

Zeitschrift: Tsantsa : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Ethnologischen Gesellschaft
= revue de la Société suisse d'ethnologie = rivista della Società svizzera
d'etnologia

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Ethnologische Gesellschaft

Band: 10 (2005)

Artikel: Bringing in the citizen : culture, politics, and democracy in the US
anthropology of education

Autor: Levison, Bradley A.U.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1007348>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 29.03.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Bringing in the citizen

Culture, politics, and democracy in the US anthropology of education

Bradley A.U. Levinson

Too much culture, not enough politics. Such is my thumbnail assessment of my own contribution to the field of educational anthropology in the United States. In this essay, I present the evolution of my own research in Mexico, and provide an overview of major trends in the US tradition of educational anthropology, in order to make a critique of the field and point in a new direction¹.

Over the last 25 years, there has been an explosion of interest in democratic citizenship and civic education around the world (Stevick/Levinson forthcoming). This appears to be one of the many paradoxes of globalization: as states everywhere generally shrink or background their political-economic functions, they bolster their educational role in schooling democratic citizens (Castles 2004). This is true in most of the so-called «new» or «transitional» democracies, like Mexico or Indonesia or Estonia, where states look to schools to build a democratic political culture. But it is also true in the older European democracies undergoing striking demographic transition, where there is said to be a «democracy deficit», and where schools must wrestle with how to integrate new immigrants while constructing a pan-European identity. At least since Emile Durkheim's work on education at the beginning of the 20th century (Durkheim 1956 [1902/03]), scholars have recognized the importance of education as part of political socialization, and political

socialization must necessarily engage the terrain of culture. Yet the discourse of democracy is ascendant, if not already hegemonic, on the global stage, and thus political socialization has been almost universally framed in terms of forming the democratic citizen.

Where have US-based anthropologists of education been located in this scenario? Generalization is risky, of course, and I am sure to leave out important work that complicates the simple outlines of my critique. Still, I would venture that much of our work over this period has pursued questions of cultural difference, identity, and learning orientation in relation to school performance or failure. We have been driven by questions like «who fails in school, and why?» or «how does culture lead to educational conflict or exclusion?» Following the dominant liberal script in the US, we have most frequently conceived difference in terms of racial or ethnic membership (Jacob / Jordan 1993), thereby leaving out social class. Our research concerns and categories have largely grown out of the popular classifications used to mark difference in the US (Rockwell 2002). Depending on our theory of power and social change, we may focus our work on critiquing and transforming those structural arrangements that privilege some ethnic groups over others, or we may propose more just and effective educational arrangements that recognize and «accommodate» cultural diversity.

¹ I have chosen to keep my self and my personal experience at the center of the narrative in order to illustrate the traps of excessively culturalist thinking. Moreover, such an approach is faithful to the so-called «reflexive turn» that has characterized much American work over the last 25 years.

No doubt most American anthropologists of education have imagined our work to contribute to strengthening democratic life and reclaiming our democratic ideals (Ladson-Billings 2004), yet this political horizon has remained largely implicit in our work on culture. A 20-year review of *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, the major journal of our field, is very instructive in this regard. In reviewing article titles and abstracts since 1984, I discovered the following: there is not a single mention of «citizenship»; there is no mention of «democracy» or «democratic» concerns until 1992, after which there are a total of five mentions, but none central to the article's main argument; there is no mention of «identity» until 1991, after which there are some twenty mentions. Clearly, identity has been a growing concern and topic in the anthropology of education, but typically it has been in reference to categorical membership (gender, ethnicity), and thus largely divorced from questions of democracy or citizenship. What does it mean for our field when our key concepts of culture and identity fail to capture the possibilities of political participation and recognition in the public sphere?

I pursue this line of inquiry here through attention to our scholarly practice as anthropologists of education, as well as attention to emerging discussions of democratic citizenship. Anchored in self-critique and insights from my own evolving research in Mexico, as well as a brief charting of scholarly trends in our field, I attempt to lay out a vision of a renovated and politically engaged scholarship in the anthropology of education.

Theoretical and topical trends in the US anthropology of education

Scholars like Daniel Yon (2003), Elizabeth Eddy (1997), and others (e.g., Levinson / Holland 1996) have attempted to reconstruct the history of this vital field.

While there is no need to fully rehearse this history, some of the historical foundations and contemporary trends that indicate how and why a more political conception of education has been difficult to achieve are indicated below.

The key moments in the institutionalization of the US anthropology of education include the so-called «Stanford Congress» on education and anthropology of 1954, which resulted in a book of the same name (Spindler 1955), the formation of the Council on Anthropology and Education in 1967, and the launching of the *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* in 1973. Most of the early contributors to the field were scholars whose roots lay in village or community-based studies of child socialization, «culture and personality», or language acquisition. There was often a decidedly psychological, or at least cognitive, orientation to this work. Scholars were trying to understand how children were «traditionally» socialized, and how they were adapting to sudden and dramatic social change². Much of this work had an «applied» focus. Anthropologists of education were also beginning to contribute to more general theories of culture, culture transmission, and culture change, with a focus on micro-interactionist processes between children and adults³.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several new trends emerged. The Civil Rights Movement and the struggle for racial equality in the US, accompanied by the expansion of the educational welfare state in 1965, spurred anthropologists even more strongly to study inequalities in educational achievement. Now that racial desegregation had been outlawed, and compensatory funds were made available to equalize educational opportunity, scholars wondered how and why an «achievement gap» between White (Euro- American) students and students of color (African, Asian, and Latin American in origin) persisted. One of the prevailing explanations was that ethnic minority students were «culturally deprived» in relation to their White counterparts, and therefore needed a kind of

² Actually, American anthropologists have been more likely to use the term «enculturated» over «socialized», precisely to emphasize the ideational dimension, and cultural particularity, of knowledge transmission. See J.F. Hansen (1979: 26-28) for a discussion of the difference between socialization and enculturation.

cultural remediation. This came to be known as the «deficit» approach to educational achievement. Anthropologists quickly chimed in that it was not so much a matter of cultural deprivation, as it was of cultural *difference*. They argued that ethnic minority students tended to do more poorly in school because their cultures of origin used different epistemologies, styles of communication (Cazden, John et al. 1972) and participant structures (Phillips 1983) to educate children in the home. Such cultural attributes differed sharply from the mainstream, middle-class cultural rules governing school life (Heath 1983). Work on language socialization, part of a burgeoning «ethnography of communication» was the predominant strain of this scholarship.

Even as most anthropologists of education turned their attention to these applied questions of school achievement, important work in studies of non-formal education (Lave 1977) and cultural transmission (Friedman Hansen 1979; Gearing / Sangree 1979) continued. By the late 1970s, attention had shifted from processes of general transmission to a focus on cultural *acquisition*, in which the role of the learner was central (Wolcott 1982). During this time, the Nigerian-born immigrant John Ogbu also developed a critique of the «cultural difference approach». He argued that anthropologists needed to take into account the «cultural ecology» of a group's response to schooling (1974, 1981, 1987). Making an important distinction between so-called «voluntary» or immigrant minorities and so-called «involuntary» minorities, Ogbu showed that the question of school achievement could not be separated from the history of a group's position in society, and the repertoire of attitudes and practices that had developed out of that position. Involuntary minorities, such as the descendants of Africans brought through slavery to the US, had developed alternative and «oppositional» cultural forms and strategies – what Ogbu called secondary cultural characteristics. Their problems with school could not be reduced to mere differences in primary culture or linguistic

style. The problems were more deeply rooted in the history of subordination and its cultural entailments.

Over the course of the next 10 years, Ogbu continued to shake the field out of its complacency regarding primary cultural differences in language and knowledge formation. Then, by the middle of the 1980s, another body of literature began to shake things up. Work in the «new sociology of education», along with critical advances in social theory, forced anthropologists of education to consider more deeply the role of structure and power in contemporary education. Scholars like Paul Willis (1977) placed social class and human agency at the heart of critical scholarship, and along with continental social theory (e.g., Bourdieu 1984; Giddens 1979), raised vital questions about the reproduction of inequalities through educational practices. The volume edited by Levinson, Foley and Holland (1996), *The Cultural Production of the Educated Person*, takes stock of this encounter between educational anthropology and critical sociology, and presents a number of exemplary ethnographic studies. Perhaps the strongest strain of recent work influenced by critical social theory has focused on the power of *peer relations*, both in and out of schools, to mediate dominant knowledge and thereby influence processes of social reproduction (e.g., Foley 1990; Hall 2002, Holland / Eisenhart 1990; Levinson 2001; Luykx 1999; Stambach 2000; Yon 2002). With the new emphasis on education as the cultural production of knowledge, inherently recursive, political and contingent, the previous study of cultural transmission and acquisition was seen as partial or incomplete.

Since the 1990s, a number of different approaches in the field can be discerned, each one with a unique relation to prior traditions and trends. I will chart these very briefly. There have been important advances in the ethnography of communication and the ethno-methodological approach as applied to the study of education (e.g., Mehan 1998, 1993). In a major work that culminates many years of fruitful collaboration, Hervé Varenne and Ray

³ Possible exceptions to this trend include the work by Jules Henry that eventuated in his brilliant, iconoclastic study of educational institutions in the US. (1963), and the holistic study of an American Indian school and community by Murray Wax et al (1964).

McDermott (1998) extend this tradition by showing how «failure» is deeply and inexorably embedded in the US school system through linguistic categories and interactional repertoires. Similarly, Fred Erickson (2004) has recently summarized his life's work on communication regimes in US schools with a book that brings critical social theory into dialogue with the ethnography of communication approach. Meanwhile, other work has taken up the basic insights of the cultural difference approach and the critique that John Ogbu made. Taking seriously the influence of historical experience and racial categories, new work has nonetheless tried to nuance Ogbu's formulations and look more closely at institutional (school-level) effects (Davidson 1996; Gibson 1997; Suárez-Orozco / Suárez-Orozco 1995; Valenzuela 1999).

Out of the earlier work on the cultural organization of knowledge and non-formal education have come more sophisticated approaches that take into account both the effects of power and the contingencies of practice. From their first book on *Situated Learning* (Lave and Wenger 1991), Swiss-born scholar Etienne Wenger (1998) has developed a powerful theory of learning as organized in «communities of practice». Dorothy Holland and her colleagues have drawn in important insights from the work of Soviet theorists Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin to elaborate a theory of identity formation (Holland, Lachicotte et al. 1998), while in collaboration with Jean Lave, Holland has also extended some of Bourdieu's concepts to articulate a theory of the historical person-in-practice (Holland / Lave 2002). Meanwhile, Kathryn Anderson-Levitt's recent book (2002) on «teaching cultures» in France and the United States provides a powerful empirical example of teaching as a form of knowledge-in-practice.

As educational anthropologists have become increasingly marginalized from departments of anthropology, they have taken up positions in Schools of Education. Their work often and necessarily involves teacher training. At the same time, educational anthropologists have

steadily undergone a process of self-critique which has led to increases in collaborative research design and the democratization of research relationships. Both of these trends partly explain the emergence and strength of school-based applied and action research. Examples of such work across a range of contexts include Hugh Mehan and colleagues' (1996) attempts to study the consequences of a program to provide special support and mentoring to minority high school students, Norma González and Luís Moll's (1995) work on connecting Mexican students' «funds of knowledge» with school curriculum, and Teresa McCarty's (2002) study of language revitalization efforts amongst indigenous Navajo speakers. A similar stream of work has been conducted by «ethnic insiders» amongst students and families of their own ethnic communities. Such work, which challenges many of anthropology's traditional epistemological assumptions about the value of an «outsider» perspective (Foley, Levinson and Hurtig 2001), has explored the challenges and contradictions of education for historically subordinated groups, with an eye toward ethnic empowerment and the critique of dominant culture (e.g., Fordham 1996; Lee 1996; González 2001; Lomawaima 2000).

Finally, an emerging anthropology of education policy and education reform efforts has yielded methodological models for studying processes and discourses across ethnographic sites and levels of social scale. Patrick McQuillan (1998) has illuminated some of the deep cultural assumptions in American high schools by looking at how they resist reform efforts designed from outside the school. Pauline Lipman (2002) provided an anatomy of a major school reform across a whole district, with attention to racial categories and bureaucratic obstacles to implementation. E.T. Hamann (2003) has developed a fascinating portrait of how education policies emerged in a single school district to respond to the sudden and large influx of Spanish-speaking immigrants. His study ranges from the local level to the national and even international level of

educational discourse. Among the essays that Margaret Sutton and Bradley Levinson (2001) bring together to elucidate «policy as practice», those by Porter (2001) and Rosen (2001) are particularly astute in the way they permit us to see how local actors appropriate structures and discourses designed by the state.

My review of this field is admittedly and unavoidably tendentious, with some of my own work occupying center stage. To be sure, important work has gone unmentioned. Yet my concern has been to indicate the strengths and weaknesses to which a new anthropology of democratic citizenship education might be addressed. In sum, the field of educational anthropology in the US has recently seen a vital period of conceptual development and rich empirical exploration. Some of the best insights from earlier periods have been extended and elaborated. Starting with the political spaces opened up by the civil rights movements of the 1960s, anthropologists of education have continued to pursue an activist agenda that addresses educational inequality. Yet the absence of a conceptual discourse on democracy and citizenship, as well as the prominence of culturalist frameworks, limits the potential of educational anthropology to contribute to social movements that are explicitly about political order and the education of political subjects.

Citizenship education and democracy in Mexico

About 5 years ago, I completed a study of student culture and identity formation at a Mexican secondary school (Levinson 2001). In that work, I sought to understand how students in the school, amidst considerable socio-cultural diversity, developed what I came to call, following Ortner (1996), a cultural «game of equality». Tropes of equality and national identity, rooted in the broader history of post revolutionary Mexican education and state formation, formed an important part of school life. The school's creation of

diverse class cohorts and structuring of everyday activities also encouraged a sense of equality. Students appropriated the organizational and discursive resources made available to them to create their own cultural forms, and their own meanings, through the informal social domain. As a result, students from otherwise rather different backgrounds and circumstances came to see one another as more alike, more «equal», within the terms of this cultural game. Playing the game in 1991, then, had consequences for students' identities and trajectories over the next several years.

My study of student culture and equality in Mexico was originally framed by social and cultural reproduction theory in education. This literature is very political, to be sure, concerned as it is with how schools help reproduce social inequalities and the distribution of social power. By the 1990s, an ethnographic stream in the reproduction literature had begun to emphasize the role of peer culture in social and cultural reproduction (Levinson / Holland 1996). What emerged as a common pattern across these ethnographic accounts was the prevalence of sub-cultural polarization in US, European, and Australian secondary schools – the formation of antagonistic student groups and «subcultures». It appeared that school structures and practices fomented such polarization⁴. I wanted to study whether and how this happened at a Mexican secondary school. What I eventually discovered, in short, was a school structure and culture that promoted unification, even as it gave rise to new and unintended divisions between secondary students and those who no longer studied (Levinson 1996). Above all, the school promoted a strong common identity on the grounds of national citizenship, and this common identity, appropriated and inflected by students, forestalled the polarization of student peer groups; it also appeared to displace or postpone processes of reproductive differentiation to spaces and times outside or after school life.

Contemporaneous with my extended period of fieldwork (1988-1998) was a

⁴ In the qualitative tradition of British educational sociology, work on this institutional dynamic has been referred to as the «differentiation-polarization thesis». Institutional practices, such as streaming, «differentiate» students according to academic ability, and then social group formation and polarization ensues.

burgeoning movement for democracy in Mexico (Preston / Dillon 2004). In fits and starts, Mexican civil society was beginning to throw off the yoke of authoritarian, single-party rule. Elections became fairer and cleaner, and the flow of information became freer. Human rights and transparency in government emerged as key demands of an emerging democratic culture. Opposition parties secured important victories, and new social movements generated outside the state came to exercise important influence on policy and public opinion. Concurrent with the democratic turn, Mexicans across the political spectrum also grew increasingly concerned about social «disintegration». The combined influence of mass media, transnational migration, economic recession, aggressive consumerism, and new forms of labor exploitation appeared to create severe dislocations in everyday life. Among the dislocations that adult Mexicans most emphasized was the shifting, precarious attitude of many youth. To hear parents and teachers tell it, Mexican youth were now more likely than ever to gratuitously challenge parental authority, engage in violence or crime, and disrespect the traditional symbols of national and community life. Adults talked a lot about a «loss of values» in the current generation, yet they had few ideas about how effectively to address it (Levinson 2003; Levinson in press). Many, of course, looked to the schools; more specifically, they sought a solution through resuscitating the grand tradition of civic education (Latapi Sarre 2003).

From the moment of its creation in 1923, the Mexican secondary school, or *secundaria*, has prominently featured a civics curriculum. Through successive presidential administrations of the 20th century, civic education has varied, but always around certain key themes: learning and valuing the official legal and political instruments of Mexican society, developing a sense of belonging and commitment to the nation, and developing forms of solidarity and cooperation at the local level. However, when I did the main part of my fieldwork, from 1990 to 1991,

there was no separate course in «civic education» at most secondary schools like the one I studied. Since 1974, civic themes had been folded into a general curriculum of social studies, which occupied 7 hours of the week's 35-hour curriculum.

In 1995, the Mexican Secretary of Education gave an internal team the charge to create an ambitious new program in «civic and ethical formation» (FCE) for all three years of secondary school. The FCE program attempted to respond to those societal concerns about the loss of values through a curriculum of democratic citizenship formation. Meanwhile, prominently placed advocates of the ongoing democratic opening also saw in the schools, and the FCE program, a chance to build a new political culture from the ground up. For them, values of democratic participation, equity, open debate and respect were paramount.

By 1999 the new FCE program had been implemented in virtually every Mexican secondary school, public or private (Levinson 2003). Highlighting a dialogic, student-centered pedagogy, the authors of the FCE hoped that it would form the axis of a new, less authoritarian school culture to offset traditionally authoritarian practices (Fierro / Carbajal 2003; García Salord / Vanella 1992). Moreover, the decision to combine the political socialization goals of civic education with the multi-faceted aim of «ethical» values formation brought together a set of so-called democratic attitudes and competencies that had not been articulated in quite the same fashion before. Education for democratic citizenship became inextricably linked with the clarification of values and the «prevention» of undesirable attitudes and activities, such as drug use, prostitution or illegal gang participation.

The development and implementation of the FCE in Mexico is exciting on a number of grounds. It represents a fresh attempt to actualize the practice of democracy in Mexican schools, to create a school life more consonant with emerging democratic movements and practices in the broader society. Amongst policymakers,

administrators, teachers, and even students there appears to be a vigorous, and I believe salutary, debate about the meanings of democracy, and about the most important elements of «values» and citizenship education for democracy (Latapí Sarre 2003). This debate began in earnest with the Mexican student movement of the 1960s, which openly questioned the democratic façade of an authoritarian state. It has since taken a great variety of forms, ranging from electoral reform and anti-corruption legislation at the national level to subtle changes in community affiliation and gender relations at more local levels (e.g., Gutmann 2002). Part of this debate involves questioning the homogenizing myth of national identity in favor of a more pluralist conception of citizenship (Villoro 2001). And in virtually every case, the debate about cultivating democracy in Mexico has invoked the importance of education.

My interest in education for democracy grew throughout the 1990s, as I was finishing up my extended dissertation study and casting about for new topics of research. Yet I have continually asked myself how and why I could have missed the importance of citizenship, values formation, and democracy in my earlier fieldwork. Certainly, I had numerous discussions with friends and colleagues – many of them schoolteachers – about politics in Mexico. I was privy to much of the alternating hope and cynicism that has characterized much of everyday Mexican discourse about democracy for the last 20 years. I was also close witness to a dissident movement within the national teachers' union that claimed democracy as its mantle (2001: 49-51). Yet neither the word democracy nor citizenship appears in my book's index.

I have since come to believe that a major factor contributing to this temporary myopia was the absence of a serious concern with citizenship and democracy in the anthropology of education. Neither social and cultural reproduction theory, nor the prevailing variants of «cultural difference» theory in our field encourage us to link our research with the concerns

of democracy and citizenship education. While our existing theoretical frames may carry an implicit democratic charge, seeking justice and inclusiveness, they fail to orient us explicitly toward questions and debates of political order. In many ways, this inattention to politics simply mirrors a deeper American educational myopia. The themes of citizenship education for democracy – political participation, deliberation, civic engagement, etc. – are relatively invisible in our typical school curriculum, not to mention the surrounding civic culture. It is no wonder, then, that anthropology has not sniffed them out very well.

We can add to this myopia a certain problem of insularity. Within educational scholarship more broadly, there has been a vital discussion about the importance of education for democratic and global citizenship. Social studies educators, epitomized in the recent book by Walter Parker (2003), have long deliberated the best means for «teaching democracy», and global educators like Elise Boulding (1988) have articulated the basis for an even broader conception of citizenship. Critical pedagogues like Henry Giroux (1992), Roger Simon (1992), and Patti Lather (1991) have theorized the possibilities for radical democratic action in and through the schools. Yet American anthropologists have been slow and partial in their engagement with such scholarly discourses.

When I finally «discovered» the broader Mexican debate about democratic citizenship in the late 1990s, and when I learned of recent developments in civic education, I realized for perhaps the first time that what had taken center stage in my ethnographic writing were in fact practices of citizenship education and values formation. Even without a stand-alone civics curriculum, the *secundaria* I studied was actively engaged in producing moral subjects oriented toward the collective good. The wearing of common uniforms, the structuring of cohorts, teachers' exhortations to solidarity, the Monday morning rituals of national identification – all of these were elements of an integral values education for citizenship (Levinson

2002). Such education, of course, was only nominally democratic in the liberal sense, yet it also embodied elements of equality and solidarity that might well temper the prevailing individualism of an emerging liberal democracy. Moreover, there was an active values education occurring in spaces outside the school. In my writing, I describe this varied education of the home, the church, the workplace and the «street» in a language of identity formation, but it was also, I now see, about the socialization of citizenship. And the sense of citizenship one learned in the school did not always mesh smoothly with the citizenship taught and caught elsewhere. One female student, for instance, was an avid consumer of pop psychology advice in magazines and daytime television programs. Embracing the individualistic ethic of self-improvement communicated there, she chafed against the school's emphasis on group solidarity.

In my latest field-based research, I have explored one small corner of the educational bureaucracy in Mexico. I have undertaken a modest ethnographic study of how the FCE program came into being, and how it is now faring in the context of other, competing proposals for citizenship education (Levinson in press). Yet my broader agenda eventually includes a return to the students – an intensive, multi-sited ethnographic study of civic teaching and learning in early Mexican adolescence. Through both longitudinal and «latitudinal» methods⁵, I will attempt to assess the relative impact of school-based citizenship education on students' broader learning of civic identities. Meanwhile, I have also taken my concerns about citizenship and democracy to the local level in central Indiana. My study of «educational ecologies» for the social integration of newcomer immigrants draws heavily on the same literature. One of the great dramas playing out in numerous US locales, as elsewhere, is the clash of cultural difference produced through new kinds of transnational migration. Yet it is not enough to theorize such conflict in terms of racial or cultural differ-

ence. What is at stake is the very definition of democratic citizenship and the way that political participation gets constructed locally. Race figures into this construction, of course. Discourses of assimilation and integration presuppose certain «desirable» social characteristics, the prerequisites of political participation, which may or may not be deemed educable. But local institutions, including schools, play a preponderant role in projecting the discourses that define both the limits and the necessary qualities of political participation and social belonging.

The unifying potential of scholarship on citizenship, identity, and democracy

What is the meaning of my Mexican findings for other national traditions of schooling? At conferences, lectures, and in university classes, colleagues and students have wondered whether some of the schooling practices in Mexico could be advantageously adopted into US schools. (We, too, are apparently lacking in values education). The salutary sense of solidarity and the absence of invidious distinction, in particular, strike most as worthy of import. On the other hand, perhaps just as many cringe at what they see as a prescription for conformity. They worry about what would happen to our vaunted individualism, our freedom to pursue self-expression. According to such liberal understandings, any kind of prescribed collectivism would be profoundly anti-democratic.

These kinds of discussions only serve to highlight what has become a common frame of reference for education at the dawn of the 21st century: throughout the world, schools have become key sites for the negotiation of local meanings with global institutional forms (Anderson-Levitt 2003). More to the point, school-based programs in democratic civic and

⁵ Longitudinal methods are well known in social science, and encourage the study of unfolding social processes over time. By latitudinal methods, I mean to emphasize the juxtaposition of observational and interview data from a variety of social sites for learning, including the home, the «street», the church, the workplace, and the school.

citizenship education have become one of the primary sites for the creation of new political dispositions and identities, and for the consolidation of meanings about «democracy». This alone should qualify such programs as eminently worthy of anthropological attention.

As it happens, questions of identity formation have continued moving to the theoretical heart of contemporary cultural anthropology, as has a burgeoning anthropology of politics and the «public» (e.g., Holland, et al. in press). For over a decade now, anthropologists and sociologists alike have undertaken a considered meditation on the imperatives of public scholarship. This meditation has coupled a disciplinary reflection on the means of influencing policy with a theoretical-methodological reflection on how to study politics, policy, and public-making in complex societies. In dialogue with the field of political and legal anthropology, an exciting new anthropology of nationalism, globalization, and democracy has arguably led the way in these developments (e.g. Appadurai 2002; Burawoy / Verdery 1999; Comaroff / Comaroff 1997; Lomnitz 2001; Paley 2002). Such work, broadly speaking, seeks to elucidate the cultural forms that constitute the nation-state, as well as the cultural forms that articulate new modes of political action and participation.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2004: 120), quoting the «founder» of the US anthropology of education, George Spindler (1987), suggests that «from an anthropological perspective, all education is citizenship education». What I propose here, then, is a strong reminder and a potentially unifying research program for the anthropology of education that engages with the heart of the discipline. I suggest that the anthropological study of citizenship importantly links processes of identity formation to the political-economic forces that sponsor and construct educational programs for creating «democratic» publics. Of the few works in educational anthropology that have sought to articulate the relation between education, citizenship, and identity, recent ones that

stand out are Aurolyn Luykx's study of indigenous teacher education in Bolivia (Luykx 1999), and Kathleen Hall's original research on Sikh immigrant youth in Britain (Hall 2002). While contributing a great deal to formulations of citizenship and identity, however, neither work frames the question of citizenship strongly in terms of democracy.

Citizenship, identity, and democracy are key concepts, indexing tremendously vital debates and processes of change in the world today. As a shorthand, I offer the following working definitions: Citizenship is about the rules and meanings of political and cultural membership, and the associated modalities of participation implied by such membership; identity is about the varying senses of social belonging and commitment that form in each individual; and democracy is about the continual construction of a political order that sponsors reasoned deliberation, promotes civic participation in decision-making, justly distributes political-economic power, and strives for cultural inclusiveness. The study of citizenship education for democracy is therefore the study of efforts to educate the members of a social group to imagine their social belonging and exercise their participation as democratic citizens.

Now, an anthropology of citizenship education for democracy may well have as one of its goals the development of a cultural critique, theorizing the way that «controlling processes» (Nader 1995) limit and blunt the full possibilities for democratic participation. Yet an anthropology of citizenship education for democracy may also contribute knowledge to alternative democratic projects, to educational efforts aimed at creating plural «counter-publics» for a democratic renaissance (Benhabib 1996). As democratic theorist Jeffrey Isaac puts it, we can and should help to develop such democratic «oases in the desert» (Isaac 1998). Much of the action and applied work in contemporary educational anthropology could easily be framed in such terms. My study of civic education for democracy in Mexico aims to illuminate the structural and ideological

obstacles to effective democratic civic learning in Mexican schools, even as it brings the Mexican case into a critique of practices elsewhere. Meanwhile, my study of local newcomer integration has an important applied, dialogical component, with professional development activities, advocacy work, and website publication oriented to local democratic actors.

Until now, the study of civics and citizenship education has been dominated by researchers in the fields of political science, comparative education, and social studies education (e.g., Niemi / Junn 1998; Torney-Purta, et al. 2001). Such researchers tend to use survey methods, and they tend to take for granted the limited hegemonic meanings of liberal (representative) democracy. With its diverse methodological toolkit, anthropology has a great deal to contribute to this body of work. Anthropology has always had as its strength the elucidation of cultural frameworks of meaning, of local identities; in recent years, as we have learned to cross sites and theorize both social scale and connectivity, we have also become more adept at understanding the interplay between such local identities and broader social, cultural, and political-economic structures and processes (e.g., Lamphere 1992; Marcus 1998). We understand how concepts of «the educated person» are structured at the local level and enter into a dynamic interplay with other concepts of the educated person that circulate at the level of the state and the world system (Levinson / Holland 1996). Describing this with ethnographic detail and theorizing its political consequences can make a significant contribution. As a matter of contributing to policy, it seems to me, anthropologists can also speak to questions of citizenship education. Building on decades of work regarding the social life of schools and the problematic of cultural difference, anthropologists of education can reframe and extend their findings as a contribution to the search for democratic conviviality within schools.

Bibliography

- ANDERSON-LEVITT Kathryn
2002. *Teaching Cultures: Knowledge for Teaching First Grade in France and the US* Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.
- ANDERSON-LEVITT Kathryn (ed.)
2003. *Local Meanings, Global Schooling: Anthropology and World Culture Theory*. New York: Palgrave/Macmillan.
- APPADURAI Arjun
2002. «Deep democracy: urban governmentality and the horizon of politics». *Public Culture* 14(1): 21-47.
- BENHABIB Seyla (ed.)
1996. *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- BOULDING Elise
1998. *Building a Global Civic Culture: Education for an Interdependent World*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- BOURDIEU Pierre
1984. *Distinction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- BURAWOY Michael and Katherine VERDERY (eds)
1999. *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
- CASTLES Stephen
2004. «Migration, citizenship, and education», in: James A. BANKS (ed.), *Diversity and Citizenship Education: Global Perspectives*, p. 17-48. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- CAZDEN Courtney B., Vera P. JOHN, and Dell HYMES
1972. *Functions of Language in the Classroom*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.
- COMAROFF John L. and Jean COMAROFF
1997. «Postcolonial politics and discourses of democracy in Southern Africa: an anthropological reflection on African political modernities». *Journal of Anthropological Research* (Albuquerque NM) 53(2): 123-146.
- DAVIDSON Anne L.
1996. *Making and Molding Identity in Schools: Student Narratives on Race, Gender, and Academic Engagement*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- DURKHEIM Emile
1956 (1902/03). *Education and Sociology*. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press.

- EDDY Elizabeth
1997. «Theory, research, and application in educational anthropology», in: George D. SPINDLER (ed.), *Education and Cultural Process: Anthropological Approaches*, p. 4-25. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- ERICKSON Frederick
2004. *Talk and Social Theory*. London: Polity Press.
- FIERRO Maria Cecilia, and Patricia CARBAJAL
2003. *Mirar la práctica docente desde los valores*. Barcelona: Gedisa/Universidad Iberoamericana.
- FOLEY Douglas A.
1990. *Learning Capitalist Culture: Deep in the Heart of Tejas*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- FOLEY Douglas A., Bradley A. LEVINSON, and Janise HURTIG
2001. «Anthropology goes inside: the new educational ethnography of ethnicity and gender». *Review of Research in Education* (Itasca Ill.) 25: 37-98.
- FORDHAM Signithia
1996. *Blacked Out: Dilemmas of Race, Identity, and Success at Capital High*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- GARCÍA SALORD Susana, and Liliana VANELLA
1992. *Normas y valores en el salón de clases*. Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno.
- GEARING Frederick, and Lucinda SANGREE
1979. *Toward a Cultural Theory of Education and Schooling*. The Hague: Mouton.
- GIBSON Margaret (ed.)
1997. *Ethnicity and School Performance: Complicating the Immigrant/Involuntary Minority Typology*. Theme Issue, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (Berkeley) 28(3).
- GIDDENS Anthony
1979. *Central Problems in Social Theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- GIROUX Henry
1992. *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*. New York: Routledge.
- GONZÁLEZ Norma
2001. *I am My Language: Discourses of Women and Children in the Borderlands*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.
- GONZÁLEZ Norma, et al.
1995. «Funds of knowledge for teaching in Latino households». *Urban Education* 29(4): 443-470.
- GUTMANN Matthew C.
2002. *The Romance of Democracy: Compliant Defiance in Contemporary Mexico*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- HALL Kathleen D.
2002. *Lives in Translation: Sikh Youth as British Citizens*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- HAMANN Edmund T
2003. *The Educational Welcome of Latinos in the New South*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- HANSEN Judith F.
1979. *Sociocultural Perspectives on Human Learning: Foundations of Educational Anthropology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- HEATH Shirley Brice
1983. *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- HENRY Jules
1963. *Culture Against Man*. New York: Vintage
- HOLLAND Dorothy C., and Margaret A. EISENHART
1990. *Educated in Romance: Women, Achievement, and College Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- HOLLAND Dorothy C., and Jean LAVE (eds)
2002. *History in Person: Enduring Struggles, Contentious Practice, Intimate Identities*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
- HOLLAND Dorothy, et al.
1998. *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- HOLLAND Dorothy C., Catherine LUTZ, Donald NONINI, Thaddeus GULDBRANSEN, Lesley BARTLETT, and Enrique MURRILLO, Jr.
In press. *If This is Democracy: Public Interests and Private Politics in a Neoliberal Age*. New York: New York University Press.
- ISAAC Jeffrey C.
1998. *Democracy in Dark Times*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- JACOB Evelyn, and Cathie JORDAN
1993. *Minority Education: Anthropological Perspectives*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- LADSON-BILLINGS Gloria
2004. «Culture versus citizenship: the challenge of racialized citizenship in the United States», in: James A. BANKS (ed.), *Diversity and Citizenship Education: Global Perspectives*, p. 99-126. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- LAMPHERE Louise (ed.)
1992. *Structuring Diversity: Ethnographic Perspectives on the New Immigration*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- LATAPÍ SARRE Pablo
2003. *El debate sobre los valores en la escuela mexicana*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

- LATHER Patti
1991 *Getting Smart: Feminist Pedagogy With/In the Postmodern*. New York: Routledge.
- LAVE Jean
1977. «Cognitive consequences of traditional apprenticeship training in West Africa». *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (Berkeley) 8: 177-180.
- LAVE Jean, and Etienne WENGER
1991. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LEE Stacey
1996. *Unraveling the «Model Minority» Stereotype: Listening to Asian-American Youth*. New York: Routledge.
- LEVINSON Bradley A.U.
1996. «Social difference and schooled identity at a Mexican secundaria», in: Bradley A.U. LEVINSON, Douglas FOLEY, and Dorothy HOLLAND (eds), *The Cultural Production of the Educated Person: Critical Ethnographies of Schooling and Local Practice*, p. 211-238. Albany: State University of New York Press.
2000. *Schooling the Symbolic Animal: Social and Cultural Dimensions of Education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
2001. *We Are All Equal: Student Culture and Identity at a Mexican Secondary School, 1988-1998*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
2002. «Valores y cultura estudiantil en la secundaria mexicana», in: Carlos ORNELAS (ed.), *Valores, Calidad, y Educación: Memoria del Primer Encuentro Internacional de Educación*, p. 173-204. Mexico City: Santillana.
2003. «Hopes and challenges for the new civic education in Mexico: Toward a democratic citizen without adjectives». *International Journal of Educational Development* (Amsterdam) 24: 269-282.
- In press. «Programs for democratic citizenship education in Mexico's Ministry of Education: local appropriations of global cultural flows». *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* (Bloomington).
- LEVINSON Bradley A., Douglas E. FOLEY, and Dorothy C. HOLLAND
1996. *The Cultural Production of the Educated Person: Critical Ethnographies of Schooling and Local Practice*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- LEVINSON Bradley A., and Dorothy C. HOLLAND
1996. «The cultural production of the educated person: an introduction», in: Bradley A. LEVINSON, Douglas E. FOLEY, and Dorothy C. HOLLAND (eds), *The Cultural Production of the Educated Person: Critical Ethnographies of Schooling and Local Practice*, p. 1-54. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- LIPMAN Pauline
2001. *Race, Class, and Power In School Restructuring*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- LOMAWAIMA K. Tsianina
2000. «Tribal sovereigns: Reframing research in American Indian education». *Harvard Educational Review* (Cambridge MA) 70(1): 1-22.
- LOMNITZ Claudio
2001. *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism*. University of Minnesota Press.
- LUYKX Aurolyn
1999. *Inside the Citizen Factory: Schooling and Cultural Production in Bolivia*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- MARCUS George
1998. *Ethnography through Thick and Thin*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- MCCARTY Teresa L.
2002. *A Place to Be Navajo: Rough Rock and the Struggle for Self-Determination in Indigenous Schooling*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- MCQUILLAN Patrick James
1998. *Educational Opportunity in an Urban American High School: A Cultural Analysis*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- MEHAN Hugh
1993. «Beneath the skin and between the ears: a case study in the politics of representation», in: Seth CHAIKLIN and Jean LAVE (eds), *Understanding Practice: Perspectives on Activity and Context*, p. 241-268. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.
1998. «The study of social interaction in educational settings: accomplishments and unresolved issues». *Human Development* 41: 245-269.
- MEHAN Hugh, et al.
1996. *Constructing School Success: The Consequences of Untracking Low-Achieving Students*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- NADER Laura
1995. «Controlling processes: tracing the dynamic components of power». *Current Anthropology* (Chicago) 38(5): 711-737.
- NIEMI Richard G., and Jane JUNN
1998. *Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- OGBU John
1974. *The Next Generation: An Ethnography of Education in an Urban Neighborhood*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

1981. «School ethnography: a multilevel approach». *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (Berkeley) 12(1): 3-29.
1987. «Variability in minority school performance: a problem in search of an explanation». *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (Berkeley) 18(4): 312-334.
- ORTNER Sherry B.
1996. *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- PALEY Julia
2002. «Toward an anthropology of democracy». *Annual Review of Anthropology* (Palo Alto) 31: 469-496.
- PARKER Walter C.
2003. *Teaching Democracy: Unity and Diversity in Public Life*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- PATRICK John J., Gregory E. HAMOT, and Robert S. LEMING (eds)
2003. *Civic Learning in Teacher Education: International Perspectives on Education for Democracy in the Preparation of Teachers*. Bloomington: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education.
- PHILIPS Susan
1983. *Invisible Culture: Communication in Classroom and Community on the Warm Springs Indiana Reservation*. New York: Longman.
- PORTER Maureen
2001. «“We are mountain”: Appalachian educators’ responses to the challenges of systemic reform», in: Margaret SUTTON and Bradley A.U. LEVINSON (eds), *Policy as Practice*, p. 265-293. Westport, CT: Ablex.
- PRESTON Julia, and Samuel DILLON
2004. *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux.
- ROSEN Lisa
2001. «Myth making and moral order in a debate on mathematics education policy», in: Margaret SUTTON and Bradley A.U. LEVINSON (eds), *Policy as Practice*, p. 295-316. Westport, CT: Ablex.
- ROCKWELL Elsie
2002. «Constructing diversity and civility in the United States and Latin America: implications for ethnographic educational research», in: Bradley A.U. LEVINSON, Sandra L. CADE, Ana PADAWER, and Ana Patricia ELVIR (eds), *Ethnography and Education Policy Across the Americas*, p. 3-19. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- SIMON Roger
1992. *Teaching Against the Grain*. New York: Bergin and Garvey Press.
- SPINDLER George D. (ed.)
1955. *Education and Anthropology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
1987. *Education and Cultural Process: Anthropological Approaches*, 2nd edition. Prospect Heights, Il.: Waveland Press.
- STAMBACH Amy
2000. *Lessons From Mount Kilimanjaro: Schooling, Community, and Gender in East Africa*. New York: Routledge.
- STEVICK E. Doyle, and Bradley A.U. LEVINSON (eds)
Forthcoming. *The Many Faces of the Democratic Citizen: The Drama of Civic Education Around the Globe*. Stamford, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- SUÁREZ-OROZCO Carola, and Marcelo SUÁREZ-OROZCO
1995. *Transformations: Migration, Family Life, and Achievement Motivation Among Latino Adolescents*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- SUTTON Margaret, and Bradley A.U. LEVINSON (eds)
2001. *Policy as Practice: Toward a Comparative Sociocultural Analysis of Educational Policy*. Westport, CT: Ablex.
- TORNEY-PURTA Judith, et al.
2001. *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-Eight Countries: Civic Knowledge and Engagement at Age Fourteen*. Amsterdam: IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement).
- VALENZUELA Angela
1999. *Subtractive Schooling: US-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- VARENNE Hervé, and Ray MCDERMOTT
1998. *Successful Failure: The School America Builds*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- VILLORO Luis
2001. *De la libertad a la comunidad*. Mexico City: Tec de Monterrey / Ariel.
- WAX Murray, Rosalie H. WAX, and Robert V. DUMONT, Jr.
1964. *Formal Education in an American Indian Community*. Kalamazoo, Mi: Society for the Study of Social Problems.
- WENGER Etienne
1998. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- WILLIS Paul
1977. *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- WOLCOTT Harry
1982. «The anthropology of learning». *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (Berkeley) 13(2): 83-108.
- YON Daniel A.
2000. *Elusive Culture: Schooling, Race and Identity in Global Times*. Albany, NY: State Uni-

versity of New York Press.

2003. «Highlights and overview of the history of educational ethnography». *Annual Review of Anthropology* (Palo Alto) 32(1): 411-430.

Abstract

Bringing in the citizen: culture, politics, and democracy in the US anthropology of education

This article reviews historical and contemporary developments in the field of educational anthropology in relation to programs for democratic citizenship. Anchored in reflections and insights from his evolving research in Mexico, the author attempts to show how the anthropology of education, engaged with critical theoretical discourses in the broader discipline, can contribute to research on democratic citizenship education. The author argues for the need to put questions of democracy, citizenship, and governance at the conceptual heart of the field.

Author

Bradley A.U. Levinson is Associate Professor in the School of Education (Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies), Adjunct Professor of Anthropology and Latino Studies, and Affiliated Professor of Latin American Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington. He is a cultural anthropologist by training, and has done extensive fieldwork on Mexican secondary education and secondary-age youth.

School of Education, Room 4228, 201 N. Rose Ave., Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405, USA.