

# CHAPTER 17

## Toward an Anthropology of (Democratic) Citizenship Education

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In recent years, discourses about citizenship have come to occupy center stage, in both contemporary political practice and academic scholarship. The salience of citizenship has certainly made itself felt in anthropology as well, but less so in our educational subfield. In this chapter, my aim is to explore the relationships between educational processes and citizenship education from an anthropological perspective. In doing so, I review (not exhaustively) a good deal of work in anthropology that probes these relationships, but I also argue that our patchwork conceptual frameworks in the anthropology of education have yet to catch up with the richness and complexity of citizenship education across both formal and informal educational domains. I hope to point the way toward a more coherent and unified approach.

This chapter begins with an attempt to define citizenship and democracy, and to offer anthropological distinctions between formal and informal citizenship education, and between democratic and non-democratic citizenship education. From there, I discuss the history of our subfield's engagement with citizenship education and political practice, and raise questions about our existing conceptual limitations. Next, I review a broad range of anthropological scholarship on what I would call citizenship education (even when the anthropologists themselves do not frame it as education), attempting to bring into critical dialogue the various ways that anthropologists have documented how citizens are formed. What follows is a brief personal narrative about

how I “discovered” the issue of citizenship in my own work on Mexican youth and secondary education. The chapter is then capped by a final programmatic reflection about how anthropology could contribute to understanding not only informal and non-formal citizenship education, but also one of the most important and active movements in global education reform today: formal school-based democratic citizenship education.

### OPENING GAMBITS: DEFINITIONS AND DOMAINS

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2004: 120), quoting George Spindler (Spindler, 1987), has suggested that “from an anthropological perspective, all education is citizenship education.” My first inclination is to agree with this, but only to a point. It is true insofar as virtually all education, in and out of school, constructs identities and orients moral conduct for group life. The conception is admirably broader than understandings of “political socialization” and citizenship in sociology and political science, yet it may be excessively broad. I would like to venture a rather more explicitly political conception of citizenship: *Citizenship is constituted by the meanings, rights, and obligations of membership in publics, as well as the forms of agency and modalities of participation implicated by such membership.* This conception honors the etymology and evolution of sets of related English terms like civics, cities, and civilization, while opening to other culturally conceived notions of citizenship. It highlights the relationship between identity and the *state*, without foreclosing other possibilities or making this relationship its exclusive feature (as Carol Greenhouse (2002) puts it, “There is an ethnographic question to be asked about citizenship, regarding whether and how people incorporate the state into their own self-understandings and agency.”). The emphasis in my proposed definition is on forms of action and subjectivity that are oriented to a public – the diverse social space beyond close kin and consociates, but not fully encompassed by the state – in a relatively complex polity. I know that this begs more questions, and I don’t wish to draw too sharp a distinction between public and private (a notoriously slippery set of Western categories), or complex (large scale) and simple (small scale). But if you’ll bear with me, I think the distinctions still have good heuristic value. They allow us to gain some purchase on the political dimension of citizenship education, without losing sight of the fact that, as Sally Anderson (Chapter 19, below, citing Benveniste, 1974) reminds us, citizenship is not merely a juridical *status* granted by a state but a reciprocally engaged *relationship* between persons in the public sphere.

Given this definition of citizenship, I think it’s fair to say that *much*, if not all, education is still citizenship education. It should be helpful, moreover, to further distinguish between formal and informal citizenship education, and between democratic and non-democratic citizenship education. Here I believe the concept of identity is crucial. An anthropological concept of identity captures the varying senses of social belonging and commitment, identification (Hall, 1996) or attachment, in relation to diverse publics. Some identities are situational and ephemeral, others more enduring across time and context. Twisting Spindler a bit, and concurring with Lave (in press), I venture that “all education is identity formation.” Thus, the question for us here is what forms of education constitute *citizen identities*. If we can get clear about what

and how citizen identities are formed through education in the home, the street, the recreation center, and the media (i.e., non-formal or informal domains), then we can better understand how these identities articulate with, or chafe against, the identities proposed and shaped in schools. We can also better understand what makes identities more or less ephemeral, more or less “sutured” and articulated between hegemonic and non-hegemonic discourses, more or less embodied and emotive (see Beni, Chapter 16, above). Finally, we can comprehend how identity figures into the formation of effective “counterpublics” – those “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinate groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1992).

Now what about democracy? I think it’s fair to say that in recent years, when academics write about citizenship, they take democracy as their (often implicit) horizon. In other words, citizenship is about the (attempted) production and maintenance of democratic publics. Such an emphasis acknowledges the discourse of citizenship that has accompanied the rise of liberal democratic theory and practice from the time of the French Revolution. Indeed, citizenship under democracy often connotes a kind of active participation that is contrasted with the more passive “subjecthood” of authoritarian or monarchical regimes; indeed, the terms “political socialization” or “national identity formation” have often been applied to such authoritarian regimes, whereas “citizenship education” implicitly invokes democracy. It helps to remember, though, that contemporary non-democratic regimes still construct a kind of citizenship, and at times that construction can be quite active as well. From fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, which fostered highly participatory, patriotic, racist forms of exclusivism (Berezin, 1999), to some contemporary Asian regimes, which foster an active, committed moral obedience to the nation-state rooted in tropes of kinship (Lall and Vickers, 2009), elite-legitimizing, authoritarian citizenship is alive and well. Anthropologists of education ought to pay close attention, then, to the educational forms and practices that comprise a spectrum from authoritarian to democratic citizenship.

Of course, conceptions of democratic citizenship are themselves highly varied. One can imagine a kind of continuum, from minimalist and restrictive liberal democracies such as the early United States (with its sexist, racist, and classist exclusions) to rather more participatory multicultural democracies, such as the contemporary Netherlands or Brazil. In a democratic society, what constitutes legitimate expressions of citizenship itself becomes a matter of debate and disputation; for instance, much contemporary educational discourse on citizenship highlights the virtues of deliberative debate and community service, but civil disobedience is much less often represented as a legitimate form of democratic participation. Anthropology cannot afford to play the neutral bystander in such debates. Indeed, at the risk of offending anthropological relativisms, and even as I suggest we remain open to alternative emic conceptions, I would propose a normative definition of democracy to guide our inquiries: democracy is *the continual striving toward a social order that sponsors reasoned deliberation, promotes civic participation in decision-making, justly and equitably distributes political-economic power, and facilitates cultural inclusiveness*. As an empirical matter, then, any public that manifests such a “striving” in practice ought to be considered democratic. A critical anthropological approach to the study of democracy (Paley, 2002) would therefore place emphasis on how “continual” the striving is (versus the ossifying

effects of restrictive provisions), whether and how different cultural *forms* of reason and argumentation are admitted into deliberation (as an act of cultural inclusiveness), what kinds of meaningful participation are promoted, and to what extent power is justly and equitably distributed. The study of citizenship education for democracy is therefore the study of efforts by such democratic (counter) publics to educate their members to imagine their social belonging and exercise their participation as democratic citizens.

### AN ALLERGY TO POLITICS?: THE US-BASED ANTHROPOLOGY OF EDUCATION

As I've noted, over the last 25 years or so there has been an explosion of interest in democratic citizenship and civic education around the world. This appears to be one of the many paradoxes of globalization: under neoliberalism, states generally shrink their regulatory functions and encourage the outsourcing of labor, even as they still bolster their own role in schooling democratic citizens (Castles, 2004). In most of the so-called "new" or "transitional" democracies, like Mexico, as well as in the older European democracies undergoing striking demographic transition and Euro-integration (Reed-Danahay, 2007), scholars and educators have often looked to the United States for ideas about democratic and multicultural education. They have found here abundant models in the philosophical and pedagogical literature, and they have discovered non-profit organizations, like the Center for Civic Education and Civitas International, which specialize in exporting programs and curricula for democratic civic education. Yet educators and policymakers in other countries seem less aware that the trend in US public education has been to eschew a central commitment to educating democratic citizens in favor of drilling and testing in academic "basics." They may take for granted that the teaching of democracy is alive and well in US schools. Thus, as countries around the world engage in fresh debates about the meanings of democracy and the role of schools in building it, they appropriate and enliven US ideas that have increasingly fallen into disuse stateside.

Where have we US-based anthropologists of education been located in this ironic scenario? Generalization is risky, of course, but I would venture that much of our work over this same period has pursued questions of cultural difference, identity, and learning orientation in relation to school performance or "achievement," as opposed to questions of political agency and democratic participation. To be sure, our field first "got political" in the 1960s and 1970s, casting its lot with the civil rights movement and school desegregation efforts. Yet perhaps with the exception of Jules Henry (1963), who critically examined forms of what now might be called "citizenship education" in mainstream US schools, we largely followed the dominant liberal script, conceiving of difference largely in terms of racial or ethnic style and identity (Jacob and Jordan, 1993). Our research concerns and categories have thus largely grown out of the popular categories used to mark difference in the United States (Rockwell, 2002). Depending on our implicit theories of action and social change, at times we may focus our work on critiquing and transforming those arrangements that privilege some social groups over others, while at times we may propose more just and effective

educational arrangements that recognize and meaningfully incorporate local cultural diversity. Yet rarely have we addressed head-on the broader political implications of schooled identities: What kinds of citizens, for what kind of democracy, with what kinds of intercultural sensibilities, deliberative competencies, and political agency are being shaped in schools (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004), and how do students, perhaps, draw on alternative political imaginaries to resist such shaping?

No doubt most of us have imagined our work to contribute to strengthening democratic life and reclaiming our democratic ideals (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Yet our professional discourse seems largely insulated from the question of citizenship, and so the specifically political horizon of this work has remained largely implicit. A 26-year review of the flagship journal for our US field, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, is very instructive in this regard. In reviewing article titles, abstracts, and keywords from 1984 through early 2010, I discovered the following: there is not a single mention of “citizenship” until 2005, after which there are only six; there is no mention of “democracy” or “democratic” concerns until 1992, after which there are a total of eight mentions, but few are actually central to the article’s main argument; there is no mention of “identity” until 1991, after which there are some 46 mentions, with the majority coming after 2005. Now, admittedly, titles and abstracts are only imperfect approximations to the intellectual substance of an article, but they are telling indicators of the discourse we wield. Clearly, identity has been a growing concern and topic in the US-based anthropology of education, but how often does this use of identity move beyond social or ethnic group membership and reference specifically political commitments and competencies? Does our talk about social justice, oppression, resistance, marginalization, de-colonization, empowerment, and so forth contribute to a critical conception of democratic citizenship, ranging from local to supra-local domains of political action? Our work is “political,” to be sure, and it has political goals and outcomes, but rarely do we cite political theory or philosophy, not to mention political anthropology. And rarely do we look outside the United States for scholarship on the civic consequences of educational action (see Anderson-Levitt, Chapter 1, above). This is partly a question of semantics, but it is also a question of where we locate our work and how we connect our insights about power and exclusion in education to a politics of citizenship.

Thus, while anthropology provides an ethnographic methodology and nuanced theories of culture and power that could infuse the research on citizenship education, this has all too rarely happened. We easily become mired in discourses of our own making, all-too-often borrowed and adapted from the simplistic bureaucratic discourses that surround schools (cf. Díaz de Rada and Jiménez, Chapter 24, and Dietz and Mateos, Chapter 29, below). A renovated anthropology of education, engaged with questions of political agency and critical theoretical discourses in the broader discipline, could be extremely illuminating for the challenges of citizenship education, at home and abroad. The anthropological study of citizenship education would importantly link informal processes of identity formation to both the political-economic forces that sponsor and construct educational programs for creating “democratic” publics, and the social groups and movements that create counterpublics. Yet before we get to the discussion of formal educational programs, we must first examine what and how anthropology contributes to the broader study of citizenship education.

## EDUCATING FOR CITIZENSHIP: THE BROAD VIEW

The burgeoning field of the anthropology of citizenship is now too vast to summarize adequately in such a short space. Economic globalization, new flows of transnational migration and diaspora formation, a growing online and media culture, new rules of dual citizenship, and other contemporary processes have complicated what had *seemed* like a long and stable relationship between national territory and legal citizenship. The landscape of affiliation and belonging, which previously appeared limited to clan, ethnicity, or nation, has now been made infinitely more complicated. Yet the perspective gained by these new developments has also forced us to realize that citizenship was *never* as stable, uncomplicated, or territorially bound as we might have thought. Class, race, gender, and religious divisions within polities have always cleaved the rules and identities of citizenship (Rosaldo, 1999), just as the facile trope of spatial contiguity was never the sole, or even primary, organizing rubric for “shared culture” or citizenship identification (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; Ong, 1999).

Questions of identity formation have continued moving to the theoretical heart of contemporary cultural anthropology, as has a burgeoning anthropology of the “public” (Holland *et al.*, 2007). In dialogue with the field of political and legal anthropology, an exciting new anthropology of the state, nationalism, globalization, social movements, democracy, and citizenship has arguably led the way in these developments (e.g., Alonso, 1994; Appadurai, 1996, 2002; Burawoy and Verdery, 1999; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1997; Escobar, 2008; Ferguson and Gupta, 2002; Geschiere, 2009; Herzfeld, 1997; Lomnitz, 2001; Lomnitz-Adler, 1992; Moore, 1993; Paley, 2002; Trouillot, 2001). Such work, broadly speaking, seeks to elucidate the discourses, institutions, and cultural forms that constitute the nation-state, as well as the forms of identity and political action that emerge through, around, and against the state (Stevick and Levinson, 2008).

As a result of such theoretical understanding, anthropologists have undertaken sophisticated studies of citizenship formation; although not explicitly framed as such, I would call these studies of citizenship education – what I have defined here as “efforts of societies and social groups to educate their members to imagine their social belonging and exercise their participation as (democratic) citizens.” Such studies have done so largely by looking outside the school and exploring new modalities through which citizenship identities are formed. They have focused mostly on the national space, though increasingly they have addressed issues of transnational citizenship as well (Coutin, 2007). They also range from the more celebratory tone of an inclusive “cultural citizenship” (Flores and Benmayor, 1997), to a more critical tone of citizenship as constraining or “disciplining” the subject, often in ethnic, class, or gendered terms. For instance, using the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, Aihwa Ong (Ong, 2003) examines the role of social service providers in the San Francisco Bay area in establishing the parameters of acceptable citizenship behavior among recently immigrated Cambodians. James Holston (2009) explores the new forms of citizenship generated in the urban peripheries of major Brazilian cities through self-organized land occupations and movements for municipal services. Purnima Mankekar (1999) and Lila Abu-Lughod

(2005) have written incisively about the role of television viewing in the construction of a gendered national citizenship in India and Egypt, respectively, while Sara Friedman (2006) has explored the fraught relationship between the Chinese state's construction of "modern" socialist citizens and local practices around women's bodies and dress in the rural southeast. Others have explored the role of creative writing amongst immigrant mothers (Hurtig, 2005), of religious ceremony (O'Neill, 2010), of business activity (Werbner, 2004), of diasporic consciousness (Siu, 2005), and of political activism (Coutin, 2000; Oboler, 1996) in forming and shaping new citizenship identities.

One of the most powerful new veins of anthropological scholarship on citizenship concerns the relationship between indigenous groups and the nation-state in Latin America. Over the last 20 years or so, a neoliberal political economy in Latin America paradoxically spawned important new forms of indigenous activism and social movement, which in turn constituted new forms of citizenship and claims on the state (De la Peña, 2006; Fischer, 2009; Postero, 2007; Yashar, 2005). Neoliberal reforms tended to grant a symbolic multicultural pluralism while constricting the actual possibilities for land reform, political participation, and material social justice (Hale, 2002, 2006). Often, such neoliberal reforms have included new "intercultural" educational programs; such programs are intended, in theory, to create opportunities for meaningful indigenous participation in the design of educational programs, as well as competencies for respectful social exchange across the indigenous–mestizo divide in these societies. However, and in spite of the spaces it may open for unexpected alliances and knowledge production, intercultural education in practice often becomes little more than a symbolic form of indigenous empowerment (Gustafson, 2009). What some hope will become a more radical reformulation of the knowledge comprising state and citizenship in Latin America (Walsh, García Linera, and Mignolo, 2006), often devolves into a more subtly insidious form of the old assimilation.

A related vein of work argues that indigenous forms of democratic communitarian citizenship already exist, and that their corresponding forms of citizenship education can and ought to be scaled up (and out) for broader consideration. This is the thrust of Mexican anthropologist Maria Bertely's work in Chiapas, starting with the creation of intercultural pedagogies and teaching resources across three different Mayan languages and groups, rather than between the Mayans and the mestizo majority (Bertely Busquets, 2009). Yet Bertely also wishes to argue for the broader viability of the forms of "active and mutualistic (*solidaria*)" democracy and citizenship that she documents in contemporary Maya communities. In an audacious move, she offers up these alternative forms of grass-roots citizenship not only for the communities themselves, but "for the world" (Bertely Busquets, 2008). One could chart an interesting parallel to this kind of work with the efforts of feminist "counterpublics" to diffuse alternative models of gender equity, or with the paradigm of legal pluralism in anthropology, which recognizes and valorizes alternative, grass-roots legal systems and concepts that must interface with broader national and supra-national systems (Benda-Beckmann, Benda-Beckmann, and Griffiths, 2008).

As I've suggested, the question of identity and identification is central to these broad studies of citizenship. More specifically still, recent work in educational anthropology on *schools* has sought to articulate the relation between formal

education, citizenship, and identity. Among the books that stand out are Aurolyn Luykx's study of indigenous teacher education in Bolivia (Luykx, 1999), Werner Schifffauer *et al.*'s (2004) ambitious comparative study of "civil enculturation" in schools in the Netherlands, Britain, Germany, and France, Ritty Lukose's (2009) account of college students and "consumer citizenship" in Kerala, India, Véronique Beni's (2008) study of nationalist emotion and passion at an elementary school in Maharashtra, India, and Kathleen Hall's original research on Sikh immigrant youth in Britain (Hall, 2002). Meanwhile, the collection of essays by Stevick and Levinson (Stevick and Levinson, 2007) explore a variety of sites and modalities – inside, outside, and even against the school – through which diverse kinds of citizenship identities are formed (Gordon, 2010; Lazar, 2010). Rob Whitman's striking essay about "civic education" in and out of school on the Spokane Indian Reservation (Whitman, 2007) drives home a point made by many of these authors: that the school proposes civic identities that may deeply influence students, but alternative political imaginaries and counterpublics outside the school often bring such identities into creative contradiction.

In the United States, some cutting-edge studies have explored the interface between citizenship education in informal educational spaces, such as the family or the "street," and more formal, school-based education. For instance, Beth Rubin (2007) has developed a compelling "situated sociocultural" approach to understanding how youth learn citizenship identities across school and community contexts. Thea Renda Abu el Haj (2007) has illuminated the complex forms of belonging that evolve among transnational Palestinian-American youth, who must negotiate the contradictory messages they receive about being Muslims and Americans in a US school with the sense of belonging imparted to them through family and community discourses. Finally, Patti Buck and Rachel Silver (2008) describe the citizenship dilemmas faced by immigrant adult Somali women in a Maine town, when the "liberal" subjectivity of citizenship encouraged upon them by their well-meaning teachers at an adult learning center clashes with the forms of gendered adult identity and community solidarity into which they were previously educated.

### **FROM IDENTITY FORMATION TO CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: A BRIEF STORY FROM MEXICO**

This new body of work that explores citizenship identities across multiple contexts is highly significant, for it enables us to tease out the relationships between formal and informal educational registers, and to explore contradictions or continuities between them; to assess the balance of democratic versus non-democratic influences; and to theorize a whole new process and domain for educational anthropology. In order to explore this in greater detail, allow me tell a story about how I discovered and developed the dimension of "citizenship" in my own work.

About ten years ago, I completed a study of student culture and identity formation at a Mexican secondary school (Levinson, 2001). In that work, I sought to understand how students in the school, amid considerable sociocultural diversity, developed what I came to call, following Ortner (1996), a cultural "game of equality." Tropes of



equality and national identity, rooted in the broader history of post revolutionary Mexican education and state formation, formed an important part of school life. The school's creation of diverse class cohorts and structuring of everyday activities also encouraged a sense of equality. Students appropriated these organizational and discursive resources made available to them to create their own cultural forms, and their own meanings, through the informal social domain. As a result, students from otherwise rather different backgrounds and sociocultural circumstances came to see one another as more alike, more "equal," within the terms of this cultural game. Playing the game in 1991 then had consequences for students' identities and trajectories over the next several years.

My study of student culture and equality in Mexico was originally framed by social and cultural reproduction theory in education. This literature is very "political," to be sure, concerned as it is with how schools help reproduce social inequalities. By the 1990s, an ethnographic stream in the literature had begun to emphasize the role of peer culture in the reproduction of such inequalities (Levinson and Holland, 1996). What emerged as a common pattern across these ethnographic accounts was the prevalence of subcultural polarization in US, European, and Australian secondary schools. It appeared that school structures and practices fomented such polarization. I wanted to study whether and how this happened at a Mexican secondary school. What I eventually discovered, in short, was a school structure and culture that promoted unification, even as it gave rise to new and unintended divisions between secondary students and those who no longer studied (Levinson, 1996). Above all, the school promoted a strong common identity on the grounds of national citizenship, and this common identity, appropriated and inflected by students, forestalled the polarization of student peer groups; it also appeared to displace or postpone processes of reproductive differentiation to spaces and times outside or after school life.

Contemporaneous with my extended period of fieldwork (1988–1998) was a burgeoning movement for democracy in Mexico (Preston and Dillon, 2004). In fits and starts, Mexican civil society was beginning to throw off the yoke of authoritarian, single-party rule. Elections became fairer and cleaner, and the flow of information became freer. Human rights and transparency in government emerged as key discourses of an emerging democratic culture. Opposition parties secured important victories, and new social movements generated outside the state came to exercise important influence on policy and public opinion. Concurrent with the democratic turn, Mexicans across the political spectrum also grew increasingly concerned about social "disintegration." The combined influence of mass media, transnational migration, economic recession, aggressive consumerism, and new forms of labor exploitation appeared to create severe dislocations in everyday life. Among the dislocations that adult Mexicans most emphasized was the shifting, precarious attitude of many youth. To hear parents and teachers tell it, Mexican youth were now more likely than ever to gratuitously challenge parental authority, engage in violence or crime, and disrespect the traditional symbols of national and community life. Adults talked a lot about a "loss of values" in the current generation, yet they had few ideas about how to effectively address it (Levinson, 2003, 2005). Many, of course, looked to the school; more specifically, they sought a solution through resuscitating the grand tradition of civic education (Latapí Sarre, 2003).

From the moment of its creation in 1923, the Mexican secondary school, or *secundaria*, has prominently featured a civics curriculum. Through successive presidential administrations of the twentieth century, civic education has varied, but always around certain key themes: learning and valuing the official legal and political instruments of Mexican society, especially the Constitution; developing a sense of belonging and commitment to the nation; and developing forms of solidarity and cooperation at the local level. However, since 1974, and when I did the main part of my fieldwork, from 1990 to 1991, there was no longer a separate course in “civic education” at most secondary schools like the one I studied; instead, civic education themes and discussions of democracy were folded into the omnibus subject, “Social Sciences.” A serious reform of Mexican civic education only began just as I was finishing my year of school ethnography, and it wasn’t until 1995 that the secretary of education gave an internal team the charge to create an ambitious new program in “civic and ethical formation” (FCE) for all three years of secondary school. The FCE program attempted to respond to those societal concerns about the loss of values through a curriculum of democratic citizenship education. Meanwhile, prominently placed advocates of the ongoing democratic opening also saw in the schools, and the FCE program, a chance to build a new political culture from the ground up. For them, values of democratic participation, equity, open debate, and respect were paramount.

By 1999 the new FCE program had been implemented in virtually every Mexican secondary school, public or private (Levinson, 2003). Highlighting a dialogic, student-centered pedagogy, the authors of the FCE hoped that it would form the axis of a new, less authoritarian school culture to offset traditionally authoritarian practices (Fierro and Carbajal, 2003; García Salord and Vanella, 1992). Moreover, the decision to combine the political socialization goals of civic education with the multi-faceted aim of “ethical” values formation brought together a set of so-called democratic attitudes and competencies that had not been articulated in quite the same fashion before. Education for democratic citizenship became inextricably linked with the clarification of values and the “prevention” of undesirable attitudes and activities, such as drug use, prostitution, or illegal gang participation. Importantly, prevention would not be sought through moralizing or punitive measures (e.g., “Abstinence only” or “Just say no”), but through a process of communication and dialogical reflection.

Throughout this same period of the 1990s, my interest in education for democracy continued to grow as I finished a book and cast about for new topics of research. Yet I have continually asked myself how and why I could have missed the importance of citizenship and democracy in my earlier fieldwork; indeed, neither the word democracy nor citizenship appears in my book’s index. I’ve since come to believe that a major factor contributing to this temporary myopia was the absence of a serious discourse on citizenship and democracy in the anthropology of education. Neither social and cultural reproduction theory, nor the prevailing variants of “cultural difference” theory in our field, encourages us to link our research with the concerns of citizenship and democracy. While our existing theoretical frames and normative commitments may carry an implicit democratic charge (justice, equity, and inclusiveness), they fail to orient us explicitly toward questions and debates of political agency and publics. In many ways, this inattention to politics simply mirrors a deeper American educational myopia. The themes of citizenship education for

democracy – political participation, deliberation, civic engagement, etc. – are relatively invisible in our typical school curriculum, not to mention the surrounding civic culture. It's no wonder, then, that we hadn't sniffed them out very well. Tellingly, much of my own inspiration came from outside the discipline – a perennially strong program in social studies education for democracy at my home institution, Indiana University (Patrick, Hamot, and Leming, 2003). It was also the special interest of two of my graduate students in the “new” democratic civic education in Estonia and Indonesia, respectively (Doyle Stevick and Wendy Gaylord), that prodded me to look again, and to look differently, in Mexico.

When I finally “discovered” the broader Mexican debate about democratic citizenship in the late 1990s, and when I learned of recent developments in civic education, I realized for perhaps the first time that what had taken center stage in my ethnographic writing – under a different name – were in fact practices of citizenship education. Even without a stand-alone civics curriculum, the *secundaria* I studied was actively engaged in producing moral subjects oriented toward the collective good. The wearing of common uniforms, the structuring of “mixed” cohorts, teachers' exhortations to solidarity, the Monday morning rituals of national identification – all of these were clearly elements of an integral values education for citizenship (Levinson, 2002). Of course, at the same time there was an active values education occurring in spaces outside the school. In my writing, I describe this varied education of the home, the church, the workplace, and the “street” in a language of identity formation, but it was also, I now see, about the modalities of citizenship. And the sense of citizenship one learned in the school did not always mesh smoothly with the citizenship taught and caught elsewhere. One female student, for instance, was an avid consumer of pop psychology advice in magazines and daytime television programs. Embracing the individualistic ethic of self-improvement communicated there, she chafed against the school's emphasis on group solidarity. Another student, from a rural indigenous community, all but knew that he would soon be joining his brother in the fields and restaurants of California. He remained aloof and skeptical of the school's claim to provide mobility and solidarity through its rituals of identification; one foot was already placed in a transnational counterpublic whose political imaginary questioned the legitimacy of the Mexican state to provide social and economic opportunities. Since my study was framed by reproduction theory, I was still asking what now seem like sterile questions about whether, and how, such phenomena contributed to the “reproduction of inequality.” I did not ask whether, and how, such phenomena contributed to educating the students “to imagine their social belonging and exercise their participation as democratic citizens” across different publics.

In my recent research, then, I have explored one small corner of the educational bureaucracy in Mexico. I have undertaken a modest ethnographic study of how the FCE program came into being, and how it is now faring in the context of other, competing proposals for citizenship education (Levinson, 2005). Yet my broader agenda eventually includes a return to the students – an intensive, multi-sited ethnographic study of civic teaching and learning in early Mexican adolescence. Through both longitudinal and “latitudinal” methods, I will attempt to assess the relative impact of school-based citizenship education on students' broader learning of civic identities and public commitments. I am still interested in the problem of inequality, but

I re-frame it in terms of the identities that inspire and enable democratic commitments to, and participation for, social justice.

### **FORMAL DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION: THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION**

To this point, I have argued the need for us to study and theorize practices and processes of citizenship formation occurring in and out of schools, especially when they are not explicitly recognized as such. In this last section, I shift my attention to deliberate and explicit school-based programs. School-based programs in democratic civic and citizenship education (DCE) have become one of the primary sites for the creation of new political dispositions and identities, and for the consolidation of particular meanings about “democracy.” What has occurred over the last 20 years is a veritable explosion of activity in this domain, galvanized by international charters and agreements on the one hand, and civil society activism on the other. The result is a curious amalgam of programs and activities which reflect a minimal consensus on such values as “participation” and “freedom,” but which display a great variety of interpretations of such values in practical implementation. This alone should qualify such programs as eminently worthy of anthropological attention.

Let me illustrate again, briefly, with the case of Latin America in the global purview. Any anthropological attempt to understand the growing phenomenon of DCE in Latin America must first reckon with its historical-institutional context, and ask the following, rather “sociological” questions: what are the major organizations sponsoring democracy, and how do they work?; who funds them?; what laws and policy statements have been passed that are driving these programs?; what is the prevailing political and social climate, and what is the existential context, in which certain kinds of programs and policies are being developed (e.g., a prevalence of human rights abuses; corruption; civil war; narcotraffic)?; finally, what role do government agencies, especially ministries of education, play in developing and implementing these programs, and what role do various NGOS – local, national, and international – play? what kinds of collaborations/relationships, if any, exist between these different sectors?

The kinds of visible programs and initiatives in DCE, while associated with particular organizations, often have their roots in broader social movements that find their expression within such organizations. With the (re)emergence of democracy in Latin America, a variety of social actors who had participated in the democratic struggle have now moved into positions of leadership. Often having endured the worst measures of dictatorship, they now find themselves at the forefront of efforts to consolidate a democratic culture and thereby forestall future swings back to authoritarian rule.

Partly as a result of such activism, since the late 1980s most independent Latin American nations have included some form of DCE in their education plans and reforms, and they have been abetted by multilateral organizations often led by democratic activists as well. The Organization of American States (OAS) is one of the most proactive policy bodies to sponsor DCE throughout Latin America. At

least since the Second Summit of the Americas, held in Santiago, Chile, in 1998, numerous mandates for attention to “democratic values and practices” have been promulgated during OAS general assemblies, plenary sessions, and Summits of the Americas. Such efforts were strongly bolstered by the signing of the Inter-American Democratic Charter of the OAS in September of 2001. Articles 26 and 27 of the Charter placed emphasis on education for developing a “democratic culture” to accompany democratic political reforms, and this provided the justification for the eventual establishment of the Inter-American Program on Education for Democratic Values and Practices at the OAS.

The OAS is one kind of international organization that influences the direction of DCE within Latin America. However, there is also a very active NGO sector, with varying degrees of collaboration with, and funding from, state agencies. For instance, Civitas Latin America is a US-based non-governmental organization that provides democratic education services to its Latin American partners. It receives a major portion of its funding from the United States Department of Education under the Education for Democracy Act approved by the United States Congress. Other strong influences come from member-state organizations, such as the United Nations (particularly UNESCO), the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI), and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The IDB enabled an initial “observatory” of regional citizenship education trends to evolve into a well-funded Regional System for the Evaluation and Development of Citizenship Competencies (SREDECC). SREDECC has gained strength more recently by collaborating with the IEA Civic Education Study and developing a unique Latin American module of this internationally comparative study.

Virtually every Latin American State has subscribed to one or more of these regional and international policy-making bodies. State education ministries are thus strongly conditioned by the agreements, mechanisms, and policies that such bodies establish. National laws and policies are often formulated with reference to them. In this way, a broad hemispheric commitment to DCE has been orchestrated. This is the over arching historical-institutional context. Yet when we examine particular programs anthropologically, we should also ask: how is “democracy” implicitly or explicitly defined and conceived by actors in different roles?; what kinds of knowledge, competencies, values, or dispositions are highlighted, and what kinds of political agency fostered?; what is the political-social context in which certain values and competencies are highlighted over others?; finally, how are policy goals transformed or translated into practice?

In virtually all DCE discourses and programs, there is broad agreement about the need to supplement “mere” electoral democratization with more robust and far-reaching cultural change. Policymakers see education – more specifically, schooling – as the most effective way to bring about such change. There is also broad agreement that such education cannot rely on the time-worn accumulation of encyclopedic knowledge that characterized the “old” civic education. Rather, DCE necessarily involves the creation of new values, dispositions, skills, and knowledge. It is not surprising, then, that older terms like *valores* (values), *ética* (ethics), or *normas* (norms), as well as the newer *competencias* (competencies), figure prominently in DCE programs. Such programs claim to seek to instill deep commitments

to democracy in which core values and knowledge undergird reflective action. Where the DCE programs differ amongst themselves is in the values they highlight and the competencies they seek to develop (not to mention the varying degrees of political will to implement them). Some place emphasis on deliberative conceptions of democracy, others rule-of-law, others participatory democracy, and so forth. And in cases where the rhetoric would seem to be similar, the meanings can be quite different as well. For instance, participation has become the ubiquitous watchword of programs for DCE. Schools are supposed to create participatory dispositions, or competencies, through dialogic, student-centered, problem-solving pedagogies. Yet participation has also become a kind of Rorschach image, susceptible to manifold cultural and ideological projections. We know that the term participation can be drafted as easily into a neoliberal project of governance as a social democratic or socialist one (see Paley, 2001). If in Latin America the modernizing, developmentalist state of the 1940s to the 1970s wanted “productive” citizens who worked for the good of the country, the neoliberal state wants “participatory” citizens who can learn to solve their own problems and provide for their own needs privately, or at best through civil society. Meanwhile, the populist democratic state (e.g., Venezuela) wants participatory citizens who become public “protagonists” for state-led social change. Thus, meanings of democratic participation may correspond roughly to state forms and state projects.

When we bring Latin America together with Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and other regions, what we are witnessing is an unprecedented and concerted effort to use formal education to form democratic citizens on a global scale. At least in rhetoric, it seems a striking attempt to retool schools away from their authoritarian roots and refunctionalize them as spaces of democratic conviviality – not unlike the global effort to refunctionalize schools for indigenous and regional language revitalization, and away from the colonial ethos of linguistic assimilation (see McCarty and Warhol, Chapter 11, above). Yet until recently, the study of this phenomenon has been dominated by researchers in the fields of political science, comparative education, and social studies education (Niemi and Junn, 1998; Torney-Purta *et al.*, 2001). Such researchers tend to use survey methods, and they tend to take for granted the limited hegemonic meanings of liberal (representative) democracy. They cannot, for instance, parse out the different meanings that “participation” might have for both education policymakers and the teachers and students who engage in the prescribed activities of DCE. With its diverse methodological toolkit, anthropology has a great deal to contribute to this body of work. Indeed, we cannot afford to concede this field of study entirely to other research traditions. It is too fascinating, and too important.

Anthropology has always had as its strength the elucidation of cultural frameworks of meaning, of local identities; in recent years, as we’ve learned to cross sites and theorize both social scale and connectivity, we’ve also become more adept at understanding the interplay between such local identities and broader social, cultural, and political-economic structures and processes (Lamphere, 1992; Marcus, 1998). We understand how concepts of “the educated person” are structured at the local level and enter into a dynamic interplay with other concepts of the educated person that circulate at the level of the state and the global system (Levinson and Holland, 1996).

Describing with ethnographic detail the interplay between informal citizenship education practices and discourses, and the DCE of schools, anthropology is poised to make a significant contribution.

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