Re-envisioning Education for Global Citizenship

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Abstract

In this article, we offer glimpses of a conceptual model of civic education responsive to the challenges of globalization. Moving with and beyond theoretical and empirical models, we propose a visionary model to find new social purposes, processes, and practices that hold promise for deepening democracy. We propose that civic education in and for deep democracy is radically social, persistently exploratory, and compellingly aesthetic. We further advocate the development of exploratory democratic practices for use in classrooms and communities, and describe the design of a website as one example.

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The turbulent mix of globalization's dynamics, along with consequential large and small scale events, shape the challenges to conceptualizing civic education. Globalization as a concept is sharply contested along economic, political, and social lines and across both theoretical and action venues. Citizenship as a concept is pulled by the conflicting demands of national, sub-national, and transnational identities, structures, and processes. Education continues to be a crucial conceptual and practical site of exciting promise and urgent constraint. In this paper, we offer glimpses of a conceptual model of civic education responsive to the challenges of globalization.

We begin by acknowledging three forms of conceptual modeling capable of advancing our understanding of the processes and prospects for civic education. Empirical models offer provocative descriptive and comparative insights by summarizing observations and measurements in statistical or diagrammatic representations. Data based models offer differing perspectives that vary across the hypotheses tested, the methodologies deployed, and the extent of generalizability. Theoretical models render accessible complex explanatory and normative schema in order to guide inquiry and justify policy and practice. The assumptions, values, and arguments revealed inform curricular deliberations. While we have learned much from several empirical and theoretical models and their research environments, here we propose a visionary model. Visionary models are dynamic and exploratory. We use the term re-envisioning to refer to a continuing process of imagining new possibilities; developing change-related knowledge that is social, systemic and provisional; and bringing consensual possibilities into existence. (Kurth-Schai & Green, 2003) Visionary models are centered in notions of high purpose, developed in response to questions of depth, challenge, and social significance. In centering our efforts to enhance civic education we ask: “Given challenging and uncertain times, how can we initiate and sustain comprehensive social reform and renewal that supports...
broad-based participation in democratic processes of social inquiry and civic engagement?"

In response, we first sketch our understanding of the present context of globalization and then recommend conceptual pathways that map and extend the purpose, process, and practice of civic education.

A Challenging Context

There are five interrelated and mutually reinforcing attributes of the contemporary global context with which the purposes and processes of civic education must contend. These are the consequential shifts in world markets, in centers of wealth and power, in human rights, in the balance between public and private, and in the uses of quantification.

Marketization

Capital, consumer, and labor markets increasingly cross national boundaries and mobilize global competition for goods and services in ways that have broad implications. Traditional cultures struggle to negotiate meaning with newly penetrating technologies and intense consumer materialism. Existing political and economic structures struggle to cope with global flows of capital, labor, goods, and services that defy national regulation but have massive local political, social, and environmental effects. Individuals struggle with material, social, and spiritual challenges to identity and personal conduct. National education systems struggle to balance the competing demands of transmitting their particular cultural and social values with the powerful impingement of global marketization.

Concentration of Wealth and Power

Globalization, along with such pattern-shifting events as the end of the Cold War and the pervasive development of information technologies, has reinforced existing control centers of wealth and power. Robust stratification continues. On almost all measures, the gaps between highest and lowest positions of social, economic, and political influence are widening. The conditions of personal and community well-being and access to vital social services including education remain skewed.

Human Rights

Citizenship is generally conceived of as a rights-responsibility based individual condition. As a property of being human, individuals have legitimate claims for protections from and provisions by their governments. Violations of basic protections and deprivation of services by governments are identified as breaches of human rights. Violent actions by government against its citizens and egregious instances of deprivation of justice and other rightful services are, unfortunately, widespread. When adequate protections of individual freedom and governmental services are provided, adult individuals are expected to be responsible tax-paying, law abiding, and voting citizens.

Privatization

What is conceived of as ‘public’ and ‘private’ is culturally and politically variable, but
globalization has brought new forces into this complex tension. One trend is the reduction of 'public space' and the growth of what is considered rightfully 'private'. 'Private' is first framed in terms of individual rights—freedom of action and acquisition. Individual rights are then vigorously expanded into claimed 'space' for corporate firms and to a lesser extent to other non-governmental organizations. There is persistent advocacy for selective de-regulation, lower taxation, and reduction in the size and services of governments. The 'private sector' is claimed to be more creative, agile, and productive than its 'public' counterparts. Social services, health care, and education all experience diminished resources in spite of sharply increased demand. Market-based, competitive, non-public responses to social service demands are emerging globally with highly problematic results.

**Quantification**

Numbers matter in the intense interactions among the attributes of globalization identified here. Market transactions, the concentrations of wealth and power, citizens and their rights, and shifts in public and private spaces all have bottom-lines. The computation and allocation of costs and benefits are at the core of understanding the dynamics and implications of globalization. Calculations of what, and for what, are always contested. Yet numerical indicators ranging from market shares, income distribution, social stratification, taxation rates, voter turn-out, educational achievement, and even human rights abuses come to dominate discourse.

Globalization frames our thought and action in especially troubling, complex, and uncertain times. Globalization is strongly associated with economic, political, and cultural turbulence that buffs every level and every location of contemporary life. Indicators include the growing gap between rich and poor, the accelerating rate of environmental degradation, and the painful salience of terrorism as the preferred form of political violence. Authoritarianism remains resilient while racial, ethnic, and religious intolerance persist, even as new opportunities for power sharing and connectedness both open and threaten.

This constellation of comprehensive and systemic conflicts directly challenges civic education. These daunting problem clusters require systemic responses—concurrent responses across levels and dimensions. Holistic imagination, inquiry and action must offer more than narrowly defensive tactics, more than piecemeal planning, and more than fragmentary reactions. There are resources to envision new social purposes, processes, and practices that hold promise for revitalizing democracy and promoting social justice and compassion. Civic education is at the center of this opportunity for systemic social transformation.

**Extending Purpose: Aspirations for Civic Education**

Two interrelated purposes, socialization and social mobility, dominate contemporary aspirations for civic education. Socialization is necessary to prepare individuals to participate in sustaining the economic and political order. For the majority of young people, civic education will provide knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for informed and responsible consumption of material goods (economic gain) and non-material benefits (individual rights). Public schooling is to prepare future citizens to be orderly and responsible participants in the particular processes
of representative governance in their nation and locality.

Aspirations for social mobility complement socialization goals. Interwoven with instructional efforts to shape political stability and teach appropriate forms of social action, are programs structured to provide opportunities for upward mobility. Students who demonstrate potential for intelligent leadership and those who display aptitudes for advanced specialized study are systematically recruited. In return for more intensive education, there are expectations for civic leadership and higher economic and political status.

Drawing from and moving beyond the imperatives of established socialization objectives and individual aspirations for social mobility are civic visions of social transformation. Young citizens can be prepared for complex and active engagement in teaching/learning processes that aim to ameliorate the negative consequences of current forms of globalization. Educational purpose can be re-envisioned and renewed to build effective global awareness, deliberative competence, and transformative imagination. This educational purpose inevitably requires strategic consideration of political process.

Extending Process: Aspirations for Deeper Democracy

All political systems feature processes for civic education that define citizenship and legitimate citizen roles. Civic education, however, is particularly challenging in political systems with democratic aspirations. Democracy is a continuing project and the development of its component processes is uneven. Nation-states in transition still moving out of recent colonial experience or from authoritarian regimes toward more democratic forms strive for political, civic, and educational systems that are more inclusive, participatory, and humane. Long-standing democracies strive to provide civic education and political processes that formally promote broad participation and transparent governmental accountability.

We join analyses that conclude that although these efforts are laudable, most result in shallow democracy. Even the most practiced democratic states experience voter indifference, elite-dominated public discourse, and growing citizen disengagement. With some situational differences, shallow democracy reinforces voters as passive consumers of candidates, parties and policies that are advertised in ways indistinguishable from the retail marketplace. Education that emphasizes market centered attitudes and learning results in low intensity citizenship—personal civic responsibilities that can be discharged by preferred ignorance, fragmentary complaints, and episodic votes.

Drawing from and moving beyond these well-intended efforts are real prospects for deep democracy. A deep democracy is radically social, persistently exploratory, and compellingly aesthetic. The distinguishing criteria of deep democracy as envisioned here are recognizable in many traditional versions of the good society. For example there are long-standing aspirations for a social order that supports widespread extension of justice, pursuit of truth, and experience of beauty.

A deep democracy is radically social when it is broadly and authentically collaborative and inclusive. Most of our current political processes, at all levels and in all venues, involve elites
and a limited set of interest groups. Reliance on this established pattern supports isolation, reinforces alienation, structures a narrowed public discourse, and solidifies established forms of opposition.

Developing a deeper set of democratic processes would expand the number of active participants through all stages of inquiry, decision-making, and implementation. Such movement requires broad engagement of citizens and groups to support ‘border crossings’ between disparate positions and expectations. In finding such pathways, difficult encounters and negotiations will occur. These opportunities are necessary to engage and possibly integrate what may appear to be sharply conflicting goals, values, and approaches. Deep democracy entails going beyond our familiar political processes to broaden and deepen political engagement and continually reform ‘democratic elitism’.

This challenge is approachable when democratic process is persistently exploratory. Shallow democracy offers a sense of certainty with minimal citizen effort. Yet the realities of constant change that flow from the dynamics of our experienced world signal pervasive uncertainty. From the most general level, the shaping forces of globalization, through mid-level worlds influenced by national elections, to local worlds such as communities shaped by demographic transitions, to ‘personal worlds’ affected by unemployment or aging, uncertainties abound.

Amid relentless change, it is necessary to engage individual and collective ingenuity and resourcefulness. Deep democracy requires continuing collaborative participation in processes of teaching and learning structured to sustain openness, support principled risk-taking, and yield adaptive response to changing conditions. Deeply social inquiry requires creativity over caution, inclusiveness over short-term efficiency, and visionary movement over constrained response. It is difficult but necessary to encourage and sustain conceptual divergence and multiplicity in adapting to both the turbulent and the subtle changes in our multi-leveled lives. We need to invent and re-invent ways to avoid premature closure and superficial response. In all our inquiry as engaged citizens, politically accountable decision-makers, educators, or researchers, multiple modes of inquiry and assessment must be in play. There are no easy answers.

Deep democracy is compellingly aesthetic as it engages the emotions and energies necessary to sustain perseverance through the difficult experience of change. Intuition and inspiration, prophecy and poetry, enchantment and emotion, mystery and movement, silence and spirit are concepts seldom associated with problem solving in education, politics, and governance. At times, however, the most compelling rationale for a social policy or practice does not lend itself to empirical verification or logical interpretation. Teaching, learning, and decision-making for public purposes involve and require much more than objective analysis and linear problem solving. Inseparable, rather than distinct from highly individualized cognitive processes, are human capacities for social empathy, intuition, and artistry.

Our emotions shape our thinking, often focusing attention, sometimes exerting decisive influence. Empathy, a feelings-based capacity, makes it possible to establish meaningful connections. Its continuing development allows us to sustain collaborative relationships not
only with like-minded others, but even more importantly, with those whose experiences and commitments are quite different from our own.

At times we are moved by awareness that is surprising. A strong sense of understanding or direction suddenly appears, comprehension preceding its validation. Intuitions, like emotions, can help to mobilize, connect and extend divergent conceptual resources. Shifting time, space, speed, pattern, and perspective, intuitive processing can break down conceptual barriers and signal new pathways.

At other times we are moved by awareness of beauty. The need for aesthetic experience and expression is active in all aspects of our lives. To engage artistry in the domain of public policy is to extend beyond valid concerns for efficiency and utility to add priorities for balance, movement, resonance, and grace.

Current tendencies toward narrow rationality, economic determinism, and unnecessary risk avoidance prevent full integration of emotion, aesthetics, intuition, and spirit. Visions of reform thereby lose their capacity to inspire and sustain principled social action. Yet democratic politics and governance—in concept, content, and process—can be energetically guided by aesthetic principles. “Checks and balances” are more than a metaphor in democratic life. They go beyond constitutionally sanctioned competition between government branches to principles of argument and evidence in democratic discourse. A sense of symmetry can engage both the critique and the re-balancing of complex relationships such as income distribution and other influential hierarchies. A sense of appropriate, even graceful, movement can inform political perspectives. The aesthetics of sound—harmony, dissonance, and resonance—can also function as more than metaphors for deepening democracy.

Democracy is a dynamic, multifaceted social composition. It can be shaped to create sites for the expression of strategic intuition, imaginative policy, and artistic advocacy. A more inclusive, more widely exploratory, and more aesthetically informed political process opens opportunities for deeper experiences of democratic learning and life.

**Extending Practice: Aspirations for Civic Practices and Pedagogy**

Fulfillment of socially transformative purpose in challenging global contexts requires continuing innovation in civic education. We need to develop techniques that encourage movement beyond approaches to inquiry and advocacy focused primarily on developing individual initiative, expertise, and efficacy. We need to develop pedagogies that support movement beyond illusions of certainty, convergence, and control to engage dynamically varied and valid meanings, perspectives, possibilities and plans.

We need to envision and evolve exploratory democratic practices—techniques that provide opportunities to socially construct and apply knowledge in a holistic, consensual and purposeful manner. Drawing from the rich literature on democratic process and pedagogy are practices that have been shown to:

1. extend collective wisdom concerning significant social issues;
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2. integrate varied dimensions of human experience and understanding—intellectual, emotional, intuitive, aesthetic, and sensory;
3. expand possibilities for thought and action beyond those initially brought by individuals;
4. enrich relationships by increasing the number and variety of meaningful connections among diverse participants; and
5. enhance capacities for continued engagement in civic learning and public life that narrow the gap between democratic aspirations and ‘real-world’ accomplishments.

In light of these criteria, many existing pedagogies (e.g., Paulo Freire’s problem-posing approach, service learning, Thai Khit-Pen model) and research methodologies (e.g., Delphi, action research, Ethnographic Futures interviews) might be adapted for use as exploratory democratic practice; perhaps first for use in schools, and then extended to social, political, philanthropic, and research settings. Here we describe our continuing efforts to develop an interactive website and explore its potential as a vehicle for the expression of civic scholarship and a platform for continuing social inquiry.

The Internet as Exploratory Democratic Practice

Bold claims have been made about the democratizing potential of distributed forms of information technology—from the personal computer, to various networking systems, culminating in the arrival and evolution of the World Wide Web. Educational vendors and users have not only asserted this technology’s teaching/learning capabilities, but have also introduced concepts such as “individual choice,” “personal empowerment,” and “democratic deliberation” into their advocacy.

While concerns persist about privacy, intellectual property, quality control, and gaps in use and access stratified by income, the Internet now serves as a major resource for education reform. Important deliberations and policy designs are shaped as government agencies, advocacy groups, academic and civic organizations, parents, teachers and students use websites to gather, interpret, and disseminate information. More, however, is required if we are to engage education and policy communities in more deeply democratic approaches to research and reform. New features and functions are required if we are to move toward realizing the potential of the Internet to support social inquiry, imagination, composition, and action.

What began as a course web page is now being reconfigured to contribute to a broader community conversation on education reform. Our goal is to design and support an interactive site through which knowledge is socially constructed and then disseminated on-line. To do so, we intend to incorporate traditional functions with a coordinated set of strategies designed to sustain collective deliberations on significant reform issues.

Interactive strategies supporting democratic social inquiry require further explanation. We are working to engage students and teachers with community participants in producing socially composed public essays regarding education reform issues and initiatives of local and national
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interest. The process we envision features:

1. Full integration within school curriculum (teachers and students would facilitate the site’s social inquiry process);
2. Collective selection of essay topics facilitated by an on-line survey function [topics might include consideration of local public education reform initiatives and/or issues receiving national attention (e.g., vouchers, charter schools, accountability, privatization, civic education, etc.)];
3. Recruitment strategies for community participants including an open invitation provided on-line and personal invitations extended to a carefully selected body of resource persons;
4. Solicitation of varied forms of contributions scheduled developmentally over a 10-12 week time period including: (a) reflection and response to shared readings; (b) contribution of annotated resources; (c) response to questionnaires or prompts for brief statements of opinion, and (d) development of strategic narratives, social poetry, visual imagery, or other forms of expression that highlight opportunities and likely barriers to implementation as well as integrate emotional, intuitive, imaginative and aesthetic dimensions of policy design;
5. Each major contribution set followed by submission of brief reflective statements from participants; and
6. Final synthesis by site facilitators resulting in a socially composed public essay featured on the website.

Concluding Statement

By extending current purposes, processes, and practices of civic education, we can provide opportunities not only to imagine, but also to experience democratic transformations within specific school, community, national, and global contexts. By altering familiar patterns of understanding, discourse, and participation we can move beyond education, politics, and governance “as usual.” By joining together in a continuous process that is radically social, always exploratory, and necessarily aesthetic, we can re-envision and renew civic learning and life.

Imagination is the means for going beyond our selves as presently formed, moving transformatively toward imagined ideals of what we might become, how we might relate to others, and how we might address problematic situations. Moral imagination is our capacity to see and to realize in some actual or contemplated experience possibilities for enhancing the quality of experience, both for ourselves and for the communities of which we are a part, both for the present and for future generations. (Johnson, 1993, p. 209)
References


