WHO'S AFRAID OF POLITICAL EDUCATION?

The Challenge to Teach Civic Competence and Democratic Participation

Edited by
Henry Tam

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Populism, classrooms and shared authority

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> On a summer afternoon, twenty-two years ago, I joined my mother, a veteran schoolteacher, in a crowd of several thousand people to listen to a campaign speech by a U.S. Presidential candidate. I was 13 years old, about to begin 8th grade and start my tenure as Student Council President at my elementary school. At the time, I didn't have particularly strong political leanings, but I was excited to be part of the political process. After the candidate gave his speech, I left my mom's side to run to the front of the crowd, joining a line of people gathered along a metal barrier, hoping to shake the candidate's hand. I was the first person in the line, and next to me clustered a group of young people, a dozen or so of us, all about the same age. Clearly, none of us were old enough to vote, but how exciting, how affirming, that we had all found our way to the front of the crowd! For a few moments, I felt a valued part of this ritual. Our excitement grew as the candidate descended the stairs from the stage. In front of him, along the length of the metal barricade, stood a line of citizens, all of us eager to meet him. I watched his eyes skim the crowd, beginning with us young people, then darting to my left, toward the adults. My heart sank, as he pivoted to the side and began walking briskly toward the first adult in line, who he greeted with a smile and handshake, before moving on to the other adults. The group of us young people stood utterly ignored. This was a moment I would not soon forget.

However personally disappointing to the young Kathleen Sellers, the cordial political tenor of that rally two decades ago bears little resemblance to the polarised and even violent energy present in American politics today. We live in a 'populist moment' (Mouffe, 2018, p 1), a time of frequent uprisings and movements of the people, the *demos*, making demands of political leaders. Edda Sant (2021, p 75) has suggested that populist political action is 'an alert

to a crisis, and an anticipation of times of change'. We are living through this liminal moment, when our democratic norms are changing, and the very notion of democracy feels more tenuous (Lee et al, 2021). As those in education are well aware, teachers have been drawn into this political fray, in ways that fundamentally undermine their classroom authority and question the legitimacy of public education itself (Stitzlein, 2017; Sant, 2021).

In response to this democratic and educational crisis, the National Academy of Education (NAEd) published *Educating for Civic Reasoning & Discourse*, a multi-authored report investigating current understandings of democracy, citizenship and civics education (Lee et al, 2021). At the heart of this report is the essential civic question: 'What should we do?' (Levine, 2016; Dishon and Ben-Porath, 2018; Stitzlein, 2021). This question is directed not at teachers, but at students, who through civic education should develop civic competences that enable them to answer this question well. From this question stems recommendations for pedagogical and policy actions. Yet, underlying this question, but unaddressed in the report, is the notion of student authority. In this chapter, we seek to answer the question: Who is authorised to ask and answer questions regarding 'what should we do' as a public, as a democratic people? We approach this question from the perspective of classroom teachers, those figures perhaps best positioned in America 'to advocate for a strong civics education' (Lee et al, 2021, p 4). We agree with Sant (2021, p 124) that civic 'education needs to acclimatise to the current circumstances of conflict and uncertainty rather than pretending that it is business as usual', and we draw on the work of Paulo Freire (1993, 2001) and Mary Parker Follett (1924, 1970, 1995; Metcalf and Urwick, 1941) to argue that embedded in the ethos of populist activity is one important remedy for what ails our democracy and civic education: shared authority.

We will make this argument in four parts. First, we briefly review relevant literature on populism, notions of democratic citizenship and civics education, critical pedagogy, and authority. Then, we present an argument regarding our central claim, that students-as-citizens have the authority to ask and answer the essential civic question 'What should we do?', but are not permitted to exercise this authority in traditional 'banking classrooms'. We will then explore this argument through two diverse theoretical perspectives. The first of these are Freirean critiques of banking education as well as his recommendations for problem-posing education (1993). The second comes from the organisational power theories of Mary Parker Follett, a pioneer in theorising control in organisations as more humanely based in social processes rather than subordination (Metcalf and Urwick, 1941). Our last section provides practical examples of how educators are creating innovative ways to share classroom authority in civics, maths and science classrooms, exploring possibilities of pedagogical power-sharing in this populist moment.

Populism and the democratic authority of (future?) citizens

Populism is a political phenomenon with deep roots in Western legal and cultural history (Kaltwasser et al, 2017). The term 'populist' emerged in the late 19th century in the US when a diverse group of farmers, angry about elected officials' neglect of their collective economic interests, launched a third political party, the People's Party, at a national convention in Cincinnati, Ohio. Members of this political party came to be known as 'Populists' and their ideas came to be realised decades later in US progressive-era New Deal policies (Frank, 2020). As of late, populist political activity has been documented on every inhabited continent and expresses itself both on the political Left and Right (Kaltwasser et al, 2017; Sant, 2021). For example, in the 2016 US presidential election, candidate Donald Trump would be an expression of Right populism, while candidate Bernie Sanders would be an expression of Left populism.

Populism, as a political phenomenon, has been defined variously as a 'thin-centred ideology' (Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2018), a political strategy (Akkerman, 2003), a cultural phenomenon (Ostiguy et al, 2020), a social movement (Aslanidis, 2020; Singer, 2021), or a discursive strategy (Laclau, 2005; Mårdh and Tryggvason, 2017; Mouffe, 2018). Edda Sant (2021, p 47) explains that while political scientists may disagree on the particulars, 'there is a general agreement that populism is a "vague" term referring to political practices that polarise society into two distinct groups, the elite and the people, where "the people" underpin the ultimate source of the general will'. Because of its commitment to the will of the people, the *demos*, populism has often been linked with democracy (Boyte, 2007; Baker, 2019). For the purposes of this discussion, we employ Sant's (2021) definition of populism and add to it the additional understanding, which is widely acknowledged in the literature: populists can be good at naming serious political problems (Baker, 2019), albeit less adept at the complex resolution of said problems through political processes. Because populism hinges on the people's belief that their collective will is the ultimate source of political legitimacy, populist mobilisation can often serve as a litmus test of democratic crisis, when the legitimacy of those 'elite' in power is fundamentally questioned (Sant, 2021).

In a democracy, it is the responsibility of citizens to contribute to the common good of associated life. While the notion of citizenship is often defined in narrow, legalistic terms, we agree with Sarah Stitzlein (2021, p 25), writing in the NAEd report, that citizens are better defined 'in terms of what they do … Citizens … [are] people who engage in activities of citizenship', even if they 'are not granted citizenship in terms of formal legal or informal membership status'.

The membership status attached to most meanings of citizenship is also strongly attached to legal ages of adulthood. People who are not old

enough to vote are often, in practice, excluded from the formal category of citizenship, a reality that has implications for classroom instruction and school culture writ large. We see this, for example, in the same NAEd report, when Lee et al (2021, p 3, emphasis added) claim that civic skills 'are essential to cultivate as students prepare for their *future roles* as adults, citizens, and being full members of their varied communities'. This claim is consistent with contemporary discourse on democratic education and reveals how Americans are regularly socialised, and what most civic educators are expected to understand about their students: young people are not *full* members of their varied communities but *future* adults and citizens (DeCesare, 2021, 2022). Such a narrow understanding seems to imply that the *real* mark of citizenship is limited to some unspecified marker of adulthood, perhaps voting, in which case one becomes a real citizen at the moment they reach the age of enfranchisement, a strictly legal definition and a literal marker of one, albeit important, civic action. This is a paradox we mean to trouble.

To challenge these dominant meanings of 'citizenship' for students, teachers and their broader communities, we need to make two things clear. First, while we agree that students, like all citizens, are in an ongoing process of learning civic competences, it is also true that students are able to contribute to civic life in distinct and meaningful ways. This has implications for civic education, because it indicates that students and teachers alike, by virtue of their mutual citizenship, have responsibility to exercise shared authority. Second, shared, or democratic authority, is expressed through a process of co-creation enacted by students with teachers. Paulo Freire (2001) explains that

> democratic authority carries the conviction that true discipline does not exist in the muteness of those who have been silenced but in the stirrings of those who have been challenged, in the doubt of those who have been prodded, and in the hopes of those who have been awakened … I will know better and more authentically what I know the more efficaciously I build up my autonomy vis-à-vis the autonomy of others. (pp 86–7)

Freire's notions of autonomy are not individualistic; his conception of education views autonomy as 'a condition arising from the ethical and responsible engagement with decision-making' (Weiner, 2003, p 90). Freirean ideas of democratic authority are fluid and dynamic, created through student engagement in practices that are meaningful for civic learning and decision-making. Put more simply, teachers express democratic authority by engaging in problem-posing education (that is, critical pedagogy) with their students, and students express their democratic authority by the same process. Sant (2021) reinforces this claim when she writes:

> Teachers' authority should not only be dependent on how much they know. Social respect can also be a consequence of whether teachers facilitate educational experiences that allow (or at least do not prevent) learners from understanding themselves better, feeling more comfortable in their skins and making meaningful political contributions. (p 135)

Sant's choice to ground authority in both knowledge and experience is, she explains, a response to contemporary populist actions, some of which call into question truth claims made by 'elite' figures, including teachers. As Sant suggests, while traditional forms of teacher authority in the classroom are based on knowledge expertise (and not, coincidentally, notions of banking education), rethinking classroom authority and student voice within and beyond the classroom ought to be a fundamental realisation for educators in the present global populist moment.[1]

Classroom authority: 'coactive', not coercive

Theorists of power and control in organisations provide frames for building new habits and knowledge related to classroom authority. Writing in the early 20th century, Mary Parker Follett (1995, p 154) asserted that 'authority is a self-generating process'. This process is carried out by people employing their knowledge, experience and skill to meet the responsibilities inherent to specific roles. Such authority, if it is to be employed successfully, can never be coercive, or 'power-over'. Rather, it must be what she called 'coactive' or 'power-with' (Follett, 1924, p 200). Accordingly, legitimate authority could only be exercised through collective problem-solving,[2] a characterisation consistent with Freire's (1993, 2001) notion of critical pedagogy. And also like Freire (2001), Follett (1918, 1924, 1995) understood that the fruit of such authority is freedom *for* action that has civic impact. Writing specifically about the student–teacher relationship, Follett (1970, p 137) explained: 'The greatest service the teacher can render the student is to increase his freedom – his free range of activity and thought and his power of control.' For this reason, teachers need 'faith in our students' (Follett, 1970, p 139) that they have the capacity to fulfil their role as citizens. Classroom

[1] For details of how Sant applies this approach to the teaching of national identity in political education, see Chapter 7.

[2] Follett (1924, 1995) identifies three ways of dealing with difference: domination (coercive 'power-over'), compromise (both sides lose some and express some 'power-over') and integration ('coactive power-with'). Follett believed that only integration, which required co-active problem-solving, could offer an effective way to deal with difference.

authority, as a relational and dynamic process, involves an ongoing practice of 'self-fashioning' for both teacher and students, whereby teacher–student and students–teachers balance each other's contributions to the learning process and, in so doing, shape each other's identities and actions as (civic) agents (Bingham 2009, p 144).

This brings us back to our initial query: Who is authorised to ask and answer questions regarding 'what should we do?' Let us remember that the NAEd report makes the claim, and rightly so, that we need students *capable* of answering the fundamental civic question. Underlying this is the unstated but critical assumption that students have the *authority* to answer the question. Follett (1995) reminds us that authority is inherent to roles; that is, how people leverage their knowledge, skills and experience to responsibly meet the demands (and duties) of their roles. This is a dynamic process and, to be effective, must be enacted with others. Let us remember, also, that citizenship is about civic action, not only a legal status or age, and despite adults (including teachers) being socialised to the contrary, students are citizens by this definition. Accordingly, in so much as students are citizens, they absolutely have authority to ask and answer civic questions. And, for students to learn the civic competences necessary to ask and answer civic questions well, they must be allowed to exercise this authority in (and beyond) classrooms. Herein lies the rub for pedagogy and curriculum in schools.

Traditional banking methods of education (Freire, 1993) are coercive; such practices deny students the freedom to function as civic agents (Freire, 2001). Indeed, banking logics conceive of students as passive recipients of their teachers' knowledge (Freire, 1993). Follett (1924) calls this type of student–teacher relationship coercive, because it relies on an unequal power relationship to achieve its aims. In banking education, the teacher has 'power-over' the student, not 'power-with' (Follett, 1924). Likewise, traditional conceptions of the role of students, as future citizens (DeCesare, 2021, 2022; Lee et al, 2021), imagine students as receiving knowledge about citizenship rather than engaging in citizenship activities. *Future* citizen is not a role with the authority to ask or answer the civic question.

We suggest that this banking mode of civic education is typical of most classrooms, and most adults inside and outside classrooms are socialised to imagine students as future, not current, citizens. This has the double effect of dominating and constructing non-citizens, that is, people without agency and authority to ask and respond to the essential civic question of 'what should we do?' If teachers do not have 'faith in our students' (Follett, 1970, p 139) to ask and respond to this question, then students habituate themselves to oppressive (Freire, 1993) and coercive (Follett, 1995) modes of learning and, by extension, oppressive and coercive modes of political life. It's little wonder, then, that for more than two decades, the majority of American students have failed to demonstrate proficiency in a national assessment of

civic competency (Campbell, 2019). American students are demonstrating exactly what they've been authorised to learn: non-citizenship.

Banking education is enabled, however, not simply by the traditional relations of 'power-over' in classrooms, but also by our conceptions of what types of curriculum are most essential for creating good citizens. As the previous mention of national (and international) assessments of civic competency reminds us, much curriculum oriented towards civics learning emphasises knowledge and skills related to history and government. Too often, our interests in creating better citizens get translated into more standardised and fixed content rather than the engaged inquiry and practice across the curriculum. As Stitzlein (2021, p 29) notes: 'citizenship education should not be boiled down to a fixed body of static knowledge to convey to children. Instead, knowledge should be taught as part of active inquiry into authentic controversies in our democracy and struggles to live well together within it'.[3]

Freire's conception of 'problem-posing' education was meant to dismantle banking relations in education by shifting the focus of learners and teachers to shared problems – the means to knowledge construction – that would motivate shared inquiry and shifting power relations. Freire (1993, pp 60–1) writes that 'liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information', and that education based in authentic dialogical relations between teachers and students must be based in 'the capacity of cognitive actors to cooperate in perceiving the same cognizable object'. This, in turn, is a holistic form of authority, much akin to Follett's notion of 'power-with'; that working towards a shared focus of inquiry, individuals coactively exercise free will on common ends in group process. Parker explains the implications of Follett's theory:

> As a social process, self-control allowed the exercising of free will. The individual was not to be dominated by others because "A" did not control "B," nor did "B" control "A." Instead, they inter-mingled and exchanged views and ideas in a continuing social process in order to produce the collective thought and the collective will (Follett, 1918). The group-oriented process of shared self-control therefore constituted the major aspect of the Follett behavioral model of control. (Parker, 1984, p 740)

The group-oriented process of shared control provides a focus on how power-with enables a shifting of classroom authority relations. This

[3] See Chapter 3 for a detailed examination of the problems associated with the teaching of controversial political issues and 'divisive concepts'.

major shift is from a vertical, teacher to student transmission of content, to more horizontal group processes in which teacher and students are oriented around learning that is activated around problems, experiments, or creative endeavours.

These processes help create the 'we' of teachers and students in classrooms and, importantly, elevate students into more agentic roles in (and beyond) classrooms. The more horizontal authority relations of the classroom are needed to socialise and model for students what it means to work together on shared problems outside school boundaries. To achieve this reorientation, we suggest a fundamental change: teachers need to engage students as citizens, a role vested with authority to ask and answer the essential civic question. This requires adults – families and teachers, school administrators and community leaders – who are willing and able to honour students' role as citizen (and its inherent authority) and share civic authority with them, as they strive together to respond to the essential civic question.

As we approach this civic problem, we take lessons from populist movements, whose activity is sparked by a democratic will. At its heart, populism is concerned with the authority of the people, the *demos*. If the people's will is not expressed through the actions of those elites in office, then their authority is perceived as illegitimate (Aslanidis, 2020; Sant, 2021). Here, we could say that populist movements often express a form of coactive leadership (Follett, 1924), in which the will of some body of people seeks to be integrated, or coherent with that of their leaders. Thus, when the people's problems are not adequately addressed, if democracy is to persist in a manner they perceive as legitimate, populists feel they must resist the coercive power-over (Follett, 1924) of the elites by posing their problems to those in power, a process at which populists are quite skilled (Baker, 2019) and which is often very emotional (Mudde, 2004; Sant, 2021; Zembylas, 2020). By joining together into a civically active 'we', populists assert their authority, the same authority to which any citizen is entitled (and expected to express) in a democracy. Whether the particular wishes of any populist movement *ought* to shift policy or decision-making is not the point here. Rather, the point is that becoming part of the 'we' of the civic question, 'what ought we to do', is something going on all around us in this populist moment of diverse resistances to leadership or authorities understood to be coercive.

For classroom teachers, trusted with civic education, our populist moment amplifies two important truths. First, the authority of citizens – and this includes youth and adults – is crucial to democratic life. Second, problem-posing is a critical educational and civic activity. We suggest that these features of democratic life, citizen authority and problem-posing, can and should work together to enhance the types and varieties of education created in classrooms. This coheres with Freire's (1993) notion

of critical pedagogy, which understands students and teachers to be in an equitable and dynamic relationship. And critical praxis is predicated on students and teachers, together, responding to some problem posed in their environment. In this respect, critical pedagogy is also a form of civic pedagogy (Freire, 2001), because both occur as a response to real-life problem-posing. Such education meets more than a pedagogical need; it is responsive to any human need that might surface in daily life (Follett, 1970). Further, the collective response of students and teachers together must be productive, not 'a mere shibboleth of empty words' (Follett, 1924, p xiii). We next provide examples illustrating some pedagogical formations that meet this standard.

Teacher engagements in sharing power and authority

For teachers trying to sort out how to facilitate education for civic life, a first step is recognising the role their students possess as present citizens, and then honouring that role by co-developing the authority inherent to it. They must also create opportunities to problem-pose and problem-solve in ways responsive to the needs of the students, their communities and the lived experiences of democratic life. Teachers must figure out these tasks and new arrangements within the parameters of their content areas, school cultures, broader community and, too often, inhospitable political contexts.

Below, we provide three examples of pedagogy that work to shift classroom authority relations, elevate and empower student voice, and form collective organisational structures that facilitate shared inquiry and expertise. Only one of the three content areas of the examples described here is traditionally conceived as *civics* content; we purposefully position the work of elevating student authority and voice as a challenge for *all* content areas and grade levels in a school.

Public sensemaking in high school mathematics

Lo and Ruef (2020, p 17) describe public sensemaking classrooms as places where teachers are 'widening the ways that students can perform competence – when there are more ways to be "good at math," more students will be competent'. Public sensemaking instruction (Ruef, 2016) includes pedagogy that cultivates respect and acknowledgement of one another's perspectives, 'welcoming mistakes and productive struggle as aspects of learning; and taking risks' by sharing one's thinking through presentations, critiques, revisions, and refining work (Lo and Ruef, 2020, p 18). Mathematics classes should, in this view, enable students to become 'collaborative and critical problem solvers prepared to leverage productive change in the world' (p 17). Students become 'active partners in creating

learning opportunities for each other', and agency is no longer the sole province of the teacher, but distributed through the network of students, who take on different roles in equitable teaching and learning practices in the classroom (p 16).

Lo and Ruef's study explores mathematical interactions around different kinds of 'interactive positioning', in groupwork problem-solving. One can be positioned as an expert, novice or facilitator; ideally, students and teachers shift their positions depending on the problem, the content knowledge required, and one's level of relative expertise or experience with that particular problem.

> Ideally, in an equitable classroom, positions are impermanent as an equitable classroom culture would produce relatively frequent shifts in positioning. This is because each student brings a different level of prior knowledge or expertise to the task at hand. A student who recalls a strategy used in a similar problem may be viewed as an expert on one task and a novice on another where the student has less mathematical insight. (Lo and Ruef, 2020, p 19)

Lo and Ruef (2020) sought to understand the ways that students are negotiating different positions in their interactive maths groups in a public sensemaking classroom in an urban high school. The pedagogical design allows students and teachers to collectively mediate authority in groups and between groups, enabling students to distribute agency and authority within groups as situations and individual personalities demand. 'Teaching and learning become more equitable when students do not permanently position each other. Temporary positioning, fluid across activities, creates space for students to fluctuate between expert, facilitator, contributor, novice and [other] positions' (Lo and Ruef, 2020, p 29). This process of repositioning teacher and student expertise in collaborative maths groupwork exemplifies Follett's (1995) notion of authority as 'coactive'. Public sensemaking in mathematics pedagogy also highlights the notion of authority as constructed, produced and achieved over time through risk-taking; the enactment of learning as a co-active, social endeavour rather than an individual one; and the important civic proposition that expertise is not the sole property of the professional in the room.

Expressing civic agency through science education collaboration

In 'Adaptations to a secondary school-based citizen science project to engage students in monitoring well water for arsenic during the COVID-19 pandemic', Anna Farrell et al. (2021, p 1) illustrate how students, teachers, and scientists collaborated to promote 'positive long-term health impacts

on the students and their communities', through scientific inquiry and data literacy in and beyond classrooms. The All About Arsenic project (www.allaboutarsenic.org), which Farrell et al's article explores, engaged middle and high school students in Maine and New Hampshire, the two US states with the highest reliance on private wells for drinking water, as citizen scientists. This presented students with a real problem that they could address through scientific inquiry and civic action, in and beyond the classroom. With the support and guidance of scientists and 16 science teachers during the 2019–20 school year, students collected 518 'well water samples for arsenic analysis' (p 1), analysed data and organised it into graphs and maps that were pertinent to their local context, and shared their findings and resources for mitigating arsenic contamination in public forums. From these samples, 82 wells were identified as having elevated levels of arsenic, and the owners of the wells were immediately contacted and provided with resources to address this issue. This is just part of the way that this project commits all participants to translating 'data to action' in the students' community. Additionally, students and teachers worked co-actively to design and implement community outreach, resulting in such varied actions as virtual meetings between students and their state representatives to discuss students' research findings, students writing to their local elected officials and newspapers to inform the public about this community health issue, and developing longer term plans for 'student participation in a town-wide effort to get all wells tested' (Farrell et al, 2021, p 9). This variety of civic actions reflects the project's broader structure as a framework, rather than a strict lesson or unit plan. 'Each teacher involved in the project embeds this citizen science initiative into their curriculum in different ways' (Farrell et al, 2021, p 3), allowing the integration of civic and science learning at different grade levels and in different subject areas, including chemistry and biology. Sharing authority with students as citizens provides many possibilities for curriculum and teaching innovations.

Controversial issues discussions

Diana Hess (2009) demonstrates the democratic power of dialogue by profiling several case studies of teachers who adeptly use controversial issues discussions in their pedagogy. Controversial issues discussions are designed to give students practice in inclusive deliberation, critical reasoning and explorations of and tolerance for political and other forms of difference. Such discussions are based on contemporary questions that have controversial and conflictual elements. Controversial issues discussion is

> teaching *for* and *with* discussion, [wherein] the teachers direct the full resources of their pedagogical content knowledge to the lesson planning

> process, and they devote a generous amount of classroom time to teaching students how to prepare for discussions, how to participate in them, and how to debrief them. (Hess, 2009, p 56)

One example is a classroom town hall meeting model developed by Ann Twain, a middle school social studies teacher, for her interdisciplinary US history, civics and world geography class (Hess, 2009, p 56). Ms Twain's students participated in eight town hall meetings across the school year, weaving in service learning programming across the curriculum as well. Ms Twain chose topics that were presently being discussed or deliberated at local, state or national levels. One example of a successful topic was an upcoming ballot initiative that would ban local and state government affirmative action programmes based on race and gender. Students created, and then assumed, the roles of those participating in the town hall discussion – each role was a person with a particular point of view or position in this controversial issue. Students worked through extensive background materials prior to the meeting, to make sure that the deliberation was productive and based on good evidence, sources and testimonial. Students shared power with teachers throughout the process, from creating the initial guidelines for the discussion activity to doing preparation work to actually being at the centre of the discussion. Teachers, like Ms Twain, who successfully practised this pedagogy, viewed discussions as a 'forum for their students', not another soapbox for teacher authority (Hess, 2009, p 75). Likewise, Ms Twain's students deliberated with each other at their town hall meetings, rather than centring on the teacher's power.

There is no one way to renegotiate authority relations between students and teachers, yet all three examples show how pedagogical innovation can provide structures for students to address complex problems and issues that matter. In the maths class, students experiment with different positionalities as they work through maths problems. When they have expertise, they facilitate, but when they are novices or struggle with a skill, they play other roles. In science class, students are active participants in water sampling, testing and communicating with community members regarding water safety. In a controversial issue discussion, students are active participants in staging, conducting and evaluating vital exchanges of information and argument in regards to substantive, controversial issues of the day relevant to the school curriculum and the real world. These examples demonstrate the variety of pedagogical approaches for students to contribute as citizens in the present moment and not at some abstract point in the future.

Becoming the 'we' of democracy

We began this chapter with a personal example of civic engagement outside the classroom. In a moment of heightened political emotion, a young citizen

and her peers were ignored by a political candidate, who devoted his time and energy, instead, to engagement with adults of apparent voting age. She read this action then, and we read the action together now, as a failure to acknowledge the citizenship of young people. Such failures communicate to young people that their contributions today do not matter to civic life. Similar actions take place in American classrooms every day, and they have serious consequences for the kinds of citizens we shape in schools.

We have argued that students-as-citizens have the authority to ask and answer the essential civic question 'What should we do?', and as such, it is incumbent upon educators to employ problem-posing education that allows space for students across the curriculum and grade levels to co-actively solve problems relevant to their daily lives. The examples of controversial issues discussions (Hess, 2009), the All About Arsenic project (Farrell et al, 2021) and public sensemaking in mathematics (Lo and Ruef, 2020) illustrate what this can look like in context. These examples underscore that the teacher needs to be prepared to engage with their students and co-actively plan and implement responses to the essential civic question. Only then will the teacher render the student the greatest service possible, 'to increase his freedom – his free range of activity and thought and his power of control' (Follett, 1970, p 137). Indeed, in our populist moment: 'The test of the teacher-student relation is: Is the teacher's work such, are his ideas and aims such, that the student can *carry on*, can *take over* just where the teacher leaves off' (Follett, 1970, p 139).

The education of citizens requires that we reconceive the fundamental notions of authority in classrooms, and who has the right and responsibility to ask and answer civic questions in our society. We can tinker with civics education curriculum and assessment questions, yet still miss analysing a foundational question about how students understand themselves to be citizens, as part of the 'we' of democracy. The expansion and increase of populist expression, whether coming from the Left or the Right, signifies that more and more of us feel disenfranchised. Banking pedagogy sets up that dynamic. However, by taking our cues from populist expression, we might pursue a more co-active, authoritative civic education.

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