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18

Education for Citizenship: Obstacles and Opportunities

Patricia White

One way of arriving at a considered view of the form education for citizenship should take in a democratic society is to consider obvious obstacles to such an education in imperfectly democratic societies with which one is familiar. Proceeding in this way can have a number of advantages. It can, for a start, avoid the rather overblown, rhetorical stance which sometimes characterises writing on the aims of education for citizenship. Not because it avoids the need to have a conception of the aims of citizenship education—how otherwise would the obstacles be identified as such?—but because it can help to make the, perhaps implicit, conception one is working with more precise. In so doing it can provide a usefully specific focus for educational effort at the broad policy making level and at classroom level.

Two Views of the Obstacles to Education for Citizenship

In their discussions, Kevin Harris and James M. Giarelli both identify major obstacles to the realisation of their conceptions of education for citizenship in a democracy.

For Harris capitalism is the major obstacle, since it cannot allow for "real equality, real autonomy and real democracy." A capitalist state will always

operate "to secure and protect the interests of capital and the capitalist class." Current capitalist states, however, (Harris's examples are drawn from Western Europe and the USA,) do not do this in any nakedly obvious way. They "legitimate the discourse of liberalism" and create the illusion that they are liberal democratic states. They do this, *inter alia*, by fostering a number of illusions: namely, that schools are educating students, the knowledge taught is neutral, students enjoy equality of educational opportunity, and citizens exercise autonomy, whilst living in a democratic and liberal society.

In this situation teachers, as "transformative intellectuals," need to recognise the ways in which they have been constituted as ideological subjects, learn how to establish critical perspectives and educate their students to do the same. Doing this within a capitalist education system will not be easy and the teacher will need to avoid "replacing one form of indoctrination with another."

For Giarelli it is not clear that education for public life is possible at all in the USA in the last decade of the twentieth century. His overview of a broad spectrum of views in the first part of his paper leads him to conclude that "almost any agreement on a common vocabulary, set of starting points or ends-in-view . . . is unavailable."

But then it seems that the dismantling, or perhaps the revision, of certain distinctions may offer a way forward. These are, according to Giarelli, the "traditional distinctions and valorizations of public and private, the productive and reproductive, . . . enshrined in our political and social theory and how these distinctions reflect and support gender-biased descriptions of the world and our possibilities for action within it." These distinctions "mask power and claims of privilege," as every distinction does.

Removing this obstacle means, for Giarelli, collapsing the walls between the public and private, the productive and the reproductive and then educating people in "multiple excellences" drawn from these spheres.

Getting Clear About the Obstacles

Identifying obstacles to education for citizenship can bring a desirable precision to the whole enterprise. For it to do that though, the characterisation of the obstacles needs to be exact and concrete and precisely why they constitute obstacles to desirable states of affairs needs to be examined in careful detail.

According to Harris's account, the capitalist state operates to protect the interests of the capitalist class. In any extended version of this conversation, Harris would need to offer a more precise and detailed analysis of the nature of the capitalist state in advanced industrial societies in the late twentieth century. Is Harris's view that the state is a direct instrument of class rule—"the executive committee of the bourgeoisie," as in traditional

Marxism? His claim that "there is now good reason to support a conspiracy theory" would tend to suggest this. On the other hand, much of his analysis suggests that he, in line with other critics, sees the state sandwiched between contradictory influences. It is buffeted on the one side by organised labour and socialist political movements, demanding the extension of citizenship rights, and on the other by private and corporate capital whose owners want to resist government attempts to procure income to provide community services supportive of those rights. Getting the analysis right, whether it approximates to one of those just mentioned or is different again, is crucially important for education for citizenship. For instance, taking the first view might lead to the conclusion that the way forward is to destroy the capitalist class and build a new kind of economic order and society. This would require an account of the way in which the capitalist class is to be disposed, a careful delineation of the new order—including an account of "real equality, real autonomy and real democracy"—as well as a defence of any proposed wholesale construction of social institutions against "utopianism". Alternatively, if, as Harris seems to, one accepts that power and privilege have yielded to political pressure in the past and could continue to do so, then a rather different citizenship education is required. Certainly recent evidence seems to suggest that "economic development contributes most to welfare when guided by an effective public authority that guarantees civil, political and social rights to all and is thus open to pressure by effective political mobilisation" (Doyal and Gough 1994; see also Doyal and Gough 1991). So perhaps on this analysis citizenship education should have in view a mixed economy with appropriate employment, health, educational, and arts policies.

Giarelli's major obstacle, too, needs a more probing analysis before one can judge what, for him, stands in the way of education for citizenship. Giarelli talks of the traditional valorization of public and private, the productive and reproductive spheres. Concretely for citizenship education we need to know if he has in mind, for instance, the designation of some tasks as private unpaid tasks—bringing up children, looking after the house, looking after sick members of the family—whilst other tasks are public and have a remuneration attached to them. Or is the crucial obstacle the linkage of this distinction with the idea of gender-specific roles, with which it has been linked historically but from which it is separable? Questions about the best ways of raising children, equitably distributing housework have occasioned lively and ingenious contemporary debate which clearly bears on citizenship education (see eg. Okin 1989; Nussbaum 1992; Delphy and Leonard 1992).

What is at issue in these and other writings is a revisionary look at who does the work in the public and private spheres and how that work is regarded and valued. That seems clearly different from a wholesale collapsing of the public/private distinction which it seems Giarelli may have in mind at the end of his paper when he claims that every distinction masks power and

claims of privilege. But is that so? Fruit and vegetables? Deciduous and evergreen trees? And if it is often the case with social categories at least, does it follow that all such distinctions should be collapsed? What of those cases where the distinctions are designed to privilege the unfortunate and the weak in the distribution of some benefit—food in times of rationing, seats on trains? In the case in point, the public/private distinction, what would a collapsing of the distinction entail? Would it mean the end of any notion of a private sphere at all—the end of intimate friendships and private diaries as well as private fishing rights or private slaves? A private sphere may be necessary to support some of the most cherished goods in human life. It may also serve to hide some of the worst abuses. An investigation is needed which indicates how we can have the one without the other.

This leads to a puzzle. Giarelli draws attention to the difficulty of establishing an education for citizenship in a society which has divided starting-points and aims. What is unclear to me is how a collapsing, or even a revision, of the public/private distinction is going to help here. Any attempt to redraw the public/private distinction is likely to cut across the values groups within the society place on family life or local loyalties, thus producing more discord.

Obstacles, Evils, and Pessimism

Harris and Giarelli depict the obstacles standing in the way of citizenship education as large-scale and general—capitalism and a division of life into spheres to shore up privilege and power. This has several effects. It leads to a conception of citizenship education as at best a struggle for victory over great evils, and as, at worst, impossible. It leads to understandable pessimism about this area of education, since it seems the school can do little, except make its students aware of the situation in which they find themselves. Since this is a task requiring a sophisticated understanding of social and political arrangements it can only come in the later years of schooling. In the early years, for Harris as for Giarelli, there seems to be no possibility of citizenship education.

But perhaps the situation is not so stark and thus the outlook not so bleak. Perhaps closer inspection of the obstacles can give grounds for realistic hope. It can encourage a political attitude that aims "not at ending evils, but at preventing their victory" (Seneca, quoted in Nussbaum, 1990, p. 213). This is not to say that it is an attitude which is *tolerant* of evil but it is one which stresses the importance of fostering what good there may be. To that end it cannot rest with large abstractions: it has to try to see more of the detail of our political and social life to foster the good in the face of the pervasive obstacles to it.

Opportunities and Democratic Dispositions

Contemporary liberal democracies are, as Harris allows, different from totalitarian governments. There are, as Giarelli accepts, some possibilities for virtue in some areas of life. I want to argue that the institution of the school needs to exploit these opportunities to establish its own ethos, supportive of the basic dispositions underlying democratic citizenship.

Democrats certainly need considerable knowledge and understanding of their situation, as Harris rightly emphasises, but they also need to be certain sorts of people. We all develop an array of dispositions—to be kind or spiteful, lethargic or enterprising, tolerant or bigoted, tidy or untidy and so on—in all kinds of combinations and to all kinds of degrees. With education for public life in mind, therefore, teachers from the first school onwards need to look at the part the school might play in shaping the dispositions democratic citizens require (See Callan 1994, for a similar view which sees the cultivation of civic dispositions, like "emotional generosity," as a viable and wise alternative to a sentimental civic education or alienated scepticism).

A full treatment of this topic, covering the great range of relevant dispositions (self-respect, tolerance, honesty, hope, courage, patience) is impossible in this context but let me try to make some specific remarks about what, for me, would be one of the "multiple excellences" Giarelli refers to as necessary to a public. For the way forward, it seems to me, is via the concrete and specific.

Let me focus on trust, which I have discussed in detail elsewhere (White 1993). Trust, both personal trust in other people and social trust in institutions, is vital to human life (see Gambetta 1988). Indeed Baier (1985) has suggested that a moral theory (or family of theories) that made trust its central problem might be a way of bringing together the insights of those currently alternative theories which put obligation and caring at the centre of consideration.

In a pluralist multicultural society, in particular, the school has a major role to play in helping students to become trustworthy, to learn to trust others, and to have a proper trust and distrust of institutions.

Trust involves the belief that you can rely on someone (specifically, their beliefs, dispositions, motives, good will) or something (an institution or a piece of equipment) where there is a greater or lesser element of risk. One may or may not be conscious of the trust relationship and it will involve varying degrees of personal commitment.

Learning to trust another person typically has no definite beginning and grows slowly. By contrast, trust relationships can be destroyed by a single action and are not easily repaired, for those wronged are likely to be resentful, disappointed, and suspicious. Both Baier (1986, p. 238–9) and Luhmann

(1979, p. 74-5) have sensitive treatments of the supporting attitudes needed to maintain and repair trust relationships. Between them they stress, for instance, self-confidence, tact, delicacy of discrimination in appreciating *what* one is trusted with, good judgement as to *whom* to trust with *what* and a willingness to forgive and admit fault.

Schools can do much to help children to form, maintain and, when necessary, repair trust relationships. In many inner city schools in the U.K. some children come to the first school already disposed to be distrustful of other groups and so a sensitive building of trust has to start from the outset. Without such bonds of trust neither fullhearted tolerance nor any bonds of civic friendship will be possible.

No society, much less a pluralist democracy, could survive simply on the basis of personal trust between individuals. It requires a basis of social trust. By analogy with personal trust, citizens need to believe that they can rely on the institutions within which they are living to be informed by goodwill towards all members of society. It seems to be a necessary condition for social trust that citizens do not regard their society as structurally unfair (Dunn 1988, p. 77). Concretely they need to believe that the society's legal, economic, and political rules and procedures are fair, being fairly applied and that if the system breaks down there will be swift redress for any wrong.

At this point the wide-ranging critiques of contemporary societies Harris and Giarelli have offered might suggest that social trust in such societies would be sparse. Distrust amongst the majority of the population as well as amongst minority groups would be likely to be widespread. Is the role of the school here to attempt to paper over the cracks and encourage social trust in institutions operating, for instance, in class-biased, gender-biased and ethnically-biased ways?

The short answer is no. The school, along with other major institutions, will be encouraging a judicious distrust of the system. As Luhmann (1979) and others (eg. Shklar 1984, p. 185, 190) have noted, a political system which will promote the well-being of all its citizens must have institutions into which distrust as a protective device has been built. Democracies have a legal opposition, an independent judiciary, independent commissions of inquiry into matters of public concern, a free press and, if educators have done their work, a vigilant public who will judge the government by what it does rather than its rhetoric.

Schools will be introducing their students in this context to the possibility of fundamental and procedural distrust. Fundamental distrust is directed to the aims or ends of a system or institution, procedural distrust to means and procedures. Institutions can tolerate large amounts of procedural distrust if their basic aims are accepted but fundamental distrust is a powerful destructive force. A nuanced political education will introduce students to both of these notions via work on, for instance, reasons for trusting democratic sys-

tems in general and specific versions of democracy in particular. If the ends and/or procedures of these were changed, it might be asked, might they merit greater trust? In addition it will encourage students to examine the criteria citizens might employ to judge how far they should trust parties, politicians or specific institutions within a system—again focussing on ends and procedures.

But this is just to scratch the surface of the complex issues involved in encouraging personal and social trust in school in the contemporary situation. It is a topic which clearly merits further wide-ranging investigation as well as careful treatment in teacher education. Several teachers have pointed out to me that in a situation where social trust may be breaking down, the common school can offer a unique forum where young people can be encouraged rationally to take stock of whether distrust of some, most or all of our current institutions should be fundamental or whether repair and reform is the path more likely to produce more good than harm. The school occupies this privileged site because it is in a position to foster personal trust between students from different groups so that debate and dialogue take place between people who have come to see each other as trustworthy, even if trustworthy advocates of radically opposed viewpoints.

I have chosen to focus on trust because it seems to me that much of the analysis of Harris and Giarelli would support the view that in many of the older and newer aspiring democracies there is, for very good reasons, a crisis of trust in the system; I hope I have shown however, that even in this unpromising situation the school need not be powerless to educate for public life. It can promote personal trust between its members and it can encourage a thoughtful analysis of social trust and how it might be maintained, repaired or restored. It can focus here both on the wider society and also, importantly, because it can serve instructively as a responsive model, on the school itself.

In order to deal with the topic with the specificity and concreteness I have urged is required, I have had here to concentrate on just one aspect of the way in which an attention to relevant dispositions can contribute positively to citizenship education. Linked to trust are connected dispositions, like hope and self-respect, which the school can seek to encourage in all its pupils (see White 1986, 1991 for detailed treatments). On hope, for instance, if any worthwhile change is going to be possible, people have to feel realistic hope (rather than have, say, be in the grip of apathetic cynicism or wishful thinking) and they have to feel that they are able to bring about such change. (Beyond this, I can do no more than gesture towards a growing body of work, both by philosophers of education and philosophers with other interests, on the specific dispositions which teachers and schools might be encouraging: Baier (1986, 1990) on trust and honesty; Bok on honesty and secrecy, (1978, 1984); Callan (1993) on patience and courage; Nussbaum (1993) on mercy; Rorty (1986) on courage; and Taylor (1985) on pride, shame, and guilt.)

Teachers, Democratic Dispositions, and Public Life

On a view which assigns particular importance to the fostering of democratic dispositions teachers have a crucial role. Encouraging children to be patient, courageous, merciful, and honest "at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way," in Aristotelian fashion, requires careful, perceptive attention to individual children and their attitudes, actions and situation as well as to the school and the way its organisation and rules, intentionally or otherwise, shape behaviour.

It also requires of the teacher that she increasingly brings home to students as they get older, that on occasion life as a citizen in a democracy is not easy. The more successful the education in democratic dispositions and the more the student becomes a merciful, courageous person the more she will feel the tug of different values. In fact, the teacher will be encouraging this by typically saying in response to a remark which seems to be stressing one value in a situation to the exclusion of all other considerations: "But don't you think that it's more complicated than that?" A school student, for instance, may want to take a strong line on the importance of truth-telling at all times and in all circumstances. And although, in the U.K., recent curriculum guidelines on spiritual and moral education (1993) support this by referring to truth-telling as a moral absolute, any teacher worth her salt should draw attention to the possibility that other values which the student also holds dear may sometimes prove weightier than honesty. Where others' well-being is seriously at risk, for instance, reticence (pace Kant) may be wiser than the whole truth.

I have focussed in my part of this conversation on obstacles to education for democratic citizenship and the light they can throw on the aims of citizenship education. What I see as one of the greatest obstacles to education for citizenship is the teacher who is committed to a single value, or a fixed hierarchy of values, who is very clear about what is wrong with the world and how it can be put right and who sees it as her duty to encourage her students to see the world in this way. Democratic citizenship demands teachers who on occasion complicate matters for their students, who remind them that they are committed to a number of values; this fact makes the way forward more problematic than it might have seemed at first. The skill is to do this in such a way that students see that democratic citizens should not be paralysed in the face of competing commitments, but that they need to judge and act in the light of them. This may mean that they attempt to effect a compromise. It may mean sometimes that they, regretfully, are simply not able to satisfy a particular moral concern. The "regretfully" is very important here because it registers the commitment to the value which has had to be overridden. As Bernard Williams puts it, it "embodies a sensibility to moral costs" (Williams 1978, p. 65). Conveying to students a lively appreciation of

the idea of moral costs should be a central aim in any education for democratic citizenship.

I am left with a puzzle. Would such a teacher be one of the "transformative intellectuals" or would she constitute an obstacle for them?

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PART THREE

EXPANDING/ EXPLODING THE "CANON"
