

Fractured Education Forges Fractured Citizens. A Theoretical Approach to the Competing Pedagogies of Civic Formation

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Abstract: This article attempts to describe a theoretical problem from a less definitive and more brainstorming-oriented perspective. The theoretical problem it engages can be posed as a question: Why do investments in formal civic education seem to have little effect on the actual health of a community or even the *polis*? The straightforward argument is that school, in its formal outline, is not, and it was never the primary forge where the citizen is trained. The influence of formal education can be overestimated, sometimes to a greater extent than it should be, whereas its power is entirely contingent on a much larger, more powerful pedagogical ecosystem that also contains the community and the family. The article does not aim to devalue formal education, but rather to describe ways of integrating the pedagogical ecosystem into the forging of citizens within this formal educational system. The article proposes a brainstorming format, where questions abound, making the interaction more direct but significantly shorter. In this case, the bibliographical sources informed the ideas presented here rather than supporting them.

Keywords: Scholastic Fallacy, Pedagogical Environment, Fractured Polis, Citizen

Is the “Scholastic Fallacy” a Real Problem?

What is the main issue with the fractured *polis*? When decision makers, the media, and parents look at contemporary society, they see polarization, low trust, and a general decline in democratic norms. The most apparent solution is to propose fixing the schools (Ali & Shahsiah, 2023). The result can be new curricula, new standards for media literacy, or new modules on the topic of non-violent communication, among other things. What is the core assumption for the problem? Schools are thought of as being an environment where information is transferred from the teacher to the student. It does not apply to all schools, but we would argue that the main view, at least in some countries, such as Romania, is precisely this (Kang, 2020). If so, then citizenship is considered a cognitive subject that is learned, much like mathematics. The logic seems to be that if students are provided with the correct information, they will inevitably become good citizens. The underlying issue is “scholastic fallacy”, which can be defined as the formal, rational, and abstract scholastic lessons of a school curriculum being considered the foundation of citizen formation (Cabezudo & Haavelsrud, 2022).

Why would “scholastic fallacy” (Kester et al., 2022) be so important for the educational environment? There are several issues that need to be addressed. It seems that since the time of the Enlightenment, reason has been considered the most important element in the educational system. Reason can subdue primitive forces such as passions, tribalism, and superstition. It also seems that there is the conviction that only the curriculum is the

only means through which the state and policymakers can shape efficient citizens. The reason for such a strong conviction is that the contents of the curriculum are controllable, testable, and scalable, even if it is not the only tool to use. A rather different take on the issue is the third one, which stretches the barriers of the problem, and which argues that the scholastic fallacy is rather a convenient fiction, not only a fallacy. This suggests that the state would rather teach an abstract and safe model of citizenship, forged in strict patterns that require submission rather than real and passionate political perspectives (Awad, 2019). Peace education is rather a form of pacification that would inevitably fail in the real world. These citizens are peaceful without being able to solve the societal problems they are dealing with on a daily basis.

Who Are the Players in the Educational Ecosystem?

This issue stems from the question: if the school is not the main forge for shaping citizens, which other environments are there? The first environment is the formal education, which is the one most students are enrolled in. Formal education offers the official grammar of citizenship, since it is shaped mainly by state institutions, such as ministries of education and regional educational institutions, that also provide regular evaluations of these schools. In the environment of formal education, students experience the explicit or official curriculum. Students learn about citizenship through disciplines such as civics, history, or various types of modules that deal with peace and conflict resolution (McKenna, 2019). History and civics teach about the official story of the nation, the structure of the government, and the rights and obligations of the citizens. Supposedly, the history and civics formal contents are verified by scholars, through validation processes, that allow for a deep and accurate understanding of history. The question that is rightly asked is: how historically accurate is the information to which students are exposed? Once that is cleared, the rest is a matter of pedagogy (Rauf et al., 2024), to get that information in the best possible way to the students.

In the context of the formal or official curriculum, there is a hidden player, the hidden curriculum (Schimmel, 2003). In this case, the hidden curriculum is about the behavioral blueprint of the school as an institution or the pedagogy of the institution (Crépon et al., 2020). The components are the way time is split, the meaning of grades, and the way a classroom is organized as a hierarchy of power. Time is split into 50 minutes of teaching, 10 minutes of breaks, that are repetitive day in and day out, for duration of a semester and an academic year. The breaks are time periods when students are not completely cut off from school but receive various types of school tasks to complete. Homework, which is received most likely on a daily basis, extends into the “free time” of the students, when they give up their freedom for such chores. The excuse or the argument is that students need to practice in order to achieve a higher level of efficiency. The question here is whether that level is acquired mostly during homework time or during classroom time, or perhaps in other types of activities? Time, during class hours, is “controlled” by the bell, that splits and organizes time into parcels, and students understand the meaning of the bell and its sound. The bell is invoked as an authority, on the same level as the teacher, when students are late. This might be considered a righteous scolding that forges discipline, but the question is whether it has the desired effect?

Grades are the second element of the hidden curriculum that appears to have a significant impact on a student's future. They can determine various aspects of one's life, from education to jobs. Grades are determined by the individual, but their value depends on the type of discipline. If the discipline is in the field of humanities, the value is volatile, depending on series of factors, such as the teacher's perspectives on a certain subject, the quality of argumentation, or the type of content that is assessed, orally or in writing. There

are guidelines on how to assess as objectively as possible, but the humanities elude objectivity. The STEM disciplines are easier to assess because the grade is determined by objective parameters. The issue in STEM disciplines is whether innovation is stifled by the teacher, through a fixed method of assessment. Therefore, a high grade in humanities does not equal a high grade in STEM disciplines (Puckett & Gravel, 2020). Even more so, high grades in both categories in certain schools do not equal high grades in other schools. For example, a student might get higher grades in a class where teaching quality is low, whereas another student might get lower grades, in a class where teaching quality is high. This means that when the two students meet, the one with lower grades will score higher than the student with higher grades. Therefore, it is quite important to have final national examinations that assess correctly the quality of student education. Grades can be seen as moral calculus of rank, where one student's educational, social, economic, and even cultural environment is significantly different from another student's. Differences cannot be ascertained purely on grades, but on student achievement on a set of educational actions that have real-life consequences. In this context, grades are not to be abandoned, but in the best interest of the student and future citizens, assessments would be more revealing if considered together with other forms of assessment, such as portfolios (Arumugham, 2019).

The teacher and students in the classroom are a matter of utmost importance, because they are representatives of several types of interactions, some beneficial, others toxic. The teachers stand in front of the classroom, while the students sit in rows. From a hierarchy of power perspective, since the students are expected and even prepared to listen, while the teacher speaks, the perception is that the system imposes hierarchy, surveillance, and passive reception. Traditional classes might have been structured around the authority of the teacher, but modern classes revolve around interactions, which engage students in their own education. In brief, teacher authority can be abused and used to control and coerce students, not to teach and shape, and this difference makes the tension between educational system more evident (Affandi et al., 2020).

The second important player in the pedagogical ecosystem is the family, which can be described as the first pedagogy for children. This player sets the foundation for the most important ways in which the child will act in society throughout his life. The family environment works from and through the most basic periods of the child's development. The child will experience an intricate, sometimes raw, complex, witty, intelligent play on authority, power, justice, and personal and public good. The child will be exposed either to arbitrary, violent and absolute authority, which revolves around the final statement: "Because I said so!" or a just, reasonable, and open to appeal authority, that always explains why something is required (Garcia & Bernal, 2020). In a concentrated form, the way the child experiences authority in the home will determine the way he will act towards any other type of authority throughout his life. In the same context, the way the child experiences conflict and conflict resolution in the home will determine how he will solve conflicts in the future. Depending on how disagreements are handled, either with shouting, or open dialogue, or even with the silent treatment, will shape the type of approach he will have in the classroom, as he will copy what he knows. His treatment conflict will be either that dominance must win, or that it is unmanageable, or that resolution is possible, and even desirable (Shelton & Harold, 2008). If the teachers' approach is either of these, or a mix, depending on the teacher, the student will deepen their personal view of conflict, the economy, and the public good. Violence coupled with scarcity will inform views on taxation, welfare, and social contract, in general, while abundance and open dialogue will inform a different view. The mix between violence, nurture, and social and economic status could be mediated in a school environment, but the challenge might be too much for the educational system to administer.

The third player in the pedagogical environment is the community, which consists of neighborhood, peers, and church. This environment offers the student a sense of identity in the immediate world. Within the group of peers, the student experiences a brutal, hands-on, honor-based pedagogy that informs him about rigid conformity, the danger of difference, and a justice based on social shaming or even collective punishment. On the other hand, students might create groups that function on friendship, care, forgiveness, friendly interactions, and even a blatant refusal to shame others (Farrell et al., 2010). These values are seldom formed in the school environment, but rather at home, and are imported and promoted among peers, as the best way to face pedagogical challenges and other types of issues. The neighborhood creates another pedagogical challenge, as it can be maintained with civic responsibility, fairness, and care for one another, or it can be a hotbed of social tension, that leads to frequent clashes with authorities. The question for students is whether the state is a protector or an occupying force? Schools could mediate the way students see authority, but not by creating a submissive set of citizens, but individuals who value one another, and who apply informed critical thinking to social issues (Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021), with the specific purpose of safeguarding social peace.

The church can act as a transcendent narrative for justice, peace, and authority, but also as a mediator in matters of meaningful relationships and social interactions that are based on the love of one's neighbor. Schools cannot and perhaps should not try to emulate the high views that are specific to the church environment but can integrate values and allow for informed debates on matters of religion and faith, without taking sides. However, in the church pedagogy, peace is a divine mandate, and justice is a moral absolute. This environment, depending on the theological tradition, could advocate for righteous war. The church is not, by any means, reduced to pacifist views, since some of its members adhere to strong military codes, and would defend the country in a war (Nakashian, 2023).

The fourth and final player in the pedagogical environment is the digital and/or market culture. This seems to be the most active and ever-present of the four players, because it revolves around the concept of desire. The modern *polis* is built on the concept of market pedagogy, where the citizen is seen as consumer and partisan. As a consumer, the citizen is not playing a role but is somehow an ontological way of replacing citizenship with consumer choice, which applies also to voting and ethics (Giroux, 2016). In other words, you are what you choose, and your identity is dictated by the group to which you belong. In the same context, he who shapes one's identity creates a personal brand. This is the opposite of belonging, instead it is about creating a following.

The digital pedagogy presents a considerable challenge, since it is in contrast with what schools officially train students to do. The digital pedagogy teaches deliberation, which can be slow, rational, methodical, and even burdensome, while the digital pedagogy is performative, fast, and emotionally charged. This environment grades by giving "likes" and "retweeting", and the reward is outrage, not nuance (Aguilera & Salazar, 2023).

Why Is the *Polis* Fractured?

The *polis* is not a standalone entity, but rather made up of citizens, therefore, if the citizens present issues of education or a lack of values, the *polis* will embody the matter. Would the system train a broken fractured citizen, who would enable the fracture of the *polis*? Such citizens are easy to manipulate and control. They are also easy to market. Their passions and their compliant demeanor, make them excellent consumers. Citizens who are incapable of collective and rational action do not threaten the system (Levinson, 2003). A citizenry that revolts like a mob, rather than an organized collective, driven by civic values, lives of the illusion of power and control.

The *polis* is not made up exclusively of citizens who are victims of their fragmented environment. Therefore, the part of the citizens who managed to build strong values, that they have transferred into the civic fabric, manage to counterbalance the disruptive social elements. In the wider picture, schools are not alone in forging informed citizens. The wider pedagogical environment, that comprises families, communities, churches, and the ambient, contributes to the forging of citizens, who would also determine whether the *polis* fractures or heals itself (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Is the Scholastic Fallacy Still an Issue?

The Scholastic Fallacy seems to be a policy error that makes blaming the curriculum and the school a priority. In this context, the mature citizen is shaped by various environments, where crises are addressed by other, older citizens, who play different roles, from parents, to teachers, to opinion shapers, workers, and other jobs. If the peaceful polis project fails, it means it is a systemic crisis, which can only be solved through the intervention and engagement of all citizens. The challenge for schools is to offer students the tools they need to build a better *polis*, and to be able to assess whether the mechanisms that promote peace are working and that they are efficient. The schools are not citizen factories, but environments where critical thinking is combined with genuine care for one's neighbor. There will be tensions and even conflicts between the schools, families, communities, and the wider society, but these conflicts might inform the citizens of the perils their cities are facing and even promote easier ways to engage and solve such issues. Preventing the fracturing of the *polis* should not rest solely on the shoulders of the educational system, but as a failsafe, it should be a cooperation between schools, families, communities, policy makers, where the wider society benefits for future generations.

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