The Relationship between Character and Citizenship Education

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Democracy can never be taken for granted. Democrats do not grow on trees. Any democratic society must concern itself with raising good citizens. Democratic societies need children to develop into moral adults. It is not enough for a society to be populated with benign hedonists, as a truly civil society needs citizens to care about the general welfare and those who cannot advocate for themselves. Nor is it adequate to have a strong and clear legal system to proscribe immoral and prescribe moral behaviour; we have all heard the dictum: "you can't legislate morality." No law is people-proof: ill-intentioned people will find a way around the law. For a society to truly thrive and endure, it needs citizens who are intrinsically and actively pro-social. Schools are critical for this process.

This conference is largely about character education. In this paper, I will shift the focus to citizenship education and the fact that it necessarily entails character and moral formation. For any society, the question arises as to how to instil citizenship in each subsequent generation, however citizenship is defined. Here we enter the field of citizenship education. Not surprisingly, there is variation in what this endeavour is called (e.g., citizenship education, civic education, political socialization, democratic education). For the purposes of this discussion I will call it citizenship education. I will not attempt to give a full account of approaches to citizenship education in this article (see Parker, 2003, for one such attempt) but rather will highlight some controversial standpoints and offer a possible consensus. In addition, please note that I am writing from a U.S. American perspective.

It is important to note that there is a common and often unreflective complex interplay between the outcomes of citizenship education (i.e., citizenship, differentially defined as knowledge, skills, and dispositions) and the methods of citizenship education (e.g., direct instruction, direct experience with politics, indirect experience with public service, etc.).

On the conceptual level, there has been a longstanding tension in educational theory and research between approaches directed towards knowledge delivery and approaches directed toward practice, active participation, and experiential learning as the means to competent citizenship.

> The 'knowledge' model presumes that information *of itself* will lead to understanding and to appropriate motivation. By providing children with information (including the skills to read that information critically), both enlightenment *and involvement* will follow; 'appropriate' civic knowledge will motivate civic participation. In contrast, the 'praxis' model assumes that practical and theoretical knowledge, and particularly the motivation to use them, are acquired through actively engaging with relevant tasks. The assumption is that knowledge comes from making sense of experience rather than vice versa, and that knowledge has limited usefulness unless it translates into the individual's own encounters with salient materials. (Haste, 2004, 425).

Traditional citizenship education (typically self-identified as "civic education") has employed the knowledge model. In the civics courses required in American middle and especially high school curricula the focus is on factual knowledge *about* government, as well as on the individual as the bearer of constitutional rights. Learning by way of praxis, experience and deliberative discourse has been promoted (at least) since Dewey and the pre-WWII progressive education movement. More recently, communitarianism has emphasized the importance of communal life and, hence, responsibilities more than individualism and a focus on individual rights. From a communitarian perspective, citizenship education should focus on community service in order to transmit the values of responsibility for and commitment to others and the common good (Anderson, 1998).

It appears that there is a consensus taking shape in recent years. As Galston states, "This consensus typically replaces either/or choices with both/and propositions. The skills needed to judge the deeds of representatives and to initiate action are both important; civil discourse need not lack passion; (...) classroom study and community practice both play a role in forming citizens" (2001, p. 218). At least within the scope of educational theory (practitioners tend to be more practical and eclectic in their methods and orientations anyway), the purely experiential doctrines of the progressive education movement today have minority status, as have advocates of factual literacy, like J. Martin Rochester who insists on the exclusive priority of solid

knowledge in claiming, "The 'social curriculum' can become a major distraction from teaching the substance of history and related subject matter. The more time spent on cultivating 'civic virtue', the less time can be devoted to developing cognitive competences and skills" (2005, p. 654). Walter Parker, who was critiqued in Rochester's article, states what seems to be the more consensual perspective on this matter:

> Citizens need disciplinary knowledge just as much as they need deliberative experience and skill. The suggestion to engage students in dialogues on the shared problems of school life is not an argument for lessening emphasis on subject-matter learning. To the contrary, making decisions without knowledge – whether immediate knowledge of the alternatives under consideration or background knowledge – is no cause for celebration. Action without understanding is not wise action except by accidents. (...) Consequently, a rigorous liberal arts curriculum that deals in powerful ideas, important issues, and core values is essential alongside deliberations of controversial public issues. (Parker, 2005, 350)

It is now a consensual idea that a competent, engaged, and effective citizenship – necessary for full political, economic, social and cultural participation – requires a set of competencies that are commonly grouped into (a) civic and political knowledge (such as concepts of democracy, understanding the structure and mechanics of political decision-making and legislation, citizens' rights and duties, current political issues and problems), (b) intellectual skills (e.g., the ability to understand, analyse and check the reliability of information about government and public policy issues); (c) social and participatory skills (e.g., the ability to reason, argue and express own views in political discussions; conflict solution skills; knowing how to influence policies and decisions by petitioning and lobbying; build coalitions and co-operate with partner organisations) and (d) certain values, attitudes, and "dispositions" with a motivational power (e.g., interest in social and political affairs, a sense of responsibility, tolerance and recognition of own prejudices; appreciation of values on which democratic societies are founded like democracy, social justice and human rights). One of the most elaborate accounts of these "strands" of competent citizenship can be found in Torney-Purta & Lopez Vermeer (2006; also see Patrick & Vontz, 2001).

Character and citizenship education

As much as the literatures for character (and moral) education and citizenship education tend to be separate, in actual educational practice, there is a clear trend to combine or even integrate the two. In fact, school mission statements often cite that goal of promoting responsible future citizens and then list character traits as aspects of this. For example, the Pleasanton (CA) Unified School District, which was cited as a National District of Character by the Character Education Partnership in 2004, promises to "provide character and citizenship education that promotes civic responsibility and respect for others" (Pleasanton Unified School District, 2004, 2). Several U.S. states have legislation and curriculum frameworks that integrate citizenship and character education. Various national education organizations have also attempted to integrate the two. For example, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has issued a position paper "Pathways to Civic Character" (Boston, 2005, p. 44) "which posits the acquisition of civic character—the knowledge, skills, virtues and commitment necessary for engaged and responsible citizenship—as a central goal for excellence in education" (ibid, p. 31). Nonetheless, there remain many conceptual challenges in integrating character and citizenship education.

Much of the current citizenship education field takes a progressive democratic perspective. Halstead and Pike (2006), while arguing that "moral education is a vital and unavoidable aspect of Citizenship" (p.1), nonetheless reject character education as incompatible with their view, viewing character education as prone to indoctrination and lacking "understanding [of] the reasons for such behaviour, without engaging in any form of moral reasoning and without reference to underlying democratic virtues" (p. 44). This perception, however, is incomplete at best. Most major perspectives on character education do in fact incorporate moral reasoning, and they also include moral reflection and application to democratic citizenship. One of the "Six Pillars of Character" for Character Counts, a very widely implemented character education framework, is "civic virtue." Clearly, education for democratic citizenship requires a perspective that incorporates empowerment, debate, and critical reflection about both the existing society and on the core virtues and values of civic life. Such virtues and values include freedom, equality and rationality (Halstead & Pike, 2006), tolerance and respect, impartiality, and concern for the rights of individuals and society (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003), and an ethic of care and responsibility (Sehr, 1997).

If one were to accept the overlap between character education and citizenship education, a second challenge is to contend with the role of morality in both. Even within the character education field, there is disagreement on the place of morality. It would be strange to argue that morality should not be part of character, but some argue that character should be exclusively moral, others predominantly moral, and yet some equally moral and non-moral ("moral character" vs. "performance character"). Interestingly, there is a parallel disagreement in the citizenship education literature.

Despite their concerns about US character education, Halstead and Pike (2006) emphasize the centrality of morality to citizenship. Others imply such a relationship with terms such as civic virtue (Butts, 2006) or civic character (Boston, 2005). Bull (2006) states this interrelationship of morality and citizenship clearly: "civic education is certainly a kind of moral education in that it promotes and supports a public morality, that is, the agreements about the principles governing citizens' relationships and obligations to one another" (p. 26).

The complete citizen must understand self, morality and society, be motivated to act in the best interests of the common good, and have the requisite skills effectively to do so. Within this complex set of qualifications there is appreciable overlap between the goals of character education and the goals of citizenship education (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Berkowitz, 2000; Berkowitz, Althof & Jones, 2008). The challenge lies in plotting the similarities and differences between these two set of goals. Then it will be possible to fully integrate concepts of character and citizenship as a broader foundation for educating youth. Here is a coarse list of similarities and differences:

Place in the curriculum: In general it is clearer where citizenship education belongs in the curriculum in the United States. Typically it is part of the social studies curriculum and/or a stand-alone civics course (or set of courses). When it is manifested (in part or entirely) as a service-learning program, it may even stand outside the normal school structures and hours. Character education, on the other hand, runs the gamut from stand-alone courses to modules in academic courses to extra-curricular activities and often to whole school culture, behaviour management, and/or reform models. The Character Education Partnership suggests that character education should be part of all aspects of school life (Beland, 2003).

Developmental goals: It is unclear what the developmental goals of each domain are. Even within either domain, there is substantial disagreement. Some citizenship educators would argue for a well-informed student (Rochester, 2003) while others argue for a virtuous, public minded student (Colby et al., 2003). Similarly, some character educators would argue for a socialised, conventional thinker (Wynne & Ryan, 1993) while others argue for a critical, independent, moral agent (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989).

Pedagogy: Citizenship education can include very different types of learning activities (e.g. collaborative research projects, discussion of public issues, simulations and participation in student government) but in practice tends to rely on two predominant pedagogical strategies, knowledge transmission in civics classes and service learning. Character education on the other hand relies on a greater range of strategies (including modelling and classroom management) but also includes the methods most typical in citizenship education (direct instruction and community service/service learning). Despite some of the stereotypical representations of character education (e.g., Davies, Gorard, & McGuinn, 2005; Halstead & Pike, 2006), it is clear that character education includes methods compatible with the need for promoting autonomous critical thinkers (Halstead & Pike, 2006) who feel a moral obligation to serve the common good (Bull, 2006).

Educational Timing: Hoge (2002) points out that character education tends to be more common at the elementary (primary) level and citizenship more common at the secondary level. Given the character education focus on shaping personality, values, attitudes, and habits, it makes sense to intervene sooner rather than later in the developmental trajectory of students. Likewise, given the citizenship education focus on teaching about government, on participatory skills and on service learning, it makes sense to wait until students have development more cognitive and psycho-social maturity to be able to learn the abstract concepts of democratic citizenship and to be able to engage in meaningful sustained service that is integrated with academic learning. And yet, these differences are merely trends. Character education, in fact, is implemented from the pre-school through post-secondary grades and even into post-graduate and professional education. Citizenship education, likewise, has its elementary school versions, especially in the social studies.

Integration

Despite the challenges and conflicts sketched above, it should be clear that there is not only a possible, but a necessary relationship between character and citizenship education. The true challenge is in explicating the complexity of this relationship. If citizenship is understood as pro-social engagement in a democratic political system, then clearly such engagement relies in large part on the psychological character of the individual citizen. Hoge (2002) suggests, "citizenship education actually needs a character education foundation" (p. 106). That foundation is necessary to foster the development of those civic virtues and dispositions cited repeatedly by citizenship educators. Of course this assumes an approach to character education that is compatible with such civic virtues, rather than the indoctrinative, behavioristic approach that forms the stereotype assumed by many citizenship educators.

A progressive and democratic approach to character *and* citizenship education would rest on certain key principles, such as empowerment, open discourse, promotion of critical thinking, and the development of moral communities in classrooms and schools. Such approaches are well documented. A notable example is the Child Development Project, with strong roots in Deweyian educational philosophy and constructivist developmental psychology (Dalton & Watson, 1997).

Nonetheless, whereas character education may serve as a foundation for citizenship education, they are far from isomorphic. Citizenship education requires a strong academic grounding in content areas such as government, civics, and history. It also requires certain procedural and social-emotional skills that are less central to character education; e.g., communication, civic literacy, knowledge of and participation in civic and political procedures (Marciano, 1997; Milner, 2002). There also are differences in emphasis, as the citizenship educators tend to be less interested in personal morality and more in public morality (Bull, 2006; Sehr, 1997) and emphasize critical thinking more heavily (Davies, Gorard, & McGuinn, 2005). But these are clearly matters of degree, not categorical differences.

Perhaps it is best to think of the relationship of character education to citizenship education as a set of partially overlapping domains. The knowledge bases of the two fields are minimally overlapping, the targeted dispositions are highly overlapping, and the skill sets partially overlapping. Whereas character education's knowledge focus is more on moral concepts, manners and civility, the citizenship education knowledge base focuses more on

politics, government and the interdependencies of social life. The dispositions (personality traits, values and motives) of character education and citizenship education share many elements: social justice, honesty, personal and social responsibility, equality, etc. Many of the skills of character education also apply to citizenship education as general skills of self-management and social competencies are required for effective social living. However, citizenship education also requires skills not typically of central interest to character education; e.g., resistance to political persuasion, critical analysis of political messages.

If indeed the shared goal of both citizenship education and character education is to foster the development of the kinds of citizens who are both pro-social and effective at participating in a democratic society, then of course there should be both collaboration and overlap of goals and methods. It makes much more sense to then find the common ground than to propagate distorting stereotypes. What is ultimately needed is a synthesis of philosophies, methods, and goals based on a solid empirical and theoretical base. Then and only then can we optimally design schools and school programs that foster good people and good citizens.

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