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STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY THROUGH PARTICIPATION AND CRITICAL ADULT EDUCATION: THE CASE OF THE PARTICIPATORY BUDGET

Marlon Sanches

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Abstract

Reducing education to pure technique is to anesthetize curiosity (Freire, 1997). Neo-liberal policies privilege private interests and promote a model of education based on competition and consumerism (Harvey, 2005). This model of education perpetuates and increases inequalities. It also affects education whose priority is not to deliver learners with an immediate financial return. I claim that critical citizenship education and adult education principles have the potential to oppose the neo-liberal forces in education. Additionally, promoting a "thick" vision of democracy (Carr, 2008) underpinned in citizens' participation is a strong tool to counter neo-liberal policies. In this study, I will look into the Brazilian participatory budget initiative as a tool to promote democracy and citizenship. Finally, I will propose a theoretical framework that incorporates strong adult education principles to strengthen democracy in times of neo-liberalism.

Résumé

Réduire l'éducation à la technique pure, c'est anesthésier la curiosité (Freire, 1997). Les politiques néolibérales privilégient les intérêts privés et promeuvent un modèle d'éducation basé sur la concurrence et le consumérisme (Harvey, 2005). Ce modèle d'éducation perpétue et accentue les inégalités. Il affecte également l'éducation dont la priorité n'est pas de fournir aux apprenants un retour financier immédiat. Je pense que l'éducation à la citoyenneté critique et les principes de l'éducation des adultes ont le potentiel de s'opposer aux forces néolibérales dans l'éducation. En outre, la promotion d'une vision «robuste» de la démocratie (Carr, 2008), soutenue par la participation des citoyens, est un outil puissant pour s'opposer aux politiques néolibérales. Dans cette étude, je me pencherai sur l'initiative budgétaire participative brésilienne comme outil de promotion de la démocratie et de la citoyenneté. Enfin, je proposerai un cadre théorique qui incorpore de solides principes de l'éducation des adultes pour renforcer la démocratie en ces temps de néolibéralisme.

In the book *Pedagogy of the Heart*, Freire (1997) explained that "curiosity achieved by an educational practice reduced to pure technique may be an anesthetized curiosity, one that does not go past a scientific position before the world" (p. 100). The reduction of curiosity to pure technique is a tragic consequence of worldwide neo-liberal policies that transform education into a consumer market. Neo-liberalism is a political and economic paradigm that privileges private interests and individualism over social and collective interests. Neo-liberal initiatives undermine public education by promoting education based on free market policies and encouraging private enterprise and consumerism. In this paradigm, education is no longer a collective right, but a privilege—privilege for the few who can afford it and purchase the educational goods. Success is promoted as an individual effort and learners can achieve it through performance and meritocracy. By ignoring social and economic inequalities that raise barriers for the unprivileged and work as levers for the privileged, the neo-liberal model of education contributes to the perpetuation of inequalities, and worse, the world becomes increasingly divided between the haves and have-nots (Cleary, 2015; Connell, 2013; Harvey, 2005).

Adult education is particularly implicated here due to the emphasis on market values. A valuable education is one that can give learners a financial return. Citizenship adult education, for example, is not a priority and is, in many cases, seen as of little importance because it is not focused on the job market. Adult education for the development of human beings and the society they live in is seen as secondary (Jean, 1982). The commodification of education and the consequent transformation of the teacher-student relationship are examples of how pervasive the neo-liberal ideology is and how far it has already gone and is destroying our sense of community (Olssen & Peters, 2005). Even trivial actions, such as speaking about our rights, citizenship, democracy, and community, have become difficult and are often perceived as old-fashioned. In a polarized world, like the one we are living in now, it is more and more difficult but crucial to strive for social justice and democratic principles. I believe that adult citizenship education can be a strong force to resist neo-liberalism and foster change by strengthening citizenship and democracy. In this paper, I systematically review the literature of the major authors in the field of adult citizenship education and develop my argument as to its critical importance. In terms of methodology, this is a conceptual paper as defined by McGregor (2018): "A conceptual paper identifies and defines concepts, constructs, and their relationship to a specific topic or phenomenon…conceptual papers tend to be discursive, meaning they involve reasoning and argumentation" (p. 784). In this article, I start with an analysis of neo-liberalism and how it is affecting education. I then discuss democracy and citizenship education as possibilities to counter neo-liberalism. After that, I describe the participatory budget as a tool to promote democracy and citizenship. Finally, I propose a theoretical framework that is built on adult education principles and could be used to strengthen democracy and citizenship in times of neo-liberalism.

Neo-liberalism and Education

The neo-liberal ideology has been the underpinning of social and economic transformations since the 1970s. In economic terms, it is premised upon the following principles: private enterprise, entrepreneurship, competition, free markets, accountability, and small government (Harvey, 2005). One of the main goals of neo-liberalism is to transform society

into a consuming economy where capitalism can achieve its full potential. Apple (2006a) taught us that neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideologies have diverse objectives. One of them is the transformation of the society into a consumer society by promoting free market, free trade, globalization, a laissez-faire state, and the self-interested individual. Neo-liberal values go against common precepts of adult education, such as the promotion of a sense of community and collective thought (Spencer, 2006). It is almost impossible to promote democratic principles, citizenship education, and social justice because the neo-liberal focus is on individualism and the job market, which are disconnected from communal values.

To create this consumption society, it is necessary, as Apple (2006a) taught us, "to change people's understanding of themselves as members of collective groups" (p. 23). It means that people are not considered as members of a community anymore but as individual consumers who must satisfy their own interests and desires. This way of self-understanding creates an environment where it is normal to have winners and losers, where people are constantly competing with each other for the latest product, for the best restaurant, the exclusive commodity, for anything that can make them distinguished from the others. It is a world where the main purpose is to keep the privileged positions of the ones who already have them without challenging the status quo.

Education becomes synonymous with training. Neo-liberalism promises learners that if they get the best education, they will get the best jobs. Learners and educators get into a consumer's model of relationship where educators need to deliver what learners want. Therefore, students look for education in order to achieve the best positions and teachers are judged for their ability to perform in training the best students for the best jobs. Consequently, teachers work under terrible and unfair pressure and are accountable if students do not succeed in standardized tests or find the best jobs (Bouchard, 2006).

It is important to say that job training is part of education and one of its purposes. We want to have professional lives, and for this we need to have jobs—there is no question about that. The problem is when this is the only focus of education and when it takes the place of democratic principles and denies the importance of community in education. Austerity measures have brought reductions in funding for democratic initiatives and adult education centres, and as a result, citizenship education has lost its importance.

In schools, with the implementation and expansion of standardized tests, subjects such as math and sciences have overtaken the place of the humanities and social sciences. However, the most serious problem is that market values have been transforming schools, community centres, and higher-education institutions into enterprises. These places are seen as companies and need to be managed as one. Unfortunately, there is a trend toward an overvaluation of anything that can be translated into commercial and capitalized values, to the detriment of social values such as social justice and community (Harvey, 2005).

Adult Education Principles in Contrast to Neo-liberal Principles

In contrast to the neo-liberal pressure on education, in a study about adult education in Quebec, known as the *Rapport Jean*, Jean (1982) stated that the emphasis in education should not be on the development of human capital, but on the development of human potential. The emphasis on human potential contrasts with human capital because its focus is not only economic, but also on the human being as a whole. Jean said that education is

a lifelong process (p. 14). Besides, adult education cannot be focused solely on economic considerations; it must also aim for the overall development of the person. It is remarkable how the report emphasized that the development of the human potential (not human capital) is the basis of adult education because of what it means for the individual and the group: learn to identify, organize, and exercise power over their own daily lives (Jean, 1982, p. 14).

Correspondingly, Freire's critical pedagogy is a strong adult education paradigm against neo-liberalism that came out of his literacy work with peasants in Brazil in the 1960s. Freire promoted adult literacy not only by helping peasants to read and write but also by encouraging peasants to gain critical consciousness of themselves and their lives (read the world). Freire also promoted political actions to resist forms of oppression among peasants.

According to Kumagai and Lypson (2009), "The development of critical consciousness involves a reflective awareness of the differences in power and privilege" (p. 783). It is what Freire meant by "reading the world." Freire named this process *conscientização*, and it comes out of a collective process. It incorporates the idea of critical thinking and a social justice orientation. Its focus is on the humanization of human relationships. Critical consciousness alone does not promote social change. Political action is necessary to bring up social change. Freire called it praxis, which is reflection and action.

The "banking concept of education" refers to traditional educational systems where the teachers are seen as the owners of the knowledge and students are empty vessels yearning for knowledge to be deposited in them (Freire, 1970, p. 72). It is a system where students are not encouraged to reflect or act but to memorize, file, organize, and store information as much as possible. Presently, "banking education" is very popular and widely spread as our educational systems turn toward neo-liberalism and technical teaching for the job market and, consequently, forget the human and social aspects of education.

Opposing the banking system, Freire's problem-posing education encourages students and teachers to learn from one other. Freire (1970) taught us that "the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach" (p. 80). Teachers recognize the students' previous knowledge and use it to promote reflection to construct knowledge and act upon the world to promote social justice (praxis). This perspective incorporates the students' own values, worldview, and experiences. Students and teachers exchange knowledge that stimulate critical reflection on issues that affect them directly.

As neo-liberalism destroys the sense of community and instills in people an unnecessary sense of competitiveness, we become more individualistic and distrustful of the public good. Trust in democratic values has been decreasing as people do not get involved in the community anymore. Elections, voting, and participation are very low and indifference and disbelief in politics has increased. Apathy is on the rise.

Frustration with Representative Democracy

Representative democracy can be defined as a form of government where elected officials represent a group of people, as opposed to direct democracy. In many countries, the adoption of representative democracy frustrates their citizens who expect improvements in wealth distribution and social security (Connell, 2013). The transparency of political power is another source of frustration. Politicians seem to have difficulties representing the

population and using resources in a proper and timely manner. Very frequently, elected representatives are more committed to complete projects supported by their wealthy benefactors, as they are often paying back the ones who financed their campaigns. In many contemporary democracies, the only form of participation in democracy is by voting. Elections have become extremely expensive and dominated by powerful groups who privilege elitist demands and generate mass disengagement and who have little or no concern of the poor at all. Democracy should be a dynamic process because of its relationship with dissent by integrating all voices, especially marginalized ones. It is a conflictual process of adaptions and changes on the balance of social and political power (Nylen, 2003).

"Thin and Thick" Concept of Democracy

Democracy is normally associated with elections. We elect our representatives every 4 or 5 years and hope they will do a good job and represent our dreams and visions of a fair society. Although voting is an important aspect of democracy, it represents only a limited view of what it actually is. The distinction between thin and thick democracy (Carr, 2008) gives us a better understanding of the concept of democracy. The thin interpretation is related to the traditional view of democracy. The role of the citizen in this perspective is limited to the electoral process by voting and choosing representatives who are more closely related to their own views. Citizens can supervise their representative but cannot intervene directly on the decisions. Democracy is limited to political parties, elections, and voting. Are such elections really democratic? This is a very relevant question as we have recently seen the fragility of the representative systems in countries such as the United States, and more recently Brazil, with the illegal use of social media in the dissemination of fake news to manipulate elections (Sanches & Gomes, 2019).

Carr (2008) helped us understand that thick democracy involves active participation. Citizens who participate in decisions about their communities are practising thick democracy. They are critically and actively engaged in their community and committed to social change. They are aware of the power relations that permeate politics and are committed to emancipation. It is clear that this definition of democracy is a powerful concept against neo-liberal policies that advocate for a thin state and, consequently, a thin view of democracy. It is also associated with emancipatory adult education principles that focus on an adult who is engaged in social action for a more just society (Freire, 1970; Spencer & Lange, 2014).

Issues with Definitions of Citizenship

The Cambridge English dictionary defines citizenship as "the state of being a member of a particular country and having rights because of it" or "the state of living in a particular area or town and behaving in a way that other people who live there expect of you" (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Schugurensky (2005) shed light into the discussion of citizenship by saying that "citizenship is a dynamic, contextual, contested and multidimensional notion" (p. 1). It is dynamic because it has been changing historically, contextual because its meanings depend on time and space, contested because there are disagreements on what citizenship is, and multidimensional because it has four different dimensions: status, identity, civic virtues, and agency.

Citizenship as Status

According to Schugurensky (2005), citizenship as status is one of the most common definitions because it describes citizenship as membership to a nation-state. Members who are called citizens can vote and have a passport. Non-members are non-citizens who have very limited rights or no rights at all. Membership is acquired by birthplace (*jus solis*), descent (*jus sanguinis*), or naturalization (a process that varies according to the nation-state). However, there are exceptions, and some nation-states do not give membership to some people who are born in their land. In the past, they were slaves, women, or foreigners. Sadly, nowadays, the vast majority of countries still refuse to give automatic citizenship to children of undocumented immigrants or refugees who are born in their territories. This has created an increasing number of children who do not have any kind of citizenship based on the civic dimension. Data from the UN Refugee Agency say that a stateless child is born somewhere in the world every 10 minutes. Many of these children do not have access to medical care because they do not own nationality documentation. In some cases, they cannot even get vaccinated (UNHCR, 2015, p. 1).

Citizenship as Identity

This status is related to issues of belonging and meaning. Important factors like a common history, language, religion, values, traditions, and culture assign meaning and identity to a person. This perception of being a citizen is like being a member of a community and belonging to a certain culture. It is not necessarily attached to a nation-state or territories because borders of nation-states are constantly changing throughout history. It can assume different forms, as there may be different citizenships within a nation-state. Someone may be born in a nation-state and may not feel part of it, as in the example of refugees who are forced to leave their own countries. This aspect of citizenship as identity is troublesome, especially when we see colonized populations who can have citizenship of the nation-state where they live but do not consider themselves part of it. Through violence, these groups have been dominated, assimilated, and in some cases eliminated. This view of citizenship may enforce the assimilation of minorities to the dominant group.

Citizenship as Civic Virtues

Another aspect of citizenship refers to the characteristics that are expected of a "good citizen." For some people, citizenship as civic virtues is to be patriotic, obedient, diligent, and religious. For others, it is to have compassion, respect, tolerance, solidarity, and individual responsibility. Some would say it is political engagement, community participation, good knowledge of social reality, critical thinking, and interest for the common good. A report on citizenship published in 2012 by the Environics Institute, in partnership with the Institute for Canadian Citizenship, says that Canadians consider a good citizen someone who (1) obeys laws, (2) participates actively in the community, and (3) helps other people/neighbours (Environics Institute, 2012, p. 5). The issue with this perspective is there is no consensus of what a good citizen is because it varies according to different historical, ideological, and political contexts.

Citizenship as Agency

Citizenship as agency may be seen as an alternative for the issues we encounter with citizenship as status, identity, or civic virtues. This approach does not deny the other aspects of citizenship; it complements it. Citizenship as agency refers to citizens as social actors who exercise their rights and participate fully in the society individually and collectively. It seems to be more interesting for the society because it is about promoting change and addressing injustices. People are seen as active political subjects rather than bystanders and consumers. It is important to understand that people exercise their citizenship as agency in a context permeated with barriers and power relations that specify what a citizen can or cannot do. Schugurensky (2005) said that we need to understand "passive" and "active" citizenship as a continuum rather than two different categories (p. 5).

Throughout history, traditional citizenship education in Canada has focused on a kind of citizenship that promoted assimilation. In residential schools, Indigenous people were forced to live according to dominant standards. Immigrants have had to comply with dominant culture and learn how to be "Canadian." Citizenship education was fundamentally based on language training for the labour market and was focused on citizenship as status (Schugurensky, 2005, 2006).

In contrast, Schugurensky (2006) highlighted that "the social-action tradition of Canadian adult education citizenship building has been about the development of collective agency for community empowerment and social transformation" (p. 74). As an example, he gave the Antigonish Movement coordinated by Moses Coady. It was a movement that achieved great economic, social, and cultural changes through cooperatives among poor workers in Nova Scotia.

Which definition of citizenship better informs an inclusive paradigm to strengthen democracy and is closely oriented by and toward adult education principles? It is interesting to note that citizenship as agency is closely aligned to Freire's concepts of adult education, such as praxis, and Carr's concept of thick democracy. It is exciting to see the potential of how an inclusive conceptual framework against neo-liberalism can be constructed by the integration and application of these powerful concepts.

What Kind of Citizen Is Crucial for an Effective Democratic Society?

Drawing on a 2-year study of citizenship and democratic education programs in schools, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) came up with a framework for citizenship education. In this framework, they found three visions of citizenship that helped in the conception of three different kinds of citizens: the personally responsible, the participatory, and the justice-oriented. Westheimer and Kahne highlighted that these three different visions of citizens are not cumulative because they reflect a distinct set of theoretical and curricular goals. However, citizenship education programs may choose a curriculum that attempts to address the three visions of citizens.

The Personally Responsible Citizen

The personally responsible citizen is someone who acts responsibly. A good personally responsible citizen picks up litter, gives blood, recycles, obeys laws, donates food or clothing, and volunteers in the community. This is the most common kind of citizen that is described by people as desirable and normally receives more attention than other kinds.

Educational programs who adopt this vision focus on building character by promoting personal characteristics such as honesty, integrity, hard work, and self-discipline. Educators usually promote volunteer work as a way of developing compassion and good feelings. This type of citizen is aligned to Schugurensky's (2005) concept of citizenship as civic values.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) stated that this kind of citizen is inadequate to "the challenges of educating a democratic citizenry" (p. 5) because there is too much emphasis on individual characteristics and behaviour and not enough on collective and public initiatives. There is no focus to combat the real causes of the social issues and therefore, there is no action to promote social justice. Actually, the contradiction is that just charity and volunteering will only perpetuate the problem instead of solving it. Freire (1970) explained that this is false generosity. It is a feel-good perspective that does not challenge the status quo.

Another important aspect is that too much focus on obedience and patriotism can go against critical democratic goals because students are taught to obey and not to question. There is a clear link with the neo-liberal ideology, as citizens are encouraged to think in terms of their own responsibilities in relation to the society and never to question the actions of government or corporations. It is definitely aligned to a thin vision of democracy where the citizen's participation is limited to voting and elections.

The Participatory Citizen

This type of citizen is active in their community at local, provincial, and national levels. This citizen is engaged collectively in the community by organizing events and participating in actions involving caring for those in need. A good participatory citizen is someone who develops relationships, common understandings, trust, and collective commitments. Educators who hold this vision normally engage in activities that teach students how government and community organizations function and how to participate.

The participatory citizen model can also be problematic because it does not address causes of injustice. In this vision, citizens are encouraged to participate in their own communities, but they do not address ideological and political issues related to the causes of poverty and injustice. This vision of citizenship education promotes a neutral analysis of the society. It is aligned to the neo-liberal ideology and to a thin view of democracy because issues are simplified and neglected. Focus on this vision of citizens may promote an apolitical citizen who does not recognize how power permeates our lives and is not ready to address injustices and/or challenge the status quo (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

The Justice-Oriented Citizen

This person is someone who focuses on understanding how social, economic, and political forces interrelate with each other. This kind of citizen is interested in issues of injustice and social change. A justice-oriented citizen will analyze society critically in order to improve it (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Programs that adopt this vision engage students to question the social, political, and economic structures of society. This vision of citizenship focuses on addressing the root causes of injustice. Charity and volunteerism are not seen as the solution to these issues as they do not promote social change.

Freire (1970) said that "in order to have the continued opportunity to express their 'generosity', the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the

permanent fountain of this 'generosity'" (p. 44). The justice-oriented citizen goes beyond "feel-good" activism and engages with the real practice of democracy. It does not mean that characteristics such as respect, integrity, or engagement in the community are not valued. Actually, they are, but they are not enough. It is crucial to address and change structural issues related to, for example, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. According to Freire (1998), "Preconceptions of race, class, or sex offend the essence of human dignity and constitute a radical negation of democracy" (p. 41).

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) clarified the difference between the three visions by saying that "if participatory citizens are organizing the food drive and personally responsible citizens are donating food, justice-oriented citizens are asking why people are hungry and acting on what they discover" (p. 4). The justice-oriented vision of citizenship education is aligned to a thick view of democracy and is ready to question, resist, and repel neo-liberal policies that perpetuate injustices.

Discussing democratic educational practice in Brazil, Freire (1997, p. 91) taught us that it is important to discuss the presence or absence of a democratic practice and that we need to engage schools, universities, unions, and the whole society in discussions about the history of democracy, democracy and ethics, democracy and popular classes, and democracy and economics. He shed light on democratic teaching by saying, "I do not mean to sound as if I suddenly believed that democracy could be taught through speeches. Democracy is taught and learned through the practice of democracy" (p. 91). Freire (1998) said that if we advocate for a democratic society, we need to concentrate our efforts to democratize the schools and the curriculum, and therefore democratize the teaching of the content.

Participatory Democracy as an Instrument to Promote Citizenship

Citizenship participation comes to life when citizens engage in discussions of policy formation and implementation. Proponents of participatory democracy believe that participation is an important tool to strengthen democracy and to empower citizens against anti-democratic threats, such as anti-state neo-liberalism, citizen-demobilization, or demagogic neo-populism. It is capable of increasing citizenship participation and augmenting the interest in politics against the status quo (Nylen, 2003).

Participatory democracy has the potential to promote strategies to act in the interests of the repressed and excluded. Nylan (2003) believed that active participation in organized civil society, such as social movements or political parties, for instance, reinforces democracy. Citizens feel they are part of something, and they believe that they can contribute to the improvement of their communities.

Participatory Budget: An Example of Participatory Democracy

Participatory democracy is a great tool to promote adult citizenship education because it is democracy in action. The focus is definitely on the perspective of citizenship as agency and on the justice-oriented type of citizen. I analyzed a successful example of a participatory democracy tool that started in Brazil, called participatory budgeting, which emerged as a post-authoritarian reaction to dictatorship and neo-liberal impositions. It quickly spread all over Brazil (about 250 cities) and was implemented in more than 40 countries.

Wampler (2007a) taught us that "participatory budgeting is a decision-making process through which citizens deliberate and negotiate over the distribution of public

resources" (p. 21). Citizens play a direct role in deciding how and where resources should be spent. Maley (2010) explained that participatory budgets "are a form of resistance to the extensive privatization of public services and deep cuts to basic infrastructures imposed by neoliberal governments" (p. 110). Participatory budgets have the potential to facilitate the emergence of new democratic processes.

Traditionally, budgeting decisions are made based on corporate capital interests. Regular citizens have been excluded from budgeting decisions. Participatory budgets are great tools to bring marginal voices back into budgeting decisions. Schugurensky (2004) said that a democracy tool like participatory budgeting "not only contributes to the construction of more transparent, efficient and democratic ways of governing, but also constitutes privileged spaces for civic learning and for the redistribution of political capital" (p. 607).

For participatory budgeting to be successful, governments need to delegate real authority to citizens and implement the projects that are selected by them. According to Wampler (2007b), democratic participatory budgeting programs have decision-making attributes, promote deliberation, and help to empower citizens, and their decisions/policy creations can transform whole communities.

Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil

Porto Alegre is a city of about 1.4 million inhabitants. It is the main city in a metropolitan area with a population of about 3 million. It is considered a developed and rich city by Brazil's standards. When participatory budgeting started in Porto Alegre, the city was immersed in social debts and there was no transparency in how the city budget was used. The relationship between the population and elected representatives was based on corruption and patronage. It was under the government of the Worker's Party that tax reform took place to make sure that sufficient resources were available and participatory budgeting started. In the beginning, participation was low, but it started to increase as citizens started to feel confident and saw the improvements in their quality of life. It takes time to overcome distrust of political systems brought about by politicians in a representative democracy.

Cordeiro (2004) reported that even the revenue from locally raised taxes increased by 50 percent as people stopped tax evasion because they could see where the money was used and they participated in that decision. A great respect for the decisions made by the population was important to generate trust in participatory budgeting. Citizens were not merely consulted about their projects, but also decided through voting, and the government made sure that their decisions were put into action.

Before participatory budgeting, only 50 percent of Porto Alegre's population was connected to the sewage system. After the process, this increased to 83 percent. Normally, citizens' projects are focused on improvements for quality of life in their neighbourhoods, such as sewage, treated water, and/or health care. According to Cordeiro (2004), between 1989 and 2000, the number of municipally run schools increased from 22 to 90, the failure rate among students decreased from 30 percent to 10 percent, and 114 community-run day-care centres were created. Citizens can participate in participatory budgeting either through their own neighbourhoods (16 regions) or according to subject areas (housing, social service, education, transport, leisure, etc.). Cordeiro (2004) explained that in smaller local meetings, the citizens decide on what the needs and priorities are according to the needs of the neighbourhood. There are also thematic meetings in which

citizens decide on wider subjects (general issues) that encompass a larger area or the whole city. For yet another story from Porto Alegre, see the description of a meeting by Wampler (2007b).

Apple (2006b) said that "Porto Alegre has demonstrated that it is possible to have a 'thicker' democracy, even in times of both economic crisis and ideological attacks from neoliberal parties and the conservative press" (p. 25). The pedagogic function of the participatory budgeting initiative is undeniable. People develop a collective sense of belonging and learn how to engage in their own communities by taking control of their own lives. The participatory characteristic of this initiative changes the relationship between citizens, students, parents, school administrators, the state, and education because it creates a sense of responsibility toward the community. People know how much it costs to build a bridge or to build a health centre; students know how their school functions and therefore take the responsibility to preserve and promote public education.

Nowadays, participatory budgeting is still active and continues to be an important tool to promote citizenship participation, as seen in recent sessions in Porto Alegre (Magalhães, 2019). Unfortunately, after the Workers' Party lost elections to conservative parties, participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre lost momentum and has been struggling to survive because of lack of political will. Budget cuts and disrespect of citizens' decisions are recent examples of actions promoting the dismantling of the participatory budgeting system in this city (Fedozzi & Martins, 2015).

Participatory Budgeting: A School of Democracy and Citizenship—The Experience at Bioscience High School in Phoenix, Arizona

Cohen et al. (2015) studied the case of Bioscience High School, a public school in Phoenix, Arizona, which implemented the first student-centred participatory budget in North America during the 2013–2014 academic year. In order to put the process in practice, the principal of the school reserved a $2,000 budget for students to decide how to spend. The process counted on the participation of the student government board and two elected students from each grade. This committee (16 members) was responsible to coordinate the entire process. They introduced participatory budgeting to the students in a school-wide assembly. Students learned that they could present projects to use the $2,000 budget and were very surprised that the principal would trust them to decide on the application of the money. In total, 45 students submitted 32 projects. An important aspect of this process is that novice students had specific lessons on participatory democracy and how to engage in the participatory budgeting process. Teachers at this grade dedicated time in their lessons to discuss this process.

In Cohen et al.'s (2015) study, novice students had more meaningful changes than other students did. The authors explained that the learning changes were higher among novice students because they had formal, in-class learning opportunities that might have contributed to maximize the informal learning that happened during the participatory budgeting process. Novice students' teachers were more involved in the process and reserved more class time to engage with their students by explaining the importance of the decision-making process and deliberation. Cohen et al. concluded that the role of teachers in teaching about the process and encouraging students to participate "was a crucial piece in the learning process of freshman students, and confirms the value of connecting formal and

informal settings to nurture the development of certain competencies, and the importance of reflection in experiential learning" (p. 31). From this case study, they concluded that it is very important to build up-front capacity by discussing the background and justification of participatory budgeting with students. It is also crucial to have enough time to conduct the process in order to build capacity and design a more meaningful process. Finally, Cohen et al. said that it is important to have formal classroom education to improve student competency while participating.

Principles of Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting has some universal principles that can be applied on a general scale. De Souza (2004) participated very closely in participatory budgeting experiences in both municipal and state levels in Brazil. He enumerated some principles that were common in most initiatives.

Direct Democracy

Participatory budgeting is a process of direct, voluntary, and universal democracy. It means that citizens discuss and decide on public policies and budget. Citizens are not spectators of democracy anymore, but are active participants.

Social Justice

Participatory budgeting attacks the process of social exclusion that comes out of neo-liberalism. It responds to the challenges of the contemporary state's crisis of legitimacy.

Universal Participation

Citizens of all levels, regardless of their political party, social class, religious affiliation, or level of schooling, have the right to participate. To ensure the integrity of the process, nobody should have any privilege. This principle enables citizens of all classes, spheres, ranks, arenas, or status, even without any tradition in political participation, to express themselves and have a voice.

The Principle of the Whole Budget

This principle means that the population needs to be trusted and able to decide on the whole budget and not only on simple and small aspects or quantities. Citizens need to be given courses on technical aspects so that they can make informed decisions. Adult education initiatives are crucial at this point because they prepare citizens to participate.

Participatory Budgeting Builds on Existing Political Rights

Participatory budgeting does not substitute representative democracy; it complements and improves it. That is why, most of the time, no new legislation is required to implement the process.

Citizens Create the Rules of Participatory Budgeting Autonomously

Participatory budgeting is a process and not a finished project. It needs constant discussion and development. It is built on assumptions of self-managing, autonomy, and openness. De Souza (2004) clarified that for participatory budgeting "to be a genuine and effective

process of popular participation, not just a process of consultation, the decisions taken by the population and the government need to be documented and published so that they are available to everyone" (p. 61).

Solidarity Among Citizens

The awareness of their own rights as citizens (quality education, health care, etc.) and the belief that their actions promote change and make those rights a reality give participants a sense of belonging, solidarity, self-esteem, and conscious citizenship. Minority and marginalized groups feel their voices are heard and that they can participate in society because they are the ones who make the decisions.

The Tango of Citizenship Education and Participatory Democracy

According to Schugurensky (2004), participatory democracy is a school of citizenship that can happen in schools, families, the workplace, and a variety of organizations, such as churches, advocacy groups, neighbourhood associations, political parties, housing cooperatives, or social and environmental movements. By participating in participatory democracy processes through deliberation and decision making, ordinary citizens develop not only a variety of civic virtues (solidarity, tolerance, openness, responsibility, and respect), but also political capital. Schugurensky (2004) defined political capital as the capacity for self-governance and for influencing political decisions (knowledge, skills, attitudes, distance to power, and resources).

The first dimension of the tango metaphor starts with the assumption that meaningful informal learning takes place in participatory democracy initiatives, such as participatory budgeting. The act of participating is educative and self-sustaining, which means that the more people participate in direct democracy, the more people learn and improve the quality of their participation (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014; Schugurensky, 2004). For example, Hajdarowicz (2018) reported how involvement in participatory budgeting affected women of two districts in Medellín, Colombia. Traditionally, in Colombia, the culture of machismo and male supremacy are strong barriers that marginalize women and keep them away from political participation. Hajdarowicz listened to the individual stories of women who actively got involved in participatory budgeting in Medellín. She reported that in her study, women "obtained enough capabilities and agency to slowly transform their surrounding and power relations, which could potentially enable them to contribute to the slow transformation of the political system" (p. 15).

The second dimension of the tango metaphor is underpinned in the assumption that educated citizens who have learned about direct democracy initiatives such as participatory budgeting will participate more effectively in direct democracy initiatives (Cohen et al., 2015). Citizenship education enables participation by providing learners with awareness, resources, knowledge, and skills to act. For example, Endresen (2009) investigated non-formal training programs in three organizations in Cape Town, South Africa: the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (for shop stewards), the Alternative Information and Development Centre (for the unemployed), and the Treatment Action Campaign (for HIV-positive people). She concluded that participants in these programs became more active in their communities. She explained that "participants no longer view

poverty, inequality and unemployment as something natural. They are no longer passive citizens" (p. 371).

From this pattern, we understand that there is continuous reinforcement between participation and learning. The more citizens participate, the more they learn and develop their political capacities. The more citizens are prepared to participate by citizenship education, the better their participation and outcomes will be. It is a self-sustaining virtuous circle.

A Theoretical Framework to Strengthen Democracy Through Citizenship Education and Participation in Schools and Adult Education Centres

The theoretical framework consists of 3 main components: Critical citizenship education, participation in deliberation and decision-making processes and a thick vision of democracy. See Figure 1 for a summary of the framework.

Critical citizenship education can strengthen democracy by incorporating the following:

- Adult education principles, because adult education teaches us about different forms of democracy, the implications of each, and how we can participate. Freire (1970) offered us a critical social aspect that can be used to understand the collectivity and to question issues of power and to promote social justice.
- Citizenship as agency, because it sees the learners and educators as social actors of the community. It goes beyond the understanding of citizenship as status, identity, or civic virtues.
- The justice-oriented model of citizen, because it focuses on understanding how social, economic, and political forces interrelate in our society. It is not based on volunteerism or false generosity (Freire, 1970).
- The problem-posing model of education, because it challenges the banking model of education and promotes critical awareness and action. While the banking model of education is aligned with neo-liberal practices and inhibits creativity, problem-posing education "strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 81).
- Education for human potential, because it reinforces the concepts of citizenship education, democracy, collectivity, and public education, and it is crucial for a thick vision of democracy (Jean, 1982).

Participation in deliberation and decision-making processes (Cordeiro, 2004) can also enhance democracy by integrating participatory budgeting principles, such as the following:

- Voluntary and direct participation, because participants take part in the democratic process voluntarily and directly. People should not be forced to participate.
- Solidarity, because social exclusion should be combatted overtly through participation and action. Once marginalized voices are heard and put into practice, participants feel part of the decisions and less excluded.
- Universal participation, because participation should be universal. Participation should be guaranteed regardless of social class, gender, sex orientation, political party, religion, and so forth.
- Trust as the centre of the process. Participants must be trusted. Regardless of the decision, if the process of deliberation was followed and the majority of

the participants made a decision, it must be respected. There is nothing more discouraging than not being taken seriously and learn that your voice is worthless.

- Ongoing transformation, because the process of participatory democracy is in constant transformation. It is organic because it is always becoming and evolving. The more people participate, the better the process becomes, and new and improved forms of participation appear.

Aiming for a thick vision of democracy (Carr, 2008) needs to be our goal by promoting the following:

- Political literacy and commitment to an education that promotes social justice, social transformation, and educates people politically.
- Political awareness, because awareness of power relations allows one to be committed to critical thinking about social and political issues. Addressing issues of power in all aspects of social life is part of a thick vision of democracy.
- Direct participation and political engagement. Citizens know what they need and want to participate in the decisions. It is important to believe in citizens' capacity to make a difference, act against oppression, and liberate themselves. Emancipatory engagement and political action seek to encourage participation and inclusion of social movements in the decisions of the society/community.
- Problematization of voting and elections and of widely spread neo-liberal discourses and market-oriented views of democracy.
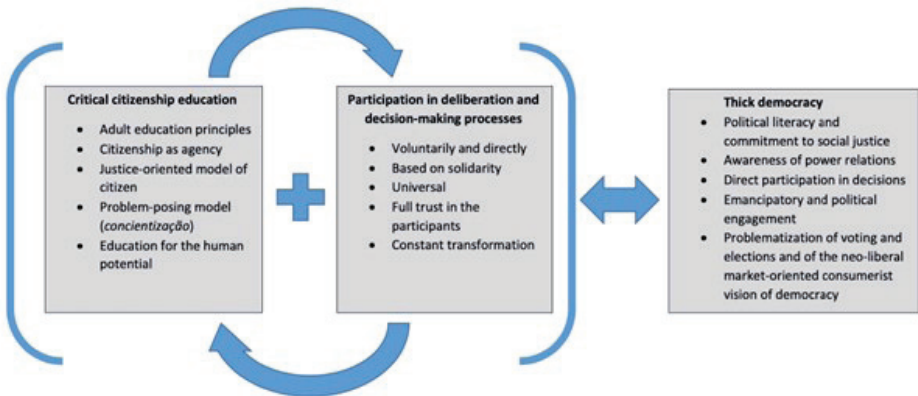

Figure 1. Summary of the Theoretical Framework

Note. The tango metaphor (Schugurensky, 2004) in Figure 1 represents the relationship between critical citizenship education and participation in deliberation and decision-making processes. Education supports participation and participation reinforces education. This is an ongoing process of reflection (citizenship education) and practice (participation) that leads to stronger democratic practices that challenge neo-liberal processes.

Implementing initiatives similar to the participatory budget with the potential to promote a thick democracy and oppose neo-liberal policies is not an easy process. Political powers need to be mobilized to create possibilities of implementation. Challenging the

status quo is a necessary step to promote democratic opportunities. Adult citizenship education is a strong force in this process to promote a justice-oriented model of citizen. Informed citizens have possibilities to engage in change and push for more participation in decision-making processes.

By taking formal or non-formal lessons on critical citizenship, people learn how to participate in democracy and what they need to exercise their rights and change their realities. By participating in deliberation and decision-making processes, people also learn and reinforce what they have already learned in school and adult education centres about participation, democracy, citizenship, and how power permeates our society. It is like a dance, one promoting the other. This ongoing process leads toward a thick democracy. Democracy is never a product or a finalized outcome, because democracy is always becoming. It is changed and perfected by this dance between critical citizenship education and participation in deliberation and decision-making processes.

Conclusion

Educating for democratic critical citizenship is extremely important in times of increasing neo-liberal ideology. As the neo-liberal paradigm has changed the structures of our communities by promoting individuality through consumerism and the commodification of education and of the access to education, it is crucial to understand democracy by teaching citizenship as agency and by engaging justice-oriented citizens. Striving for an education that educates for the human potential rather than human capital is essential for the survival of democracy. Without this understanding, the neo-liberal agenda will continue to deepen its transformation of education into consumerism and individualism.

Democracy is more than a concern for individual freedom because it embodies a concern for the public good. We need to restore the political in education. There is no neutrality in citizenship or democracy. Education toward critical awareness reconciles the marginalized and excluded voices with the democratic process. Political awareness engages citizens with understanding and exercising power. Informed citizens can push for more participation. Educators need to see that education is much more than preparation for careers or technical training.

I advocate that we can resist neo-liberalism and its consequences by challenging it through citizenship education and participating in deliberation and decision-making processes to achieve a thick form of democracy. I believe that there is always space for democratic critical citizenship education, and participation can be a potent antidote against neo-liberal ideology.

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