Chapter 18
Citizenship Education:
Ideology or System? A Critical View on Civic Educational Policy Thinking

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate salient approaches to citizenship and civic-normative education in liberal democratic life. The chapter argues that core technocratic assumptions about clarity, linearity, and predictability feeding into civic-educational deployment and change warrant critical attention. The chapter aims to shed new light on states' instinct to regard themselves and their value sets as seamless conceptual wholes. A range of ramifications of this typical approach are interrogated, in principle as well as in relation to Swedish civic-educational matrices. The chapter refines a heuristic model for unpacking citizenship and civic-normative education thinking in liberal democracy originally presented in an earlier work by the author. It is concluded that even as the enormous policy efforts that go into organizing and revamping public civic-normative education in response to new societal challenges have little chance of meeting governments' intentions; they may still be important since they are exerted in highly visible public spaces and domains.

INTRODUCTION

Civic education on values and citizenship is a major arena for dissemination of mindsets and dispositions to mass populations.[1] Even as the emphasis on normative, moral, civic, and formerly religious education has always been a core feature of European educational regimes the present presents these with new and as yet unresolved issues to address. The concomitant rise in many countries of new strands of nationalism, populism, demands for cultural uniformism, and ideological intolerance clearly strains and challenges civic-normative educational tenets and frames of thinking to an unforeseen extent. This chapter traces and explores different political-educational responses to these new conditions, partly by referring to current and former Swedish curriculum approaches, but mainly by providing a novel reading of what I propose is a deeply problematic but dominant technocratic style of doing and thinking civic

and citizenship education by liberal democratic educational statehood. The kernel problem here is the standard scholarly and political custom to regard civic-normative education in terms of predictable flows of constructive articulations of desirable and humane value matrices on the level of high state politics through adaptive educational systems to the malleable and formative minds of pupils in comprehensive national systems of education. Understandable and established as this mechanistic policy model surely is, it rests on a number of assumptions about statehood, ideology, education, and politics that at closer inspection seem difficult to maintain.

The chapter engages with a number of these oftentimes tacit assumptions and the conclusions and educational solutions they propend. To my mind, the chapter's core contribution is the post-technocratic alternative *SEP* model for critical policy thinking that I introduce elsewhere (Strandbrink 2017) and elaborate further on here, but if the argument holds water some conclusions may also be formulated as to how to cope with the political, ideological, and cultural challenges mentioned at the outset. The argument thus addresses two interlinked levels of critical interrogation in various ways; one concerned with the typically under-processed view of institutional liberal democratic statehood that underpins mainstream educational scholarship, the other targeting the oversimplified view of civic-normative and citizenship instruction that seems to be a general rationale behind European public education. This double nexus of conceptual idealisation, I suggest, is a serious impairment for educational statehood as well as individual pupils-to-be-citizens to work out which value configurations and dispositions they can possibly and reasonably embrace. It ultimately points to a range of paradoxes and dilemmas for liberal democratic governments and stakeholders as they struggle to understand themselves, their normative patterns of thinking, and the expectations and hopes they may hold for articulating and conducting viable civic-normative and citizenship education in ethically and culturally diversive societies. As European normative communities multiply, cumulate, disperse, cross, fragment, and reinvent themselves the old nationalist imagination that all citizens be bound to one normatively rich and common standard seems to be receding into history. Even as it seems to be a political-ideological driving force behind the contemporary rise of neo-nationalist and neo-fascist sentiments it is extremely difficult to imagine a true return to a political culture that effectively ended in 1945. But governments, agents, and departments of national civic education still to some extent dance to the same tune. One important difference, however, is that when old-style nationalist educators could cogently suppose there to exist and refer to one civic-normative community and focus their instruction on this singular entity, this can hardly be done today as the world's populations are acutely aware that the sliver of the world they live in is one among many other slivers. To imagine or pursue old-style national-cultural-ethical purity in this context seems patently absurd. As will be partly shown below this profound cultural change implies that today's liberal democratic civic-normative educational programmes are more concerned with second-tier value words and concepts – that is: ideationally and normatively fluid terms that operate in the spaces between as well as across first-tier worldviews – than to argue comprehensively and singularly about citizenship and civic identity.

Civic educational orientations do not only vary in and across educational and political settings; there is also variation regarding how social and educational scholarship approaches civic education as a theoretical domain and an analytical problem. Two main perspectives are discernible here. On the one hand, there is the entrenched technocratic view that the effort by states' educational departments and various agencies to craft and implement programmes for civic-normative, ethical, and religious public education is in principle coherent and effective (cf, however, Biesta *et al.* 2009: 21; see also Berglund 2015: 8). The inference is that studying educational programmes, mindsets, and policy priorities will also enable us to

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