

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE ON DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGES AND EDUCATIONAL POSSIBILITIES

“CITIZENSHIP”



A TREMENDOUSLY ‘STRETCHY’ CONCEPT
PERHAPS EVEN MORE SO IN THE CONTEXT OF ‘THE DIGITAL’

A NOT-SO-GOOD EXAMPLE



Digital citizenship is the capacity to participate actively, continuously and responsibly in communities online and offline, through **competent and positive engagement with digital technologies** (by creating, working, sharing, socialising, investigating, playing, communicating and learning).

Digital Citizenship Education (DCE) strives to empower children through education, developing the competences they need to actively learn and participate in today's highly digitised society.

DCE is a holistic approach that strives to develop the essential **skills** and **knowledge** needed in today's connected world, and foster the **values** and **attitudes** that will ensure they are used wisely and meaningfully.

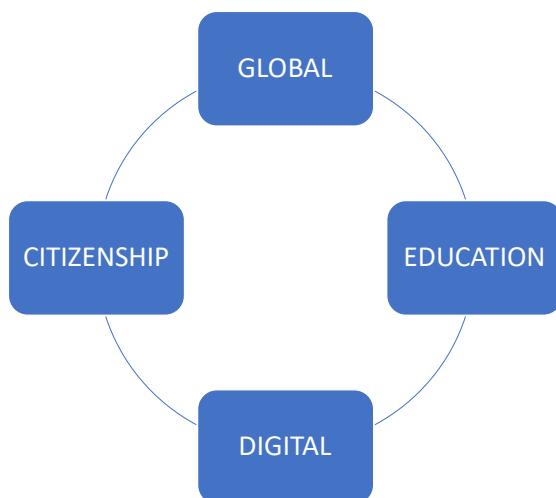
IS THIS DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP?
OR JUST ICT LITERACY?

GERT BIESTA – FOR THE SIXTH UM GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM – 13 JANUARY 2026



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A COMPLEX SET OF CONCEPTS!



- 1 THE DIGITAL AGE
- 2 CITIZENSHIP
- 3 EDUCATION
- 4 DEMOCRACY
- 5 CONCLUSIONS

AND LEAVE ‘THE GLOBAL’
FOR DISCUSSION

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THE DIGITAL AGE: HOW DIGITAL?

THE DIGITAL AGE ISN'T VERY DIGITAL!

information and communication technologies

global communication networks
which has changed the meaning of distance



Who owns and controls the networks?

Who has access and who hasn't?

fast and vast storage and retrieval capacity
which has changed the meaning of location



Who owns and controls the hardware, software and data?

THE RISK OF MANIPULATION AND MISINFORMATION

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THE DIGITAL AGE: NEW QUESTIONS

NEW POLITICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL

the digital age dis-locates (distance and location)
new questions about where we are



which is both a geographical and a moral question

new questions about what is true and truthful



it requires "new antennas" for the truth

new questions about what is real



it requires "new antennas" for what is real

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THE DIGITAL AGE: SOCIAL MEDIA

SOCIAL MEDIA AREN'T VERY SOCIAL
they are advertising technologies

Facebook relies on the principle of consumer profiling
it sells customers to companies

TikTok relies on the principle of attention grabbing
in the hope that we forget to pay attention to our attention
they sell our attention to companies

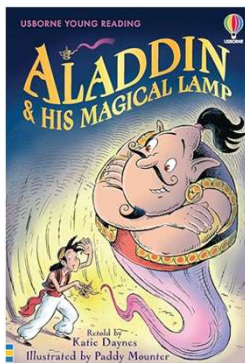
AND THEN THERE IS 'AI'
which apparently "will radically transform education"

REALLY?
like the radio, the tv, the cd, the dvd, the internet . . . ?

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THE 'PROMISE' OF AI? ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES!

LIKE ALADDIN'S MAGICAL LAMP?
"YOUR WISH IS MY COMMAND"

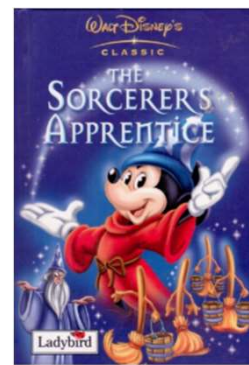


'A NEW DRUG ON THE STREET?'

"WHAT SHOULD I WISH FOR, IF I
CAN WISH FOR ANYTHING?"

"HOW CAN I MAKE SURE THAT
THE TOOL REMAINS A TOOL?"

THESE QUESTIONS ARE UTTERLY
POLITICAL AND EDUCATIONAL



LIKE THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE?
WHERE THE TOOL TAKES CONTROL

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**IF THIS CHARACTERISES 'OUR' AGE,
WHAT, THEN, FOR CITIZENSHIP AND EDUCATION?**

THAT DEPENDS!

THE (MIS)UNDERSTANDING OF CITIZENSHIP



SOCIAL, MORAL OR POLITICAL?

[1] SOCIAL: AN EMPHASIS ON SOCIAL COHESION AND INTEGRATION

but a highly integrated and cohesive society is not automatically also democratic
see *The Democratic People's Republic of North Korea*

[2] MORAL: AN EMPHASIS ON RESPONSIBILITY AND PARTICIPATION

the responsible citizen; the active citizen; respect & tolerance

Westheimer & Kahne (2004)

"The values of the personally responsible citizen are not necessarily democratic."

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THE NEED FOR A POLITICAL APPROACH

explicitly connecting citizenship to the idea(l) of democracy
and to the values of equality, liberty and solidarity

DEFINING DEMOCRACY

the inclusion of everyone (the whole *demos*) into the ruling (*kratein*) of society

"the government of the people, by the people, and for the people" (Lincoln)

"the worst form of government ... except for all other forms tried so far" (Churchill)

"the twin principles of *popular control* over collective decision-making
and *equality of rights* in the exercise of that control"

TWO OBSERVATIONS



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DEMOCRACY IS A HISTORICAL INVENTION

not natural but artificial – not rational but a political project
which helps helps to understand why not everyone is a democrat

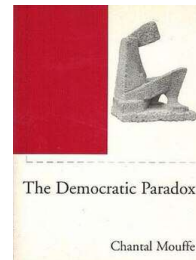
a way to engage with 'the fact of plurality'
on the assumption that plurality is desirable
or that the eradication of plurality is undesirable



not any plurality – the problem with populism
'bounded' by the values of
equality – liberty – solidarity

with an unresolvable tension between
equality and liberty

↓
Chantal Mouffe's 'democratic paradox'



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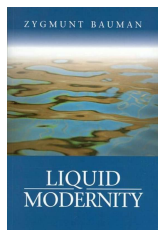
DEMOCRACY IS NOT A MATTER OF CHOICE

THE ARITHMETIC APPROACH

the expression and counting of preferences (majority rule)

THE DELIBERATIVE APPROACH

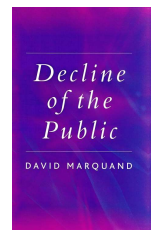
the transformation of what is desired (by individuals or groups)
into what can be considered desirable (at the collective level)



translation of "private problems into the language of public issues" where
"public solutions are sought, negotiated and agreed for private troubles"

this *needs* a public domain and *defines* the public domain

↓
"protected from the adjacent market and private domains, where strangers
encounter each other as equal partners in the common life of the society"
to "define the public interest and to produce public goods"



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WHAT DOES THE DEMOCRATIC LIFE ASK OF ITS CITIZENS?

the **values** "that sustain, and are sustained by, the public domain" are **not** the values of **self-interest** but of **collective interest**, which may sometimes go against one's self-interest"

engagement with the public domain implies "**a certain self-restraint**" which **does not come naturally** but has to be "**learned and then internalized, sometimes painfully**"

A NEED FOR EMANCIPATION FROM SELF-INTEREST

democracy thus requires and brings about
an interruption of being with and for oneself

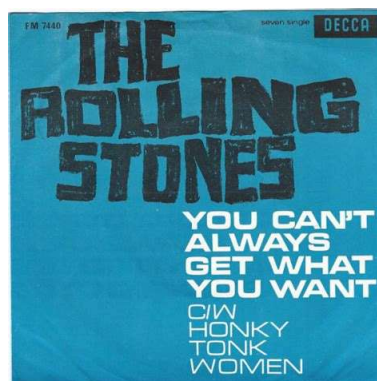


not flourishing but limiting
not a common identity but political relationships Citoyen! Citoyenne!
'distance and strangeness' (Hannah Arendt)

'a common world, not a common ground' (Hannah Arendt)

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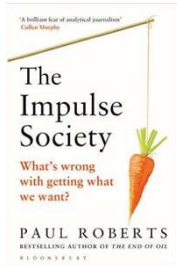
BECAUSE IN A DEMOCRACY . . .



. . . YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT!

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WHICH IS A DIFFICULT AND UNWELCOME MESSAGE IN THE 'IMPULSE SOCIETY'



“What is wrong with getting what we want?”

A LOT!

economic systems that want us to desire more
rather than that we question our desires

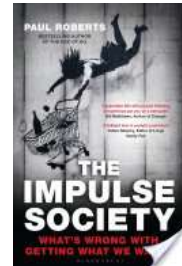
Apple doesn't sell mobile phones . . .

populist politicians who say

“If you vote for me, I will give you everything you desire!”



which is never really possible



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CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

democracy requires a 'worldly' and interrupted way of existing
not with oneself, but with 'the world' – with what and who is other
not driven by individual desires, but by what can be considered desirable

which is exactly the educational question



"Toute la pédagogie est un travail compliqué ... pour
aider l'enfant à se dégager de la logique du caprice." (Philippe Meirieu)

"All education comes down to the difficult work ... of
helping children to disconnect from the logic of desire."

not telling children what they should desire and what not
but helping them to figure out which desires are worth desiring
and making this into a 'living question' for them

being in a relationship with one's desires rather than being 'consumed' by them



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EDUCATIONAL POSSIBILITIES

NOT 'A RACE TOWARDS THE EXIT'

personalised learning trajectories that secure a smooth path towards pre-defined outcomes

BUT A NEED FOR DIFFERENT QUALITIES

INTERRUPTION of being with oneself

through an encounter with what is real and offers resistance to one's desires
the importance of teaching and 'being taught'

SUSPENSION

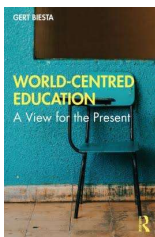
time and forms to stay with the difficulty

meeting the world and meeting one's desires in relation to the world
and figuring out which desires are worth pursuing

SUSTENANCE

holding students with the difficulty

AROUSING THE DESIRE FOR WANTING TO EXIST IN THE WORLD
IN A 'GROWN-UP' WAY: NOT SELF-CENTRED BUT WORLD-CENTRED



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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CURRICULUM

this is not a matter of learning outcomes or competences
but starts from an awareness that the journey matters



curriculum as a 'course of study'
the temporal organisation of education

with opportunities and time
for practising 'grown-up-ness'

which can happen anywhere
but see also the unique potential of the arts
and before that the unique potential of the crafts



education for democratic citizenship
starts in the handicrafts room
[het handenarbeidlokaal]

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NEARLY THERE!



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education and democracy share a common interest

↓
in **emancipation** from 'unworthy' desires

education and democracy share a common principle

↓
the **transformation** of what is desired into what is desirable

BUT

this is, of course, not our political reality
which has become even more arithmetic
'a battle of worldviews'
even about the value(s) of democracy itself

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SO WHAT ABOUT THE VALUES OF DEMOCRACY?

Are liberty, equality and solidarity the values chosen
by a majority because they 'like' them?

Which means that they can be voted out if there is
another majority with different value preferences?

So that the defence of these values can only be a matter
of 'us' defending 'our' values against 'them'?

Or are they the values that make it possible to have
preferences and values in the first place?

'infrastructural' rather than structural

↓
not the possession of a community
but 'uncommon' to anyone who wishes to exist 'in plurality'
in a common world, rather than on a common ground

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A BIT LIKE FOOTBALL

everyone who cares about football,
 and everyone who has a deep passion for their own team,
also needs to care
for the conditions that make it possible
to play football in the first place
 ↓
the playing field
 the rules, the regulations, the referees, and so on

 liberty, equality and solidarity
 are **the values that constitute the democratic playing field**
within which it is possible to 'have' values

they are not possessed by anyone
but should be the concern of everyone

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CONCLUDING COMMENTS

the digital age isn't very digital and social
 perhaps we should call it the age of digital capitalism
 with new questions about ownership, power and control
 ↓
 which are democratic questions

 the digital citizen is not the one who can use technology competently
 but is the one who is willing to ask difficult question
about the technology and their own 'implications' in it
 rather than being seduced by its 'endless possibilities'

 it is the one who navigates the digital world
 with 'new antennas' for what is true and real (and what isn't)
 about the world and about themselves
 and with a concern for the common playing field

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A BIG ASK FOR EDUCATION?

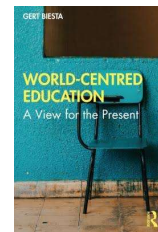
OF COURSE!

But if not the school, the college and the university,
who else will provide space, time and opportunities
 for the difficult work of education for democratic citizenship,
 the difficult work of coming and staying
 in a relationship with our desires?



SOME BIG QUESTIONS FOR US EDUCATORS

Do we still know how to do that?
 Are we still willing to do that?
 Does 'society' still allow us to do that?
 Are we still willing to claim our role?



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THANK YOU

gert.biesta@mu.ie
www.gertbiesta.com

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