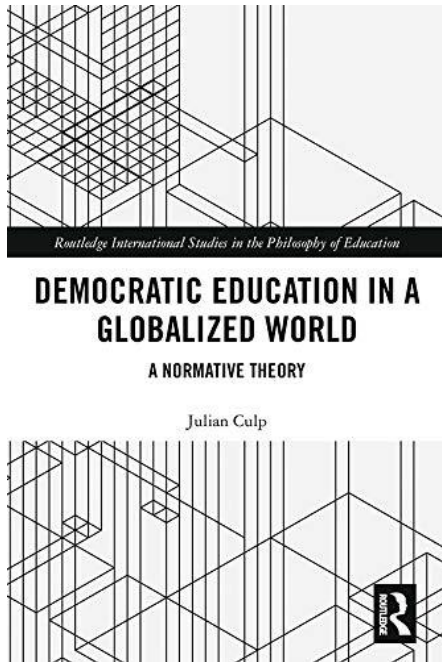


DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD: A NORMATIVE THEORY

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Culp, J (2019) *Democratic Education in a Globalized World: A Normative Theory*, New York: Routledge.



Having been teaching in a few pro-neoliberal universities in the UK and the Netherlands for two decades, I, like many other academics, seem to have slowly and passively accepted the market approach to education, constant performance appraisals, and the rhetoric of public engagement. Questions, as to what education is for, and what alternatives are available, have been put aside in our daily, overwhelming and competing research-teaching-administration agenda. The book by Julian Culp is, therefore, highly welcoming and refreshing. In his book, Culp criticises the functional and human-capital approach to education, and advocates a new

perspective to education. Culp particularly champions global democratic educational justice and global democratic citizenship education.

Throughout his book, Culp tries to develop a theory of global democratic education which ‘provides a normative conception of how educational public policy bears on the solution of global problems’ (Culp, 2019: 2). In doing so, he uses eight chapters to explain and defend his theory, and each chapter touches on different issues around global education. In chapter two, he draws on the concepts of justice and moral autonomy to challenge the domestic-focused perspective to education. In chapter three, he compares and contrasts the principle of equal education opportunity raised by Brighouse and Swift (2006) and the idea of democratic educational adequacy by Satz (2007). The contrast and the debate about these two theories are used to underline what his ideals of global democratic educational justice are about. In this chapter, he makes the rather controversial argument that the ultimate goal of education is to realise ‘the fundamental rights to education of citizens from other states’ (Culp, 2019: 78).

Chapter four shifts the attention to the concept of democratic citizenship education. In this chapter, he urges readers expanding the perspective of education from their domestic contexts to the inter-, supra- and trans-national layers of education and democracy. To achieve global citizenship education, Culp uses chapter five to examine how transnational democratic conscientisation is crucial to understanding the process of ‘being knowledgeable of globalization’ (Ibid: 128). In the following chapter, he explores the complex meaning and ideology of education for autonomy. In chapter seven, Culp makes a strong response to the post-colonial critiques to his normative theory of democratic education. He insists that he does not impose his democratic ideals on the non-Western world, and democratic values are not ‘exclusively Western’ (Ibid: 174).

I found the book clearly-written and well-structured. The painstaking and detailed literature review helps articulate the differences of various schools of thought in global justice, morality and values of education. Right at the beginning of the book, Culp expresses his apologies to readers about the excessive abstraction of the book and the normative nature of his proposed theory (Ibid: ix). The author need not be apologetic because his normative

theory is intended to set out a different vision to global education. Additionally, the author has provided sufficient sign-posts and recaps in each chapter, which help clarify the complex arguments he makes.

That said, the author focuses the discussion on global democratic citizenship in the contexts of primary and secondary education only. It is unclear why the tertiary education sector has not been included in the discussion. I fully understand that the nature of education in different levels could be different, and the author has the right to focus on some particular levels, but not all. However, the proposed normative theory seems highly relevant and applicable to the tertiary education level, and the author could have made his decision-making process more transparent right at the beginning of the book.

As mentioned earlier, the author has discussed global democratic educational justice in chapter three and global democratic citizenship education in Chapter four. Are these two concepts identical? If not, what are their actual relationships? Is the notion of justice in chapter three a means to achieving democratic citizenship education in chapter four? It would have been useful for the author to have made the connections clearer.

I also found the author slightly over-defensive in response to the post-colonial critiques to his theory in chapter seven. On the one hand, the author has stated his position very clearly that ‘any norms or entitlements that claim universal validity’ (Ibid: 129) deserve scrutiny. The author’s own theory is no exception. On the other hand, throughout the book, the author is very aware of the ‘appropriately structured political discourses’ (Ibid: 129) that could derail his vision to the global democratic education in reality. The author could have used the same argument to make a response to the post-colonial critiques, suggesting that he is not blind to the asymmetries of power structures, but he simply wants to develop a normative theory that may offer an alternative to existing un-critical approaches to education, especially in developing country contexts.

Lastly, this book may be successful in developing a coherent normative theory relevant to global democratic education, but how do we know that the author's vision will be achieved? Since it is a normative theory, we cannot simply draw on a typical, positivist assessment approach to examining the effectiveness of the theory or the policies recommended. Perhaps the author could have touched on the issues of assessment and evaluation in the concluding chapter, which would make the whole discussion more transparent and complete.

All in all, this book is highly relevant to pedagogical scholars who may have found the neo-liberal, market-based approach to education unimaginative or frustrating. Those who are in the field of education theory will find this book very interesting too because it explains and demonstrates how normative theories are different from the positivist counterparts. Those who champion public justice, citizenship and morality, especially the educational public policy makers, will also find this book particularly encouraging and inspiring.

References

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