

# EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP: THEORY AND TEACHING PRACTICE

## Session 2: Education for democratic citizenship and education for democratic culture

Compiled and partly written by Dr. Felisa Tibbitts

### *Guiding Questions:*

- What are different forms of citizenship?
- What forms of good citizenship are essential for a functioning, democratic society?
- What kinds of behaviors in society are encouraged in each of these models?
- What influences our understanding of good citizenship?
- What is the role of schooling in promoting good citizenship?

### **Healthy Democracies and Rule of Law**

(excerpt from Tommasoli, 2013)

The Declaration adopted on 24 September 2012 by the United Nations General Assembly at the High-level Meeting on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels reaffirmed that "human rights, the rule of law and democracy are interlinked and mutually reinforcing and that they belong to the universal and indivisible core values and principles of the United Nations".<sup>1</sup> Indeed, government responsiveness to the interests and needs of the greatest number of citizens is strictly associated with the capacity of democratic institutions and processes to bolster the dimensions of rights, equality and accountability.

If considered not solely an instrument of the government but as a rule to which the entire society, including the government, is bound, the rule of law is fundamental in advancing democracy. Strengthening the rule of law has to be approached not only by focusing on the application of norms and procedures. One must also emphasize its fundamental role in protecting rights and advancing inclusiveness, in this way framing the protection of rights within the broader discourse on human development.

A common feature of both democracy and the rule of law is that a purely institutional approach does not say anything about actual outcomes of processes and procedures, even if the latter are formally correct. When addressing the rule of law and democracy nexus, a fundamental distinction has to be drawn between "rule by law", whereby law is an



instrument of government and government is considered above the law, and "rule of law", which implies that everyone in society is bound by the law, including the government. Essentially, constitutional limits on power, a key feature of democracy, require adherence to the rule of law.

A "thick" definition delineates positively the rule of law as incorporating such elements as a strong constitution, an effective electoral system, a commitment to gender equality, laws for the protection of minorities and other vulnerable groups and a strong civil society (underline added). The rule of law, defended by an independent judiciary, plays a crucial function by ensuring that civil and political rights and civil liberties are safe and that the equality and dignity of all citizens are not at risk. It also helps protect the effective performance of the various agencies of electoral, societal and horizontal accountability from potential obstructions and intimidation by powerful State actors. This "thick" definition of the rule of law differs from "thinner" definitions that place emphasis on the procedures through which rules are formulated and applied.

A practical example of the importance of the rule of law for democracy building is the fact that the rule of law is a fundamental principle embraced in most modern democracies. Constitutions contain the fundamental and, most often, supreme law of the State, and the rule of law dictates the enforcement of those principles above all other laws. Constitutions also preserve fundamental principles and values by making the process of amendment burdensome. Some constitutions ensure the permanence of certain principles and values by prohibiting amendments.

(text below adapted from Democracy Fund, 2021)

Democracies are complex and imperfect systems, continuously a “work in progress”. There are several features of a healthy democracy:

- Equal protection of rights under the law
- A free, fair, accessible and secure method of voting for all eligible adults
- A just and equitable political system that ensures that historically marginalized persons have a meaningful influence
- Constitutional checks and balances and respect for the rule of law, as protection against abuses of power
- An independent and free press



- A robust civil society
- Leaders who act with integrity and engage in principled compromise that respect facts and pursue the common good.

### **Kinds of Citizenship and Links with Democracy**

‘Citizenship’ can be defined in many ways, with direct implications for how learning is organized to promote it. ‘Active citizenship’ is the presumptive approach but invites further scrutiny, both theoretically and in practice. UNESCO approaches for promoting active citizenship include global citizenship education, human rights education, education for gender equality, education for sustainable development, education for intercultural understanding and peace education are all mentioned under SDG 4.7 (United Nations, 2016).

There are several working assumptions about active citizenship, suggesting benefits both for individuals as well as the societies in which they reside.

- Active citizenship is a desirable goal for everyone in all societies. ‘Active citizenship’ can involve engagement in ‘social, civic and community’ life.
- Active citizenship can involve fostering life skills that result in youth being motivated and capable of engaging in their communities, including at the local, national and even transnational levels. Relevant life skills include ‘resilience, confidence and problem-solving’.
- Concurrent with fostering active citizenship, education can encourage learners to be ‘more tolerant of diversity, more attentive to issues of sustainability, and more aware of the arts, ethics and cultural heritage’ (UIL, 2016, pp. 13-14).

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) proposed a framing notion of citizenship that incorporate legal citizenship and the fulfillment of civic duties but at the same time allows for ‘active citizenship’ and even social reform. The three models are:

- the personally responsible citizen (acts responsibly in his or her community)
- the participatory citizen (participates actively in the civic affairs and social life of the community at the local, state or national level)
- the justice-oriented citizen (participates in collective work in responding to social problems)



The first model - the *personally responsible citizen* – is aligned with legal citizenship. This model suggests a prescribed, and potentially compliant, model of citizenship. In circumstances where a political system is aligned with democracy, rule of law and inclusive processes, the fulfillment of duties by a ‘personally responsible citizen’ would support conditions generally considered to be human rights aligned. Education programming oriented towards becoming a citizen or fulfilling one’s duty as a citizen can be seen as linked with voter and citizenship education programs (for both newcomers as well as legal citizens). Notably, the ‘legal citizenship’ notion of citizenship is quite popular.

*The participatory citizen* of Westheimer and Kahne (2004) is one in which the individual is engaged in the civic life of the community, along the lines of ‘active citizenship’ identified by Heater (1999). In this model, there is some degree of discretion exercised by the citizen in relation to how to contribute to the community though the orientation is largely aligned with prescribed democratic processes. Citizens who are civically competent will participate in their communities and will have ‘skills, knowledge and commitment’ needed to accomplish political purposes, such as speaking in public, voting and petitioning (Carnegie Corporation et al, 2003; Bahmueller, 1992; Patrick, 2000).

Active citizenship implies that there are possibilities to influence one’s local political, social, cultural and/or economic environment. These opportunities will inevitably vary by context. Democratic forms of governance and opportunities for active citizenship will depend upon formal political processes at all levels as well as political practices and cultures that may more or less invite ‘active citizenship’.

Inter-governmental, regional and national agencies whose mandate is to promote human rights standards believe human rights to be integral to the democratic discourse, and vice versa. Democracy is seen as a way to “protect individuals from the attempts of others to control their lives, and indeed the only way to protect democratic society itself” (Kelly, 1995), linked with the rule of law<sup>1</sup>. Human rights values such as equality and non-discrimination reinforce the tenets of democracy. Moreover, the active participation of

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<sup>1</sup> According to the United Nations, the Rule of Law (RoL) is 'a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards (United Nations, 2004, section III, para 6, p. 4 as quoted in UNESCO & UNODC, 2019, p. 18).



citizens in the political life of their society can contribute to holding the State accountable for its human rights obligations.

Education for active citizenship is therefore a crucial contribution to the democratic life of a community and country. Moving beyond simply sharing information about how to vote or participate in one's community (as we find in education for 'legal citizenship'), active citizenship cultivates capacities and motivation for ongoing individual civic engagement.

There are conditions where 'active citizenship' may involve more than 'participatory citizenship' and actually wider political actions to bring about reform in laws or policies or address underlying conditions that violate human rights. In contrast to the participatory citizen which relies strongly on individual activity and even volunteerism, another form of 'active citizenship' requires people to cooperate with one another in bringing about social change. Where individual volunteerism leaves off, political action takes over (Walker, 2002).

This brings us to the third Westheimer and Kahne (2004) model: the *justice-oriented citizen*. This approach extends our understanding of citizenship so that individual potentially promote social action. Participation carried out by the justice-oriented citizen transcends sanctioned civic channels for participation, such as voting or volunteering in the community. This is an approach that breaks an important boundary in regards to notions of citizenship, since it implies that the ultimate value system is not that of the state but moral and ethical codes, such as that offered by the human rights framework.

Academics interested in education for democracy have commented that both human rights and social justice-oriented education approaches will lead students to 'change the existing political domain rather than just participate in it' (Oesterreich, 2002) and pursue a liberation agenda that looks at power, knowledge and authority (Hawes, 1998). The justice-oriented citizen proposed by Westheimer and Kahne is linked with the emancipatory, social transformation potential of human rights.

Other forms of citizenship have been identified in the literature. Briefly, these are: citizenship as group membership, cosmopolitan citizenship and global citizenship. These are presented briefly.

*Citizenship as group membership* has us step outside any legal definition of citizenship and contemplate it as membership in a community. This community can be physical and

imagined. For example, each of us are a member of a community found in a city, town, village or neighborhood. Communities may also exist on the basis of identity. For example, one can experience group membership on the basis of one's religious belief, language group, school attended or profession.

Citizenship as group membership allows us to find a conceptual home for undocumented immigrants or other 'non-citizens' such as refugees living within the territory of the State. Such community and identity groups can extend across borders. The human rights perspective encourages the imagining of a 'human family'. All members of the human family are born with human rights and have the responsibility to uphold and promote the rights of others. This non-legalistic definition of citizenship highlights the experience and meaning of living with others on an everyday basis. Being 'active' in group membership points to goals for co-existence and care for others.

*Cosmopolitan citizenship* focuses on the values and practices of interculturalism and co-existence. The 'cosmopolitan' vision of society recognizes plurality as the norm and embraces the goals of peace, tolerance, and co-existence. These goals are similar to those for 'citizenship as group membership.' Both forms of citizenship speak to people living together in ways that reflect and promote human dignity. However, cosmopolitan citizenship assumes that the context is one of diversity. When the agenda for co-existence is set for the national level, it can be linked with policies of 'social cohesion.' In some cases, simply involving learners with diverse backgrounds and explicitly encouraging understanding, respect and cooperation can encourage 'cosmopolitan citizenship'. UNESCO defines the main goals of citizenship education in ways reflective of a cosmopolitan perspective, calling for the avoidance of concepts of citizenship that define nationality on the basis of ethnic, religious or cultural identity (UNESCO, 2005)

In some ways, the concept of cosmopolitan citizenship can be seen as an antidote to something considered dangerous for peace and security: nationalism. Globalization and global movements have resulted in increasing diversity as the norm for most societies. Yet, definitions of 'good citizens' within a country may be quite narrow, referencing majority ethnic or religious groups and ignoring or making invisible the diversity that naturally exists. Education in such contexts would work to make visible such diversity and promote the values of pluralism and cosmopolitanism as antidotes to 'negative nationalism'.



The concept of *global citizenship* has emerged in conjunction with cosmopolitan views of citizenship (Jarvis, 2004). The traditional, legal notion of citizenship is challenged by processes and political space that go beyond national boundaries. The international human rights project is one example of this.

Just as pluralism and intersectionality highlight the composite of identities that a single person can have - for example, along the lines of gender, ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status – globalization has resulted in phenomenon and ‘new communities’ that link the local with the national and cross-national. In essence, the notion of ‘national’ is changing.

Although there is no legal, international body that a person can be a ‘global citizen’ of, international human rights standards offer a normative framework that outlines rights and duties. The duties of persons to respect, protect and promote human rights extends to their local community and potentially internationally. Consumer behavior around fair-trade businesses is one example.

According to a global citizenship perspective, individuals can play their citizenship roles at any of the levels and in any of the communities that concern them. Held *et al* (1999, p. 449), likewise, suggest that we live in an interconnected world with effective power being shared so that individuals need to develop a sense of multiple citizenships: ‘a sense of belonging to overlapping (local and global) communities of interest and affection’ – one of these might be the nation state (Jarvis, 2004, p. 10).

### **Council of Europe Perspective on EDC and HRE**

(excerpt from Council of Europe Charter on EDC and HRE)

Education plays an essential role in the promotion of the core values of the Council of Europe: democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as in the prevention of human rights violations. . More generally, education is increasingly seen as a defence against the rise of violence, racism, extremism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance. This growing awareness is reflected in the adoption of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (“EDC/HRE”) by the

Organisation's 47 member states in the framework of Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7. The Charter was developed over a period of several years as a result of wide-ranging consultations and is non-binding.

2. Definitions For the purposes of the present Charter: a. "Education for democratic citizenship" means education, training, awareness-raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law (underline added) (Section I, 2).

One of the fundamental goals of all education for democratic citizenship and human rights education is not just equipping learners with knowledge, understanding and skills, but also empowering them with the readiness to take action in society in the defence and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law (underline added) (Section II, 5(g)).

### **Influences on Notions and Practices of Citizenship**

(adapted from Guy-Evans, 2020)

Bronfenbrenner's 'ecological systems theory' views child development as a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from immediate settings of family and school to broad cultural values, laws, and customs. Therefore, there is no single factor that influences a young person's impressions about what "being a good citizen" in society looks like. However, in the case of citizenship education, schools have a very important role to play in socializing young people about their roles in society. (Other components of the 'microsystem' that may influence views and actions related to citizenship, include the family, peer and religious institutions.)

Moreover, within and across schooling systems and the teachers that implement curriculum we may find little explicit attention to citizenship education in the subject curriculum (e.g., no course on citizenship education). In such circumstances, themes related to citizenship – such as 'follow the rules' or 'be an active participant in your community' – may be conveyed in other ways in the school setting. When citizenship education is not offered in the schools, then it is the 'hidden curriculum' that will convey messages to students about the role that they are expected to play in the school setting, which often is expected to apply



to society at large. In other words, a highly ‘rule oriented’ classroom or school that allows for only constricted pupil participation (that is, according to roles predetermined by adults) will likely send a message to students that their primary role as adults is to be obedient.

This is why education systems that want to promote participatory or justice oriented forms of citizenship need to make deliberate efforts to do so. This can happen in the formal curriculum – through a dedicated subject, complemented by a transversal, or cross-curricular, infusion of key themes and practices related to participatory citizenship. Active citizenship can also be promoted through co-curricular activities, such as clubs and out-of-school experiences where students can explore their ideas and take leadership in organizing activities.

Schools are a primary socializing institution of the government, and therefore have a key role to play in encouraging active citizenship. Of course, as shown in the Bronfenbrenner ecosystem, young people will be influenced by many other elements in their environment, some immediate and some quite distant. Young people themselves may have personalities that make them more or less interested to become engaged in more participatory or social justice oriented forms of citizenship.

What is key, however, is that schools and teachers present young people with the opportunity to explore these ways of engaging in society and that young people understand that ‘good citizenship’ is not constituted only by voting, although this is an important activity.



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