
Identity and the Office of the Citizen
Tensions, Arguments, and Multidimensional Engagement

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Sub Theme I

What do we expect as outcomes of our schools? What do we want all students in Pacific Circle schools to know, be able to do, and care about?

***Precious ideas are for those
who can implement them.
...with apologies to Aesop***

Introduction

The nations and cultures of the Pacific Circle, like those across the globe, are growing more concerned with rapid changes in demographics, economic markets and allocations of income, violence and war, political instability, the decline of public aesthetics, and the failure to relate ethical principles to public life. These conditions call attention to the acute need for enlightened individuals as well as societies that can create, judge, and implement policies that will replace want, ignorance, and instability with more just relationships in daily life and higher qualities of social interaction.

To achieve these outcomes, education programs will have to be clear about their purpose, comprehensive in matters of content, inclusive to all individuals, and reciprocal in matters of cultural understandings. Above all, students will need to embrace the office of citizen with the know-how to be loving-critics of society and the world, all within the graceful boundaries of civility. These intellectual virtues are often defined as the ability to understand and become engaged in reasoned debates between and among ideas, people, and policies. However, the most important attribute of education is to recognize the complexities, fears, and possibilities of life and the natural, irresistible, and disastrous tendency to embrace certainty. Understanding the elegance, diversity, and fallacies of religious, scientific, political, and economic ways of thinking allows one to combat the pathology of believing in your own certainty or righteousness. Indeed, enlightenment is, and by right should be, subtle, ironic, and counterintuitive. Education produces uncommon knowledge that illuminates contradictions and generates uncomfortable arguments. However, it is in these conflicts and debates that we create policies that can move us all toward the human goal of living with meaning, purpose, and accomplishment. Through this process of debate we can better confront and understand, both culturally and biologically, what to keep, what to throw away, and what to build anew.

With these considerations in mind, the precept advanced here is that the citizen as student can only survive within the context of a democratic community, defined by the quality of discourse and civility. Thus, the citizen must maintain and enhance democracy, so democracy can enhance the citizen. This reciprocal imperative is irrevocable. While considered corrupt by Plato and Aristotle, democracy, and its cousin, the republic, was, and is, the best form of government; even though it can elect a Hitler or a Mussolini. As Winston Churchill suggested, democracy is a less than perfect way to organize a society politically, but it's better than all the rest.



The Citizen and Multidimensional Engagement

To begin, the concept of citizen presented here brings together two political and philosophical assumptions that form a theory of democratic citizenship which I will call *multidimensional engagement*. The first assumption, which is personal in nature, focuses on the role of **citizen**. This is in opposition to understanding the individual as **subject**. In a political sense, one can only be a citizen or a subject. This means that an individual, by choice, can be a citizen of a school and at the same time a subject of the state. In a democracy, however, one should choose to be a citizen of all the institutions in which he or she is engaged. It is rare indeed to even have the choice of being a citizen, for citizenship is only possible within a democratic structure. And, as we know, democratic structures are complex in their non-formal alliances, subtle in their social constructs and information sharing, and extremely slow in developing. Moral and material infrastructures, from roads and public education to assumptions about truthful public dialogs are all necessary conditions for success. The sufficient condition for democracy, however, is the individual's attitude, or mind-set, demanding political (consent) legitimacy in and from the people--people who are capable of coming together and governing themselves, and capable of electing representatives who are, in turn, accountable to the electorate. Thus, the citizen carries a personal or private mind-set that is very different from the worldview of the subject. The citizen is a loving-critic of the republic and a creator of both common and private wealth (where wealth is understood as the creation of excellence). The subject, on the other hand, is an individual ready to follow orders, consume wealth, and live a life of social isolation. Education must make the most of these differences; diminishing the role of subject while enhancing the identity of citizen.

The second assumption, which is public in nature, rests upon the relationships that must exist between individuals and institutions or between and among institutions. The theory, simple stated, says that in a democratic republic, the several institutions that constitute the community, and the individuals within them, must understand and practice reciprocal duties with one another. It also asserts that the citizen is a citizen of all the institutions to which he or she belongs. For example, an individual is a citizen of the family, school, firm or business, and place of worship, as well as of the city, state, and nation. In fact, if people do not see themselves as citizens of the institutions in which they work, play, learn, and live, it is problematic as to whether they can be citizens of a city, state, or nation simply because the vigor of any one institution must be directly correlated to the constrains of the others. For example, if schools refuse or are less vigorous in defending their purpose, businesses or families will not be constrained to issue their own rationales. Once we appreciate individual engagement across the several institutions we can embrace the ethics of reciprocal duty and the complementary nature of institutions which is the hallmark of citizenship.

Perhaps, an illustration about the two assumptions as they relate to each other will help us operationally see the theory of Multidimensional Engagement.

A school district concerned about achievement levels, studies the relationship between absenteeism and test scores; concluding that underachieving students need to



attend classes more regularly. The way in which the administration addresses the issue is to tell teachers to: “make your classes more interesting so students want to come to school.” Good idea...perhaps, but the administration should have also gone to the parents and told them to: “ get your children up in the morning, make sure that they have breakfast, and get them to school on time.” At minimum, student achievement is a reciprocal duty between the family and the school. So, if tests scores are to improve these two institutions must be held accountable...together. Put differently and more to the point; the way to have better schools, is to have better families. Students are citizens of both the school and home. As citizens they are creators of wealth; both common and private. Students who do not understand this are, no doubt, subjects at home and at school, and see themselves as consumers. Such individuals always ask what the family or school can do for them and not what they can do for the school and family. The latter question, however, is a necessary condition for both wealth creation and citizenship, and in this case, it is necessary for learning. The role of the teacher is to teach; the role of the student is to learn. As both institutions understanding their (reciprocal) duty to one another, they will work to make sure learning happens.

One of the problems we have in understanding the theory of multidimensional engagement is the way in which we have marginalized the role of citizen. When individuals think about being a citizen they often think about it as something extra in their normal life. It’s an “add-on” that they believe will demand extra effort, time, and resources in an already jam-packed existence. Citizenship, however, is simply one important attribute of the roles we play as we participate in all facets of democratic life. People can be citizens of all the institutions to which they belong. Well, that’s not really true. If some people don’t care to be involved, they might just be subjects; out of touch with the history, policies, and meaning of their families, schools, firms, places of worship, neighborhoods, city, state, nation, and even the world. In a democracy or republic, individuals make a choice to be either a subject or a citizen. Regardless of the institution--family, firm, or city government--citizens busy themselves creating wealth in all of the institutions in which they live, work, and play; while subjects cling to a more limited role of consumer, believing that they are entitled to receive wealth from those same institutions. Wealth here means excellence. Excellence is fostered when people continue to grow in their knowledge and wisdom and through their contributions to the common good. The common good is made up of qualities from both the material and ethical infrastructures. That is, the quality of schools, courts, hospitals, bridges, as well as the ethical relationships that exist between and among people and the environment. Citizens understand that there can be no private wealth without common wealth. Subjects simple never connect the two notions, because they are focused on themselves and believe that they are helpless anyway. What has to be clear in a republic is the idea that one should be a citizen of all the institutions in which he or she is engaged. Citizens carry their identity as they live lives of meaning and work to bring democratic ideals and realities together in their everyday lives—at home, at school, at work and play, and in all the other institutions they relate to, from places of worship to community service clubs.

Citizens of different families will or should “cross paths” at work, in church, at the Rotary Club, at the city recreation basketball league, etc. In this mix, people learn how



and why institutions develop reciprocal duties with each other. For example, better families make for better schools; better businesses influence governments positively; better religious institutions help create better service clubs, and on and on; and leaders know this. Citizens of institutions understand that they all share democratic responsibilities with members of other organizations; indeed, individual who understand this notion of reciprocal duty will enhance all institutions and the health of the community as well. This is the case because the community is simply the aggregate of institutions therein. Understanding this is the basic content of education in a society that values democratic governance.

Given the above, it is also clear that democratic governance does not look the same the world around. Democracy takes on different complexities and subtleties based on culture and history. It will operate differently because institutional relationships, for example, between family and state, will differ among cultures. It is also true that even within the same culture there will be fundamental differences in citizens' knowledge and perceptions. However, the ability to bring together people from different backgrounds and to have them debate and work on common goals is necessary for citizenship. In other words, different community organizations that bring citizens together regardless of backgrounds provide the necessary connections of democracy. The mail-carrier, for example, who coaches the kid's neighborhood soccer team, worships at the local synagogue, is a member of the PTO at the public elementary school, and meets with about ten other people each month in a women's book club has a wonderful opportunity to practice multi-institutional involvements, not as an "add-on" but as a way to enhance all of the institutions to which she belongs, enriching them and herself as well. As the common wealth of the several institutions increases, so does her private wealth. This engagement is also manifested in more meaningful relationships, better knowledge about the community, increased learning and earning opportunities for herself and family, more citizen voluntary compliance with laws, and, at the same time, questioning those laws, better attention to issues of equality and freedom of participation in all institutions, and enlightened concern relative to those factors that divide and unify the community.

Through multidimensional engagement, the idea of citizen as just a label for a national association is viewed as totally inadequate to the demands of democracy and wealth creation. The role of citizen is a much more complex concept. Citizen means living in a temporal network that evokes the deep values of the culture. It means interacting in a spatial context that understands the aesthetics of landscape. It means participating in a social, political, and economic exchange that understands the pursuit of happiness as a healthy community (institutions, markets, and political states) where the concept of the limited good--that is, there is only so much money, celebrity, and wellbeing to go around, so if I have more, it means that you must have less-- is replaced with the wisdom and moral commitment to enhance life with purpose, identity, and dignity. Within the democratic context, the citizen works to grow the good instead of maintaining the moral and economic inadequacies that diminish happiness and democracy. This, of course, takes a deep trust in the people. In his first inaugural address in March of 1861, Abraham Lincoln said:



“Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better or equal hope in the world? Is there any greater wisdom?”

Lincoln’s words, of course, assume enlightenment and education, they also express confidence in the people and their ability to administer civic justice with some degree of wisdom suggests an interesting tension between the private and public lives of individuals. Exploring and debating this tension is at the heart of the theory of multidimensional engagement, as well as any study (education) of democratic citizenship. In this concern the following questions suggest a curriculum scope and must be addressed:

- How is citizen defined?
- What is the role of a citizen? In the family, school, and firm? Why?
- What must I give up in order to become a citizen of the institution? Community? What will I gain?
- What does it mean to be educated?
- Must my personal identity be tied to my society?
- What obligations do I have if I take on the role of citizen?
- Is happiness a condition of service to others? A condition of purposeful living? Is happiness defined in the moment?

The essence of citizenship and education is found in discussing these questions. In that discourse the habits of **love**, the knowledge and practice of **criticism**, and the search for **meaning** are illuminated.¹

Love

Montesquieu, writing in the *Spirit of Laws*, stated; “A government is like everything else; to preserve it, we must love it.” Within the concept of love (complexity and gentleness), an important attribute of citizenship is loyalty. While love and loyalty to one’s environment, one’s self, one’s neighbor, and one’s nation are necessary attributes of the good citizen, it is also the case that the whole business of civic loyalty must be viewed with skepticism, particularly by the citizen. Great injustices can be perpetrated in the name of love...of God, of country, of honor. This thought has little meaning for the subject, who finds skepticism an assault on certainty and he or she cannot live in an uncertain world. The citizen, on the other hand, wanting to pursue justice and truth, to say nothing of friendship, must, thus, invoke our second theme in the necessary attributes of citizenship—criticism.

Criticism

Criticism is concerned with judgments about self, community, existence, values, laws, and thinking itself. Civic criticism means clear communication among citizens—when citizens respect standards of clarity, truth, and human dignity. Empathic listening is as important to criticism as the right of free speech. Criticism also embraces courage. Civic criticism carries at least three interrelated behaviors. First, the citizen must value, observe, and absorb the social culture of the community or society so as to bring in a



more complete picture or more true “impression” of the situation. This calls for the ability to take in information and arguments, and conceptualize the setting complete with explicit as well as subtle issues, promises, and problems. Next, the citizen must be able to react to the setting: that is, she must be a countervailing force, or at least, an asker of questions. These questions should probe the consciences of self and others as part of the search for the better society. Finally, the citizen must judge. Judgments must be made of policy, leaders, resource allocations, and even of self. The citizen must carry a critical view of the political system. But this attitude will increase wealth and maintains the democratic context.

Meaning

Meaning is achieved through engagement. Engagement means being intensively involved with others in common activities, commonly perceived as good for self as well as for others so engaged. Meaning may well be at the heart of happiness as well as the heart of citizenship. Meaning and citizenship are linked in two significant ways; one by the limitations of time (history) and place, and the other by rhetoric. In order to tie criticism and love with meaning we must not only address the context of discourse, but disclose those human visions of social systems that illuminate as well as disguise and conceal the ethical acts of people. Meaning cuts through to the moral bone of society, the institution, and self, baring the collective nerve and exposing such questions as: What is the virtue? Can virtue be taught? Is there virtue enough in citizens to maintain a republic? Can virtue give meaning and purpose to life? In defense of the new Constitution of the United States, James Madison stated in 1788:

I go on this great republican principle, that the people will have virtue and intelligence to select men (and women) of virtue and wisdom. Is there no virtue among us? To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without virtue in the people is an absurd idea.

Democracies need citizens and citizens need democracies; and leaders know this simple truth. The theory of multidimensional engagement demands that we pay attention to a simple lesson. From the history of ancient Athens to the present struggles to maintain and extend democracy in many regions of the world, citizens are not free because they live in a democratic nation; rather, nations become and remain democratic because their citizens (not their subjects) believe and act as citizens must act, engaging the complex and multidimensional nature of involvement.

A Persistent Discrepancy

The persistent and principal mind-set of the democratic citizen is a healthy skepticism. Skepticism here does not mean to be cynical; it means an outlook based on reason, empiricism, and faith. This of course was and is the criterion for a liberal arts education. Basically, this means that the citizen-student knows how to ask questions and investigate issues using the intellectual virtues of thoroughness, patience, honesty, civility, and hard work. At the forefront of this kind of education is history; not only the history of a people, but also the history of science, languages, and art. Like democracy, history is



fundamentally a debate and often about different perspectives. History is based on perceptions and observations of powerful people, mostly men to this point in time. These social observers have created stories structured on certain premises that led to normative conclusions. The power of any story, however, is determined by the nature of the people involved and the quality of their ideas. Largely, history delineates discrepancies between the perception of events taking place at a certain point in time and a more desirable picture of the future. History, at its best, illuminates human imagination and helps us understand the intersection between individual interests and the collective or public will; between the notions of “real” and “ideal.” If a people entertain the belief in ethical and material progress, which is a given to the enlightened, then the quality of the citizens’ history education becomes paramount. History is the meta-subject of the school curriculum. Again, along with the histories of societies, the “history” of every content field in the curriculum must also be studied. This is the only way that citizen and scholars can understand the discrepancies, arguments, compromises, and dynamic logic of the several curriculum subjects. And, this logic is the intellectual foundation of citizenship.

Today, as in times past, there are new stories in the process of being created, and each assumption of reality is based on a set of premises leading to unique conclusions. The dynamic of any story, however, is determined by the quality of scholarship, leadership, the recourses available to the leadership or movement, a powerful coalition, and the ability to create and argue for an “irresistible” idea. The question always before us is whether or not we can imagine and create a future defined and judged by the deep historic values of civilization, enhanced by intellectual virtue, and committed to a more just world. There is also the persistent argument over the social direction and value tensions within democratic societies and the justice of the attending market driven allocations. Market allocations that will insure that individuals have access to earning a minimum annual income is crucial to democracy. How much income an individual or families requires before turning some attention to democratic governance as opposed to just keeping “food on the table” is an open question. But the debate must include an income level that will allow people to become invested in the principles and debates over market allocations. In other words, citizens must address the importance of developing and maintaining a middle class; without which, there can be no democracy. In the end, the quality of these debates depends on the kind of education we establish; its purpose and ability to create and ameliorate both private interests with public will. It is at this intersection of understanding that we assert that education will create a future; the only question is, what will that future look like? Or, to state the question differently; what kind of education does a modern democratic society depend upon?

The urgency for educating the democratic mind has never been greater simply because of the discrepancies and contradictions between today’s realities and tomorrow’s ideals. The educated or democratic mind can hold opposing ideas that seem contradictory; ideas like diversity and unity or freedom and equality. However, over the last half century, education seems to have lost touch with its identity and responsibility to civilization. During that same time, the modern world has lost touch with the deep values of the common good - its meaning, its promise, and its struggles. In so many ways people have given up their role as citizens and learners and have assumed the more mindless and



easier work of being subjects. Many have lost interest in producing common wealth (material and ethical infrastructures) without which there can be no private wealth. Many have even ignored the claims of justice and the challenge to create new knowledge. Instead, we have evolved into societies of one dimensional consumers driven by a sense of mindless entitlements. Our generational covenants with both the young and old have been suspended as we embrace more innocent and personal ideals like materialism, sexuality, personal strength, and celebrity. To a large extent, schools have been made willing scapegoats for these conditions, primarily because educators, parents, and students simply don't understand their identity, purpose, and attending responsibilities. Within this context, civic arguments are not engaged and education is diminished by strange and often corrupt political and social experiments and policy mandates.

The Aspirations

As people across the globe become more interdependent there seems to be an increased desire to search for unique or diverse identities and meaning. This tends to be a common aspiration for all children. Certainly, the interests of individual and unique cultures must be addressed, but more importantly, attention must be given to the common will of humankind manifested in the historical struggle for the identity of citizen, scholar, and artisan.² As never before, we need to give attention to a better balance between personal interest and the common will. The common will defined as a shared identity where people understand the attending responsibilities in the roles of citizen, scholar, and artisan.

Citizens' behaviors are framed by intellectual virtues (like truth, thoroughness, respect for others, industry, and civility); subjects, as discussed above, behave as they are told. "I'm just following orders," is their defense. Citizens see wealth where subjects see only poverty. Citizens create meaning; subjects wait for others to create activities. Citizens are interested in creating communities; subjects are interested in themselves. Citizens have purpose; subjects have to be motivated. The catch, however, is that the only place that one can be a citizen is within a democratic context; in this case, it can only happen if the school climate is democratic. This means having a deep understanding that democracy is an on-going argument about value tensions; that is, debating how to balance freedom and equality; diversity and unity; law and ethics; and common and private wealth.

The **scholar**, like the citizen, can only operate within a context of intellectual virtues such as honesty, patience, thoroughness, industry, respect for knowledge, and civility. The scholar, through questions and argument, is concerned with the creation of knowledge, both for its own sake and for the common good. The scholar sees knowledge as having social value as well as personal excitement that opens new intellectual doors and continually incurs the risk of altered cultural perceptions.

The **artisan** is characterized by a passion for the connections between technique and artistry. In this case, the physician, teacher, or plumber are artisans only to the degree that they transcend technique and approaches artistry. This mind-set complements the world-view of the scholar and citizen. Take, for example the act of dancing. Like so many other things in life, it is made-up of two opposing, yet complementary notions. One has to do



with technique and the second with artistry. Dance is about understanding rhythm, step, movement, and interpretation. It is about techniques. But dance is also a flow of elements that transcends technique and approaches artistry. When the dance is over all we have left is the memory of quality. Or, like some of us, we have the embarrassment of tripping and the regret of not doing your best. Again, the artistry of the artisan, like the world of the scholar and citizen, depends on the quality of the democratic community in which it is practiced. That is, to have the context to argue freely over fundamental tensions and contradictions of life.

We can practice technique, and even measure it. But, in the game, in the dance, in life, there is little satisfaction in knowing skills. Satisfaction comes from the subjective gestalt of art, which includes skills, but is much more. Art means seeing the field and ourselves on it, and making our own contribution to the game, moving it toward the more aesthetic. We may be conscious of only a few artists in the several skill areas that cross our minds. No matter whom you consider--the teacher, the baseball player, the father, the actor--only a precious few are artists. Why? Perhaps, this is the case because aesthetics has everything to do with perspective. Art is about “seeing” relationships to others, to the deep values of the culture, and to the consequences of behavior. Artistry is also about seeing oneself in the past and imagining a future with compliant relationships within the networks in which we work and live. The artisan knows that the contemporary world leaves footprints in the future.

These **identities** of citizen, scholar, and artisan are all defined within each other. That is, the citizen is a scholar and artisan; the scholar a citizen and artisan; and the artisan a citizen and scholar. All three identities are necessary conditions for the common or civic good, as well as for meaningful personal achievement, and education must nurture all three identities.

The Beginning of Inquiry

The apparitions of seeing our children as citizen, scholar, and artisan, and the maintenance and improvement of our democratic societies will depend on how our students learn to answer certain questions and how they engage in the democratic argument. Within the Pacific Circle, a set of persistent as well as contemporary questions will frame education for the twenty-first Century. Given the dynamic increase in global interdependence as well as the growing distance between the rich and poor, the educated and the non-educated, and the healthy and sick that transcend all nation-states, this framework carries some utility for an even wider circle. The following questions point to a more general confluence of history and culture that taken together yield an educational harvest of more specific purposes.

General cultural questions:

- What is my relationship to God?
- What is my relationship to the land?
- What is my relationship to my parents?
- What is my relationship to my spouse and friends?



- What is my relationship to other family members?
- What is my relationship to the state (nation) and the world beyond?

Specific cultural questions:

1. How do people interact with their environments?
 - Why/what do people name elements in nature?
 - How do people use the natural resources around them?
 - How/why do people create places in which to live?
 - How/why do people continue to construct new knowledge about the natural world?
2. How do people rear their children?
 - What are the relationships between parent and child?
 - What role(s) do children play in the home?
 - What responsibility do children have for their learning (education)?
 - How long do they go to school?
 - What do they study?
 - What kinds of work and play do children do?
 - What role does the environment play in the world view of children?
3. What kind of work do men and women do?
 - How does the work of women differ from the work of men?
 - Who makes the decisions about social, economic, and political questions/issues?
 - How does science and technology define work?
4. How/why do people worship?
 - Do people attend group or formal worship functions?
 - In what do people believe?
 - How do people find meaning in worship?
5. How do people bring beauty to their lives?
 - Why/how do people create art?
 - How do people use art in their daily lives?
 - What is the relationship between culture and art?
6. How do people communicate with one another and their culture?
 - How do people use symbols in their communications?
 - What are the ways in which people speak to one another?
 - What role does mathematics, music, art, and literature play in communications?
 - How do people create meaning in their lives?
 - What role does language play in the structure of community and in the creation of meaning?
 - How do the fields of science, history, mathematics, Art, etc. aid communications and understanding?
7. How do people provide for social order, peace and justice in their lives?
 - How does geographic location influence how people construct their communities?
 - What system of government do people practice?
 - What role do all people play in rule-making and rule-judging?
 - How can/do people change their government?



8. How do people deal with time?
 - Do people believe in a past and future? How can we tell (know)?
 - What kinds of units do people use to describe time?
 - Are older people seen as wise because they have experienced more time than younger persons?
 - How is a sense of the past used to define self and society?
 - How is a sense of time related to the natural world?
9. How do people organize themselves in order to provide basic needs and wants?
 - How are goods and services produced?
 - What kinds of markets do people create and use?
 - What kind(s) of money (exchange) do people use?
 - How do people create and maintain economic justice?
10. How does technology alter the ways in which people live?
 - How does technology (tools) change the ways people use resources?
 - How does technology change the ways people travel, communicate, work, and play?
 - How is technology related to science, religion, philosophy, and wealth?
11. How do people treat one another?
 - How do people care for one another?
 - How do people deal with illness?
 - How do people deal with and understand death?
 - How do people celebrate (special) events, people, and ideals?
 - How/why do people construct systems of laws and ethical principles by which to live?

These questions reflect the dynamics of life as played out in the human search for meaning and the continuing desire to create wealth, justice, and knowledge. These desires are defined against the backdrop of a world becoming ever more interdependent and less persuaded by the power of nations. We are more frightened by global terrorism and less certain about the motivations that drive their actions; more aware of environmental anomalies, and less sure about how to handle them; more concerned with the health of people, and less willing to understand the connections among health, justice, and wealth; regardless of earthly location, more frustrated about the meaningless of being subjects and consumers, and the unwillingness or inability to embrace the role and responsibilities of citizens.

In addition to the willingness of addressing the questions listed above, citizens also need the ability to engage in an ongoing debate over the essential democratic value tensions. If a democratic society is to be maintained, citizens must work toward balancing unity with diversity, law with ethics, freedom with equality, and common wealth with private wealth.³

Democratic Value Tensions

The four sets of values, listed below, and the arguments surrounding them, create both tension and synergy. As such, they represent the ethos and aims of any nation or



institution seeking to become democratic. Besides the dual or antagonistic nature of each set of values, they also present a unity or system. Understanding and reconciling them in creative and productive ways is the essence of the democratic mind. As the poet Henry David Thoreau put it, “Truth is always in the paradoxical.” The ultimate goal of working through the democratic arguments is to create a citizen who is a loving-critic of his or her community and nation. Unconditional love, “my country right or wrong,” will not work for a democratic society. On the other hand, criticism without love of community will lead to disillusionment. The democratic mind must combine love with criticism so the arguments can continue. This must be the case because democracy is an argument, and the argument is about how citizens can maintain, balance, and guide the democratic value tensions through the vagaries of time and place.

Law and Ethics

Laws that help us govern and ethical principles that guide behavior are not always in harmony. This dissonance and tension can lead to change, a better legal system, and a good society. The consequences hinge on how intellectually prepared we are to resolve such paradoxes. Important cultural and political documents and statements often illustrate this discord.

A great deal of mischief can be perpetrated in the name of the flag. At the same time, stubbornly holding to a “higher principle” can stall the progress of the nation. That is why statutory law and so-called “higher law” tend to be in tension. Without the arguments to balance law with ethics, the fabric of democracy is weakened. In a world that seems to grow ever more exclusionary and radical in its religious ideologies, the imbalance toward “God” or the imbalance toward the state carries the potential for dismantling democratic values. In the United States, for example, if laws were not challenged and broken we would still have slavery and women would still be disenfranchised. But, laws should only be broken if citizens understand the dynamic imbalance that can exist between that law and the ethical principles of justice and an inclusive general welfare.

Private and Common Wealth

In a democratic republic all citizens need the freedom to achieve knowledge, justice, and wealth. On the one hand, it is society’s task to assure that access to these elements is fairly distributed. This is accomplished through the creation and maintenance of the material and ethical infrastructure. From roads to parks, from courts to schools, from health care to libraries, societies provide the basic structures that allow individual to create wealth. Since people are the only creators of wealth, it becomes necessary for all the people, through their government to provide the context where this creative energy can be utilized. The concept of reciprocal duty between and among citizen, and between the citizen and the state must be understood if the democracy is to survive. In effect, the balance of private wealth and public or common wealth must be continually argued. This means seeing and living beyond oneself and giving of one’s talents to make the community better. And, in so doing private wealth is enhanced. In America, this understanding of public/private wealth was the rationale for calling



such states as Virginia, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania *commonwealths*. In fact, the signers of *The Declaration of Independence* took it for granted that citizens knew the public connotation of “the pursuit of happiness.”

Developing and maintaining the commonwealth enhances the private wealth or “is good for business.” In other words, investment in the public infrastructure helps everyone, including business and industry, to operate more efficiently, productively, and profitably. Schools and universities; streets and highways; electric and gas utilities; even parks, hospitals, libraries, and museums – all public amenities – serve to benefit firms and their employees. Likewise, a robust commonwealth is dependent upon vigorous, expanding private wealth.

Freedom and Equality

Perhaps the pivotal tension throughout the history of the United States, and the world beyond, has been the argument between freedom and equality. Democracy, at its best, is a continuous struggle to balance these ideals. The history of the United States can be read as attempts at one time to promote freedom over equality and at other times to favor the reverse. Like a swinging pendulum, one value or the other seems to be more popular and persuasive during a particular cycle of history.

Like other value tensions, emphasis on either freedom or equality results in too little of one or the other. An imbalance is undemocratic and bad for the republic. For example, when the conventional wisdom favors freedom, the power and resources of a society tend to flow into the hands of the few. In turn, those in power develop rationales to justify this distribution in the name of merit, efficiency, and economic growth. Left unattended, this imbalance of wealth and power undermines democracy and threatens to destroy the nation.

However, when the pendulum swings, the national persuasion favors redistributing wealth in the name of compassion and economic justice. In its wake, personal freedom tends to suffer. While laws were enacted to protect workers, house the poor, and promote civil rights, they often resulted in a heavier hand for government. Citizens need the freedom to achieve knowledge, justice, and wealth. It is society’s task, which is to say all of us, to assure that these elements are fairly or justly distributed.

The expansive development of technology has been a magnificent expression of this nation’s freedom. It also can be seen as a threat to equality among people as well as a subtle, dangerous undermining of personal freedom. This includes the powerful effect on the culture in more recent times of the automobile, television, and computer. For the most part, advancements in technology are seen as both inevitable and good. All in their particular ways have furthered our freedoms through improved communications, more sophisticated information, faster transportation, and the like. Yet, new technologies also have had some, often unintended, negative side effects, such as environmental pollution, auto fatalities,



compulsive use, violation of privacy, and the proliferation of trivial media. Since technology complicates the trade-off decisions between freedom and equality, citizens must be intensional about evaluating their tools both to their influence on individual behavior as well as their impact on the larger society.

The proper understanding of equality was, and is, central to republicanism. If it is to work, privilege must be out and meritocracy in; ability matters not birthright. Artistic talent is not hereditary. However, republican equality does not mean the elimination of all distinctions. Republics still have an aristocracy, but it is, in Jefferson's words, a "natural aristocracy." Leaders must not be those of opulence or wealth but people of talent and creative statesmen.⁴

Republicanism was and is both a profound and radical idea. Perhaps only the few are capable of reasoning and intellectual achievement wrote the British political philosopher John Locke, but everyone could use their senses and develop common sense. With this understanding, Thomas Jefferson included in the Declaration of Independence the words, "all men are created equal." This sentiment became the conventional wisdom of democratic republics, everywhere.

Still, most enlightened people understand that being guided by one's senses in a chaotic environment can lead to excessive sensations. To temper this Lockean possibility, we have deferred to thinkers such as Adam Smith, the Scottish moral philosopher, who wrote about man's natural social disposition. Our moral gyroscope, Smith taught us, is held in place by natural affections and benevolence.⁵ Just as we understood the physical world to have gravitational forces that held heavenly bodies together, so too, our social world had its interpersonal forces. "Love between humans," relates Professor Wood, "was the gravity of the moral world." People have a natural instinct to be sociable and benevolent.⁶ This is the glue that brings together potentially self-serving individuals into community and a republic.

In order for people to live together in civil society, it is necessary to give up a portion of our freedom. And an important role of government is to serve as an equalizer among the people. Governments are instituted for the purpose of managing that freedom individuals donate to the common good, insuring a measure of equality before civil and natural law. This is the stuff of a cohesive and good society. This is also the case in any institution, be it family, school, or firm.

In attempts to balance freedom with equality America has traveled a long, uneven, tortuous road over the past two centuries. Seldom has America been at ease with this balance, or been able to finely mesh these two powerful concepts. Even today the pursuit of unbridled individualism has resulted in a rather harsh even unforgiving environment for those relegated to the underclass. When Americans appeal, for example, to the wisdom of Adam Smith, they emphasize competition at the expense of cooperation, "self interest" devoid of benevolence, and the "invisible hand" as if it had no ethical content.



Likewise, the acquisitive pursuit of material gain often makes a mockery of Jefferson's "natural aristocracy." Those who are creative, artistic, and intellectual tend to be thought of as quaint; unless, of course, they are able to popularize this talent and become wealthy.

Unity and Diversity

"Out of Many; One;" *E Pluribus Unum*; this is the motto of the United States. The individual is highly prized in American society, yet a person must exist within the constraints of society – with its obligations and requirements as well as support, and enrichment. To understand this is to realize what it means to become an American. The question we continually struggle to address is; "What does it take to be admitted to the 'Unum'?" In his 1790 letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Rhode Island, George Washington describes the American ideal – a place where diversity is recognized and celebrated while simultaneously cherishing the unity of all people. Realizing this ideal has been difficult. We still struggle, for example, to recognize the contributions of African -Americans as well as to accept them as full status Americans. Many other immigrants, including Italian Americans, Irish Americans, Asian Americans, and others have all struggled to be accepted and recognized as Americans. Today the status of Latino Americans in various ways has taken center stage in our quest to more completely embrace the *E Pluribus Unum* guiding spirit. How well we treat and effectively assimilate Islamic Americans, for example, over the next 25 years will be a test of what Swedish sociologist, Gunnar Myrdal, called the "American Creed."⁷

Perhaps, all democratic experiments begin with the question: Is it possible to have a coherent stable culture that allows the greatest possible freedom of religious and political thought and expression? The origins of this question even predate the founding of the United States. And the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution addresses this question. It reads:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or the press; or the right of people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

This is a powerful statement and one of the most hotly contested assertions in the history of the nation. Like any important argument, the First Amendment continues to be debated as the nature of American culture and society evolves. For example, today we must deal with issues that the founders could not have thought of, such as, whether or not pornography is protected by this Amendment. Even a century ago or less, we did not have to consider if "freedom of the press" included television and the Internet. Today, it is vital that we do so. And one of the most powerful debates over the past half century has dealt with the issue of when in public schools is prayer a violation of the "establishment of religion" clause?



Another question that addresses the diversity of America and tests its unity reads: “Is it possible to have a stable, coherent, unified culture made up of different languages, religious traditions, and races?” The answer Americans forged has been a narrative that tells a national story. Some observers doubt if this narrative still exists in the powerful ways that it once did.

Over time, the continuous waves of immigrant groups reaching America has tested Americans’ understanding toward, assimilation of, and acclimation to their customs and contributions. With this, the balance between diversity and unity can be altered and democracy tested.

When diversity under the persuasion of multiculturalism becomes prominent, it tends to degenerate into segregation, tribalism, and the balkanization of the culture. In turn, the logical extension of a zealous nationalism fosters totalitarianism. Because of the issues of immigration and demographics, Americans (as, perhaps, much of the world) appear to need a new Grand Narrative woven out of the old cloth strewn about. This story might illustrate how our ethnic pluralism can provide a richer, fuller picture of this nation. It would illustrate that America can be a composite culture, where none are excluded, while maintaining a unity of its diversity. It would tell how the substance of each ethnic tale embellishes the national Creed. To live this story, needless to say, tests the ethical fiber of society and requires grasping potentially antagonistic ideas. However, there is much going on in the world today that might suggest that this kind of narrative would be impossible to create.

These tensions viewed through a cultural prism reveal their many facets, nuances, and complexities. Despite abundance, assets, advantages, and opportunities, it is not easy being a democratic citizen. Sustaining a democracy requires “paying attention” and having the ability to analyze issues, confront contradictions, deal with ambiguity, suspend judgment, and ultimately make thoughtful decisions. And people are not born with this disposition or ability; it must be taught and continuously reinforced. This is why education and learning are required and not just any education, but an education that values questioning, debate, and civility.

Contrary to the perception of many people, democracy involves much more than having the freedom to do your own thing, acquiring what you want, or even showing up to vote on election days. It involves rigorous intellectual work. The tension between law and justice, for example, presents an intriguing paradox: Laws and a legal framework provide us with a process for maintaining civil society. Yet, the more society is imbued with justice and people carry on their lives in ethical ways, the fewer laws, regulations, enforcement, and lawyers will be needed. While these and other values are in tension, when properly managed they reinforce and enhance one another.

If we attend diligently to our common wealth, that is, the physical and ethical infrastructure, our private wealth is served well.



The value tension between freedom and equality presents a challenge as well as an opportunity. The disparities that existed in a democracy always persist in various ways despite periodic attempts to foster fairness, justice, and equality for all. And this tension is perhaps the most challenging one. Yet, as we vigorously pursue equal treatment and opportunities for those who are the most disenfranchised at any time, our collective freedoms tend to be improved.

Finally, the tension between diversity and unity, perhaps more than the other tension defines the essence of the democratic character and spirit. When we manage to work beyond the initial fears associated with a different people speaking a foreign language, with strange customs, often holding to a dissimilar religion, while born of another race, assimilation with exclusivity inevitably leaves the national culture more fascinating and enjoyable. It turns out that unity really is enriched by diversity and the two can coexist in ways that only enhance the exceptionalism of any republic, if, and only if, all are educated into being citizens and not subjects.

Democratic arguments in U. S. Education: an Example

Education in America again is at a pedagogical crossroad. The fervor over the quality of U.S. schools generated two decades ago has not subsided. While political and business leaders seem to realize that the perceived crisis in education was not as dire as thought, there are still big gaps in the knowledge that students should have if they are to fill their role as citizens. While U.S. firms are competing successfully in global markets; global currency, services, and material markets are rapidly changing, as are the demographics of the world's populations. American workers, scientists, engineers, and technicians are among the world's best. If anything, the United States suffers from a lack of personal and political will to control its profligacy – consumer as well as government debt – along with its desire to import foreign goods and risk a dangerous trade imbalance with other nations. Current international and domestic dilemmas notwithstanding, the United States' challenge today is to improve its global status and be viewed as a force of good, not just power, around the world. What is pedagogically clear is the need for curricular changes that will more fully embrace the obligations of citizen-ethically, economically, and civically.

There is a fundamental disconnect between what political and business leaders think education should achieve; that is, employment skills, and the more general educational goal of citizenship. Some educators appear to recognize what the average citizen and parents knew all along - that the public generally is pleased with their children's schools and above all else want their children to be well-rounded and well-adjusted. Most U.S. families do not favor a high-pressure education, yet feel that they are pressured into it by global conditions. Most are pleased if the nation's students coming of age are decent and civilized people who possess a willingness and ability to develop skills of civility and attitudes for the modern workplace. They recognize that even if today's students do not lead the world on international assessments, they know a great deal and in some ways appear smarter than previous generations. By and large, adults admire the technological



know-how and acuity of today's young people, but not their attitudes toward building a democratic and healthy community. But, on the other hand, few adults see this attitude as a priority in their own lives.

A Debate between Freedom and Equality

In 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 5 to 4 decision, ruled that the Cleveland Public Schools voucher plan was constitutional. This meant that at in at least Cleveland, Ohio and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where a similar plan was approved, families could use public school dollars to pay for private school tuitions. Vouchers are one form of school choice that has become popular in recent years. However, statewide voucher referendums to date have failed to be passed by voters when placed on election ballots. The tuition tax credit for students attending private schools is a similar measure designed to offset the expense of private schooling. These forms of "private" school choice are resisted for a variety reasons, constitutionally and otherwise, but primarily because citizens object to public funding of private schools.

However, charter schools, a form of "public" school choice, are growing in popularity. Most states permit citizens to set up schools chartered either by a local district or the state, or both. As the argument goes, families are the school customers and students its daily consumers. Choice appeals to Americans because it is at the heart of our market economy and democratic system. And school choice promises to increase the freedom of families with school-age children and, with it, truncate the equality of learning opportunities for all students. This liberal political philosophy contradicts the fundamental premise for public schools that is based on a traditional republicanism. This latter philosophy understands that genuine liberty involves sharing in self-government and working for the common good. In this respect, school choice plans actually serve to undermine equality by subtly or otherwise eroding the republic's foundation of equal and excellent education for all. Students are hardly consumers of schooling; this is not possible because education can't be consumed. Rather it is an ongoing process of creating knowledge, developing skills, and forming character. This involves hard, productive work, and the work is expected from every student in every school.

Jefferson, Mann, Dewey, and others understood that the republic is absolutely dependent on a literate populace who develop civic virtues and character. The purpose of school is to create a public who will nurture the republic. School choice plans have little interest in this mission. Ironically, students stand to be the biggest losers in this liberal, choice environment, because the community will be divided into areas with poor schools and areas with not so poor schools. Students as customers, see schools as places to get through and that owe them information, skills, and training. In assuming the role of passive consumers, young people come away with the intellectually barren notion that schools exist to do something to or for them rather than viewing themselves as lead actors in the drama of education. These debates between those who see freedom only for their own child without paying attention to the equal quality of the whole community are no friends of democracy, or of their children.



No Child Left Behind: Mindlessness at its best

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* was to be the centerpiece of President George W. Bush's domestic policy agenda. This legislation follows in a growing line of efforts to raise the nation's educational standards, increase the learning of all students, and improve the achievement of the most underperforming children. This latter group is disproportionately represented by so-called minority youngsters and those in the lower economic class. While critics question the acts funding and implementation, its intentions appear noble all-be-it short sighted. Its aim is to provide equality of education for particularly the most disadvantaged youth. However, a fundamental problem with this newest reform effort is its limited and naïve scope. Improving the leaning of the disadvantaged youth requires more than telling schools and teachers to try harder or even providing more resources for the schools. Certainly, smaller classes, richer curriculum materials, and teacher training can help, but the problems of many underachieving students are embedded in the lack of any debate over the **purpose** of public education as having a civic responsibility to the republic. That responsibility or duty, simply stated, is to provide all students with an excellent and equal education; at school, in the home, and across the community. The notion that citizens are free to provide unequal opportunities for their own children, and at public expense, is at base undemocratic; cries for freedom notwithstanding.

In other ways, the very provisions of *No Child Left Behind* undermine its intentions and the greater educational good. The Act's requirements focus the child's learning on basic skills, essentially verbal (reading) and quantitative (mathematics). And the assessment of this, understandably, uses traditional testing methods. The intellectual opportunity costs, to say nothing of the direct money cost, are bankrupting America's future. Here, children are not only left behind, they are neglected and marginalized. Teachers now are obliged to focus on preparing students for tests on basic learning while the arts, music, humanities, literature, social studies, and science along with creative ways of exploring the depth and richness of these subjects are ignored. While the intent of *No Child Left Behind* is to enhance the equality of education, its effect is just the opposite: to restrict and narrow the learning opportunities of the students it wants most to improve.

This is just one example of the failure to engage in the argument over democratic value tension in the United States. As long as the values remain out-of-balance; that is, when freedom displaces equality, or diversity overwhelms unity, or private wealth is seen as unrelated to common wealth, democracy will not long survive.

A Curriculum Design for Citizenship

Before a discussion about curriculum, it is appropriate to comment briefly on instruction; how we learn to be citizens. Citizens of a fully functioning democracy need to continually question their own claims to truth by listening to divergent opinions and claims, on the belief that they may become persuaded of an opposing truth. This, of course, demands a high value on free speech in the exploration of all claims. It is not enough to think that you are right; you must know why you are right. The citizen must come to learn the grounds of his or her own opinions. These opinions are what drive our actions. This freedom of thought also requires freedom of discussion. And, discussion or



shared discourse is the centerpiece of instruction for citizenship education. The intellectual virtues of respect, thoroughness, industry, honesty, patience, and shared duty to search for truth come to the forefront in this mode of education where students understand that as they prepare and participate in classroom learning, they produce the common wealth of knowledge, which, in turn, enhances their own private wealth of individual learning.

The general design of this scope and sequence delineated below is intended to serve as a conversation starter on the nature of that pedagogical knowledge of most worth to democratic societies. The elements presented here are seen as necessary learning components for the 21st Century and advance the identities of citizen-scholar-artisan.

Ages: 4 – 6

Curriculum Elements

- Narratives (stories) of the several histories/cultures of the Pacific Circle; highlighting the heroic script of the culture; stories that discuss the most important culture values
- Languages – students learn at least one language beyond their first language
- Art/music/creative dramatics...with historic significances
- Non-combative martial arts

Starting at this age level, students would engage the intellectual virtues necessary for citizenship, scholarship, and artisanship. The content is intended to help students understand their culture; its values, heroes, and aesthetics. How do our people relate to time, the land, each other, and the spiritual world?

Ages: 7 – 9

Curriculum Elements

At this age level we continue the knowledge gained above, and address the new content (basic concepts and questions) on how the social and natural worlds work and relate to each other. Of primary importance are the questions of: Who can be a citizen? Why? How? What are the proper relationships between human, social institutions, and the environment? How do human beings interact with their environments?

Ages: 10 – 13

Curriculum Elements

At this age level we continue reinforcing the knowledge gained above; adding now a third language, and address the new content of the history and philosophy of the following academic areas:

- Science
- History
- Languages
- Mathematics
- Art/Music
- Literature



Emphasis is placed on communication with impressive attention on writing. What does the history of a discipline tell us about its dynamic nature and the changing conditions of human society? How are all fields of knowledge philosophical in their methods of inquiry?

Ages: 14 – 17

Curriculum Elements

At this age level we continue reinforcing the knowledge gained above, and use the academic disciplines to address persistent personal, social, and natural issues.

- How can we create healthy and aesthetic homes and communities?
- How can we understand the relationships within and among cultures?
- How can we create and allocate power, wealth, and justice in local and global settings?

Ages: 18 – 21

Curriculum Elements

This age level addresses the epistemologies (nature of knowledge) of the academic disciplines (behavioral, analytical, and synoptic) and struggles with questions such as: How are social and natural issues identified? What are the ideals or motive concepts of human history? How is knowledge (and wisdom) created, organized, validated, used, falsified, recreated, and used to develop, judge, and implement personal and public policies that move us to create a better world?

The Obligation

As we look at the conditions of the world today, defined by the demographics that tell of two worlds; one of the old, educated, and wealthy, and a second world of the young, ignorant, and poor, we know that alterations in our conception of education need to change. Above all, education must be redefined to embrace the public and civic nature of its obligation.

As the people of the world confront ever more increasing separate or exceptional visions of their group's religious, economic, military, and cultural idiosyncratic tendencies, without a mediating conception of global common humanity, not only is democracy problematic, but so too is life itself. Here, death is not only the logical extension of the individual and his or her cultural life, but of the species as well. The duty of the educator in this contemporary context, then, is clear. It is to develop unique cultural (historical) perspectives in harmony with the larger cultural context of the world. This obligation of the educator is the proper meaning of his or her identity. That identity and attending duty is to protect and enhance his or her culture while, at the same time, enhancing the more general and higher attributes of humankind. This means working with two dynamic and contradictory ideas at the same time. This democratic thinking will make it possible for the unique and changing cultures of the world to exist and maintain their integrity while embracing and complementing them with the more global and civic principles of civility, justice, and knowledge. This can be done, because culture overlap and human commonality are profound. This outcome of a grand global narrative in harmony with local cultures calls for a more civic and common curriculum. In this education design



students develop the attributes and attending behaviors associated with intellectual virtues as well as a questioning mind that can understand and debate, in civic discourse, the democratic value tensions of law and ethics; unity and diversity; freedom and equality; and common wealth and private wealth. All of this ultimately depends on individuals who can assume the identity of citizen with all its privileges and obligations. This job will never be finished, of course, for democracy is simply an on-going argument. However, without a conscience effort to teach, learn, and use these talents the future of the world looks dark indeed.

End Notes

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Note: During the last ten years, some of the first and most productive discussions about “multidimensional engagement” in which the author was engaged took place within two Minnesota civic organizations: The Minnesota Active Citizenship Initiative and Civic Organizing Inc. both directed by Peg Michels of St. Paul.



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