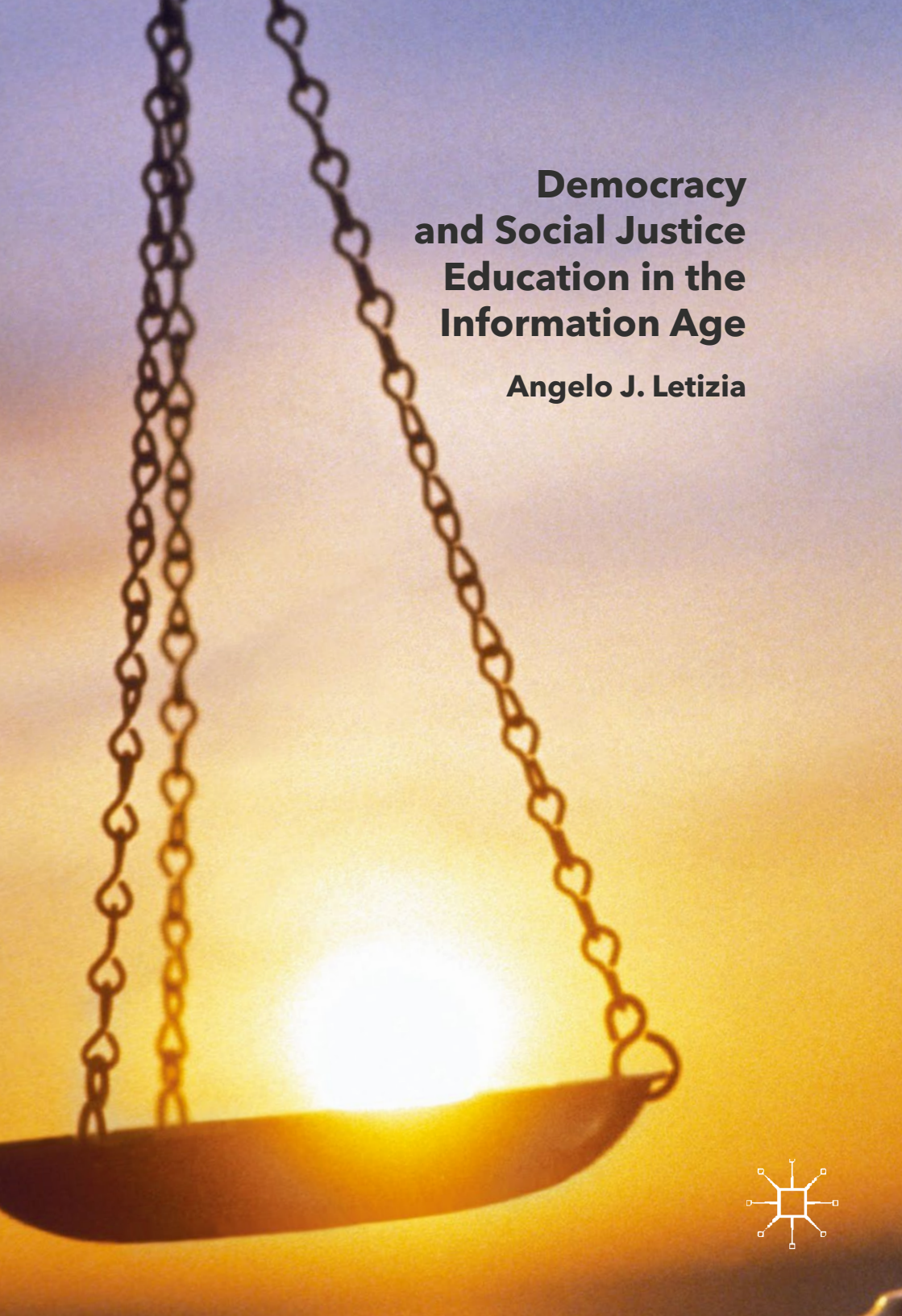

Democracy and Social Justice Education in the Information Age

Angelo J. Letizia

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I have had the privilege to work with some excellent teachers in my career as a K-12 educator. Their persistence to teach through increasingly turbulent times continues to impress me. While I do not have the space to list all the teachers, below are some of the most creative, most caring and most dedicated teachers I have ever known: Warren Zuger, Angie Head, Jessica North, Kathy Mehr, Kathy Burns, Jim Eccleston, Brian McGovern, Kenny Hardcastle, Anne Peterson, Heidi Campbell, Clint Alexander, Jason Sullivan, Brian Dodier and Emily Finerfrock. This book is dedicated to them. As with everything I write, this book is dedicated to my family: my wife Janet, my son Troy, my daughters Rosalie and Cecelia. The purpose of everything I write is to make a better world for them.

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CHAPTER 1

Citizenship in the Information Age

Citizenship in the information age is radically transforming. The amount of, and access to vast amounts of, information has made citizenship much more demanding. Citizenship is no longer just about being involved and being active in civic life. Citizenship now demands that citizens have a broad understanding of complex social issues, such as climate change, public education and foreign policy in order to meaningfully participate in the republic (Bell, 1999; Drew, Lyons & Svehla, 2010; McChesney, 2015; Mueller, Tippins, & Bryan, 2012; Stoddard, 2014; Wilson, 2006). More than just an understanding, citizens must be able to evaluate this information and put it to use in the public sphere.

The information age has placed tremendous pressure on schools to enhance citizenship. Schools can no longer simply teach academic content disassociated from real life or from citizenship. If American public schools are to continue to be bulwarks of democracy, as they have been for over 200 years (notwithstanding their simultaneous propensity for social control), and more importantly to evolve as bastions of democracy in the information age, teachers may need to assume new and hitherto unknown roles of leadership in their schools and communities. And over the last 30 years, teachers have been assuming new leadership roles outside the classroom (Kurtz, 2009; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012). One such role may be that of a citizen incubator. Not only are teachers citizens themselves, but they may have one of the most awesome responsibilities of any public servant, helping to promote citizenship in the young. In order to do this,

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teachers may need to teach above and beyond the narrow measures of accountability imposed on them by the federal and state governments.

This book will offer a toolbox of pedagogical methods for teacher-leaders to employ in their classrooms to more effectively promote citizenship in their students, a citizenship suited for the information age. One major contention of teaching democracy is the high-stakes testing and accountability environment which American schools must operate in, which has seriously impeded the promotion and teaching of citizenship on the national, state and district level (National School Climate Council, 2015). As the National School Climate Council (2015) argues, however, there does seem to be some growing support for teaching civic competencies at the federal and district levels. Further, as of 2015, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is no more. In its place, the ESSA, or Every Student Succeeds Act, was enacted. There remains a host of questions regarding ESSA however and it is too early to answer them. Under this act, schools will still measure traditional academic achievement and accountability. However, one important piece of ESSA is that it allows schools to measure accountability by using a number of methods outside of standardized tests scores, one of which can be school climate and possible socio-emotion measures (Blad, 2016; Ujifusa, 2016). Of course, the academic measurements still account for more in the measurement scheme (Ujifusa, 2016). Nevertheless, the point is, non-academic factors are being recognized as important in schooling.

There are a number of excellent texts and articles which offer critical thinking and critical pedagogy methods for classroom teachers, such as Wink (2011). The purpose of critical pedagogy is to transform students and their education and make it socially relevant and just (Giroux, 2011; Wink, 2011). In this book, I try to accomplish something similar. Thus, I draw on these texts, modify them or consolidate them. This book, however, offers methods which specifically put students in touch with the information of the information age. These methods are for the classroom, but go beyond it. By putting students in direct contact with the river of information which surrounds them, teachers are incubating citizens for the information age. My hope is that this book is a starting point for the creation of a compendium, a compendium of pedagogical methods for teachers to inspire citizenship in the information age in their classrooms. This compendium can be the weapon for teachers who seek to lead in new ways, ways that go beyond traditional leadership positions and stifling accountability. My hope is for scholars to respond, modify and critique

my work and keep the conversation alive. Yet, before the methods can be examined, it is necessary to understand what democracy and citizenship actually are and what the information age actually entails. The next sections look specifically at public education and its relation to democracy and citizenship and, further, how some of these ideas may need to be reinterpreted in the information age.

Democracy Then and Now

Over the centuries, beginning with the Greeks, the notion of democracy has been vigorously debated and continually refined. Following modern usage, democracy can take two forms, representative or direct (Tarcov, 1996). As James Madison demonstrates, in a direct democracy, the people join together and administer their government in person. In a representative democracy, the people administer the government through representatives (Tarcov, 1996). Of course, there are a number of gradations and variations between the two.

Most of the founding fathers had an aversion to direct democracy (Dotts, 2015). Simply put, many of the founding fathers did not trust the people with government (Brinkley, 2004). So the US government, especially as it was originally conceived, was not that close to the people (Brinkley, 2004). Despite the rhetoric of the constitution, the true seat of government was still largely the elite and the people were thought largely incapable of governing themselves. Yet, as time wore on, this conception began to change, albeit slowly (Brinkley, 2004). Among the founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson had a slightly different vision of the people however (Dotts, 2015).

Jefferson believed that if some thought the people incapable of governing themselves, then instead of restricting their ability to govern, the people needed to be properly educated (Dotts, 2015). Jefferson became a champion of public education, putting forth the first legislation titled "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge" to achieve that goal in 1779. This bill failed to pass the Virginia legislature, but as Gutek (1994) argues, this bill, along with other proposals by other thinkers, such as Benjamin Franklin, helped to lay the foundation for educational theory in America. For Jefferson, education was integral to the republic because a republican government demanded educated citizens. The Jeffersonian republic was a participatory and collective effort, which required diligence on the part of citizens. Citizens had to participate in their government, at all levels, from their neighborhood wards to the federal level (Dotts, 2015).

Jefferson especially prized local governments because he believed that people would be closest and most active in their communities (Dotts, 2015). Democracy at the lowest level, or ward democracy, was closest to Jefferson's heart. He believed that citizens could truly exercise their republican virtue and citizenship in the wards. Jefferson believed that teaching history to the youth would be the best guarantee against despotism (Dotts, 2015). History taught students how to spot tyrants and to avoid the pitfalls of past civilizations (Dotts, 2015). Jefferson also realized that education, while necessary, was insufficient by itself to maintain the republic. Jury duty and militia service were crucial. It was in public spaces like juries and militias that citizens could begin to exercise the sentiments they learned in school (Dotts, 2015). Jefferson promoted an active democracy which required tremendous effort on the part of citizens.

As the USA evolved, however, a much different vision of civic life emerged, that of liberal or weak democracy. In this view of democracy and civic life, individual liberty, voting, equality before the law and, above all, individual rights predominate (Parker, 1996). This view was not unique to America. Rather, its antecedents had developed largely in Europe over the course of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the doctrines of liberalism (Hobsbawm, 1996). The notion of liberalism inspired the American republic from the beginning (Tarcov, 1996). In this view, the individual takes precedence over the community (Hobsbawm, 1996). A community or polity was only seen as a group of individuals pursuing their own ends. This weak conception of democracy leans heavily toward representation (Tarcov, 1996). In the purest conception of representation, representatives are supposed to refine the will of the people. Yet, in a liberal democracy, representatives become a distant elite, far from the interests of the people (Parker, 1996). As Giroux (1994) notes, this vision of liberal or minimalist democracy is usually seen as the culmination of democracy, as the end of history and goal for all countries to aspire to. Yet, this view of democracy leaves much to be desired.

This is not to argue that liberal democracy is inherently bad. In fact, many protections and safeguards afforded to individuals in a liberal democracy are crucial to maintaining a free and prosperous state. However, many times, liberal democracies are minimalist, in that voting is seen as the only real requirement for citizenship (Parker, 1996: Phillips, 1993). As Tocqueville noted, voters step out of their private lives every

four years, vote and then relapse into passivity (Parker, 1996). The other central plank of a liberal democracy, since liberal democracy is predicated on the individual, is the notion of individual rights (Parker, 1996). There is much talk about rights in a liberal democracy. However, what is largely missing is a vision of the whole (Parker, 1996). As Parker (1996, p. 190) argues, the two planks of voting and rights talk make for a "pitifully thin moral discourse" for a liberal democracy.

Parker (1996), following John Dewey (1988), also examines the notion of creative democracy. Creative democracy sees democracy as a continual movement (Dewey, 1988; Parker, 1996). Over the course of US history, starting with Jefferson and continuing down through the Civil War, the Progressive Age and the 1960s, different visions of democracy/republicanism have emerged and existed alongside the more traditional liberal democracy. In a creative democracy, there is no end other than the journey (Parker, 1996). Democracy is not done or a thing to be studied, but, rather, a thing to be pursued and continually recreated (Dewey, 1988; Parker, 1996). There is no model democracy because all democracy is motion; it is a path that citizens travel. Parker (1996) notes that in the view of a creative democracy, the founding fathers and the Philadelphia miracle was only the starting point, with many iterations on the way, such as the Civil Rights movement. In short, democracy demands creation (Dewey, 1988). Creative democracy is part of a larger tradition known as participatory or strong democracy (Parker, 1996). In a participatory democracy, politics is not the purview of elites or interests groups; rather, the people themselves take interest in the polity and their actions extend well beyond the voting booth (Parker, 1996). As Parker (1996, p. 190) argues: "Representatives in a strong democracy would not be obsolete, nor would they be, as now, virtually the only people in a society practicing democracy." Kellner and Share (2007, p. 63) similarly call for a radical democracy, where individuals care about one another, are involved in social issues and "work together to build a more egalitarian and less repressive society." While participatory and creative and radical democracies would most likely not be direct democracies, and while representatives would still have a major role to play, the people would be active in social meetings, in pursing civic action through a number of channels. Governing would not be left to the elite.

Parker (1996) also examines the notion of a multicultural democracy. As democracy grows and the people who demand inclusion become greater, a more democratic pluralism emerges. In a multicultural democracy, diversity is not tolerated; rather, it is seen as a norm and even a strength (Parker,

1996; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). As Parker explains the notion of *e pluribus unum* is blatantly exposed as people of color, gays and the poor are openly marginalized. A multicultural democracy challenges this discrimination and truly brings all people into the fold, and not just to Americanize them or make them white. Multicultural democracy links with the notion of creative democracy. The true inclusion of all peoples and views points can help inspire more creativity. More voices equal more ideas.

All the visions of democracy overlap and have something to offer. So where does that leave us today? While Dotts (2015) laments what he sees as a sense of apathy pervading our public life, he nonetheless argues that Jeffersonian ideas can still impact education. In addition, many school systems do not incubate democracy, but rather exercise levels of social control, making students conform to the wider capitalist economy (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 2011). While there may be great apathy, there might be some signs of change (Roos, 2011). Since 2011, great demonstrations ranging from Occupy Wall Street, to Black Lives Matter to the Opt Out Testing movement, are perhaps reinvigorating the American republic. Of course, as Holowchak (2015) argues, Jeffersonian ideas may not apply in today's society because we do not live in a Jeffersonian republic. Holowchak (2015) may be correct. This is not Jefferson's republic. It is the information age. So how does the information age change citizenship and how should pedagogical methods reflect this change? As mentioned earlier, the information age demands that citizens be able to access, understand and evaluate information and then utilize this information in the public sphere. Obviously, Jeffersonian ideas are not obsolete in the information age, but they will need to be updated for educators and K-12 systems. Yet the premise of Jeffersonian republicanism is still present; citizenship requires understanding, reflection and action in a variety of spheres. Further, this understanding and reflection is gained through education. That has not changed. What has changed is what citizens are to be informed about and how they receive this information.

As noted earlier, in ward democracy, citizens were closest to their communities and participated in the life of their communities in schools, juries, public affairs and the militia. Jefferson showed a distrust as citizens moved further away from their localities (Dotts, 2015). This vision of ward democracy can still inform citizenship in the information age, yet it needs to be re-thought. Communications and transportations have expanded Jefferson's vision of ward democracy. No longer is the federal realm the highest either, now the regional and global realms must be

taken into account (Singer, 2004). Marginson and Rhoades (2002) have called for a recognition of the *glo-na-cal*, or the interconnectedness of the global-national and local spheres. Further, no sphere can be seen in isolation; rather, events and information in one sphere naturally inform and affect each other. It should of course be noted that any regional and global conceptions of citizenship are not politically binding, but they cannot be ignored either (Singer, 2004). Nevertheless, Marginson and Rhoades (2002) speak of a circuit of information that extends through all spheres. Yet one sphere does not dominate another. Citizens act in their local spheres and are closest to these spheres, much like Jefferson foresaw, but now must also take into account how actions in the local sphere affect the national and global spheres (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). However, students can understand and actively participate in their glo-na-cal spheres only if they can understand the information which flows in these circuits. The Jeffersonian wards must now be situated in the wider glo-na-cal contexts.

Teachers must not simply give information to students as certain models of education hold such as the "banking model" criticized by Paulo Freire (2000, p. 72), but now, rather teach students how to apply, evaluate and even create new information to deploy in their glo-na-cal spheres. This is the information age, and students must become conversant with this information. Daniel Bell, in the 1970s, was one of the first scholars to examine the emergence of what he called the post-industrial age . He argued that post-industrial society emerged largely after the Second World War. It should be noted that while the post-industrial society began in the 1950s, rapid advances in communication and technology had been under way since the early nineteenth century (Hobsbawm, 1996). By the 1950s, Bell argued that military and industrial capacities, while important, were no longer the most important components of national power. Rather, the creation, dissemination and control of various types of knowledge became the crucible of power. Knowledge ranging from military research, computer science, engineering, law and healthcare, to name a few, became crucial to creating and sustaining contemporary societies, and governments had to develop capabilities to create, disseminate and control this knowledge to maintain power (Bell, 1999). In the 1999 foreword to his work (which was originally written in 1973), Bell argued that we may now be entering the information age, which is marked by further technological change and a radical transformation of how people experience time and space (Bell, 1999). However, Bell notes that while technology has a huge

impact on society and social change, it does not drive social change, it only provides potential for humans to utilize and act.

Bell argued that knowledge is the foundation of post-industrial society. Knowledge is codified into symbols and systems, and is used for social control and for change and innovation (Bell, 1999). Further, technology continually helps to change society and offer new possibilities. (Bell, 1999). There is also some variation between the terms data, information and knowledge (Bell, 1999; Fullan, 2001). Data can be thought of as a list of events or numbers, whereas information and knowledge, while distinct terms for Bell, essentially signal some type of higher organization and arrangement (Bell, 1999). It should also be noted that I have by no means given an exhaustive account of post-industrial society and the information age. There are a number of contending theories, for instance, see Castells (1999).

This proliferation of knowledge was best exhibited by the growth of academic disciplines. Newer disciplines and sub-disciplines proliferate, as do academic journals, to grapple with and categorize the new information (Bell, 1999). Bell (1999) further notes that this growth is not linear, but rather, knowledge branches out into newer subfields. Bell(1999, p. 186) notes that as a society, "we now assume an openness to knowledge," we view knowledge as unbounded and constantly advancing. However, this knowledge does not just come from the hard sciences, but from the social sciences as well. Of course, in this educational climate driven by accountability and profit, the social sciences and the humanities are not seen as practical and are usually neglected (Giroux, 2011). Yet, this type of information and knowledgeis just as crucial as the more practical and scientific information because this type of information gives society and individuals the ability to ponder deeper issues and ask bigger questions (Giroux, 2016). Thus, information is not just technical or scientific; it encompasses all types of information. Following this sentiment, this book argues that information should be used to inspire critical thinking, democracy and the creation of a happier, more just life on this earth (Giroux, 2016; Marginson, 2010).

Along with the content and amount of information, another consideration of the information age is the different and growing forms of media (i.e. internet, audio and visual components) and how these forms of communication impact different audiences (Kellner & Share, 2007). These include actual technology such as computers and the internet, as well as outlets which disseminate information. Citizens must become literate in

understanding how the control of technology and information impacts their lives. As both Kellner and Share (2007) and Stoddard (2014) make clear, perhaps the most crucial aspect to understanding information is it is not neutral. Powerful political interests, corporations and organizations help to create and disseminate information in a variety of ways, from controlling bandwidth to delivering propaganda-type news, which in turn shapes public perception and individuals (Kellner & Share, 2007; Stoddard, 2014). Understanding the forces that create and disseminate information is crucial to citizenship in the information age.

As Bell (1999) notes, knowledge is power in the information age. So the ability to create and control information by an individual or country will most likely mean more power. Bell goes on to argue that those who possess knowledge, the knowledge workers, are the new class of power in the information age. Bell (1999, p. 17) examines the growth of what he terms the "professional and technical occupations" of society, composed mainly of scientists, engineers and teachers. Scientists and engineers are obviously crucial in this class, but the argument could be made that teachers, all teachers, are the most crucial. Education is how power is accessed, maintained and created in post-industrial society (Bell, 1999). How else is information disseminated to the new generations? Without teachers, the information would die on the vine.

If this is true, then teachers occupy perhaps the most powerful position in the information age. A teacher is the gatekeeper of the information which is the foundation of power and understanding in the information age. Reframed in the light of the notion of creative democracy, the democratic process and citizenship is being rapidly redefined by the information age. Further, in light of participatory democracy, access to information allows teachers and students new methods to participate in civic life in glo-na-cal contexts. As a result, teachers must exercise new leadership capabilities to draw on the awesome information bank that is proliferating exponentially and help their students become a new type of citizen. In a wider sense, a major characteristic of post-industrial society is the rate of change: it is very unlikely that children will inhabit the same world as their parents. Information radically changes society and does so very rapidly (Bell, 1999). Bell (1999, p. 171), following Henry Adams a hundred years earlier, argued that there is a radical rupture with the past and children must be "trained for an unknown future." In addition, the sheer amount of information can be staggering and overwhelming (Fullan, 2001; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). Information in isolation, as just raw numbers

or statistics usually leads to an "information glut" (Fullan, 2001 p. 6). Rather, as Fullan (2001) argues, information must be made meaningful. Pink (2005) also notes that information is important but not enough, we now need to foster a sense of creativity and meaning. Marginson (2010) argues that humankind has a tremendous potential to soar to new heights, if we are not short-sighted, if we take time to realize our own potential and the potential of the information available to us. Marginson (2010) further argues that humankind must use its growing forms of information and knowledge to create meaning, and open new possibilities for itself. Drawing on the above, the information age is a fecund opportunity for change and advancement, but it comes with the price of instability, rootlessness and tremendous uncertainty. In this volatile environment, some pedagogical structures, guidance and leadership are necessary to help harness and utilize information. Teachers can exercise this leadership.

Tarcov (1996) states that democracy is a burden and that it takes vigilance to maintain. This sentiment may be even truer in the information age. And the greatest method to maintain democracy is still education. Information is now inexorably linked with citizenship and democracy, yet, just like there are multiple conceptions of democracy, there are also multiple conceptions of citizens within those democracies. Understanding what type of citizenship is desired predicates what type of education is needed to promote, protect and sustain that type of democracy.

What Is Citizenship?

Many would most likely agree that schools should promote citizenship, yet as Westheimer and Kahne (2004) argue, there is little consensus on what citizenship actually is. In fact, as Westheimer and Kahne (2004) argue, people of varying political persuasions usually approach citizenship in different ways. Conservatives usually articulate citizenship as obedience and patriotism, while those more left of center usually articulate citizenship in terms of justice and of social action. Yet, these visions of citizenship are not mutually exclusive. One could plausibly exhibit features from different types of citizenship simultaneously.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) argued for three different types of citizenship. Their typology can help to frame how the methods outlined later in this book can help to promote different roles for citizens to act out in society. The first type of citizen is the personally responsible citizen. This type of citizen follows laws, pays taxes, recycles and gives blood and con-