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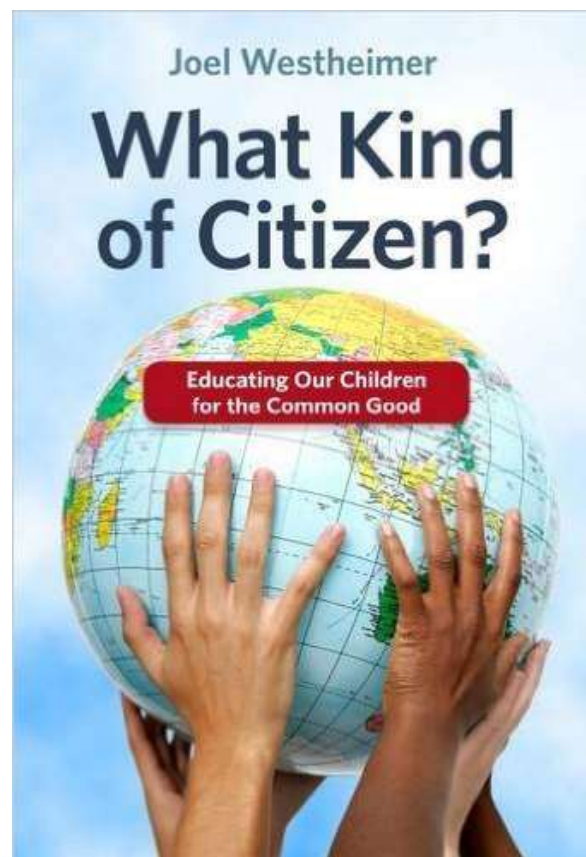
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**Reviewed by Marta Estelles  
University of Cantabria  
Spain**

“Imagine the kind of society you would like to live in and [...] how schools might best be used to make that vision a reality” (p. 2)

With a moving invitation to think about schools in ways that move beyond battles over standards and external evaluation, Joel Westheimer reminds us that decisions about how to educate our students are also decisions about the type of society that we want, and therefore, political in origin. After all, as Kliebard said (1986), debates about school are also debates about opposing visions that different stakeholders hold about the world. Whatever we do in schools, we are educating citizens. The issue, as the title of the book asks, is: what kind of citizen?

What kind of citizen do we promote if we pursue behaviors among children such as silence, order, and obedience to authority? What kind of citizen do we encourage when we seek uncritical memorization of already-given knowledge? What kind of citizen do we foster if we avoid social problems and public



controversies in classrooms? These are only a handful of points that Westheimer raises to question the democratic purpose of traditional schools, and the answers that outline his questions are far from being “critical”, “participatory” or “democratic”. It is not surprising, then, that the author asks somewhat sarcastically if a classroom of a democratic country like the US is so different from a classroom of any autocratic state. Yet—the author challenges us—if we want to educate democratic citizens, should not we teach children to think critically and to govern collectively? There is little objection to this reasoning. Unfortunately, this is not the prevailing logic that underlies the education policies adopted in the US (and in many other countries) in recent decades.

With varied and surprising examples, the author highlights how No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has moved the debate on the important issues of curriculum (in line with democracy) to standardized testing and accountability measures. It is no wonder that its consequences, as he aptly argues, are far from educating democratic citizenship. In his chapter titled, “No Child Left Thinking,” he highlights how schools provide, and students receive, such little attention to key skills for citizenship such as critical thinking. In contrast to critical thinking skills associated with a solid civic engagement, standardized tests focus on those skills that can be reduced to some objectively measurable items and leave out everything that does not have such effective translation. Another consequence of NCLB is the de-professionalization of teachers that Westheimer criticizes with his scathing expression: “No Teacher Left Teaching”. *What* and *how* it is taught are determined by *what will be assessed*, which is not decided by the teachers involved, leaving them little scope to integrate with students’ interests and local social problems.

In any case, the author advises, this current policy focus and its consequences cannot be considered without reflecting on the question: What kind of citizen are we

educating? For Westheimer, this issue should be at the center of the education debate and therefore shaping all subsequent pedagogical intention and action. The proposals Westheimer gives in this book are based on research he did with his colleague, Joseph Kahne (Westheimer & Kahne, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2006). Analyzing several citizenship education programs in the US and Canada, these researchers identified three types of “good” citizens: (1) the personally responsible citizen, (2) the participatory citizen, and (3) the social justice-oriented citizen. For those who know Westheimer’s work, this distinction will sound familiar. The first refers to the citizen who acts responsibly in their community by recycling, giving blood, paying their taxes, and obeying the law (p. 38). Thus, those programs that promote personally responsible citizens seek to develop values such as honesty, integrity, obedience, discipline, and so forth. Yet, as Westheimer criticizes, there is nothing inherently democratic about the practices associated with this type of citizenship. The second image of a good citizen is one who is actively involved in the civic affairs at local, state, and national level. For this reason, programs fostering such citizenship are focused on teaching how government and other institutions work and the importance of planning and participating in collective action (p. 40). The limitation of this citizen type, according to Westheimer, is the lack of critical attitude towards the established social order, a distinction that characterizes the next prototype. A justice-oriented citizen is able to analyze social, political, and economic structures and search for strategies to change the real causes of social problems (p. 40). Educational programs with a social-justice orientation have a clear emphasis on the development of critical thinking and discussing issues of justice, equal opportunity, and democratic commitment and finding ways to improve society along those lines (p. 40).

Although these three visions may overlap, Westheimer argues that these distinctions may be useful to bring to light the

hidden purposes and assumptions on which citizenship education programs are based. After a review of the strengths and limitations of the three different approaches, the author does not hesitate to show his clear preference for an education oriented to the promotion of citizens engaged in social justice. He uses different educational experiences at local, state, and national contexts to illustrate foundational principles for curriculum and common characteristics that should be shared by all teachers who want to promote this type of citizenship. The author also refutes a set of myths that dangerously undermine any democratic education worthy of the name. While the capacity to detect injustices does not necessarily guarantee the mobilization of the desire to participate nor the ability or possibility to do it, Westheimer emphasizes more social justice-oriented approaches to education allow students more opportunities to grow into critical, participatory, and democratic citizens.

*What Kind of Citizen? Educating Our Children for the Common Good* is an invitation to reconsider the aims of the school and a timely reminder of the highly political nature of education. In an attractive, witty, and accessible way, Westheimer advocates a democratic and social justice education without shirking away from its controversial implications:

We can never be complacent about the rights and responsibilities of citizens. If schools are to be instrumental in helping young people engage with the world around them and work to improve it, then the lessons in school have to teach more than a calcified version of past events. Schools need to offer lessons that encourage new interpretations and that land

themselves to contemporary problems. (p. 9)

Westheimer's proposal, based on the question *what kind of citizenship we want?* and its response (active and informed citizenship based on critical analysis of social structures) push him to consider the pertinence of accountability and national standards policies in this mission. As other authors have recently highlighted (Berliner, 2011; Evans, 2015; Levinson, 2012), NCLB and accountability reforms have led to an increase in traditional teaching practices: use of the textbook, and reduced use of more progressive educational methods such as deliberation, the study of social problems, cooperative learning, and analytical reasoning. From a practical perspective, these more democratic educational methods do not fit painlessly into conservative school traditions. The book highlights some of the difficulties involved in implementing this form of education: the hard work involved, the constant questioning from colleagues and parents, the increasing importance of standards and external evaluation, the widespread myths about political education, and so on.

Yet, a more frontal position against subject-centered approaches is missing. If Westheimer openly advocates that the contents of education should be connected to social problems and public controversies, one would expect from his proposal a clearer integrated approach to curriculum organization. It would be appropriate to recall, as Beane (2005) warns, major problems facing a true democratic education include not only the movement of national standards and external evaluation<sup>1</sup> but also the separate-subject approach to school curriculum. The multidisciplinary approach that the author

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<sup>1</sup> As Evans (2015) evidences, the accountability reform has also promoted courses based on traditional disciplines. In the case of Social Studies,

for instance, there has been a gradual disappearance of interdisciplinarity in favor of the traditional history and geography (Evans, 2015).

seems to advocate<sup>2</sup> ends up a timid change in the ways of understanding school knowledge because “the identities of separate subjects are maintained in the selection of the content to be used [... and often their] primary purpose is the domain of the knowledge and skills of the areas involved” (Beane, 2005, p. 31-32). Overcoming disciplinary fragmentation is crucial to design and implement a democratic curriculum based on personal and social issues (Apple & Beane, 2005; Beane, 2005; Romero & Luis, 2008).

Other critiques (Fischman & Haas, 2015; Knight-Abowitz & Harnish, 2006) to the models of citizenship like the one proposed by Westheimer and Kahne involve the understanding of citizenship within the borders of the nation<sup>3</sup>. A lack of controversy on this point is the most obvious example of the implicit reduction of citizenship to the limits of the nation-state. Therefore, relevant arguments made by the advocates of cosmopolitan (Heater, 2004; Nussbaum, 1999), global (Noddings, 2005; Stromquist, 2009) or multiple (Held, 1997) citizenship are missing in the book. Some of them are as important as the recognition of certain rights inherent to human beings; the growing global interdependence; or the urgency of a global governance considering the limited democratic legitimacy of the powers that have taken advantage of the scarce state regulation (Held, 1997).

Presenting these critiques, however, is not to suggest that the model suggested by Westheimer and Kahne does not have heuristic value in terms of analyzing citizenship education programs and exposing assumptions often taken for granted. For example, some exposes and assumptions are quite relevant and important, such as the frequent confusion between character and citizenship education and the limited attention to the structural causes of social problems given in schools. In conclusion, the book is highly recommended for anyone interested in “reconnecting education to democracy”, as Westheimer and Kahne (2003) would say, and doing it in the most direct way possible. The relevance of his questions, the strength of his arguments, and the simplicity of his explanations persuade and inspire the reader to reframe education debates in accordance with democratic principles. Furthermore, his constant connection with everyday experiences makes the reading very pleasurable, and reminds readers of the important place of emotion in education and politics.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the experiences narrated on pages 15 and 69-71, in which social problems are found inside the existing subjects.

<sup>3</sup> For this reason, as Isin (2009) would point out, categories such as “foreign” or “immigrant” are used.

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## About the Reviewer


### Marta Estelles

University of Cantabria (Spain)

Email: marta.estelles@unican.es

Marta Estellés is a predoctoral researcher in the Department of Education at the University of Cantabria (Spain). Currently she is working on her PhD within the Interuniversity Doctoral Program on Equity and Innovation in Education. In her research project she explores ways of educating for citizenship in initial teacher education through a qualitative inquiry.



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