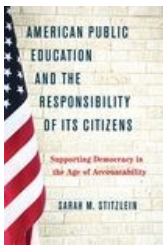


**American Public Education and the Responsibility of its Citizens: Supporting Democracy in the Age of Accountability**

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CHAPTER

# 8 Citizenship Education and Habits of Democracy

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## Abstract

Issues with legitimacy, publicness, and responsibility collectively lead to a vision of citizen preparation that I lay out in chapter eight. This introduces a cycle to support and maintain democracy through creating citizens who learn about and try it out as kids, practice it well years later, and are committed to supporting the public schools that foster it as adults. The alternative is to allow our current course to continue, a course that jeopardizes the strength of our democracy and erodes our capacity to participate in it. We have the opportunity to reorient that course to not only improve democracy and public schools now, but also to chart an improved course toward the growth and flourishing of democracy and public schools in the future.

**Keywords:** Citizenship education, citizen responsibilities, cycle of public school support, civic education, relationship between schools and democracy, civic habits

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Recently I attended a candidates' forum hosted during my local school board election season at a church in a largely black and poor part of my city. After the candidates offered a lengthy commentary on achievement scores, charter schools, and budget concerns from the candidates, a young woman sitting beside me raised her hand. She said, "I don't know much about the education policy or reforms you are talking about, but I'd like to know what you are going to do to produce better citizens in our schools." With her plain-spoken and straight-forward question, she reasserted a central aim of schools, redirected the focus, and started a conversation. Educating children to be good citizens has been one of the most important and longest-held goals for public schools since their inception in America. In recent years, preparing responsible citizens has been ranked the highest or second-highest purpose for schools on the annual Phi Delta Kappa poll.[1] And, on a 2013 national Civic Education and Political Engagement Study, 76% of respondents said that schools should be preparing responsible citizens.[2]

But other studies paint a more complex and shifting picture of our goals. For example, a 2012 Thomas B. Fordham Institute survey found that respondents strongly believe a high-quality core curriculum and an emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education are far more critical in schools than instruction in democracy and citizenship, which was found only moderately important.[3] And a 2014 Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) poll, as reported in the blog of an ASCD associate, found the most widely held purpose of education to be "to create learning conditions that enable all children to develop to their fullest potential," followed by "creating adults who can compete in a global economy."[4] Anecdotally, educating for citizenship, especially as I will describe it in this chapter, is often not at the forefront of many citizens' concerns with schools, and actually may even be contrary to the self-interest and materialist educational goals we see building steam. Also, while some teachers are aware
p. 164 and supportive of this goal, many others are unaware of it or find themselves ↳ forced to focus on other aims. While the goal of educating for citizenship persists in some regards, changing views of individuals, economic competitiveness, and academic achievement may be reshaping this longstanding goal both in terms of its value and how we understand its practice. These changes, alongside other changes threatening democracy that I have already discussed, render citizenship education especially worthy of attention now.

Democracies always have the potential for improvement because they can be improved by the participation and contributions of their citizens, especially, as I have argued so far, those who act responsibly on behalf of the well-being of their fellow citizens and democracy. If we are committed to sustaining or bettering democracy, we must support the development and improvement of our citizens. And, if we aim, as I do, to cultivate citizens who will work to form publics and support public schools as central institutions of democracy, we must be interested not only in the teachers, administrators, policymakers, parents, and taxpayers associated with schools today, but also in the children we are grooming for citizenship in our schools. If we provide our children with an education that nurtures the habits and skills of democratic public life and enable them to experience the benefits it offers, we will be more likely to produce a future generation of citizens that will work to preserve public schools as an important source of democracy and public life.

I'm describing a cycle here, where children learn to enact publicness and democracy within our schools and then, upon experiencing their benefits and becoming adults, seek additional opportunities for democratic participation for themselves and others, especially through schools. This is not an uncritical cycle that blindly celebrates democracy or schools, but rather an educative one that develops skills of criticality, communication, and problem solving necessary to question current democracy and schools and works to revise them, all the while guided by a hope for improved life together. In this chapter, I will begin to describe this cycle, highlighting how we might best educate children for citizenship and public life within our schools. In the final chapter I will detail some of the habits that can best fulfill and perpetuate the cycle.

## Defining Citizens

I turn first to defining citizenship before explicating how best to cultivate citizens within schools and civil society. Citizenship is most basically a legal status based on the rights and responsibilities of a person within a specific location. This is the notion of citizenship we invoke when we say that only US citizens can run for president—the ability to do so (the condition for participation) is tied to our status and location in the United States. This is also the notion of citizenship currently invoked in debates about increasing
p. 165 numbers ↳ of undocumented migrants who are labeled "illegals" because they are not in the United States legally and, therefore, arguably, are not entitled to the status or privileges of citizenship that come with doing so. Even though many Americans are quick to distinguish citizens from "illegals," few people confine their definition of good citizens to a status or geographic location alone. Instead, citizenship is typically thought of as an identity one has relative to others and as a normative way of behaving by using or fulfilling one's rights and responsibilities in particular ways directed by varying theories of democracy. Civic republicans, for instance, would likely uphold participatory responsibilities of citizenship, while liberal republicans would emphasize individual rights and the pursuit of the good life without limiting that of others.

Regardless of political orientation, and in addition to the shift toward the idea of a citizen as a consumer or holder of entitlements described in previous chapters, the definition of citizenship has also been recently changed by the courts. The *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* decision, for example, has awarded the Constitutional powers of speech typically reserved for individual citizens in their support of candidates to large corporations and associations. In other words, the distinction between citizen and corporate groups has become blurred; citizens' powers may now be invoked by those groups, and citizens' voices might be drowned out by the expensive media messages those groups can bankroll. When competing to be heard in the face of such powerful groups, citizens are losing our ability to take a stand and be heard in the polis. This further pushes us toward flexing limited independent economic power as consumers and perhaps magnifying it by joining with other financial contributors, rather than engaging in more significant social and political acts. Given these economic and judicial influences, one may be left to wonder whether the notion of citizenship underlying the calls to teach for citizenship noted above may actually be calling for a different form of citizenship, perhaps one with less political voice and more personal neoliberal responsibility. In other words, our shifts toward individualism, rights talk, and economic competitiveness may be spilling over into the vision of citizenship we see as feasible and which we seek to be taught in our schools.

My notion of citizenship, rooted in the Deweyan participatory view of democracy defined earlier in this book, focuses on putting one's civic skills to work in one's community alongside other citizens, not just as a duty to democracy, but also as an identity and as a way of sharing in the effort of working toward the well-being of oneself and one's community members. This citizen recognizes that democracy is a yet-to-be-fulfilled vision that requires revising and continued effort, especially in the struggle for equality among all its members. My definition of a citizen, then, is focused more on active problem solving and working toward the public good than on just seeing a citizen as a passive rights-bearer or limited consumer. My citizen not only composes publics, but actively creates and shapes them.

p. 166 My desired citizen does more than just participate in civic and public life; she also critiques established systems to understand them, to identify when they perpetuate injustice, to challenge them when they do so, and to alter them by imagining and implementing alternatives. This vision of good citizenship is aligned with the participatory version outlined for commonwealth countries around the world by Tristan McCowan.[5] It grows out of an expanded notion of the "Social-Justice-Oriented Citizen" described by Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne[6] and is enacted through the account of political living I espouse in *Teaching for Dissent*.[7]

Within civil society, citizens can be best developed, and their traits and practices affirmed, through participating in associated life together. Participatory citizens, the sort who get involved in and support public schools, don't come ready-made; rather, they must be educated. One must learn how to participate, how to work alongside others to effectively communicate, critique political systems, solve problems, and craft solutions. Such an understanding of citizenship formation has a lengthy history in America, tracing its roots to the missions of early schools, such as Boston Latin, which set its students the goals of mastering the skills of citizenship and espousing a commitment to democracy in 1635, and carrying into the plan for public education proposed by Thomas Jefferson. Yet, despite this history, schools more recently have moved away from an overt emphasis on this kind of citizenship education, choosing instead to emphasize other goals, such as job preparation and test score achievement. And, as I detailed earlier, untested social studies courses, the primary home for citizenship education, have been increasingly squeezed from the math- and reading-focused curriculum, and the social studies courses that do remain are increasingly insular and disconnected from larger civil society.

We've reached a pivotal moment for addressing the availability and format of good citizenship education in our political culture and in our schools. This is especially the case in light of the growing role of undemocratic forces in our schools and changing notions of citizens, including their roles and powers. Being inducted into democratic culture via our public schools may help keep democracy and its values at the forefront of citizens' minds and agendas as they face the pressures of consumerism, neoliberal individualism, and globalization. In the next section, I lay out a vision for improved citizenship education focused on developing participatory citizens with the skills and proclivities necessary to not only enact good democracy, but also to procure its future welfare by protecting institutions, such as public schools, and reviving civil society. I aim to arm citizens with the habits they need to face and respond to the shift toward citizen as consumer and to re-center responsibility, public goods, and collective work. These include habits of collaboration, compromise, deliberation, critique, dissent, hope, and living citizenship as shared fate.

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## Citizenship Education

Many people often refer to civics education, citizenship education, and education for democracy interchangeably. Despite the common uses of these terms, I want to more carefully distinguish their differences. A course now available only in a small portion of American schools, some readers may recall taking civics during high school. The closest course that exists in some schools today is US Government. Civics courses were established in schools during the Progressive Era. At the time, civics textbooks spoke directly to students about how to be politically and civically active, whereas today's US Government textbooks are more likely to objectively describe the details of how government works, such as its branches and its procedures for making laws. Political science, a companion discipline to civics, was also intended to increase civic and political participation in the early 1900s. It, too, has changed considerably, increasingly becoming an empirical discipline that measures civic and political life rather than a normative discipline that provides guidance on how to be better citizens.[8]

Over the years, the teaching of civics courses moved away from the Progressive Era approach and, by the 1950s, became more straightforward, concerned with teaching about citizens' rights and responsibilities in relationship to government. It is this type of course that many American adults recall today. Characterized as "traditional civics education," this project was largely conformist in nature, endorsing a Hobbesian view of inculcating obedient citizens into a state that provides stability and security. It was primarily apolitical in appearance in that it was aimed at incorporating new citizens into the existing structure, rather than teaching young Americans to question or change the order of power. It did so through a tedious focus on governmental laws and procedures accompanied by increasing patriotic sentiment prompted by World War

II, McCarthyism, and the Vietnam War. At times, especially during war, traditional civics education upheld blind patriotism, which emphasized allegiance and silenced dissent.[9]

As civics education shifted in the 1980s, it began to focus more narrowly and formally on individual rights, with an extensive focus on the Bill of Rights and the Constitution as grantors and guarantors of those rights. Certainly, these founding documents and discussions of the rights they provide are educationally worthwhile endeavors that help students develop an American identity that revolves around shared values expressed in our rights. Problematically, however, an intense focus on the rights of individuals, especially understood as entitlements granted by established documents rather than ongoing citizen work or commitments, may make one indifferent to actual political life, unless it infringes on one's own rights or desires. This kind of citizen may become primarily concerned with herself and what she believes she
p. 168 deserves, not with working with others to secure collective well-being. This shift in civics education ↳ occurred partially alongside and partially in response to the proliferation of rights talk in America, and it may have worked to further that focus. Such an approach to citizenship development lacks a sense of civic responsibility that is tied to care for others and leads to public action, the very type of responsibility that I have laid out in these pages as an important reciprocal component to rights, and which I have described as future-directed and concerned with upholding democracy.

The broader term "citizenship education" has more recently been used to go beyond the mid- to late-twentieth-century idea of civics education, with its narrow focus on rights and government structures. Instead, citizenship education denotes considering how best to live one's public and private life in the context of others in one's local, and increasingly global, community. Citizenship education encompasses learning about government, but goes beyond that to account for other places where community members interact, such as churches and public meeting spaces. In this way, it is concerned with understanding civil society and preparing children to participate in it.

The final term, "education for democracy," is the most all-encompassing and includes not only school-based learning about government and one's role within it, but also learning, inside and outside school, the skills of communication and transaction so that individuals know how to recognize, value, and improve the conditions of associated living. Although my overarching concern is with educating for democracy, the platform I put forward in this book is more confined to citizenship education. Citizenship education takes place most overtly within schools, and most of my discussion of it has been so positioned. But citizenship education should not be understood as taking place only in schools. Quite to the contrary, it should extend beyond school walls, bringing the outside world of civil society into the classroom and bringing new learning to bear on the surrounding real world.

## Defining Habits

I turn now to introducing a significant concept for citizenship education: habits. I derive my understanding of habits from the work of Dewey and employ it here to suggest that the best forms of citizenship education for perpetuating strong democracy focus on the cultivation of habits of democracy. In a seemingly mundane statement, Danielle Allen wisely proclaims, "The ordinary habits *are* the stuff of citizenship."[10] Indeed, it is our daily ways of living that shape our democracy and our experience of it. But, importantly, they also open avenues for improving democracy and ourselves as citizens. In this section I define habits, noting how they develop and change, and discuss in more detail their individual and social natures. Then I describe particular habits of democracy and how they might be fostered in schools or larger civil society.

p. 169 All of us have impulses, activities, and urges that guide our behavior, from our pangs of hunger to our desire to be around other people. According to Dewey, these natural activities are shaped and collected into habits as individuals transact with the world around them, especially in regard to cultural norms, and when they

engage in the process of inquiry. For example, from our reflections on our preferences to our experiences of cultural norms of sharing meals with family or friends, we develop a habit of gathering with others at certain times of day to partake in a meal. Habits are ways of being that are largely performed without effort or conscious attention. To continue the example, we may find ourselves drawn to the table as we hear our family gathering in the kitchen.

Habits are the dispositions, sensitivities, and ways of acting and communicating that enable us to live comfortable lives that operate smoothly. According to Dewey, habit should be understood as a predisposition to act, or a sensitivity to ways of being—rather than the more common understanding of habit as an inclination to precisely repeat identical acts or content. In Dewey's words, "All habits are demands for certain kinds of activity; and they constitute the self. In any intelligible sense of the word will, they *are* will."[11] Habits are active and energetic means that project themselves.[12]

Habits, as the will to act, engage with the world in ways that allow us to pursue desires. This is possible, in part, because habits "do all the perceiving, recognizing, imagining, recalling, judging, conceiving and reasoning that is done."[13] Habits provide the mechanisms that enable or enhance reasoning, as well as carry out the activities that might result from reasoning. Habits filter and organize our perceptions, determining which environmental objects are noted and in what way. Habits, then, shape and precede our ideas. They provide us with know-how, "working capacities" that help us know how to act in the world.[14]

There is a reciprocal relationship between habit and thought. Habits provide us a way to implement thoughts in the world, where they can be tested out and improved. Then, reflective thought about one's actions allows for newer and better habits to be developed. So rather than seeing habit as something merely routine and unconscious, for Dewey, habit is closely related to intelligence, for habits are brought into consideration whenever a problematic situation must be addressed or new conditions arise.

When formed tentatively as hypotheses in light of intelligent foresight into future, unpredictable circumstances, habits can be flexible agents of change whose form emerges as situations unfold. Or, in Dewey's words, "the intellectual element in a habit fixes the relation of the habit to varied and elastic use, and hence to continued growth."[15] In this way, habits, as intimately tied to intelligent reflection, are projective and sites of agency. They can be changed in ways that change the subject and, through transaction, can effect change in the world as well. The heart of agency lies in the process of acquiring new habits and changing old ones.[16]

p. 170 Sometimes, in the course of intelligent reflection on the trying out of a habit, it is revealed that the habit is somehow bad. In the context of democracy, this might be a habit that is stagnant and doesn't keep up with the changing population, is exclusionary, doesn't serve social needs, blocks exchanges with others, or is unjust. We cannot easily drop bad habits, but we can work through a process of changing them and replacing them with better habits, such as habits that are more just or inclusive. Ideally, because habits are "adjustments of the environment, not merely to it," adopting new habits (through a careful process of intellectual reflection and by other means) can change the environmental phenomena that produced the problematic old habit, in this case possibly making democracy better.[17] For example, a child raised in an all-white family and neighborhood may develop a bad habit of only interacting with other white children at his integrated school. As a bad habit, the child may choose to self-segregate when selecting peers to sit with at school, thereby engaging in an exclusionary practice that prevents him from learning from children of color or learning how to interact with others across differences. A novel situation may arise, such as joining a countywide baseball team, populated largely by children of color, that exposes this lack of cross-racial experience to the child, leaving him unsure how to play with his new teammates. Reflecting on this situation and discussing the struggle with his teacher might prompt a change to his seating habit at school. Selecting a new seat with children of color changes not only opportunities for new interactions and growth, but it also changes the environment, presenting new opportunities for other classmates also.

Habits are developed as individuals transact with the world around them—as they shape and are shaped by other people, traditions, practices, and experiences. While each person's collection and enactment of habits are unique, many people's habits are similar because they result from analogous transactions with the environment. Because these habits are shared across groups of people, they become customs—typical ways of behaving within a social group—thereby reinforcing the development of similar habits in younger generations, most notably in civil society, where they are often enacted and passed down.

There has been a tendency among political theorists, especially civic republicans, to call for civic virtues as foundations for citizenship education.[18] For example, prominent philosopher Michael Sandel calls for developing character (based on an Aristotelian notion of virtues) needed for self-government. While sharing some similarities, habits differ from virtues. Habits, like virtues, entail not only dispositions, but also a cognitive element of knowledge and reflection, resulting in informed patterns of action across time.[19] Habits are traits of character that are often categorized as positive or negative, as virtues or vices.[20] But, as is often the case with those who celebrate virtues, we should not limit this normative judgment to a specific ethical framework or conception of the Good.

p. 171 Echoing the views of the pragmatists on which I base my account of habits, we should not define judgments on the moral uprightness of one's traits in a way that asserts foundations that are fixed prior to or outside of human experiences. Doing so would reduce citizenship to a list of virtues prespecified by experts or government leaders, denying the important role of ongoing citizen participation in shaping what counts as good citizenship as conditions change. Nor should we reduce moral behavior to the presence or enactment of one particular habit or even a small set of habits within an individual. Virtues are moral because they are tied to other habits that bring about good action. In Dewey's words,

> To call them virtues in their isolation is like taking the skeleton for the living body. The bones are certainly important, but their importance lies in the fact that they support other organs of the body in such a way as to make them capable of integrated effective activity. And the same is true of the qualities of character which we specifically designate virtues. Morals concern nothing less than the whole character.[21]

The categorization and measure of habits extend beyond a fixed ethical framework. While virtues are largely static and positioned within an essentially unchanging moral system, good habits of democracy involve reflection, revision, and change relative to the world around them. I agree with Shane Ralston who contends, "Indeed, both values and habits can be evaluated naturalistically, instrumentally, or conventionally. Yet, the ultimate test of a habit's value is whether it directs inquiry in fruitful ways—that is, in ways that fund experience with meaning, render new connections, create helpful tools for future inquiries, and develop the inquirer's native abilities."[22] Rather than following a specific moral path, habits shape our inquiries and, in turn, we employ inquiry to revise our habits when new situations arise. Good habits are closely tied to inquiry, democracy, and education. They give us know-how that prompts us to act and carries us through our actions.

Such habits are more effective tools for achieving good public life than just following rules or moral expectations unquestioningly. And, while they are revisable, our habits are often deep and consistent across time. In this way, if we want to create citizens who continue to fulfill citizen responsibility and uphold a commitment to democracy, its institutions, and ways of life, targeting habits offers the most sustainable platform for doing so. This sustainability is especially important in light of the fact that schools have seemingly been in crisis for decades, especially since the appearance of "A Nation at Risk," which spurred widespread concerns about the international performance rankings of our schools and prompted federal and state action. Habits give us the skills and the will to keep working even in the midst of trying environments. As a proclivity to act, habits, like responsibility, move us forward, even in challenging
p. 172 circumstances used by Dewey. Habits also become a part of our identity, ↳ an understanding of who we are

by virtue of how we tend to act or see the world. In the case of a proclivity to support democracy and public schools, our habits can shape our identities as those who actively work to create and secure democracy, thereby working against popular identities of citizens as either more passive clients or consumers, or as those more removed from democracy itself used by Dewey.

## Habits and Democracy

Dewey brings together our individual engagement of democracy with habits and links them to institutions of democracy when he says:

> In any case, we can escape from this external way of thinking only as we realize in thought and act that democracy is a *personal* way of individual life; that it signifies the possession and continual use of certain attitudes, forming personal character and determining desire and purpose in all the relations of life. Instead of thinking of our own dispositions and habits as accommodated to certain institutions we have to learn to think of the latter as expressions, projections and extensions of habitually dominant personal attitudes.[23]

So, while democracy and the development of citizenship may ultimately boil down to individuals, those individuals can never be abstracted from their social contexts, their acts always have social or political impact, and their habits have the capacity to shape democracy and its institutions. Our identities as citizens are not individual understandings, nor are they merely constituted by a sense of membership. Instead, they are deeply social, for our intelligence and our identities are formed through transactions with others. Our understanding of ourselves as citizens is centrally about our life as actors in the social and political arena where we engage our habits. And as Dewey and I aim to deepen personal democracy, we do so, in part, through engaging individuals with others in publics and in the transformation of institutions, not by emphasizing individual virtues or acts apart from other people or society.

Further examining this quote from Dewey we see that rethinking our personal role in democracy via our habits radically changes problematic ways of understanding institutions as existing apart from us and requiring our assimilation to them, and instead regrounds civil society as an extension of our democratic habits. We are able, then, not only to influence institutions, including public schools, but also to have a key role in forming and composing them, thereby highlighting the active and powerful role our personal habits play in shared social living. With this in mind, Judith Green's comments on Dewey can likely be extended to
p. 173 an analysis of social situations and popular beliefs ↳ today when she says, "Though he greatly valued America's democratic heritage, Dewey believed that Americans' mid-twentieth-century cultural outlook and social practices had become overly reliant on the *forms* of our traditional institutions, giving insufficient attention to *democratic culture*—to actively nurturing the kinds of *dispositions and habits of daily living* that underlie the actual functioning of these institutions and that are indivisible elements of the democratic ideal."[24]

Often, talk of virtues is focused on individuals and, especially in the case of some civic republicans, the freedoms of the individual are subordinated to the common good. It would seem that habits might also be reduced to the individual's development and engagement with them. For Dewey, habits are individually held, and living democratically is a deeply personal endeavor. But his view of the formation of habits and their practice as inherently social and transactional prevents resulting calls for citizenship education from being problematically individualistic or overly communal. Unlike citizenship as rights talk, which is based on the assumption that individuals are isolated beings with inherent entitlements who see themselves as deserving to do whatever they want to, a habits view of citizenship begins with an individual that is always

*in* and *of* society. These social relationships are constitutive of the individual, giving rise to his or her own desires and interests, but they also raise responsibilities on the part of that individual to others.

Rather than viewing democracy as merely a formal system of government, Dewey saw democracy as a way of life that guides one personally and in interactions with others. Dewey's social definition of democracy as a "mode of associated living"[25] foregrounds the importance of collective decision making and the building of social intelligence through group problem solving, communication, and the sharing of experiences. But more than this, his model of how one's personal democratic identity—composed of one's habits, dispositions, and beliefs—works in a social framework reveals the importance of ongoing social and political action that sustains and improves collective democratic life. Citizenship education, it follows, must be thoroughly social even as it affirms individual development.

Citizenship education must employ democratic means to achieve democratic ends. In this way, rather than merely educating *for* democracy—something to be achieved by graduates at some distant point in time or beyond school walls—Dewey's view of habit formation and change demands educating *through* democracy, while still preparing children for their future roles as citizens.[26] In other words, habits of democracy are best formed and nurtured by engaging in democratic practices within schools and related civil society in the present moment. For Dewey, democracy is both an end and a means. It is a way of life that we strive to achieve, but in order to do so, our day-to-day practices must themselves also be democratic. This includes
p. 174 the way that children are educated to be good citizens. We cannot teach them to see democracy ↳ as an admirable end goal while engaging in classroom practices that are, for example, totalitarian. Rather, we must employ means that are aligned with the end, allowing students to engage in collective problem solving, inclusive communication, and shared governance as we rear them into the role of citizen. The thoughts and habits developed in this process are themselves open to change and influence from students, thereby allowing democracy to transform across time, rather than limiting children to an overly narrow or predetermined sense of democracy or good citizenship.

While I will speak of developing habits in individual students, my focus is not on students as individuals, but rather on how habits enable them to work together as publics and to function democratically. Ever since the Enlightenment, we have tended to think of democratic education as being about creating independent thinkers equipped with certain knowledge or virtues, without considering their relationships to other people or contexts.[27] The vision of citizenship education I offer in this book, however, while still concerned with developing certain dispositions of good citizenship in individuals, focuses much more on how those dispositions are related to transactions with others and are embedded in the real contemporary contexts of public schools and the social and political influences they currently face.

These dispositions are best cultivated when one is directly and actively engaged in public participation alongside others. They cannot be deeply instilled by merely imparting pertinent knowledge that must then lie dormant waiting for relevant circumstances to arise before it may be put to use. Or, in Dewey's words,

> The development within the young of the attitudes and dispositions necessary to the continuous and progressive life of a society cannot take place by direct conveyance of beliefs, emotions, and knowledge. It takes place through the intermediary of the environment … It is truly educative in its effect in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity. By doing his share in the associated activity, the individual appropriates the purpose which actuates it, becomes familiar with its methods and subject matters, acquires needed skill, and is saturated with its emotional spirit.[28]

Like Dewey, I contend that we must have opportunities to try out social inquiry and decision making in the midst of real and deep problems and disagreements. My vision for citizenship education is necessarily public and participatory, one that calls for engaging in cooperation and collaboration, in order to aid

students in confronting the antidemocratic forces of competition and privatization pressing down on schools now, and to produce the types of citizens who will create publics and usher them through to
p. 175 maturity to ensure the future health of democracy. This is not to say that the needs or interests of ↳ individuals will be overlooked, but rather that they will be explored through public problem-solving efforts, situated within a larger redefinition of politics. While there may be some worthwhile roles for virtuous citizens who carefully adhere to foundational norms of democracy, I seek to develop those capable of and motivated to engage in the types of public work that keep democracy strong.

Too often, citizenship education is construed as socializing children into the image of an ideal citizen. While there are likely some traits of good citizens that will withstand the test of time, we cannot know just what shape citizenship will take as a democracy grows and changes to meet the needs of its environment and constituents.[29] Dewey insightfully cautions,

> With the advent of democracy and modern industrial conditions, it is impossible to foretell definitely just what civilization will be twenty years from now. Hence it is impossible to prepare the child for any precise set of conditions. To prepare him for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities; that his eye and ear and hand may be tools ready to command, that his judgment may be capable of grasping the conditions under which it has to work, and the executive forces be trained to act economically and efficiently.[30]

What we can do in the face of such uncertainty about the future of democracy and the changing problems we will encounter within it is to advocate developing political agency, via the formation of habits that support a flourishing public life and the capacity for change, as a way to provide the youth with starting points for their path to a citizenship that will transform across their lifespans.

As I have argued elsewhere,[31] habits themselves should be flexible, and therein lies one of their most significant democratic implications: they can be adapted for an unknown social future. Given this, in the next chapter I provide not an all-inclusive list of specific habits of good citizenship, but rather highlight some of the habits that most need attention within, or could best serve the demands of, our current democracy, especially given the pressures impacting schools, anticipating a future where they will continue to be of use and adapted. While there are certainly elements of these habits that may have proven themselves to be enduring across centuries of democracy, my focus is not on general or static habits, but rather on flexible and context-specific habits that better prepare children for adapting to new and changing environments. In particular, these are habits that can helpfully respond to the current struggles in civil society and citizen life relative to schools that I've discussed in this book, thereby helping to make my calls for responsibility and increased citizen participation in schools more feasible.

## p. 176 Cultivating Habits in Schools

Habits are acquired in many different types of social settings, but their cultivation is often most overt in schools, where children watch, imitate, and interact with others as they learn about socially acceptable behaviors and societal traditions, through both direct teaching and the hidden curriculum. It is also under the guidance of teachers and through oversight of the inquiry process that children can best learn to use the relationship between thought and habit to improve themselves and their practice of democracy. Indeed, public schools provide an important linkage between home and society; they offer a space where a child can develop the habits of publicness that support democratic life and enable us to fulfill our role responsibilities as citizens.[32]

As noted earlier, Dewey pointed out that we have often assumed democracy will simply continue, perpetuated by far-off politicians and large government bureaucracy. We don't think of it as something that involves us or our daily lives. To keep democracy and the schools that prepare for it healthy, we have to transform this way of thinking. We cannot passively assume that others will lead the way in making democracy work, nor can we ignore the fact that the implications of growing neoliberalism may be deleterious to democracy and schools. We have to see that democracy's maintenance and improvement depend upon our active participation in building social knowledge, solving problems, supporting schools, and crafting a public good. And we have to recognize that quality education will not thrive without our own efforts.

We must recognize the need for a formative culture that supports the development of democratic habits through experiences and intelligent reflection on those experiences by its citizens.[33] This should be a culture that extends well beyond school walls, a culture that is affirmed and evident in larger civil society. This intentional formative culture in schools should not only support the development of those habits, but also respond to them as they are created, paying attention to the interests, actions, and expressions of its young citizens.

For Dewey, experience is all-encompassing, involving the entire individual—mind, body, reason, thoughts, habits, and emotions—as well as the environment. Good experience "arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future."[34] Good experiences lead to growth and provide continuity, while bad or uneducative experiences prevent growth, stifle interest in the world, produce bad attitudes, or fail to complement the individual's changing world. The concept of growth illustrates how experiences can develop our physical, intellectual, and moral capacities, actualizing these capacities and helping them to inform one another so that they continue in a chain (though not necessarily linearly). The movement invoked by experience compounds upon itself, and is expressed as growth.

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Dewey's views on experience and growth have been criticized for not having a defined end goal and for being aligned with a politically Left agenda that sometimes operates paternalistically. In response to those criticisms, I side with pragmatist philosopher James Scott Johnston. He demonstrates the connection between habits, experience, growth, inquiry, and democracy, thereby providing criteria for growth while also allowing for openness and self-direction.[35] Moreover, Johnston rightly argues that developing habits of inquiry is precisely the type of education (and, in my case here, citizenship education) that works against indoctrination or the imposition of a particular political agenda, given that inquiry, the inclination to ask questions, and a critical outlook make all views fodder for consideration. Johnston explains:

> Dewey opposed any sort of education that would result in passivity, indoctrination, and dogma. These are foreclosed by Dewey's insistence that education equals growth, and that growth ex hypothesi cannot be yoked to any fixed agenda or belief. It will do to highlight again the role that education plays in fostering growth. In so doing, the stage is set for the further argument that it is (in part) inquiry that is being developed in growth, and that education, inasmuch as it implies growth, equally implies inquiry. Further, as inquiry is social, the education of the child as an individual and a social being implies equally the development of inquiry. Developing inquiry is the development of the individual such that she can participate fruitfully as a democratic being in a democratic community. Education thus becomes a necessary constituent of growth, community, and democracy, by fostering the habits of inquiry, which (again) fosters the movement of growth to community, to democracy, and back again.[36]

We cultivate habits by providing environments and experiences that are conducive to their use and success. For Dewey,

> The development within the young of the attitudes and dispositions necessary to the continuous and progressive life of a society cannot take place by direct conveyance of beliefs, emotions, and knowledge. It takes place through the intermediary of the environment ... It is truly educative in its effect in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity. By doing his share in the associated activity, the individual appropriates the purpose which actuates it, becomes familiar with its methods and subject matters, acquires needed skill, and is saturated with its emotional spirit.[37]

Developing habits of democracy, then, would likely necessitate immersing individuals in practices of shared living where those habits serve their needs well. Often, this process is bolstered by the guidance of teachers and other leaders who help individuals to participate in inquiry about their world and to reflect on the role of their habits.

p. 178 While the experiences that nurture and sustain democracy extend well beyond schools, I want to focus on schools explicitly. Schools provide an environment and social institution that help children acquire habits, and also offer spaces where intelligent inquiry about cultural norms and ways of life can shape and improve habits. They provide a space where teachers and students can work together to question, critique, and change norms, even as many are adopted. Schools can respond to the customs of a democratic society and incorporate those customs into their practices, even improving them in some cases. As they shape the habits of future generations, they shape future customs. Schools can provide a space that sustains public life by teaching how to be part of it, even as its contexts and approaches change.[38] I turn in my final chapter to detailing specific habits of democracy teachable in schools that can help us achieve a richer form of democratic life and fulfill our role responsibilities as citizens.

## Notes

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11. John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: Holt, 1922), 25.
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13. Ibid., 177.
14. Ibid.
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16. Sarah M. Stitzlein, *Breaking Bad Habits of Race and Gender: Identity Transformation in Schools* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 21.
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18. Robert B. Talisse, *Democracy after Liberalism: Pragmatism and Deliberative Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Gregory Fernando Pappas, *John Dewey's Ethics: Democracy as Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Shane J. Ralston, "A More Practical Pedagogical Ideal: Searching for a Criterion of Deweyan Growth," *Educational Theory* 61, no. 3 (2011): 351–364.
19. Sigal Ben-Porath, "Deferring Virtue: The New Management of Students and the Civic Role of Schools," *Theory and Research in Education* 11, no. 2 (2013): 111–128.
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22. Ralston, "A More Practical Pedagogical Ideal," 356.
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24. Judith Greene's, *Pragmatism and Social Hope: Deepening Democracy in Global Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 234.
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37. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, ed. Boydston, 26.

38. Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement.*