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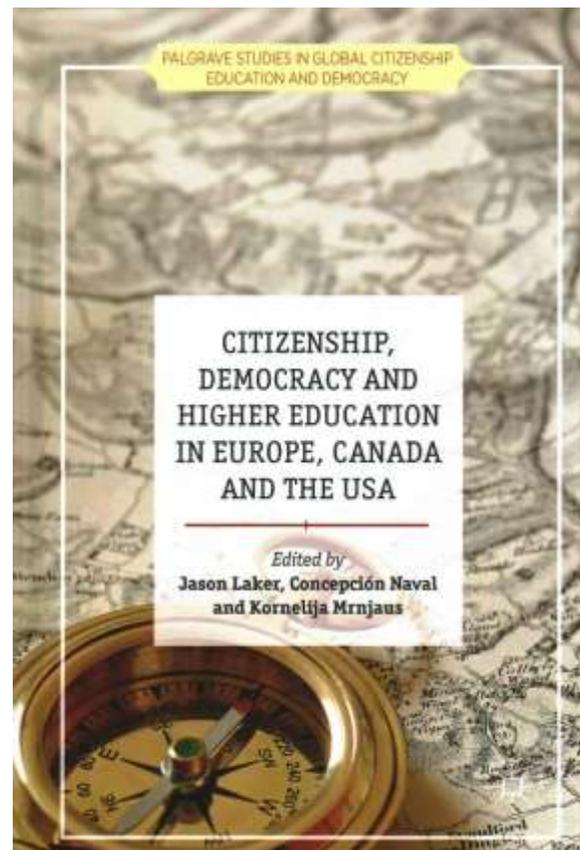
Laker, J., Naval, C., & Mrnjaus, K. (Eds.). (2014). *Citizenship, democracy and higher education in Europe, Canada, and the USA*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

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Jason Laker, Concepción Naval, and Kornelija Mrnjauš have embarked on an ambitious project in exploring the nexus between higher education, civic engagement, and democratic values. The editors' thesis is clear: "the social dimension of education" not only makes people more capable of adjusting to modern society but also allows them to enjoy life and improve the lives of others. The books seeks to explore are what this social dimension entails and how civic education can actually be implemented. According to the editors, the social dimension of education is less focused on standard educational aims such as individual success or institutional prestige than on how education can be a source of societal change that helps foster democratic values, peace, and human rights. In the western world, where neo-liberalism, individuality, and competition have come to define not only societies and educational systems, there is a need to re-imagine the social role of higher education. The university may be one of the few institutions that can still stand as a bulwark to dominant and unhealthy



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societal views which undermine the common good.

This book brings together the work of 24 different scholars from Europe, Canada, and the United States who speak to the issues of democratic participation, peace education, civic engagement, and human rights in relation to higher education. The book is divided into two related sections: the first section explores the “foundations and frameworks” of citizenship, democracy, and higher education while the second looks at specific case studies on these themes. The editors have a strong background in these areas, and their collective breadth of experience and expertise suits them well for this book project. Laker, a professor of education at San Jose State University, has a diverse educational background with his teaching experiences in both Canada and the US at private and public universities. A dean of the School of Education and Psychology at the University of Navarra (Spain), Naval also has a vast range of international teaching experiences with visiting professorships in the United States, England, Mexico, and Austria. Mrnjaus, an education professor at the University of Rijeka (Croatia), focuses her research on civic education in the evolving, globalized world.

Although my research focuses on access to higher education for immigrant students and the deconstruction of faulty narratives of the immigration debate in the secondary classroom, I found many intriguing chapters in this book that have strong relevance to my own studies. The broad nature of this text allows for numerous perspectives and ideas which can be applicable in areas of peace education, civic engagement, and multicultural education. While the volume’s focus is higher education, its core ideas can also be applied to secondary education, and to an extent, even to primary and middle school education. The ideas that this text helps to illuminate can be of great benefit to a wide range of educators, both practitioners and researchers in leadership, curriculum and instruction, or social and cultural foundations.

The intersection of higher education with human rights, citizenship, peace, and equality are large topics to cover in one text. Laker acknowledges this and states how this book can “raise more questions” than it gives answers (p. 286). However, these issues require a level of complexity that is necessary. Educators cannot address the issues of civic engagement and democratic education with overly simplistic, one-dimensional perspectives. It takes the voices and experiences of many diverse international voices to understand the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the subject. This text thoroughly and successfully sets the proper framework for understanding human rights, democracy, and citizenship in relation to higher education.

On one level, the text reveals how democratic and civic education means a commitment to peace and “personal conflict resolution skills” (p. 92). This commitment to peace entails creating bridges across ethnicities, cultures, and religions to obtain a level of mutual understanding. An illustration of this in the text was the student engagement project in Bosnia and Herzegovina which brought together multiple ethnic groups which have had a history of conflict. Higher education’s advocacy for human rights and active citizenship can serve in helping to restore fragmented societies torn apart by conflict, fear, and violence. The authors show how the university can help students move beyond blind nationalism and ethnic tensions to see each other as fellow citizens of the world community. While the authors acknowledge that schooling can be a method for instilling nationalism (and unfortunately it has often played that role), it can also be an institution that helps to break down nationalism, racism, and xenophobia. Higher education can also encourage students to consider non-violent solutions and cultural perspectives which are central to “building a better tomorrow for all human beings regardless of their ethnic identity, color of skin, religion or birth place” (p. 95). In times

of volatility, other institutions in a nation can drive the populace towards war or internal conflict. The university can be the counterforce to these trends in refusing to conform to xenophobic and racist tensions or blindly blessing the wars of the nation-state. A prime example of this was in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, where university campuses often served as the center of the peace movement. As this book collectively illustrates, modern universities can once again be places that propel the society towards greater inclusion and peace.

While the goal of civic education is to bring people together and create a more peaceful society, this text reveals how civic education can also expose oppression and break down the assumptions of unjust economic and societal structures. While at first this could seem to conflict with the goals of peace, the goals of social harmony will never be realized if overpowering structural injustice is not addressed. Two of the authors, Naomi Hodgson and Paul Standish, talk about the need for educators to engage in *parrhesia* or “truth-telling,” where educators realize their role as a prophetic one that stands against the prevailing oppressive policies in the society (p. 53). As contributor Rhonda Wyne points out, one goal is to move to a more “commonwealth” understanding of civics, where students not only seek to serve a positive role in society but actually call into question the established structures and apply a critical framework to societal issues. Many western democracies may not object to a university standing for diversity and tolerance; they may actually encourage it. However, when the university calls into question economic and structural injustices it can be controversial, especially when the university is state run as the text details in the case study on Slovenia. However, even in the case of public universities, this book argues that educators have the obligation to see their roles as not one of merely serving the status quo or as “agents” of the state, but one which is willing to call national policies into question.

Editor Laker points out that within the diverse cultures explored in the book there are strong similarities when it comes to the issues of education and citizenship. First of all, many institutions of higher education are struggling to understand their role in an education system which seems to be increasingly driven by economic interests in the globalized, capitalistic society. Students are often coming into universities primarily looking for a degree to make money rather than to understand what it means to be an engaged citizen. In what ways can leaders of higher education and professors use their position to help students actually think beyond just these personal aspirations to consider their role in the broader society?

The text also reveals how large education structures can often lead to a bureaucracy, which may lose sight of the goals of equality, human rights, and civic education while simply trying to achieve conflicting and complex institutional goals. Some of the chapters also highlight how reliance on solely teaching citizenship in the classroom is insufficient and emphasize the need for student engagement in extra-curricular and non-traditional civic and university participation in order to achieve the ideals of citizenship. In the case study from Spain, the students learned through “alternative” forms of engagement and activism such as rallies, strikes, and taking action in virtual spaces, not merely the approved institutional routes, in order to also expand their vision as citizens beyond merely voting. The case study of a program at Notre Dame shows how students and faculty can engage beyond the university with community organizations, such as a local food co-op and religious homeless charities, to address social issues and gain a broader perspective of the local needs. In the chapter on Croatia, Mrnjaus highlights the need for more cooperation with NGOs in order to achieve a truly vibrant human rights-based education.

While the text presents strong similarities between cultures, stark variances

and differing problems in higher education emerge depending on the nation, culture, and institution. Some of the authors point out the strong ethnic tensions that affect higher education, with the clearest example being Bosnia and Herzegovina. The authors point out other nations such as Portugal and Canada lack these issues with ethnic tensions in higher education. Another difference to consider is the socioeconomic status of students and how this influences views on citizenship and democratic education. Students living in countries with fairly stable welfare states such as Germany or Canada might have more opportunities to focus on ideas of civic engagement. However, this focus could be less appealing in other nations such as Croatia, where the society is not as prosperous and students' primary focus may be on economic stability. Some nations have a strongly centralized education system where the state grants less autonomy to schools which could cause schools to pursue a less critical focus, while in other nations, public institutions have more autonomy. The text also explores the example of a private school—Notre Dame—with even fewer state regulations and a greater freedom to pursue new paths of civic engagement.

The greatest limitation of this book is its narrow scope, an exploration of higher education in Europe and North America with the case studies coming primarily from Europe. Asian, Latin American, and African examples could introduce differing issues and quandaries and strengthen this text. Additional case studies from nations with more socialized societies could add more complexity to the issue of civic engagement and democratic education. For example, case studies from Scandinavian nations or societies such as Cuba or Bolivia could give a more nuanced understanding to these issues since the text largely looked at nations that follow a neo-liberal economic model.

Despite the limitations, *Citizenship, Democracy and Higher Education in Europe, Canada, and the United States* is a strong

contribution to the field of civic and democratic education. In my view, the book's most important theme involves the necessity and duty of higher education to move beyond simply being a stepping stone for economic development and instead become an entity that stresses the need for civic engagement, critical thought, human rights, and peace education. In a global economy where financial expansion has become the top priority, higher education must be a force to moderate the excesses of this system while also calling into question some of the very assumptions of the modern, capitalist society. In order for the university to fulfill this societal role, it needs to risk having somewhat of an oppositional relationship with the dominant social structures. This text reveals that if there is no tension between the goals of the university and the goals of the modern market economy, the university may have lost sight of its needed societal function.

In an age where universities are often replacing seminars that focus on philosophy, critical thinking, and ethical foundations with convenient, mainstreamed online curriculum with little space for critical pedagogies or civic education, it is of utmost importance for university administrators, professors, and students to consider what the ultimate purpose of higher education is. The release of this book has come at an opportune time. A recent study from UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute found that students' "commitment to activism, political, and civic engagement" are at the highest levels in the history of their research which began in 1966 (Higher Education Research Institute, 2016). It is time for universities to join with students in a renewed support for civic engagement and social change instead of serving as an impediment towards it. What this book lays out unequivocally is that higher education needs to move beyond the individual to the societal, from personal economic interests to economic and societal justice, and from a static, established institution to a transformative force in society.

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About the Reviewer

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