

BOOK REVIEW

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Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy. By Stephen Macedo. Harvard University Press, 2000. 343p.

Stephen Macedo's *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy* is an episodic historical analysis of the role of civic education in the U.S. This book contains three broad themes, "Public Schooling and American Citizenship," "Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism," and "School Reform and Civic Education." It is motivated by the author's conviction that much thinking surrounding the themes of diversity and difference is misconceived. According to Macedo, "Diversity is not always of value and it should not, any more than other ideals, be accepted uncritically" (p.3).

Macedo suggests that celebrating diversity should be secondary to a "civic liberalism" that advocates the legitimacy of reasonable efforts to inculcate shared political virtues while leaving deeper philosophical moral questions to private communities. He supports a public philosophy of liberalism that embraces civic ideals that are broad in its protection of freedoms but not too deep. One of the main purposes of this book is "to argue that we should not allow liberalism's most alluring features—broad freedoms, limited government, and the great pageant of diversity—to obscure other dimensions of a healthy, free, self-governing society" (p.275).

In the first section of this text, the author explains the purpose of the common school philosophy in the context of American democracy. The purpose of the common school is to acknowledge the diversity of students while homogenizing them into respectful American citizens. In this section he highlights the significant contributions of education reformer John Dewey to the common school cause. Dewey's adamant embrace of the "separation of church and state" doctrine led him to be highly critical of dogmatic religious communities.

The author critiques the historical problems public schools have confronted in accommodating the concerns of the Catholic Church. For example, Catholics protested the mandatory reading of the King James Version of the Bible in schools. Instead, they wanted Catholic students to read from the Douay Bible. In the author's judgement, the demands of Catholics (and other religious groups) fell outside of his conception of public reasonableness. According to Macedo, "Catholics were at the forefront of opposition to common schools not simply because some school materials and practices were anti-Catholic, but because some in the Catholic hierarchy rejected legitimate civic ends" (p.7). Over time, Catholics stopped seeking concessions from the common schools and established a separate system of parochial education.

Much of the weight of this book is put on the challenge of accommodating religious diversity in public schools in the U.S. Much of Macedo's discussion is centered on the issue of religious sectarianism and the "Establishment" and "Free Exercise" clauses contained in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In fact, the 1983 *Mozert v. Hawkins* case guides most of the author's discussion on the limits of tolerance and accommodation. Fundamentalist Christian families in Hawkins County, Tennessee charged that a reading series required by the school system denigrated their religious views. Hence, the Mozert families asked school officials to allow their children to opt out of the reading program. The school said no and ultimately the courts upheld the school's decision. Macedo states that the Mozert families had no right to be accommodated on principled ground. Macedo's deconstruction of this case gives us a good example of his framework and his position. He refers to this section as "The Intolerance for Educating for Tolerance" (p.157).

Macedo's conception of "liberal public reasonableness" guards against the excessive zeal of religious fundamentalists. He states that his model espouses a "tolerance for reasonable forms of diversity and respect for a wide array of freedoms" (p.179). Given the author's emphasis on religion, perhaps this book should have been entitled "Religious Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy."

While much of the discourse on multiculturalism has become hackneyed, Macedo offers us a bold and refreshing philosophical discussion of the debate. This work represents sound scholarship. Unlike many in the fields of Education, Ethnic Studies, and American Studies who have written on multiculturalism, Macedo's work is grounded in political philosophy and constitutional principles. Indeed, he draws on works of John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, J.S. Mill, and John Rawls to guide him in his analysis. In his defense of a "civic liberalism" the author outlines a range of public principles that move beyond the political liberalism of Rawls.

Rawls developed a template for a public morality that is not grounded in religion. The task for Macedo is more specific, promoting moral education in public schools without infusing religion. Is this possible? Macedo agrees with Rawls that a public morality can be created from public ideals and principles that are espoused by liberal democratic institutions that are not entangled in religious or deep philosophical beliefs.

This book is insightful and engaging. However, there are limitations. The author fails to tell us specifically what a moral education divorced of religious principles would entail: the teaching of mutual respect, cross-cultural understanding, sexual abstinence, anger management, respect for the environment? How does a moral education avoid discussing the "Golden Rule" and its genesis?

Although the author explores the on-going debate of "school choice" and "market competition" on school reform, he does not seize the opportunity to critically examine other important "hot button" issues in the context of his "tough liberalism" and "prudential accommodation" framework. For example, how would the author deconstruct "Affirmative Action," "Cultural Bias in Standardized Testing," "Gay Rights," "English Only," "A Moment of Silence," as they relate to public schools? By using these issues as examples, the author could have elucidated and strengthened his arguments. In fact, a critical examination of these issues could have put this well written book at the center of various policy debates.

Irrespective of its limitations, this book is timely and relevant. Genuine education reforms cannot take place unless stakeholders have a conceptual understanding of the intellectual "big picture" that Macedo outlines in this book. I will use it in my "Politics of the Public Policy Process" course to enhance students' philosophical understanding of the role of civic education in a multicultural society.