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ABSTRACT

In this essay I question the liberal faith in the efficacy and morality of citizenship education (CE) as it has been traditionally (and is still) practiced in most public state schools. In challenging institutionalized faith in CE, I also challenge liberal understandings of what it means to be a citizen, and how the social and political world of citizens is constituted. I interrogate CE as defended in the liberal tradition, with particular attention to Gutmann's 'conscious social reproduction'. I argue that CE in practice does not operate on the bases of non-repression or non-discrimination, and has weak claims for legitimacy. In fact, CE in many forms reproduces social inequalities, and contributes to the expulsion of disadvantaged students from schools and from the ranks of recognized citizens.

KEYWORDS

Liberalism; citizenship education; inequality; Gutmann; dissent

More than any other public institution, schools are assigned the task of producing 'good citizens', ensuring that when children grow up and leave school, and perhaps even before, they are prepared (even if not necessarily inclined) to practise the civic virtues most valued in their respective societies. Illustratively, Macedo (2000) observes that nothing less than the 'core purpose of public schooling is to promote civic ideals' (p. 122). Among these civic ideals or aims is to inculcate basic knowledge and understanding about state institutions and the purposes of government. This liberal model of civic education, which continues to prevail across contemporary North / South American and European school systems, but also elsewhere in South and East Asia, Australia and parts of the Middle East, mirrors to a large degree Marshall's (1950) model, wherein social citizenship, the highest form of citizenship, rests on political participation and access for all to the enjoyment of civil rights.

This belief that schools can and must achieve these ends of civic education is very deeply held. And across the world state / public schools, through one or another form of citizenship education, manage to provide young people with at least a minimal understanding of their respective political systems, basic constitutional rights, the purposes of government, and some direction – explicit or not – toward becoming citizens. Additionally, many will agree that schools generally succeed in facilitating modest forms of 'civic engagement', such as student government and community service.[1]

At the same time, however, the question of who means what by 'citizenship', 'civic education', or even 'civility' remains very much contested.[2] For instance, there is evidence to suggest that that citizenship policy and discourse is an elitist and racialized discourse (Eksner & Nur Chemma, 2017; Gillborn, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2004).[3] Further, it has been argued that citizenship education policy as expressed in curricula and classrooms tends to reduce to basic knowledge about political institutions, and – in part owing to the values and cultural practices of its teachers and administrators – generally rewards students who demonstrate both moral and intellectual conformity (Merry, 2018; Osler & Starkey, 2000; Pykett, 2007). Hence there are reasons to be skeptical about whether schools are capable of doing what many claim they ought to do with respect to citizenship, not to mention whether the core principles invoked to justify citizenship education are tenable in the first place.

In the scholarly literature there is a broad range of ideals, conceptions, and measures of citizenship put forward by political scientists and theorists, social and political psychologists, as well as civic education scholars. A coherent analysis does not permit me to examine each of these. Instead, I will focus my attention on liberal philosophical conceptions of citizenship education, and reconstruct and synthesize what I believe to be the most prominent and influential views. The reason for focusing on *liberal* views of citizenship is simple: both inside and outside the academy, liberal views arguably receive the most attention and sustained defense. Indeed, in the political science, political theory and political philosophy literatures, it is liberal views that have long dominated the field; liberal understandings of citizenship in educational theory also continue to enjoy unrivaled influence. Thus by critically examining liberal notions of citizenship education, this article aims to scrutinize the liberal understandings of what it means to be a citizen, and how the social and political world of citizens is constituted.

After expounding the liberal conceptions of citizenship education, both on theoretical as well as evidential grounds, I argue that these liberal conceptions are both morally and politically problematic inasmuch as they depend upon an imposed and coercive conditioning that undermines the very legitimacy they aim to ensure. I further argue that efforts to rescue citizenship education by appeals to dissent are empirically naïve for what they suppose about schools, where dissent is most often interpreted as misbehavior, and whose institutional design resists any outcome other than the status quo. The article concludes by reflecting on why all of this should matter for, inter alia, researchers, policy makers and teachers who are concerned with, and invested in, the furtherance of citizenship education.

Liberal conceptions of citizenship

Among theorists who explicitly link citizenship to its educational precursors, most believe that normative theories of liberal citizenship represent understandings that are essential to the education every child should receive; indeed it should feature prominently in the curricula and instruction of all public schools (Callan, 1997; Clayton, 2006; Galston, 1991; Gutmann, 1999; Levinson, 1999; Macedo, 2000; Macmullen, 2015; Williams, 2003). While there continues to be a lively theoretical debate among both political scientists and political philosophers concerning the precise meanings, requirements and scope of

citizenship, in discussions on *citizenship education*, Amy Gutmann's views are emblematic of the liberal sensibility. More than that, her views about the importance of setting a high bar for citizenship have strongly influenced academic discussion over the past three decades. I therefore give her work special consideration.

At the heart of Gutmann's civic education narrative is the idea of 'conscious social reproduction' (CSR), consisting in knowledge about the political institutions and processes that make liberal democratic institutions possible, as well as the attitudes and dispositions necessary for constructing, maintaining, participating in, but also critiquing the power structures or modes of governance. In order to facilitate CSR, citizens need to come into contact with a plurality of individuals and their ideas from which they can reflect, make comparative judgments, and take decisive action. Further, citizens will need to cultivate the capacities for critical self-consciousness, a kind of moral reasoning necessary for discussing and debating on complex social and political issues. Citizens also will need to cultivate the appropriate civic virtues necessary for public deliberation, the idea that disagreements and disputes should be non-coercively settled using methods of discussion in which arguments and evidence for or against a position are considered on terms of equal status and recognition.

It is important to stress that this is very much an *ideal* theory, insofar as it does not presuppose an existing school or social environment in which this kind of learning or self-cultivation actually occurs. But it is also important to note that Gutmann simultaneously presupposes some unspecified kind of learning theory, with complementary environment, that would facilitate the work necessary to potentially realize these ideals.

A capacity for deliberation roughly describes the ability to engage with others on matters of social and political importance in a respectful manner, exhibiting a give-and-take that recognizes both the significance and seriousness of other points of view. Where principled differences exist, deliberation stresses the importance of finding common ground. Deliberation should be contextually sensitive but must proceed rationally, permitting only 'publicly accessible' reasons. Echoing Gutmann, Clayton (2006) maintains that civic education will prepare –

> deliberative citizens [to] display a set of skills and virtues related to deliberative interaction: skills related to articulating a position and the reasons for its affirmation; listening skills; the ability charitably to understand the views of others; analytical skills that facilitate a critical assessment of different positions; an appreciation of the benefits of exchanging ideas; and a commitment to reason rather than to employ attractive slogans or rhetoric. (p. 147)

Finally, integral to Gutmann's notion of civic education are two supporting principles, viz., non-repression and non-discrimination. *Non-repression* entails emphasizing the importance of consideration for views that do not enjoy widespread support. In other words, non-repression requires that room be left for *dissent*. Meanwhile, *non-discrimination*, entails universal access to a political education adequate for participating in democratic politics (cf. Satz, 2007). Each of these elements is tied together by the principle of *legitimacy*, which means that publicly accessible reasons are necessary for procuring uncoerced consent and validating collective agreements, ones used to reproduce the political offices and institutions necessary for political stability (cf. Macmullen, 2015).

Much more could be said about Gutmann's or any other liberal theory of citizenship, but those supplementary details – such as the specific content or methods that ought

to be used to best facilitate or express these ideas – are not necessary to capture what are undoubtedly the most important, foundational, and widely-shared principles.

Citizenship theory and practice: mind the gap

Most normative theorists working in this field, including Gutmann, are well aware that the citizenship education on offer in schools fails miserably to correspond to their prescriptions. Indeed, much of the normative work in this field is motivated by precisely such an awareness. Neither are these same theorists naïve concerning how difficult it is in practice to insulate schools from other social forces so that they can assist in cultivating, say, critical thinking and the ability to conceive and fair-mindedly evaluate incremental changes to the current political status quo.

Accordingly, liberal theorists generally regard 'dissent' – derivative of the principle of non-repression – as a necessity within democratic societies. Schools, they argue, must teach students how to exercise this prerogative. For instance, Levinson (2012) hearkens back explicitly to Dewey's notion that citizenship education ought to prepare students *for* democracy, not just teach them *about* democracy. She situates her arguments in the context of contemporary political struggle and its attendant rhetoric, where its primary purpose is to help remedy inequality and injustice, to close what she calls the 'civic empowerment gap.' Civic education, enacted through curricula and 'progressive' pedagogy, is conceived as potentially emancipatory for the 'disempowered', as the lever by which to finally achieve the promises of democracy. Citizenship education becomes, then, a component of a more general, transformational multicultural education (Banks & McGee Banks, 2009; Osler, 2000), and a critical social studies education that seeks to teach students about the 'true' history of their respective countries, rather than the mythic history to which students are routinely exposed in traditional textbooks.

Now some of the 'skills necessary for dissent' that liberal theorists have in mind represent respectable, if modest, endeavors; they include a willingness to empathically consider perspectives one does not agree with, or the aim to cultivate the ability to assess the merits of counter-arguments and evidence. Nobody is required to change their mind. On the other hand, many of the skills seem akin to the bland 'civic competences' frameworks promoted by empirical researchers writing on the subject (Amnå, 2012; Geboers, Admiraal, Geijsel, & ten Dam, 2015), or the knowledge and skills of deliberative argumentation often promoted by social studies advocates (Hess, 2009; Parker, 2003), leaving one to wonder how far-reaching the resulting dissent could be. The basic position these scholars assume is that we live in a world of many perspectives and values, and that we as individuals cannot take them all for our own, but the aim is that we not only learn to get along with one another but also come to better understand and appreciate our differences, and work toward a consensus-building necessary for political stability.

Though many theorists, too, explicitly recommend community organizing, power analysis, and action civics, dissent in this classroom scenario generally serves the cognitive function of making alternative viewpoints visible, as arguments, but dissent does not signify – let alone allow for – permanent alienation or conflict. The goal of dissent, in the liberal paradigm, is to supplement rational deliberation, not to replace it with the demand to make a decision on political grounds, that is, on the basis of power (cf. Mouffe, 2005). Indeed, liberal dissent appears to imply little more than respectful

disagreement with a particular policy, or set of policies, favored by a ruling political party. But dissent is never construed as principled opposition to the existing economic and political order. That is to say, the 'decisions' arising out of deliberative dialogue rarely include, let alone represent, the views of the dissenters (Fricker, 2007; Hickey & Pauli-Myler, 2017; Sanders, 1997; Young, 2000). Without at least a preference for the efficacy of dissent, decisions tend to be made on the basis of power, which resides outside the bounded framework of the dialogue.

Accordingly, other proponents of civic education (e.g. Stitzlein, 2012; Zembylas, 2011) – who may identify themselves 'progressive', 'agonistic', or even 'radical' instead of liberal – want to go further and foreground dissent as the most critical element in 'democratic education'. Attempting to step outside the normative framework of philosophical formulations like Gutmann's, these educators recognize that real schools are often governed by competition rather than cooperation, that labeling practices and tracking mechanisms assign children to altogether different school experiences, and that standards and testing discourage deliberative dialogue and encourage compliance and conformity. They have not missed the fact that speaking truth to power in schools most often does not end well for the speakers, especially when these speakers do not inhabit the social identities with the presumptive legitimacy to speak.

Underlying these recognitions, however, lies a resolute adherence to the core liberal positions regarding citizenship. Thus even when criticizing liberal conceptions of citizenship, many of the same normative theorists continue to hold fast to the idea that state / public schools are somehow uniquely capable of sowing the seeds of free and equal citizenship, and that schools ideally ought to serve as incubators for the cultivation of moral character, not only where it is possible to reflect upon a variety of different ideas about the good life, but also where possibilities for mutual respect abound.

This faith follows from the belief that state / public schools have a special civic mission, as Macedo's earlier remark underscores, but also because schools are thought to bring children together from different backgrounds, and the differences children bring with them to school help to facilitate thoughtful encounters with others who espouse different conceptions of the good life, which in turn will encourage reflection upon one's own beliefs and assumptions. Sociologist Bischoff (2016) expresses this faith with characteristic liberal optimism:

> Schools play a unique role in civic education as compulsory, structured, non-familial institutional affiliations for young people … [they serve] as an alternate political sphere for children – an institutional context where schools provide, to varying degrees, opportunities for students to practice leadership skills, volunteerism, and to closely interact with other individuals who hold different views, live different lifestyles, and engage in different activities in and out of school. Schools might be viewed as children's workplace, their civic domain, and a place where they can effect change. (pp. 95, 98)

The meaningful encounters with different opinions, preferences and lifestyles that Bischoff describes are meant to encourage reflection upon one's own beliefs and assumptions, i.e. to assist in fostering autonomy, an idea I return to later.

I will have more to say about the liberal principles themselves below, but for now my point is simply that the faith liberal theorists exhibit in civic education leans heavily toward the ahistorical, given many of the dubious purposes for which schools were designed

(Anyon, 1980; Bernstein, 1975; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Coons, Clune, & Sugarman, 1970; Goodman, 1962; Holt, 1969; Ilich, 1970; Jackson, 1968; Katz, 1968; Labaree, 2012; Macleod, 1995; Willis, 1977). Most liberal advocates of citizenship education are of course not ignorant of this history, or these dubious purposes, but they nevertheless consistently exhibit a non-critical faith in the power of schools to produce 'good citizens'. In doing so, they conveniently elide the conditions of deep inequality that are endemic to schools, and indeed to entire school systems. They also generally elide the copious ways that national educational systems sanitize, even patently falsify, their own histories in order to encourage loyalty to a favored view of the past and the privileged place of the majority population in that narrative. And so, for example, while his comments refer to the North American context, Murphy's (2007) observations are just as applicable to much of northern Europe. He writes:

> It should be no surprise that in order to teach civic values, [textbooks] in every epoch have sanitized, distorted, and falsified history, literature, and social studies to inculcate racism; nationalism; every manner of religious, cultural, and class bigotry; Anglo-Saxon superiority, [imperialism], Social Darwinism, anti-Catholicism, and anti-intellectualism. (p. 660)

My point here is *not* that the gap between the empirical 'is' and the normative 'ought' leaves us with no ways of imagining real improvements. Indeed, absent ideals, it is difficult to imagine meaningful reform on any front. I am therefore very much aware that the normative descriptions offered by liberals capture not the schools we *have*, but the schools its authors believe we *need*. But as I aim to demonstrate in the next section, the difficulties with liberal conceptions of citizenship education run deeper than this.

Liberal citizenship revisited

Allow me to return to Gutmann's (1999) idea of CSR, which requires that individuals come into meaningful contact with others from different backgrounds on terms of equal status and recognition; cultivating the capacity for critical self-consciousness; and engaging with others in a process known as 'deliberation' for the purposes of democratic decision-making. The reader may remember that for Gutmann CSR not only will supply students with the attitudes and dispositions necessary for constructing, maintaining and participating in democratic decision-making; it also putatively will equip students with the dispositions to critique power structures and modes of governance – in other words, a capacity for dissent.

The problem, I maintain, is that virtually all of the evidence points in the opposite direction. Indeed the difficulties with Gutmann's theory, or any other liberal variant of civic education, are not only evidential; the principles themselves do not hold up under scrutiny. I begin with the principles. For the sake of brevity, I limit my focus to some difficulties with *political stability* and *legitimacy*.

Principles

The interdependent features of *political stability* and *legitimacy* are noteworthy in liberal citizenship theory, both for what the former implies about the necessity of maintaining the status quo, as well as for what the latter implies about the faith liberals have that

the consent offered by citizens hasn't been coercively conditioned in the first place. Now, of course, 'instability', on the standard liberal account, occurs when laws and institutional practices are found to be unjust and undesirable; this state of affairs is then meant to provoke protest and change so that a state of stability can once again be reached. Thus stability, the argument runs, is not desired so that the state can maintain power, but rather so that citizens can function smoothly within it, content with the laws that reflect their will. So political stability, to borrow a Rawlsian phrase, can be fostered for the 'right reasons'. Even so, when liberal theorists assert that the purpose of citizenship education is to 'ensure the stability and preservation of the liberal state', or to 'give citizens the ability to participate effectively in the political sphere', it is not only difficult to conceive of any room for dissent against the political and economic systems we have – be they in Taiwan, Lebanon, South Africa, or Greece; it is difficult to conceive of any political activity at all that does not conform to that which the state has expressly allowed.

But the difficulties with liberal citizenship theory do not merely concern whether or not political stability conforms to the right kind of reasons, or whether or not dissent in any meaningful sense is permitted. The real moral conundrum concerns whether the authority of the state can be legitimate in the first place when that same authority is used to instill the very educational content deemed by the state essential for manifesting 'good citizenship'. If legitimate political authority requires the free and authentic consent of the governed, then the very consent of the citizenry on which legitimacy rests is dubious when it has been imposed and conditioned by the state. Brighouse (1998) articulates this objection succinctly:

> Something is puzzling about the idea that liberal states may regulate the educational curriculum by mandating a civic education aimed at inculcating the values on which liberalism is based and behaviors which sustain it [and thus] what confidence can we have in a judgment of how much conscience to cede to a body which we know has deliberately shaped our judgment to cede? (pp. 719, 723)

Brighouse suggests that liberals might solve this quandary either by getting out of the citizenship business altogether, or else by according less priority to legitimacy as a regulating principle. He repudiates both. On the one hand, he says, schools have a proper role to play in fostering healthy civic outcomes; on the other hand, he argues, legitimacy ought not to be tossed aside as a rudimentary liberal principle simply because it is inconvenient for achieving some other aim. Consent can only authentic when the *principles themselves* can be meaningfully scrutinized and assessed.

Brighouse's remedy is to introduce the idea of an 'autonomy-facilitating' education that would (somehow) operate independently of citizenship education. He understands autonomy to entail developing the capacity to compare, consider and choose from among a range of options for oneself; to formulate a conception of the good; having made considered choices and developed a conception of the good from among a range of options; and finally, to govern oneself on the strength of considered alternatives, remaining open to the possibility of revising one's commitments with the passage of time. The virtues of autonomy will also presumably enable persons to exhibit 'public reasonableness', i.e. the capacity to evaluate different points of view, and to respectfully engage in deliberation and debate with others with whom one does not agree. And thus with respect to citizenship, an autonomy-facilitating education would encourage, but not

require, children to subject their beliefs to rational criticism, perhaps especially those that require informed and authentic consent to a government whose function also entails shaping consent.

In light of the demands of autonomy delineated above, it is curious that Brighouse appears unworried about the prior non-autonomous inculcation of liberal democratic principles. He argues that consent to those principles *becomes* authentic, i.e. autonomously espoused, once young people are encouraged to devote 'an appropriate amount of critical attention' to them. But in addition to this unhelpfully imprecise formulation, the bar he sets for 'authenticity' is so low that nearly everyone is able to satisfy it. And in any case, 'autonomous consent' as he formulates it does not seem capable of escaping the paradox of *conditioned* consent, which dilutes the meaning and value of legitimacy on which the state's authority to mandate civic education putatively rests. Nor, finally, does an 'autonomy-facilitating' education seem a likely outcome of schooling tout court, in particular for those subject to harm by its institutional practices designed to apportion rank and opportunity.

Evidence

Moving now to the evidence, suppose we take the first condition of CSR – meaningful contact with others different from oneself – there is little reason to be optimistic that the vast majority of schools in *any* country can satisfy this condition, let alone develop meaningful interactions under prevailing conditions of mutual recognition and respect, given the high indices of segregation between and within neighborhoods and between and within schools (Johnston, Poulsen, & Forrest, 2007); given the deliberate ways in which bureaucratic school organization ensures minimum contact through selection, tracking and grouping (Gamoran & Mare, 1989); given the ways in which peer groups function (Hattie, 2002); and finally given what we know about middle-class parental behavior, in particular the lengths to which well-educated (but especially white) parents will go in order to avoid their child attending a school with 'too many' poor (but especially non-white) children (Brantlinger, 2003; Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Norman, 2017; Roda & Wells, 2013).

Taken together, these things mean that beyond the primary school most children seldom interact with others from a different cultural, social class or religious background in any substantive way. And it is an open secret that school systems facilitate this.[4] For example, by the time most children reach the age of 12 in many European countries, a single test score (sometimes mediated by a teacher's advice) largely determines whether one will attend classes with others very different from oneself. These institutional norms also dictate that the possibilities for cultivating 'critical consciousness' – at least for young people belonging to the majority group – are few and far between.

Or suppose we consider again the principle of non-discrimination. Remember that this concerns access to a 'political education adequate for participating in democratic politics' But considering that schools don't typically supply students with much more than basic knowledge and understanding of the constitution, the electoral system, or the voting right, the upshot is in fact a form of political education that aspires to political stability, which almost by definition will favor dominant ways of thought and action.[5] Meanwhile, with respect to the principle of non-repression – whose ostensible purpose is to allow for unpopular points of view – again, all evidence points toward schools *repressing* dissent, not

encouraging it. Indeed the empirical evidence (e.g. Francis & Mills, 2012; Harber, 2009; Hodgson, 2018) each year documents innumerable instances of what Banks (2015) has called 'failed citizenship', where mostly poor, mostly minority youth continue to disengage from whatever schools are trying to teach them about how to be a 'proper' citizen. While it remains the fashion in some quarters to refer to these children as 'at risk', 'dropouts', or 'school leavers', educational researchers have been demonstrating for more than half a century that it is more accurate to say that these students are *pushed out of school*, and not only into a world where the 'good citizenship' of stigmatized groups is routinely questioned, but more generally into a world of structural exclusion and diminished opportunities that awaits those without academic credentials and skills (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010; Mallett, 2017; Noguera, 2009; Payne, 2008). The upshot is this: the CSR of democracy liberal theorists like Gutmann envisioned that public schools would provide everyone was long ago revealed as the social reproduction of inequality[6] (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Coleman, 1966; Jencks, 1972). Neither liberal theorists nor empirical researchers of citizenship should be surprised by any of this; indeed, the preponderance of educational research from the past 60 years consistently documents the ways in which schools are designed to prevent 'democratic education' from ever getting off the ground.

Citizenship education: a modest pars construens

None of what I have argued means that schools have nothing to offer, or that the social reproduction of inequality is the whole story. After all, the state / public school possesses the institutional means to offset many harms; for instance, many school systems provide free health services, meals, and remedial tutoring; many schools have passionate teachers and mentoring programs; many school systems provide free access to computers, books and extracurricular activities; and provided that children have access to many years of good quality education, schools can provide a path to future economic self-reliance. I do not deny any of that.

Nor should my criticisms be taken to mean that there is zero possibility for reform or resistance, or that 'success stories' do not occasionally appear.[7] Formal education has certainly contributed to the improvement of the lives of those historically consigned to the domains of the illiterate and innumerate, with concomitant limitations on well-being across the spectrum, and to whatever measure of social and economic mobility allowed by our capitalist order. The skills and knowledge necessary for effective political resistance are no doubt one, though likely unintended, product of schooling.

That citizenship curricula and democratic pedagogy has in many cases positive effects I also do not contest. Indeed, I have no substantive critique of the plenitude of educational programs and curricula whose intent is to teach students about the Environment, or about community service, or to learn about the purposes of government, or to understand one's basic constitutional rights, or how to engage in respectful, constructive dialogue. Many schools succeed well enough in covering these basics. This kind of education, when it is permitted, has the potential to help produce a next generation of voters with a better understanding of government, even democracy, than the current generation in many countries has evinced recently.

And finally, nothing in my argument entails opposing political education; indeed, without some kind of political education, we could hardly expect institutional reform or

progress. Even dissent-oriented political education, though uncommon, can occur in school. To take an American example, not a few high school history and social studies teachers incorporate reading material and discussion that challenges the dominant – and quite explicitly patriotic – narrative. This is a narrative, Loewen (1995) reminds us in his book *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, where 'the authors of history textbooks have taken us on a trip of their own, away from the facts of history, into the realm of myth. They and we have been duped by an outrageous concoction of lies, half-truths, truths, and omissions' (pp. 32–33). Loewen's book offers a corrective to the fictions and distortions of American history[8] that has paid too little attention to the patriotic significance of dissent, or to the folly of believing that any criticism directed against the United States is 'un-American'.

Moving out of the classroom, political protest, too, can occur on school grounds. In late 2017, for instance, parents joined students in York, UK to protest against school inaction in combating violence against LGBTQ students.[9] Across the Atlantic, in early 2018 hundreds of thousands of American high school students walked out of their school buildings to protest gun violence;[10] not long afterward, high school students in many American cities walked out to protest the arrests of 'dreamers', i.e. undocumented children whose parents at one point had illegally crossed the border from Mexico, and consequently whose citizenship status remains unclear. Given how these events impacted entire communities, many teachers and administrators, too, lent their moral support.

Notwithstanding these inspiring examples, three things should be borne in mind. First, protests on high school campuses are comparatively rare given the absence of freedom to undertake political action without fear of punishment. Second, owing to time and curricular constraints, but also a general unease about broaching politically sensitive issues, few teachers are inclined to engage students in 'deliberative' discussions in classrooms where opinions vary on controversial issues.[11] Third, political reform and progress generally occurs not because of a coercive, state-directed, curriculum-based citizenship education, but rather *in spite of it*.

And thus while schools have an important function to play in supplying children with some of the civic basics, we should not expect that citizenship education, as currently practised or as articulated by its defenders, will likely ever permit challenges to the institutional status quo. Schools and school systems are not designed for this purpose, but rather to inculcate dispositions in pupils to 'abide by the law' and to 'support fundamental political arrangements'. And notice that this is precisely what liberal citizenship theories exhort us to do.[12] Indeed the imagined schools that foster civic respect, deliberation and 'shared fate', or that encourage dissent, or that allow for a critique of power structures and modes of governance are quite remote to the experiences of most youth everywhere. Teachers and schools that do persist in this idealist approach invariably find themselves at loggerheads with the ways in which citizenship education of whatever kind is devised by ministries and superintendents of education, and handed down for implementation in classrooms.

In light of the above, and in addition to continuing with the modest citizenship curricula that schools already use, it strikes me as a more promising strategy to simply focus on *making our schools more just institutions*. School systems designed to foster justice, at a minimum, would require that children not have their educational experiences determined by their postcode, their ethnic status, first language or family wealth; school systems designed to foster justice would also ensure that some mechanisms are in place to

guarantee that some are not unduly advantaged or disadvantaged, where their own educational interests are concerned, by personal or circumstantial features beyond their control. Though much progress has been made, well into the twenty-first century we are still a long way off from realizing these more basic equitable aims. Striving to make our schools more just institutions does not mean that we need to sideline citizenship; but we should not derive any false comfort from believing that we reach the former by devoting ourselves to the latter.

Conclusions

Throughout this paper I have questioned whether it is possible that state / public schools might be capable of doing what liberal theorists claim they ought to do with respect to citizenship. Further, I have questioned whether the core principles invoked to justify citizenship education are tenable in the first place. To that end, I have aimed to demonstrate that the liberal faith in citizenship education is too disconnected from the institutional realities of schools to offer us useful guidance. Expressed in the vernacular of Gutmann and other liberal theorists, the ideals of non-repression and non-discrimination are consistently not realized in state / public schools around the world. Indeed in many if not most places, hardly even lip service is paid to these ideals, or the lip service paid is so openly contradicted by practice that hardly any of the students are fooled.[13]

By interrogating the tenets of liberal citizenship education, it is not my aim to recommend cynicism about the importance of citizenship, even as I question – with many others – what citizenship has been historically, for both the advantaged and disadvantaged; what it is now in our world of constant emergency, fluid identities, and fluid borders; how it is operationalized by political elites to upbraid racialized minority groups for their 'failure to integrate'; and what potential there might be for citizenship education in the future. But what I question is whether these liberal conceptions of citizenship, no matter how well conceived and delivered, will somehow save children from an alienating education, or save the rest of us from political tribalism or depravity. Claims like this, more often insinuated than stated outright, are commonplace in media, political debate, and also academia. Yet as I hope to have demonstrated, there are reasons to doubt the ardent defense of a set of ideals that seem, historically, to have little potential for realization beyond the very basics, which again include coming to acquire a minimal understanding of political systems, basic constitutional rights, and the purposes of government.

And thus, if it is improbable that we can succeed in making state / public schools places capable of approximating the exalted civic ideals liberal philosophers defend, we might at least try for alternatives where the ideals driving notions of 'good citizenship' do not lean so heavily on contentious principles, and in any case where expressions of civility are not thwarted at every turn by a set of hierarchical institutional norms that brook no meaningful dissent. And hence in addition to my plea that we strive to make our schools more just institutions, my very modest suggestion is that we simply begin with some basic honesty regarding the historical and current state of affairs of schooling. Because right now, citizenship education as it is currently being defended, is drifting so far from reality that it risks becoming irrelevant, of use mostly as a legitimating discourse by the powers-that-be to conceal the increasingly undemocratic nature of state / public schooling in most countries.

Notes

1. Many interesting frameworks concerning citizenship education have been researched, where the aim has been to test the 'effectiveness' of citizenship programs in schools and education systems across the world. See inter alia Driessen (2008); National Conference on Citizenship (2006): Putnam (2000); and Whiteley (2005). Also see the highly influential 'Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools: Final Report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship' (1997), otherwise known as the Crick Report, which outlines a number of arguments, objectives and directives for teaching citizenship in English schools.
2. Definitions of 'citizenship education' are diffuse but most closely approximate a definition whose aims are to explicitly teach the knowledge, skills and values believed necessary for democratic citizenship. See, for example, Kahne and Middaugh (2008).
3. Gillborn (2006) argues that 'in practice citizenship education operates as a form of placebo: an activity that gives the appearance of addressing the issues (racism and race equality) but which, in reality, manifestly fails to tackle the real problem' (p. 85).
4. To illustrate a phenomenon observed in many school districts, a recent report commissioned by the city of Amsterdam in the Netherlands indicated that teachers feel both incompetent and disinclined to broach sensitive topics in the classroom where there is a diversity of opinion. The report also indicates that the school system is so segregated that it is unlikely that most students will be attending a school with others whose backgrounds are very different from themselves in the first place, making many of the objectives of citizenship education unattainable. See https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/-leerlingen-groeien-op-in-hun-eigen-bubbel~a4569791/
5. Mill (1978) understood this well: 'Wherever there is an ascendant class, a large portion of the morality of the country emanates from its class interests and its feelings of class superiority' (p. 6).
6. Bourdieu (1989) noted:

   to speak of strategies of reproduction is not to say that the strategies through which dominants manifest their tendency to maintain the status quo are the result of rational calculation or even strategic intent. It is merely to register that many practices that are phenomenally very different are objectively organized in such a way that they contribute to the reproduction of the capital at hand, without having been explicitly designed and instituted with this end in mind. (p. 272)

7. For example, one might think of programs such as Facing History and Ourselves, Youth-led-action-participatory research (YPAR), apprenticeships such as those supported by Big Picture Schools, and a variety of service-learning projects.
8. Cf. Niebuhr (1932), who observed, 'Perhaps the most significant moral characteristic of a nation is its hypocrisy. We have noted that self-deception and hypocrisy is an unvarying element in the moral life of all human beings' (p. 95).
9. https://www.pressherald.com/2017/10/23/york-high-school-students-stage-protest-over-alleged-bullying-of-gay-student/
10. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/students-leading-mass-protests-gun-control-180316082945149.html
11. For example, each year the Dutch Inspectorate of Education reports that despite citizenship being a required subject in all Dutch schools, relatively few schools incorporate it into their aims, relatively few teachers understand its importance, and most students continue to exhibit pitifully low civic 'knowledge and skills'. See file:///C:/Users/mmerry1/Downloads/108126_IvhO_StaatvanhetOnderwijs_TG.pdf
12. For example, political theorist Macmullen (2015) echoes many others in maintaining that civic education ought to inculcate 'dispositions to abide by the law' and 'dispositions to engage in political participation through legal channels', each of which points to a general support for the 'fundamental political arrangements' of a given polity, and hence the institutional status quo.

13. See, for example, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/education/wp/2017/06/20/a-valed ictorian-went-rogue-in-his-final-speech-his-school-tried-to-shut-him-down/?tid=pm_pop&ut m_term=.4144be98a07e

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