**Evolutionary Citizenship Education: Achieving democracy through the development of critical thinking deliberative citizens**

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**Abstract**

*In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, liberal conceptions of democracy become more and more unable to achieve egalitarian concerns or to protect the autonomy of its citizens. The view that people are democratically independent and free of exogenous influence is fallacious, as the number of overlapping spheres of authority grow in complexity. A person is no longer just a member of a political community; they are affected in terms of economics, culture, ecology, history, geography and religion.*

*Mainstream citizenship education is inherently grounded in the status quo and has a vested interest in maintaining existing power structures. This type of liberal citizenship ignores the social and other elements of citizenship, assuming that all will either agree on conceptions of ‘the good life’ or be sufficiently self-realized to pursue this goal for themselves.*

*Transformative citizenship education is required not only to better enfranchise marginalized groups but to increase the value of democratic outcomes; citizens that are taught to critical consider all points of view will be able to reduce the inequalities of society and thereby increasing democratic outcomes for all. This type of deliberative democratic education must begin at school, as this is the only and ideal environment to develop critically thinking new citizens who understand the limitations of their own perspectives. This development of deliberative citizens is an evolutionary process, with each generation improving on the previous and leading society continually towards better outcomes. Democratic structures beyond schooling are needed to continue building democratic competency though, and the ideal form given the growing multiculturalism and interdependency is to use decentralized non-electoral politics, such as demarchy.*

In this paper I will argue that education and democracy are inextricably linked as individuals must be taught how to participate and contribute to their society. Given that the use of democracy can only rest on justifications rather than foundations, educators play a crucial role in preparing new citizens for rational engagement in society. This type of education cannot occur in a discipline-specific context; students learn how to be citizens through all of their interactions, and will develop a type of democratic character regardless of educational intention. This character may be adversarial, apathetic, communitarian, considerate, selfish, short- or long-sighted; a democratic education is needed to guide young citizens to certain values that will aid them in participating in a deliberative democracy. All forms of democracy and democratic participation benefit from citizens having this democratic character, in that they can choose to engage or disengage, debate and discuss, and this choice is meaningful rather than accidental. I will, therefore, argue that the way we conceive of democratic boundaries no longer serves to protect our liberty, equality or communicate effectively between affected groups. Society has an ever growing complexity that requires a reconceptualization of identity and citizenship in order to maintain its legitimacy. Next, I will be arguing that the teaching of democratic character and values is a requirement for democracy to function in a pluralistic world. Finally, I will conclude by arguing that our current systems of government are becoming increasingly incapable of dealing with multinational problems, both in terms of pragmatic decision-making as well as accuracy of representation, and that a more decentralized series of governments (as theorized by John Burnheim) is a superior method of achieving a more democratic outcome.

**Pragmatic concerns of boundaries**

The structure of societies around the world have changed drastically over millennia, and one only has to glance at a modern industrialized nation to see how different it is from an ancient Greek democracy (Fleck & Hanssen, 2006, p. 119). An ancient society may have had a much more homogenous society; overwhelmingly large majorities of single ethnicities, cultures, religions, economies, governments, legal systems etc. Each nation represented the totality of a single homogeneity, meaning that outside these borders were different cultures and political structures. Political boundaries demarcated the social, political, cultural and economic spheres of a state, and this could be achieved in a roughly geographic delineation. This did not remain unproblematic for long though, as international trade, commerce and conflict inevitably spilled across boundaries (Dahl, 1991, p. 319).

It makes little sense to remain steadfastly loyal to the previous means of determining the boundaries of political authority within the context of a modern industrialized nation-state. A multicultural society with continuous immigration of new citizens from various countries around the world can have many large religious and ethnic groups living within the same political sphere. Using a political or geographical delineation to determine democratic rights and responsibilities does not accurately represent the plethora of other spheres of influence. It is more respectful to individual and group interests to delineate by legitimate interests in a given function, rather than having guaranteed rights within a particular geographic area. If citizens must self-select to participate in a democracy, then they require an education that can prepare them with several cognitive tools to participate meaningfully (Gutmann, 1987, p. 171; Splitter, 2011, p. 498). These tools necessarily include:

1. An understanding of their own interests
2. An understanding of issues that affect those interests
3. The ability to communicate their interests to others in a rational manner (in the sense of having reasons, rather than merely the appearance of reason)
4. Toleration and willingness to listen to the views and interests of others.

On the first point, it is a fundamental right of people to determine for themselves what the good life entails, and how to pursue it. It is not incumbent on society to determine what a good life is for anyone, but it is vital that society develops the capacities of its citizens so that they may determine their own interests (Gutmann, 1987, p. 62).

The second point refers to a complexity of thought and the capacity to recognize causal links between events. This is aided by critical thinking and analysis skills; this type of education is required so that citizens in a cosmopolitan world will be able to distinguish between policies that will and won’t affect them (Noddings, 2010, p. 392).

The third tool – of communication – is of value in a democratic system as it is the means by which interests can be incorporated into the decision-making process. Regardless of one’s views on the role of government, the bounds of political authority, and the limits of autonomy, communication skills are essential to the functioning of a democracy. However, those skills need to be developed in more than the obvious group of disempowered and disenfranchised parts of the population, but also the mainstream and dominant sectors as well. Too often, those with alternate forms of communication from the dominant culture or gender are ignored or overlooked because they lack access to the communicative tools available or usable to others (Young, 1996, 2001). At its most basic level, this may be as simple as speaking the same language. There is no reasonable justification as to why the interests of a person who does not speak a particular language should have their interests ignored or overlooked. More troubling though are the subtleties of communication, in which minute cues in culture or posture change the meaning of one’s speech to something unintentional, such as with eye contact, verbal tics, and profanity. Often in Western societies, precedence and respect is given to the loudest and simplest of arguments, or worse still, on character attacks, irrelevant distractions and other slanderous tactics (Jamieson, 1993). A democratic education must be capable of recognising the differences in communication as well as valuing them in order to have a meaningfully democratic process (Young, 2001, p. 688).

The fourth tool refers to democratic character; the values that are used and developed in a democracy. The pursuit of the good life in a pluralistic society thus requires certain underpinning values; a democratic character that all citizens should have (Ozoliņš, 2010). This will involve two essential components. Firstly, the toleration of other views, beliefs and conceptions of the good life. Without any objectively knowable right and wrong, all participants in a democracy must be tolerant of the answers that others create for themselves. This is not to say that people should not persuade others of their views, only that without objective truth, good citizenship in pluralism requires the tolerance of other views (Gutmann, 1987, pp. 310-316). The second important component of democratic character is the ability to listen to others. In adversarial conceptions of democracy, listening provides a means of analysing the weaknesses of an opponent’s views and rhetoric, or at best, is a means of assessing the cost require to trade votes to achieve one’s goals (e.g. I am required to give up my preference in issue X to achieve my more important preference in issue Y). Listening provides a means of furthering one’s own liberty rather than any kind of joint venture or better compromise in an adversarial democracy.

Listening for democratic character, however, is the second part of communication that allows one person to be understood. If a person takes the time to listen to the ideas of another, they can begin to understand their life, their goals and why they want what they want. This notion is hardly controversial (that by listening to one another we can learn about each other) but it is often overlooked and undervalued as a component of democratic character. The pluralism of society creates a wider range of views with no common frame of reference and no common goal. In order to achieve a democratic outcome, participants must be capable of understanding the interests of others, which requires that they become capable of listening to others in the first place (Young, 2001, p. 672). This type of character trait does not emerge naturally and so must be instilled and encouraged through an educational process.

*Bringing about democratic values*

While the types of values that children and citizens should hold are of unending contention, it is clearly the task of schools to develop the capacities necessary to meaningfully hold these views (Dewey, 2004, p. 8; Splitter, 2011, p. 498). It is inadequate to simply tell students what they ought to believe – there will be no substantive uptake of these values, and in the best case for those who advocate these non-deliberative views, the beliefs will serve as rigid standards for personal behaviour. For a meaningful absorption of values, educators must model the very values they wish to impart.

Many justifications for democracy and for governance are based on some pre-political or metaphysical assumptions on human nature. Given that it is impossible to reach agreement on human nature or whether it exists at all, it is more value to explore how societies array themselves and what the relationship is between individuals and society (Rawls, 1985, p. 230; Rorty, 2002, p. 169). There are many overlapping private and public spheres of interaction, which is contrary to the idea that there is a simple demarcation between the individual and the state. Conceptions of democracy and education for democracy must have a pragmatic approach and an intellectually honest appreciation of fallibilism (Peirce, 2012, p. 58). There will always be gaps in our understanding of the world, society, and people, and education must reveal these limitations in order to develop more autonomous citizens. To assert that this is not the case is to commit a fallacy of singular affiliation (Sen, 2007, p. 20ff)

Children learn from more than the lessons in class; interactions with teachers, parents, conflicts with other children, participation in extracurricular activities, juvenile romances – in all of these contexts, children are learning how to become autonomous people. Vygotsky argued that all learning is dialogic in nature (Vygotsky, 1978), meaning that whether it is intentional on the part of educators, students are always learning. A democratic education is required to ensure that at no point does the public education reinforce authoritarian or dominant views (or at least to not do this by accident). A democratic education is one that utilizes communities of inquiry, which describes knowledge as context dependent and requiring the agreement of those within the learning environment for the knowledge to have legitimacy. A community of inquiry rejects the idea that there is an objectively correct method of looking at an issue or problem (Pardales & Girod, 2006).

*Developing Citizenship*

Diversity in society exists, meaning that this diversity of perspective, interests and modes of communication must be recognised in order to produce a more democratic outcome. An approach is required that differentiates and values these views to attain desirable outcomes like civic equality and the protection of liberty (Banks, 2008, p. 131). Banks points to the idea of identity – the character that unifies people and groups, allowing for collective problem solving and mutual toleration. In order to produce a more democratic outcome, it is necessary to more closely examine the citizenship education that produces those outcomes.

Mainstream citizenship education (MCE) has the outcome of reproducing existing social and cultural structures (Banks, 2008, p. 135). Students are taught intentionally in civics education and accidentally through interaction to respect authority, to value the status quo, to see the dominant views as having moral primacy and to conceive of the good life in the same ways as their educators. This type of citizenship empirically has a stabilizing effect on that society, but only if that society is homogenous. Developing critical-thinking skills, having strong decision-making capabilities, and the capacities for independent thought and action are all disruptive to mainstream citizenship education. MCE ignores the social, political, civil and cultural elements of a society, as these are all disruptive to the mainstream self-replication (Hanson & Howe, 2011, p. 5). These elements complicate the society when it would prefer conformity to its norms. While this position may be defensible in certain historical contexts, it is simply untenable in any multicultural states, or any state that would claim to value diversity. The outcome of mainstream citizenship education on a multicultural society is the suppression of many ethnic, religious and gendered groups while privileging one group without justification. A MCE in a multicultural society has the opposite desire effect in that it destabilizes the society, revealing the cracks and divisions in that society, increasing conflict while providing no means of problem solving or finding common ground.

Transformative citizenship education (TCE) challenges the mainstream views by recognising the value in all cultural identities while granting primacy to none (Banks, 2008, p. 135). TCE has the aim of providing students with the cognitive tools they require to discover and address the problems within their world. Critical thinking, toleration, listening and decision-making skills are all required to identify society problems and begin to solve them. A crucial component of this type of education is that it also has an honesty and willingness to discuss the flaws with the existing socio-political structures, examining weaknesses and processes that could be changed or improved to better society (Hanson & Howe, 2011, p. 7).

In an ideal world, all people would have a transformative citizenship education and be participants on matters that affect them. However, current political structures would prove to be a hindrance in the realization of their citizenship; a liberal adversarial democracy is less useful for opinion forming than it is for assessing the basic aggregation of citizens’ views (Knight & Johnson, 1994, p. 281; Talisse, 2005, p. 5). There is little purpose in having a well-informed citizenry when political system are set up to (arguably) protect certain interest groups. Decision-makers must have the flexibility to deal with pragmatic realities without be entrenched in ideological quagmires in order to fulfil their democratic responsibilities (Misak, 2004, p. 10). For example, a person may be elected on a platform of providing unlimited free water for every home. However, it would constitute a catastrophic failure of representation, common sense and responsible governance to adhere to this position if a drought was in effect. The demos would not consent to dying of dehydration or starvation; the changing facts must be incorporated into political decision-making. If we are to consider democracy a process of communication, coming to mutual understanding and valuing cognitive diversity, then we must recognize the worsening failure of liberal politics to achieve democratic outcomes (Mouffe, 1999, p. 745).

Demarchic structures for a globalizing world

A format of democracy that is more able to communicate interpersonal and intercultural difference is needed. I am arguing that something akin to John Burnheim’s demarchy (Burnheim, 2006) would be a superior match for the changing democratic landscape. A demarchy decentralizes governance by function so that each authority decides only for its own attendant issues and has no authority over other functions. This demarchic structure is much more capable of providing communicative access to those who are affected, with any who are legitimately interested being eligible to participate in the political process. A decentralized committee for a single function, such as education, will be able to look to the issues facing it much more directly, dealing with the pragmatic realities of education in the 21st century. One of the greatest limitation of electoral democracy is of electoral promises and mandates (Goodin & Saward, 2005; Grossback, Peterson, & Stimson, 2007); the requirement of politicians to make promises then to deliver on them (regardless of circumstance). Decisions and promises are often made as a means of achieving electoral success rather than as seen as ends in themselves. Democracies that use electoral politics are less capable of being communicative tools due to this link between decision-making and partisan power building (Burnheim, 1995, 1997; Louwerse, 2012; Mair, 2005). Demarchy on the other hand uses sortition – random selection in politics – which overcomes many of these issues. Citizens who are legitimately interested in a given function are eligible to be selected, and if selected, are limited to a predetermined length of service. This minimizes the irrelevant factors to good decision making that come with electoral politics and provides a political structure much more conducive to effective communication. Burnheim emphasizes the interdependency of these committees, arguing that while the committees hold authority over those who are affected by the function, they are designed to work in consultation with other functional committees (Burnheim, 2006, pp. 86-87). For example, health education in schools may fall under the authority of an education function, but the creation of health education curricula should be done in consultation with a healthcare functional committee. This type of political structure bears a much closer resemblance to the transformative citizenship education and the democratic character it is attempt to create for a pluralistic society.

The delineation by function also allows groups to better understand and articulate their interests without the accidental conflation of issues that occur in electoral politics. As democratic education is a developmental process rather than knowledge that is imparted, better democratic mechanisms are needed to build this competency – a liberal electoral democracy provides this type of developmental opportunity to an elite few. The demarchic structure also provides much greater opportunities for developing the toleration, listening skills and mutual respect that is needed in a globally interdependent world (Walker, 1992, p. 328). While many political problems are small and local, there are developing and increasing numbers of issues that face all people in the world, such as climate change, sustainable development, and free trade.

**Conclusion**

Democracy and education are closely linked, and legitimacy in governance requires that citizens can effectively communicate their interests and listen to the interests of others. In order to achieve the best possible democratic outcome, it is necessary to have educative mechanisms and political structures that are capable of bring their outcomes about. A democracy must deal with its pragmatic realities, which for contemporary societies involves a broad pluralism and a commitment to developing the cognitive tools required for effective democratic operation. A demarchy provides a superior democratic structure to correspond to the transformative citizenship education, having both opportunities to develop citizens’ democratic competency, as well as a clarified decision-making process allowing those who are affected by a function to be heard. Ultimately, the greatest value of democracy is its ability to communicate, meaning that it is only as good as its ability to reflect the interests and ideas of people. Groups and societies change over time and so there is no perfect or universalizable democracy – only more or less effective versions, and the better options involves structures that allow those who are affected to participate. Demarchy may not be perfect but it may provide a viable democratic structure in a world growing more interconnected, intricate and interdependent.

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