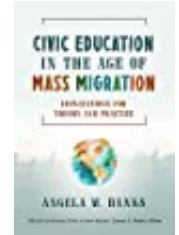


Civic Education in the Age of Mass Migration: Implications for Theory and Practice

reviewed by Benjamin R. Wellenreiter - October 25, 2021

Title: Civic Education in the Age of Mass Migration: Implications for Theory and Practice
Author(s): Angela M. Banks & James A. Banks
Publisher: Teachers College Press, New York
ISBN: 0807765791, **Pages:** 160, **Year:** 2021
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Broadening dialogue in the field of civic education beyond “what types of citizens do we need?” through exploration of the boundaries of citizenship itself, Angela M. Banks’s *Civic Education in the Age of Mass Migration: Implications for Theory and Practice* provides to civic educators legal and historical context of the concept of citizenship and adds a needed dimension to their thinking and classroom practices. Banks’s text simultaneously takes to task and works to improve civic education by challenging a fundamental assumption about the definition and framing of “citizenship” often used in classrooms. This challenge is accomplished through deep and articulate consideration of how conceptualization of citizenship through only a legal—and structurally exclusionary—*de jure* lens limits students’ consideration of the richer and more accurate lived *de facto* citizenship landscape we all experience. The net result of Banks’s work is a step closer to a more inclusive civic education that acknowledges and embraces all people in society, regardless of legal citizenship status. It is through this civic education, Banks ultimately argues, that the United States will come closer to achieving the democratic ideals deeply embedded in its civic identity.

Chapter 1 immediately challenges a fundamentally flawed assumption too often made in the dialogue and practice of civic education: “...that citizenship is generally viewed as the only membership category within civic education” (p. 1). This *de jure* membership within a democratic society, with its rights, privileges, and responsibilities of “good citizenship,” is frequently the sole focus of civic education thought and practice without consideration of those outside this membership, despite their integral cultural, historical, and economic contributions to society. By challenging the boundaries of membership citizenship, Banks argues our society is improved and more accurately described through the more inclusive framing of societal citizenship to include *de facto* citizens. Banks then provides legal and historical context of immigration-status differences. The concise comparisons of these statuses compel readers to—as much as possible—envision themselves in positions of noncitizen and consider both the practical challenges they face and how they may experience the previously articulated flaws within current civic education theory and practice.

Demonstrating commitment to meaningful dialogue with all students who walk through classroom doors, Banks takes an unexpected but important journey into the psychology and sociology of the cognitive dissonance many might experience when considering the boundaries of citizenship and, subsequently, their own identities. This important addition to the text reminds readers that “Exposure to ideas and materials that illustrate the role that race, class, and gender have played in defining membership in American society could threaten students’ identity as American or their racial, class, or gender identity” (p. 15). This discussion reflects the practical issues teachers and students may experience when exploring such an important and under-considered topic. As a civic educator in a sociopolitical region where exploration of the boundaries of citizenship would face deep resistance by students, their caring adults, and perhaps even school administrators, I am particularly grateful for Banks’s practical and empathetic consideration of this concern.

Chapter 2 dives into the long history of legal barriers put in front of individuals who may otherwise claim membership to society using the *jus nexi* principle; “which focuses on the social fact of membership or the actual ties an individual has to the society” (p. 19). Banks’s broad thesis—supported with many detailed examples—is that U.S. history demonstrates support of a racial and economic hierarchy through ongoing and broadly successful legal efforts to limit *de jure* membership to society of certain *de facto* members. In allowing noncitizens to propel the U.S. economy through access to jobs while being systematically denied *de jure* citizenship status, the Immigrant Labor Paradox (Banks, 2020) perpetuates legal, social, and cultural exclusion of noncitizens while exploiting their contributions. After providing this context, Banks argues that civic education must examine the boundaries of *de jure* citizenship with focus on this paradox if the democratic principles upon which the United States was founded are to be better

realized.

Banks uses Chapter 3 to broaden the common conceptualization of citizenship to include *de facto* citizens based upon the *jus nexi* principle. Because all residents are often not conceived of—or legally recognized as—citizens, Banks argues that the “fundamental principle of democratic governance, popular sovereignty, and the related principle of inclusion are not being realized” (p. 39). With this assertion as foundation, Banks explores discrepancies between employment of privileged values, norms, and practices to determine citizenship identity and the values of inclusion, equity, and representation purported by broad U.S. identity narratives. With compelling examples to support, Banks effectively argues that if the United States is to better realize these values, civic educators and their students must compare narratives of the country as one of inclusion with the historical and contemporary truths of exclusionary approaches to both legal and cultural citizenship. Broadly, the case is made that non-citizen residents—with their strong ties to their homes and communities—should be legally recognized and culturally embraced as citizens. As with the other chapters, Chapter 3 concludes with application of the concepts in the civics classroom. Demonstrating the empathy for students who may experience cognitive and identity dissonance described in Chapter 1, questions Banks asks throughout the text encourage honest dialogue and show respect for a wide variety of viewpoints.

Chapter 4 applies the explored concepts in five activities teachers may use with their students. The activities explore the boundaries of membership in American society, gender norms as a membership boundary, narratives in the Immigration Rights movement, the Immigrant Labor Paradox, and the implications of government conceptualizations of citizenship on economic security during times of crisis. In these activities, students take on various roles and perspectives as they dissect past narratives and then work to newly construct possible, more inclusive, conceptualizations of what it means to be a citizen, legally and culturally. To assist those who experience cognitive dissonance during discussion of these important and (unfortunately) provocative concepts, Banks encourages repeated return to fundamental values of U.S. identity; equality, diversity, representation, and political voice for all. With great sensitivity toward how students may experience these discussions, Banks emphasizes transparent dialogue regarding classroom norms and values before exploring these concepts. Upon review of the primary sources used in the activities, teachers will need to consider how racist language and concepts in the documents may impact students’ experiences. Inspired by the compelling arguments Banks presents, early childhood, elementary, and middle-level educators may leave the text with deep want of resources to use for their reconceptualized crucibles of civic education. Though rich and diverse, the resources provided are developmentally appropriate for secondary students.

Throughout the book, Banks presents complex ideas and profound questions in an accessible, engaging style. Upon considering the concepts explored in this text, civic educators will reflect not only how citizenship has been framed in their courses, but how it can be improved upon, creating a more inclusive and accurate exploration of its nature and practice. Living up to its title, this text facilitates compelling consideration of civic education theory and what expanded conceptualization of citizenship means for practice.

Reference

Banks, A. M. (2020). The continuing legacy of the national origin quotas. *William & Mary Journal of Race, Gender & Social Justice*, 27(1), 1-32.

Cite This Article as: *Teachers College Record*, Date Published: October 25, 2021
<https://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 23879, Date Accessed: 10/26/2021 3:35:17 PM

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