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Teach your children well: introduction to the book symposium on Julian Culp's *democratic education in a globalized world*

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an introduction to the book symposium on Julian Culp's *Democratic Education in a Globalized World*. In this paper we introduce the themes and core claims of Culp's book, sketch the contributions made by authors of this symposium, and highlight the plausibility of the book's significance for debates in political philosophy, philosophy of education, educational public policy, as well as for the practice of political education. The issue includes three critical essays by Michael Festl, Martin Beckstein, and Michael Geiss as well as a response to the critics by Culp.

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Introduction

If the normative objective of education is to promote personal moral autonomy, what educational public policies are appropriate for social contexts in which our lives are increasingly shaped by globalized social structures? And if principles of global justice are to be realized in the world we now inhabit, what kind of citizenship education will we need? Julian Culp's *Democratic Education in a Globalized World: A Normative Theory* asks big questions. It also highlights a gap in our knowledge and thinking and aims to close it. In political philosophy, the topic of education has drawn significant attention over the past few decades (see, for example, Gutmann 1987; Anderson 2007 or Satz 2007). Moreover, political theorists have come to recognize – not least in their contributions to this journal – what early ‘internationalists’ like Charles Beitz (1975) have long maintained: namely that politics and justice are less and less confined to the nation state and that, therefore, social science and normative theory should join force in addressing global questions (Brown and Eckersley et al. 2018). In debates on global justice, however, education often remains a blind spot. Bringing the different strands of writing together, Culp's study on global democratic education thus offers a timely addition to the growing literatures on international political theory, on global justice and on the normative foundations and roles of education.

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Education for global justice: why bother?

Debates about global justice tend to say more about taxation than about education. Noting that few people write about the link, we might thus be tempted to question whether education may simply not be central for thinking about, let alone realizing global justice. But such a conclusion would obviously be wrong. Where opportunities in life are distributed unequally, for example, we commonly identify this as an injustice; and divergence in access to (high quality) education tends to count as one major source of such injustice. As a result, providing equally good education to all becomes a matter of justice, as does the effort to institutionalize this provision in the form of an individual right.

The right to education is rarely disputed in normative political theory, and it has also been codified in numerous international legal documents, including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26), the 1966 International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (Article 13), or the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 28). However, the link between education and justice does not end here. What matters may not only be equal access to *any* kind of education, but rather every child and adolescent's right to a *specific form of education*, namely one that allows her to thrive as a human being and to participate meaningfully in the making of political decisions that affect her life. The general comment on Article 13 of the UN Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights thus stipulates that education is 'the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities' (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1999, emphasis added).

In times of economic and political globalization, the boundaries of everyone's community shift. Political decisions that affect your life are taken not only at home, but also abroad. Accordingly, the right to political participation translates as a right to make your voice heard in both spheres. Like every right it implies correlative duties – in this case, for instance, the duty international organizations as well as the governments of their member states hold to inform the public about their decision-making processes. Yet, such a duty remains practically void where the public fails to understand what is at stake in negotiations over, say, an Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) or a proposed treaty on business and human rights. And justice is also structurally impeded where only some groups know how such treaties affect their interests, know how to organize effectively, and know how to lobby for their preferences.

In line with this thought, Steffek (2018, 443) identifies 'inequality among participants, caused by diverging levels of formal education, experience in public speaking, gendered role models, and, not least, individual personality traits' as 'probably the most pressing issue [regarding participation]' in international deliberative forums where 'social status, skills, and habitus inevitably privilege some speakers'. As a result, it is not only equal access to education *in general*, but also equal access to *political education specifically*, which becomes central to realize procedural justice on a global scale (Dingwerth 2014).

But notions such as social skills or habitus could also take us yet another step further. We could thus note that, if education is meant to provide the means to participate fully in one's community, then the 'transformation of political community' (Linklater 1998) also requires us to develop a kind new of education. This insight could lead us to call

for a specific form of education that can provide a basis for global citizens to understand each other and co-decide their collective fates. In addition to a *right to education* in general and a *right to (global) political education* more specifically, we could then think about an individual *right to (global) democratic citizen education* and a related duty for states to provide access to such an education.

Democratic education in a globalized world: the core claims

Julian Culp's *Democratic Education in a Globalized World* recognizes the right to education in general and the right to political education more specifically. But it is the author's insistence on the third and most demanding aspect which turns the book into a particularly noteworthy contribution to the growing scholarship on ethics and global politics. Culp seeks to convince his readers that we cannot realize justice without also realizing a right to global democratic citizenship education.

So, what are the core claims of *Democratic Education in a Globalized World*? Even though the concept does not appear in the book title, the starting point of Julian Culp's analysis is the notion of *justice*. The first of the author's three core claims thus holds 'that a conception of global democratic justice constitutes the normative ground of educational public policy' (Culp 2019, 15). *Democracy*, which does appear in the title, comes in as a result of the discourse-theoretical conception of global justice which Culp adopts in chapter 2. This conception rules out the possibility to rely on strong substantive claims as it provides for a procedural conception of justice instead. In brief, Culp (2019, i) thus argues that, because justice implies democracy and because democratic practices are increasingly undermined by economic globalization and its consequences, educational public policy must now 'cultivate democratic relationships not only within but also across and between states'. More precisely, he seeks educational policies that 'empower citizens to exercise democratic control in domestic as well as in inter- and transnational politics'.

Ultimately, two ideas form the core of Culp's conception of global education justice: the normative aim of 'global democratic citizen education' and its accompanying educational aim of 'transnational democratic conscientization' (Culp 2019, chapters 4–5). For Culp, and here lies his second core claim, the former is a right which all individuals hold and which every state should recognize and guarantee: the right to democratically adequate education. The realization of this right takes place 'in institutions of primary and secondary education', and it should have 'the facilitation of democratic relations inside, as well as across, national borders as its goal' (Culp 2019, viii). In other words, because the complex structures of interdependence that result from economic globalization turn all of us into 'global citizens', democratic citizen education needs to step up to the challenge and become 'globalized' as well. Education needs to cultivate, as Culp's third core claim postulates (Culp 2019, 1 and 15), a consciousness for domestic as well as for global justice.

Culp's discussion of 'transnational democratic conscientization' reveals which attitudes, skills and knowledge a globalized democratic citizen education would need to promote in pursuit of individual citizens' ability to exercise democratic agency in times of globalization. On the one hand, Culp (2019, viii) highlights the importance of multicultural education and he proposes that students learn about 'general features of human cultures' but also gain an in-depth understanding 'of at least one particular

culture with which students are not already familiar'. On the other hand, language skills, the ability to empathize across spatial and – if we think of the climate crisis – temporal distance, and knowledge of transboundary political and economic structures and their respective histories will also form part of a global democratic citizenship education, properly understood.

Liberal, conservative, historical: three comments

Culp's book covers much ground, and it does so with boldness and ambition. In the final chapters of this book, Culp already anticipates that his ideas may also draw some criticism. Notably, he expects some readers to criticize his emphasis on autonomy as ideological, and he also defends his account against a possible postcolonial critique that would see his argument as a mere extrapolation of Western notions of democracy (cf. Culp 2019, chapters 6–7). With three comments and a reply from the author, this symposium aims to continue the debate Culp begins in his book. While some challenges touch upon problems the author already anticipates in *Democratic Education in a Globalized World*, others identify new issues that deserve further discussion. In terms of theoretical perspectives, the three comments look at the education/justice nexus from different angles. The first two contributions draw on liberal and conservative approaches, respectively, and hence address Culp's argument from the familiar terrain of political theory itself. The third response broadens the spectrum further and brings the history of education into the debate.

In the first contribution, Michael Festl addresses Culp's relationship with liberal political thought. While Festl agrees that the principles of distributive justice are global in scope and not limited to existing (nation-)states, he challenges that Culp fails to recognize 'how the current state of global society complicates the realization' of international justice. Developing a thought-experiment with one group of rich countries ('cornucopia') and one group of poor countries ('miserabilia'), he highlights a number of normative problems involved in deciding whether a redistribution of resources from one group to the other for educational purposes may be required – Culp remains somewhat hesitant on this point – and, if so, how large it would need to be and which principles ought to guide the organization of such transfers. Moreover, Festl contrasts Culp's 'free-standing' conception with a conception of education in which the value of autonomy takes centre-stage and provides the basis for making choices about 'the good life'.

In the second contribution, Martin Beckstein, too, finds much to applaud in Culp's study. Yet, while he explicitly appreciates the author's call for 'epistemic modesty', he also critically comments on the content of Culp's educational agenda. First, he challenges that relying, as Culp does, on liberal principles of neutrality and personal moral autonomy may leave 'too little room for traditional ways of life'. Second, and following communitarian political theory on this point, he suspects that failure to duly account for the role of tradition will render it impossible to generate the motivational resources an engagement in transnational democratic agency requires.

Finally, Michael Geiss addresses the arguments of *Democratic Education in a Globalized World* as a historian of political education. He argues that, historically, plans for educational policy have often failed spectacularly in achieving their noble aims, that educational grand design frequently overlooks how educational policy is

rooted in existing social structures, and that contemporary political debates are characterized by a severe risk of ‘educationalizing’ social problems of all sorts. His central challenge to Culp, therefore, lies in confronting normative approaches with empirical knowledge about educational reform and in using such knowledge to ask whether education is indeed the right place, normatively speaking, to address issues of social progress or global justice.

Education for global justice: where do we go from here?

Democratic Education in a Globalized World will primarily find readers among political philosophers and philosophers of education. The themes of the book, however, will also appeal to broader audiences, notably practitioners of educational public policy and of education.

Practitioners of educational public policy will read the core message in two ways – as a call to expand the curricula of primary and secondary education, and as a call to critically reflect upon what education is meant to be for. Regarding school curricula, they (as well as Culp) may draw inspiration from empirical studies. These studies show that, over the past few decades, human rights education as well as multicultural education in secondary school have expanded significantly across the world (Meyer, Bromley, and Ramirez 2010; Terra and Bromley 2012). So maybe the state of global democratic citizen education is not so bad, after all. Regarding the normative foundations of education, their key task will be to balance considerations of competitiveness – which are neatly intertwined with the economic and political structures of global society – with considerations of dignity and personal moral autonomy.

Practitioners of tertiary education may, at least if they teach political theory or international affairs, find the study to provide new meaning to their daily work. Through teaching ethics and global politics ‘in the right way’, they contribute to our collective efforts at realizing global justice. At the same time, *Democratic Education in Global Education* provides strong theoretical support for ongoing efforts (but often slow progress) to diversify our faculties, to decolonize our curricula, to collaborate with a diverse set of partner universities across the globe, and to regularly ask ourselves what we educate for.

The real challenge, however, would seem to come at the primary and secondary school level where expanding citizen education to develop a *global* democratic consciousness would – unless the school week were further expanded – need to come at the cost of some other content, where many of those commenting on the digital transformation would equally like to add their content to the curriculum, and where allowing students to gain first-hand experiences of other cultures is considerably more challenging. These complications notwithstanding, we may draw inspiration from the transnational climate movements young people have created in recent years. Their success in coordinating activities across national borders, in taking their plea for systemic change to the streets and in making their voices heard proves that global democratic citizen education can build on something – and it also hints at the possibility that the educational projects we engage in will eventually become more of a two-way street than we may have imagined at first.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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