

Book Reviews

Democracy, Education, and Multiculturalism: Dilemmas of Citizenship in a Global World. Carlos A. Torres. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998, 300 pages.

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In *Democracy, Education, and Multiculturalism* Carlos A. Torres ambitiously attempts to synthesize classical theories of liberal democracy and citizenship with contemporary challenges to them. Finding common ground for these theories is not an easy task, particularly as many multicultural theories are critiques of the so-called classical theories of citizenship and democracy. Despite this obstacle, Torres comprehensively analyzes the potential linkages between the theories and outlines the broad theoretical developments. He essentially engages in a dialogue with the key texts and their postmodern, poststructural, and feminist challenges. The goal of the work is to find a genesis on which a new definition of citizenship education can be constructed, to which Torres argues that pluralism must be a central consideration.

After laying out his goal and the organization of the book in Chapter 1, in Chapter 2 Torres asserts that theories of the state control and define the system of education, particularly policy and research, and are the locus for understanding the relationship among citizenship, democracy, and multiculturalism. He argues that the contemporary use of classical theories of the state must incorporate postmodern and feminist critiques, as well as the impact of globalization. Chapter 3 argues that the current process of globalization is dissolving the sovereignty of the nation-state. This process thus has significant implications for citizenship and democracy, which are dependent on a theory of the state.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 examine in detail theories of citizenship, democracy, and multiculturalism. Chapter 4 concludes that past liberal conceptions of citizenship ignore the problems of widespread poverty and social class, while arguing that the Enlightenment foundation of citizenship tied to the liberal state is necessary. Here Torres relies heavily on Marshall's concept of the duality of democratic citizenship, as well Pateman's (1970) work on the educative aspects of participatory democracy, and incorporates feminist critiques. Chapter 5 uses the work of Macpherson as a starting point to discuss the crisis of liberal democracy and capitalism and to explore the challenges of Freire's work for democratic education. Chapter 6 examines multicultural education from different political perspectives using the work of Bank to link multicultural education to the problems of democracy.

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The type of citizenship that Torres favors, a “multicultural citizenship,” is made specific only in the Conclusion, Chapter 7, and then not in the detail or care with which he fashions the rest of the book. Remaining true to his argument that liberal democracy must remain the base for democratic citizenship, Torres redefines classical civic virtues when stating his preference for a model of citizenship. These virtues are tolerance, knowledge, hope, love, and dialogue and are presumably distilled from the key works of multiculturalism and contemporary critiques of liberal democratic citizenship.

Democracy, Education, and Multiculturalism is narrowly theoretical, despite the author’s stated hope that it “tries not to be just another stone nested in that wall representing the mass of theoretical constructs that only philosophers can decipher ... it also seeks to help parents, adults, youth, and children” (p. 2). A contribution to the field of educational theory does not ensure a contribution to educational practice, either for teachers or students; and it is unlikely that this book will be read by anyone other than educational theorists. In this case the distance from theory to the practice of education is simply too great. To be fair, it is not his intent to write a practical or programmatic book, and it is thus more relevant to address the author’s stated intentions. The question, then, is whether Torres actually developed a specific theory of multicultural citizenship, and the answer is that he did not. The result of the book’s comprehensive theoretical discussion is the hope that Torres’ updated choice of civic virtues will replace traditional civic virtues. The construction of citizenship, and any theory that purports to describe it, is more complex than solitary civic virtues, although they are an important aspect of citizenship. Pateman (1970) observed that although a number of democratic theorists believe a certain character is necessary to maintain a democratic polity, they rarely discuss how it can be developed in the population. Torres’ work would be more valuable if it addressed this point or was a prelude to the elucidation of a novel theory that contributed to citizenship education.

In arguing for locating educational reform in the political context, it is surprising that Torres’ solution is entirely apolitical, by simply hoping that millions of citizens embrace new values toward their fellow citizens and their daily lives. More useful than attempting to reify the elusive and mythical concept of “civic virtues” would be an inspiring description of the “multicultural citizen,” the character of society in which one could flourish, and how schools might contribute to its formation. Unfortunately, Torres does not construct a viable theory of citizenship, and the work’s lack of political engagement makes it unlikely to have a significant impact in the field of educational practice. This book is appropriate for those who are interested in a scholarly, detailed review of theoretical works in the areas of education, democracy, and the state; however, if you are most concerned with shedding “light upon this or that group of individuals, this or that concrete human being, this or that special institution or social arrangement,” then it will be less useful (Dewey, in Rorty, 1998, p. 92).

References

- Pateman, C. (1970). *Participation and democratic theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 Rorty, R. (1998). *Achieving our country: Leftist thought in twentieth century America*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.