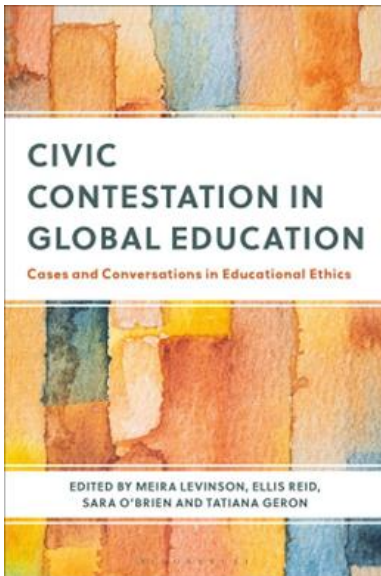


# CIVIC CONTESTATION IN GLOBAL EDUCATION: CASES AND CONVERSATIONS IN EDUCATIONAL ETHICS

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*Civic Contestation in Global Education: Cases and Conversations in Educational Ethics* offers a timely and innovative contribution to global citizenship education and educational ethics. The book comprises eight global normative case studies, each paired with an introductory context, and a convivial conversation among educators from schools, leaders from community organisations, and academics. Each chapter concludes with a character guide that outlines the school setting, key characters, and study questions designed as teaching tools for both formal and informal educational contexts. Each case study is grounded in real-life educational challenges and primarily aimed at teachers

and school principals. These challenges range from dealing with conspiracy theories, online teaching and digital ethics, environmental challenges, promoting or silencing student activism, racism, sexism, classism, nationalism, polarisation

of society, religious sensitivities, and civic responsibility in conservative contexts. Each case study takes place in different contexts: the United States, The Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Australia, Canada, and England (Levinson et al., 2024: 2).

The book begins by positioning schools and education at the heart of democratic spaces - particularly in fragile democracies - and challenges polarisation by promoting dialogue and communication (Ibid: 1-12). Each case study takes place in different levels of formal education; primary, secondary, middle and high schools, vocational institutes, or higher education institutions. It revives the notion of education as liberation, applying critical pedagogies to contemporary controversial topics faced by educators and learners across the Western world (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2014). The book refers to education's role in society for 'reading the world' rather than 'reading the word' (Freire 1970). The book also fosters ethical praxis, echoing Paulo Freire's call for educators to move from reflection to action (Ibid.) by digging deep into reflexive case studies and then suggesting action plans and tools for the teachers or the school principals to use in similar cases. Its writing style in conversations also showcases the work of educators as collaborative, dialogical, and based on active learning as the practice of engaged pedagogies (hooks, 2014; Goodrich and Vu, 2025).

There are common themes arising in different case studies to re-imagine education and the role of educators and learners, while offering strategic and practical solutions for the daily lives of educators in different spaces at different levels. For example, the first normative case study in the book takes place in a comprehensive secondary school in Dortmund, Germany and is about a student promoting conspiracy theories in class (Drerup, 2024: 13). The student, influenced by far-right ideologies, introduces COVID-19 conspiracy theories that dominate classroom discussions (Ibid: 13-30). There is another student in the same class who lost family members to the pandemic and is on the verge of tears. This case study brings a lot of challenges for the educator with respect to responding to the student in a meaningful way, while protecting other students from being influenced by a loud and assertive student dominating the discussion in the classroom. The teacher questions how to have a meaningful dialogue on political and moral issues with the students in a safe learning environment.

The case study continues with other teachers in the same school discussing how to engage with that student, his background and his family, as well as facilitate a dialogic, critical atmosphere in the classroom without excluding him (Ibid: 13-19). Other educators then analyse the case and reflect on the teachers' attitudes in this secondary school. A particularly striking moment in this chapter arises when a primary school teacher from Münster, Germany, remarked that schools partly exist 'to protect children from being stuck at home under the tyranny of their parents' ideas' (Ibid: 25) or 'to challenge their social bubbles' (Ibid: 19). The conversation enriches the debate about the role of schools and the value of deliberation beyond schools.

In another chapter, the role of schools in supporting dialogue is discussed but this time the case study takes place in a repressive environment. This case study is about teaching a critical consciousness course in an anti-critical race theory environment, in a middle school in the United States (Michael, Tanchuk, and O'Brien, 2024: 115-133). In this case, the only Black school principal in a conservative county, called Heath, is considering how to keep the critical consciousness course open while being threatened by parents about spreading 'unholy' or 'un-American' ideals, such as promoting gay marriage as a matter of equity (Ibid: 119-120). This conversation among educators highlights 'the purpose of education as liberation, developing critical thinking skills and critical consciousness so that people can become the best versions of themselves' (Ibid: 122). This case study reflects on the role of schools as critical spaces challenging the social bubbles of the students and educators.

The role of public schools for a progressive society with critical consciousness and critical thinking are core issues at stake in this book. In all the chapters, educators offer hands-on, practical advice for teachers by drawing from their own experiences. For example, in the first case study about a student spreading conspiracy theories in the classroom, the educators suggest organising classes on media literacy, the notion of skepticism, and critical thinking for the students to create their own informed opinions (Ibid: 20-22); they also suggest using different methods of facilitation and moderation to make the classroom a safe space for the educator (Ibid: 23-25). It takes the classroom as a micro-society in which educators and learners share notions of respect while considering each

other's backgrounds and family influence. It also offers ideas such as talking to the student one-to-one after class and proposing a reflective writing assignment that enables him to challenge his views by self-learning (Ibid: 25). The book highlights the role of educators in turning difficult conversations into learning moments that are vital for critical consciousness. Educators need to keep practicing self-reflection and restorative practice for these conflict-driven moments to support critical transformation (Cheng et al., 2017).

Another common theme in the book is the critical role of school support and organisational dynamics within formal school settings to overcome isolation among citizenship teachers (Groot, Weening and O'Brien, 2024: 31-47). Although overcoming isolation is important for teachers and educators at all levels, it is vital for citizenship teachers, who discuss sensitive subjects every day in the classroom. In the current polarising period, some subjects such as free healthcare can be difficult to talk about within the classroom, especially in online settings.

A case study set in 'a vocational school for students aged 16-25 in the Netherlands' (Ibid: 46) discusses a challenge set by a teacher of an online class about healthcare by asking a controversial question to the class: 'Should people who drink or smoke a lot pay more for their health insurance?' (Ibid: 32). This is heard by one of the parents in an online classroom, and the parent interrupted the class in an abrupt manner and threatened the teacher for being biased. The parent made a formal complaint about the teacher for teaching their child that their parents are not worthy of receiving healthcare because they drink or smoke (Ibid: 32-33). This incident made the teacher think about the safety and privacy of online classrooms for students and educators, and shared this with her colleagues in her vocational school (Ibid: 35).

In the conversation section, the educators question the learning goals of the course for citizenship education and how it can be adapted to an online learning environment. They also highlight one of the most important tools for educators; feeling the room with non-verbal communication in their classroom, when they are physically present (Ibid: 38). The online classroom does not offer that tool to the educator. Moreover, organisational support for teachers, and

creating a community of practice to discuss these issues without feeling isolated and alienated as an educator, are crucial concerns for a better learning environment for both educators and learners (Ibid: 40-42). All educators in the conversation agreed that the school senior leadership and management should be proactive about supporting their teachers with training on technical and pedagogical issues related to online classrooms, especially while discussing controversial issues and creating a safe space for students and educators, in-person or online (Ibid.: 42-45).

This raises important questions about power dynamics both among senior leaders and between educators and learners. Who has agency and power? The conversation among educators in the United States, discusses *Weapons of the Weak* by James Scott (1985), and Jarvis Givens' work *Fugitive Pedagogy* (2021) to emphasise that even small acts of defiance can offer resistance and be liberatory in difficult, repressive systems (Michael, Tanchuk and O'Brien, 2024: 125-126). This raises the same question on the role of schools in challenging the status quo and racist laws, for learners, educators and communities around the schools. One of the teachers points out that 'When people talk about anti-American ideals, the American ideals they are referring to are White, middle class, heteronormative ideas' (Ibid: 127). This makes the point that all school curricula are value-laden in one way or another and not recognising that they are value-laden is 'problematic' (Ibid.).

The use of normative case studies inspired from real contexts and real issues experienced by educators is a brilliant way to make this book 'a teaching tool for the classroom and discussion tools for democracy' (Ibid: 176). The authors claim that the book is written both for teachers in the classroom and citizens who have conversations on social issues that can potentially transform points of view (Ibid: 175). It offers perspectives and actions for educators and practicing teachers that support difficult conversations in global citizenship education on controversial issues, while contributing to reflective teaching and learning (Ibid: 176). The authors offer a practical guidance on how to 'use these case studies for democratic dialogue' in a detailed manner (Ibid: 176-182). They also offer models of facilitation for the case studies as 'Tools for Learning' (Ibid: 182-187). Each case study models facilitation techniques as they all involve meta-

level discussions among educators, trying to identify ‘the ethical dilemmas in play, and different values, interests, and practical constraints that constitute these dilemmas’ (Ibid: 10). So ethical values and practical wisdom come together and reflect on ‘gritty materialities’ of an educator in an everyday life school context (Apple, 2012).

My main critique of the book is that its content is drawn from the global North; incorporating case studies from the global South would have made the conversation richer and more insightful. The underrepresentation of the global South in knowledge production when it comes to case studies in education is well-recorded (Breidlid, 2013). A focus on the connections and interdependence between the global North and South would have brought a more global discussion on educational challenges, while addressing the power asymmetries between different contexts. The book does not promote ‘soft’ as opposed to ‘critical global citizenship education’ (Andreotti, 2006). The authors offer a critical understanding of global citizenship education and approach power imbalances and inequalities seriously in local contexts and dig deep into complex global relationships (Ibid: 46-48). However, the authors could have identified the societal problems more explicitly to discuss the limitations of the scope of the book. For example, focusing only on formal school settings and on the global North is a limitation. It is a limitation to discuss Islamophobia or migration in school settings in Europe, without addressing historical connections and colonisation processes that lead to these societal issues being present in schools.

Overall, *Civic Contestation in Global Education* is an insightful, engaging, and practically valuable resource that aligns closely with the aims and values of global citizenship education. Through its rich, grounded case studies and dialogic methodology, it provides a unique approach to civic dilemmas in education. I highly recommend this book for student-teachers, teachers, school principals, and education policy makers to take a stance on ethical issues, to make pedagogical decisions in formal education contexts, as well as learn more about facilitation and communication techniques in citizenship education. I also recommend this book to community and trade union organisers, as well as citizens, who seek to foster ethical, inclusive and courageous civic learning in contested times.

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