

DIGITAL ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP AT HARVARD
DASH.HARVARD.EDU

HARVARD LIBRARY


Citizenship and Civic Education

Citation

Levinson, Meira, (2014). Citizenship and Civic Education. In Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy, ed. Denis C. Phillips. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Link

http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:12701475

Terms of use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Open Access Policy Articles (OAP), as set forth at
https://harvardwiki.atlassian.net/wiki/external/NGY5NDE4ZjgzNTc5NDQzMGIzZWZhMGFlOWI2M2EwYTg

Accessibility

https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/digital-accessibility-policy

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. Submit a story

CITIZENSHIP AND CIVIC EDUCATION

Meira Levinson

Forthcoming in Denis Phillips, ed., *Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Citizenship has a number of different potential meanings, ranging from a person's legal status within a country to their civil, political, or social standing within a community to the set of behaviors that represent a particular ideal of civic virtue. Civic education is hence an equally broad concept. It can cover solely the specific rights and duties of legal citizens, but usually it is used more capaciously to indicate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that children are expected to learn to be virtuous and civically productive members of society. Citizenship and civic education are key concepts in philosophy of education because their meanings, aims, and practices are so contested, both among philosophers and among actors on the ground like parents, educators, politicians, students, and members of diverse cultural groups. This entry begins by addressing different conceptions of citizenship, including emerging concepts of digital and global citizenship. It then transitions to the relationship between citizenship and civic education, explaining why civic education is needed and how its aims and functions vary in relation to a country's form of government. Given democracy's global ascendancy, the bulk of the entry discusses why even within democratic contexts there is significant contestation over civic education's purposes and practices. The entry ends by clarifying that civic education takes place in multiple settings, not just schools, although schools do pose particularly interesting challenges to philosophers of education.

What does it mean to be a citizen?

At its most basic level, citizenship refers to the legal status enjoyed by full members of a state (meaning a self-governing country). Citizens have rights and privileges accorded or protected by the state, as well as duties toward the state. These duties almost always entail paying taxes and following the laws; they may also include serving on a jury, voting, serving in the military, attending church, reporting suspected subversives, or attending rallies, among many other possibilities. Rights and privileges are equally variable, depending on the state's form of government and political traditions. They may include rights or privileges to vote, to be protected from physical attack, to earn a living wage, to speak freely, to attend school, to run for office, to obtain a passport, to practice one's religion, or to travel. Even in democracies, however, not all citizens necessarily share the same rights, duties, or privileges. Before 1971, for example, female citizens of Switzerland did not enjoy the same right to vote in federal elections as male citizens had. Currently, male citizens have the duty in the U.S. to register for Selective Service whereas female citizens do not. Gay citizens in most countries do not enjoy the privilege of marrying a same-sex partner. So citizenship is a shared legal status to some extent, but one that may vary depending on individual citizens' identities. At the same time, a number of rights, duties, and privileges are also enjoyed by non-citizens who live within a state. For example, in most states non-citizens are obligated to pay taxes, are provided some social services, and have similar rights to free expression or free assembly as citizens possess. Non-citizens sometimes even have the right to vote.

When philosophers and educators address citizenship or civic education, therefore, they often think of themselves as referring to the identities, rights, and obligations of residents of a country in general, rather than solely those of legal citizens. It can be helpful to think in terms of the three forms of citizenship—civil, political, and social—distinguished by sociologist T.H.

Marshall. He used this distinction to analyze how citizens' rights have changed over time, but these three forms are equally useful for understanding how citizenship itself is a multi-dimensional concept, not merely a political status. "Good citizenship" is similarly taken to refer to a broader set of virtues than those characteristic merely of legal citizenship. Civic virtue may be seen in a person's helping out an ailing neighbor, or in their working with multinational organizations to improve economic conditions or end child slavery. In this respect, citizenship is sometimes treated as a way of being in the world—of being attentive to the common good or doing one's part—rather than as a way to distinguish a set of people from others on status-dependent grounds.

New forms of citizenship are also coming to the fore that are not connected to state membership or residence. One is the "digital citizen," sometimes referred to as the "netizen." Digital citizenship can refer to how people work across geographic boundaries to identify injustices or solve problems together. The use of Twitter during Arab Spring in 2011 was one prominent instance of digital citizenship. Digital citizenship may also refer to the use of digital tools, such as on-line petitions or automatic data aggregators, to conduct civic and political action solely online. It also increasingly refers to citizens' roles as media producers rather than solely consumers; digital citizens contribute to the creation and dissemination of civic knowledge through posting blogs, videos, and other resources. Or, netizens may enact digital citizenship by fighting against trolls and socializing new members into a network. Just as the digital space is in flux, so too is digital citizenship; one can predict, however, that it will be an ever more prominent component of both philosophy and education about citizenship.

A second category of citizenship that transcends state boundaries includes transnational, global, and cosmopolitan citizenship. Transnational citizens have political roots in two or more

states, thanks to immigration, refugee status, intermarriage, or other life experiences. They identify with multiple countries. Advocates of global citizenship, by contrast, often deny that they—or anyone—should identify with *any* country; rather, they embrace a vision of citizenship that links all human beings in a collective search for solutions to global problems like climate change or economic inequality. They also embrace a globalized conception of human rights and obligations, rather than one that is state-specific. Cosmopolitan citizens may (or may not) also disavow allegiance to any particular country, but this tends to be because they feel connected to many countries and cultures thanks to multicultural production and consumption, work, travel, or the cosmopolitan character of where they live. Thanks to these experiences, the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah argues, cosmopolitan citizens embrace the value of pluralism, even if they also hold strong local identities. Martha Nussbaum (2002) pushes the cosmopolitan ideal further toward a global one, arguing that "we should give our first allegiance to no mere form of government, no temporal power, but to the moral community made up by the humanity of all human beings" (p.7). Cosmopolitan citizenship is often contrasted with patriotic citizenship, a commitment to "my country, right or wrong."

Why is civic education necessary?

There are two primary reasons that civic education is necessary within any state. First, and perhaps of primary importance for those who do not want to sink into a state of nature (in which life is likely to become "nasty, brutish, and short," as Hobbes so memorably put it), civic education of some sort is necessary to perpetuate the state itself. No government is intrinsically self-perpetuating, as there is no reason to think that human beings born under any particular government will naturally come to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to maintain it. In the case of an unjust or illegitimate state, civic education may be needed especially to

convince or compel its subjects to remain in its thrall. Such an education might play primarily on fear: of a dangerous "other," of social collapse in the absence of the state, or of the state's power to inflict harm on dissenters. In this respect, illegitimate states may also use civic education as a means of maintaining privilege for those in power, and either justifying or obscuring the disempowerment of others. A just and legitimate state, however, also needs civic education for its perpetuation. As will be addressed below, citizens in just and legitimate states tend to have many rights and duties. It takes a lot of work to learn how, when, and why to exercise one's own rights and duties, as well as to respect those of others. To the extent that ordinary citizens are also involved in governing—as they are in a democracy "of the people, by the people, and for the people"—civic education is necessary to teach citizens how to lead.

Second, civic education is necessary to realize states' civic ideals. This is different from perpetuating the state itself. Rather, there are civic ideals about the appropriate kinds of relationships among citizens—whether those are of equality, natural hierarchy, mutual respect, shared adoration for the fatherland, mutual non-interference, or common national identity—that are achieved only to the extent that citizens internalize and act upon these ideals. Civic education is necessary for this internalization and action. Related to this, some thinkers also view civic education as essential for helping people become their ideal selves, insofar as they view civic life as essential to living a good life. Aristotle, for example, declared in his *Politics* that "Man is by nature a political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity" (253a3-4). This perspective that civic engagement is central to the good life is one that has been developed especially by advocates of civic republicanism, including Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Hannah Arendt.

Civic education is also arguably necessary regardless of state interests. As young people learn to navigate digital citizenship, for example, they may well need guidance for how to do so responsibly, constructively, and safely. Many adults and children alike are concerned about on-line bullying, for example. Navigating the many different on-line publics with their own echo chambers of ideas, and even simply distinguishing fact from opinion from falsehood using unmediated digital sources, are also skills that civic education may be necessary to help children develop. Advocates of cosmopolitan or global citizenship also tend to see civic education as being essential to help develop broad-minded, mutually respectful citizens of the world. It also takes a great deal of effort to work across cultural, linguistic, or geographic boundaries to solve problems of collective concern. This kind of practice is an essential component of civic education for global citizenship.

What are the goals of civic education in a democracy?

As the sections above have suggested, civic education may have many different goals, depending on the civic institutions which it is intended to serve. Because the majority of countries in the world are in some way democratic, however, and because the majority of philosophy of education that addresses civic education presumes a democratic context, it is especially important to consider the goals of civic education in a democracy in particular.

To begin with, it is important to acknowledge many components of a democratic civic education may also be attractive to authoritarians or even tyrants. For example, teaching respect for the law, honesty, literacy, and willingness to sacrifice for the greater good may be essential goals of an effective civic education in either a democracy or an autocracy. On the other hand, some knowledge, skills, and attitudes seem more particular to democracies. The capacity for self-rule, for example, is by definition central to democracy, whose Greek origin means “rule by

the people." Other aims of democratic civic education might include the development of mutual toleration and respect, commitments to freedom of speech and other core democratic rights and values, acknowledgement of the legitimacy of democratically-achieved decisions even if one is on the losing side, the capacities and inclination to deliberate with diverse others, and the ability to recognize and elect good political leaders.

To some extent, which of these aims rises to the fore depends on one's ideal of democracy itself. For example, the capacities for deliberation with diverse others, on the one hand, and for recognizing and electing good leaders, on the other, echo key tensions among advocates of popular democracy, deliberative democracy, and representative democracy. Depending on one's view about what democracy entails—majority rule, deliberative consensus-building, or the election of wise representatives who do the actual governing—a democratic civic education may focus on fairly disparate skills and knowledge. Thomas Jefferson (1856 [1818]) clearly demonstrates this divide in his proposal for public education. He advocates universal primary education on the grounds that every citizen should learn to be economically self-sufficient, "to understand his duties to his neighbors and country," and "to know his rights; to exercise with order and justice those he retains; to choose with discretion" his representatives, and "to notice their conduct with diligence, with candor, and judgment" (p. 434). He advocates higher education for a much smaller number of students, however, "to form the statesmen, legislators and judges on whom public prosperity and individual happiness are so much to depend" (p. 435). Jefferson's vision of civic education clearly distinguishes between the democratic rulers and the democratically ruled. Thirty years later, the American educator Horace Mann (1891 [1846]) promoted a very different vision of democratic civic education. He warned, "In a republican [representative] government, legislators are a mirror reflecting the

moral countenance of their constituents. And hence it is, that the establishment of a republican government, without well-appointed and efficient means for the universal education of the people, is the most rash and fool-hardy experiment ever tried by man….It may be an easy thing to make a republic; but it is a very laborious thing to make republicans" (pp. 270-271).

Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer (2004) have identified a related division in contemporary civic education among proponents of "personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented" citizenship (p. 237). They characterize the personally responsible citizen as someone who donates food to a canned food drive, say, while the participatory citizen organizes the food drive. The justice-oriented citizen, by contrast, focuses on addressing the underlying problems of hunger and food scarcity. All three approaches are compatible with democracy, but as Kahne and Westheimer show through both philosophical and empirical analyses, they imply very different agendas for civic education.

To some extent, these differences are rooted in competing civic *identities*. If a person thinks, "as a good citizen, I am someone who…," how should they finish the sentence? The debate over patriotic education becomes relevant here. How important is it for someone to declare, "I am proud to be an American [or other nationality]," or "As a good citizen, I am someone who defends my country to the utmost"? Many advocates of patriotic education argue that only such sentiments bind strangers together in a web of reciprocal obligation. Only such sentiments are strong enough to motivate civic engagement and active democratic cooperation in a multicultural context. Others advocate instead that citizens should learn, "As a good citizen, I am someone who fights injustice even when that means opposing my own government," or "who defends human rights and battles global climate change." These divisions do not break down neatly along ideological lines. Patriotic civic education is supported by Lynne Cheney on the

right, but also by Richard Rorty on the left. Nonetheless, such disputes raise significant practical challenges for civic educators, who fear teaching a partisan curriculum. Unfortunately, this means that civic education often eschews politics altogether for an anodyne mush of lessons about how a bill becomes a law and controversy-free service learning projects.

Finally, some people question any separation of civic education from the broader educative enterprise. John Dewey (1944) famously characterized democracy as follows: "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (p. 87). In this respect, education for democracy and education for life are inextricably intertwined. It does not make sense to conceive of one in the absence of the other. Another reason that civic education may be thought to be inseparable from "good education" is that the strongest predictor of adults' civic and political engagement is their number of years of schooling. This finding has held true for a century in virtually every country that has been studied. Hence, it is possible that civic education understood as education for civic empowerment might best be characterized as high-quality education, period, rather than as specific instruction in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes particular to democratic citizenship.

On the other hand, there is significant evidence of a civic empowerment gap in the United States and other countries between members of historically privileged versus historically disenfranchised groups (Levinson, 2012). One way to address this gap is to work with historically disenfranchised youth to construct an intentionally designed, empowering civic education. Paulo Freire (1970) similarly advocates reshaping education in concert with "the oppressed" to achieve transformative civic ends. "No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their

emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption" (p. 54).

Where does civic education take place?

Civic education takes place throughout society, in public and in private. Civil society is itself educative, through its signs, symbols, and practices. Every coin and bill offers a prominent reminder of the state's civic heroes and values. So, nowadays, do most government websites. Court rooms featuring judges clad in robes and often wigs, police checkpoints, everyday interactions with social service agencies, and the architecture of city halls all teach citizens about the power and nature of the state and where they stand in relation to it—whether for good or ill. Families also engage in civic education, whether intentionally or not. Children are instructed about when and how to speak up, and when to keep their heads down and comply with the dictates of others. Some children learn how to exercise leadership in the family or through extracurricular activities. They may learn to debate current events over dinner, accompany their parents to vote on election day, or volunteer at a shelter every month. There is strong evidence that all of these kinds of experiences impact the nature, quantity, and quality of their later civic and political engagement as adults. The impact of the family on civic engagement has been recognized for centuries, in fact. Even while women were excluded from most public roles in the United States until the 20th century, for instance, they were lauded as essential contributors in raising their sons and husbands to support the causes of liberty and democracy.

Just as families and civil society engage in civic education both explicitly and implicitly, so do schools have multiple ways of providing civic education. The most obvious of these are government, history, and civics courses. There has been an ongoing debate about the impact of

such courses. There seems to be good evidence that when these courses are taught very well, including active learning opportunities such as simulations, discussions, and action civics, they can contribute to students' civic knowledge, skills, and engagement. The most important factor is an open classroom climate in which students feel free to express their own opinions and disagree with others in a mutually respectful way. Unfortunately, however, many of these classes feature dry recitations, textbooks, and worksheets that have little demonstrable impact on students' civic learning. As these pedagogical examples suggest, though, schools also provide civic education, whether intentionally or not, more broadly through their overall culture, practices, and pedagogies. Whether or not a student experiences a high-quality civics course, her experiences of participating in student government, feeling respected in the hallway and cafeteria, and being solicited for her opinions in school assemblies, can also promote her sense of civic efficacy, membership, and identity. The opposite may also occur in schools that disrespect students or give them few outlets for voice and leadership. As philosophers of education reflect about citizenship and civic education, therefore, this is another realm for productive inquiry.

Meira Levinson

See also Dewey, John; Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Critical Pedagogy; Democratic Theory of Education; Patriotism; Political Education; Multicultural Citizenship; Values Education

FURTHER READINGS

Callan, E. (2004) *Creating citizens: Political education and liberal democracy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: The MacMillan Company.

Freire, P. (2008 [1970]). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M.B. Ramos, Trans.) New York: Continuum.

Gutmann, A. (1987). *Democratic education*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jefferson, T. (1856 [1818]). Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Fix the Site of the University of Virginia. In N.F. Cabell (Ed.), *Early History of the University of Virginia, as Contained in the Letters of Thomas Jefferson and Joseph Cabell* (pp. 432 – 447). Richmond, VA: J.W. Randolph.

Kahne, J., & Westheimer, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. *American Educational Research Journal, 41*(2), 237–269.

Kymlicka, W., & Norman, W. (Eds.). (2000). *Citizenship in diverse societies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Levinson, M. (2012). *No citizen left behind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mann, H. (1891 [1846]). *Life and works of Horace Mann, Volume 4*. Boston: Lee and Shepard.

McDonnell, L.M., Timpane, P.M., & Benjamin, R. (Eds.). (2000). *Rediscovering the democratic purposes of education*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

McDonough, K., & Feinberg, W. (Eds.). (2003). *Citizenship and education in liberal-democratic societies: Teaching for cosmopolitan values and collective identities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2002). *For love of country?* Boston: Beacon Press.