voting and police protection, for example. Criteria become important: Can you access these things simply by being here for an amount of time, or must you be born here? Do you need additional qualifications—blood, language, or religion? And what about educational attainment? To be a member of this political community must you be literate? Must you pass a 'citizenship test'?

We can see, then, that *citizenship* is a longstanding idea and still vital today. The idea of citizenship *education* is old and still vital, too. In contemporary U. S. society, it is also called “civic education” and “political education” although the latter is often avoided outside academe, perhaps because it connotes indoctrination. In schools, citizenship education includes formal coursework in government—not government generally but U. S. government in particular and, less frequently offered or taken, comparative government (specifically, *Advanced Placement Comparative Government and Politics*). Citizenship education also occurs formally in U. S. history courses. These are typically offered in grades 5, 8, and 11. Less formally, citizenship education also occurs in student council programs, elections to various school offices, daily recitation of the loyalty oath known as *The Pledge of Allegiance*, and elsewhere.¹

For a proper understanding of citizenship education in any society, it is necessary to appreciate that it is, in William Galston’s (2001) succinct phrase, “relative to regime type” (p. 218). Democratic regimes “require democratic citizens whose specific knowledge, competencies, and character would not be as well suited to nondemocratic politics.” *Regime* is no longer a widely used term outside the academy, but it is key to understanding citizenship education in any country. A country’s regime is its form of government coupled with its political culture, including its practices and its aspirations. *Patriotism*, whatever its particular meanings, is an idea related to membership in a particular regime. In a democratic regime, the animating idea is that the people themselves are the governors. This is *popular sovereignty* or the idea that “we the people” (the opening words of the U. S. Constitution) create governments to secure their rights, and that we consent to be governed. This is, quoting Lincoln at Gettysburg, “government of, by, and for the people.” Citizens need not only comply with authorities, but become authorities; not only obey laws, but make laws; not only abide by judges’ rulings, but serve as jurors and deliberate policy with other citizens. As Jefferson implies in this chapter’s opening quote, the people cannot rule well if they are a band of unskillful or unthoughtful know-nothings. Their minds “must be improved to a certain degree.” Accordingly, he tried to convince fellow Virginians to fund public education. He failed. That innovation came in the middle of the next century in Massachusetts, championed by Horace Mann.

Every regime has an interest in civic education, even non-democracies like contemporary China and Saudi Arabia or 1940 Germany. Nazi Germany had extensive civic education programs, both in school and out, tailored to the cultivation of good Nazis. Youth were taught obedience to state authority, militarism, patriarchy, heterosexism, love of Hitler, hatred of Jews, and racism (Rempel, 1989). Two millennia earlier, Plato had another idea about citizenship education. Unlike the Nazis, he had a fair and just regime in mind, but he doubted citizens’ ability to rule. It is easy today to answer affirmatively the question, *Should* the people rule? Americans grow up in a cultural surround that believes fervently in popular sovereignty, at least rhetorically and generally. But *can* the people rule? Are they *able*? This is a different question, and probably every reader of this chapter is circumspect about it. Jefferson believed education could compensate for the people’s lack of native ability to govern. Plato famously did not. Ordinary citizens mistake their opinions for knowledge, Plato believed, and “democracy” in practice is the tyranny of these opinions multiplied by the number of citizens—the blind leading the blind while confidently believing they can see clearly. This is not a promising situation. And so, in *The Republic*, he presented an education system where children were removed from their mother’s care and then educated according to their abilities, with the most able trained to be the governors of the country.

With this introduction to the central ideas of this chapter in hand (citizenship and citizenship education), let me preview what is to come. In the next two sections, I address the

¹ I return to the curriculum in the final section of the chapter.

current state of scholarship on both concepts. We will see that investigations of each have returned to prominence. Then, I turn to three foundational issues that help to explain some unique political controversies that animate citizenship education in the United States, “unique” because they are specific to the U. S. regime type and its core tension between democratic authority (e.g., a school board) and personal freedom (e.g., religious beliefs). Following this, we will peer into citizenship-education practices in classrooms and schools where we find, first and foremost, inequality in the distribution of effective pedagogies and, again unique to the U. S. regime type, the key role of non-governmental organizations.

Scholarship on Citizenship Returns

Citizenship and citizenship education, both ancient and much-addressed topics, have not always been foremost on scholarly agendas. Today they are back with gusto.² Reasons for this can be found at the juncture of globalization, migration, and the decline in civic engagement in actually-existing democracies. Gershon Shafir (1998), the editor of a leading volume on the subject, suggests that *citizenship* is back because of four contemporary processes: the recent wave of democratization in Eastern Europe and parts of Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East; the rise of ethnic conflicts in the European Union; the associated debate over welfare entitlements (an argument over the rights and benefits of citizenship); and global migration to modern industrial nations. All of these, he notes, have been analyzed through the prism of citizenship.

Anthropologist Aiwa Ong (1999, 2003) examines the buzzing heterogeneity in these global flows. In two studies, she contrasts the affluent transnational citizens of global metropolises—“flexible citizens,” she calls them, because they hold multiple passports and properties in, say, Hong Kong and San Francisco—with poor and often desperate migrants seeking low-end work in nearby countries (Indians in Persian Gulf states, Mexicans in the United States), and their ensuing struggles for access to rights and benefits. On the same platform, geographer Katharyne Mitchell (2001) examined the education conflicts that resulted when affluent Chinese, who had migrated from Hong Kong and Taiwan to neighborhoods in and around Vancouver, clashed with their similarly affluent but ethnically different Anglo-Canadian neighbors over curriculum policies in the school district. Deweyan democracy and child-centered pedagogy met Confucian meritocracy and filial piety. The formation of the “good Canadian citizen” was opened to debate.

Also inviting the new scholarship on citizenship is the decline in traditional forms of civic engagement in the United States and other democratic societies. Civic engagement or “political participation” has long been understood to be a leading indicator of the vibrancy of any democratic society. Alexis de Tocqueville (1969), the astute French observer of the early 19th century, argued that it was not merely an indicator but a cause. In his chapter in *Democracy in America* called “Causes Which Mitigate the Tyranny of the Majority in the United States,” he

² Unfortunately their return to *scholarly* interest does not mirror a return to classroom and school practice. Citizenship education and, more broadly, social studies (studies of the social disciplines: history, political science, economics, geography, sociology, psychology, anthropology) of any sort have been pushed in some locales to the margins of the curriculum, particularly in elementary and middle schools. This is due to the frenzied attention now being paid to testing-and-accountability and “STEM” (the ‘harder’ disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and math). This squeezing of citizenship education, it should be noted, has had a disproportionate impact on the most disadvantaged students (Kahne & Middaugh, 2010; Rothstein & Jacobson, 2006). See the “Inequality” section later in this chapter.

identified the chief mitigating factor as the dispersal of government power. The dispersion is both *across* territory (today, the federal government in Washington, D. C. and local governments in the 50 states plus the still more-local municipalities, counties, and school districts that are sanctioned by states) and *within* governments (legislative, executive, judicial) at both national and local levels. Importantly, this dispersal of power operates cooperatively with a farrago of close-to-home, intermediary institutions. These are mid-range solidarities that range from faith communities and political parties to choirs, bowling leagues, and unions. These networks, known jointly as “civil society,” are outside government; yet they are its foundation. This is because they join people together outside their families. “Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition,” de Tocqueville wrote,

are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types—religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute. . . . Nothing, in my view, deserves more attention than the intellectual and moral associations in America. (p. 517)³

A century and a half later, Robert Putnam (1995) wrote an influential article on the decline of civic engagement in the United States. He called it “Bowling Alone.” Putnam concluded that civic decline had reached so far into society that, just as the number of people reading a common newspaper or attending precinct meetings had declined, or going to the Elks Lodge or a weekly card game, so had the number of people joining bowling leagues. The whole system of social networks was declining. His research struck a chord with scholars and pundits alike, and it popularized the concept “social capital”: these social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trust that they generate and support.

Of special concern to civic educators today is the decline in civic engagement among youth. Many high school seniors reach voting age before they graduate and, ironically, while they are sitting in the high school government course offered to seniors. But research demonstrates that their political involvement is meager. Flanagan and Levine (2010) provide the details:

Young adults today are less likely than their counterparts in the 1970s were to exhibit nine out of ten important characteristics of citizenship: belonging to at least one group, attending religious services at least monthly, belonging to a union, reading newspapers at least once a week, voting, being contacted by a political party, working on a community project, attending club meetings, and believing that people are trustworthy. Only in a tenth form of citizenship—volunteering—are they more likely to participate, probably as a result of deliberate efforts over the past several decades by schools, colleges, and community groups to encourage volunteering. For several of these ten types of engagement—notably voting—rates have risen in the 2000s compared with the 1990s, but not enough to compensate for thirty years of decline. (p. 161)

Are Americans participating less or differently? And, if less, is the decline more a matter of delay or long-term decline? Difference theorists point to graduates who are reconnecting with lost classmates on Facebook, stay-at-home parents who meet one another on social networking portals such as *Meetup*, the proliferation of book clubs thanks to *Oprah* and fan clubs thanks to the reality television show *American Idol*, and so forth. Delay theorists emphasize that adolescence (a

³ Historical note: The “tyranny of the majority,” from Aristotle onward, is regarded as the primary threat to democracy and the reason why many democracies fail. Madison’s project in *The Federalist* no. 10 was to solve this problem. Later, it is on de Tocqueville’s mind, too, coming as he was from the tyranny of the Jacobin “Terror” of the French Revolution.

construct dating to approximately 1900 in the United States) is lengthening, which predictably delays civic engagement. This is because civic engagement is related to life-cycle patterns and historical forces. The young adult finishes school, moves out of the parental home, moves into the work force, and starts a new family. These are watersheds that make regular engagement in civic life more likely because the youth is outside the family of origin and spending more time “in public” where she is exposed to diverse ideologies and lifestyles. The young adult is thereby positioned on a social platform where it is easier to see opportunities for civic engagement, plus she is more available for recruitment into community activity (Finlay et al., 2010). A broadened horizon alongside availability to others—seeing and being seen—is a powerful combination for civic involvement. But, it is easily interrupted, too. The Great Recession of 2008-12 destabilized the life-cycle transitions of the middle and working classes, and time spent in gated communities has increased the segregation of Americans, thereby narrowing, not broadening, their horizons. The sorting-by-incarceration of Black and Latino males (Alexander, 2010) further entrenches a caste system in America, the civic engagement consequences of which include temporary or, in some states, permanent restrictions on voting rights and an “ex-con’s” lasting status as a second-class citizen.⁴

To summarize: citizenship and citizenship education are old ideas and practices, and they are venerable topics of scholarly inquiry. Furthermore, they are relative to regime type and, therefore, hollow topics without the meanings, issues, and power relations found in particular political contexts: Athens in the 5th century BCE, Lexington in 1775, Gettysburg in 1863, Paris in 1789, Berlin in 1933, Birmingham in 1963, Arizona today. Both topics ebb and flow as objects of study depending on historical contingencies, and both are back on the scholarly agenda today thanks to a combination of forces: a decline in civic engagement, the intensification of globalization and migration, and the appearance of new patterns of integration and segregation.

Citizenship Education Matters

The return of citizenship education to critical study, research, and development in the United States is welcome news. It had been buried from the 1960s through the 1990s under a curious scholarly consensus that believed formal citizenship education in classrooms had no significant effect on civic knowledge or behavior. The study that put the nail in the coffin was “Political Socialization and the High School Civics Curriculum in the United States,” by Langton and Jennings (1968) in the *American Political Science Review*. Personally, I began my teaching career in the aftermath of this study. I had just completed a bachelor’s degree in political science and was enrolled in the University of Colorado’s fine, year-long, post-BA program in teacher education. Along with others who were training to become high school government teachers, I learned of the study and was puzzled not only by its findings but by the way they had been embraced by the political science field. The findings were truly counterintuitive. A maxim of both parenting and educational research is that children stand a better chance of learning something if it is taught than if it is not, and if they study it than if they don’t. This is why parents and teachers encourage students to attend rather than skip classes, to pay attention rather than sleep, and do the homework; and it is why colleges are more likely to admit applicants who have done well in their high school courses than those who have failed them or dropped out.

Thirty years later, political scientists Niemi and Junn (1998) presented evidence and analysis contrary to Langton and Jennings. On Langton and Jennings’ survey, civic knowledge

⁴ See Dewey (1985) on the personal and public effects of lives lived segregated, and the education thus afforded as “partial and distorted” (p. 89); also Parker (1996).

had been measured by only six items. Niemi and Junn used the 1998 NAEP Civics Assessment, which had 150 knowledge items. Moreover, these items were tied to actual civics courses that students were likely to take. To show whether civics courses affect civic knowledge, the knowledge measure needs to match the curriculum of the civic courses whose effect is being determined. Niemi and Junn's study did this. Not only did they tie their study to actual civics coursework (vs. general political knowledge), they focused on four aspects of coursework: amount, recency, topics addressed, and inclusion of current events. They found that higher student knowledge was associated with higher amounts and greater recency of civics courses, a greater range of topics, and more discussion of current events.⁵

Niemi and Junn's (1998) study was a watershed that ended the "coursework doesn't matter" consensus and re-opened the gates to research on civics coursework generally and *kinds* of civic coursework in particular (we will come to effective practices later in this chapter). And because the recency of civics coursework had been shown to matter, Niemi and Smith (2001) immediately studied the prevalence of the high school government course that students most often take in the twelfth grade. They found that, after a temporary decline during the 1960s and 70s (a period sometimes described as "curriculum anarchy" [e.g., Taylor & Haas, 1973, p. 83]), enrollment in this course had returned to a high level. By 2001, 75% of high school students were taking the course.

The high school government course deserves critical attention despite its homely façade. It is a "structures and functions" course, its focus being "how government works" in the United States. The subject matter includes the history and ratification of the Constitution, federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances, landmark Supreme Court cases, limited government, legislation, political parties, media, and interest groups. The course is intriguing on the landscape of citizenship education because it is both prevalent and pedestrian. Though its footprint is enormous, it almost escapes detection—lost in plain sight. Most students take it, but its mention in the citizenship education literature is rare and then often derisive, with criticism of boring topics, maintenance of sociopolitical orthodoxies, and unrealistic portrayals of U. S. democracy. Remarkably, its curriculum has been settled for decades, so much so that the course escapes the partisan public wrangling that routinely besets the U. S. history curriculum.⁶

Foundational Issues

Yet, citizenship education (like any common endeavor) cannot avoid politics. The dull high school government course may fly beneath the radar screen, but the daily conduct of citizenship education in a democracy is lively and contentious on several fronts. In my judgment, three are central. The first issue is conceptual and concerns the objectives of citizenship education: For what type of democratic regime do we want to educate students in the United States? That is, what kinds of democratic political identity and corresponding virtues should schools try to cultivate? This involves a distinction between liberal and illiberal democracy. The second issue concerns authority over the citizenship education curriculum. In a theocracy or military regime, there is little question as to who is authorized to shape and distribute the education of future citizens: priests or generals. In a democracy, however, there are contending forces and interests, each clamoring for a say. Which group(s) of adults can legitimately decide on the particulars of

⁵ Both studies have been widely reviewed. See Avery (2000), Galston (2001), and Torney-Purta (1999).

⁶ See Zimmerman's (2002) history of this contention and McKinley (2010) for a recent example: "Texas Conservatives win Curriculum Change."

citizenship education in schools? Parents? Professional educators? Citizens? The third issue stems from the conflicts that arise in liberal-democratic regimes over the meaning of patriotism and the tension between majority rule and personal freedom. Specifically, should students be exposed to a range of beliefs, even those that oppose their parents' beliefs? That is, should they be taught to think for themselves?

The three issues are related. The founders of the United States created a liberal democracy, which guarantees personal freedom and human rights in addition to majority rule. One implication is that parents cannot demand that schools cater to their own ethnic customs, religious beliefs, or political ideologies. At least, they cannot demand this if doing so would harm or interfere with or otherwise burden the customs, beliefs, and ideologies of other families. Citizenship education is particularly interesting from this liberal perspective not only because it aims to shape children into particular kinds of citizens, but because it also aims to shape them into the kind of people who decide for themselves what shape they will take. Accordingly, the teaching of critical thinking and toleration as two hallmarks of good citizenship in a liberal democracy have been challenged on the grounds that they might draw children away from the beliefs of their parents. Should schools be able to interfere in family life in this way, and does liberal-democratic citizenship education demand it? A consideration of the three issues will afford a more robust understanding of the politics of citizenship education in the United States.

Issue 1: Liberal or Illiberal Democracy?

A politician working to restore peace in a genocide-ravaged county today could very well worry that free and fair elections might eventually be held under the banner of “democracy.” Her concern is that the men who are thereby elected would be the same racists and separatists who engineered the mass rape, murder, and plunder during the genocide. It would be a democratic government—in Greek *demos* (the many) and *cracy* (rule)—but it would ignore limits on its power and continue to deny civil rights and liberties to members of the despised minority group. This would be an *illiberal* democracy. Popular sovereignty, made manifest in free and fair elections, is the critical attribute of democracy, but more is required of a *liberal* democracy. As Crick (2008) wrote, liberal democracy is a hybrid—a “fusion of the idea of the power of the people and the idea of legally guaranteed individual rights” (p. 15; also Habermas, 1997).

Any sort of democratic regime—liberal or illiberal—is a rare occurrence historically, so much so that its absence at any time or in any place does not demand attention or explanation. Yet my experience in 40 years of teaching suggests that American students of all ages take democracy for granted, as though it were common and easy rather than rare and difficult. Historians know better. They are surprised when democracies appear, all the more so when they develop and endure. Historians know that tyranny—absolutism—is the historical norm, the most common forms being theocracy, military dictatorship, and absolute monarchy—rule by clergy, colonels, and kings. The third often combines with the first in such a way that the monarch’s absolute authority is believed to be supernatural—derived from the heavens (the “divine right of kings”). By the time Aristotle wrote *Politics*, there had been such a variety of political systems that he could classify and evaluate them. Among them were democracies, which he considered feckless. Either they devolved quickly into illiberal mob rule (majority will without constitutional restraint) or oligarchy (an elected but corrupt managerial class).

The founders of the U. S. constitutional democracy were also critical of democracy. Having just won independence from the divine-right king of England, and having been avid readers of ancient Greek and Roman and then Renaissance and Enlightenment thinkers, the U. S. founders were convinced that democracy’s prospects were bleak. Hamilton wrote in *Federalist No. 9*:

It is impossible to read the history of the petty Republics of Greece and Italy without feeling sensations of horror and disgust at the distractions with which they were continually agitated, and at the rapid succession of revolutions by which they were kept in a state of perpetual vibration between the extremes of tyranny and anarchy. (p. 44)

Democracies usually failed, the founders believed, not for lack of splendid ideals but for an excess of wishful thinking combined with bad planning. They failed because they required “we the people” to be angels, which they are not. On this the historical record needs no elaboration. As Madison (1937) wrote in *Federalist No. 51*, “If men were angels no government would be necessary” (p. 337). Government is necessary because “we the people” easily become an illiberal mob, seduced by demagogues, or a motley of interest groups each blinded by its own passions. Madison wrote, “A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.” For this reason, the men who founded the U. S. regime created a constitution that controlled both the people and the government and aimed to constrain or prevent absolutism and oppression or, stated positively, to preserve liberty and rights. (“Liberty is the right to do what the law permits,” Montesquieu wrote, summarizing the tension between political freedom and constraint.) Among these precautions were the separation of powers into distinct branches of government, checks and balances that kept one branch from overwhelming the others, a bicameral legislature, federalism, and, eventually, a Bill of Rights. These have become widespread features of liberal democracies ever since.

It is well known that illiberal oppressions based on race, class, and gender were present even as these liberal-democratic innovations were being inscribed in the late 18th century. When the U. S. Constitution was ratified in 1787, African Americans were chattel and women were only somewhat better off. Native peoples were in another category still—savages, demons. “We the people” referred to White, male, property-owning citizens of a certain age. Slaves and women *were* property. Liberal democracies fall short of their aspirations (there are no ideal democracies), and this motivates social movements that aim to close the gap between ideals and realities. The framers of the U. S. Constitution may have been the birth parents of liberal democracy on a large scale, but those who were excluded became the adoptive, nurturing parents. That is, the core values of liberal democracy have been pursued not necessarily by those already secured within “we the people” but by those people living at the margins and fighting for inclusion (Okiehiro, 1994). The women’s suffrage and civil rights movements noted in the first paragraph of this chapter are the iconic cases in the United States.

Issue 2: Who Has Legitimate Educational Authority?

Who has the legitimate authority in a liberal-democratic regime to decide how the next generation of citizens shall be educated? The U. S. Constitution reserves education policy to the states but does not resolve the matter further. Who or what will fill in the details of curriculum and instruction?

Parents are key players in curricular decision making, of course. As Dewey (1956) wrote, “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.” (p. 7) This is an appealing assertion of collective responsibility for all children, not just our own children. Yet, Amy Gutmann (1999) noticed its undemocratic contradiction. Where are “we the people” in Dewey’s formulation? In other words, where is the *citizenry* working together to create and maintain a free society within the constraints of a constitution? The “enforcement of any moral ideal of education,” Gutmann writes, “whether it be ideologically liberal or conservative, without the consent of citizens subverts democracy” (p. 14). A liberal-democratic society, because it values rights and liberties, requires citizens to deliberate

collectively about the education of future citizens. Citizens are obliged to negotiate the curriculum of democratic education across plural interests and beliefs just as they negotiate tax rules, gun law, and foreign policy across plural interests and beliefs. The “best and wisest parents” are not of a single voice. They want different goods for their children. *They don’t and won’t agree*. This pluralism is a fact of life in society, and a liberal-democratic regime embraces it.

Some parents will claim they have a natural right to exclusive educational authority. They will assert this because, first, the children in question are “their” children (the proprietary assumption), and second because parents are naturally concerned to maximize the welfare of their children (the altruistic or evolutionary assumption). But these assumptions are specious, as both educators and citizens are quick to point out. Parents may have given birth to or adopted children, but that does not establish possession. Children could be (and have been) imagined to “belong” to the gods, the state, or the village, for example. The propensity of at least some families to teach racist, ethnocentric, and sexist values that contradict liberal-democratic ideals—particularly the bedrock values of civic equality, popular sovereignty, tolerance, inalienable rights, and liberty—undermines the second assumption, not to mention the frequency of child abuse and neglect. Parents cannot hold their children in a state of what Eamon Callan calls “ethical servility” (1997, p. 152) where they exist only to fulfill their parents’ wishes and are never taught to think for themselves. As Walter Lippmann (1928) wrote, curriculum controversies “are among the bitterest political struggles which now divide the nations” (p. 22). But why the bitterness? Why not simply disagreement? He believed the assertion of parental authority is often the cause:

Wherever two or more groups within a state differ in religion, or in language and in nationality, the immediate concern of each group is to use the schools to preserve its own faith and tradition. For it is in the school that the child is drawn towards or drawn away from the religion and the patriotism of its parents. (p. 23)

Most parents are far from holding their children in a state of ethical servility, so let us not overstate the liberal-democratic case against parents being the sole authorities for the education of democratic citizens. Still, we must note that neither educators nor democratic citizens are inclined, as parents may be, to claim exclusive educational authority, for that would be patently undemocratic. Rather, both groups claim a seat at the deliberative table *alongside* parents where curricular policy is developed in a democratic society. Gutmann (1999) argues that collective moral argument and decision making (collective deliberation) among the various educational stakeholders is the most democratically justifiable approach to the authority question.⁷ In brief, who should decide the curriculum by which the next generation of democrats shall be educated? On Gutmann’s analysis, consistent with her political theory of deliberative democracy, the answer is straightforward: All of us together, weighing the alternatives, arguing across differences, and, when needed, voting to decide the issue. After all, the most important thing adults can do together, across their differences, is decide how to educate their children for what will be a shared future. This is not something they can be doing in isolation, not if they aim to have a liberal democracy.

Issue 3: Should Schools Teach Toleration and Critical Thinking?

Some readers will be surprised to learn that a perennial controversy affecting citizenship education in the United States is whether public schools should aim to teach critical thinking and toleration. It is surprising because both are usually considered unremarkable, pedestrian aims that are intuitively fundamental to education, almost defining it (Jefferson’s “their minds must be improved to a certain degree”). So accustomed have American citizens become to freely

⁷ Because these are roles, not persons, they overlap. Many parents are citizens, many teachers are parents, etc.

exercising or seeking their rights and liberties that, generally, toleration has become a mundane aim, not a public controversy. Episodes of intolerance, such as hate crimes, are generally reviled.⁸ Governors appoint commissions and order flags flown at half-mast; legislatures pass resolutions; vigils are held. As Justice Brennan wrote matter-of-factly in 1989,

We are not an assimilative, homogeneous society, but a facilitative, pluralistic one, in which we must be willing to abide someone else's unfamiliar or even repellant practice because the same tolerant impulse protects our own idiosyncracies.

Nevertheless, challenges to the teaching of toleration and critical thinking arise regularly, and there follow court cases and turbulent school board elections. The case of *Mozert v. Hawkins* served as a bellwether in 1987. Conservative parents claimed that a pro-toleration, multicultural policy by Tennessee public schools was intolerant of their own "born again Christian" world-view and undermined their First Amendment right to freely exercise their religion and pass it along to their children. The school board had unanimously voted to adopt a series of basal reading textbooks that exposed their children to beliefs contrary to their own in several categories. Quoting from the court's decision:

(A parent) identified passages from stories and poems used in the (the publisher's) series that fell into each category. Illustrative is her first category, futuristic supernaturalism, which she defined as teaching "Man As God." Passages that she found offensive described Leonardo da Vinci as the human with a creative mind that "came closest to the divine touch." Similarly, she felt that a passage entitled "Seeing Beneath the Surface" related to an occult theme, by describing the use of imagination as a vehicle for seeing things not discernible through our physical eyes. She interpreted a poem, "Look at Anything," as presenting the idea that by using imagination a child can become part of anything and thus understand it better. (The parent) testified that it is an "occult practice" for children to use imagination beyond the limitation of scriptural authority.

The 6th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the citizens of Tennessee had a compelling interest here, which justified the burden being placed on these parents. That interest, quoting the Court, is that "public education must prepare pupils for citizenship in the Republic," which includes exposing children to diverse beliefs and controversial issues.⁹

More recently, the platform of the Texas Republican Party of 2012, following the battle over the state's revised curriculum standards for social studies,¹⁰ contained this plank: "We oppose the teaching of ... critical thinking skills and similar programs that ... have the purpose of challenging the student's fixed beliefs and undermining parental authority" (p. 12). This statement reveals, again, that citizenship education can conflict with parental authority when the child, per Lippman's observation earlier, is "drawn away from the religion and the patriotism of its parents."

A number of theorists in addition to Gutmann, notably Brighouse (2000), Callan (1997), and Levinson (2012) argue that a liberal-democratic regime has a morally compelling obligation to educate its citizens both to think critically and to tolerate one another. As we saw in the *Mozert* case, the courts often agree. The reason is that the U. S. regime type exists to maintain individuals' rights and liberties, which include their freedom to pursue happiness in whatever direction they

⁸ Certainly not always (e.g., Nussbaum, 2012).

⁹ See Macedo's analysis (1993).

¹⁰ The new standards emphasize "the superiority of American capitalism, question the Founding Fathers' commitment to a purely secular government, and present Republican political philosophies in a more positive light" (McKinnley, 2010, p. A10).

choose, within the law: a life of faith and family, or not; a life of science and industry, or not; a life of baseball caps or *hijabs*, or neither. This regime type assumes that individuals will differ on conceptions of the good, the true, and the beautiful, and that they have a natural right to do so. *The ensuing freedom leads to further proliferation of diversity in all directions, thus requiring a political culture of tolerant co-existence.* This regime type assumes, further, that these individuals are capable of making the decision to “consent” to be governed, as the Declaration of Independence states.¹¹ Young children cannot consent, which is one reason why they are in the custody of their parents. But as young people approach their “majority” or “emancipation,” as it is called (legal adulthood, independence, and responsibility for conduct), this is precisely what is required: an independent decision to live within the social contract, with rights and liberties both guaranteed by and constrained by law. Consent requires critical thinking or in the language of political philosophy “political autonomy”: the capacity to make un-coerced decisions—to develop one’s own views without manipulation by others.

Dewey characterized this kind of education—liberal civic education—as a “method of intelligence” or “intelligence in operation.” It is a middle way between extremes. The political left and right have different conceptions of the good life, and they often see schools as technologies for realizing them. On the right (e.g., Finn, 2003), students should be taught to serve, succeed in, and preserve the current social order. Patriotism on the right is pride in what has already been accomplished—the status quo—and one’s civic duty is to protect and nurture it. On the left (e.g., Counts, 1932), students should be taught to transform the social order so as to realize a more just and vibrant democracy, one that would include the economy rather than leaving it solely in the hands of the market. Patriotism on the left is pride in democratic ideals, and one’s civic duty is to help achieve them. Dewey advocated neither of these but carved a middle way: Students should be taught to use their minds well—to think critically and to value and use scientific inquiry. They should not be told to what ends they should use these competencies, however, but left free to determine their own ends and path. It is up to them—well-educated democratic citizens, trained thinkers—to engage in the ongoing work of government of, by, and for the people.¹²

The obligation of schools to teach critical thinking and tolerance does not license them to indoctrinate students into a particular conception of the good life, only to enable students to think for themselves and let others think for themselves. Here, then, is the famous tension: Liberal democracy is neutral as to conceptions of the good life *and* it is committed (not neutral) to the values of liberal democracy. Citizens, therefore, have both freedoms and obligations. Liberty is not independence from the community, but a dimension of community. Quoting Aristotle, “Individuals are so many parts all equally depending on the whole which alone can bring self-sufficiency” (1958, p. 6).

By now it will have occurred to readers that Dewey’s middle way wasn’t so neutral after all. *The child’s character is deliberately formed to meet regime requirements; she is required to become a tolerant, independent, and critical thinker.* And this is why liberal democratic regimes face an enduring role conflict. While parents may and do indoctrinate children into particular beliefs and lifestyles—this is the parent’s right—civic educators are obliged to “prepare pupils for citizenship in the Republic” as ruled in Mozart. The regime has a compelling interest in cultivating liberal-democratic character—citizens who are democratically enlightened and politically engaged (Parker, 2008). These are citizens who know and do particular things. They know the historical

¹¹ “... life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...”

¹² I am grateful to William Stanley (2010 and personal communications) for his analysis of the transmission-transformation question.

rarity of democracy and the historically predictable routines by which it descends into demagoguery and autocracy. They know why in the more successful democracies power is divided among “branches” and why the state is neutral (to an extent) and non-interfering as to religion. They do things, too. They vote and serve on juries, for example, and call out intolerance and discrimination where they find them. Importantly, they protect from governmental or popular incursions not only their own group but other groups. They *do* this because they *know* something: Like King (1963) sitting in Birmingham City Jail, they know that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (p. 77). Moreover, they can and do endeavor to communicate with one another across their differences in ways that make liberal-democratic living possible—Dewey’s “mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (1985, p. 93). This becomes their *common* way of life, a public similarity bridging private difference, to which children are assimilated at the *common* school.

Classroom and School Practice

How can we characterize the practices of classroom and school-based citizenship education in the United States? The aforementioned high school government course plays an important, formal role in the upper grades, but so do the many less formal classroom and school-wide practices at all levels. The daily recitation of the *Pledge of Allegiance*, for example, is required by law in 35 states and practiced by custom in most of them (Piscatelli, 2003). “Citizenship” (comportment) marks are often given in the lower grades along with subject area marks, and homeroom meetings and student councils continue to dot the school landscape. Some elementary school principals convene one council for grades 1 – 3 and another for grades 4 – 6. “Our one purpose here,” one principal told the children, “is to identify problems and try to solve them” (Parker, 2011a, p. 97). Like the U. S. Senate, each class elects two members to serve on the council. These students may be told they are delegates of their classrooms, not representatives, and consequently must vote at council meetings as instructed by their classmates. Therefore, the elections matter to the class, and class meetings at which delegates are given instructions are an important part of the program. In such a council program, even primary-grade children gain experience with electing and being elected, with majority rule, with the distinction between delegate and representative, and with discussion of issues that are important to them.¹³

Returning to the formal curriculum,¹⁴ the U. S. history curriculum is typically taught across the nation in grades five, eight, and eleven. Not merely historical or historiographic in emphasis, it serves a civic, nation-building purpose (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Epstein, 2009). Nations everywhere create schools to advance national cohesion, a positive story, and a national imaginary, and the U. S. history curriculum follows suit. Its subject matter at all three levels centers on the founding of the nation, the Constitution, its greatest crisis (the Civil War), and the fulfillment, to an extent, of its promise in the Civil Rights Movement. Each of these four eras has one or two events at its center; consequently, a narrative history style (“And then what happened?” and “Who did it?”) is both common and popular with old and young students alike. Indeed, the evidentiary historiographic approach is rare: few history teachers even in the upper grades engage students in historical inquiry where the emphasis is on the creation and evaluation of claims and their warrants. This practice is unfortunate, for as Barton and Levstik (2010) conclude, students

¹³ In addition to Parker (2011a) see Howard & Kenny (1992) and Power (1988) on robust forms of student participation in school governance.

¹⁴ On civic learning *outside* school, there is a burgeoning literature, e.g., Bennett 2010, and Biesta, 2009.

are left with “no way of distinguishing historical claims that are based on evidence from those that aren’t—such as myths, legends, or outright lies. The inability to distinguish between a myth and a warranted assertion destroys the foundation for democracy, because students will be susceptible to any outrageous story they may be told” (pp. 39-40).

With this introduction behind us, let us turn briefly to three dimensions of citizenship-education practice in U. S. classrooms and schools: inequality, discussion-oriented pedagogy, and the role of non-governmental organizations.

Inequality

First, classroom and school practices of citizenship education in the United States are variant and unequal. They vary because the national government plays only a small role in citizenship education in schools; school practices are reserved by the Constitution to the 50 states, most of which further devolve authority to local school districts—some 14,000 little ministries of education with an elected school board. Contrast this decentered system to the standardization and uniformity found in many other modern democracies; in Singapore for example, where all students take a common civic education course using materials produced by the national curriculum office (Sim, 2011), or in England where a new citizenship education program—the first ever in that nation—was instituted nation-wide in 2001 (Kerr & Cleaver, 2009).

But alongside state and local variation in civic education in the United States, which is legitimate in a federalist regime, lies an illegitimate form of variation: inequality. This is the gap between students who receive high and low quality civic education in school. It is called the “civic achievement” or “civic opportunity” or “civic empowerment” gap (e.g., Levinson, 2012). A consensus report in 2003 (Gibson & Levine) and again in 2011 (Campaign) identified six research-supported practices in civic education, each related to higher levels of student civic knowledge, skill, commitment, and actual civic involvement. They are:

1. Learning information about local, state, and national government
2. Opportunities to debate and discuss current events and other issues that matter to students
3. Service-learning opportunities
4. Participation in extra-curriculum activities
5. Opportunities for decision-making and governance experiences
6. Participation in simulations of civic processes.

These practices are distributed unequally in the United States on the basis of social class, ethnicity, and college-going plans. In a sweeping study of California high school seniors, Kahne and Middaugh (2010) found that African American students were less likely than others to have had participation-oriented government courses, less likely to report having opportunities to participate in school decision making, and less likely to report opportunities for discussions and simulations. Latino students reported fewer opportunities for service than did other students and also fewer experiences with simulations. Also, seniors who did not expect to take part in any form of post-secondary education reported significantly fewer opportunities to develop civic skills and commitments than seniors with post-secondary plans. The Campaign for the Civic Mission of the Schools (2011) concluded that schools exacerbate the civic empowerment gap “by providing poor and nonwhite students fewer and less high-quality learning opportunities than they provide to middle class and wealthy white students” (p. 19).¹⁵

¹⁵ There are other inequalities, too. See, for example, Dabach’s (2012) examination of this intriguing asymmetry: teachers who are legal citizens teaching about citizenship and voting to immigrant students who are not.

Let us focus first on practice 1—learning about government—and then turn to some of the others. As we saw earlier, most high school students take a U. S. government course. Additionally, most take a U. S. history course three times, in grades 5, 8, and 11. Each time they likely are exposed, in one form or another, to the core texts of the U. S. regime (the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution of the United States*) and to information about their creation. Because social class remains the strongest predictor of the particular school curriculum and classroom resources to which American students are exposed, and because the rich-poor gap in the United States is widening,¹⁶ it is difficult to determine the number of students who are exposed to additional resources, from *The Federalist Papers* to King’s *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. What is surprising to observers from other nations (e.g., Frazer, 2002) is that there is widespread bipartisan agreement in the United States on these and a handful of additional texts that are considered “core.” Accordingly, there is in a kind of ‘civic canon’ alongside a consensus on research-based pedagogies. To summarize, while the distribution of political information, core texts, and best practices is unequal, there is remarkable agreement on what they are.

Discussion-Oriented Pedagogy

We can consider practices 2, 5, and 6 together under the name “discussion-oriented pedagogy.” (For reasons of space, we will leave aside practices 3 and 4.¹⁷) Practices 2, 5, and 6 easily converge in classroom practice—they fit together well—and each involves participatory, active learning and discussion. Practice 2 is teaching and learning about current events and issues. These are not synonyms. Events are happenings in time and space (an election, a natural disaster, an incident in the school building) whereas issues are controversies or dilemmas involving value tensions (What is fair tax policy? Should voting be required?). Neither events nor issues are self-evident; each is a “text” requiring interpretation, and this is best done with others. As Bridges (1979) wrote, the advantage of discussion is “to set alongside one perception of the matter under discussion the several perceptions of other participants, challenging our own view of things with those of others” (p. 50).

Practice 5 involves decision making about community and school problems. Community problems often are current events and issues, it should be noted; school problems are as well, and these can be studied and deliberated in the aforementioned classroom meetings and school councils. Practice 6 is also participatory, for students take roles and, with them, social positions and political perspectives. Discussions are conducted in these roles. The simulated civic process may be a mock trial, election, congressional floor debate, committee hearing, or a moot (already decided) Supreme Court case. The branches of government are involved as are media, political parties, and interest groups. Fourth-grade students may be simulating their community—its politics, businesses, mail and other public services—while seniors in the government course simulate the federal government or city hall, from campaigning to law making and judicial review.

Discussion-oriented pedagogy has always been popular with civic educators but has grown since the 1980s and been subjected to an array of investigations and design experiments (e.g., Beck, 2003; Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002; Hahn, 1998; Haroutunian-Gordon, 2009; Hess, 2009; Larson, 2003; Paley, 1992; Parker et al. 2011; Power, 1988; Torney-Purta & Wilkenfeld, 2009). The rationale, in brief, is that democratic regimes entail government by discussion. The ability to discuss—to argue and deliberate, to speak and listen to strangers—has been a central strategy for democratic public policy formation at least since Socrates held discussions in the

¹⁶ The United States has the greatest income inequality of any wealthy nation in the world (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010).

¹⁷ But see chapters by Hart and Power, this volume, and Billig et al., 2005.

agora. It becomes, therefore, a curricular end of schools in democratic regimes, not simply a lively instructional means. As an end, a goal, it is part and parcel to schools' democratic mission.

Discussion-oriented pedagogy takes advantage of powerful assets that prevail at school (Parker, 2003). First, diversity. Schools are not private places like our homes but public places with diverse students. When five-year-olds come to kindergarten, they emerge from the private silos of babyhood, family, and kin into the mixed public arena of acquaintances and strangers. While some schools are more diverse than others, *all schools are diverse to some pedagogically meaningful extent*. The work of cognitive developmentalists has established this (e.g., Finlay et al., 2010; Kohlberg et al., 1983). In a public school, furthermore, boys and girls are both there; Jews, Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, Buddhists, and atheists may all be there; there are racial and class differences, and therefore differences in social status and power; and immigrants from the world over may be there. Ideological differences are present, too, and not to be overlooked (Hess, 2009). This variety does not exist at home, church, temple, or mosque.

A second asset that is abundant in schools, thanks to the diversity of students and the tasks of educating them and keeping them safe, is the prevalence of problems. These problems are mutual, collective concerns; they are *public* problems. There are two kinds of problems at school: social and academic. Social problems arise over resources, policies, classroom assignments, injustices, scarcity, safety, and the myriad frictions of social interaction. Academic problems, on the other hand, reside in each discipline. Expertise in a discipline is defined by one's knowledge of its core and emerging problems. Both social and academic problems lend themselves to discursive practices: communication about the nature of the problem (interpretation) and communication about solutions (deliberation). Interpretation and deliberation correspond to discussions of powerful literature and speeches (these are *seminars*) and discussions of controversial issues where a decision is needed as to what course of action to take (e.g., *Structured Academic Controversy*).¹⁸

Practices 2, 5, and 6 mobilize these assets, which is to say they lend themselves to increasing the variety and frequency of interaction among diverse students around social and academic problems. If the school is homogeneous or if the school is diverse but curriculum tracks keep students apart, then the first asset is impeded. Still, school leaders can capitalize on whatever diversity is present and increase the interaction among students, both in the classroom and in student councils and other governance settings. As Paley (1992) has demonstrated, this discursive pedagogy is perfectly suitable for even the youngest children in kindergarten.

Influential Organizations

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) understandably play a large role in civic education in a decentralized school system. They produce classroom materials, lesson plans, and professional development opportunities for teachers. They have even helped write curriculum standards, a task reserved for government agencies in most other regimes. The most prominent among these NGOs are those that have networks spanning the 50 states. Here is a sample:

- *iCivics* is the creation of former U. S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. It features an innovative website and instructional video games for students.
- *Street Law* developed the leading website for teaching about landmark cases of the Supreme Court. It also brings teachers to the Court for professional development, and across the U. S. it connects law school students with high school classrooms.
- *Close Up* brings middle and high school students on field trips to the nation's capital each

¹⁸ On this distinction, see Parker 2006, 2010, and 2011b.

- year for a close-up experience with U. S. government and politics.
- *Kidsvoting* produces opportunities for experiential learning about voting and elections, including the right to vote and active citizenship.
- The *Center for Civic Education* produces *We The People* and *Project Citizen*, widely successful programs that are practiced in every state. *We The People* concentrates on historical knowledge while *Project Citizen* engages students in community problem solving.
- The *Constitutional Rights Foundation* produces *Deliberating in a Democracy*, in which high school students engage in authentic civic deliberations, and a popular newsletter for history and government classes, *The Bill of Rights in Action*.
- *Facing History and Ourselves* produces lessons and professional development for teaching students to take action against injustice and bigotry of all sorts, especially racism and anti-semitism.
- The College Board's *Advanced Placement* (AP) program is expanding to new groups of students as local superintendents lower the threshold for entry into courses, sometimes even requiring them. Consequently, the number of students taking the AP version of the high school government course is skyrocketing (see Parker et al., 2011.)

Conclusion

The five anchoring concepts of this review were *citizenship*, *citizenship education*, *regime type*, *liberal democracy*, and *classroom and school practice*. Citizenship and citizenship education are old ideas, and today they are again at the forefront of scholarship in the social sciences and education. A liberal-democratic regime such as the United States aims to balance individual rights and liberties with a common political culture. In its schools, the regime has to be more or less neutral (impartial) with respect to differences, such as religious belief and political ideology; yet it is obliged also to educate students to value liberal democracy and to possess the knowledge and skills, such as toleration and critical thinking, needed to sustain it. *This is the regime's unique brand of moral and character education*. Accordingly, value neutrality is practiced alongside value commitment, and conflict inevitably arises among parents, educators, and the state. Democratic education cannot be democratic education without this tension; it comes with the territory of liberal democracy and its array of conflicting interests each endeavoring to express the freedom that the regime is established to protect. There are rival and incompatible conceptions of the good life, of god and country, of community and individual freedom. Of course, there are power and history, too, which advantage some conceptions over others and fuel the struggles that attempt to redraw the playing field.

I opened this chapter with a Jefferson quote for two reasons. The first is its substantive meaning: democratic citizens are not born with the knowledge, skills, and character they need. This is the assertion that justifies public education generally and citizenship or civic education in particular. Second, the assertion serves a discursive function, which is to locate this review not in universal verities but in a particular time, place, and political regime: the United States of America, its Constitution, and its political culture. In this particular local context, unequal access to effective classroom practice is a paramount problem. Alongside it lies another: illiberal groups that seek to exempt students from exposure to diversity and from learning to think critically and independently. These exemptions are problematic because they undermine democratic education at its root: informing a person's capacity to make an un-coerced decision to consent to be governed and, reciprocally, to govern a diverse society. Present and future attempts to solve the first problem are likely to encounter opposition from groups that seek exemptions, and this ongoing conflict

summarizes a key skirmish in citizenship education in the United States today.

Afterword

I want to recommend two other reviews of citizenship education in the United States that will serve as complements to this one: one by Carole L. Hahn (2008) and another by Kathleen Knight-Abowitz and Jason Harnish (2006).

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