James McManus

Dr Aarón Alzola Romero

Comparative Education

February 4th, 2014

<div align="center">Citizenship Education: An Educator's Duty</div>

One of the number one complaints about the United States government today is regarding the widespread fierce partisanship, essentially making it impossible for Congress to pass laws or even treat each other with civility. Unfortunately, while many Americans claim to be dissatisfied with their country's current state, very few of them choose to exercise their right to vote. According to George Madison University (2013), the population of the United States on Election Day 2012 eligible to vote was 221.9 million, while the total ballots counted in the presidential election totaled 129 million. That means the United States, long considered the bastion of democracy in the West, had almost forty-two percent of its citizens choose not to participate in its biggest election. In fact the United States is not alone as the turnout in the United Kingdom has been around sixty percent in recent elections (The Electoral Commission). How can a country improve its voter turnout, increase citizenship participation, and secure the future of its political system and way of life? Education can and should be a mechanism towards achieving this end; educators have a responsibility to make each student a "better citizen" who is both knowledgeable about and can participate in their country's government and way of life.

Firstly, in order to understand what it takes to create "better" citizens, one must examine what being a "good" citizen entails. Henry A. Giroux in *Education as Enforcement* (Saltman and Gabbard 2003, p. x) coins the term "critical citizenship," where students are trained to criticize and question government. A hallmark of modern education is the ability to think critically, as increasingly more assessments and pedagogy concentrate on developing and honing this skill. Forming opinions is another important aspect of citizenship, especially

when one is determining for whom one should vote and what policies one should support. However, opinions must be informed and tempered with humility, as well as the abilities to compromise and understand another's point of view. This can act as a safeguard against stubbornness and hotheadedness, which cause even more problems than political systems currently boast to include. Another, more controversial aspect of citizenship pertains to patriotism, specifically the obstinate nationalism the world saw in Germany before the outbreak of World War One. A balanced patriotism more inclined towards both "political integration" and an "overarching unity of the nation" is significantly more beneficial to a political process, as are the abilities to understand and empathize with cultures and peoples different than one's own (Chan Wang 1978, p. 464). Critical, patriotic, and informed students who can compromise and place themselves in their opponent's shoes, exhibit the traits and characteristics of "good citizens."

Creating good citizens does not actually require too much more work than teachers are already accomplishing in classrooms, since both good students and good citizens share more or less the same qualities. However, there does need to be a good-quality program or curriculum, with certain key features, to facilitate continuity across classes, schools, districts, and states (or provinces). The purpose of a citizenship program should be to "train students in order to practice their rights and responsibilities as citizens," but it should be developed through "sustained and careful analysis," not desperately thrown together because of some impending civic education Armageddon (Maiztegui, et al. 2008, p. 313; Sears and Hughes 2006, p. 5-6). Sears and Hughes (2006, p. 11, 6) are quick to point out that a drought of educated and active citizens has plagued the world for hundreds of years and "purveyors of crisis" are almost always "advancing very particular political purposes and agendas" wishing to "indoctrinate not educate." Good citizenship programs must broaden and deepen discussions of topics, encourage the application and investigation of evidence, and build a

strong knowledge base from which students can make fact-based opinions (Sears and Hughes 2006). The development of critical thinking skills is of the utmost importance, as this is crucial for students to become "critical citizens." Therefore, a teacher must encourage his or her students to question the status quo and to discuss different perspectives and both mainstream and eccentric beliefs with others, including friends, parents, and other teachers. Talking to peers and superiors is important for students to understand their place in the political system while making it relevant to their current situation. Civic education must also encourage and foster debate between points of view. As Sears and Hughes (2006, p. 13) indicate, students are "active constructors of their own knowledge" and must be allowed to pursue and investigate topics which interest and affect them, while also making the subject applicable to their personal position. By the age of fourteen, most students have already established their own political opinions (Sears and Hughes 2006, p. 8), therefore citizenship education should have two levels aimed at different age groups, similar to that mentioned by Maiztegui et al. (2008). The first tier, intended for students up to age 14 (American elementary and middle school), should focus specifically on facts and not personal anecdotes (Sears and Hughes 2006, p. 7). It should present students with multiple sides of an issue and ensure they can understand many perspectives, simultaneously educating them as to the nuts and bolts of how their government works. The second tier, for students older than 14 (American high school), should involve a great deal of debating and challenging their own and each other's arguments, in order to expand public discourse on topics (Sears and Hughes 2006, p. 9). Lastly, good-quality citizenship curricula should be constantly "audit[ed]" for effectiveness, through several processes, in order to ensure continuity and impact on students and the community at large (Sears and Hughes 2006, p. 13). Overall, well-structured and developed citizenship programs should foster debate and questioning, encourage critical

thinking skills, and place students in other perspectives, all while explaining the specifics of government.

There are several pitfalls to avoid when teachers step into their roles as citizen educators. Primarily, a school needs to ensure their curriculum is not based solely on education instead of indoctrination. Sears and Hughes (2006, p. 4) defines indoctrination as the "push for uncritical acceptance of doctrine without regard for evidence" and says it "narrows and limits possibilities." Therefore the key to educating and not indoctrinating lies in opening up possibilities and encouraging critical citizenship. However, acculturation (which could be seen as a type of indoctrination) paired with some sort of multicultural education is important in order to establish the level of patriotism necessary for a "good citizen." The "overarching unity" required for patriotism cannot come from disjointed cultures all myopically following their own beliefs and values. The home country and culture should be dominant in order to tie an area's groups together with some degree of patriotism. Educators must also take care not to present information and conflicts as black and white with only two possible sides, which does not encourage cooperation, compromise, or criticality, all qualities important in good citizens. Sher and Bennett (1982, p. 665-6) believe teachers should not educate students on any traits or principles in the classroom, fearing that it "violates a student's autonomy" and "inculcat[es] moral views in the classroom." However, if citizenship education is done correctly, teachers should present both the pros and cons about why certain values like patriotism and compromise are useful in society, including why one might consider implementing them in one's life. After all, teachers in the United States currently explain why it is important to vote in elections, and it seems that only about fifty-eight percent of the students accept the presented logic and decide to follow it in their everyday lives. The second objection offered by Sher and Bennett (1982, p. 666) is that educating students on the values of citizenship "involves sectarian teaching inappropriate to a

pluralistic society," a claim which the aforementioned multicultural education in addition to citizenship education should refute. It is vitally important and not impossible to present the positive values socially associated with being a "good citizen" in a pluralistic light, taking into account all points of view, while presenting students with multiple perspectives.

The future of countries in this world rests squarely on the shoulders of their citizens. This is particularly true in democratic countries as the process on which they are based places both rights and responsibilities on their citizens. It is crucial that students understand how to participate in a country's government and way of life, in order to allow them to take full advantage of the opportunities available. Educators have a duty to their students to educate and prepare them for their futures and the world ahead, much of which can be taught through citizenship education. While presenting benefits and disadvantages to good citizenship in numerous lights, teachers can promote empathy and a pluralistic society without "crusad[ing] to eliminate diversity" and encroaching on students' autonomy (Apple 1990, p. 60). Fostering critical thinking skills and the ability to see an issue from multiple perspectives through debate and questioning can lead to both better citizens and better students.

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