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Argumentation, Anger, and Action: Citizenship Education In and Out of the Classroom

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Introduction

This special issue brings together four articles that examine various frameworks and research on knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with democratic citizenship education. The perspectives represented include developmental psychology, educational psychology, educational philosophy, psychoanalysis, and curriculum and instruction. Overall, the message from these viewpoints comes together with remarkable clarity in terms of generating ideas and evidence for the improvement of citizenship education. My goals for the current discussion include a description of four themes gleaned from the articles' commonalities and differences, thoughts regarding educational implications, and suggestions for future considerations and research).

Themes

Considering, developing, and assessing students' knowledge, skills, and dispositions are aspects of a longstanding and common framework in education.¹ More specifically, civic knowledge, civic skills, and civics dispositions (i.e., attitudes and

¹ L. Anderson and D. Krathwohl, *A Taxonomy of Learning, Teaching and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. (New York: Longman, 2001).

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beliefs) are considered key components of democratic citizenship education.² In the following section, I focus mainly on the latter two components of citizenship education (i.e., civics skills and civics dispositions) because they are more of a focus of the articles and are often underemphasized in schools.³

For the sake of clarity, the themes of: 1) argumentation and deliberation, 2) affect and anger, 3) civic action (or a lack thereof), and 4) imagining a “good” citizen are discussed as separate entities but, overall, they are considered interrelated and reciprocal.

Argumentation and Deliberation

What are some civic skills that should be emphasized in citizenship education? The articles in this special issue give us a number of insights into this question. Weinstock provides a review of several of his empirical studies that focus on informal reasoning and skilled argumentation within the context of democratic engagement.⁴ Informal reasoning focuses on building sound arguments (as opposed to formal logic) about what individuals encounter in everyday controversial issues such as juror decision-making and the evaluation of political campaign speeches. With this framework in mind, Weinstock also walks us through the various steps of juror decision-making; an important aspect of participatory citizenship.

In addition, the ability to recognize fallacies in informal reasoning (persuasive yet logically flawed arguments) is also considered in social and political issues in the Weinstock article. In terms of this skill development, it was also found that a majority of adolescents were able to distinguish between fallacious and non-fallacious statements (but a fourth of them could not and only half could point out specific fallacies). The main message here is that for citizens to be effectively engaged in a democracy they must possess these skills of argumentation.

Similar to Weinstock, Ruitenberg argues convincingly that “democratic deliberation” is a corner stone of a healthy democracy.⁵ More specifically, disagreement about the interpretation of political values and the like should be at the heart of politics. This is in contrast to the more current overvaluing of political procedures and the views of consensus at all costs. She states that the skills of disagreement are a necessary “communicative capacity” (along with affect which will be discussed in a later section) that political education should cultivate in individual citizens and society.⁶

² John Patrick, “Defining, Delivering and Defending a Common Education for Citizenship in a Democracy.” In *Principles and Practices of Democracy in the Education of Social Studies Teachers: Civic Learning in Teacher Education: Volume 2*. Edited by John Patrick, G. Hamot, and R. Leming (Bloomington, IN: ERIC, 2002): 5-21.

³ Anderson and Krathwohl.

⁴ Michael Weinstock, “Epistemic Understanding and Sound Reasoning Skills that Underlie Effective Democratic Engagement” In *Factis Pax* 4(1) (2010): 56-77.

⁵ Claudia Ruitenberg, “Conflict, Affect and the Political: On Disagreement as Democratic Capacity” In *Factis Pax* 4(1) (2010): 40-55.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1

In her article, Olafson gives an additional view into particular informal reasoning skills that are associated with citizenship.⁷ An in-depth and mixed-method investigation of Vietnam War resisters and veterans revealed significant differences in their moral reasoning. For example, veterans were more conventional (i.e., follow rules and laws unquestioningly) in their moral reasoning than resisters who demonstrated more post-conventional reasoning (i.e., disobey laws if they are deemed unjust). Again, more developed and complex reasoning skills about the moral dilemmas citizens face are advocated for in this piece.

Schraw, Olafson, Vander Veldt and Ponder's article focuses on research with teachers in a social studies methods course that emphasized civic education.⁸ One of the central skills that emerged from the study (and also consistent with the other articles in this issue) was that of reflection. Teachers reported that in-class activities that promoted discussion with peers and reflection on their own practice and beliefs were considered influential factors on their knowledge and views of civics education.

Affect and Anger

This theme considers the civic dispositions of democratic citizenship. As was stated previously, attitudes and beliefs of students has been a focus in education for a number of years but most would agree that knowledge or cognitive goals for students has been the main focus and not the affective side.⁹ In general, the field of educational psychology seems to be more open to the important role of emotion in learning and instruction in recent years (e.g., Pekrun, Schutz) but is far from the psychoanalytic perspective on affect described by Ruitenberg in the current issue.¹⁰

Affect and anger. As was discussed previously, deliberation that includes disagreement is a key to healthy democracy.¹¹ Generally speaking, terms associated with affective educational goals for students include developing an "appreciation for," or a "valuing of," a certain subject of study.¹² Although emotions and feelings are often included, rarely does one see such descriptors for emotions such as anger, joy, or pleasure as specific goals for students. According to Ruitenberg's framework, "Democratic disagreement is a passionate affair" it is not only "a detached exchange of rational argument...".¹³ Disagreement without this affective engagement undermines the chance

⁷ Lori Olafson, "Good" Americans and 'Bad' Americans: Personal Epistemology, Moral Reasoning, and Citizenship" *In Factis Pax* 4(1) (2010): 11-39.

⁸ Gregory Schraw, Lori Olafson, Michelle Vander Veldt, and Jennifer Ponder, "Teachers' Epistemological Stances and Citizenship Education" *In Factis Pax* 4(1) (2010): 78-107.

⁹ L. Anderson and D. Krathwohl, *A Taxonomy of Learning, Teaching and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (New York: Longman, 2001).

¹⁰ Paul Schutz and Reinhard Pekrun, *Emotion in Education* (London, UK: Elsevier, Inc., 2007).

¹¹ Ruitenberg, *Conflict, Affect, and the Political* and Weinstock, *Epistemic Understanding*.

¹² Anderson and Krathwohl.

¹³ Ruitenberg, *Conflict, Affect, and the Political*, p. 44.

of developing this capacity and a strong political identity and sense of belonging to a group (which is a basic human need). Part of this identity development is imagining (or reflection upon) a better society. Once students are asked to do this, they may become angry and/or disappointed with the current political situation but, according to Ruitenberg, this is a sign of healthy political engagement and these strong emotions should not be suppressed but encouraged. Similarly, Perry (1978) discusses this disenchantment as a loss of innocence that accompanies growth or gain in development and teachers, in particular, should be aware and compassionate about it for their students experiencing it.¹⁴

This combination of civic affect with civic cognition and skill may be an important component of the informal reasoning/argumentation that Olafson and Weinstock describe as well. As opposed to the detached, rational, and formulaic approach of formal reasoning, informal reasoning that is required of socio-political issues should include argumentation skill, and openness to disagreement, and emotional engagement (and that certainly includes “political anger”¹⁵).

Personal epistemology. In three of the articles in this issue, students and teachers’ beliefs about knowledge and knowing (i.e., their personal epistemology) were a focus within the context of citizenship education (and it is often considered a disposition).¹⁶ Important empirical links between personal epistemology and aspects of democratic citizenship including moral reasoning, views of citizenship, and argumentation were found. For example, more advanced personal epistemology, or evaluativism¹⁷ (i.e., integrating objective and subjective views of knowledge and the belief that differing views can be evaluated based on some criteria), was associated with more advanced moral reasoning in war resisters, reasoning and judgments about jury cases and fallacious arguments, and justice-oriented views of citizenship (i.e., citizens should question, debate, and change the social order).

The affective side of personal epistemology development has also been a more recent topic of theory and research.¹⁸ In sum, the evidence is certainly building that

¹⁴ William Perry, “Sharing in the Costs of Growth.” In *Encouraging Development in College Students*. Edited by C. A. Parker (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1978): 267 - 273.

¹⁵ Ruitenberg, *Conflict, Affect, and the Political*, p. 51.

¹⁶ Olafson “‘Good’ Americans”, Schraw et al. “Teachers’ Epistemology” and Weinstock, “Epistemic Understanding”.

¹⁷ Deanna Kuhn and Michael Weinstock, “What is Personal Epistemological Thinking and Why Does it Matter?” In *Personal Epistemology: The Psychology of Beliefs About Knowledge and Knowing*. Edited by Barbara Hofer and Paul Pintrich (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2002): 121 – 144.

¹⁸ Lisa Bendixen, “A Process Model of Epistemic Belief Change.” In *Personal Epistemology: The Psychology of Beliefs about Knowledge and Knowing*. Edited by Barbara Hofer and Paul Pintrich (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2002): 191 - 208. See also Lucia Mason, “Beliefs about Knowledge and Revision of Knowledge: On the Importance of Epistemic Beliefs for Intentional Conceptual Change in Elementary and Middle School Students.” In *Personal Epistemology in the Classroom: Theory, Research, and Implications for Practice*. Edited By Lisa Bendixen and Florian Feucht (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 258 – 291.

personal epistemology and its advancement should have a specific place in educational settings including citizenship education.¹⁹

Civic Action (or a Lack Thereof)

Effective civic engagement includes social and political activism and is a goal of citizenship education.²⁰ An important question is what psychological processes and educational opportunities lead to civic action? The articles in this special issue have much to say about this aspect of civic engagement. Ruitenbergh describes the current apolitical or disengagement of democratic citizens and the underlying mechanisms for this behavior, or a lack thereof.²¹ Without “political emotions,” citizens lack a clear political identity and essentially choose to go elsewhere to meet their needs of belonging (e.g., the popularity of “traditional” family values in certain groups in the U.S.). More specifically, political anger may be a catalyst for civic action (e.g., she gives us Critchley’s quote: “it is often anger that moves a subject to action.”²²). She argues that students should be educated about the emotions related to self and emotions related to society and that “educating the political emotions thus requires the development of a sense of solidarity.”²³

Another line of reasoning centers on the role of commitment in a relativistic political world full of differing opinions. Olafson and Weinstock describe the necessary weighing of conflicting views and evidence in the political arena and the making of choices or commitments that then influence behavior (e.g., an aspect of evaluativism in personal epistemology). Choosing to participate or resist in the Vietnam War certainly falls under the category of civic action. The precursors that lead to these choices and behavior are described in Olafson’s article in a number of ways.²⁴ For example, she includes James Rest’s²⁵ four-component model of moral psychological processes (moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character) to interpret her participants’ reasoning and behavior and also William Perry’s²⁶ model of ethical and intellectual development (the higher levels include commitment with relativism that is synonymous with evaluativism discussed previously). These models, in conjunction with her findings, are quite reflective of the how higher levels of argumentation skill, strong affect, and advanced personal epistemology coalesce into civic action. Interestingly, the

¹⁹ Lisa Bendixen and Florian Feucht. *Personal Epistemology in the Classroom: Theory, Research, and Implications for Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁰ The Center for Civic Education, *We the People: Project Citizen* (Calabasas, CA: Website, 2009).

²¹ Ruitenbergh “Conflict, Affect, and the Political.”

²² Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 130.

²³ Ruitenbergh, “Conflict, Affect, and the Political,” p. 51.

²⁴ Olafson “‘Good’ Americans”

²⁵ James Rest, Muriel Bebeau, and Joseph Volker, “An Overview of the Psychology of Morality.” In *Moral Development: Advances in Research and Theory* (New York: Praeger, 1986): 1-39.

²⁶ William Perry, Jr., *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1970).

war resisters also described how they have continued social activism efforts in their later years (while the war veterans did not engage in these types of activities).

In the Schraw et al. article they describe how social studies teachers' views changed in terms of viewing the civic action of their students (their students participated in service learning projects).²⁷ The teachers were at first skeptical but in the end of their graduate course were surprised at the positive engagement of their students in these activities. In addition, all of the teachers in their study realized the value of civics education and considered it to be a high priority and would include it in their future social studies teaching.

Imagining a "Good" Citizen

In some of my own work I have discussed and asked others how personal epistemology (and critical thinking) is related to effective and engaged citizenship, or what makes a "good" citizen?²⁸ To help summarize the three themes just discussed and in the spirit of Ruitenberg's article specifically, and the other articles more generally, I will imagine and describe what a good citizen could look like in an engaged democracy. A good or effective citizen would:

- be informed with civic knowledge and current socio-political events
- feel comfortable with disagreement and conflict in political issues
- have a clear and emotionally engaged political identity
- recognize sound arguments and not fall prey to fallacious statements
- be able to produce sound arguments about socio-political issues
- have supporting skills and beliefs to question, debate, and change the social order
- have an evaluativist perspective on knowledge and knowing
- would find joy and pride in their political system yet could still be critical of it
- participate in social and political activism
- be skilled in informal reasoning about everyday controversial issues
- imagine/desire a better society within the realistic confines of that social structure

As has been discussed, more clearly imagining what could be in terms of engaged citizens can facilitate reform in citizenship education.

²⁷ Schraw et al. "Teachers Epistemological Stances"

²⁸ Lisa Bendixen, Lori Olafson, Robert Mattson, and Florian Feucht, *The Skills of Citizenship: Epistemic Beliefs, Moral Reasoning, and Critical Thinking*. (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of The Jean Piaget Society, St. Louis, MO, June, 2010). See also Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy," *American Educational Research Journal* 41 (2004): 237 – 269.

Educational Implications

If we can envision the goals that we have for citizens and citizenship we can also make clearer our expectations for education and its role. In this section, I consider the educational implications that stem from this special issue both within and outside of the classroom. Overall, I think that both areas of education working together with common goals for citizenship education have the greatest chance of success.

Ruitenbergh recommends a more inductive approach to political education that would start with students responding (both cognitively and emotionally) to a real/concrete socio-political situation (e.g., a person experiencing a social injustice).²⁹ From there, emotional responses and explicit discussion would ensue including a critique of various levels and perspectives in the socio-political environment (e.g., schools, community, government). In other words this approach allows students to consider and react to the “stickier”³⁰ or messier side of politics from the ground up (Stavarkis, 2005). In my view, this approach has great potential both in and out of the classroom.

In the Classroom

A number of quality recommendations are given throughout the articles in terms of recommendations for citizenship education in the classroom. For example, Parker (1997) proposes that schools could teach the “art of deliberation” and/or “argument instruction.”³¹ For this to be successful, education needs to move beyond some of its “nervousness” regarding the conflict and strong emotion that comes from discussion of controversial issues.³² Where does this hesitation in education come from? Deanna Kuhn discusses this issue.³³ In her view, a too-narrow of a focus on tolerance and the idea of equality in that everyone has a right to their own opinion has overshadowed critical thought and true deliberation. This sentiment regarding the roots of avoiding political disagreement is echoed in the Ruitenbergh article as well.

I also think that this discomfort with discussing difficult issues comes from a more teacher-centered view of education that is still predominant in many classrooms. In this view, the teacher is in control of every aspect of the classroom including student emotions (as opposed to a more student-centered classroom).³⁴ More open-ended discussion that may elicit conflict and disagreement are, of course, more unpredictable and this may conflict with the goals of a teacher-centered classroom. If this is the overall message that students consistently receive in education, it is no surprise that students (and

²⁹ Ruitenbergh “Conflict, Affect, and the Political.”

³⁰ As cited in Ruitenbergh, “Conflict, Affect, and the Political”p. 48 (this issue).

³¹ As cited in Weinstock, “Epistemic Understanding,” p. 73 .

³² Ruitenbergh “Conflict, Affect, and the Political.”

³³ Deanna Kuhn, *Education for Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

³⁴ D. Daniels and L. Shumow, “Child development and Classroom Teaching: A Review of the Literature and Implications for Educating Teachers,” *Applied Developmental Psychology* 23 (2003): 495 – 526.

adults) tend to turn away from disagreements or socio-political discussions that may incite conflict and strong emotion – they may not be equipped with the skills and dispositions to navigate these types of discussions or see the value in them.

Along these same lines, the importance of student debate is mentioned explicitly in three of the four articles and implicitly in the fourth (i.e., Schraw et al., the significance of in-class discussions). Most likely due to the reasons just described, “debate has gotten a very bad name”³⁵ in education and this needs to be overcome and given a higher priority in the classroom.³⁶ Similarly, Olafson recommends more epistemologically-based classrooms in which students are encouraged to explore the complexities of knowledge and knowing especially within the context of socio-political issues.

The significant role of the teacher and teacher training in citizenship education cannot be overlooked.³⁷ For example, Schraw et al. discuss the importance of teacher reflection in terms of teachers’ beliefs about civics education. Teacher education that espouses views similar to that of citizenship education portrayed in this special issue would certainly have an impact on effective (and affective) democratic engagement of citizens.

Out of the Classroom

Because of the constraints of the classroom and formal education, Ruitenberg recommends that political education and disagreement “space” should be provided more in the community (e.g., local political groups).³⁸ Service learning opportunities (e.g., organizing and participating in a neighborhood food drive) such as the ones Schraw et al. describe for elementary students are other important opportunities for civic engagement beyond the classroom.³⁹ The more “training” mentality that was described by Miller in terms of military education falls outside of the typical K-12 experience as well along with its more potentially negative consequences on democratic citizenship (i.e., stifling of discussion, debate, and/or disagreement).⁴⁰

As I stated previously, opportunities for advancing citizenship have the greatest potential if formal and informal educational contexts work together with common goals in mind. More specifically, a “systems perspective” to citizenship education wherein individual students and teachers (i.e., individual system), their classroom climates (i.e.,

³⁵ Weinstock, *Epistemic Understanding*, p. 73

³⁶ See also D. Zeidler and B. Nicholls, “Socioscientific Issues: Theory and Practice,” *Journal of Elementary Science Education*, 21 (2009): 49 - 58.

³⁷ Florian Haerle and Lisa Bendixen, “Personal Epistemology in Elementary Classrooms: A Conceptual Comparison of Germany and the United States and a Guide for Future Cross-cultural Research.” In *Knowing, Knowledge and Beliefs: Epistemological Studies Across Diverse Cultures*. Edited by M.S. Khine (New York; Springer, 2005): 151-176.

³⁸ Ruitenberg “Conflict, Affect, and the Political.”

³⁹ Schraw et al. “Teachers Epistemological Stances”

⁴⁰ As cited in Olafson “‘Good’ Americans”.

microsystem), curriculum and schools (i.e., exosystem), and broader social and cultural (i.e., macrosystem) are assumed to impact one another reciprocally seems advantageous.⁴¹ This framework could guide future citizenship educational objectives, practice, and policy.

Future Considerations

To conclude this discussion I offer two areas in which future dialogue and research could focus to further expand what this special issue has initiated. The first issue is the rapidly-increasing importance of the Internet as a source of knowledge for citizens. How individuals evaluate the quality and credibility of information in general and socio-political issues in particular should be examined empirically. Bromme, Kienhues, and Porsch point out that students and adults rely on the knowledge of others or “second-hand” knowledge most of our lives (e.g., medical information).⁴² The knowledge, skills, and dispositions (e.g., evaluativist beliefs) needed to navigate this vast information space should be a top priority in citizenship education. For example, both Mason and Boldrin and Braten and colleagues have found that beliefs about knowledge and knowing influence the way in which students think about and make choices when searching for information on the Internet.⁴³

Secondly, Weinstock raises the important question of what culture we are indeed considering in terms of democratic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.⁴⁴ Is this a Western ideal of democratic engagement only or does it apply to other conceptions of democracy and cultures as well (e.g., Eastern cultures)? In addition, more recent theory and research associated with the role of culture in personal epistemology makes it clear that more work needs to be done in this regard.⁴⁵

Education has a unique and powerful position in regard to determining what is and isn't important for students to think about.⁴⁶ The valuing of citizenship knowledge, skills, and dispositions both in and out of the classroom needs to be at the forefront if an engaged and healthy democracy is the goal.

⁴¹ Bendixen and Feucht, 555.

⁴² Rainer Bromme, Dorothe Keinhues, and Torsten Porsch, “Who Knows What and Who We Can Believe? Epistemological Beliefs about Knowledge (Mostly) to be Attained from Others.” In *Personal Epistemology in the Classroom: Theory, Research, and Implications for Practice*. Edited by Lisa Bendixen and Florian Feucht (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 163 - 193.

⁴³ Lucia Mason and Angela Boldrin, “Epistemic Metacognition in the Context of Information Searching on the Web,” in *Knowing, Knowledge and Beliefs: Epistemological Studies Across Diverse Cultures*. Edited by M. S. Khine (New York; Springer), 377 - 404. See also Ivar Braten, “Personal Epistemology, Understanding of Multiple Contexts, and Learning Within Internet Technologies,” in *Knowing, Knowledge and Beliefs: Epistemological Studies Across Diverse Cultures*. Edited by M. S. Khine (New York; Springer), 351 - 376.

⁴⁴ Weinstock “Epistemic Understanding”.

⁴⁵ Barbara Hofer, “Personal Epistemology and Culture,” in *Knowing, Knowledge and Beliefs: Epistemological Studies Across Diverse Cultures*. Edited by M. S. Khine (New York; Springer), 3 - 22.

⁴⁶ Deanna Kuhn, *Education for Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

To sum up what I see as the potential of this special issue and the message it conveys regarding effective democratic citizenship, I end with a quotation from a thirty-eight-year-old woman responding to the question “Who am I?”: “I am the anger that will change the world.”⁴⁷

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⁴⁷ Author unknown, class activity, Lifespan Development (2001).

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