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The meaning of citizenship in the 21st Century

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Response: Concerns about the Meaning of Citizenship for the
21st Century

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The authors in this special issue of *Theory and

Research in Social Education* present questions about the

meaning of democratic citizenship for the 21st century.

Given the ever-changing nature of modern life, these

researchers suggest that current definitions of citizenship

need to be reexamined and indeed broadened. Despite their

common recommendations, the authors employ different

research paradigms, advance divergent claims about the

nature of citizenship, and propose varied possibilities for

social studies education in the future. A well informed

response, however, demands investigation of certain

differences and similarities, particularly the assertion

that educators need to incorporate an expanded notion of

citizenship in the social studies curriculum for the new

century.

Perspectives on Citizenship

Each of the articles contains notable and thoughtfully

researched perspectives on citizenship and democratic

education. The three articles by Houser and Kuzmic, Cary,

and Shinew constitute theoretical pieces in which the

authors explore and manipulate a variety of interpretations of the concept of citizenship. The article by Bishop and Hamot examines theoretical constructs in actual practice. Bishop and Hamot research the adaptability of democracy as a cross-cultural concept by comparing it, with respect to education and teaching, in the United States and the newly established Czech Republic. Following the collapse of communism in the late 1980s, the recently accelerated democratization of Eastern and Central Europe provided the setting to compare citizenship education efforts with approaches already developed and practiced in the U.S. Indeed, this work by Bishop and Hamot provides a practical portrayal and an analysis of ideas similar to those explored in the other three articles.

In "Ethical Citizenship in a Postmodern World: Toward a More Connected Approach to Social Education For the Twenty-First Century" Houser and Kuzmic investigate ethical dimensions of citizenship. They draw from diverse research traditions, such as pragmatism, social learning theory, critical learning theory, and multicultural education, to develop what they call a caring and "connected approach to citizenship education"(p. 4). They advocate methods of teaching social education that they contend would benefit the communities that schools serve. Houser and Kuzmic's

concern for the responsibility of democratic citizens'

relationships to one another echoes Ross's (1998) plea for

the pursuit of social justice in social studies education.

Ross reminds *TRSE* readers that, "the primary responsibility

of democratic citizens is concern with the development of

shared interests that lead to sensitivity about

repercussions of their actions on others" (1998, p.458).

Shinew, on the other hand, in her article focuses her

examination on <u>feminist</u> interpretations of educating for

democratic citizenship. She employs a novel methodology in

which she encourages readers to "disrupt, transgress and

invent possibilities" (citing Fine, 1992, p.xii) as she

suggests new and different theoretical understandings of

citizenship. The most striking aspect of Shinew's

contribution is the manner in which she blurs the

boundaries between research and fiction. In doing so, she

creates a "visual readers theater" (p.9) where the distinct

voices of the participants in her study emerge from an

invented story. Shinew deliberately pushes and prods at

traditional concepts of educational research.

Drawing upon postmodern and poststructuralist theory,

Cary in her article "The Refusuals of Citizenship:

Normalizing Practices in Social Education Discourses"

deconstructs common notions of citizenship. She theorizes

about normalizing practices in social education discourses and suggests the possibility of <u>refusals</u> of citizenship. To her, classic notions of "good citizens" and even "multicultural education" confine, oppress, and damage students as they inevitably lead to the "danger of reinscribing normalizing practices" (p. 25). Despite the overall merit of the article, Cary's extensive use of postmodern jargon tends to obfuscate her central message and provides few alternatives for social studies educators to employ when they make decisions. Specific and substantive proposals that inform practitioners would have proved more insightful.

Common Ideas about Citizenship

Each author expresses a common desire to expand traditional notions of citizenship. With feminist interpretations to consider, Shinew explores numerous definitions of citizenship. Members of her focus group appear dissatisfied with the traditional dictionary definition because of its emphasis on political membership in a nation state and the corresponding importance that this definition has placed upon duties, rights, and privileges. Yet, Shinew's group does not completely accept other definitions either. Clearly, these women believe

that the boundaries between the personal and public sphere
are more blurred than classic definitions of citizenship
imply. Perhaps, a more inclusive understanding of
citizenship would not neglect the traditionally private
roles of women as wives, mothers, daughters, and
homemakers. Pressing feminist explorations even further,
Cary claims that the classic notion of "good citizen/good
teacher" implies a superiority of professional knowledge to
a "more feminized intuitive knowing" (p. 34). She claims
space for women's ways of knowing. Feminist authors Nel
Noddings (1992), Jane Roland Martin (1992), and Andra
Makler (1999) remind readers that accentuation on the
political sphere precludes attention to personal and
familial relations. They suggest that the curriculum
should be redesigned to be more inclusive of the
possibilities and values of women and of other
traditionally underrepresented members of society. Of
course, many educators would support attempts to establish
a more inclusive and equitable society.

    As noted by Shinew, definitions that broaden the
meaning of citizenship unsettle the common understandings
as they call for a new conception of citizenship in which
American citizens value diversity and difference (citing
Stone, 1996a, p. 51). According to Cary, dominant

conceptions of citizenship silence cultural differences (p. 9). Interestingly, Bishop and Hamot also conclude that commonly held definitions of democracy are problematic in that their meanings vary according to setting, place in time, and individual interpretation (p. 7-9). Their research uncovers the problematic nature of adopting novel and complex understandings of democracy in Czech Republic schools. Yet, they also detect possibilities for improved conceptions of democracy in these schools. Two areas of agreement between Czech curriculum writers and U.S. educators on the concept of democracy is a regard for "democracy as tolerance" and "democracy as decision making" (p. 18-21). These findings, with respect to concepts of democracy, correspond with Shinew's, Cary's, and Houser and Kuzmic's theoretical examinations which place value on diversity and shared responsibility. Nonetheless, Bishop and Hamot also find that Czech teachers typically characterize the concept of democracy primarily as a form of government with only secondary importance placed upon rights and freedoms. To these teachers, explanations of democracy that mention tolerance and duty are almost non-existent.

The possibilities of a broadened understanding of concepts of citizenship and democracy include questions

about agency and methods for teaching social studies

education. Cary calls attention to Freire's (1970) work,

which discusses issues of power, liberation, and education.

In developing an expanded understanding of citizenship

important questions need to be deliberated, such as; Who

will be included in the dialogue about citizenship? How

will an educational program, which includes such dialogue,

be developed and implemented? Cary poses numerous

questions, but few ideas for action and decision. Houser

and Kuzmic, however, detail several alternatives. They

note that the ideal of the "good citizen" which implied

uncritical obedience has been replaced by that of the

"responsible citizen" who recognizes the need for analysis

and action (p. 7). They propose that citizenship education

should include a discussion of caring and the virtues of

shared responsibility, a narrative of conquerors and

oppressed, and a focus on community, connectedness, and the

common good. Nonetheless, any proposed suggestions would

need to include proposals for a move toward genuine

dialogue among educators rather than imposed and enforced

liberal cultural transmission.

Divergent Themes

Notably absent from several authors' discussions of citizenship and democratic education was an examination of the rich literature of classic political theory upon which such ideas are based. Two of the articles named political theorists, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Alexis de Tocqueville (Bishop & Hamot, p. 9; Houser & Kuzmic, p. 27), and Bishop and Hamot briefly discuss Czech philosopher Tomáš Masaryk (Bishop & Hamot, p. 9-10). However, John Locke, Thomas Paine, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and John Stuart Mill do not receive mention. Why were their ideas ignored? Does their status as dead "White men" (Shinew, p. 36) mean they only represent the oppressive nature of Western cultural heritage? Developing a truly broadened conception of citizenship, however, is impossible without knowledge of the foundation upon which such ideas rest. In *The Rights of Man,* Thomas Paine (1790), who was ostracized by his contemporaries as a radical freethinker, reminds readers, "There was a time when kings disposed of their crowns by will upon their death-beds, and consigned the people, like beasts of the field, to whatever successor they appointed" (p. 278).

Furthermore, these classical political theorists must be viewed in the context of their times. Their beliefs

about citizenship, democracy, liberty, and man's rights were literally revolutionary *in their times*, and opposed by many leading authorities. Consider Edmund Burke's objections in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Many modern political theorists have questioned the breadth of these 18th and 19th century theorists conception of citizenship and democracy. For example, Richard Matthews discusses the problematic nature of Thomas Jefferson's commitment to the principle that "all men are created equal" because he owned slaves and he viewed blacks as equal but "in reason much inferior" (Jefferson, 1787, *Notes on the State of Virginia, Query XIV,* p. 266; Jefferson to Benjamin Banneker, August 30, 1791, p. 982-983). Yet, even Matthews (1986) claims that Jefferson's, "…unwavering faith in democracy and the ability of humanity to govern itself places him in the radical progressive tradition" (p. 119). Of course, John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty* (1859) explored the tension between a citizen's liberty and the proper sphere of state action and in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) asserted the diversity of human nature and criticized sexual discrimination.

Clearly, as Leming and Nelson (1995) discovered, the field of social studies research continues to focus narrowly on its own scholarship placing no emphasis on a

broader base of social science research for its foundation of knowledge. Houser and Kuzmic mention contemporary political theorists whose writings explore the relationships between individuals and society, as well as prominent educational philosophers, such as John Dewey and Maxine Greene. But these authors omit more recent classic political theorists, such as Peter Woll, Richard Neustadt, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. After reading these articles the reader is left with the impression that modern political theory is extinct everywhere except the Czech Republic. The curricular implications of neglecting the foundation of classical conceptions of citizenship and democracy are significant. How can researchers broaden an understanding of citizenship and democracy if they neglect traditional conceptions? Not only did these researchers uncover the challenges that inevitably accompany the teaching of concepts such as democracy and citizenship in a place where a democratic form of government is relatively recent, but they also highlight the complexities that teachers face as they struggle to teach these ideas in established democracies such as the United States.

Critiquing problems of the modern world, such as overpopulation, depletion of vital resources, and a culture of individualism, calls needed attention to societal

concerns. Analysis and scrutiny of positivist paradigms,
of limited perspectives in educational research, and of
hidden normalizing practices in educational discourses,
also focuses attention on flaws in methodologies,
assumptions, and findings. Importantly, Reid (1994) and
Schwab (1970) persistently point researchers toward
practice, to the contextual situations in which particular
situations in which particular teachers in specific schools
must inevitably make curriculum decisions about the
teaching of concepts such as citizenship and democracy.
Teachers and administrators throughout the country who
strive to provide solid democratic education for their
students do not have the luxury of theorizing or creating
knowledge that may or may not involve the making of
difficult decisions. Will educators be better prepared to
teach about citizenship and democracy if they were to
encounter and debate the ideas presented in this issue of
TRSE? Leanne, the teacher in Shinew's research, wonders "…
I don't know if we ever really did teach citizenship, now
that I think about it. But perhaps we've gotten to the
point where we're so afraid to step on somebody's toes that
we don't dare tell anybody that this is the way a good
citizen does things…" (p.26-27).

Meanings of Citizenship

Questions about the meaning of democratic citizenship form the core of all four of these research studies. Each of the authors asks fundamental questions about the nature of citizenship, such as; What is the meaning of citizenship? What is the role of citizenship in a democracy? How should understandings of citizenship change in modern times given the increased diversity of society? Each of the authors addresses these important questions in very different manners. Yet, after reading and reviewing each of the articles, significant questions remain about citizenship education. Throughout the authors' analyses, readers might ponder how real teachers in real classrooms could employ the ideas, explorations, or suggestions. That a level of "productive ambiguity" remains after reading the articles should not be disturbing. Rather, each author acknowledges the complexities of understanding citizenship. Cary claims to ask more questions than she answers (p.5). In addition, Shinew repeats Eisner's (1997) idea that if material presented is more evocative than denotative, "… in its evocation, it generates insight and invites attention to complexity" (p.8). If such complexity leads to more enlightened citizenship, perhaps such research eventually will result in an improved American society. Such

improvement, however, ultimately includes the making of
decisions by practitioners who engage in the process of
deliberation. If theories about a broadened understanding
of democracy intend to influence or inform this process of
deliberation, they should retain a close relationship to
the practical reality of teachers, students, and curriculum
decisions.

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