The Transforming Citizen: A Conceptual Framework for Civic Education in Challenging Times

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Abstract: This article presents The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education as an approach for critical engagement with citizenship in a democratic society during challenging times. It consists of three phases that can be deployed to facilitate critical civic education: Exposure, Emergence, and Embodiment. The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education offers guidance to those scholars and practitioners committed to envisioning higher education as transformative and emancipatory. This article also shares a vignette in which The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education was used to design, teach, and evaluate an undergraduate sociology course. It is my hope that the reader will transfer the knowledge in this article to their own context as they transform themselves in order to transform society.

Résumé: Cet article présente le cadre conceptuel E^3 pour l'éducation civique en tant qu'approche pour un engagement critique envers la citoyenneté dans une société démocratique en ces temps difficiles. Il se compose de trois phases qui peuvent être déployées pour faciliter l'éducation civique critique: exposition, émergence et incarnation. Le cadre conceptuel E^3 pour l'éducation civique offre des conseils aux praticiens et aux universitaires engagés à envisager l'enseignement supérieur comme transformateur et émancipateur. Cet article met également en lumière une vignette dans laquelle le cadre conceptuel E^3 pour l'éducation civique a été utilisé pour concevoir, enseigner et évaluer un cours de sociologie de premier cycle. J'espère que le lecteur transférera les connaissances de cet article dans son propre contexte à mesure qu'il se transforme afin de changer la société.

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The current landscape of society is characterized by political uneasiness, economic uncertainty, and social unrest (Finnegan, 2019; Keet, 2018). The relationship between institutions and individuals is seemingly fragile, as a sense of distrust becomes more prevalent. The ebb and flow of the economy brings with it immense stress for those struggling to make ends meet. The presence of social inequalities leads to much needed resistance from people who are ready to no longer occupy the margins. All of these challenges must also be examined in respect to changing ecological circumstances, including a pandemic. Thus, it is crucial for us to reconsider our place in society as it continues to shift around us. Civic education, then, is one possibility for us to deploy as we attempt to traverse these unknown and uncomfortable waters (Carcasson & Sprain, 2012). There exist many conceptualizations of citizenship within the research on and practice of civic education (Banks, 2017; Hanson & Howe, 2011; Sabzalian, 2019; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Wheeler-Bell, 2012). While they may vary in scale and scope, each shares the core idea that civic education is fundamental for a democracy to flourish in challenging times (Hoskins, 2013).

The purpose of this article is to join the scholars and practitioners, both past and present, who reimagine and reinvigorate civic education by offering a conceptual framework that has the potential to inform our understanding and practice of citizenship in a democratic society from a critical perspective (Wheeler-Bell, 2012). The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education positions a person as a citizen when they actively, critically, and reflectively engage in civic life (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Levine, 2006). It consists of three phases that suggest a pathway for developing and implementing critical civic education in higher education institutions. The first phase, Exposure, refers to the initial interaction between the student and critical citizenship. The second phase, Emergence, occurs when the student develops the capacity for and interest in critical citizenship. The third phase, Embodiment, describes a state of being and doing in which critical citizenship is part of daily life for the student. The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education suggests that people must transform themselves in order to transform society (Finnegan, 2019; Mezirow, 1989), but it should be acknowledged that this is a process of lifelong learning for each one of us (Clancy, 2019).

This article is organized into five interconnected parts. The first part offers background that situates The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education in its social realities. In other words, it reveals

and critiques the social inequalities that push so many within a democratic society to the margins. The second part explores other conceptualizations of civic education as described in the literature. This review is meant to demonstrate how The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education moves the discussion of civic education forward. The third part presents the theoretical underpinnings that inform how and why The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education functions. It makes the connection(s) between democratic education, transformative learning, and critical pedagogy as a nexus for social change. The fourth part outlines each phase of The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education for implementation in higher education institutions. It is important to note, however, that the phases are often iterative in nature. The fifth part presents a vignette of The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education in action. Although this article is more abstract in nature, The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education has value for scholars and practitioners beyond the pages of the manuscript itself. This article, in its entirety, serves as a call to action for us all to accept and adopt a framing of civic education that is transformative and emancipatory in challenging times.

Background

Before a discussion of The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education can occur, we must first have an understanding of the social realities in which it is situated. In other words, we must recognize the institutions and inequalities that shape daily life in order to discern the rationale for a conceptual framework for civic education from a critical perspective. This means deploying the sociological imagination as a way for us to step outside of our individual realities to see the social realities. Mills (1959) describes the sociological imagination as "the vivid awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society" (p. 6). For example, a person who is using their sociological imagination would see that poverty is largely a result of societal barriers that limit access to resources and opportunities for individuals. He explained,

> The first fruit of this imagination—and the first lesson of the social science that embodies it—is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period,

> that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances. (Mills, 1959, p. 5)

The sociological imagination, then, equips us to better uncover the forces at play in institutions that produce and perpetuate inequalities in society (Doob, 2019; Hurst et al., 2020). These institutions—including family, education, healthcare, and media—play a key role in the socialization of individuals (Ore, 2018).

By revealing the inequalities that permeate institutions, we become empowered to critique and transform them as an enactment of citizenship. Such inequalities often manifest through a process called social stratification, which sorts and ranks individuals into groups based on socially constructed categories (Marger, 2014). For example, race and racism have a complicated history within institutions of the United States that is characterized by exclusion and exploitation of racialized communities. It is only through a deployment of the sociological imagination that such inequalities become clear as embedded in the fabric of a society built on hegemonic, patriarchal, and neoliberal structures (Giroux & Robbins, 2015). The conceptual framework offered in this article, thus, is formed on the assumption that society is inherently unjust.

Civic education—a curricular exploration of society and the individual's role in it— offers the opportunity to redress those structural woes through the development of a sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) and a critical consciousness (Freire, 1972). Higher education institutions are socially situated in such a way to intentionally contribute to this empowerment of students as they gain an understanding of the world around them and their positionalities in the world. In fact, it is arguable that such a notion captures the very mission of universities and colleges (Gourley, 2012). Students must become equipped to tackle wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973) in order to shape a better future for those on the margins. Civic education, then, enables students to become transforming citizens as they learn to see beyond individual realities (Kelley et al., 2021), to disrupt oppressive structures and practices (Giroux, 2014), and to promote democratic thinking (Helwig & Yang, 2016).

Review of Literature

Many scholars and practitioners have offered conceptualizations of citizenship for our consideration (Banks, 2017; Hanson & Howe, 2011; Johnson & Morris, 2010; Swalwell & Payne, 2019; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Wheeler-Bell, 2012). While each one might vary from the next, it is evident that they all share a core idea. Civic education is fundamental for a democracy to flourish in challenging times (Hoskins, 2013). Westheimer and Kahne (2004) suggest that there are three types of citizens needed to support a democracy. The personably responsible citizen acts thoughtfully and mindfully within their community. The participatory citizen engages in civic activities at the local, state, and national levels. The justice-orientated citizen recognizes and redresses inequalities that plague a society. Of course, it is not enough to be responsible within your community as a means for promoting democracy. Westheimer and Kahne argue, "Developing commitments for civic participation and social justice as well as fostering the capacities to fulfill those commitments will support the development of a more democratic society" (p. 245). Civic education, then, is how we can move people toward the capacity for transforming society through citizenship.

Banks (2017) also provides a citizenship configuration comprised of four types. Failed citizenship occurs when a nation-state does not recognize an individual who then develops ambivalent feelings toward the nation-state. Recognized citizenship occurs when a nation-state acknowledges and affirms an individual by providing full rights for participation. Participatory citizenship occurs when an individual acts on the right for participation provided by the nation-state. Transformative citizenship occurs when an individual acts on values, such as human rights, to enact social change. Higher education institutions can "help reduce failed citizenship and enable students to acquire structural inclusion, political efficacy, and civic action skills by implementing transformative citizenship education" (Banks, 2017, p. 7). Pedagogical strategies for implementation in civic education might include culturally sustaining pedagogies, ethnic studies curriculum, and service learning.

It is crucial to understand not only how citizenship is defined but also how civic education might function. Wheeler-Bell (2012) suggests a critical approach to civic education that is meant to prepare students to transform society. By developing a "spirit of activism," students become conscious of inequalities in society and are able to engage in social movements. Wheeler-Bell points out, ".

. . the educational experience needed to radically change society is much different than one needed to reproduce, or slightly alter, the current society" (p. 6). Johnson and Morris (2010) outline a framework for critical civic education that pairs four elements from critical pedagogy (politics, social, self, and praxis) with four competencies for citizenship (knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions). Their framework "can be used as a pictorial representation to contrast the existence of, opportunities for, and absence of elements of critical citizenship within the various levels of a curriculum and its materials (p. 91). Johnson and Morris point out, however, that the framework is a malleable work in progress.

Moreover, Swalwell and Payne (2019) contend that critical civic education has the potential to equip students "to form and voice opinions, solve problems, recognize diversity and inequality, and consider the impact of their decisions on others" (p. 131). This pedagogical perspective demonstrates that action is at the heart of critical civic education. It is not enough for students to simply understand society through a critical lens; they must also act to transform society as more just for all. Swalwell and Payne warn us that enactments of citizenship may have power and privilege woven into them. They state,

> [W]e must also consider how the various identities of our students provide differing histories, politics, and ideas about how to engage civically. Given that the varied traditions of deliberation and civic engagement are all classed, raced, and gendered, among others, educators must be wary of presenting any civic engagement as natural, neutral, or apolitical. (p. 129)

For example, we witnessed systematic voter suppression among racialized communities in the United States during the 2020 presidential election. Voting is seen as the bedrock of a democratic society, but we cannot assume that racialized communities are always able to deploy those strategies for citizenship when structural forces act against them.

Unfortunately, each of these conceptualizations is situated in and informed by nation-states that are hegemonic, patriarchal, and colonial. There are scholars and practitioners, however, who have problematized the reliance on such conceptualizations that tend to exclude some perspectives and privilege other perspectives (Sabzalian, 2019). It is worth noting that such discussions of

citizenship and civic education offer key insights that advance our understanding in critical and emancipatory ways. Sabzalian (2019), for instance, argues that civic education is rooted in the logics of settler colonialism that seek to erase Indigenous sovereignty through its focus on legal membership to an often oppressive nation-state. Of course, this notion of citizenship completely ignores the nationhood and autonomy of Indigenous peoples. Sabzalian proposes a framework for civic education in which "its theories and practices must be placed within the context of ongoing colonization and Indigenous peoples' struggles to protect their lands, lifeways, nations, and sovereignty" (p. 313). To achieve that, the framework provides six orientations—place, presence, perspectives, political nationhood, power, and partnerships—that inform teaching and learning for citizenship through an Indigenous lens.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Democratic Education

The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education is supported and guided by the notion of democratic education. In his foundational text Democracy and Education, Dewey (1916) explores the role of education in a democratic society. He points out that the purpose of the text is to "state the ideas implied in a democratic society and to apply these ideas to the problems of the enterprise of education" (p. 3). In other words, education is pivotal to the pursuit of democracy as students must embrace their role to influence decisions. There has been much discussion about democratic education by scholars and practitioners since Dewey, including some critiques about the actualization of democratic education (Meshulam & Apple, 2018). Democratic education is important to the conceptual framework because it highlights the potential of higher education institutions to foster democratic values and beliefs among students. It is acknowledged, however, that inequalities can still emerge through the best of intentions in civic education.

Transformative Learning

The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education is supported and guided by the idea of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). Adults collect a mosaic of experiences that influence how they see and interpret the world around them. Often times, they develop frames of reference that limit or truncate their perspectives (Mezirow, 1996). Transformative learning, then, is an attempt to

expand those frames of reference to be "more inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative of experience" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Transformative learning is central to the conceptual framework because it asks students to expand and explicate previous conceptualizations of citizenship by moving toward a capacity for critical engagement in society. For many students, this is a paradigm that is unfamiliar and uncomfortable. As such, transformative learning is necessary for students to gain both a broader and a deeper understanding of society through civic education.

Critical Pedagogy

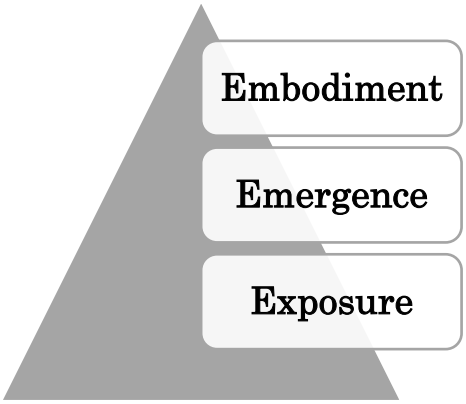
The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education is supported and guided by the principles of critical pedagogy. As previously discussed, there are historical forces that produce and perpetuate inequalities within social institutions (Giroux & Robbins, 2015). It becomes a democratic imperative for students to learn to reveal and critique these inequalities. Critical pedagogy is an approach to teaching and learning that cultivates a critical consciousness among students to recognize and redress inequalities in society through praxis (Freire, 1972; Kincheloe, 2008). In other words, critical pedagogy equips students with a transformed mindset that enables them to transform society to be more just for all. Giroux (2020) notes, "Critical pedagogy takes as one of its central projects an attempt to be discerning and attentive to those places and practices in which social agency has been denied and produced" (p. 1). Critical pedagogy is fundamental to the conceptual framework because it spotlights the importance of education, particularly civic education, in developing students who are liberated by and for social change (Clancy, 2019). Simply put, they become transforming citizens.

The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education

The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education has the potential to inform our understanding and practice of citizenship in a democratic society from a critical perspective (Wheeler-Bell, 2012). It builds on previous conceptualizations of citizenship by positioning a person as a citizen when they actively, critically, and reflectively engage in civic life (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Levine, 2006). In other words, citizenship is seen as an emancipatory enactment of

agency in which an individual challenges and transforms the status quo in their sphere of influence (Gorski, 2013). Critical civic education, then, offers a route to transformation for students as they address wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973) in society that must also be transformed. Of course, this is a process of lifelong learning for each one of us (Clancy, 2019). The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education consists of three phases that suggest a pathway for developing and implementing critical civic education: Exposure, Emergence, and Embodiment (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education



Exposure

The first phase of The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education is Exposure, which refers to the initial interaction between the student and critical citizenship. This is the pedagogical spark that sets the entire conceptual framework into motion. The goal is to capture the student's attention through relevance of and connection to civic education. For many students, a critical approach to citizenship might involve a paradigm shift that makes them uncomfortable. There might even be some resistance to learning. It is paramount for faculty and staff to create a learning environment that is true to the critical mission but is also safe for exploration during the Exposure phase. How might faculty and staff develop a community of learners that is open to new perspectives on the world around them?

Emergence

The second phase of The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education is Emergence, which occurs when the student develops the capacity for and interest in critical citizenship. This is the pedagogical action that keeps the conceptual framework moving. The goal is to foster motivation that pushes the student to continue engaging with civic education in active and reflective ways. It is here that most of the learning occurs in the conceptual framework. In the Emergence phrase, there might be feelings of burnout toward critical citizenship. It is crucial that faculty and staff deploy innovative and transformative pedagogies to keep students going. What activities and assessments might faculty and staff design to promote active and reflective engagement with critical citizenship?

Embodiment

The third phase of The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education is Embodiment, which describes a state of being and doing in which critical citizenship is part of daily life for the student. This is the pedagogical outcome in which the conceptual framework has reached its peak. The student has transformed into a citizen who is able to recognize and redress inequalities that exist in society. In other words, they have developed the capacity for transformation needed to move us toward social justice through civic education. It is essential for faculty and staff to acknowledge the successes of the students. The Embodiment phase is not the end of the journey, though. All of us must be reflexive as we move through the world, as learning is a lifelong and lifewide process that offers us endless potentialities. In what way might faculty and staff foster a culture of lifelong and lifewide learning that transfers to other contexts?

Vignette

Although this article is more abstract in nature, The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education has value for scholars and practitioners beyond the pages of the article itself. As such, I present a vignette of the conceptual framework in action at a higher education institution. I was part of a teaching team for an undergraduate course called Social Problems several years ago. This course examined major issues in society like poverty and

racism through multiple sociological perspectives. It sought to equip students to actively and critically identify, examine, and redress social problems. Students explored the social construction of social problems and discovered how they can enact their agency to create social change. At the core of this course was the sociological imagination. Interestingly, the course brought together students from multiple disciplines at different stages of their academic journeys.

The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education maps nicely onto the course design for Social Problems. The course opened with a documentary on poverty in a Guatemalan village. This was the Exposure phase of The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education, as it drew the students into a discussion on the societal forces that too often push people into poverty. Throughout the course, the students were tasked with developing possible solutions to social problems. This was the Emergence phase of The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education in which the students were asked each week to engage actively, critically, and reflectively with a new social problem. The culminating project for the course was a digital media campaign that clearly and coherently communicated a solution to a real-world social problem of their choice by using an emerging technology. This was the Embodiment phase of The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education, given that the students put their ideas into action beyond the classroom.

Conclusion

It is probably safe to say that society is in a chaotic state at the moment. While that presents challenges to daily life, it also creates opportunities for transformation and liberation. Civic education from a critical perspective, in particular, is one possibility for empowerment that prepares students to enact change in their spheres of influence. Higher education institutions must rise up to disrupt patterns of oppression by shifting focus to emancipatory approaches to teaching and learning. As such, The E3 Conceptual Framework for Civic Education offers some guidance for scholars and practitioners to design learning experiences that challenge the status quo. It is my hope that the reader will transfer the knowledge in this article to their own context as they also become transforming citizens.

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