

**Book Review**

# Citizenship Under Fire: Democratic Education in Times of Conflict

Sigal R. Ben-Porath

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The effects of war within a nation and what it means to be a citizen in wartime has evolved dramatically in the last fifteen years. Sigal Ben-Porath's *Citizenship Under Fire* takes a close look at the recreating of citizen identity when one's country is involved in a protracted and seemingly endless war. Specifically examining the effects of the War on Terror on citizens and education in both Israel and the United States, Ben-Porath presents an innovative conception of expansive education as a way to promote democratic ideals and citizens. Though it is now ten years since the first publication, Ben-Porath's analysis is still topical and provides an important framework through which democratic change can be considered.

Ben-Porath's main analysis rightly identifies a unique change in the identity of citizens whose country is involved in a protracted conflict, the "belligerent citizens." This altered citizenry is highlighted through three broad changes: an increase in mandated citizen contribution by the state, a decrease in tolerant pluralism caused by a withdrawal into highly stratified social groups, and the discouragement of deliberation amongst citizens. These changes are then found and enhanced within civic education, which she describes as "the institutional tool legitimately used to enhance the civic commitments of future citizens" (p. 36). Education then must be armed against the rising belligerent citizen, and a wide number of paths are explored in this book, including peace education, feminist education, and multiculturalism in education.

The conceptual flexibility and applicability of both a belligerent citizenry and the suggested educational remedies serve as one of the important pillars of this analysis. Although only the effects of protracted external conflict are examined, I believe that it is also appropriate to apply these changes to citizen identity when a country is involved in a similar internal conflict. This can be found within the Canadian political landscape when considering the historical and current treatment of First Nations people, where the conflict only serves to further separate all Canadians despite recent reconciliation efforts.

Expansive education is the proposed solution which will combat the narrow and undemocratic citizen created in wartime. Ben-Porath articulates three aspects of expansive education. The first is that schools must create "reverse patriotism" through a "diversification of the conceptions of patriotism" (p. 48). Secondly, expansive education must use dialogue as a form of pedagogy, incorporating a variety of social perspectives into civic education. Among other benefits, Ben-Porath argues that this would "accommodate some of the most pressing

social needs, expectations, and tendencies in times of war” (p. 114), especially those that ensure the continuing stability of a democratic theory of education. Thirdly, schools must focus on forming a student identity based on a “shared fate.”

In chapters 1 and 2, Ben-Porath interrogates the creation of a belligerent citizenry by examining the changes found in the democratic ideals and resulting actions of civic participation, social unity, and deliberation and dialogue. She outlines the belligerent citizen as found in both the American and Israeli contexts and the negative consequences then found in liberal citizenship. Ben-Porath, drawing on the work of Iris Marion Young, posits that the suppression of democratic commitments leads to a growing risk to the survival of the state and that the resulting change in citizen identity is that of increased isolationism and oppression. She then suggests an alternative view of citizenship that must be created through democratic education, identity as shared fate. This alternative view is based on the many “ties among the members of the community and the mutual effects of their political choices” (p. 27) and could include the shared commitment to a social contract, shared voice in representatives in government, and shared economic resources. For Ben-Porath, to view citizenship as shared fate is to move beyond national or political identity.

Chapters 3-5 discuss, in turn, the contributions that peace education, feminist education, and multicultural education make to expansive education. She argues persuasively that when political context is removed from education, resulting in a blurring of important definitions such as war/peace and war/gender, the problematic implications reinforce patriarchal ideas and systems, disavowing minority groups and reinforcing dominant ones. Ben-Porath, in her chapter on feminist contributions to expansive education, engages in an important discussion on the structural gendering present in modern wartime.

Chapter 6 works to connect the previous themes covered under the umbrella of expansive education, which works to balance “the demands of belligerent citizenship with democratic principles and a realistic version of peace” (p. 113). This is done through including a diverse—and possibly dissenting—range of views in the classroom that will involve educational communities as a whole, including students, teachers, and parents. Ben-Porath concludes that for expansive education to remain relevant, this vision of education should be realized through experience and must be based on an understanding of education as a political endeavour which responds “to the lived experiences of students” (p. 128).

Although Ben-Porath’s analysis is intriguing, the broad range of ideas covered results in missing discussions on necessary ideas, such as a critical discussion of power within expansive education. Ben-Porath details the oppressive form of power found in the creation and maintenance of belligerent citizenry but neglects to further the discussion in her proposed solution. There is no discussion on the power interactions found between student and teacher, and readers will be left to formulate for themselves how expansive education will work as a form of emancipatory education within the limits of a democratic theory of education.

Also limiting is Ben-Porath’s chapter on peace education, in which students as future citizens must “learn to aspire to, embrace, and endure the road for peace” (p. 57). Peace education, while an admirable educational goal, is confused in this chapter because of the ambiguity surrounding the definition of peace. She presents two current views on peace within education, characterized as either too broad or too narrow, but does not suggest how either’s flaws should be accounted for nor is a differing conception of peace offered. This leaves the chapter wanting and seemingly serves more as a critique than a positive contribution to expansive education. Also in this chapter, the work that Ben-Porath provides seems to conflate

peace with democracy, which are interrelated but irreducible.

Despite these limitations, Ben-Porath's *Citizenship Under Fire* provides an important view into the needs of the education system to address the changing national landscape found in wartime. The relationship between education and the political complexities faced today is an unfortunate but necessary field of research that will require more work to be done.

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