This is an excellent book which goes to the heart of debates about character ("the personally responsible citizen", p.45) and community ("the participatory citizen", p.40) and activism ("the social justice oriented citizen", p.40). In just over 100 pages Joel Westheimer (professor and university research chair in democracy and education at the University of Ottawa, Canada) raises key issues and provides ways of thinking clearly about them in a well written, engaging style. He declares that "This book asks you to imagine the kind of society you would like to live in and shows how schools might best be used to make that vision a reality" (p. 2). This is complex and controversial but (as indicated by very many very positive statements published on the back cover from highly respected academics and others from around the world) Westheimer has brilliantly achieved his goal.

There are 10 chapters: changing the narrative of the school; no child left thinking; no teacher left teaching; how did this happen; what kind of citizen?; personally responsible citizens; participatory and social justice oriented citizens; thinking engaged citizens; seven myths about education; what kind of school. The early chapters are essentially a critique of the single narrative approach to education in which there is too much standardization, performativity, illustrated, for example, by excessive testing, and meaning that we are missing the flexible, dynamic professionalism that Westheimer sees as essential for education for critical thinking that is allied with promoting the common good.

As indicated above, a big part of this short book focuses on the framework (developed with Joe Kahne) of 3 kinds

Review of the Book:

Westheimer, Joel, 2015. What kind of citizen? Educating our children for the common good, New York and London, Teachers College Press ISBN 978-0-8077-5635-5, 122pp., £25.95.

of citizens: personally responsible, participatory; and social justice-oriented. There is a very clear outline of these 3 types with descriptions, sample actions and core assumptions. Essentially, the personally responsible model links closely with character education of honest and law abiding members of the community; the participatory connects (to use my own short hand interpretation) with community and service learning; and the social justice-oriented with certain types of citizenship education in which there is criticality about systems and structures and connections with forms of activism. Westheimer offers a good discussion about these different approaches and in a reasoned and reasonable way tends to display support for the social justice approach.

The book is very well presented. It is a very useful summary of contexts, key ideas, issues and research findings. I did not always enjoy what I see as a rather folksy discourse but it is very engagingly written. There are good illustrations from mainly (but not exclusively) north America. He makes good use of his own teaching experience (in a range of contexts). I am not surprised that he has a role as an education columnist for CBC Radio as he is clearly able to communicate very effectively with large audiences.

Of course, in such a short book everything is not covered and there is a need for more depth (for example, about the appropriateness of particular teaching approaches across cultural contexts) in what is a complex field. At times labels are used in a broad brush manner. There are difficult philosophical challenges about the nature of the citizen models he offers. There are many other ways of thinking about things in general and within each strand of citizenship there are complex debates that are not really pursued here in any depth. And the key part of this book is connected to something that was published in an academic journal more than 10 years ago (see American Educational Research Journal 41(2), 237-269). But this book is just what is needed – it is engagingly written in ways that are appropriate to help clarify important ideas and issues. It is research-based, policy-related and professionally useful. It is essential reading.

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