



Pluralism and Unity in Education

On Education for Democratic Citizenship and Personal
Autonomy in a Pluralist Society

av

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Abstract

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The overarching theme of this thesis concerns the possibility of balancing the values of unity and pluralism in education in developed nation states characterized by an increasing pluralism when it comes to the beliefs and values of its citizens. The author suggests that democracy has a normative basis in the principle of reciprocity which can be supported in an overlapping consensus by reasonable persons who differ in their moral, religious and philosophical beliefs. It is argued that this basis mandates a deliberative kind of democracy and that certain implications follow for how to understand the relation between democracy and individual rights, between democracy and religious belief and speech, and between rationality and deliberation, among other things. The author proceeds to discuss three educational issues in relation to the principle of reciprocity and its implications: 1. The legitimacy and content of a mandatory citizenship education, 2. Children's rights to develop personal autonomy, 3. The opportunity for parents and children to choose which school children attend. These issues are important in relation to the question of how to balance unity and pluralism in education in that they concern the promotion of certain common beliefs, values and dispositions among citizens or the creation of a system of choice between schools with different profiles. The purpose of the discussion is to construct a theoretical position which balances the values of unity and pluralism in education, by giving diversity its due (*contra* communitarianism) while upholding a measure of unity (*contra* libertarianism and radical multiculturalism) which is located in the democratic and autonomy-promoting purposes of education rather than (exclusively) in its economic/vocational purposes (*contra* neo-liberalism). The discussions make use of political philosophy, educational philosophy and empirical research carried out by other researchers.

Keywords: pluralism, democratic education, citizenship education, children's rights, autonomy-promotion, school choice, deliberative democracy, political philosophy, educational philosophy.

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