JOURNAL OF SOCIAL STUDIES AND HISTORY EDUCATION (JSSHE)

A Peer-Reviewed Online Journal Sponsored by the Texas Council for the Social Studies and the University of Houston - Downtown

Edited by: Bernardo Pohl and Sarah M. Straub

Recommended Citation: Goodwin, J. (2026). Comparative approaches to teaching civics today: Teaching in uncertain times. *Journal of Social Studies and History Education, 9(1)*, 45-58

Comparative Approaches to Teaching Civics Today: Teaching in Uncertain Times

Jacob Goodwin

Abstract: This article examines contemporary approaches to civic education in the United States at a time of increasing political polarization, policy mandates, and debates over the purpose of schooling. Drawing on the framework developed by Westheimer and Kahne, the manuscript analyzes three prominent models of civic education: the Responsible Citizen, the Participatory Citizen, and the Justice Oriented Citizen. Through a review of relevant scholarship, the article explores how each approach reflects broader assumptions about citizenship, democracy, and the role of schools in society. The Responsible Citizen model emphasizes personal responsibility and civic knowledge but may limit critical engagement, while the Participatory Citizen model encourages civic involvement and community engagement but can lack deeper structural analysis. The Justice Oriented citizen model foregrounds critical inquiry into social and political systems and emphasizes collective action for democratic change. By comparing these approaches, the article highlights the implications of pedagogical choices for democratic life.

Civic life is being pulled apart by extreme political polarization. This has resulted in greater stress being placed on civic education. Practitioners of civic education are under pressure to address civic strain while balancing new initiatives and laws. In some states, these laws censor the teaching of history, in others standardized civic tests have become mandated.

All of these developments have created a changing and challenging classroom environment for educational practitioners. Indeed, civic educators find themselves at a crossroads in a tense cultural and political battle for the soul of schools. Teachers across the country and civic education advocates are seeking to understand this rapidly changing time and what new developments mean to the field.

This article explores the landscape of civic education using Kahne and Westheimer's three approaches to teaching civics (2004). Following a brief discussion of historical visions for civic education, an examination of the Responsible Citizen

Jacob Goodwin is a sixth-grade teacher, former New Hampshire History Teacher of the Year, and the author of the book, *Teach Like a Community Organizer: Practical Tools for Community-Building, Civic Engagement and Progressive Change* (Routledge, 2026).

Approach, the Participatory Citizen Approach and the Justice Oriented Citizen Approach frame an examination of the literature. Through this article, practitioners may find their footing, even as common ground remains elusive in our current era.

Historical Context: Visions for Civic Education

In *The Crisis in Education* Hannah Arendt theorizes that the problems of the modern political system have warped educational institutions (1953). Namely, this has been a crisis in authority (hooks, 1994). Political models have historically relied on the notion of the child-parent relationship to explain the power dynamic between the governed and the government (Arendt, 1953). This model was significantly disrupted by the American Revolution, which proclaimed a "New Order for the Ages" (1953, 493-513). Arendt reasons that the place where this disruption occurred is now home to the greatest struggle over the role of authority in public and private life, and she accordingly uses the United States to make the case for her theory (1953). Breaking away from the European traditions of primogenitor and monarchical rule, the United States attempted to bring the lofty ideals of the enlightenment into effect through a myriad of policy decisions, but notably via the creation of educational institutions (Kaestle, 1989). Furthermore, Arendt writes that "The more radical the distrust of authority becomes in the public sphere, the greater the probability naturally becomes that the private sphere will not remain inviolate" (1958, 508). Schools represent the place where the public and private sphere intersect as teachers act as guides for the young as they enter into the new world. The methods by which students are guided show the manner by which society believes it may renew the world, a common millennialist belief with deep roots in the American psyche (Cremin, 1992).

In this regard, Arednt's work occupies common ground with the observations of educational historian Lawrence Cremin. Cremin asserted that education in America echoes the political chaos of democracy, the infatuation with fads inherent to mass self-determination, and the millennialist aspirations of America becoming the "novus ordo seclorum" (1992, 93). American hopes of solving social ills through education have, over time, made education into a battleground for competing political ideologies (Ravitch, 2013). Educational philosophers have debated since the inception of the United States about the proper function of education (Bode, 1927, 237). In short, Americans seek to solve political problems through educational policy reforms, but such an arrangement forever makes educational goals impossible to attain (Cremin, 1992). The result is the over burdening educators with unbearable loads and millennialist hopes.

Scholars and philosophers of education debate the purpose of public education and

[1]

note the shifting demands placed on educators (Miller, 1997) (Soder et al., 2002) (Goodlad, 2008) (Breyer, 1996). The reorientation of schools has coincided with the perceived and real economic, social and political needs of the country and communities (Goldstein, 2015). Renewed interest in civic education necessitates awareness of the implications of policy choices. Kahne and Westerheimer remind that "the narrow and often ideologically conservative conception of citizenship embedded in many current efforts at teaching for democracy reflects not arbitrary choices but, rather, political choices with political consequences" (2004, 237). The decision to neglect civic education, to water it down or to exploit it for profit are all aspects of a civics of cynicism, spreading distrust in educators and in the system of public education.

The work of Arendt and Cremin bring scholars to ask the question: on what political schemes are modern day educational "reformers" pinning their hopes? Michael Apple, noted educational philosopher, responds to this question with a term that he coined, "conservative modernization" (2008, 239-261). This movement is fueled by the dual forces of neoliberalism and neoconservatism (Apple, 2008, 240). Neoliberalism proffered a world view of humans as "homoeconomicus" or economically motivated beings, lifting up economic rationality as the determinant for decision making in public life (Soder, et al, 2002). Neoliberal policy has advanced market forces into education in the form of voucher plans and private charter management organizations (Apple, 2008). Neoconservative policy has been behind the standards movement and testing regimes (Apple, 2008). Neoconservatism attempted to remove what it saw as moral relativism in education by asserting the necessity of foundational knowledge rooted in traditional western values. The third leg of "conservative modernization" has been the "authoritarian populist religious conservatives" who seek to revive a mythical "common culture" that is primarily focused on ultra-religiosity (ultra-Christianity in the US) (Apple, 2016, 148-153). In turn, these forces have formed a "new hegemonic bloc" that has influenced educational policies and pushed forward the enactment of legislative efforts such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Apple, 2014, 12). Despite promises of decentralization of bureaucracy, these "reforms" have produced the opposite effect, which Apple describes as, "a massive recentralization and...a process of dedemocratization" (Apple, 2004, 618). While these political movements provide context for the ongoing battle over the role of education in American society, it is necessary to consider how schools and educators have responded in kind.

Educational scholars Kahne and Westheimer offer a model that will aid in organizing the remainder of this literature review (2004). They propose that citizen education (and therefore research on it) can be characterized as fitting into three non-exclusive categories: the Responsible Citizen Approach, the Participatory Citizen Approach, and the Justice Oriented Approach (2004). These various

approaches are not always mutually exclusive, but there is often a dominant paradigm within a school or in scholarship. This typology has a dual purpose of organizing and assessing the literature related to civic education. It also provides a framework for comprehending the real-world educational practices in this realm of inquiry. Kahn and Westheimer's empirical study uses a mixed methods approach, relying on both qualitative and quantitative data to assess the outcomes of varied methods of teaching civics. The researchers conducted their research at ten sites over a period of two years.

In the end, this manuscript intends to obtain helpful insights relating to these approaches to civic education and the effects of such pedagogical decisions. Developing a more robust understanding of these two lines of inquiry may, in turn, help to inform choices in practice and improve future civic outcomes for students.

The Responsible Citizen

The Responsible Citizen Approach is often embraced by schools and perceived as value neutral. This kind of education is a traditionalist approach to pedagogy advocated by Thomas Lickona (1992). In this model schools are a place for imparting lessons of personal responsibility and respect (1992). Students are taught the connection between individual choice and academic success (Sondel, 2015). There is little exploration of the external factors influencing the complexities of society or much talk of citizen action outside of responsibility to oneself. The responsible citizen approach is closely tied to neoliberal and neoconservative ideology in a reductionist approach to citizenship. Citizens become a unit of economic utility and are trained to respect figures of authority and the socio-political structure imposed by the dominant groups of the time. This is not to say that elements of the Responsible Citizen Approach do not have educative value, but alone this approach does not encourage the development of active republicanism (Snir, 2016).

The Responsible Citizen Approach is most clearly a derivation of liberal educational thought. This tradition views freedom from interference as its chief maxim (Snir, 2016). This means minimal state intervention, which can result in the domination of the strong over the weak. In the school, this often means the adoption of a Lockean view of education whereby students are viewed as being developmentally unable to practice decision making and therefore must be under the guardianship of the teacher (Locke, 1721). The teacher takes on the role of being the main transmitter of knowledge and the student assumes the role of receiver of knowledge. This is, undoubtedly, an oddly authoritarian training ground for democratic preparation. Nevertheless, the teacher is seen as a neutral agent of the state who can divorce his/herself from politics to deliver information to students that builds a foundational understanding of their constitutional rights (Locke, 1721). This idea, of course, is essentially political because it prioritizes a certain set of values, such as individualism, respect for

the governing authority and the acceptance of the dominant dogma (Locke, 1721). In the modern context these values and the correlated educational practices have morphed and may be more easily recognized in the form of pedagogy and practice supported by the campaign of neoliberal school reform (Apple, 2016).

Scholar Beth Sondel tested the Responsible Citizen Approach in Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) in post-Katrina New Orleans, a city that has seen the full force of conservative modernization in education (2015). Her study used the taxonomy of citizenship to determine the harmony or dissonance that exists between teachers and the rhetoric of CMO schools in New Orleans. The study blended theory with empirical research. Both an ethnographic data set collected in 2011-2012 and interviews with administrators and staff in CMO schools factored into the analysis of the study. The study found that interviewees who expressed sentiments categorically fitting with "the personal responsibility citizen" tended to be the most harmonious fit with the CMO philosophy of raising test scores at all costs (2015).

These types of teachers, however, were more likely to use authoritarian behavior management practices resembling behaviorist conditioning and often focused narrowly on education for increasing test scores. From the corporate structure of CMOs flow an economized vision of education that permeates the culture of the schools managed. Sondel leaves the reader with the distinct impression that CMO policies, which rule New Orleans and have significant footprints in other major American metro-areas, constrain citizen development by enforcing non-democratic measures in the classroom.

In another instance, neoliberal market-reform ideology shaped public education in the state of Texas. McNeil's *Creating New Inequalities* dives into the aftershock caused to the educational system following reforms advanced by Ross Perot, namely the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) (2000). TAAS was created as part of the accountability movement and sought to equalize the quality of education for all students in the state of Texas. This was not the result. School districts often ended up spending vast amounts of money on curriculum, testing, and consultants from educational corporations in order to improve student scores on TAAS. This narrowed the curriculum, especially in schools that served high poverty populations (McNeil, 2000). TAAS demonstrated that measuring learning using only a handful of indicators warps instruction and leads to a hollowing out of the curriculum. The case of Texas captures how relying on private interests, technocrats and the gospel of neo-liberalism takes away agency from the public and erodes the institutional power of public schools.

Today's practitioners feel the pressure to conform to a style of civic education that is measurable and bounded by narrowed understandings of American history. This is reflected in states that have passed laws for high school graduation requirements that mirror the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services test, a naturalization test administered to applicants for citizenship (HB 320, 2021)

(The Naturalization Interview and Test | USCIS, 2020). Such tests define competence in the domain of civics in terms that are based on the concepts of assimilation, passivity and civic outcomes that are legible to the state (Scott, 1988).

The assimilationist essence of the Responsible Citizen Approach to civic education is intertwined with the xenophobic history of the Americanization movement in schools (Mirel, 2010). Americanization was meant to transform children from immigrant backgrounds into an American based on a white Christian conception of citizenship. As Stanford University Professor Ellwood Cubberly wrote, "Our task is to break up these groups…and to implant in their children… the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order, and popular government, and to awaken in them a reverend for our democratic institutions and for those things in our national life which we as a people hold to be of abiding worth" (1909, 15). As this historical example illustrates, Americanization was aimed at perpetuating a dominant white, Christian, Anglo-Saxon view of what it meant to be a citizen of the United States. The pull of assimilationist education has historically peaked when the dominant culture felt threatened by nondominant groups. Today, there is mounting evidence that ethnonationalism is reshaping the landscape in civic education. Most visibly, there is the sharp increase in the number of laws passed seeking to censor the teaching of history and to shallowly test civic knowledge. In this regard, the Responsible Citizen Approach has real life implications for practitioners in the classroom.

Educators of conscience must understand the Responsible Citizen Approach to civic education is not neutral, as the preceding discussion demonstrates. Assimilationist education marginalizes learners from non-dominant cultural backgrounds. It ignores the diversity of experiences that learners bring to the classroom. And it limits civic agency by defining civics in narrow terms that often perpetuate passive absorption of facts. This creates a difficult situation for educators in states where classroom censorship laws have been enacted and where standardized civic tests have been implemented. In these situations, educators may consider the range of options regarding compliance. The educator of conscience must pursue an active intellectual, emotional, and relational life-in-the-school as a counterweight to the advancement of damaging ideology. The vibrancy and openness of learning in community, a core of democratic practice, is at risk when approaches like the Responsible Citizen Approach are accepted as neutral.

The Participatory Citizen

In contrast, scholarship is mildly more supportive of the Participatory Citizen Approach to civic education. The participatory citizen is described by Sondel as someone who "extends their sense of responsibility outward from themselves to their community...and works within the pre-existing structures to challenge the status quo" (2015, 298). This model of citizen education looks to impart historical lessons of change making through engagement in the civic process (voting, campaigning, etc.) and volunteerism.

Determining whether education can generally influence participatory citizenship is an important broad-based consideration of this model. For this reason, the findings of David Campbell's analysis of the National Civic Engagement Study held that there was a correlation between increased education and participatory citizenship (2009). The NCES dataset, gathered by Zikin, et al (2006), had an N of 3,348 students, and found that there was a strong correlation between level of educational attainment and voting as a form of participatory behavior. Campbell's research did not test the effect of the type of educational instruction or curriculum to which students were exposed. This hole in the scholarship is something beyond the scope of this manuscript, but something scholars should seek to understand. Still, this study suggests a positive relationship between educational experience and participatory outcomes for citizens.

Westheimer and Kahne looked specifically into the Participatory Citizen Approach, which emphasizes volunteerism and neighborliness in their 2004 pedagogical study of Madison County School (2004). Students at this school engaged in a traditional civic knowledge development course in the first quarter of their high school study of government before taking on volunteer projects within their community in the second quarter of the academic year. The study found that the students of Madison Country School demonstrated high levels of engagement with the curriculum, yet did not show as strong an understanding of the deep-rooted nature of the social problems involved with the populations with whom they volunteered (Westheimer, 2004). The lack of an emphasis in regard to learning about these deeper issues has been identified as a shortfall of the participatory model of civic education.

While there is nothing wrong with the idea of encouraging participatory action among developing citizens, it is worth exploring whether rich multidimensional civic educational experiences are equally distributed across various demographic groups in the United States. Scholars Torney-Purta, et al. studied the differences in civic knowledge and attitudes of adolescents across the country with the specific goal of seeing if immigrant status or Hispanic background correlated with higher content knowledge, civic skills or civic dispositions. The study used a data set made up of over 2,800 student responses from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta, 2006). Multilevel modeling techniques and researcher analysis revealed that when it came to student's conceptual understanding of citizenship, "there was no significant differences in the extent to which the immigrant groups or the Hispanic groups understood what adult citizens should do" (Torney-Purta, 2006, 351). In comparison, the study also found that Hispanic immigrant students had "less competence than native-born students in assessing... political information" (Torney-Purta, 2006, 351). Once again, the potential causes for the discrepancy between understanding and engagement in participatory civic actions were highlighted as shortcomings of this educational model. Another way of

synthesizing these results might be to say that this model did not promote the ability of students to develop the kind of interpretive and analytical skills necessary to fully operate as a citizen in the complex political environment of the modern world.

The Participatory Citizen Approach has traces of what may be deemed virtuous republicanism (Snir, 2016). Many of the Founding Fathers saw religion and education as closely intertwined and believed both to be helpful in forming virtuous citizens that would serve the republic. James Madison once wrote, "Is there no virtue among us? If there be not we are in a wretched situation. No theoretical checks, no form of government can render us secure. To suppose that nay form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people, is a chimerical idea" (Madison, 2018). There can be no question that the development of participatory citizens must remain a central goal of civic education. That being said, the exclusive practice of this model of education may not provide the kind of results that best prepare students for the challenges of democratic self-governance.

The participatory citizen approach has lessons for teachers in today's classroom. In a polarized partisan environment, the participatory approach might be seen as a step toward restoring neighborliness and a baseline of civility. Getting students out into their communities through volunteering and service projects can build the kind of relationships that foster positive social, emotional connections between students and between students and community members.

In this regard, we might see a continuum of civic engagement emerging from the literature. The participatory approach may well put students on the path toward deeper understanding, yet as teachers, we must seek to help students to forge those relational connections that can be conduits to further learning. In this regard, the use of developmentally appropriate analytical frameworks can support student reflection during and following participatory learning. Absent tools of analysis, participatory civic learning may result in student frustrations with superficiality or a lack of path forward to address issues that require sustained engagement and broader community involvement.

The Justice Oriented Citizen

The Justice Oriented Approach to civic learning attempts to engage students in the analysis of the deeper meaning of socio-political events by determining root-causes and moving toward aligned solutions (Sondel, 2015). This definition is derived from Westheimer and Kahne's taxonomy of citizenship and is focused on restorative practices (2004). The concept of a justice-oriented citizen may be further traced to the writings of Brazilian educational philosopher Paulo Freire. Freire warned of traditional education's use of what he called the "banking model" of education (1986). This placed students as passive recipients of information, which truly constituted a method of norm transmission from one generation to the next (a fitting description of the responsible citizen approach). The

"banking model" ensured the sustained dominance of the historically powerful over the historically marginalized by laying dormant the ability of the masses to see and "read the world" (Freire, 1986). Freire asserted that the remedy to the widespread use of the "banking model" was the awakening of students and educators through the practice of critical educational theory (from which the Justice-Oriented Approach is derived) (1986).

Westheimer and Kahn tested the effect of the justice-oriented approach in the Bayside School's 12th grade in comparison to the aforementioned results from the Madison County School. The Bayside School was much more ethnically and racially diverse than the MCS and the cohort of students studied at the Bayside School had been labeled as "low achieving" (2004, 246). The researchers used a blend of surveys and interviews to measure the students' knowledge and attitudes as they progressed through their justice-based course. This mixed methods approach yielded both quantitative analysis and rich descriptive accounts from the students and teachers.

The study found that students at Bayside came away from their educational experiences with a better understanding of "structural issues" inherent to creating change in a democracy (2004, 254). Students also reported on the need for collective action to alter systemic problems and students expressed a keen ability to articulate how politics related to them personally (2004). These results were all in stark contrast to Madison County School where there was a general commitment to community service following the treatment of the participatory education class, but only a superficial understanding of the socio-political factors at hand in their areas of service (2004).

The Justice Oriented Approach is influenced by what Snir and Eylon call "neo-republican theory" (2016, 759-774). It is a theory of education that is based on a philosophy of non-domination. This line of thinking posits that maximum freedom can be attained by informed citizens using their power[2] within the state to wield authority in a manner that enhances egalitarianism rather than subjugating the weak to the will of the strong. This core belief can transcend educational practices by creating cultures within classrooms that seek to distribute decision making power among students and educators. As a pedagogical practice, neo-republicanism (or civic-republicanism, as it is sometimes called) depends on reducing the use of methods that instill obedience and instead encourages the development of free-thinkers who understand the interplay between classroom (or societal) structures and political life both in and outside of the schoolhouse. By focusing student attention on developing critical self-awareness of social and political structures within their everyday lives, students can become true agents in republican life. The ongoing development of students as agents in republican life is essential to civic-republicanism. This model of education sees the student at the time of their learning as a citizen and a person who has

agency in that moment, which is unlike other forms of citizen education (Snir, 2016). Examining the facets of neo-republican theory as it relates to education offers a glimpse into how practitioners might operationalize the theory. Neo-republican theory is also anchored by the belief that education should have three core elements: awareness of interdependencies in society, civic self-restraint, and deliberative engagement (Snir, 2016). The element of awareness of interdependencies in society refers to understanding the rich tapestry of history and how that history is linked to the political situation of the day. Civic self-restraint is conceptualized as the idea that we are bound together to fulfill a vision of the common good. Lastly, deliberative engagement is meant to encompass the ability of students to develop their own thoughts and ideas about issues while also being able to participate in the deliberative process, account for the ideas of others, and respect the ideas of others. In turn, each of these elements of neo-republican educational theory are guideposts for educators to use as they work with students collaboratively in the construction of civic minded classes.

Neo-republicanism has high salience for the civics teacher seeking to combat polarization and the destruction of communities. Civic restraint counters hyperpolarization with an assertion of togetherness that holds the potential for building a more inclusive classroom community. Such a classroom community can grow into the broader community. This idea animates thinking of civic life in terms of a broader civic ecology (Mathews, 2014). Bringing the practice of non-domination into school life creates room for learners to develop agency through play, joy and wonder. New forms of civic being can sprout from the imagination of the learners–merging what Cobb called the ecology of imagination with the more technical understanding of civic ecology that is gaining traction in educational parlance (Cobb, 1993).

The promise of restoring classroom communities (and democracy) through deliberation is another attractive element of neo-republicanism for practitioners. Practicing deliberation with students in the classroom and stretching deliberation outward to face and engage the community can further enhance student capacity to make sense of our changing community and world. Living together requires that we seek to understand one another. Exchanging observations on the condition of our communities and on the issues facing our communities opens the door to building collective understanding of one another, a foundation for rebuilding trusting relationships. Deliberation alone cannot solve the civic problems that we face, but without it our classrooms will be increasingly vulnerable to strands of asocial thinking that flourish in a monocultural environment.

Deliberation opens us to seeing one another, our fullness and complexity. This inextricably links deliberation with the concept of interdependence. When we seek to understand the differences and communities that we hold, we increase awareness of the many ways each learner adds to our overall classroom community.

Not only that, but the class can see how we are each a reflection of other community members, a part of the present, and a product of the past.

The refinement of educational praxis develops alongside a deep sense of being self-embedded in a historical and ecological context (Aronowitz, 2008) (Freire, 1986). The teacher interrogates their methods with an eye toward justice, toward democratizing the learning environment. And in doing so, the teacher engages in what Bode described as an invitation to the pupil to gain “a sense of living on the ragged edge of things, a sense that life is an experiment, a constant venture into the unknown” (1927, 240). This is a clear departure from the notion of a prescribed curriculum and the existing testing regime. Instead, we are left with the challenge of joining the prior generations of educators who have sought to find their footing on the path toward a more perfect union.

Conclusions

This short article provided an account of three major theories (or approaches) to civic education: the Responsible Citizen Approach, the Participatory Citizen Approach, and the Justice Oriented Citizen Approach. Each of these approaches have significant political and socio-cultural histories attached to them. The responsible citizen is derived from a mixture of classical liberalism and modern capitalism. The participatory citizen approach may be said to be a derivation of virtuous republicanism. It was the belief of Madison, and other founders, after all, that an aspect of education would compel citizens to serve the public in some capacity (Madison, 2018). Lastly, the Justice Oriented Approach, which has been influenced by critical educational theory and neo-republicanism, provides both a nuanced and somewhat misunderstood method of civic education.

There remains significant room for exploring practitioner's frequency of usage and the effects of each of these approaches at the various levels of public education. Particularly, the literature remains silent on the utilization of the three major pedagogical approaches to civic education at the middle school level (grades 6-8). As civic life becomes more strained by the harsh rhetoric and political divisiveness of our times, it is the duty of all concerned citizens to raise awareness of the importance of civic education at all levels of learning.

Education for democracy must engage practitioners and students in a manner that is empowering and meaningful. In this regard, the renewal of civic education must be personal, public and pragmatic (Dewey, 2018). This is the domain of holistic civics. Healing the longstandings traumas of our society is a multigenerational task that requires commitment and vision. Civic education that brushes over inequalities or that turns young people into passive receptacles of knowledge are a mere facade of civic learning, civic learning in name only.

Along these lines, practitioners must unearth a civic education that connects to

the body and mind, to where meaning intertwines with community and where learners can construct new knowledge and new relationships, both with others and between themselves and the natural world. In this pursuit, students can develop greater agency, a sense of purpose and a sense of connectedness to one another and the social and environmental ecology that hugs their existence.

Kahne and Westheimer's framework for civic education is a starting point for educators in the field. Their three approaches are recognizable to teachers. Teachers have lived through cycles of testing, back to basics initiatives, cries for renewed efforts to improve civic literacy and attempts to bring concepts like diversity, equity, inclusion and justice into the classroom. It is these firsthand experiences that motivate teachers to search for meaningful civic education–holding on to a life raft of hope as democracy is hit by swell after swell of punishing blows.

As neoconservatism and neoliberalism advances through new testing regimes and legislative fiat, we must seek to understand the philosophical and ideological underpinnings that gird the privatization movement and the narrowing of civic education in public schools. The dual occurrence of a rise in privatization schemes and the surge in mandates for narrow civic testing in public schools is part and parcel of the same attack on pluralistic multi-racial democracy. Both efforts seek to deprive young people of a truly educational experience–from experiencing a sense of self, a sense of agency and a sense of civic possibility.

It is through the review and analysis of past and present efforts toward improving civic learning that we can navigate the millennialist currents that have previously swept meaningful efforts at improving learning away in times of political turbulence. This means that we must engage in further research into the rich and diverse tradition of progressive education, to the likes of Dewey, Bode, Palmer and Korczak, as well as to the countless practitioners whose names have been lost to history, but whose lives were lived in the service of children (Dewey, 2018) (Bode, 1948) (Palmer, 2014) (Korczak, 2018).

Civic education requires overcoming cynicism to create a sense of commitment to democracy as a way of life. We cannot expect democratic outcomes to flourish when democracy is only talked about as an abstract concept in schools, or where schools where democratic practices are constrained to a single class. No, such a limited program will not do. Democracy and civic education must be the cornerstone of the educational endeavor of our public schools. In pursuing a fully integrated approach to schooling, civic education will pass from a siloed afterthought for millennialist aspiration to becoming the mature endeavor of the pragmatic educator (Bode, 1937).

References

Apple, M. W. (2004). Schooling, markets, and an audit culture. Educational Policy, 18(4), 618–639.

Apple, M. W. (2008). Can schooling contribute to a more just society? Education, Citizenship and Social Justice, 3(3), 239–261.

Apple, M. W. (2014). Official knowledge: Democratic education in a conservative age (12th ed.). Retrieved March 25, 2018, from

Apple, M. W. (2016). Introduction to "The politics of educational reforms." The Educational Forum, 80(2), 127–136.

Apple, M. W. (2016). What is present and absent in critical analyses of neoliberalism in education. Peabody Journal of Education, 92(1), 148–153.

Arendt, H. (1958). The crisis in education. The Partisan Review, 25(4), 493–513. Retrieved March 3, 2018.

Aronowitz, S. (2008). Against schooling: Toward an education that matters. Paradigm Publishers.

Bode, B. (1948). Democracy as a way of life.

Bode, H. B. (1937). Democracy as a way of life. Macmillan.

Breyer, L. E. (1996). Creating democratic classrooms: The struggle to integrate theory and practice. Teachers College Press.

Campbell, D. E. (2009). Civic engagement and education: An empirical test of the sorting model. American Journal of Political Science, 53(4), 771–786.

Cobb, E. (1993). The ecology of imagination in childhood. Spring Publications.

Cremin, L. A. (1992). Popular education and its discontents. Harper & Row.
Cubberly, E. (1909). Changing conceptions of education. Houghton Mifflin.

Dewey, J. (2018). Democracy and education.

Freire, P. (1986). Pedagogy of the oppressed. Continuum.

Goldstein, D. (2015). The teacher wars: A history of America's most embattled profession. Anchor Books.

Goodlad, J., Soder, R., & McDaniel, B. (2008). Education and the making of a democratic people. Paradigm Publishers.
HB 320: Requiring a civics competency assessment as a high school graduation requirement. (2021). Legiscan.com. Retrieved April 18, 2024, from https://legiscan.com/NH/text/HB320/id/2232822

hooks, b. (1994). Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom. Routledge.

Kaestle, C. F., & Foner, E. (1983). Pillars of the republic: Common schools and American society, 1780–1860. Hill and Wang.

Korczak, J. (2018). The orphanage. Summer camp. The orphans' home. Volume 1. Vallentine Mitchell.

Lickona, T. (1992). Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility. Bantam Books.

Locke, J. (1721). Some thoughts concerning education [Electronic resource]. Printed for A. Churchill and sold by W. Taylor.

Madison, J. (2000). Representation. Retrieved April 15, 2018, from http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch13s36.html

Mathews, D. (2014). The ecology of democracy: Finding ways to have a stronger hand in shaping our future. Kettering Foundation Press.

McNeil, L. M. (2000). Creating new inequalities: Contradictions of reform. Phi Delta Kappan, 81(10), 728–734. Retrieved March 13, 2018.

Miller, R. (1997). What are schools for? Alternative Education Resource Organization.

Mirel, J. (2010). Patriotic pluralism. Harvard University Press.

Palmer, P. J. (2014). Healing the heart of democracy: The courage to create a politics worthy of the human spirit. Jossey-Bass.

Ravitch, D. (2013). Reign of error: The hoax of the privatization movement and the danger to America's public schools. Alfred A. Knopf.

Scott, J. C. (1998). Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed. Yale University Press.

Snir, I., & Eylon, Y. (2016). Civic republicanism and education: Democracy and social justice in school. Studies in Philosophy and Education, 36(5), 585–600.

Snir, I., & Eylon, Y. (2016). Pedagogy of non-domination: Neo-republican political theory and critical education. Policy Futures in Education, 14(6), 761–775.

Soder, R., Goodlad, J. I., & McMannon, T. J. (2002). Developing democratic character in the young. John Wiley & Sons.

Sondel, B. (2015). Raising citizens or raising test scores? Teach for America, "No Excuses" charters, and the development of the neoliberal citizen. Theory & Research in Social Education, 43(3), 298–329.

Sondel, B. (2015). Raising citizens or raising test scores? Teach for America, "No Excuses" charters, and the development of the neoliberal citizen. Theory & Research in Social Education, 43(3), 294–311.

Sondel, B. (2015). Raising citizens or raising test scores? Teach for America, "No Excuses" charters, and the development of the neoliberal citizen. Theory & Research in Social Education, 43(3), 301–317.

Torney-Purta, J., Barber, C., & Wilkenfeld, B. (2006). Differences in the civic knowledge and attitudes of adolescents in the United States by immigrant status and Hispanic background. Prospects, 36(3), 343–354.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2020, July 7). The naturalization interview and test. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Retrieved April 28, 2024, from https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learn-about-citizenship/the-naturalization-interview-and-test

Westheimer, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. American Educational Research Journal, 41(2), 246.

Westheimer, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. American Educational Research Journal, 41(2), 254.

Westheimer, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. American Educational Research Journal, 41(2), 257.

Westheimer, J., & Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. American Educational Research Journal, 41(2), 237–269.